



*We wave our palms, we welcome Jesus; we express our joy at accompanying Him, at knowing Him to be close, present in us and among us as a friend, a brother, and also as a King. – Pope Francis*

(Sacred Heart Cathedral, Kota Kinabalu)

# Addressing issues raised at synod

**VATICAN: Pope Francis has taken a proactive step towards addressing some of the most debated topics from the first assembly of the Synod of Bishops on synodality by initiating study groups to examine these issues beyond the synod's concluding session this October.**

These groups are set to explore several critical areas — potential updates to the training guidelines for priests and deacons; examining the role of women within the Church and their involvement in decision-making and leadership; considering changes to the process of selecting bishops, and revising the regulations governing the interaction between bishops and the religious orders within their dioceses.

That Pope Francis did not wait until the end of the second assembly to convoke the study groups, “shows that he has a heart that listens; he listened and is acting,” Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary-general of the synod, told reporters March 14.

Pope Francis has given his approval for the 10 groups and their respective topics, instructing them to prepare a preliminary

report for the synod's second assembly in October and to deliver a final report on their findings by June 2025. These groups, each coordinated by a different office of the Roman Curia, are tasked with this significant undertaking.

Msgr Piero Coda, the secretary-general of the International Theological Commission, an entity appointed by the Pope that assists the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, noted that these groups will “certainly” explore a range of specific issues. Among these are the potential for women to become deacons, the inclusion of laypeople in the selection process for bishops, and the pursuit of greater inclusivity for LGBTQ+ Catholics within the Church.

In a letter to Cardinal Grech, released March 14, Pope Francis said that with the study groups working on issues “requiring in-depth study,” members of the synodal assembly in October will be able “to focus more easily on the general theme that I assigned to it at the time, and which can now be summarised in the question: ‘How to be a synodal Church in mission?’”

Pope Francis named the 10 themes to be explored by the study groups and provided references to where those themes were discussed in the first assembly's synthesis re-

port (SR) in October:

1. Some aspects of the relationship between the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Latin Church (SR 6)
2. Listening to the Cry of the Poor (SR 4 and 16)
3. The mission in the digital environment (SR 17)
4. The revision of the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* in a missionary synodal perspective (SR 11)
5. Some theological and canonical matters regarding specific ministerial forms (SR 8 and 9)
6. The revision, in a synodal missionary perspective, of the documents touching on the relationship between Bishops, consecrated life, and ecclesial associations (SR 10)
7. Some aspects of the person and ministry of the Bishop (criteria for selecting candidates to Episcopacy, judicial function of the Bishops, nature and course of *ad limina Apostolorum* visits) from a missionary synodal perspective (SR 12 and 13)
8. The role of Papal Representatives in a missionary synodal perspective (SR 13)

9. Theological criteria and synodal methodologies for shared discernment of controversial doctrinal, pastoral, and ethical issues (SR 15)

10. The reception of the fruits of the ecumenical journey in ecclesial practices (SR 7)

Cardinal Grech revealed that the synod secretariat has initiated five task forces dedicated to various aspects of synodality: fostering it within dioceses; promoting it at national or regional levels; expanding it across the global church, which includes assessing the interplay between the Pope's primacy, episcopal unity, and church-wide synodality; implementing a “synodal approach” that incorporates prayer, attentive listening, discernment, and liturgical practices; and examining the church's identity as a community that cherishes unity in diversity across cultures, languages, or traditions.

According to the synod's secretariat, the essence of synodality lies in “authentically and effectively showcasing and supporting” the Church's mission, which remains the key standard for discernment. The approach that most effectively communicates the Gospel should be prioritised, alongside the bravery to let go of what is found to be less beneficial or obstructive. — *Agencies*

Who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

Phil. 2:6-7



**Celebrating the Pope's anniversary**

■ P5



**Priest fasts during Ramadan**

■ P11



**Vatican launches social media campaign to rediscover 'Christus vivit'**

■ P16



## HERALD

ESTABLISHED 1994

Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre  
5, Jalan Robertson, 50150, KL  
Tel / Whatsapp: 03-20268291  
Website : www.heraldmalaysia.com  
Facebook : www.facebook.com/  
heraldmalaysia

Jointly published by the  
Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur,  
Diocese of Malacca Johore,  
Diocese of Penang and  
Diocese of Keningau



**EDITOR**  
**Patricia Pereira**  
editor1@herald.com.my



**ASSISTANT EDITOR**  
**Social Media Coordinator**  
**Sandra Ann Inbaraj**  
sandra@herald.com.my



**GRAPHIC DESIGNER**  
**Youth Section**  
**Amanda Mah**  
amanda@herald.com.my



**BAHASA MALAYSIA**  
**Melania Liza Magnus**  
liza@herald.com.my



**MANDARIN**  
**Adelina Wong**  
yin4482@gmail.com



**TAMIL**  
**RK Samy**  
rksamy3@hotmail.com

**Advertisements /Subscription**  
advertisement@herald.com.my

**MEMORIAM**  
memoriam@herald.com.my

**LETTERS**  
letterseditor@herald.com.my

# With Peter, always

**A reflection on the 11th anniversary of Pope Francis' election to the papacy (March 13) and his constant calls for the world to follow the path of mercy and peace.**

In the deafening silence of diplomacy, in a landscape marked by the increasingly evident absence of political initiative and leadership capable of betting on peace, while the world has begun a mad race to rearm, allocating sums that would suffice to ensure basic healthcare twice over for all the inhabitants of the earth and significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the lone voice of Pope Francis continues to plead for weapons to be silenced and call for the courage to foster paths of peace.

The Pope continues to call for a ceasefire in the Holy Land, where the ruthless massacre of October 7 carried out by Hamas terrorists, was followed by the tragic carnage that continues to be perpetrated in Gaza.

He continues to call for weapons to fall silent in the tragic war that erupted in the heart of Christian Europe, in Ukraine destroyed and martyred by the bombings of the aggressor Russian army.

He continues to invoke peace in other parts of the world where conflicts are fought with unspeakable violence, the forgotten conflicts that make up increasingly large pieces of a global conflict.

The Bishop of Rome enters the twelfth year of his pontificate in a dark hour, with the fate of humanity at the mercy of rulers incapable of assessing the consequences of their decisions, who seem to surrender to the inevitability of war.

With clarity and realism, he says that "he is stronger who sees the situation, who thinks of the people," that is, "who has the courage to negotiate," because "negotiating is a courageous word," of which one should not be ashamed.

Pope Francis, challenging the misunderstandings of those both near and far, continues to place the sanctity of life at the centre of attention, expressing closeness to innocent victims and denouncing the dirty economic interests that move the strings of wars cloaked in hypocrisy.

A quick look at these last eleven years of history makes clear the prophetic value of Peter's voice. The alarm, first raised two decades ago, about the third world war fought piecemeal.

The social encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015) showed how climate change, migrations, wars, and an economy that kills, are interconnected phenomena that can only be addressed through a global perspective.

The great encyclical on human fraternity (*Fratelli Tutti*, 2020) pointed the way to building a new world based on fraternity, once again removing any excuse for abusing the name of God to justify terrorism, hatred, and violence.

There is also the constant reference in his magisterium to mercy, which weaves the entire fabric of a missionary pontificate.

In secularised, "liquid" societies that lack certain foundations, nothing can be taken for granted, and evangelisation — teaches Pope Francis — begins anew from the essentials, as read in *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013): "We have rediscovered the fundamental role of the first announcement or *kerygma*, which needs to be the centre of all evangelising activity and all efforts at Church renewal... The centrality of the *kerygma* calls for stressing those elements which are most needed today: it has to express God's saving love which precedes any moral and religious obligation

on our part; it should not impose the truth but appeal to freedom; it should be marked by joy, encouragement, liveliness and a harmonious balance which will not reduce preaching to a few doctrines which are, at times, more philosophical than evangelical. All this demands, on the part of the evangeliser, certain attitudes which foster openness to the message: approachability, readiness for dialogue, patience, a warmth and welcome which is non-judgmental."

The testimony of mercy, therefore, represents a fundamental element of this "saving love of God" which is "prior to moral and religious obligation."

In other words, those who have not yet come into contact with the Christian reality, as Pope Benedict XVI had already lucidly observed in May 2010, will hardly be struck and fascinated by the affirmation of norms and moral obligations, by the insistence on prohibitions, by the meticulous lists of sins, by condemnations, or by nostalgic appeals to the values of the past.

At the origin of welcome, closeness, tenderness, and accompaniment, at the origin of a Christian community capable of embracing and listening, there is the echo of mercy that has been experienced and that one seeks — despite a thousand limitations and failures — to return to.

If we read with these eyes the Pope's gestures, even those that have provoked in some the same scandalised reactions that Jesus' gestures provoked two thousand years ago, one discovers their profound evangelising and missionary force. — **By Andrea Tornielli, Vatican News**

• See also Page 10

## Jesus did not turn away from His mission

Today, Palm or Passion Sunday, is the first day of Holy Week, the high point of the Church's year, climaxing in the Easter Triduum: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday.

Two Gospels are proclaimed during today's Eucharist. The first is proclaimed during the procession with palms and recounts Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, riding on a borrowed colt. He is greeted joyfully by the crowds, who spread their garments and leafy branches on the road before Him and acclaim Him with the words: 'Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming! Hosanna in the highest!' (Mark 11:10). It is shocking but salutary to remember that these are the same crowds who will, a few days later, shout out in unison, 'Crucify him!' (Mark 15: 13).

At the Liturgy of the Word, the events of Jesus' passion are proclaimed in full, this year from the Gospel of Mark. We will hear these same events once more on Good Friday, when the passion of Jesus, according to the Gospel of John, will be proclaimed.

Why does the Church give so central a place in its liturgy to the passion and death of Jesus on the Cross? Why do we continue to remember, in all their shameful and gory details, the humiliation and crucifixion of the one who was Love Incarnate, the one who came on earth only



to bring healing, forgiveness and peace? It was surely not because this was the price demanded by the Father for our sins. Only a sadist would demand such a price, and God, far from being a sadist, is Love itself. Nor does Jesus deliberately court His own destruction. He did not seek the Cross though He did embrace it freely as He discerned that the inevitable outcome of His mission of love was to be handed over to His enemies and put to death: 'Now it happened that as the time drew near for Him to be taken up, He resolutely turned His face towards Jerusalem' (Luke 9:51).

Jesus' passion and agonising death by crucifixion was not a consequence of the Father's need to be placated, nor the result of a martyr complex on the part of Jesus

Himself. Jesus' suffering and death shows us, with startling clarity, what happens to self-forgetful love in a world ruled by the demons of hatred and violence. Jesus could have avoided the Cross, but only by turning aside from His mission of proclaiming and inaugurating God's reign of justice, peace and love. And this He could not, and would not, do. To reveal the full extent of God's love for us, He had to endure suffering and death. The events we recall today represent the final phase and climax of Jesus' life-giving mission of love.

In the story of Jesus' passion and death, presented in exacting detail by all the evangelists, Jesus' mission moves into a higher key, in which He allows Himself to be acted upon rather than to act. For three

Reflecting on our  
**Sunday Readings**  
with the Society of African  
Missions

**Palm Sunday (B)**

**Readings: Isaiah 50:4-7;**

**Philippians 2:6-11;**

**Gospel: Mark 14:1 — 15:47**

years he had acted: reaching out to people, especially the poor and marginalised, proclaiming a message of hope to those longing for liberation, healing the sick, forgiving sinners, and casting out demons.

In the first phase of His mission, He was the protagonist. Now, in this climactic phase, He is the one being acted upon. We see Him being betrayed, arrested, imprisoned, interrogated by Caiphas, Herod and Pilate - scourged, crowned with thorns, mocked, forced to carry a cross, stripped of His garments, and finally nailed and hung on the cross until He expired. This is the supreme moment of His witness to the God of Love. Jesus' suffering and death on the Cross.

As we prayerfully recall the dangerous memory of Jesus' passion and death, we profess our gratitude for a love that allowed Jesus to be 'led like an innocent lamb to the slaughter'. We also remember and express our solidarity with all those people whose courageous love makes them victims of violence in our world today.



# MCCBCHST urges adherence to Federal Court ruling

KUALA LUMPUR: In a decisive stance, the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Taoism (MCCBCHST) has voiced its concern over the Kelantan legislative assembly's recent motion to re-enact 16 provisions previously nullified by the Federal Court in the landmark *Nik Elin Zurina Binti Nik Abdul Rashid & Another v Negeri Kelantan* case, decided on February 9, 2024.

The Federal Court, in an 8-1 judgment, had declared these provisions from the Kelantan Syariah Criminal Code (1) Enactment 2019 unconstitutional, as they exceeded the state's legislative authority under the Federal Constitution. The ruling emphasised that these sections, dealing with matters already governed by federal law, violated the constitutional demarcation of legislative powers between the state and the federation.

The MCCBCHST's statement, issued on March 14, underscores the Kelantan legislature's obligation to adhere to the Federal



Kuala Lumpur High Court

Constitution and the court's decision. It criticises the state's legislative assembly for challenging the constitution, the highest court, and the rule of law through its motion. The council urges the Attorney General, as the guardian of public interest and constitutional protector, to advise the Kelantan State Government against any attempts to reinstate the impugned provisions, highlighting the potential threat such actions pose to democracy

and national stability.

Citing several landmark Federal Court decisions, the MCCBCHST reaffirms the constitutional limitation on legislative powers, the secular nature of Malaysia's legal framework, and the specific jurisdiction of *Syariah* Courts. It appeals to the foundational principles of the constitution, including the separation of powers, the rule of law, and the protection of minorities, as essential elements that cannot be overridden by legislative or constitutional amendments.

The council's plea for the Kelantan State Government to respect and accept the Federal Court's ruling is echoed by its diverse leadership, comprising representatives from major religious communities in Malaysia. The statement concludes with a call for all parties to act in the country's best interests and uphold constitutional democracy, emphasising the urgency of maintaining harmony and legal integrity within Malaysia's pluralistic society.



ARCHDIOCESE OF KOTA KINABALU

## Chancery Notice

### New pastoral appointment of priest

The Most Reverend Archbishop John Wong hereby announces a new pastoral appointment for Friar Gerald Terence Saimel, OFM.

He will be transferred from Sacred Heart Cathedral, Kota Kinabalu (Church of Mary Immaculate, Bukit Padang and St Paul, Dontozidon) to be the Assistant Parish Priest of St Michael, Penampang and St Augustine, Kinarut.

The new appointment will be with immediate effect.

*Fr Wilfred Atin*  
Chancellor,  
Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu.  
March 6, 2024



## KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

### Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

#### March

- 24 **Rededication of Chapel of Christ the King**
- 28 **Exco Meeting – MCCBCHST**
- 29 **Good Friday service – Church of St Paul the Hermit**
- 30 **Easter Vigil – Church of St Paul the Hermit**
- 31 **Easter – Church of the Risen Christ, KL**



## PENANG DIOCESE

### Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

#### March

- 21-31 **Palm Sunday and Holy Week – Church of Our Lady of Fatima of the Holy Rosary, Kota Bahru, Kelantan**



## MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

### Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

#### March

- 26-27 **Clergy Monthly Recollection – Church of St Philip, Segamat**
- 26 **Chrism Mass – Church of St Philip, Segamat**
- 28-31 **Easter Triduum and Easter – Church of St Peter, Melaka**



## Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #168

F12  
MJD NEWS  
UPDATES

### Greetings to you, dear friends of Malacca Johore Diocese

Two Malaysian hospitals have been recognised in the highly respected *Newsweek* and *Statista's World's Best Hospitals 2024*. The citizenship law is waiting to be amended. Again, the call to review vernacular schools has surfaced. *Ramadan* is here. Lent is our time to fast and pray to sense God's love and plans for His world.

**Resilient Times:** There are a lot of traits vital to succeeding at life: creativity, passion, vision, persistence, grit, and so many more. *One that many people underestimate, but which turns out to be incredibly important, is resilience.*

Resilience not only enables you to bounce back from hardships, but helps you adapt so that you can be better and your resilient body is more resistant to debilitating or incapacitating injuries. Is it any surprise that a resilient mind is crucial for better mental health?

