

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

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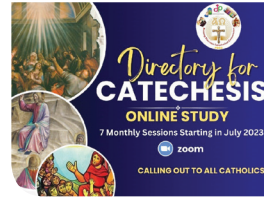
The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there.

John 2:13-14



World Day of Consecrated Life in Malaysia

■ P4



Directory for Catechesis online study

■ P6



Journaling towards healing

■ P12



Church is vibrant

'open construction site'

VATICAN: Pope Francis shared a powerful reminder that the Church functions as a dynamic “open construction site,” characterised by a collective journey of the faithful in synodality, attuned to the Holy Spirit and responsive to the contemporary world’s challenges.

“The Church fundamentally exists as a vibrant open construction site, perpetually in motion, embracing the fresh impulses of the Spirit, and resisting the urge to become insular or self-serving,” said the Holy Father.

This message was delivered as Pope Francis engaged with seminarians and community members from the Alessio Ascalesi Seminary of the Archdiocese of Naples, as they commemorated the 90th anniversary of its establishment.

In his remarks to the group, the Pope reflected on the ongoing nature of priestly formation needed to bring the “beauty of the Gospel” to the people of our time, listening to the Holy Spirit, and their demands.

“Let us remember – he said – “that for-

mation never ends, it lasts a lifetime, and if it stops, we do not remain where we were, but we regress.”

A synodal Church that walks alongside the Crucified and Risen Christ, and listens to the Spirit, requires ministers, that is “servants”, who “know how to adopt a pastoral discernment style in every situation”, the Pope said.

“We cannot offer monolithic and pre-packaged answers to today’s complex reality, but we must invest our energies in announcing the essential, which is God’s mercy, and manifesting it through closeness, fatherhood, gentleness, refining the art of discernment.”

The Pope then characterised the journey of priestly formation as an ongoing construction project, emphasising the importance of continual growth and openness to change for those on the path to priesthood. He cautioned against complacency, urging those in training for the priesthood not to consider themselves as feeling fully prepared or having reached the journey’s end, but to remain receptive to God’s transformative work throughout their lives.

“Each individual is challenged to be actively involved and truthful, allowing God to shape his work over time,” said the

pontiff, as he encouraged seminarians and priests to embrace the process of demolition and rebuilding that the Holy Spirit initiates, which involves stripping away false beliefs, inconsistent ideas about faith, and ministry, to pave the way for a renewal in the image of Jesus Christ.

Addressing the challenges of such deep, inner work, Pope Francis assured those in formation that while the process may be arduous, a docile and truthful attitude towards the Spirit’s action would reveal God’s tenderness even in their weaknesses and the joy found in service.

The pontiff also addressed the importance of emotional and human maturity in priestly formation, suggesting that without these, one’s journey and ability to serve effectively are significantly hampered. He urged those in formation to deepen their self-awareness and sincerity, engage deeply with Scripture, and confront contemporary theological and pastoral challenges with an open heart and mind.

Observing the seminary as a vibrant construction site, the Pope highlighted that his reference extends beyond the mere physical structures.

“A dynamic process is unfolding in priestly formation, characterised by fresh

inquiries and new insights. The pathways of formation are evolving significantly, attuned to the challenges that future priests will face, requiring dedication, passion, and creative thinking from all involved.

“We are witnessing the exploration of new pastoral and missionary endeavours aimed at facilitating a smooth transition into future ministerial roles. Deliberate pauses in the journey are being considered to foster personal growth. Embracing and evaluating these innovations as opportunities for grace and service, recognising God’s presence within them, is commendable,” he stated.

Concluding his address, the Pope inspired the seminary community members to embark on a journey of “conversion and renewal,” as outlined in his Lenten message. He urged them to “allow themselves to be deeply moved by the love of God,” to “rekindle their joy in simplicity,” and to dedicate themselves to the care of the poor, the pursuit of justice, and the protection of creation. He emphasised the importance of “cultivating peace and harmony, and learning to live in fraternity with humility.” “Fraternity,” he stressed, “is, especially today, one of the greatest testimonies we can offer to the world.” — *Agencies*

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We ignore Pope Francis' words at our peril

“Either we do not realise it or we are pretending not to see that we are on the brink of the abyss.” Pope Francis uttered those chilling words in a recent interview that appeared in the Italian daily *La Stampa* recently. “A global cease-fire is urgent,” he warned.

The 87-year-old Pope, who is increasingly showing signs of old age and declining health, has not scaled back his efforts to use the bully pulpit of the Roman papacy to offer moral guidance to a world that seems to have gone mad. And though at times his speech is slower and he can appear somewhat out of breath, he has certainly not lost his prophetic voice. “I will never tire of reiterating my call, addressed in particular to those who have political responsibility: stop the bombs and missiles now, put an end to hostilities. Everywhere!” he said in this latest interview.

Pope Francis, who has repeatedly pointed out that humanity is embroiled in a “piece-meal world war three”, also hammered home — as he’s done so many times before — that war is a dead-end path.

“War is always a defeat. For everyone,” he said. “The only ones who benefit are the manufacturers and traffickers of arms,” he insisted, condemning once again the weapons industry as he did on Christmas Day in his *Urbi et Orbi* message. On that occasion he was even more forceful. But no one seemed to be listening. It did not get many headlines then and it’s not getting much ink now. Who, in fact, is writing about the huge amounts of money that are being spent on weapons? Who is talking about the people — including

Christians, or specifically Catholics — who invest in the companies that create the “components” for “defence and security systems”, to borrow the euphemistic terms that decent, God-fearing people who are involved in the arms industry like to use. And, by the way, that includes those who support the manufacturing and legalisation of guns (especially assault weapons) for the use of private citizens in places like the United States... Don’t think so?

Ponder again these words of Pope Francis: “The human heart is weak and impulsive; if we find instruments of death in our hands, sooner or later we will use them.” Guns are made for one purpose only — to injure and kill.

The Pope is not a utopian. He is a radical disciple of Jesus the Christ and His Gospel. He tries to look at the world with the eyes and attitude of the Nazarene. He sees that we’re all children of the one and same God, and he is warning that the idiotic and bloody wars we wage against each other will end up destroying us all. In his interview with *La Stampa*, he said there’s only one way to end this. “Dialogue. Dialogue. Dialogue. And then (creating) a spirit of solidarity and human fraternity,” he said. “We cannot go on killing each other as brothers and sisters! It makes no sense!”

The Pope’s wise, yet challenging words are not just for Christians or limited to people who claim to be religious. They are words for the entire human race, the human “family”. But Francis also had some important words that were more specifically aimed at

Catholics. He was asked about the stir he’s caused among some in our faith community by insisting — as he did last August at World Youth Day in Lisbon — that “all people” (*Tutti! Tutti! Tutti!*) are welcome in the Church.

Most recently some Catholics have complained about his decision to allow non-liturgical blessing for same-sex couples. Here’s how he answered: “They ask me why. I respond by saying that the Gospel is for sanctifying all people (*tutti*). Obviously, as long as there’s good will. And there need to be precise instructions about the Christian life (I stress that unions are not being blessed, but the individuals are). But we are all sinners. So why do we draw up a list of sinners who can be a part of the Church and a list of sinners who cannot be part of the Church? This is not the Gospel.”

It’s not just the traditionalist, doctrinally rigid or even African Catholics who might draw up a list of sinners that should not be welcomed in the Church, in this case, people in the LGBTQ community. If we’re honest, we all tend to have our own lists. We are tempted to think our sins are not as grave (or “mortal” to use the classical language) as compared to the evil perpetrated by some. Perhaps we think we are thus a bit more “worthy” of, say, receiving the Eucharist. But is there anyone who is really worthy?

Pope Francis has again reminded us — both as a human family and a Church community — that we are actually all in the same boat. Either we all go together or we don’t go at all. *Tutti! Tutti! Tutti!* — **By Robert Mickens, LCI** (<https://international.la-croix.com>)

True worship is everywhere

A couple visited Lourdes for the first time, where the Blessed Virgin appeared to St Bernadette. One of the things that struck them most was the very many large or small shops and stalls. These were selling all kinds of religious articles, medals, crucifixes, holy water bottles with Lourdes water etc. One of the owners rolled up in his big car as they passed his large store. Obviously trading in these religious objects was a very profitable venture for him. The one saving fact in all this was that these shops and stalls were kept a good distance away from the actual Basilica and Grotto. There was a barrier keeping them at a reasonable distance from the worshipping and praying areas.

Unfortunately, in today’s Gospel scene there was no such protective barrier. Right in the very heart of the temple itself was a large market in which all kinds of trading and money changing was going on. This provoked the anger of Jesus who angrily said to all the traders. ‘Take all this out of here and stop turning My Father’s house into a market’.

Today’s Gospel indicates what true religion is all about for Jesus. In the temple Jesus finds a new form of oppression of God’s people, especially the poor. For the Jews, going up to Jerusalem to the Temple, was the high point of their religion. When there, they would make an offering of sheep, or of doves in the case of the poor, to Yahweh. It was an expression of their desire to offer themselves to God. But sheep and doves had to be paid for and the Roman money was not acceptable so there were money changers who changed this money into the coin of the Temple. Every coin changed cost money, even up to a day’s wages for a labourer, depending on



the amount changed. In reality, the religious leaders of the time were behind the trading taking place in the temple and were becoming rich at the expense of others. Jesus’ protest and rejection affected powerful interests, the interests of those who had replaced God (without denying God openly) by greed, which St Paul would call idolatry. So, idols were put in the place of God. It all seemed very holy and good but Jesus saw through all this to what was really going on. Is the Church today totally free of this? Are we? Do we need to examine our consciences? What are the idols in our own lives? Where do we need to cleanse our own temples since we are all temples of the Holy Spirit?

In the biblical sense, all sin is a profanation of the Temple of God and the installing of idols there. If we exploit or abuse human beings, we are profaning God’s temple which each one of them is.

Jesus came to liberate us all but the Temple scene shows that the religious leaders were oppressing the people of their day by insisting that temple sacrifices and temple worship

were the most important forms of worship. This was a great effort to control people by telling them that God was to be worshipped in the Temple setting. Is it not trying to confine our worship / service of God to a sacred place or time? It can give great power and riches to those who wish to control the worship of God.

In reality, the temple religion or indeed some church worship may consist in trying to confine God within a place, a time or in certain people only. The great good news in today’s Gospel is that true worship is not confined only to sacred times or places or people. TRUE WORSHIP IS EVERYWHERE, at any time or by any people as long as they do God’s will and glorify Him by loving and serving others. Since God is Love, then anywhere there is love there is God at work. So, we can literally find God whilst in a bar drinking — maybe we’re listening to someone whom no one else listens to and who would never think of going to church or confession. If our interest is truly the good of the other, is that not a form of worshiping or serving God? But because of maybe a wrong

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings with the Society of African Missions

3rd Sunday of Lent (B)

Readings: *Exodus 20:1-17;*
1 Corinthians 1:22-25;
Gospel: John 2:13-25

understanding of true worship, we might think God is principally in a church or a holy place, hardly in a bar!

Ultimately, Jesus is saying that true religion is a Person, Jesus Himself, and our relationship with Him. The centre of God’s presence is no longer to be a place but a Person, His beloved Son Jesus. Is that our own understanding of true religion?

Obviously, we are not speaking against our churches or the worship we offer there. Jesus too loved the temple and the synagogue, but we want to ask ourselves whether we confine or limit God to a part of our lives, of our time, as if a temple or church which we go to maybe weekly is our only possibility of worshipping or encountering God? Do we see God as present in the depths of our ordinary daily lives, of our joys, our doubts, our travelling, our struggles and suffering etc?

Jesus is saying that we cannot buy or sell God. God loves us totally, even before we do anything for Him. It is a matter of where our heart is, of our service, concern and forgiveness of others. It is about respecting all God’s creatures and all of His creation. — **Society of African Missions homily archives**

Franciscan friar ordained deacon

By Augustine Leeroy Garet

KOTA PADAWAN, Kuching: Friar Nelson Evarinus Sipalan OFM was ordained to the Order of Deacons at the Church of St Ann by Archbishop Simon Poh, January 14.

The Mass began with a traditional dance from the Bidayuh community of Kampung Seratau.

Friar Nelson, a Sabahan, embraced his vocation within the Franciscan Friars of St Anthony's Custody for Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei. His connection with the parish dates back to 2017 when he commenced his

pastoral work there as part of his formation.

The congregation, comprising parishioners from St Ann's and guests from various regions, witnessed Friar Nelson's ordination, with his siblings representing their parents who were unable to attend.

Concelebrating were Friar Don Don Ramirez OFM (Rector), Friar Derrick Yap OFM (Custos), and others from the Franciscan Friars community, as well as other clergy.

Friar Derrick announced that Deacon Nelson would undergo a six-month Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) pro-

gramme in Penang to enhance his pastoral abilities. Subsequently, his ordination to the priesthood will be scheduled.

After Mass, the festivities continued at the parish hall, where attendees celebrated with fellowship, including cake cutting, speeches, performances by the Sisters of St Francis of Sarawak, dancing, and a feast.

Deacon Nelson expressed gratitude to all parishioners, benefactors, family, and friends who supported him throughout his journey. As he begins his service as a deacon, we offer our prayers for his continued guidance and blessings from God. — *Today's Catholic*



Friar Nelson Evarinus OFM giving his speech. (facebook photo/MickLongBridalStudio)

Kuantan parish participates in state level MADANI programme

KUANTAN: The inaugural Pahang state level Harmony MADANI programme coincided with the 2024 World Interfaith Harmony Week (WIHW), heralding a significant step towards fostering mutual understanding and respect among different cultures and religions.

This initiative, held on February 18, was led by Puan Amirah binti Abdullah, the Director of the Pahang state department National Unity and Integration Department (JPNIN) and was aimed at promoting unity in diversity to cultivate a culture of peace and religious freedom.

A diverse group of 40 participants, comprising spiritual leaders, organisational figures, youth advocates, law enforcement officers, and JPNIN personnel, embarked on an enlightening bus tour across Kuantan's



Diverse group of religious leaders and participants at the Church of St Thomas, Kuantan.

religious landmarks.