What is resilience, exactly? It's so much more than just being able to recover or "bounce back" after a hard time — in fact, it actually takes things a step farther. *Resilience is about not only recovery, but also adaptability.* It enables you to repair the damage in the present and take steps to protect yourself and prevent further damage in the future.

Some of the *characteristics of a resilient person* include:

- High levels of commitment to their goals
- Positive view of change as an opportunity for growth and improvement
- Tendency to lean on others for support
- Good sense of humour
- Faith and belief
- Optimistic outlook
- Patience and tolerance, even in

negative circumstances

- Well-established goals, both personal and collective
- Connections with others.
- Adaptability and versatility, even with the new and unfamiliar.

### Thought for the Week:

**Mark & Bill.** On his way home, Mark noticed the boy ahead of him had tripped and dropped all of the books he was carrying, along with two sweaters, a baseball bat, a glove and a small tape recorder.

Mark stopped to help. Since they were going the same way, he helped with the load and discovered that the boy's name was Bill, that he had a love for video games, baseball and history, his trouble with some subjects and his breakup with his girlfriend. Bill invited Mark to share the afternoon with him. They drank coke, watched TV, laughed and shared small talk. This friendship grew during their lunch breaks, through high school and senior year.

Three weeks before graduation, Bill called up Mark for a chat. Then Bill reminded him of the first time they had met. "You see, I cleaned out my locker so as to leave no mess for anyone. With me was my mother's sleeping pills to kill myself. But our time together, the talking and laughing, made me realise what I would have missed. So you see, Mark, when you picked up those books that day, you did a lot more, you saved my life."

*A lesson from the front guy: Sometimes a simple, kind gesture that you go out of your way to give someone, may mean more to a person's life than you will ever know. A little act of kindness or a simple gesture to someone today, may change their life forever.*

### Announcements for this Week.

1. The diocese prepares for the *Chrism*

**Mass** at the Church of St Philip, Segamat on March 26 at 8.00pm.  
2. The Parish of St Philip established in 1924 prepares for her *centennial celebration*, on May 4, 2024  
3. Reminder to all parishes and Catholics of the diocese:

REMEMBER to submit your *Lenten envelopes*, the fruits of your fast and sacrifice. Come Good Friday, give generously to the *"Maintenance of the Holy Sites of the Holy Land"*.  
4. The *First World Children's Day* will be celebrated on May 25-26, 2024: "Dear children, because, as the Bible teaches us, and as Jesus showed so often, "you are precious" in God's eyes (Is 43:4). This message is to all of you, all children, everywhere. You are a sign of every person's desire to grow and flourish.

### QnQ: Q asks: How to be great?

I asked a wise man, "Tell me sir, in which field could I make a great career?"



He said with a smile, "Be a good human being. There is a lot of opportunity in this area, and very little competition."

Just to tickle you: *When we work, we work. When we pray, God works.*—James Hudson Taylor.

*Bishop Bernard Paul*

Bishop Bernard Paul



# 24 Hours for the Lord drew hearts closer to God



Deacon Paul Kang incensing the blessed sacrament during the adoration.

GEORGE TOWN: City Parish answered Pope Francis' call for parishes worldwide to organise the 24 Hours for the Lord initiative with an overnight Eucharistic adoration from March 8 to 9.

Held for the eleventh year with the theme Walk in Newness of Life taken from Romans 6:4, this year's edition coincides with the Year of Prayer as the Holy Father has urged all to dedicate this time for prayer and reconciliation.

The Church of Our Lady of Sorrows (OLS) kept its doors open for 24 hours, as the programme began with the Stations of the Cross and Masses on Friday evening, followed by the Exposition of the

Blessed Sacrament which concluded with Novena to Our Lady and solemn Benediction on Saturday evening.

The different segments of the parish, ranging from language apostolates to prayer ministries covering various age groups, came together to accompany the Lord throughout the programme. They organised different prayer sessions which included the Holy Hour, Praise and Worship, chanting of Taize prayer, as well as recitation of the Holy Rosary and Divine Office.

The clergy of the parish, Frs Edmund Woon and Desmond Jansen, together with Deacon Paul Kang, were also present and

led parishioners in the different devotions.

Fr Edmund shared that the initiative was a good start and hoped to make it a yearly Lenten practice together with the Way of the Cross devotion in the parish.

"To be in the presence of the Lord gladdens the heart," said Santha Melina from the Tamil Charismatic Renewal who felt touched spending time with God through the Blessed Sacrament.

Edwin Cheah from the Altar Servers Ministry shared that the prayers, songs and silence enlightened his spirit and "transformed the heart of stone into the heart of flesh." — **By Aaron Lim**

## Adoration and worship through dance

By Gunavathi Thiurchinamurthy

PETALING JAYA: The Ministry for Special Needs, under the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development, organised a memorable Lenten outreach event on March 2 at the Church of St Francis Xavier's Loyola Hall. Themed *So You Think You Can Dance*, the programme invited participants to express their adoration and worship of God through the art of dance.

The day commenced with an inspiring welcome speech by

SFX parish priest, Fr Alvin Ng, SJ. Fr Alvin drew parallels between the participants' dance and King David's biblical dance before the Lord, highlighting the act of worship through complete surrender to God. He emphasised the importance of recognising and including individuals with special needs within our community, pointing out the valuable lessons they offer.

Gunasegaran, a seasoned theatrical dance and movement choreographer and drama teacher, led the programme, which saw a turnout of 65 attendees, including volunteers. The session kicked off

with a warm-up involving slow, rhythmic floor-work dance, preparing participants for the main event. This was a dance session dedicated to worship, preceded by a run-through to familiarise everyone with the flow.

Aidan Shane Dicom narrated the Lenten messages, setting the stage for an immersive experience of music and dance by individuals of varying abilities. Parents participated by holding lighted candles, adding a divine warmth to the atmosphere.

This programme championed dance as a medium for self-expression, sequence learning, and



Dance teacher, Gunasegaran teaching the art of dance.

community bonding. It emphasised the importance of constant movement for both physical and mental well-being, particularly highlighting the benefits for individuals with disabilities in terms of body coordination, muscle strength, and social interaction. The group dance activities facilitated a sense of rhythm and connection, encouraging touch and socialisation among participants.

The inclusivity and engagement observed were heartwarming, creating a platform for social acceptance and awareness. Non-disabled participants gained new perspectives, fostering a supportive and understanding community.

Thirteen volunteers were instrumental in the event's success, managing logistics from setup to support for individuals with

special needs. The generosity of the Sunday Fellowship members from SFX parish, who sponsored an array of refreshments, and the dedication of the behind-the-scenes volunteers, demonstrated profound compassion and empathy towards the differently-abled community.

Special thanks were extended to Fr Alvin and his team, including Cordelia and Ken Phuah of the SFX social communications team, Francis Lai of SFX PIHDM, Aaron, the hall manager, and many others whose support and presence were crucial to the programme's success. This collaborative effort underscored the power of community and the transformative potential of dance as a medium for worship and inclusion.



The participants expressing themselves through dance.

## Called to act as His hands and voice

MERLIMAU, MELAKA: On March 9, the Chapel of St James hosted a Lenten Outreach Programme, welcoming 20 individuals from ten underprivileged families. This compassionate initiative was a collaboration between the SSVF Conference of St James, Merlimau, and a Catholic group from Kuala Lumpur, aiming to extend God's love to deserving families living on the margins of society.

Fr Devadasan Madala Muthu, the chapel's administrator, along with Savuriappan, the chairman of the SSVF Conference of St James, warmly greeted the guests. They were joined by over 30 Catholics

from Kuala Lumpur for the Mass.

In his homily, Fr Deva emphasised the crucial role of Christian charity, a core virtue and foundational aspect of Christian spirituality. He highlighted that Christians are called not only to pray but also to actively participate in the work of God's kingdom by reaching out to others. He reminded the congregation that both material and spiritual blessings are gifts from God, and as followers of Jesus, we are to act as His hands and voice, embodying the message, "What I desire is mercy, not sacrifice."

Serving also as the parish priest of the Church of the Holy Spirit

in Jasin, Fr Deva shared that love compels us to care for the less fortunate. He spoke about the three pillars of Lent — prayer, fasting, and almsgiving — as means to foster a deeper relationship with God and to cleanse ourselves of sin. He stressed that all acts of charity should be carried out with a heart full of God's merciful love and in a manner pleasing to Him.

After Mass, everyone shared a vegetarian meal in the parish hall, where fellowship allowed for the mingling of community members and their guests.

The event concluded with Fr Deva offering prayers and overseeing the distribution of 30 dif-



Families receiving the provisions.

ferent types of essential food items to the marginalised families. Additionally, the families received pillows and toothbrushes. A total of 17 blessed Rosaries were given to SSVF members and

some of the Catholic families.

The outreach programme left the guests with smiles, feeling blessed by God's grace and the warmth of the community's welcome. — **By Bernard Anthony**



# Celebrating the anniversary of Pope Francis' pontificate

By Tianne Ramona Pereira

KUALA LUMPUR: The Cathedral of St John the Evangelist (CSJE) was filled to capacity during the 11.00am Mass, March 10. A large gathering of faithful, clergy, and numerous diplomatic representatives came together to mark the 11th anniversary of Pope Francis' Pontificate.

The Mass was presided over by Cardinal Sebastian Francis. Concelebrating with him were Archbishop Wojciech Zaluski, Apostolic Nuncio to Malaysia, Archbishop Julian Leow, Archbishop Emeritus Murphy Pakiam, Fr Gerard Theraviam, CSJE parish priest, and Fr Adawai Michael.

In his homily, Archbishop Julian reminded the congregation that the upcoming Easter Vigil would unveil one of the most profound love stories ever told — the saga of a God who relentlessly pursues us. He elaborated on how God is fully aware of our need for His grace which is accessible through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Despite humanity's role in the crucifixion of Jesus, God's response was not condemnation but an open invitation to return, time after time. The prelate underscored God's desire for each of us to partake in His eternal joy in heaven.



Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Archbishop Wojciech Zaluski and Archbishop Julian Leow blessing the congregation at the end of the Mass.

The archbishop further explained the significance of the rose-coloured vestments worn during the celebration on Laetare Sunday, the fourth Sunday of Lent. This colour, blending the penitential purple of Lent with the joyful white of Easter, signals that we are halfway through our Lenten journey, with hope brightly on the horizon. He also reminded the congregation that occasionally, Jesus sends angels into our lives to stir our conscience and guide us back to Him. In Pope Francis, he pointed out, we see the hu-

man face of God — a reminder of the divine among us.

Emphasising the importance of progressing as a Synodal Church, Archbishop Julian cautioned against moving so swiftly that we risk leaving anyone behind. He concluded his homily by urging the congregation to cherish life and recognise the depth of God's love for us. Highlighting the mercy of Jesus, he reassured us that no matter our sins, Jesus awaits our return, ready to welcome us into the eternal feast with Him.

Addressing the congregation, the apostolic nuncio reflected on the 11-year tenure of Pope Francis, highlighting his steadfast commitment to fostering a "Synodal Church." This vision promotes collaboration, dialogue, and inclusive decision-making among all members of the Church, including bishops, clergy, religious, and laity.

Expressing gratitude, Archbishop Wojciech thanked Archbishop Julian for convening the faithful in prayer for Pope Francis. He also thanked the concelebrants and Cardinal Sebastian, emphasising the significance of this occasion and acknowledging it as a great honour.

Archbishop Zaluski urged the faithful to continue uplifting Pope Francis in prayer, considering his advancing age and ongoing health challenges. He emphasised that it remains one of Pope Francis' most fervent requests — that we consistently hold him in our prayers.

On March 13, the actual anniversary of Pope Francis' papacy, the apostolic nuncio hosted a reception at the Ritz-Carlton, Kuala Lumpur.

The guest of honour was YB Nga Kor Ming, Minister of Housing and Local Government of Malaysia.

## St Peter's College welcomes aspirants and initiation year students

KOTA KINABALU: Archbishop John Wong emphasised the significance of Lent as an opportunity bestowed upon each of us by the Lord to deepen our encounter with Him and foster compassion.

He said this during the Mass marking the commencement of the new Academic Year for CAC Aspirancy and Initiation Year Seminarians on February 26 at St Peter's College (SPC).

"Take this 40-day journey seriously," he urged, "for Lent is a sacred season designed to enrich our communion with God and one another."

Archbishop Wong extended a warm invitation to all new aspirants and seminarians to embrace encounters with Jesus, to share the love they've received, and to serve with authenticity.

Concelebrating with the archbishop were Fr Mattheus Luta, Director of SPC for Initiation Year, Fr Isidore Gilbert, Director of CDC Formation House for Aspirants and Fr Rhobby Mojolou one of the Spiritual Directors.

After Mass, Fr Isidore, in his speech,

said he was delighted to have 15 aspirants this year and he reminded them to, "be humble, be open, be yourself, be willing and surrender yourself to the formation, especially to the spiritual formation."

Fr Isidore also said that freedom is theirs to express acts of kindness, doing what is right and what they must adhere to.

Meanwhile, Fr Mattheus informed everyone present that there were ten Initiation Year students this year from the Diocese of Keningau, Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu and the Dioceses of Keningau, Sibiu, Miri and Sandakan.

Quoting the theme of the Synodal Church, Fr Mattheus invited all the seminarians to journey together in communion, participation and mission.

He concluded by thanking the benefactors and requested them to pray for the seminarians in their daily prayers.

Also present at the opening of the Academic Year 2024 was Seminarian Philip Asirwalam from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur. — **By Euseclara Suah**



(Photo/St Paul's Institution Facebook page)

## St Paul's Institution turns co-ed amid student shortage

SEREMBAN: St Paul's Institution, one of Malaysia's oldest Catholic boys-only schools, has recently embraced co-education to address a decline in admissions attributed to a falling birth rate.

The school, managed by the De La Salle Brothers, welcomed its first batch of 10 female students for the new school session which started on March 11, as reported by Bernama. Founded in 1899, the institution stands as one of the oldest schools in the state of Negeri Sembilan and the country.

The decision to transition to a co-educational model was prompted by a drop in first-year admissions over the past five years, with only around 70 students admitted annually compared to the previous numbers exceeding 100.

Dr Mahadevan Deva Tata, chair of the school's Board of Governors, highlighted the need for change to prevent the school's closure due to a lack of students.

"We need to make changes before the situation worsens," Tata emphasised, noting the positive response from parents. "Most parents who sent their daughters here also have sons studying in this school. Many want to register for Years Two and Three, but we are only accepting Year One for now."

Headmistress E. Margret mentioned that

girls currently comprise about 10 per cent of the 102 Year One students, with expectations of their percentage increasing in the future. "We want changes for their future success; today I see them happy and excited to come to school. There are no objections from parents; our goal is to increase the number of students in this school," she stated.

Year One student Ashley Vianna Mattheus expressed her excitement about attending school to meet new friends, reflecting the positive atmosphere surrounding the school's new co-educational direction.

According to government data, Malaysia is experiencing stagnant population growth due to a declining birth rate and a decrease in the total fertility rate (TFR), representing the average number of children a woman is anticipated to have during her childbearing years. The TFR has decreased from 4.9 in 1970 to 1.6 in 2022, falling below the replacement threshold of 2.1.

Official records indicate that Malaysia's population grew to 32.7 million in 2022 from 29.5 million in 2012, accompanied by a growth rate of 0.2 per cent. This growth rate has gradually declined from its peak of 2.8 per cent in 1992.



Archbishop John Wong with the clergy and seminarians.



# Launching connections for working adults

By Yvonne Bolton

KLANG: March 10 marked the inaugural meeting of the Church of the Holy Redeemer's Working Adult Ministry (WAM), with a blend of ice-breaker activities and lunch for the 40 attendees.

The inception of the WAM traces back to parish priest, Fr Andrew Kooi, and the Parish Council, who envisioned it nearly a year ago. Their goal was to establish a ministry that would serve as a bridge connecting the youth and senior members of the parish. A dedicated committee was formed, and about a month prior to the event, invitations were extended to parishioners for this initial gathering.