Commencing at 8.30am and concluding at 2.30pm, the itinerary included visits to the Pahang State Mosque, Sri Murugan Hindu Temple, Gurdwara Sahib Sikh Temple, St Thomas Catholic church, and the Buddhist Association, where custodians shared insights into the history and significance of

each site.

The journey culminated at the Pahang Buddhist Association Centre in Kuantan, where closing remarks for WIHW were delivered by YB Leong Yu Man, the EXCO member of Unity, Tourism, and Culture of Pahang, and YB Chan Chun Kuang, the State Assemblyman of Semambu.

Both speakers commended the efforts of the state's National Unity and Integration Department and lauded the collaborative spirit among participants from diverse faiths and organisations.

YB Leong expressed optimism that these visits would nurture harmony, solidarity, and understanding within society, underscoring the importance of mutual respect among Malaysia's ethnic and religious communities for a peaceful and united nation. As a token of appreciation, certificates, souvenirs, and prizes were presented to the guests. Subsequently, approximately 200 individuals gathered at the Pahang Buddhist Association Centre for a fellowship *Yee Sang* and a festive Chinese New Year lunch. — *By Dr Francis Leong*



**KUALA LUMPUR
ARCHDIOCESE**

**Diary of Archbishop
Julian Leow**

March

- 5 **Australian Catholic University Graduation**
- 6 **Meeting — Pan Malaysia Pastoral Core Team**
- 6 **Meeting — Peninsular Malaysia Finance**




PENANG DIOCESE

**Diary of Cardinal
Sebastian Francis**

March

- 5 **Australian Catholic University Graduation**
- 6 **Meeting — Pan Malaysia Pastoral Core Team**
- 6 **Meeting — Peninsular Malaysia Finance**

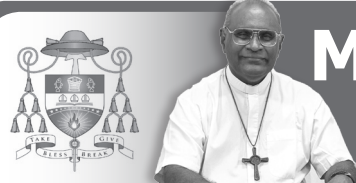


**MALACCA JOHORE
DIOCESE**

**Diary of Bishop
Bernard Paul**

March

- 5 **Australian Catholic University Graduation**
- 6 **Meeting — Pan Malaysia Pastoral Core Team**
- 6 **Meeting — Peninsular Malaysia Finance**



Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #166



Greetings to you, dear friends of MJD.

Malaysia is the second safest country in Asia, and the 15th in the world. Threats fly freely across the board defying the court and democratic processes. Gen Z prefers not only to study overseas, but also to work and live abroad. The ringgit and badminton continue to slide. The Pope says that "the Church is a work in progress". Everything is hard work. No pain, no gain!

Purification Times: The world, the Church and the nation is on a journey. Even Christian life is a journey. What we put into it is what we will reap. Simply, this journey has three parts.

The First Part is the call, to leave behind the old and even every attachment and follow the call.

The Second Part is the journey of discovery, accompanied with many trials and testing, the temptations and distractions to leave the path taken. It is purification time.

The Final Part is the fulfilment, the unitive stage, finding oneself in God, and hearing the words of the Lord: This is my beloved son or daughter. My favour is with you.

The purification phase is the hardest. Many fail here. Recall the words of St Paul to be strong, he said: Walk by faith, not by sight. Our weaknesses are pleasure, power and prestige. They can corrupt anyone. It only takes "setitik nila rosak susu sebelangga"

Thought for the Week: Lost Watch

There once was a farmer who discovered that he had lost his watch of great sentimental value. He searched and searched but could not find it. Then he enlisted the help of children who happened to be there. Heartbroken, he was about to give up, when a little boy asked the farmer: "Can I look for the watch one more time? The farmer told him to go back into the barn to continue

his search. To his complete surprise and astonishment, the boy came out, face beaming with pride, with the farmer's watch in his hand! The farmer asked: "How did you discover it, when others could not?" The boy simply said: "I did nothing but sit quietly on the ground and listen...in silence. Then I heard the ticking of the watch and just looked for it in the direction the sound was coming from."

The lesson from the watch: Listen and you will hear. Listen and you will find. Listening to the ticking led to the watch. What must we listen to, to find ourselves or find God?

Announcements for this Week

1. The **Rite of Election Retreat** and **Mass** ended two weeks ago, with catechumens, sponsors and facilitators. A gathering exceeding 400 prayed, recollected, reflected and fellowshiped together.
2. The **Diocesan Animating Team** met to discern the Synodal Initiatives taken by the diocese. It involves setting up pastoral structures for listening, for discerning and walking together. The movement is to listen to what the Spirit is saying here. It means "letting go" of the usual: "Tell us what to do? Where's the plan? You tell us!"
3. The Diocese prepares to bring the "**Becoming Synodal Diocese**" thrust to the parishes, all parishioners, and ministries, beginning with Training of Trainers Module and programme under the animation of Fr Paul Dass SJ. It is a two-year preparation. Teams of trainers, in all languages, will descend on the parishes to conduct parish retreat or study day.
4. **Lenten Formation programmes** around MJD for language groups and age groups are underway. Follow our Facebook page or lookout for parish bulletin boards for more information.

QnQ: Q asks:

How to ensure that a child remains a Catholic when he grows up?

A study by Georgetown University's Centre of Applied Research in the Apostolate and the Peyton Institute for Life of the Domestic Church revealed some common factors among families whose children remain practising Catholics in adulthood (at present, it's only 15 per cent in the United States).

Among the findings was that these families generally described their homes as warm and affectionate, integrating the faith in their daily family. Secondly, going to Mass weekly, carrying out works of service and making donations, parents clearing doubts with their children about the faith, explaining things to them instead of imposing their authority, were other responses.

The study also showed a decrease in the number of American adults, raised as Catholics, who remain in the faith and go to Mass weekly, which suggests the need to strengthen the transmission of the faith in the home and the community. From 36 per cent remaining Catholics as adults in the 70s, it dropped to 32 per cent in 80s, then to 25 per cent in the 90s, to 21 per cent in 2000, and 14 per cent in the 2018 study. Are these "writings on the wall" appearing in our homes and churches?

(ZENIT News / Washington, 16.02.2024).

Let our prayer, fast and almsgiving help us see the face of the poor and forgotten.

Just to tickle you: Give God what's right, not what's left!

Bishop Bernard Paul

Be creative



JOHOR BAHRU: The religious in the Diocese of Malacca Johore gathered at the Chapel of St James in MAJODI to celebrate the World Day for Consecrated Life recently.

Bishop Bernard Paul, the presider, spoke on how even Christians can be corrupted by the lure of power, be it in the Church or world. "What happens then? There will be a reaction, followed by a revolution which will bring about destruction and disruption. And what do we find in the course of the revolution? We begin to become dictators. "Is this the only way? No. The Church has another option — reconciliation."

He then said, "In our diocese we have 16

congregations with diverse charisms but all rooted in the Gospel."

He urged the religious to discern God's Will for them as individuals and as a community. He reminded them to be trees that bear fruit.

He cautioned them against being stuck in the past and urged them to explore the sign of the times — to listen and share their stories. "We have to be open to the promptings of the Spirit and be creative."

"Then we can glimpse the fullness of God's revelation — He is the same yesterday, today and forever."

He ended his homily by praying for them.

In Kuching...



The religious from the Archdiocese of Kuching with Archbishop Simon Poh during the World Day for Consecrated Life.

Synodality and the soul of consecrated living

IPOH: The Diocese of Penang celebrated the 28th World Day for Consecrated Life on February 2, with a formation session and the renewal of vows for the religious. It coincided with the sacerdotal ordination of Fr George Vaithynathan.

The day began with a formation session held at the Bernadette Centre Room of the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes. The session, conducted in a hybrid mode allowed those who are homebound to benefit from the session. Friar Michael Raymond, OFM Cap, spoke on the theme *Engaging Hearts — Synodality and the Soul of Consecrated Living*. Religious members from different congregations deepened their understanding of their calling and strengthened their commitment to serving the Lord. They gained valuable insights into synodality and its role in their consecrated lives.

Reflecting on the session, Sr Angelin Gnanapiragasam, FMDM explained that embracing consecrated religious life transcends any particular individual or order. It's about embodying Christ's presence for all.

"Christ stands as the focal point, guiding both our way of life and our mission. Consequently, the renewal of my religious consecration extends beyond mere commitment to Christ. It's a continual rediscovery of my authentic identity, life's purpose, and the fullness of my calling in God," she said.

Friar Joshua Yong, OFM, Cap, said the formation focused on community, participation, and the essence of togetherness within the Church. He emphasised how Friar Michael Raymond's mention of the communion of love with God underscores the importance of unity and shared experiences among believers.

Friar Joshua further noted that wholehearted listening serves as a profound practice, fostering deeper connections with both ourselves

and others. He highlighted the significance of embracing the spirituality of listening, as faith emerges from this attentive practice. Faith, he suggested, often finds its roots in listening with the heart. Moreover, Friar Joshua remarked that the spirituality of listening encourages us to welcome moments of solitude and inner silence. "This," he added, "allows for meaningful conversations and enhances our understanding and relationships with God, ourselves, and others."

The Diocese of Penang is home to various religious congregations dedicated to serving the Lord, including the Cannosian Daughters of Charity (FdCC); the Redemptorists (CSsR); the Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood (FMDM); the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM); the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (FSIC); the Lasalle Brothers (FSC); the Kongregasi Carmelita Sancti Eliae (CSE); the Kongregasi Putri Karmel (P.Karm); the Little Sisters of the Poor (LSP); the Capuchins (OFM Cap); the Franciscan Friars (OFM); the Religious of the Good Shepherd (RGS); the Sisters of the Infant Jesus (IJ), and the Society of Jesus (SJ).

As the day turned to evening, attention shifted to the sacerdotal ordination of Fr George Vaithynathan, with Cardinal Sebastian Francis as the main presider. After the ordination rites, the religious brothers and sisters renewed their consecration before the gathered faithful.

This double celebration portrays the importance of consecrated life and collaboration within the Church, echoing Pope Francis' vision of a synodal Church where all members journey together in faith. It served as a witness to the vibrancy and dedication of religious life within the diocese, emphasising the need for ongoing formation, unity, and collaboration in the faith journey.



The religious renewing their vows.

Re-igniting the 'fire' in consecrated life

PETALING JAYA: Consecrated life is a cherished treasure meant to illuminate and inspire both the Church and the world. It is a unique flame, representing the charism — a divine gift expressed through the Spirit's manifestation. For the religious, it embodies the distinct charism of each congregation. Fr Paul Cheong, OFM Cap said this as he addressed religious men and women during the commemoration of World Day for Consecrated Life.

The Mass, held at the Church of St Francis Xavier February 2, was presided over by Fr Paul with Fr Nicholas Hoh, OCD, and Fr Alvin Ng, SJ concelebrating.

Taking part in the celebration were the male and female religious orders serving in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.

In his homily, Fr Paul said, "Consecrated life appears as a charism of the Spirit to inspire and empower us for effective witness as missionary disciples of Jesus, to empower for effective daily Christian living. Therefore, the people of God must be inspired and edified by the witness of our joyful and grateful religious life and ministry. They must see the fire in us — bearing of the light of Christ to the world as symbolised by the lighting of candles during the Feast of

the Presentation of the Lord."

Fr Paul pointed out that lay people expect something more from religious people — something which is more radical, definitive, profound, demanding and challenging.

"The Church has always benefited from the gift of charisms, from the most extraordinary to the simplest. Through them, the Spirit rejuvenates and renews the Church with joy and gratitude. The Church today needs their prophetic voice and action. Our charisms are at the loving service of communion and mission

in our local churches."

Throughout his homily, Fr Paul emphasised the charism of the Holy Spirit which reinvigorates the entire Church.

"The synodal journey has been guiding us with its emphasis on communion and participation. This year's focus is on mission — "A Synodal Church in Mission," he continued. "Mission leads us to fullness of Christian vocation, together in loving fellowship and active participation. We are God's mission."

Quoting Pope Francis, Fr Paul described



Fr Paul Cheong, OFM, Cap (fourth from right) was the main celebrant at the World Day for Consecrated Life Eucharistic celebration at the Church of St Francis Xavier, Petaling Jaya on February 2.

mission as "the oxygen of Christian life" which invigorates and purifies us. To live the mission in God's way as consecrated persons, we need the breath of the Spirit who oxygenates our consecration, who does not allow our fire of mission to fade.

"Not just religious, but everyone, including laity. We need the fire of the Spirit to purify us in holiness for active participation in mission," he added. "In this sense, this fire and charism of the Spirit is perpetually old and new, or rather, needs to be renewed. We need the perpetual Pentecost for the new evangelisation."

Fr Paul affirms that each religious' handbook and its spirituality is a treasure. But one needs the courage to make changes and adaption in response to the signs of the times. "Courage and creative imagination are needed for the renewal of religious life," he explained.

In this regard, the new evangelisation calls for new means, expressions, forms and fervour.

He concluded: "We need the fire of creative imagination of the Spirit. Let the religious be on fire because if we are ourselves not on fire, then we will not be able to set the people on fire. The fire of Jesus and fire of faith." — **By Cordelia Lee**

Baptism does not solve everything, reminds archbishop

By Christina George

KOTA KINABALU: Nine hundred and forty-one catechumens from 18 parishes and two churches within the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu were officially enrolled in the Book of the Elect during the Rite of Election February 18. Archbishop John Wong presided over the three-language annual rite at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart.

In his homily, Archbishop John called upon the Elect to reflect on who Jesus is to them as they prepare for their baptism at Easter. "You have learnt, listened and know who Jesus is during your RCIA classes. Now I invite you to reflect, who is Jesus in your life now? What is your experience of Him? Do you accept Him as your God and Saviour?"

"Don't think that with baptism everything is solved. Baptism is only the beginning of following Jesus," said the prelate, as he reminded the catechumens to always remember that they have made a very personal decision to be baptised and it is not a fad to follow others.

The archbishop also urged them to continue to unite themselves with Jesus through prayer, reading and reflecting on the Word of God and the Eucharistic Celebration. He called on all to hold on to and lean on, and be strengthened by, Jesus.

Labuan held its own Rite of Election for 42 catechumens, also officiated by Archbishop John.