The primary objective was to foster interaction, participation, and volunteering among individuals aged 25 to 54, in efforts to strengthen community bonds. Moreover, the event was inclusive of the participants' children, who engaged in their own set of activities, thereby immersing them in

church life from a young age.

Hosted in the church hall, the event kicked off with an engaging activity that encouraged attendees to converse with at least a dozen people they hadn't previously interacted with. This not only facilitated new friendships but also revealed shared interests beyond their collective faith and commitment to family and church. The group comprised of people from diverse working backgrounds including hoteliers, IT personnel, GPs, housewives, and executives.

The luncheon, courtesy of a parishioner, featured a mouth-watering menu, while children enjoyed a special kiddie meal. Post-lunch entertainment saw our host, Jason, challenging us to overcome our shyness through a hilarious animal-themed mind-reading game, sparking laughter and diminishing any initial awkwardness.

Raymond Sam, the coordinator, eloquently outlined WAM's vision and mission towards the end, emphasising "Reigniting our connection with Jesus and the Church" and



The working adults during one of the activities.

promoting engagement with Jesus Christ, the Church, its global mission, and the inter-generational community within. He invited suggestions and volunteer support for upcoming events, indicating a series of planned spiritual and recreational activities for the year.

The gathering began in quiet anticipation but concluded on a high note of laughter, engaging conversations, and smiles, signalling a strong start for the WAM. The next meeting, set for June, is eagerly anticipated. Special gratitude is directed towards Fr Andrew for his support.

## St Mark's Church embarks on RM20 Million development project

BATU KAWA, Kuching: The RM20 million expansion project for the Church of St Mark officially commenced with a ceremonial groundbreaking and blessing on March 9. The event, which marked the beginning of Phase 1 of the project, was graced by the presence of Archbishop Simon Poh and Deputy Premier and Minister for Public Health, Housing, and Local Government, Sarawak, Datuk Amar Dr Sim Kui Hian.

The existing church building, situated in Batu Kawa, has been a focal point for the Catholic community in Kuching since its inauguration in 1999. Under the pastoral care of St Joseph's Cathedral until 2021, the church continues to serve a rapidly growing congregation, now overseen by Sacred Heart Parish, Kota Sentosa, while maintaining support from the Cathedral and other parishes.

Fr Felix Au, the rector of St Mark's Church, emphasised the necessity of expanding the church's facilities to accommodate the growing number of worshippers, which currently surpasses 2,000 attendees every weekend. This expansion aims to create a space for community-building and faith formation, contributing to the advancement of Sarawak's future.

Archbishop Simon Poh expressed the vision of establishing St Mark's as an independent



Archbishop Simon Poh and Datuk Amar Dr Sim (yellow shirt) cutting the ribbon to launch the earth breaking ceremony of St Mark's Church extension project. (Today's Catholic photo)

parish, highlighting the importance of positioning the church for autonomous operation. The complete realisation of this vision will require an estimated total cost of RM20 million.

The development plan for the parish is divided into four phases, with Phase 1 focusing on the construction of the parish office and rectory. Subsequent phases will include the construction of classroom blocks, a multi-purpose activity hall, and an extension of the existing church for worship.

Funding for the project has been partially secured through fundraising efforts organised by the church committee, amounting to one-third of the total project cost.

Both YB Datuk Amar Dr Sim and Archbishop Simon Poh emphasised the importance of supporting places of worship as integral to nation building. Datuk Amar Dr Sim highlighted that the government's support is directed towards the community as a whole, rather than individuals, affirming that UNIFOR (Unit for Other Religions) will continue its role in supporting churches, temples, and other religious institutions in Sarawak's nation-building endeavours.

Archbishop Simon further underlined the role of the Church in community building, emphasising its contributions towards fostering blessings, goodness, and kindness. He noted that the Church's acts of mercy and good deeds extend beyond its congregations, positively impacting society and thus solidifying its indispensable role in the nation-building process.

Phase 1 involves the construction of vital infrastructure, including the parish office, priest and caretaker quarters, utility rooms, and new toilets. Furthermore, groundwork has commenced for Phase 2, which will feature a 4 1/2 storey Sunday School block. The estimated budget for Phase 1 and the foundation of Phase 2 amounts to RM6.3 million.

St Mark's Church looks forward to continued support from UNIFOR to complete Phase 1 and the belfry, and to progress to subsequent phases of the project. The ceremony was attended by local priests and religious figures, members of St Mark's community, and Elder Ambrose Linang, representing the Association of Churches (ACS) and UNIFOR. — *Today's Catholic*

## Coalfields church project faces delays

KUALA SELANGOR: The construction of the new church in Bandar Seri Coalfields, slated for last year, has faced delays due to numerous issues.

This church is intended to replace the aging 51-year-old Chapel of St Anthony, currently situated in a flood-prone area along Jalan Kuala Selangor.

Peter Nages, the chairperson of the building fund committee, said that the new building will accommodate up to 800 individuals and is projected to cost around RM7.5 million.

He also mentioned that while the construction permit has been approved, the physical document has yet to be received. Peter remains hopeful for its imminent arrival. As of now, they have raised RM100,000 from local parish contributions.

Encouraged by the parish priest, Fr James Gabriel, the committee is striving to kick-start construction this year, targeting a commencement by June 2024 at the latest. Peter explained that the Archdiocese plans to fund the project in phases, with the parish responsible for reimbursing these costs. The construction is expected to span 18 months.



To aid in fundraising, a 'Buy A Brick' campaign has been launched (*pic*), selling bricks at RM10 each. However, the committee seeks to gain approval from neighbouring parishes before extending their fundraising efforts beyond their own community.

Currently, the Chapel of St Anthony serves approximately 300 parishioners, in addition to numerous Catholic migrants residing in Coalfields and its vicinity. — *By Bernard Anthony*

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# Medical campaign at Silibin parish

By Christina Joyce Nasimuthu

IPOH: The Medical Ministry, in collaboration with the Caritas team of the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, organised a Lenten blood donation drive and medical campaign on March 10. Held at the parish hall, this annual event was open to all, both parishioners and non-parishioners alike.

The primary goal was to encourage blood donation to meet the increasing demand for blood supply in MOH hospitals. Additionally, the event aimed to raise health awareness, particularly among the underprivileged and marginalised in the community who may have limited access to health information and screening. This initiative was part of the 2024 Lenten Campaign — *Together We Rebuild Our Church, Community, and Common Home*.

A stable and ample supply of blood is crucial for a well-functioning public healthcare system. The blood donation was managed by doctors and staff from Tabung Darah, Hospital Batu Gajah. We are pleased to announce that 47 individuals donated blood during the event. Each pint of donated blood can save up to three lives, and we extend our heartfelt thanks to each donor for their life-saving gift.

Furthermore, approximately 100 individuals from various backgrounds participated in health screenings, including pap smears, blood pressure, BMI, body fat analysis, blood sugar, and cholesterol checks. Following their tests, participants received medical advice from doctors on non-communicable diseases (NCDs), promotion of a healthy lifestyle, and other relevant topics. Participants also verified their eligibility for Skim Perubatan Madani, a



Blood donation drive and dental check-up.

government initiative providing health services for the B40 group.

As an additional service, dental examinations and simple dental treatments were provided to 108 people, including children. An oral health exhibition booth was also set up to provide advice on oral hygiene, tooth brushing techniques, and oral cancer awareness.

The event exceeded our expectations

and was a great success. We extend our sincere thanks to the management and staff of Tabung Darah Hospital Batu Gajah, Klinik Kesihatan Manjoi, Klinik Kesihatan Greentown, and Klinik Pergigian Jelapang for their invaluable service. Lastly, we commend the members of the Medical Ministry and Caritas for their outstanding work in organising and executing this event.



ARCHDIOCESE OF  
KUALA LUMPUR  
CHAN/CD/05/2024

## Chancery Notice

### Clergy appointments and updates

Archbishop Julian Leow, after having made the necessary consultations, has hereby made the following appointments:

1. Rev Fr George Harrison is appointed parish priest of the Church of the Divine Mercy, Shah Alam, Selangor, effective April 15, 2024.
2. Rev Fr Michel Dass is appointed assistant priest of the Church of St Anthony, Kuala Lumpur, effective April 15, 2024.
3. Rev Fr Thomas Koo, CDD is appointed assistant priest of the Church of St Ignatius, Petaling Jaya, Selangor, effective April 1, 2024.
4. Rev Fr Frederick Joseph, after having been on medical leave, resumes his duties as parish priest of the Church of St Joseph, Sentul, Kuala Lumpur, starting April 15, 2024. He is also appointed as the Parish Administrator of the Church of the Risen Christ, Kuala Lumpur, effective April 15, 2024.
5. Rev Fr Jean Claude, after having undergone surgery, will return to the Chapel of Kristus Aman, Taman Tun Dr Ismail, Kuala Lumpur, starting March 31, 2024 (Easter Sunday).

Let us continue to pray and support our priests as they dedicate themselves to the service of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

*Clarence Devadass*  
Rev Fr Dr Clarence Devadass  
Chancellor  
Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur  
March 13, 2024

KLANG: The Church of the Holy Redeemer organised a Lenten Retreat titled *Living and Loving Lent* for its parishioners recently.

The session was facilitated by Martin Jalleh, who commenced with a succinct introduction and an overview of the day's agenda. Contrary to the traditional view of Lent as a period marked by sacrifice and somber reflection, Martin highlighted the season's positive aspects, emphasising its life-affirming message.

A key takeaway for us, after engaging more deeply with the discussions, was the refreshing perspective on Lent as the spiritual equivalent of spring cleaning for the soul. This season invites us to introspect and review our actions over the past year, aiming to emerge from any spiritual darkness

## Living and loving Lent



and embrace a new beginning. Central to this period is the powerful reminder that no sin is beyond God's grace. This point struck a chord with us: God is ever-eager to draw

us closer to heavenly bliss, challenging the secular narrative that often focuses on guilt and shame.

The retreat beautifully illustrated this

concept through the parable of the Prodigal Son, where the father's joyous reception of his returning child serves as a metaphor for God's boundless love and forgiveness. It reminded us that admitting our wrongdoings, seeking forgiveness, and making amends are not signs of weakness but steps toward rekindling our relationship with God.

The *Living & Loving Lent* retreat reshaped our understanding of this sacred season. It's not merely a time for penance but a period for reconnecting with God's love and mercy, paving the way for spiritual renewal. This Lenten message, encouraging us to view our faith journey as a continuous embrace of God's grace, is one we'll carry in our hearts and minds long after the Lenten season. —  
*By Morgan and Angela*

## Spreading hope and love

KLANG: The Lenten Campaign 2024 organised by the Women's Ministry of the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development in Klang District concluded on a high note, with two impactful social outreach programmes aimed at supporting marginalised communities.

The first outreach programme took place at Rumah Grace, a non-profit organisation dedicated to providing shelter and care for homeless and destitute women. The second programme was held at Rumah Ozanam for Girls and SSVP Boys' Home, which focuses on creating a nurturing environment for children from single-parent families.

The event received overwhelming support from volunteers who not only contributed their time but also generously supported the

needs of the homes. The presence of Brian Lim, a talented balloonist, added to the festive atmosphere, along with the blessings of Archbishop Julian Leow, who graced the occasion.

"Visiting two homes with different occupants, yet united in their appreciation for our presence, was truly humbling. These are individuals often overlooked by society, but today, they felt seen and heard, bringing them immeasurable joy," shared a volunteer.

The volunteer recounted touching encounters, such as listening to Mdm Irene, a resident of Rumah Grace, share her journey from Bukit Bintang Girls School to a career in domestic work. Despite facing challenges, Mdm Irene exuded pride in her decades-long service to various families.



The Women's Ministry members with the elderly.

Similarly, at St Bernadette's home for girls, managed by SSVP, the resilience and joy of the children reaffirmed the power of choice in finding happiness amidst adversity.

The volunteer expressed gratitude for the experience, noting that there is much to be grateful for and to look forward to, as love and joy

can be found in the simplest of experiences.

As the Lenten Campaign 2024 drew to a close, it left a lasting impression of compassion and solidarity in the hearts of all who participated, reaffirming the community's commitment to serving those in need. —  
*By Bernadette Anne Fernandez*



# Church must eradicate situations that protect abusers



(Vatican Media)

VATICAN: "Humanising relationships in any society, including the Church, means working tirelessly to form mature, coherent individuals who, firm in their faith and ethical principles, are capable of confronting evil, bearing witness to the truth in capital letters."

Pope Francis offered that consideration in a message sent to participants in the 3rd Latin American Congress, which took place March 12-14.

Promoted by the Centre for the Protection of Minors (CEPROME), the event gathered Church representatives from across the region to reflect on the theme: *Vulnerability and abuse: Towards a broader view of prevention*.

In his message, the Pope entrusted to the Lord the Church's efforts to eradicate "the scourge of abuse in all areas of society."

He recalled his audience in the Vatican with members of CEPROME on September 25, 2023. At the time, he highlighted the Church's

commitment to discover the "suffering face of Jesus in each of the victims."

Pope Francis also encouraged participants to pray for the conversion of all sinners, including abusers, while working to prevent all forms of abuse.

Considering the issue with the eyes of God, he added, can help us better understand our own vulnerability.

"Seeing our own weakness as an excuse to stop being full persons and complete Christians, incapable of taking control of their destiny, will create childish, resentful people," he said, "and in no way represents the littleness to which Jesus invites us."

Rather, said Pope Francis, Christians are called to find strength in our weaknesses while trusting in God's grace (cf. 2 Cor 12:8-10).

By finding our strength and trust in God, he noted, "we will be able to face life's contra-

dictions and contribute to the common good in the vocation to which we have been called."

Pope Francis went on to call for the Church to root out structures that protect people who abuse others.

"In terms of prevention," he said, "our efforts must undoubtedly aim to eradicate situations that protect those who hide behind their position to impose themselves on others in a perverse manner, but also to understand why they are incapable of relating to others in a healthy way."

The Pope noted that any society not based on the premises of moral integrity "will be a sick society," whose relationships will wind up perverted by selfishness, fear, and deceit.

Pope Francis concluded his message to the 3rd Latin American Congress by inviting participants to entrust their "weakness to the strength that the Lord gives us." — **By Devin Watkins, Vatican News**

## Vote for European project, Christian values

BRUSSELS: As the June 2024 EU Parliament elections approach, the bishops of the European Union are urging citizens to cast their votes for candidates who not only champion Christian principles, but also support the advancement of the European project.

"In these challenging and uncertain times for Europe and the European Union, we are in dire need of policymakers who are courageous, competent, and driven by values, striving earnestly for the common good," the bishops have stated. It falls upon us to ensure that our choices in the upcoming elections reflect these necessities.

Through a statement released by the delegate bishops of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE), there's a call for Christians to carefully discern their choices at the ballot box, emphasising the significance of this election for the future of the European Union.

Acknowledging the unique political landscapes across different countries, the bishops still stress the importance of voting for individuals and parties who are commit-

ted to the European project. They advocate for support towards those who embody and promote core values such as the dignity of every human being, solidarity, equality, support for families, sanctity of life, democracy, freedom, the principle of subsidiarity, and environmental stewardship.

Fr Manuel Enrique Barrios Prieto, Secretary-General of COMECE, highlighted the bishops' desire for a thoughtful and responsible voting process that would further both the European project and Christian values.

Moreover, the statement from COMECE extends a special invitation to young voters to participate actively in shaping a Europe that secures their future and aligns with their aspirations. It also encourages those young individuals inspired to enter politics to do so with a spirit of service towards the communal good.

"Young people are urged to embrace the European project and promote Christian values within Europe," said Fr Prieto. "The forthcoming elections are a vital tool for achieving this goal." — **Vatican News**

## Consecrated persons rejuvenate Church

PANAJI, Goa: Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrao, archbishop of Goa and Daman, has hailed the Catholic religious men and women as a blessing since they rejuvenate the Church.