The Rite of Election marks the conclusion of the Period of the Catechumenate and typically coincides with the first Sunday of Lent.

During this rite, the Church, based on the testimony of sponsors, catechists, and the catechumens' affirmation of their intention to join the Church, makes its "election" of these catechumens to receive the Sacraments of Initiation. The catechumens inscribe their names in the Book of the Elect at the cathedral as a pledge of fidelity.

The catechumens are now referred to as "the elect" or "the illuminandi" (those who will be enlightened) and begin a period of Purification and Enlightenment. This period, which includes the next five Sundays of Lent, involves three scrutinies (rites for self-searching and repentance) and the presentations of the Creed and Lord's Prayer. It concludes with the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil.



The parish representatives with the Book of the Elect which will be presented to the archbishop.

Reaching out during Lent



Volunteers with some essential items at the home.

KUALA LUMPUR: Accepting that each one of us is a gift to others and that we have been blessed was the Lenten focus of the Creation Justice Ministry of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur. The outreach, a first of the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development's Lenten activities, under the theme *Church Celebrating Human Fraternity*, was held on February 16 at Tunas Harapan, Kuala Kubu Baru, a home for 64 children from different faiths and for 20 families that require assistance.

The volunteers assembled at the Church of Our Lady of Fatima, and started the activity with a prayer. Post breakfast, crates of eggs and groceries were loaded into two vans and cars. Along the way, volunteers engaged in interactions that fostered a better understanding amongst them. Bags of rice, oil, flour, biscuits, and 200 crates of eggs were all transported safely to the home.

On arrival, the volunteers were greeted by cheerful children, who were on their school holidays, but continue to live there. Some of

these children visit their parents who work in plantations or rubber estates, some visit relatives during the break while some are orphans. Mr and Mrs Vijay, the caretakers of the 35-year-old government-run home, have been serving here for nine years.

The volunteers and the staff bonded over some refreshments and KFC meals were ordered for all the children. It was touching to see a family balance a bag of rice, groceries, a tray of eggs and her young child on the motorbike as they headed back to their home in the estate.

Melina, a volunteer, remarked, "I am humbled by the generosity of our friends that heeded the Cry of the Poor. It was wonderful to meet volunteers from different parishes who gave a helping hand, including a 14-year-old boy. When we reached the home, all the bright-eyed children were happy to help carry the trays of eggs. The small gestures of appreciation and effort made our 66km ride all worthwhile." — *By Marilyn Menezes Simon*

Rt Rev Richard Ng celebrates 10 years as Miri bishop

MIRI: January 25 was a joyous day for the Christian community in Miri. It was the 10th anniversary of the episcopal ordination of Rt Rev Richard Ng, Bishop of Miri.

Over 1,000 parishioners thronged the Cathedral of St Joseph to participate in the thanksgiving Mass celebrated by Bishop Richard, with 20 concelebrating priests from nearby parishes. Religious Sisters, leaders and members of the various local church organisations were also present.

It being in the week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the occasion was also an ecumenical event, with representatives from the Association of Churches in Sarawak as well as pastors from the local Methodist and BEM churches in attendance. Bishop Richard is currently the sitting president of the Miri branch of ACS.

An ad-hoc choir, comprising choir members from various churches in Miri came together to lead the congregation in joyous song in multiple languages. In-



Bishop Richard Ng with priests who concelebrated his thanksgiving Mass. (Today's Catholic Photo/Diocese of Miri Social Communications Commission)

tercessors offered up prayers for Bishop Richard, his family members, and the Church in the main languages.

As it was also the feast day of the Conversion of St Paul the Apostle, Bishop Richard mentioned that he specially chose this feast day for his ordination 10 years ago as St Paul was the apostle who, called by the Risen Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit, through his life-long endeavour

and sacrifices, brought the Good News to the Gentiles of his day to the extent that there were more Gentile Christians than there were Jewish Christians by the time of St Paul's martyrdom in Rome.

Bishop Richard aptly chose as his motto, *Proclaim the Gospel* at his episcopal ordination to encapsulate his personal desire and mission.

A fellowship buffet followed immediately after the Mass in the

compound of the cathedral where the congregation were treated to a special anniversary cake and an abundance of local dishes.

It was a memorable evening for everyone, with the young and old participating in the fun quiz about Bishop Richard. An interesting slideshow of the bishop's 10 years in Miri was also presented.

Bishop Richard Ng was ordained a priest in 1995 in the Archdiocese of Kuching. After

serving in the archdiocese for a number of years, he furthered his studies at the Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome and obtained a Licentiate in Sacred Scripture in 2003. He then returned to Kuching to teach at St Peter's College and later became the rector of the college in 2008.

Bishop Richard received his episcopal consecration on January 25, 2014 from his predecessor, Bishop Emeritus Anthony Lee, with Archbishop Emeritus John Ha (Kuching) and Bishop Joseph Hii (Sibu) serving as co-consecrators. Bishop Richard Ng is the third Bishop of Miri.

The evening ended with a closing prayer and blessing by Msgr Francis Kuleh. As the celebration ended and people headed for home, a large group of willing volunteers stayed back to wash up and to clean up as this event was organised without using any single-use plastic cups, plates or cutlery. There was also minimal food waste or rubbish. All in the spirit of *Laudato Si* and care for our Common Home. — *By William Gan, Today's Catholic*

Directory for Catechesis online study

By Jennifer Duarte

PENANG: There is a paradigm shift in the way catechesis should be dealt with today. This was brought to light when the Penang Diocesan Catechetical Commission (PDCC) conducted an online course to expose its 'evangelising catechists' to the new Directory for Catechesis (DC).

The DC was published in 2020 by the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelisation under the Dicastery for Evangelisation, with the approval of Pope Francis. It is the third directory since Vatican II – after the General Catechetical Directory (1971), and the General Directory for Catechesis (1997) – with updates based on the Synod of Bishops on Evangelisation (2012) and Pope Francis' encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium* (Joy of the Gospel, 2013).

This new directory also gives pastoral guidance on how catechists could adapt to globalisation and the digital era which has radically transformed people's way of thinking and interaction with one another.

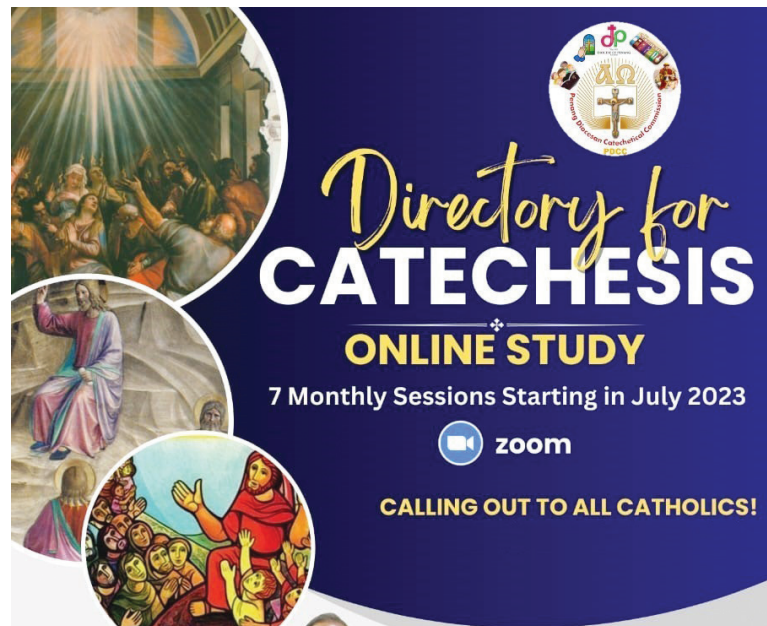
The seven-session study conducted in English, with self and/or group study in between, began in July 2023 and attracted more than 200 evangelising catechists and the lay faithful, not only from the diocese but also from throughout Malaysia. The speakers for the sessions included Dr Steven Selvaraju, Bernadette Teh, Fr Desmond Jansen, Fr Joseph Stephens CSsR, and Deacon Clement Samuel.