"You render service to the holiness of the Church. We need your prophetic voice and action. You can teach the entire Church to walk the synodal path," the cardinal told the general body meeting of the Goa unit of the Conference of Religious India.

More than 300 religious attended the March 8 programme held at Don Bosco Oratory, Panaji, the state capital.

The prelate, who had participated in the Rome Synod, shared his experience of the October 2023 event.

"The Synod was an experience of the common journey. Everyone in the synod was given equal consideration. There was no hierarchical seating arrangement. We all sat around a round table, irrespective of our status in the Church. And we addressed each one by name," the cardinal recalled.

He said the synod was held in a deeply religious environment where interreligious prayer service and a three-day retreat prepared the participants to discern what the Holy Spirit was telling them during the event.

Suggesting more collaboration with the Church and laity, the prelate said, "The Holy Spirit is very generous. Our role is to facilitate and share the gifts in our missionary Church. As bishop of the archdiocese, I appreciate with deep gratitude your presence and service."

The assembly felicitated the cardinal for being elected the president of the Federation Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC).

The cardinal said those in consecrated life are the first to sense important historical changes and to heed the promptings of the Spirit. "Today too, the Church needs your prophetic voice and action," he added. — **By Lissy Maruthanakuzhy, Matters India**

## British parliament questions 'false baptism' by asylum seekers



(Unsplash/Jameltene Reskp)

LEICESTER, United Kingdom: A representative from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales informed British MPs that clergy members maintain "clear engagement" with individuals seeking baptism. This conversation took place during a session with the Home Affairs Select Committee, which was examining concerns that asylum seekers might be pursuing baptisms as a means to secure their stay in the UK.

Open Doors UK has identified 50 countries where Christians are under threat, with North Korea, Somalia, Libya, Eritrea, Yemen, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sudan, Iran, and Afghanistan topping the list. Reports emerged earlier indicating that among the 500 individuals aboard the Bibby Stockholm, a vessel designated for processing asylum applications, 40 migrants expressed an interest in converting to Christianity.

Fr Christopher Thomas, general secretary of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, addressed inquiries on whether converts remain active within the church post-baptism. He emphasised the importance of a thorough interview process by priests with candidates, to deeply understand their background and motivations, especially for asylum seekers, highlighting the Church's commitment to genuine engagement.

Fr Matthew Firth, previously a Church of England priest and now serving in the Free Church of England, shared with the Daily

Telegraph that during his tenure, he encountered 20 failed asylum seekers seeking baptism, suggesting the actual number across the UK could be in the thousands. Firth noted to the Home Affairs committee that these requests for baptism often occur during the appeal phase of their asylum process, viewing it potentially as a lifeline amidst their challenging circumstances.

The Anglican Bishop of Chelmsford, Eleanor "Guli" Francis-Dehqani, raised concerns over the allegations of false baptisms among asylum seekers, suggesting the numbers reported did not fully align with her experience. She acknowledged instances where clergy declined baptism requests based on insufficient evidence of genuine faith conversion, underlining the seriousness with which such decisions are made, despite the Church's human capacity for error.

Home Office Minister Tom Pursglove clarified to the committee that converting to Christianity does not automatically influence an asylum seeker's case outcome. He outlined that such claims are considered among a spectrum of factors, with a particular focus on the credibility of the conversion story, highlighting that most conversions are declared at the initial stage of asylum application.

This discourse underscores the complexity of assessing religious conversion claims within the asylum process and the diverse perspectives within the Church community on addressing these sensitive matters. — **Crux**





# Young pilgrims to walk thousands of miles with the Eucharist

The 2024 National Eucharistic Congress, set to occur from July 17-21 in Indianapolis, USA, is being hailed as the 'largest Eucharistic procession in world history.' The event is anticipated to attract tens of thousands of individuals for Masses, worship, talks, workshops, and various other activities, all commemorating Christ's true presence in the Eucharist.

A group of two dozen young Catholic pilgrims will walk thousands of miles across the United States this summer, carrying Jesus Christ in the Eucharist through city streets and the countryside, converging at the 2024 National Eucharistic Congress.

Collectively, the pilgrims will walk over 6,500 miles and will traverse four different routes, beginning on opposite sides of the country and meeting in Indianapolis for the National Eucharistic Congress July 17-21.

All between the ages of 19 and 29, the 24 "Perpetual Pilgrims" — six per route — have committed to giving up their summer and braving sun and rain to help the US bishops rededicate the country to Christ in the Eucharist. Accompanied throughout the entire route by priest chaplains, the pilgrims will travel 10-15 miles each day, mostly on foot, while taking part in a minor Eucharistic procession.

The pilgrim walk will commence the Pentecost weekend, May 17-19.

## The Seton Route

The Seton Route, which begins in Connecticut and is named for St Elizabeth Ann Seton, will pass through a number of the country's largest cities as well as the nation's oldest diocese, Baltimore.

Amayrani Higueldo Sanchez, a recent nursing school graduate from Philadelphia, found herself with a few unstructured months after her graduation, and at the same time, during her busy nursing school experience, she says she continually felt a tug to spend more time with Jesus in adoration.

So, when the opportunity arose to drop everything and spend months travelling with the Eucharistic Jesus across the country, she said it felt like a providential way to spend more time with Jesus and encourage others to do the same.

Higueldo, a native



of Acapulco, Mexico, who has lived in the Philadelphia area since age seven, said she is especially looking forward to bringing the Eucharist through the major cities in the East. She described a powerful encounter she had with the Eucharist while on a retreat as a teenager and expressed a hope to bring a similar experience to those participating along the route.

"I remember just the piercing gaze of Our Lord. It just pierced everything in my body and my soul. And I remember just being, feeling like, seen, loved, and just redeemed for the first time in my life," she recalled.

"And really, it just changed the whole trajectory of my life, just that gaze of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. And really, I was restored in that moment, and I sought the sacrament of reconciliation right after. And I haven't been the same since. I used to be so shy, so I didn't talk to anyone. I was deep in sin. And now I'm like, you're talking to people and going on this Eucharistic pilgrimage, talking to many, many people. And really, it just really changed my life."

## The Marian Route

Matthew Heidenreich, a native Ohioan attending college in Alabama, will be walking the northern Marian Route, which begins at the headwaters of the Mississippi River in Minnesota.

Heidenreich said that his personal relationship with Christ began at a Eucharistic pilgrimage while

attending adoration at a Catholic summer camp. It was there during an adoration hour out in nature that he first came to a "place of surrender" to Christ.

He said he is looking forward to helping give "someone else permission to let the Lord do the same thing in their heart, opening up their heart to receive what the Lord wants to give so freely."

"I think just seeing a group of six to eight young people who have given everything for a summer to follow Christ speaks deeply," Heidenreich said.

"If someone is willing to follow something, to leave the things behind that you could have done, leave behind the security and to follow someone or something, that says something powerful."

## The Junipero Serra Route

The longest of the four routes, the route named for St Junipero Serra, will begin with a dramatic procession across the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco and will see the pilgrims traverse the Rocky Mountains and the Great Plains.

Jaella Mac Au, a Georgia native and undergraduate student, will be walking this route. Mac Au said she had planned to look for Catholic missionary work following her graduation, but when the opportunity arose to go on this pilgrimage and God seemed to be calling her there, she accelerated her plans. Ultimately, she said, embarking on this two-month journey meant delaying an important internship.

Despite the sacrifice involved, Mac Au said that throughout the discernment process of becoming a pilgrim, she has come to find "security in the insecurity" — not knowing exactly what her future holds but trusting that God has it in control.

Mac Au requested prayers for herself and her fellow pilgrims that they would rely on God's love and grace throughout the challenging pilgrimage experience and not merely on their own abilities. She said she views the pilgrimage as a transformative experience that aligns with her desire to serve in a missionary capacity.

"Through Jesus in the Eucharist, it's such just a tangible reminder that the Lord desires to love us in a very humane, human-like way ... He actually desires to continue to seek out humanity and meet them exactly where they're at," she said.

## The Juan Diego Route

Charlie McCullough, 22, will be walking the southern Juan Diego Route, beginning in Brownsville, Texas, just a few minutes from the US-Mexico border.

A college senior about to finish his final semester at Texas A&M University, McCullough said that he had a personal encounter with Christ after receiving the Eucharist at a Wednesday evening Mass his freshman year.

"I very vividly remember the spot in the church where I knelt and prayed, and something was entirely different from that moment forward," he explained. "I realised in that moment that there was a place inside of me that the Lord rested and was His home. That was deeper than anything else that I've ever experienced in the world."

"From that moment, I kept coming back to daily Mass, and I kept coming back to the adoration chapel. And just from there, it began, this relationship of deep love with Jesus Christ, all because I realised that He was already living in me, and I was just starting to get to know Him because of the gift of the Eucharist."

McCullough said he is open to God radically altering the course of his life during the pilgrimage. Although he is getting ready to embark on a once-in-a-lifetime, cross-country journey, he said that he is most looking forward to being able to help people encounter those small, "seemingly insignificant" interactions with Christ in the Eucharist that "radically change everything."

"My hope for the pilgrimage is that every person that we encounter has something stir inside of them that makes them question: 'Why do I feel differently when I was encountered by this procession? ... What if that is truly the body and blood of Jesus Christ?'" he said.

"I have full confidence that Jesus Christ is truly present, body, blood, soul, and divinity in the Eucharist and if the pilgrimage simply stirs questions in the hearts of those that we encounter, I know that those questions will be answered with the truth."

Joining McCullough on the Juan Diego Route is Shayla Elm, a North Dakotan who works for Christ in the City, a Catholic ministry to the homeless in Denver.

Elm said despite being a lifelong Catholic, she has benefited greatly already in recent months from the Catholic formation that the pilgrims have been provided to prepare them for the pilgrimage. The pilgrims have been given weekly Zoom formation sessions and went on retreat together in February.

"We're all coming from different places, all have different gifts, and I just think it's really exciting to get to walk with other young adults who are on fire for the Lord," she said.

Elm emphasised the central role of the Eucharist in her faith journey, highlighting how it has always been a core aspect of her life and how she believes her vocation is deeply tied to the Eucharist.

"I've just known for a while that wherever my life will go, whatever my path is, vocationally, wherever I'm going, the Eucharist will be at the centre, period," she explained.

— By Jonah McKeown, Peter Pinedo, CNA







(NCR photo/Vatican Media via AP)

# The best gift you can give Pope Francis

## Praying with (and for) him

For the gift of diversity in the Church. For the terminally ill. For the role of women — these are a few of Pope Francis' special prayer intentions that he prays each month. The Pope has an official "prayer network" that prays with him and promotes these intentions. As the Pope enters the 12th year of his papacy, there is no better gift than to pray with and for him.

As the national director of the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network, otherwise known as the Apostleship of Prayer, I travel around the country and speak about the Pope's prayer intentions, encouraging people to join the Apostleship of Prayer. As I tell people: "Jesuits are called to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. So, if Francis isn't making you uncomfortable, then you're not paying attention!" But this call is not just for the Jesuits; Jesus Himself both comforts us and challenges us. All Christians, especially popes, must continue to announce the Gospel message with their words and actions. The Pope's monthly intentions reflect the tension between the comfort and challenge of the Gospel.

During March, Pope Francis invites us to pray with him "for the new martyrs. We pray that those who risk their lives for the Gospel in various parts of the world inflame the Church with their courage and missionary enthusiasm." This inten-

tion, particularly, stirs my heart. I love the many Jesuit saints and martyrs who gave their lives in witness to Christ. But in many countries, martyrdom is not just part of Church history but a present-day reality. I have Jesuit friends in India and Nigeria who have been kidnapped, harassed and brutalised. The Pope's prayer intention raises awareness about important issues and brings the needs of others into our prayers.

Reading over Francis' prayer intentions for 2025, I noticed how our Jesuit Pope has his fingerprints on these intentions. He invites us to pray for a healthy "relationship with all of creation" in September 2025. The following month, we will pray for "collaboration between different religious traditions." There is a strong resonance in these intentions with his papal encyclicals: *Laudato Si'* on the environment and *Fratelli Tutti* on human fraternity.

When I entered the Jesuits in 2000, I learned about the Apostleship of Prayer and have been praying with the Pope's intentions ever since. Since 2025 is a jubilee year, I recently looked back at St John Paul II's intentions in the 2000 jubilee year. I also read through Pope Benedict XVI's intentions in 2012 — the last full year of his papacy and the Year of Faith, which marked 50 years since the start of the Second Vatican Council.

I found significant overlap in

these popes' intentions, as well as the unique personalities and emphases of each pontiff shining through. In June 2000, Pope John Paul II prayed that "Christ, adored and celebrated in the Eucharist, may increasingly be shared as Bread of life for the good of the world." In his homilies and writings, especially the encyclical *Ecclesia Eucharistica*, John Paul II consistently sought a renewal and deepening of Eucharistic piety, which he sensed had diminished in the years following Vatican II. Similarly, Pope Benedict XVI was a liturgical theologian and likewise devoted a monthly intention to the Eucharist in October 2012, praying that we recognise "the living presence of the Risen One" in the Eucharist.

All three of these popes have, and will continue, to pray for vocations to the priesthood and religious life. I was struck that John Paul II's July 2000 intention is almost identical to Francis' for October 2025. John Paul II prayed that the followers of different "religions may grow in respecting one another and collaborating to consolidate justice and peace." Many recall John Paul II's historic gathering of religious leaders in Assisi, Italy, in both 1986 and 2002, to pray and work for peace. Pope Francis continues this tradition of dialogue with other faiths, particularly in *Fratelli Tutti* and in his namesake, the beloved "Saint of

Peace," Francis of Assisi.

In December 2012, Pope Benedict XVI prayed "that migrants throughout the world may be welcomed with generosity and authentic love." John Paul II also prayed that migrants and refugees might experience "God the Father's goodness" through "Christians' generous welcome." Care for migrants is certainly a passion of Pope Francis, and while he does not name this intention in 2025, he does in June 2024: "that migrants fleeing from war or hunger, forced to undertake journeys full of danger and violence, find welcome and new opportunities in the countries that receive them."

Notice, too, the increasingly ominous tone of these petitions. First, John Paul II prayed for "young married couples" in 2000. Then, Benedict XVI prayed for "initiatives which defend and uphold the role of the family," as many modern governments marginalised or redefined the traditional family. Now, Francis prays for "families in crisis," that they might "discover the cure for their wounds through forgiveness." There has been an increase in severity across these papal intentions: for families, defending families, for families in crisis. In a similarly sombre tone, Francis will pray for "the prevention of suicide" in November 2025. The scientific and technological developments of

the 21st century offer incredible opportunities, but they have not created a more caring world.

Each of these pontiffs has his unique gifts, experiences and interests that he brings to his prayer intentions — John Paul II's global vision, Benedict XVI's academic wisdom and Francis' Latin American roots. In their intentions, we see their common mission as prayerful pastors of an international Church that labours for faith, hope and love in a troubled world.

The Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network is rooted in the love of Jesus, as expressed in the Sacred Heart devotion. These monthly intentions are prayers offered to God by people of faith. Christians pray. We turn to God for help. In the traditional daily offering of the Apostleship of Prayer, we pray "for all the intentions of your Sacred Heart: salvation of souls, reparation for sins, the reunion of all Christians." We believe that God wants these things even more than we do.

Popes are bishops, leaders, heads of the Vatican state and leaders of over a billion Catholics. But popes are also disciples, Christians and men of prayer. They pray for us. They ask us to pray with them and for them.

Happy 11th anniversary, Pope Francis! We are praying with you and for you. — **By Fr Joe Laramie, SJ, America**

## Pope Francis' eleventh year marred by sorrow over wars

Pope Francis' eleventh year has been profoundly marked by the sorrow of global conflicts, particularly the ongoing wars in Ukraine and the Middle East. Over the past year, the Pope has issued more than 150 appeals for Ukraine, emphasising its suffering and calling it "martyred," and over 60 calls for ceasefire and peace in the Middle East. These appeals come with an invitation to world leaders to engage in "creative efforts" for a just and enduring peace, reflecting his deep concern for what he describes as humanity's "dark hour."