Church documents are not easy to read, so the course, broken-down into bite-size pieces, was indeed relevant, challenging and helpful, not only for experienced catechists but

also for those discerning to join the catechetical ministry. The study was well-planned and presented, with participants having to submit assignments after each online session. Assignments were reviewed and feedback was given personally. Sample answers were also provided so that participants could gauge their own performance and understanding of the subject matter.

Participants were very pleased with the way that the course was professionally administered under the leadership of Deacon Clement, the Head of PDCC. The course was an eye-opener for many as they came to understand the importance of their role as evangelisers in today's challenging circumstances.

At the final session of the study, Deacon Clement gave some practical recommendations for catechesis, the way forward in light of the



new directory, among them – formation of missionary disciples begins from young (i.e. in Standard 1 or even younger, and not only when preparing for the Sacrament of Confirmation), it all begins with the catechists becoming evangelisers, on-going encounter of God from young, encountering Jesus through liturgy/sacraments, engaging the parents, pedagogy (teaching) through accompaniment, and

digital catechesis.

As one participant commented in the feedback form, "Each session was enlightening, spiritually motivating and forward-looking. We now know that as evangelising catechists we have to always focus on the kerygma of the Catholic faith and share personal and practical examples of how faith works in our lives in the spirit of evangelisation."

Silibin parish marks 119th feast day celebration



Fr Eugene Fernandez, CSsR anointing the sick at the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Ipoh on February 11, 2024.

IPOH: The Church of Our Lady of Lourdes joyously celebrated its 119th parish feast from February 3rd to the 11th, centred around the theme *Lord, teach us to pray* (Lk 11:1), in alignment with the Year of Prayer 2024.

During the novena Masses, Msgr Jude Miranda, parish priest of the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Penang, led the English sessions, while Fr Arockiaraj Pavlu, CMF, from Serian, Sarawak, conducted the Tamil sessions. Both preachers delivered inspiring messages urging the faithful to deepen their prayer life and trust in God's providence.

Msgr Jude delved into topics such as forgiveness, temptation,

and gratitude, emphasising the presence of miracles in everyday life. He encouraged the congregation to express gratitude to God through a heartfelt 'Thank You' letter, fostering a closer relationship with the divine. His reassuring words, "You are not alone, God is with you," provided solace to all present.

On the feast day, celebrated on Feb 10, Fr Arockiaraj highlighted Mary's role as Mother of God, emphasising her intercessory power. The festivities culminated in a vibrant outdoor procession, with priests carrying the Blessed Sacrament and the faithful following behind the adorned statue of Our Lady of Lourdes.

The celebration continued on Feb

11 with a Mass for the anointing of the sick, coinciding with the World Day of the Sick. Parishioners from near and far gathered to receive the sacrament, administered by parish priest Fr Robert Daniel, Fr Eugene Fernandez CSsR, Fr Arockiaraj, and newly ordained assistant parish priest Fr George Vaithynathan. The theme, Mary, Intercessor of the Sick, emphasised Mary's role in seeking healing from her son, Jesus Christ.

Those anointed felt comfort and gratitude, expressing appreciation to Fr Robert for his care. The day concluded with a shared breakfast at the parish hall, fostering fellowship and community spirit. — **By Pauline Sundram**

Celebrating human fraternity as Church

KLANG: The Church of Our Lady of Lourdes (OLL) observed her annual feast with daily novena and Mass from February 3 – 11. Thousands of devoted parishioners and pilgrims from various places congregated at the church to express gratitude to God and seek the intercession of Our Lady.

This year's central theme was inspired by Matthew 7:12: *Do to others what you would have them do to you - Celebrating Human Fraternity as Church*. The nine-day novena Masses, were celebrated by clergy from the different dioceses.

The celebration commenced with a flag-raising ceremony led by parish priest Fr Gregory Chan and assistant parish priest Fr Gnana Selvam Berentis. The inaugural novena Mass, a communal gathering, was presided over by Fr Gregory, with Fr Selva and Fr Cyril Mannayagam concelebrating. Their sermons preached in the different languages, revolved around the overarching theme of "Celebrating Human Fraternity as Church," with Fr Selva emphasising that "Action

without contemplation is rootless, and contemplation without action is fruitless."

On the second day, Fr Paul Sia celebrated the Mass in Bahasa, while Fr Cyril celebrated the Tamil Mass. Both preachers shared messages related to the subtheme on Communion, Participation, and Mission in Youth.

Concurrent Masses were held on the third day, with Fr Patrick Massang, CSsR and Fr Cyril addressing themes of unity within the family during the English and Tamil Masses, respectively.

Fr Patrick and Msgr Henry Rajoo celebrated the English and Tamil Masses on the fourth day, focusing on the idea of a synodal Church and communion within the Church, respectively.

Msgr Henry and Fr Xavier Andrew celebrated the English and Tamil masses respectively on the fifth day, centering their sermons on Communion, Participation, and Mission in Ecology, with Msgr Henry screening a video on ecology, which captivated the younger congregation.



On the sixth day, Fr Xavier and Fr Peter Anthony led the English and Tamil Masses, urging the congregation to reflect on their societal influence and their love for Jesus, while emphasising community engagement.

Fr William Michael and Fr Selva celebrated the English and Tamil Masses respectively on the seventh and eighth days, focusing on leadership qualities and mental health support within the community.

The feast day celebration culminated with a multilingual Mass on

The clergy, servers and parishioners kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament at the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Klang.

Feb 11 at 6.00pm, presided over by Archbishop Julian Leow and several clergy members concelebrating. This was followed by a candlelight procession along Jalan Tengku Kelana towards 'Little India' and back. The Eucharistic Procession, featuring the monstrance containing the Blessed Sacrament and the icon of Our Lady of Lourdes, was adorned with beautiful flowers. The celebration concluded with benediction at the grotto.

Fr Amalanathan, the first son of OLL, celebrated his 55th sacerdotal anniversary in December 2023, and the parish community celebrated his belated anniversary with a cake cutting ceremony, followed by dinner for all present.