Reflecting on the toll of the conflict, Pope Francis shared his personal anguish, especially over the young lives lost, echoing the grief of thousands of mothers worldwide. In his first podcast, produced by *Vatican News*, he particularly mourned the young victims of the war in Ukraine, repeatedly referring to the nation as "martyred" or "tormented." This characterisation isn't just a repetitive slogan but a persistent reminder of the Ukrainian people's suffering, a focus that has only intensified with



'Peace', reads a banner in St Peter's Square, Vatican. (Vatican Media)

the conflict's potential escalation in Eastern Europe and the devastating violence in the Holy Land sparked by a terrorist attack by Hamas and the subsequent military response by Israel, leading to approximately 31,000 deaths in five months.

In his solitary prayers, Pope Francis carries the weight of these global crises, symbolised by the icons, crosses, and objects in his room from the afflicted nations. His public statements, overflowing with more than 130 appeals for Ukraine and over 60 for the

Middle East, consistently emphasise his solidarity with the victims and his prayers for peace. Regardless of the occasion — be it *Angelus*, *Regina Caeli*, or General Audience — the Pope has consistently highlighted the ongoing wars, advocating for peace and an end to the "madness" of war.

The Pope's call for peace extends beyond verbal appeals. He urges a harmonious political and diplomatic commitment to peace, notably calling on the European Union to play a

significant role. This call for action is part of his broader plea to the international community and world leaders to embrace the principles outlined in the *Pacem in Terris* encyclical, advocating for a world regulated by reason — truth, justice, and active solidarity — rather than armed force.

The pontiff has also questioned the absence of "creative efforts for peace" and has highlighted the importance of opening channels for dialogue and friendship as paths to

peace. His commitment to peace efforts led to the appointment of Cardinal Matteo Maria Zuppi as his envoy to key global capitals, embodying the Pope's desire for "creativity" in peace missions.

Amidst these challenges, the Holy Father envisions a world united in peace, without hate or weapons — a vision he shared with young people during his trip to Portugal for the World Youth Day. However, this vision faces significant tests, especially in the wake of intensified violence in the Middle East. The Pope's response to these events underscores his belief that war is always a defeat, bringing only death, destruction, and suffering.

The Pope's stance is clear: the path to peace requires more than just rejecting war; it necessitates active efforts towards negotiation and respect for international law. His message is a call to action for everyone, urging a collective movement towards peace, dialogue, and understanding, and a rejection of the destructive cycles of violence that plague our world. — **Vatican News**



# I'm a Catholic priest who fasts for *Ramadan*

Several years ago, not knowing at all what it would entail, I Googled a question: How do you keep *Ramadan*?

In the spring of 2019, after a series of high profile attacks on Muslim people in New York City and a reported rise in Islamophobia, I felt compelled to act in tangible solidarity with this vulnerable and targeted community. It just so happened that Ramadan was starting the next day. I decided I would observe its discipline of fasting as a way of accompaniment and solidarity.

I knew this sacred time in the Islamic tradition meant abstaining from eating and drinking from sunrise to sunset, but I discovered it was even more rigorous. You fast from dawn — that is, even before the sun rises — until sunset. It also did not occur to me then that when *Ramadan* (the dates of which are determined by a lunar calendar) falls in the spring, with each passing day, sunrise comes earlier and sunset moves later. Unlike Lent, where the tendency is to count down the days to Easter — or to look forward to the permissible reprieve on Sundays, when the Lenten penance can be suspended — fasting gradually becomes harder through the duration of *Ramadan*.

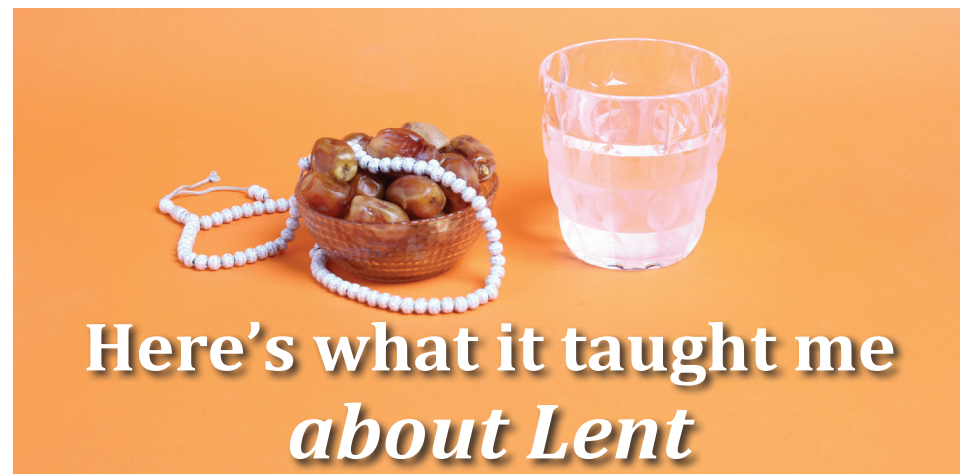
Years later, I still observe this sacred Islamic time's practice of fasting. It heightens my awareness of the afflictions that so many are forced to endure and the ways our world still needs healing.

Two years ago, for example, I used the *Ramadan* fast to pray for the people of Ukraine, and also to become more aware of the little things I take for granted. I could, for example, turn on my faucet in the morning and expect water would run. For millions of people in Ukraine, that was and still is not something they can assume. I was also able to teach my classes at Fordham uninterrupted. Many children in Ukraine are still unable to go to school.

That's the gift of fasting; it attunes us with a deeper level of reality. The discipline of fasting helps me to see the world as God sees it. Fasting has helped me to look at the world around me in a new way: We are all vulnerable, but we are not all vulnerable in the same way or to the same degree.

The first two weeks of my first *Ramadan* fast, I felt kind of proud of myself. "I can actually do this!" I thought. But it gradually became more mentally and physically exhausting. I learned, as I read more about Ramadan,

**Fasting has helped me to look at the world around me in a new way: We are all vulnerable, but we are not all vulnerable in the same way or to the same degree.**



## Here's what it taught me about Lent

that it was not simply about the external practice of refraining from food or liquids. *Ramadan*, for Muslims, is a time to become aware of all that is going on around you so that you can come closer to God.

The hunger pains experienced are supposed to help the one fasting become more aware of those who go hungry without choice. What I voluntarily endure over this annual month-long daytime fasting period is something so many in our world endure without choice. However hungry or depleted I might feel, I can eagerly anticipate the end of the day when I can break the fast. For far too many the burdens of hunger will only increase as their bodies consistently go without food.

### Hearing the cry of the poor

"The Lord hears the cry of the poor" is a verse from the Psalms we sing in our liturgies. But a question that haunts me still is this: "Do we hear the cry of the poor?" Fasting is a discipline that enables me to see the poor among us, because I now experience in my body the hunger so many others feel.

When I am fasting, I also become more aware of the homeless and unhoused who live on the streets. We can become almost immune to the poverty surrounding us; we develop a kind of force field that shields us from the painful and ugly realities that lie in plain sight. The hunger I experience during *Ramadan* fasting takes me out of myself so that I see and notice what is going on around me, yet which escapes my notice when I am full or satiated.

Another thing I learned during my first *Ramadan* is that your body has cycles of energy. If I eat my first meal at five o'clock in the morning — or earlier — I immediately

have a burst of energy because my body is nourished. But at around two in the afternoon, if I cannot have something more to eat, I am exhausted, my energy is depleted, and I can quickly become cranky and irritable. As a result, my productivity plummets when I keep *Ramadan*.

Many children in our country and other parts of the world go to school hungry. How can you do your best on a test when you can't concentrate? I now understand their plight more, and not just intellectually, because I have experienced it in my own body. In this way, fasting becomes an embodied form of prayer. When my energy plummets, I become acutely aware of the gnawing that's going on inside me, which in turn makes me more sensitive to the pain of those around me who live in an almost constant state of vulnerability. I am moved to pray for them — and to continue to work for a more just and equitable world for all.

### Communal Awareness

When I keep *Ramadan*, I am participating in a discipline practised by 1.8 billion people around the world. We are all keeping this sacred season at the same time; we are all in it together.

Something I regret about Lent is that Catholics do not really have a sense that we are engaging in this 40-day period of preparation for Easter together. Too often, we look upon Lent as a kind of a 40-day personal improvement project. It's a time for making and trying to keep sacred New Year's resolutions. We decide we are not going to drink alcohol or eat sweets; but we are not often doing it together in a community or as a community. We Christians have become far too individu-

alistic in our spirituality. In the Muslim world, *Ramadan* is not an individual exercise. Muslims keep *Ramadan* as a people. *Ramadan*'s fasting is an act of communal worship and prayer.

I believe that is what Lent is intended to be for Christians. Lent is supposed to be a time of communal awareness of our shortcomings as a people; a desert time of fasting and intense prayer that provokes deeper reflection about who we are in our world; a season that makes us as believers more sensitive to the cries of the world. Once Lent is over, we are not called to return to the way life was. Rather, we are to ask ourselves difficult questions, such as: 'How am I different now that I've heard those cries of the poor? How am I different now that I've experienced, even in some distant way, what it's like to live in an environment disrupted by war? How do we as a people make acts of repentance for how our blindness contributes to the brokenness of the world? How is our God calling us to change?'

Fasting is not a matter of depriving my body to discipline my body. For me, it is depriving my body so that I begin to pray in a different way. Through this deprivation, I become more aware of myself and my world, my hopes and my dreams.

Each year during *Ramadan*, I become more aware that I want a world where children don't go hungry, where food doesn't go to waste, where children are not impeded from learning simply because they live in a household where their parents cannot provide for them. I become more aware of the scandal of poverty and hunger in our world; and of how there is more than enough food in the world to feed everyone adequately, but we lack the will to do so.

By fasting, I become more aware of how outrageous that is — and how much I wish it were otherwise. I believe that hope is part of God's heart, too, that this is what God desires for the world. Becoming more in tune with God's heart: This is what makes fasting something sacred. And it makes the insights it gives us about our world something that is not only political, but sacred as well. — **By Fr Bryan N. Massingale, America**

● **Fr Bryan N. Massingale is a priest of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee and a professor of theological and social ethics at Fordham University.**

## Faith, art, and identity

Online *Radio KekitaanFM* recently hosted 26-year-old local artist Eva Robert, renowned for her painting of Mother Mary adorned in a traditional Sabah costume. The discussion centred around Eva's artistic talents intertwined with her faith journey and its challenges.

During the interview, Eva discussed her Catholic faith and her experiences, particularly during a mission trip abroad. She began her journey of service at 18, fulfilling her desire for volunteerism while in university. This experience taught her to be more open, humble, and grateful.

Eva recounted feeling called to the mission, much like Mother Mary, which reignited her passion for volunteerism and mis-

sion work. She emphasised the importance of prayer and hard work, believing they lead to smooth sailing in life, especially when balancing studies and spirituality.

When asked about her pride in being Catholic, Eva emphasised that one's identity as a Catholic is not based on looks or status but on showing love to others. She highlighted the Church as a place for self-discovery and growth through various activities.

Eva also stressed the role of family in teaching Church values to children, as it strengthens community life. Her inspiration for the image of Mother Mary in traditional costume came from a friend in Sarawak, and she completed her first painting of Mother Mary and Jesus in traditional Kadazan cos-



Eva (seated left) with crew of Online Radio KekitaanFM. (Kekitaanfm Facebook)

time in 2021 during the virtual Sabah Youth Day (SYD) 5 event.

In closing, Eva attributed her painting

talent to God, stating, "Praise to the Lord alone," emphasising that her artistry is a gift from God. — **Catholic Sabah**





# When you give everything to God, He gives it back

Sparks fly, dropping bright glints of light around the piece of metal. A metal worker is fabricating his latest project. But with a clerical collar visible under his coveralls, this isn't an ordinary welder doing the arc welding.

This welder happens to be a priest: Fr Dominic Couturier, chaplain and welding instructor at Harmel Academy of the Trades, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. How did he come to combine his love of making metal malleable and shepherding souls?

"I was a semi-pro athlete, I had a girlfriend, and, when I was 33, God came crashing into my life more fully and told me He wanted me as a priest," said 44 year-old Fr Couturier.

"I've only been a priest for four years. I know a lot about business and metal fabrication, but I'm still working on being a holy pastor of souls."

"Our family business, Couturier Iron Craft Inc., officially started in 1967. My grandfather started it after World War II with his GI grant money," Fr Couturier explained.

"My dad left college after his freshman year to help. Later, my uncles did so too." Ever since he was a little boy, he recalled, he was "champing at the bit to be in there with the other guys."

Now pastor of Our Lady of Consolation in Rockford, Michigan, his journey to the priesthood was unique, to say the least. Working in his family's architectural metal fabrication company through middle school and high school, he earned a business degree in college and continued with the business, moving up from sweeping floors to being a lead fabricator and then project manager. Soon, he was on the board of directors — at age 28. "I learned to be disciplined, to wake up early, do things



Teaching the next generation of welders. (NCR photo)

you didn't want to do, for family, for clients, for employees," he said.

At the family company that specialises in architectural metal fabrication products for the commercial industry, such as monumental curved stairways, Fr Couturier learned how to run crews, including estimating and finance, and guide via strategic management. But before he had such focus, he allowed his faith to fall to the wayside.

"I checked out of being Catholic when I was 15 or 16 and came back in my late 20s," he said. "I've always had a deep moral compass; I've always known there was a God. But I was more of an agnostic after college. I moved to Colorado after college for a few years and worked in construction. I loved sports and skiing, but found that I was beginning to get sucked into the secular party culture of the big Colorado ski towns."

Finding himself drawn into this lifestyle, he was worried that his moral compass was becoming disoriented. "So I went back home." Afterward, he had an intense experience of God as a personal God, which he had doubted

was possible as an agnostic. "But journeying back to the Catholic faith had to take a few more years."

"It was St Ignatius of Antioch's writing on the Eucharist that really brought me back to Catholicism," he shared. "I kept developing my relationship with God, thinking that I was called to marriage. But at a certain point, I realised that He was calling me to the priesthood. It's a call to fight the good fight." He got involved in apologetics and found that teaching high schoolers about

sexual morality was necessary. "I felt the need to teach high schoolers about what authentic sexuality, human identity and dignity was so that the secular world would not eat them up." Understanding the theology of the body better led him to a deeper love for the Blessed Sacrament. He went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and to Rome, and then had a very intense dream in 2012. "I was beginning to have a devotion to John Paul II. And in this dream, John Paul II and I were at an Italian diner. The Pope says to me, 'I'm hungry,' and I say, 'Me too.' Then he says, 'Go feed the people.'" The soon-to-be priest took this to be a reference to the Eucharist.

So, he set about selling his house, which he had just built, breaking up with his girlfriend, and disengaging from the family business.

"I went to the seminary and knew that I wasn't so much of an academic. I thought I would never play baseball again, never go mountain bike racing, or do welding ever again." But he arrived at seminary and discovered lots of other seminarians liked such

pursuits too.

Speaking with Fr Robert Barron (now Bishop Barron), then rector at Mundelein Seminary, Fr Couturier said, "I've given up everything to come here." And Fr Barron, as he recalled, replied, "Why would you give up all these things that make you who you are? You don't need to do that." And so the now-seminarian found that when "you give everything to God, He gives it back."

In seminary, he started a baseball team and taught other seminarians welding and carpentry.

In 2018, a year before being ordained to the diaconate, he heard about the future Harmel Academy. "I'm at my parents' house. Dr Nathan Schmiedicke, a longtime friend of my family, is talking to my dad about Harmel Academy. 'It's going to be a Catholic trade school.' My attention was riveted." Schmiedicke, a Scripture scholar, seminary professor and farmer, was part of Harmel's founding team. He put the seminarian in touch with the other founders.

"I got involved, my dad's business got involved, and everything fell in place," Fr Couturier recalled. "I love teaching at the academy, whether it's spiritual formation or welding."

Not only that, he realised that he "wanted to bring back men to the Church. At Harmel, we form men to be on fire — not just workers, to be manly men. You are going to have to learn how to be a father, and how to fight for your faith, through prayer, study and fraternity. It's not just a trade, but learning to be an apprentice to the Master, Jesus Christ," he said.

Thus, Harmel gives Fr Couturier a unique opportunity to practise the trades and form fellow men in Catholic ideals.

"It's a great time to be Catholic, a great time to be a saint. We have to dig our heels down into the dirt and tell the secular world that they won't push us around anymore, for we'll resist with love." — **By Julian Kwasniewski, Register**

## Catholic nuns empower distressed Nepali women

On a serene spring afternoon in early March, Usha Rokka paused her sewing of women's handbags, a customer's order, to serve snacks to her son, a seven-year-old schoolboy. The 25-year-old single mother has carved out a modest but joyful life for herself and her son in a small rented room in Pokhara, a popular tourist destination in western Nepal, since escaping her abusive marital home seven years ago.

Rokka's fledgling home-based business, nurtured by the compassionate assistance of Good Shepherd nuns as part of their initiative to support vulnerable women, has become her lifeline. It generates up to 30,000 rupees (about RM1,697) monthly, covering her rent, daily needs, utilities, and her son's education.

Reflecting on her past, Rokka recalls the despair that once drove her to the brink of suicide, feeling trapped and jobless, unable to support her family. Her journey from her in-law's oppressive household in Kushma to Pokhara in 2018 was fuelled by desperation and the need for survival.

Rokka's new chapter began with her meeting the demand for her creative products, in-

cluding mobile pouches, grocery bags, and stylish ladies' bags, which attract both local and international buyers to Pokhara. The bags, priced between 100-1,500 rupees (RM5.66 - RM85.00), symbolise her regained independence and happiness.

The pivotal change came in June last year when the Good Shepherd Sisters, through Opportunity Village Nepal (OVN), extended a

helping hand. Since its foundation in 1998 and the launch of its anti-human trafficking project in 2016, OVN has been a beacon of hope, offering vocational training and financial aid to women like Rokka, empowering them to start their own businesses.

Rokka's resilience shone through her varied attempts at earning a livelihood, from domestic chores to factory work, until the pandem-

ic's blow. Her acquaintance with OVN transformed her life, providing not only financial aid but also valuable business and psychological support.

The nuns' project targets young girls and women trapped in cycles of domestic abuse and trafficking, aiming to prevent their exploitation in the adult entertainment industry. Sr Hemalata Boddu, the project coordinator, praised Rokka's determination and skill, which led to the successful launch of her business.

Rokka's story of transformation is a testament to her strength and the critical support OVN offers to women facing exploitation and abuse. By fostering skills and providing financial assistance, OVN empowers women to achieve self-reliance and pursue meaningful lives.

With OVN's continuous efforts in combating human trafficking and supporting victims, many women have found hope and a path to recovery. As Rokka dreams of expanding her business to train other vulnerable women, her story becomes a beacon of inspiration and a call to action to support the empowerment of women everywhere. — **ucanews.com**



Usha Rokka, 25, at her rented home in Pokhara of Nepal. (Photo supplied)





## SUNDAY OBSERVER

Anil Netto

Ever seen those car stickers “God loves you”? We might silently nod our heads in approval and feel reassured we have a God who cares deeply for us.

The idea of God or Jesus as a personal saviour was, perhaps, reinforced during the revival movement or in ‘born again’ circles in recent decades.

Many feel comforted by their faith in a personal saviour who saves us from our personal sins. But if we are not careful, our personal saviour could end up becoming a ‘private saviour’ and our faith a highly individualised and private one.

Our faith in the Lord of the Universe, Who sent His Spirit to transform the world, would then be reduced to an individualistic, self-centred faith, where what matters solely is the salvation of our own soul.

Not that salvation of our souls is not important, far from it. But it should be seen in a wider context. After all, the Church, as we know, is a community affair, a collective affair.

Jesus Himself measures our faith in God by how we treat the downtrodden and our neighbours in need. The famous verse John 3:16 is often used by ‘born again Christians’ to proclaim a personal saviour who redeems us from our personal sins.

But hold on a minute, look again. John 3:16 does not say, “God so loved you; He gave His only Son...”. Rather, it reads: “God so loved the world: He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

This means God loves the entire world — so our salvation should be seen in a much wider context. Our individual faith cannot be separated from God’s mission to redeem the entire world.



## A BLESSED LIFE

Tianne Ramona Pereira

“Like the woman at the well I was seeking, for things that could not satisfy, and then I heard my Saviour speaking, draw from My well that never shall run dry” — Only recently did I pay attention to how deep and meaningful these words really are, when I realised that was me! I was the woman at the well! Lost, broken, ashamed and hurt.

It all began about 20 years ago; I was a young girl who suddenly felt unusually “holy”. I found myself very often drawn into prayer. Don’t get me wrong, I prayed — but there was something different this time.

Like it was yesterday, I remember a gloomy December morning, just as the sun was about to rise, my dad had just driven into the driveway and an overwhelming sense of relief came upon me, since I had been up all night waiting for my parents to get home from the hospital. But in an instant my relief turned into palpitations when I realised my dad was alone — he pushed the door open, sobbing and repeating the words “mummy’s dying”. It was that dreadful morning we found out my mom’s cancer was back. I could feel my knees trembling, I felt my heart sink so low it left a numbing hollowness in my chest, but for some reason, I had no tears and I found myself in front of our altar on my knees.

Over the next few months, I prayed harder than I have ever prayed before and God spoke to me. Yes! He did. His message was crystal clear and I knew a miracle was in store. No one could say anything that could shake my belief.

# The ‘privatisation’ of Jesus

Each of us lives in a fallen world, but it is a world that has been redeemed.

Salvation in this wider context is an invitation to belong to God’s alternative society under the reign of God... His kingdom.

One key problem with popular films about Jesus is that we see Jesus helping the poor, healing the sick and gathering little children around Him. But then, all of a sudden, Jesus is hauled up before the chief priests and is handed over to the Roman authorities to be executed.

But why? For healing the sick and proclaiming a message of love? Why would the chief priests and Caesar’s local military regime be bothered by that? Why would that be a threat if that was all Jesus stood for? It almost doesn’t make sense.

No, the real threat was Jesus’ ideas and vision of an alternative society based on distributive justice, love, peace and compassion. He knew that a different world was possible.

It was this alternative vision that prompted Him to lash out at the corruption in the Temple. The very custodians of the Temple, who were entrusted to act justly and mercifully, were collaborating with earthly powers (the Roman Empire) to oppress the people.

Instead of easing the people’s burden, they were making it heavier and oppressing them. Instead of practising justice, mercy and compassion, they subverted the faith. They reduced the faith to animal sacrifices and ritualistic observances of personal purity.

Worse, they were accumulating immense wealth in the Temple, leaving a trail of misery, destitution, hunger, debt and loss of land in the countryside.

Jesus’ alternative kingdom (based on justice and compassion) contrasted starkly with the values of the Empire (based on military conquest, colonialism, subjugation and greed).

The chief priests and the Sanhedrin, the Sadducees and the rest of the elite were colluding with the Roman authorities to extract wealth

from the people — assorted taxes, temple taxes and tributes.

Not only that. They commercialised agriculture. They confiscated land from indebted smallholders and turned them into large estates, producing cash crops for export. They even commercialised fisheries at the Lake of Galilee.

This turned many proudly independent farmers and fisherfolk into day labourers and contract workers who found it difficult to put food on the table.

This was an early prototype of globalisation that reaped enormous profits for the elite while squeezing ordinary people into poverty. Religion was hijacked to serve the interests of power and empire. Peasants, widows and even lower-ranking priests were oppressed, their incomes ‘stolen’ by the powers that be.

Jesus’ alternative vision of the kingdom of God was seen as a threat to this neat collusion between the religious authorities and the Empire. Tellingly, when the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate asked the chief priests if he should crucify their king, they replied: “We have no king except Caesar.”

This was a profound statement. Greed often gravitates to the centres of powers in this world.

Sometimes even Christians and the Church are not spared this tendency to gravitate to centres of power. Perhaps it is for self-preservation.

Or perhaps the message of Jesus is too radical for our comfort, and we sink into a soft complacency with what is happening in the world, or maybe we even absorb the ways of this world.

What happens then is that we separate Jesus from His radical proclamation of His new kingdom. We reduce Jesus to a personal saviour and detach Him from His proclamation of a radical kingdom, which we push into a distant future or some ‘End Times’.

Worse, some groups even distort Bible verses to serve the agendas of those in power — the way Christian Zionism does.

“Here in Palestine, the Bible is weaponised against us,” a Lutheran pastor in occupied Bethlehem, Rev Munther Isaac, observed.

Yes, today, the Bible has been ‘weaponised’ by some quarters to provide theological cover for the perpetrators of modern-day settler colonialism, unsustainable economic growth and even genocide.

In Gaza today, we see a classic case of the use of Scriptures to provide theological cover for the genocide taking place there. How else do we explain the silence among many Christians, especially ‘Christian’ world leaders, about the genocide taking place there?

Munther said he does not see the real Jesus nor the authentic Gospel message in those pushing the message of Christian Zionism.

The situation in Gaza and the rest of Palestine today mirrors what was happening in Palestine during the time of Jesus.

Jesus knew precisely what it was like to live under occupation. The local rulers, like the high priest and Pilate, were the extension of Caesar in distant Rome. Today, we have a different set of local rulers in Palestine, an extension of and in the service of a distant Empire.

If Jesus was walking the Earth today instead of 2,000 years ago, would He be seen as a threat to the powers that be? Would they bother executing Him?

Have we so successfully privatised Jesus that the powers of this world would see Him as of little threat to their goal of world domination and unimaginable wealth?

This Holy Week and Easter, let us liberate the message of Jesus from the shackles of this world that have ‘privatised’ Him.

And let us loudly continue calling for an end to the genocide in Gaza. *Thy Kingdom come on Earth as it is in heaven.*

● **Anil Netto** is a freelance writer and activist based in Penang. He believes we are all called to build the kingdom of God in this world.

## The woman at the well

Even after my mother slipped into a coma, even when the doctors told us mummy had a few days to live, even when we were asked to take her home so she could pass in the comfort of her own home — I did not care, because I knew my mom was going to be healed. God Himself told me! In my head, hundreds of people were going to be left in awe because God was going to work His miracle through my mother.

Fast forward to March 10, 2006, at almost 3.00pm, my mom’s older sister arrived from abroad. As soon as she came into the bedroom, the entire family gathered around my mom and we began to recite the *Divine Mercy* prayer. As my Mama (maternal grandmother) recited the last words of the prayer, I saw tears roll down my mom’s cheeks, she lifted her left hand as if reaching for something, laid it down gently on her chest as she took in a deep last breath. Now you must know my mummy’s left arm was limp due to an earlier surgery and for many years she was unable to use or even lift her arm. At that moment, the promise of Divine Mercy ran through my mind — Jesus Himself came to take her soul up to heaven.

Throughout my mom’s funeral I was sad but strong. I had an impenetrable inner strength, I was calm and composed. A few months later however, I found myself questioning a lot of things — mostly I questioned God. I questioned His existence. How could He be real? He told me mummy was going to be fine and now she was gone. I was convinced now that I had been fooled and bought into the fantasy of a God. I got up one morning to pray and realised I had no reason to, no one was listening and now that my mummy was gone, I had nothing to pray for. That was when I stopped praying and, very

soon after, I stopped believing.

I was still socially active in Church, I would still attend Mass. My dad made sure my sisters and I attended Mass faithfully every Sunday, and today I see that as one of the greatest blessings. He didn’t know what I was going through, no one did. At Mass I would follow the “rituals” but my mind would wander far off — it travelled into books I read, into what I was going to have for breakfast later, I would inspect the details of what the lady in front of me was wearing and when Mass was finally over, I would get up, cross myself, walk out of church and, with profound blankness in my heart, wish everyone a joyful “peace be with you”. The hypocrisy! No one knew that this girl who advised her peers about prayer life and God, in actuality didn’t believe He was real.

I had become that world-thirsty woman sitting by the well. I sat there for almost three years. Then one day, I “overheard” the homily that was going on about how we miss to see the everyday miracles and how our ways are not God’s ways. Although I thought I had blocked my mind from every and anything to do with God, I found myself becoming attentive to every word shared. Week after week it became a challenge for me to not listen. Slowly but surely, I began to realise all those times GOD DID SPEAK TO ME — but I DIDN’T UNDERSTAND. He told me mummy was going to be alright, and now she was more than alright. He said mummy would be healed, and now she is. He told me mummy would not suffer and she is now free from any pain. Every single prayer I prayed was answered. Not the way I pictured it, but the way it was truly meant to be. While I miss my mummy tremendously, I have come to understand that

death is inevitable and my mom’s death was as beautiful as her life. If I could turn back time, I wouldn’t change a thing. In fact, I hope when my time comes, I would be as prepared as she was.

I see now how Jesus equipped me for one of the greatest losses I would face. The strength I had to deal with this loss was not my own, but divine. I was strong because He made me strong. Like St Paul wrote, “God works for the good of those who love Him” (Romans 8:28). I am still on my spiritual journey — I am not done, but I do know when I look back, I’m far from where I used to be.

Like the Samaritan woman, Jesus touched me in the most painful place — in a young girl losing her mother, but He did it with tenderness and compassion. He got me ready. There in my most profound brokenness, I found and experienced God. It was not through a sensational miracle, but in the small and astonishingly beautiful details that I felt my thirst quenched.

I share my experience for anyone who needs to hear it, when things don’t go your way, don’t give up on God. Hold on and hold tight because, more often than not, we do not see the whole picture. Lift up your cup and remember, some of God’s greatest gifts are unanswered prayers!

● **Tianne Ramona Pereira** identifies first as a Catholic daughter, sister, wife and mother. From years in the media industry, she eventually started and continues to run her own businesses while teaching part-time. She has been actively serving in church for as far back as she can remember and is involved in various charities.





Fr Ron Rolheiser

# Forever ahead of our souls

Sometimes there's nothing as helpful as a good metaphor.

In his book, *The God Instinct*, Tom Stella shares this story: A number of men who made their living as porters were hired one day to carry a huge load of supplies for a group on safari. Their loads were unusually heavy and the trek through the jungle was rough. Several days into the journey they stopped, unshouldered their loads, and refused to go on. No pleas, bribes, or threats worked in terms of persuading them to go on. Asked why they couldn't continue, they answered: "We can't go on; we have to wait for our souls to catch up with us."

That also happens to us in life, except mostly, we never wait for our souls to catch up. We continue without them, sometimes for years. What this means is that we struggle to be in the present moment, to be inside our own skin, to be aware of the richness of our own experience. Too often our experiences aren't very soulful because we aren't present to them. I cite myself as an example:

For the past 25 years, I've kept a journal, a diary of sorts. My intent in keeping this journal is to record the deeper things that I'm aware of throughout each day;

but mostly what I end up actually writing down is a simple chronology of my day, a daybook, a bare, no-frills, recounting of what I did from hour to hour. My diaries don't much resemble Anne Frank's diary, *Dag Hammarskjöld's Markings* or Henri Nouwen's *Genesee Diary*. My journals resemble more what you might get from a schoolboy describing his day at school, a simple chronology of what happened. Yet when I go back some years later and read an account of what I did on a given day, I'm always amazed at how rich and full my life was on that day, except that I wasn't much aware of it at the time. While actually living through those days, mostly I was struggling to get my work done, to stay on top of things, to meet expectations, to carve out some moments of friendship and recreation amid the pressures of the day, and to get to bed at a reasonable hour. There wasn't a lot of soul there, just routine, work, and hurry.