Earlier in the day, Masses with Anointing for the sick were held. Many came for healing and to pray, in conjunction with the World Day of Prayer for the Sick. — **By Nesa Dhevasahayam**

OLL commemorates World Cancer Day

KLANG: The Church of Our Lady of Lourdes (OLL) marked a historic moment as they organised an event commemorating World Cancer Day (WCD) for the first time, uniting the global observance with their parish feast day celebration. WCD, observed annually on February 4, serves as a global initiative to rally the world in the fight against cancer, aiming to raise awareness, improve education, and catalyse personal, collective and government action to alleviate the burden of this disease worldwide.

The official theme for World Cancer Day 2024 is *Close the Care Gap*, underscoring the disparities in accessing quality cancer care across different demographics and regions. It underscores the urgency of ensuring that everyone, irrespective of their background or circumstances, has access to preventive measures, diagnosis, treatment, and palliative care when confronted with cancer.

This event was a collaborative effort between the OLL Formation Team and the Parish Ministry of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (PMEIA), bringing together nearly 100 participants from diverse inter-religious groups and neighbouring parishes. The emcee acknowledged the presence of 'star' attendees — those directly impacted by cancer: patients, survivors, and caregivers.

Fr Gregory Chan, parish priest of OLL, warmly welcomed all attendees, emphasising the significance of the occasion as a transformative platform. He shared insights gleaned from his experiences, highlighting the alarming prevalence of cancer in the community.



A guest at the OLL World Cancer Day event on February 4, lights a candle in remembrance of those affected by cancer.

His aspiration to provide increased support and assistance to those battling cancer found fulfilment with the inception of the first-ever Navigator Training at OLL — a specialised module aimed at offering comprehensive support to cancer patients and their caregivers.

Following the opening remarks, a poignant campaign video echoing the event's theme captured everyone's attention. A moment of quiet reflection ensued as participants were invited to remember those affected by cancer, symbolised by lighting candles — a gesture of hope amidst adversity.

A collective prayer was offered for those who lost their lives to cancer, incorporating intentions gathered from parishioners through a prayer intention box and an online petition link placed in the church before the event.

The second part of the event showcased heartfelt stories of resilience from a survivor

and a caregiver — a couple who shared their journey through the challenges of cancer, marked by distress and uncertainty. The wife, a courageous breast cancer survivor, recounted her ordeal and credited her healing to newfound perspectives and unwavering familial support.

The event's second part featured moving stories of resilience from a cancer survivor and caregiver. The couple recounted their challenging journey through cancer, marked by distress and uncertainty. Despite questioning her faith initially, the wife found solace in a reassuring message, leading to a transformative change and a return to the church. She credited her recovery to this new perspective and the unwavering support of her family, especially her husband who resigned from his job to become her full-time caregiver. The collective strength of her immediate family and in-laws played a

crucial role in her remarkable journey toward healing.

Madam Vijayalakshmy, Head of Patient Navigation Services at the National Cancer Society of Malaysia (NCSM), delivered crucial insights on health, urging attendees not to overlook signals their bodies may send. She emphasised the importance of early detection and self-care, drawing from her experiences working with cancer patients.

The event provided an opportunity for attendees to share their thoughts and stories, highlighting the importance of family and community support in facing the challenges of cancer. Many expressed gratitude for the event, finding inspiration and a network of support.

The organising team introduced impactful initiatives: Navigator Training and the Survivor Programme, inviting individuals to contribute and make a positive impact in supporting cancer patients.

A complimentary Health Screening booth provided by Sri Kota Specialist Medical Centre, Klang, was available, followed by refreshing treats for participants. In closing, the organising team expressed their hope of planting seeds of change in each attendee, fostering collaborative efforts to bridge the care gap and make a positive impact on the lives of those affected by cancer.

If you're interested in contributing your services in any of these fields or if your parish is interested in hosting an awareness talk and would like an overview of what Navigator training entails, contact Damian at 019 3054441.

Outreach programme at Tennamaram

BESTARI JAYA: The Chapel Committee of St Anthony's Chapel in Tennamaram collaborated with a group of Catholics from Kuala Lumpur to organise an outreach programme that aided six impoverished families.

Held on the afternoon of February 3, at the chapel, the programme welcomed five families from nearby estate areas alongside the Catholics from the city centre.

Commencing with a prayer session and reflection, the programme also included a group photo session and a tea fellowship at the chapel's foyer. Fatimah, the head of the chapel's committee, noted that the beneficiaries included both Catholics and non-Christians.

The outreach effort provided the invited families with over 20 different essential food items, along with pillows and bath towels. Additionally, some food items were earmarked for another needy family unable to attend.

The recipients expressed gratitude and joy for the care and support extended by the Catholic participants, who embodied God's love through their actions.

The Chapel of St Anthony operates under the jurisdiction of the Church of St Paul the Hermit in Bestari Jaya, and parish priest Fr James Gabriel offered his blessing and encouragement for the outreach initiative. — **By Bernard Anthony**



Letters to Editor

Guidelines for altar servers and appropriate attire

Dear Editor,

At my church, there is a little boy (approximately 4 years old) who is an altar server. When I see the poor boy, I feel very sorry for him as this is a duty that is clearly beyond his comprehension. The adorable boy looks bored at best and tortured at worst. Other altar servers are distracted from their focus since they have to play the role of a babysitter to him. The congregation, along with the presiding priest also get distracted by his innocent awkwardness. This is not the boy's fault of course. Recently another little one has joined him.

What exactly are the guidelines regarding:

- Age appropriateness — I thought you would need to have taken Holy Communion before enlisting as an

altar server;

- Girls as altar servers — Do we need them when we have boys? Aren't boys to be given priority?

- Dress code for girls and changing space for them — if we allow girls to serve, then surely this aspect needs to be given proper attention.

In line with the above, with the advent of live Mass broadcasting, we also have a space in front of my church (at the corner, but visible to everyone) where technical support sits. Surely shorts and t-shirt is not the appropriate dress code for him?

Are there guidelines issued by the bishop regarding the above or are they purely the prerogative of the parish priest?

*Mea culpa
Via email*

OLL medical team exemplified Mt 25:40

Dear Editor,

During the recent procession at the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, Klang, on February 11, the invaluable role of the medical team became abundantly clear as they showcased their proactive and compassionate approach towards caring for the elderly, disabled and wheelchair-bound faithful as the team members went above and beyond to offer personalised assistance and support.

Their unwavering dedication and swift responses stood out, ensuring everyone's safety and well-being throughout the event as it began drizzling halfway through the procession. Instantly, one of the members of the medical team who was pushing a person in the wheelchair removed his medical team vest and put it on the head of the person he was pushing. Thereafter, all his members followed suit.

There was an instance whereby an elderly woman in a wheelchair told a member

of the medical team that she was hungry and he brought her to the side to get her some food and drink before continuing in the procession.

Beyond their technical skills, the medical team's empathy and genuine concern for the well-being of every individual was palpable. From time to time, they kept checking on elderly, disabled and wheelchair-bound participants to see if they needed a drink or something to eat. They also gave out packet drinks to a few of these people.

The medical team's proactive approach and unwavering commitment to caring for the elderly and disabled during the procession exemplified the highest standards of care and compassion. Their invaluable contribution ensured the safety and well-being of participants and left a lasting impression of gratitude and admiration within the community.