I suspect that this is not atypical. Most of us live most of our days not very aware of how rich our lives are, forever leaving our souls behind. For example, many is the woman who gives ten to fifteen years of her life to bearing and raising children, with all that entails, tending constantly to

someone else's needs, getting up at night to nurse a child, spending 24 hours a day on constant alert, sacrificing all leisure time, and putting a career and personal creativity on hold. And yet, often, that same woman, later on, looks back on those years and wishes she could relive them — but now, in a more soulful way, more consciously aware of how privileged it was to do precisely those things she did within so much tedium and tiredness. Years later, looking back, she sees how rich and precious her experience was and how, because of the burden and stress how little her soul was present then to what she was experiencing.

This can be multiplied with a thousand examples. We've all read accounts wherein someone shares what he or she would do differently if he or she had life to live over again. Mostly these stories rework the same motif. Given another chance, I would try to enjoy it more, that is, I would try to keep my soul more present and more aware.

For most of us, I fear, our souls will only catch up with us when, finally, we are in retirement, with diminished health, diminished energy, and no opportunity to work. It seems we need to first lose

something before we fully appreciate it. We tend to take life, health, energy, and work for granted, until they are taken away from us. Only after the fact do we realise how rich our lives have been and how little of those riches we drank in at the time.

Our souls eventually do catch up with us, but it would be good if we didn't wait until we were in assisted living for this to happen. Like the porters who dropped their loads and stopped, we need to stop and wait for our souls to catch up.

Early on in his priesthood, when Pope Francis was principal of a school, he would, at a certain point each day, have the public address system cut in and interrupt the work that was going on in each classroom with this announcement: *Be grateful. Set your horizon. Take stock of your day.*

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

## The drama of prayer is the drama of the human heart

Prayer is a difficult path to follow in a fallen world and in the midst of a secular society. The odds are always against prayer. It requires a desirous heart to begin to pray, and a firm, well-formed heart to persevere in the life of prayer.

As a help to this challenge, the Church gives us her teachings, guidance, and encouragement. While these are expressed in numerous ways, they are particularly contained within the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

The *Catechism* gives us the Church's universal teachings on prayer and manifests her encouraging accompaniment through the spiritual life. The *Catechism* has four major sections, with the

fourth part being on prayer.

The *Catechism* divides its fourth part on prayer into two sections. The first section has three chapters, with each chapter having three articles.

In the first article of chapter one, the *Catechism* gives a review of the major developments and leaders of prayer in the Old Testament. It addresses the figures of Abraham, King David, the prophets, and the psalms, among others.

After the first article, the *Catechism* moves to article two of chapter one, which is entitled, "In the Fullness of Time."

The second article focuses on the movement and leaders of prayer in the New Testament. It rightly

highlights the prayer life of the Lord Jesus as

the supreme witness to the power and significance of prayer. As the *Catechism* tells us: "The drama of prayer is fully revealed to us in the Word who became flesh and dwells among us."

It is a comfort to see how the *Catechism* explains prayer as a "drama." Such a designation should not be confused with cheap theatrics. The drama of prayer is the drama of the human heart that wants to seek and find God. There are good days and bad days, highs and lows. The life of prayer is an adventure and it can only be fully revealed in Jesus Christ. We can only truly begin to understand the depths of prayer by entering into the Lord's own revelation of prayer to us.

The eternal Word — the fullness of all that God wishes to reveal to us — can become one of us. He had pitched His tent among us. He desires to accompany us and nourish us by His grace. Such a grace-filled accompaniment includes His witness to prayer. The *Catechism* explains: "To seek to understand [Jesus'] prayer through what His witnesses proclaim to us in the Gospel is to approach the holy Lord Jesus as Moses approached the burning bush:

In this action-packed summary given to us by the *Catechism*, we are told that we can approach the prayer of the Lord Jesus through His witness — His actual, fully-lived life of prayer — which is contained in the Gospel account.

And so, we see the sequence: the life of prayer, its witness to us, and this witness given to us through the Gospel.

As we desire to understand the prayer of the Lord Jesus through this movement of prayer, witness, and Gospel, the *Catechism* provocatively tells us that when we approach the prayer of the Lord, we should "approach

the holy Lord Jesus as Moses approached the burning bush."

Moses approached the burning bush with an initial curiosity and then an astonishment and shock at the presence of God, followed by a profound awareness of his own unworthiness before the all-holiness of God, matched by a deeply felt sense of reverence and awe at God's majesty and splendour, which then brought forth a transparent conversation and an intense closeness with God.

The *Catechism* admonishes us to approach the Lord Jesus in exactly the same way and through the same process as Moses before God's presence in the burning bush. Each of the different aspects is necessary if we are to truly understand the life of prayer that was actively lived by the Lord Jesus.

We cannot assume that we already understand. We cannot take His closeness for granted. We cannot be dismissive or attempt to domesticate the holiness of God. We must allow ourselves to feel and experience the beauty and splendour of the all-holiness, life-changing presence of the all-mighty and ever-living God in our midst. Only then can we begin to take the initial steps to understand the prayer of the Lord Jesus.

The *Catechism* provides us with help. It describes these initial steps for us: "First to contemplate Him in prayer, then to hear how He teaches us to pray, in order to know how He hears our prayer."

First and foremost, we see the Lord Jesus in prayer and labour to understand the mystery as best we can. We then open our hearts as the Lord seeks to guide and instruct us on how to pray. And this interaction helps us to see and realise how the Lord listens to our own prayer and why He desires fellowship with us. — **By Fr Jeffrey F. Kirby, *Crux***



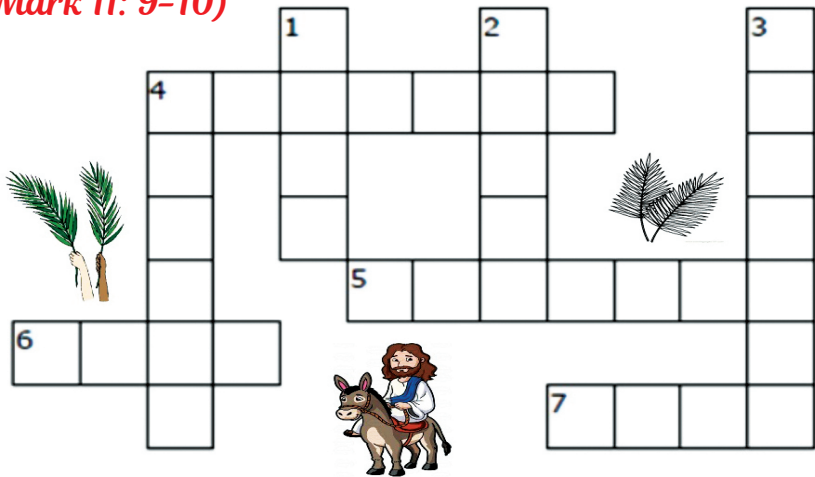
(photo/Samuel Gopal)



# Little Catholics' Corner

## The Triumphal Entry

Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! (Mark 11: 9-10)



### ACROSS

- 4. Said something in a loud voice: called out; yelled
- 5. A word used for praise and adoration which means "save us"
- 6. A pathway for vehicles, persons and animals; a street or highway
- 7. What a person is called

### DOWN

- 1. A young animal of the horse family; especially one under one year
- 2. The Son of God
- 3. A small town
- 4. To stretch out over a large area

JESUS  
VILLAGE

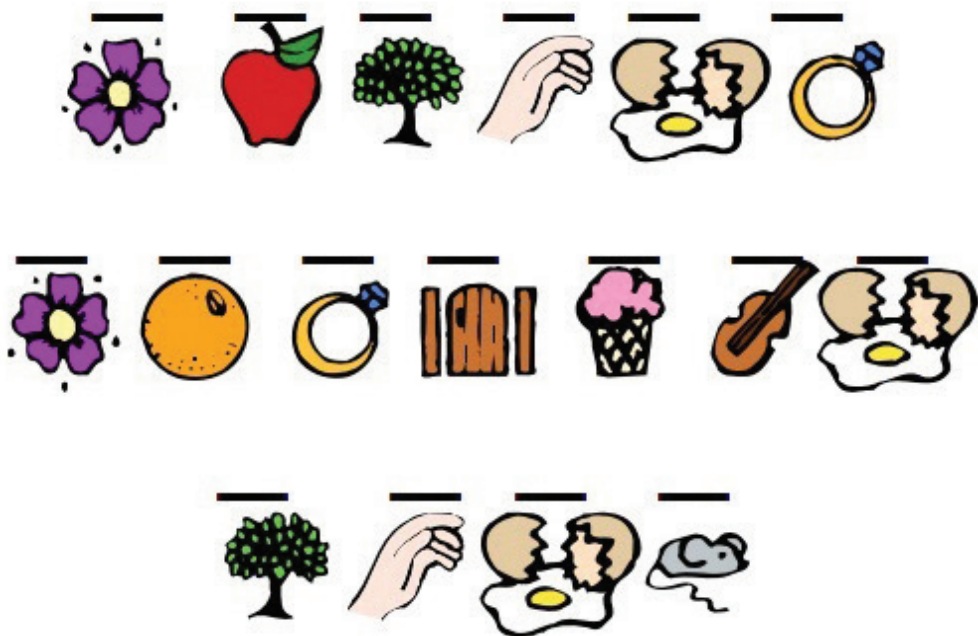
COLT  
ROAD

HOSANNA  
NAME

SHOUTED  
SPREAD

Angry men put Jesus on the cross. Even though He did no wrong, they had Him killed. Jesus was not angry with these cruel people, though. He loved and forgave them. We need to pray to God for help so that we can forgive others when they wrong us?

Fill in the blanks using the first letter of each picture to see what Jesus prayed.



Jesus sent two disciples into the city to find a donkey for Him to ride. The people were so happy to see Jesus! They waved palm branches and shouted "HOSANNA!"

Let's Colour



T A H B I C S D I E S F M G Y H B I L J  
O K O L D M O N F O T P H Q E R N S  
E T W U C W O X V Y E Z N A A B N C T  
D W E H F I G C H H I W J I K L L L M  
B N E O S P H Q E R D S F T O U R V  
M W A X N Y Y Z



Use every second letter to fill in the blanks.

T H \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
\_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
\_ \_ \_ \_ \_

Answer: This is my Blood of the New Covenant which will be shed for many.

Dear children,

Did you know that this week is the most important one in the whole year? Holy Week has Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday. On these days, we remember and celebrate the most important actions of Jesus before His resurrection on Easter Sunday.

On Thursday, we celebrate the day that Jesus ate the Last Supper with His Apostles. This was the first Mass, when He gave His Body and Blood to them in what still looked like bread and wine. He also made them priests by giving them the power to turn bread and wine into His Body and Blood to offer them to the Father.

On Good Friday, we remember the suffering and death of Our Lord. He was beaten and made fun of, and had to carry the heavy cross. Then He was nailed to the cross where He hung for hours before He gave up His life to God for us. On Holy Saturday, we remember the day that Mary and the Apostles and Jesus' other friends were very

sad and upset by what had happened. Their best friend and leader had just been killed! Do you think they knew what was about to happen on Easter Sunday? Do you remember what happened after Holy Saturday? Have a blessed Holy Week children!

Aunty Eliz



# YOUTH

March 24, 2024

## VATICAN LAUNCHES SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN TO REDISCOVER 'CHRISTUS VIVIT'



Young people at WYD Lisbon (Vatican Media)

VATICAN: In 2024, the Church will celebrate the fifth anniversary of the publication of the Post-Synodal

Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*. It was on 25 March 2019, at the Holy House in Loreto, that Pope Francis signed the "letter" to young people that sealed the work of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, which had been held in the Vatican the previous year.

One of the novelties of the October 2018 Synod was the pre-Synodal gathering that involved young people from around the world, with reflections prepared in the local Churches with representatives of the younger generations.

Now, on the fifth anniversary of *Christus Vivit*, the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life is offering its support to the group of young communicators participating in the Dicastery for Communication's *Faith Communication in the Digital World* programme through

the design and production of a social media campaign for the official Facebook and Instagram accounts of World Youth Day (WYD).

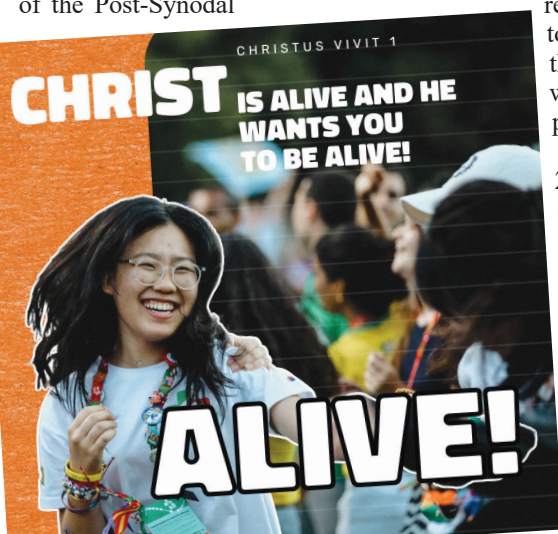
### STILL RELEVANT TODAY

The campaign, which runs from February 25 through April 25, aims to bring together young people from around the world in a 12-week experience to share the current meaning and spirit of *Christus Vivit*, as well as the fruits of the last WYD, which was held in Lisbon in 2023.

Taking inspiration from the keyword "alive," participants intend for the "Faith Communication" project to keep the experience of World Youth Day alive in the digital space as well. Through inspirational videos, calls to action, and engagement, and with the contribution of WYD participants,

young leaders, and youth ministers, they hope to make Pope Francis' invitation their own: "You are the *now* of God and through inspirational videos, calls to action and engagement, the wish of the participants in the project "Faith Communication in the Digital World" is that this initiative — with the contribution of young people who have participated in WYD, their youth leaders and youth ministry ministers — can keep the experience of World Youth Day alive also in the digital space and make the Holy Father's invitation their own: "You are the *now* of God, and He wants you to bear fruit" (CV, 178).

This project, available in several languages, can also be adopted by local Church bodies that want to transmit, in their own milieu, a spiritual reflection that reaches young people through social media networks. — *Vatican News*



## Unity and Spirituality

PETALING JAYA: The eagerly awaited annual Family Day, organised by the Catholic Student Society of Universiti Malaya (CSSUM), took place on March 9 at Dewan Perdana 1, Kompleks Perdanasiswa, Universiti Malaya.

Drawing a crowd of 40 students from various ages and fields of study, the event also welcomed esteemed alumni, including Assoc Prof Dr Patricia Nore Riget, Fr Alberto Irenus, SJ

from the Church of St Francis Xavier, as well as Prof Christopher Ng and his wife.

This year, CSSUM's freshmen were at the helm of Family Day, under the guidance of their seniors. This was to nurture unity among Catholic students and deepen their connection with God, particularly during the Lenten season, through a series of engaging and spiritual activities.

The event kicked off with an opening prayer led by the director of Family Day, Tracy Dacilla Davis, followed by an ice-breaking session to facilitate introductions among attendees. Subsequently, engaging game sessions were conducted, with the ABC game being a heartwarming favourite. Annette Rudy Balamun, the Head of the Department of Activities, expressed her joy, saying, "It was heartwarming to see everyone enjoy the games that my team created, strengthening bonds and fostering new friendships among Catholic students."

From a spiritual perspective, attendees were treated to praise and worship sessions, where the Holy Spirit filled the atmosphere. Assoc Prof Dr Patricia led a spiritual sharing session, relating her everyday life during Lent to the importance of making time for God and charity. Additionally, CSSUM senior Isaiah Disimond shared his transformative experience during a



## at CSSUM Family Day

pilgrimage in South Korea, drawing parallels between the four marks of the church and the faith of Catholic students.

Numerous attendees shared positive feedback about Family Day. Thierry Harry, the vice director of CSSUM's Family Day, remarked, "As someone involved in the event's management, I found it not only enjoyable to participate but also fulfilling to witness every committee member executing their responsibilities flawlessly."

Lavannya Edmond, the Head of the Department of Multimedia, reflected on the event's significance, stating, "University life can be challenging, especially being away from family. This Family Day reminds us that, in Christ,

we are all brothers and sisters, always there for one another."

The event concluded with a closing prayer led by Jocelyn Dania Macdonald, CSSUM's secretary, and a memorable photo session.

Alsten Adrian Lindua, the Head of the Department of Praise and Worship, emphasised, "This event highlights that, in Christ, we are all one and reminds us that whatever we do, we do it for Him."

Looking ahead, the hope is for more gatherings that focus on Catholic faith, contributing to the development of a robust Catholic community, not just within CSSUM but also in the parish. — *By Melissa Nordin and Tracy Dacilla Davis*



Game session: Addition Game



# Stella Maris students raise funds for kidney foundation

KUALA LUMPUR: Stella Maris International School (SMIS) made a significant stride in supporting the National Kidney Foundation of Malaysia (NKFM) during its 9th Annual Cross-Country Race.

The event held on March 9, saw participants ranging from the youngest Year 1 students to the older teens in Year 11. It was not just about physical prowess but also about championing a noble cause. Weeks prior

to the race, the school conducted a charity drive aimed at raising funds for the NKFM, shedding light on the challenges faced by those afflicted with kidney disease.

The initiative was not merely a charitable endeavour but also a testament to SMIS's commitment to advocating for two of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): SDG No. 3, focusing on ensuring good health and well-being for all,



Margaret Soo, President of SMIS handing over the mock-up cheque to the NKFM representative.

and SDG No.12, which emphasises responsible consumption patterns.

Archbishop Julian Leow, known for his advocacy of holistic health, flagged off the race and lent his support to the event, underscoring the importance of maintaining both physical and mental well-being. Collaborating with organisations like the NKFM and the National Cancer Society of Malaysia, SMIS aimed to instil in its students an understanding of the significance of leading healthy lifestyles, aligning with the SDGs.

President of SMIS, Margaret Soo, expressed gratitude towards the school community for their generous contributions, highlighting the collective effort in sup-

porting the Foundation's cause. The event featured various categories of races, including a special segment for lower primary students accompanied by their parents.

The culmination of the event witnessed a medal-giving ceremony, recognising race winners and best-dressed teams, alongside a cheque presentation to the NKFM. The school's unwavering dedication to kidney awareness was evident, with this year's donation totalling RM9,339, a testament to their ongoing commitment to the cause.

Through this event, SMIS reaffirmed its annual tradition of not just promoting physical fitness but also advocating for social causes, making strides towards a healthier and more compassionate society.



Archbishop Julian Leow flagging off the race.

## BUILDING GOD'S KINGDOM TOGETHER IN ALL REALITY

• Continued from the previous issue

Evangelisation or the extension of God's Reign through building His kingdom is man's free and natural response in the 4E spirituality. At the most basic understanding of the word, it simply means the proclamation of good news. In the Christian context, it is the proclamation of the love of God revealed fully in Jesus Christ and experienced through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit which makes one a child of God.

This is the logic of the proclamation of the Kingdom, the psalmist sings, "Taste and see that the Lord is good," (Psalm 34:8), and the apostle Paul declared, "woe is me if I do not preach the Gospel," (1 Cor 9:16). The MJD initiative experience sought to expand the understanding of the participants on what it means to evangelise; to not discount the much-needed proclamation of the Lordship of Christ but to include in that proclamation a story that is not burdened by pseudo-spiritual and religious jargon, but the lived experience of encountering the love of the Father in Christ in all the realities of life. To not limit the potential of an encounter with Christ only in religious events and activities but in all of life, even the most mundane, for the "Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us," (John 1:14).

The different activities that fall under this evangelical process include, but are not lim-

ited to, the liturgical celebrations, especially the initiative of the participant to offer and prompt those they visited to avail themselves to the rite of blessings. Other events include Eucharistic Adoration and the solemn celebration of Vespers at the beginning of the initiative which saw the participants chanting the psalmody entirely in Bahasa Malaysia, English, and Latin. On the more humane side of evangelisation, the participants were given the opportunity and choice to participate in the different cultural activities, home visits, and devotional practices, along with the use of the journal and the guidebook. The experience of initiative sought to expand and treat evangelisation as a human and humanising activity, following the logic of the incarnation by appealing to freedom.

The final activity was the moment of evaluation and reflection after the entirety of the initiative. The participants were led into a time of spiritual conversation in smaller groups and then prompted to share their findings in the larger group. Many of the participants noted that the difficulties encountered in dealing with young people are not different but very similar to their own experience of pastoral ministry, whether it is professional or associative.

On the experience of engaging freely in the work of evangelisation, Serena Jonius shares, "I could say that, during this initiative, I was so blessed because I had the opportunity to do a home visit, pray, and sprinkle holy water on the home that we visited. The first home visit that we did was with Auntie Joyce, to her third daughter's house. During the home visit, I encountered a few of the youth. Before the

## The MEYME Initiative in MJD

prayer and blessing, we did a self-introduction and play a game. I came to know that the young people want to be active in the church, but because of their busyness and other commitments, they choose to stay at home with their family. My second home visit was to an elderly person. We didn't talk much, but I asked permission to do the blessing. After the prayer, the grandfather said, "thank you." I felt so touched, and I thank God that He gave me the mission to encounter not only the young people but the elderly as well."

Jason Alexander also shared his experience on bonding and blessing by saying, "I have had an amazing few days with my foster family as we went to visit the sick, give them a blessing and spend time together, with some drinks at "The Jetty". All in all, the experience of evangelisation as a natural, unforced experience that encompasses all of life was accomplished in ways that even the organisers did not expect.

### Towards MCYPA2025 and MPC2026

Pope Francis writes in *Evangelii Gaudium* 231, "realities are greater than ideas." The MJD initiative sought to present this experience of reality by encountering it as it is. There is a great temptation to treat young people as a dislocated reality, uprooted from their contexts rather than taking the time to enlighten, clarify and understand all the dif-



Post-initiative evaluation at Good Shepherd Seminary.

ferent factors, be it political, economic, social, technological or ecological, that hamper and effect their freedom of choice to live in the freedom of the children of God. While there has been much good done with much good intentions, this experience of the initiative in MJD is a call to rethink our pastoral strategies, efforts and curiosity. To return to the source, our encounter with the love of God in Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit so that the bold proclamation made by Pope Francis five years ago, which is ancient but ever new, can ring out in the heart of the Church again, "Christ is alive!"

Bishop Bernard remarked in his homily that Christians can often have long faces which he likened to papayas. If the work of evangelisation, in cooperative and collaborative means, which is what the synod calls for, makes the heart of the Christian grow weary rather than burn with excitement, then perhaps it is time to evaluate what has been done. Perhaps it is time to rediscover the freedom of the children of God to speak boldly to all of reality and to restore the joy of salvation. Christ is alive! —By Francisco Overee, MJDYPN



Home blessings at the Portuguese Settlement.



# Remembering our beloved 'Apai'



SIBU: Some 1,000 faithful gathered at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, March 4, for a requiem Mass to honour the memory of the late Mill Hill missionary priest, Fr Thomas O'Connor. The Mass was presided over by the bishop of Sibu, Rt Rev Joseph Hii.

In his homily, Bishop Joseph said Fr O'Connor, better known to Catholics in central Sarawak as Fr Thomas Connors, was a good example of how everybody can evangelise and share Good News.

"Tom Connors came here because he wanted to live up to his baptismal calling. It is also the reason why he became a priest.

"He was happy and he wanted all of us to be happy. Let us live up to our true vocation, our baptismal vocation and continue to remember him by living up to our baptismal calling," Bishop Joseph told the congregation.

Sacred Heart Cathedral Council chairman, Michael Kiu, said Fr O'Connor spent much of his time in Sarawak travelling to Kapit, Song, Belaga, and areas around Baleh River to reach out to the people.

"For more than seven years when he was posted to Song area, he used to stay in a 'langkau' (hut), just opposite my rented house at that time. There was a water tank, he depended on rainwater for water supply.

"You could see the open walls. I invited him to stay with me, but he refused. Even when other missionaries visited him, they also stayed at the hut. He was a shy and humble priest. Sometimes, I invited him for dinner, he did not want to come," Kiu recalled.

He said Fr O'Connor contributed a lot to the development of the Catholic Church in Kapit.

Kiu recalled when Fr O'Connor was posted to Song, he used to travel to Kapit once a month to celebrate Mass as there was no church there then.

"I remember at that time in Kapit, we had our Mass inside a courtroom. We borrowed the courtroom of the district office and it could only accommodate 75 people maximum.

"We started with 20 people, then in just two years, the place was packed and during Christmas and Easter, people always stood outside the courtroom," he recalled.

Kiu said it was then Fr O'Connor initiated a fundraising drive to build what is now the Church of Mary

Immaculate Conception, Kapit. Construction began in 1977 and was only completed in the 1980s.

"We only designed the church for a 500 congregation. We thought it would take years for us to have a fully-packed church.

"Unexpectedly, in just about three years, we already had a congregation of about 700. When I left in 1990, we had a congregation of almost 2,000," said Kiu, who was church council secretary from 1977.

Due to the growth of church members, the Sibu Diocese extended the Kapit church to its current capacity.

In 1999, Fr O'Connor was transferred to Sacred Heart Cathedral.

English Curia Legion of Mary president, Catherine Ling, said Fr O'Connor was a very committed spiritual director for the movement.

"He was very Marian devoted, very caring, and very fatherly, and very concern with all the members. He really contributed a lot to the development of the Legion of Mary.

"When he was appointed as the spiritual director for the English Curia, he really read through the handbook and made sure that he understood whatever was written in the handbook so he could guide us well," he said.

Caritas Sibu director, Eta Ting, said she remembers Fr O'Connor as dynamic, enthusiastic, and giving joy to the people, especially the youths.

"He had great devotion for Rosary, Holy Hour, daily Mass, and drawing us closer to God," she said.

Rose Santa, who used to attend St Herbert's Catholic Church in Song, said Fr O'Connor was very dear to her family.

"Our family misses him dearly. He always said to us 'make your home my home'. I thank God for having Apai Connors with us," she said.

Rose was baptised by Fr O'Connor in 1974 and her marriage was also blessed by him.

"I remember, when I was in Form 4 and Form 5, around 1987 at that time, I used to follow Fr O'Connor to the longhouses during the weekend to teach, pray, and baptise the folks in the longhouses," she said.

Fr O'Connor, who devoted 52 years of his life to serving the central region of Sarawak, passed away on February 26, 2024, at St James' University Hospital in Dublin, at the age of 88. — **By Jane Moh, Sibu Soccom**

## MEMORIAM

For enquiries, please contact:  
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### In Loving Memory of



**Francis Louis PPN**  
14.6.1931 – 27.3.1987



**Julia Louis**  
22.4.1936 – 2.1.2023

*In our hearts, the memories left behind,  
will be cherished forever.*

Deeply missed by  
family, relatives and loved ones

### 12th Anniversary In Cherished Memory of



**Mary Sarojam Cherian**  
12-3-27 ~ 27-3-12

*Precious beautiful mother, angel  
Angel all our lives  
By your walk of faith and love  
Suffering and compassion  
Patience and forbearance  
Giving and ever-forgiving  
Honesty, humility and simplicity  
You shine a blessed light.*

*Blessed mother  
Faithful child of God  
Angel of the Lord  
Pray for us.*

Your beloved family.

### 5th Anniversary In Ever Loving Memory of



**Yvonne Yeoh Siew Lay**  
Departed: 22-03-2019

Deeply missed and  
forever cherished by  
Joseph, Michael and  
Marie Ong

### 10th Anniversary In Loving Memory of Anthonysamy Muthusamy

Born:  
15th June 1946  
Departed:  
18th March 2014



*Life is so precious and Death such a thief,  
You are the greatest gift  
that we ever had in our lives, sent by God.  
No matter how long we can never forget you.*

Deeply missed by wife, Satprasadmeri,  
Sons: Valentine Jeevan, Nicholas Jayen and Leo Lawrence,  
Daughters-in-law: Sharon, Lavinia and Menaka,  
Grandchildren: Ryan Leo, Daarlene Deepikaa Leo and  
Lachlan Xayne Anthony.

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### 2nd Anniversary In Ever Loving Memory of TONY MAARAN

From God : 12th June 1961  
To the Lord : 19th March 2022

*...you took a part of us with you  
We will always miss you  
till we meet again in the LORD.....*

*"Eternal rest grant unto him O Lord  
And let your perpetual Light  
shine upon him  
May his soul rest in GODs eternal peace.  
Amen."*

Forever cherished, loved and missed by:-  
Beloved Mother, Wife, Son, Brother,  
Sister, Nephews, Niece, Sister-in-law,  
and host of relatives and friends.



## MESSAGE FOR THE MONTH OF RAMADAN AND AIDILFITRI

### Christians and Muslims:

# Extinguish the fire of war and light the candle of peace

Dear Muslim brothers and sisters,

Once again we greet you on the occasion of the month of *Ramadan* with a message of closeness and friendship, aware of the importance of this month for your spiritual journey and for your family and social life, which also embraces your Christian friends and neighbours.

We are pleased to know that our yearly Message to you for *Ramadan* is an important means of strengthening and building good relations between Christians and Muslims, thanks to its diffusion through traditional and modern media, particularly social media. For this reason, it would be beneficial to make this Message better known among both communities.

We would have liked to share with you some considerations on a different theme from the one we have chosen to address. Yet the growing number of conflicts in these days, ranging from military combat to armed clashes of varying intensity involving states, criminal organisations, armed gangs and civilians, has become truly alarming. Pope Francis recently observed that this increase in hostilities is in fact transforming "a third world war fought piecemeal" into "a genuine global conflict".

The causes of these conflicts are many, some long-standing, others more recent. Together with the perennial human desire for domination, geo-political ambitions and economic interests, a major cause is surely the continuing production and commerce in arms. Even as part of our human family suffers grievously from the devastating effects of the use of these arms in warfare, others cynically rejoice in the great economic profit deriving from this immoral commerce. Pope Francis has described this as dipping a morsel of bread in the blood of our brother.

At the same time, we can be thankful that we also possess immense human and religious resources for advancing peace. The desire for peace and security is profoundly rooted in the soul of every person of good will, since no one can fail to see the tragic effects of war in the loss of human lives, the toll of serious injury and the throngs of orphans and widows. The destruction of infrastructure and property makes life hopelessly difficult, if not impossible. Sometimes hundreds of thousands of people are displaced in their own country or forced to flee to other countries as refugees. Consequently, the condemnation and rejection of

war should be unambiguous: every war is fratricide, useless, senseless, and dark. In war, everyone loses. Once again, in the words of Pope Francis: "No war is holy, only peace is holy".

All religions, each in their own way, consider human life sacred and thus worthy of respect and protection. The states that permit and practise capital punishment are, fortunately, becoming fewer each year. A reawakened sense of the respect for this fundamental dignity of the gift of life will contribute to the conviction that war must be rejected and peace cherished.

Albeit with their differences, religions acknowledge the existence and the important role of conscience. Forming consciences to respect the absolute value of the life of each person and his or her right to physical integrity, security and a dignified life will, likewise, contribute to the condemnation and rejection of war, any war and all wars.

We look to the Almighty as God of peace, the source of peace, who in a special way loves all those who devote their lives to the service of peace. Like so many things, peace is a divine gift but at the same time, the fruit of human efforts, especially in preparing the conditions necessary for its establishment and preservation.

As believers, we are also witnesses to hope, as we recalled in our 2021 Message for *Ramadan: Christians and Muslims: Witnesses of Hope*. Hope can be symbolised by a candle, whose light radiates security and joy, whereas fire, uncontrolled, can lead to the destruction of fauna and flora, infrastructure and the loss of human lives.

Dear Muslim brothers and sisters, let us join in extinguishing the fires of hatred, violence and war and, instead, light the gentle candle of peace, drawing upon resources for peace that are present in our rich human and religious traditions.

May your fasting and other pious practices during *Ramadan* and the celebration of *Aidilfitri* that concludes it, bring you abundant fruits of peace, hope and joy.

From the Vatican, March 11, 2024

*Miguel Angel Cardinal Ayuso Guixot,*  
MCCJ  
Prefect

*Msgr Indunil Kodithuwakku*  
Janakarathne Kankanamalage  
Secretary



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