*Lincy Ann Clare Cyril
via email*

Send your letters to ► letterseditor@herald.com.my

The Editor, HERALD, 5 Jalan Robertson, 50150 KL | Please include your name and address. *Letters without name and address will not be entertained.*

Pondering and Praying Vatican II

LONDON: A new book by Archbishop John Wilson on Vatican II was officially launched on February 22 in Liverpool, with another launch scheduled for March 6 in London.

The Second Vatican Council was a landmark event for the Catholic Church shaping its relationship with the world. The impact of Vatican II continues to be a hot topic within the Catholic Church and while many have heard of the Council, few understand what actually happened and its consequences for the Church.

To help people engage with the legacy of Vatican II and what it means for Catholic faith and life, as well as the Church's relationship with the wider world, Archbishop John Wilson of Southwark has written a short introduction covering the key themes.

The book, *Pondering and Praying Vatican II*, has been written for easy access, meaning it is perfect for those who want to understand more about this crucial moment in the Catholic Church's history, but are unsure where to start.

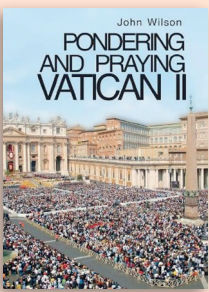
The book offers an introduction to the four key Constitutions of Vatican II — Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*); Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*); Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*) and Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*) — providing an overview of their themes and helping the readers to grasp the Council's key developments.

"Vatican II was a ground-breaking event in our Church's history and in many ways transformed the way the Church interacts with the wider world," said Archbishop Wilson.

"Beyond the headlines, few have actually read or considered the documents produced, let alone the important themes of the Council. But the documents and the themes are a rich treasure, and can teach us much about our faith in Christ and the Church's place and mission in our contemporary world.

"I hope this little book will help people engage more fully with Vatican II, assisting readers to ask themselves what the teaching of Vatican II might mean for them and how they might pray in light of it," said the prelate.

Archbishop Wilson is a passionate communicator of the Catholic faith. He was part of the representation from England and Wales which attended the recent Synod on Synodality in Rome, convened by Pope Francis, which once again considered the Catholic Church's place in the modern world. — **By Patrick Kinsella, ICN**



Cambodians begin Year of Prayer with focus on vocations

PHNOM PENH: Catholics in Cambodia are using the Year of Prayer 2024 as a special opportunity for young Cambodians to discern their vocations, whether to the priesthood, consecrated life, or other paths of service.

"To prepare for the Holy Year, a year of the Lord's mercy, we should take time for prayer. Prayer is the basis of all things, the basis of conversion, the basis of our calling through listening to the Word of God, the basis of every activity of the Christian community," said MEP Bishop Olivier Schmitthaeusler, Vicar Apostolic of Phnom Penh.

"Sometimes we are busy putting ourselves at the service of others, we carry out many activities, and all too often, we forget that the first basic principle of prayer is silence. Silence teaches us to live together with God. In this year, let's find time to pray in our Vicariate in Phnom Penh", he wrote in a message from the Vicar Apostolic.

Pope Francis designated 2024 as a Year of Prayer in preparation for the 2025 Jubilee Year "Pilgrims of Hope." The year started in Advent 2023 with dioceses invited to promote initiatives to remind people of the centrality of both individual prayer and community prayer. After the extraordinary Holy Year of Mercy initiated by Pope Francis in 2015, the upcoming Jubilee will adhere to the tradition of observing a 25-year interval between each occurrence. The last ordinary jubilee occurred in 2000, coinciding with the transition into the new millennium.

As part of events to begin the Year of



Youth spending time to discern and understand the call of God in their lives.

Prayer 2024, youth of the nine pastoral districts of the Vicariate of Phnom Penh spent "time with Jesus" to "discern and understand the call of God in life". "Discover the presence of Jesus in daily life and remain connected to Him... broaden your view of the needs of the world... know that our lives are linked to the presence of God and we will know by faith that Jesus is our companion every day," Bishop Schmitthaeusler said at a meeting with more than 100 young people from the region.

The year of preparation for the Holy Year will also be a special "year of vocation" for young Cambodians to hear the call of God, also with regard to the vocation to the priesthood, consecrated life or other paths of service. Bishop Schmitthaeusler called on "each local community to gather once a month for a special prayer for vocations, with all the faithful", but also to "gather weekly to pray

the *Lectio Divina* and to listen to the Word of God". Prayer, he says, begins in the family. "Every family should find time for prayer at home at least once a week and spend 10-15 minutes together in prayer," he said. "The year 2024 should be a time for us in which we convert and believe in the Gospel that Jesus proclaimed more than 2,000 years ago," said the bishop.

In 2023, Cambodia welcomed new local priests, with three young Cambodians ordained as diocesan priests in the Apostolic Vicariate of Phnom Penh, and celebrated the first Cambodian Jesuit priest. Bishop Schmitthaeusler sees the preparation for the Holy Year as a special gift with a growing local clergy and the dedication of foreign missionaries to continue its pastoral mission, serving approximately 20,000 Catholics across the country's ecclesiastical districts. — LCI (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)

Philippine Church relaunches project against child malnutrition for Lent

MANILA: Several Philippine dioceses have launched the "Fast to Feed" campaign during Lent. It is a way that the churches of the Philippines have developed to help hungry and malnourished children by supporting the "Fast2Feed Pondo ng Pinoy" project initiated by the Pope Pius XII Catholic Centre in Manila.

Pondo ng Pinoy, which literally means "funds of the Filipinos", is not only a collection of donations started by Cardinal Gaudencio Borbón Rosales, former Arch-

bishop of Manila, but an instrument of the Catholic Church in its mission of evangelisation in this area and of fight against child poverty.

Through the *Pondo ng Pinoy*, the Church aims to cultivate the culture of solidarity and helping others in communities through a donation of just 25 cents a day to fight poverty. Only ₱15.00 (RM1.29) is enough to feed a hungry child, per day. In this way, those who choose to fast during this Lenten period can give the equivalent

as a gift, helping to feed the country's malnourished children.

"The sacrifice of the people today will plant the seeds of hope and nourishment for a brighter tomorrow," said Bishop Gerardo Alimane Alminaza of the Diocese of San Carlos. He added, "It's about expressing our love for God through our love for others". The proceeds will also be used for food support for malnourished and pregnant women. — **By Santosh Diga, Asia News**



A nun sharing food with some children.

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Pope Francis sets dates for October synod

VATICAN: The Vatican announced, on February 17, the dates for the second Synod on Synodality assembly and the appointment of six new consulters to the General Secretariat of the Synod.

The 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops' second session will take place from Oct 2 to Oct 27. The participants in the assembly will arrive in Rome on Sept 29 to participate in a two-day spiritual retreat ahead of the start of the assembly.

Pope Francis issued a chirograph asking the dicasteries of the Roman Curia to collaborate with the General Secretariat of the Synod to establish the study groups for "in-depth analysis" of some of the themes that emerged in the first Synod on Synodality assembly.

The Pope did not specify in the chirograph published on Feb 17 how many groups will be formed, what topics will be studied, or who will participate in the study groups.

The synthesis report published at the end of the first synod assembly lists 75 different "matters for consideration," including women's access to diaconal ministry, priestly celibacy, and "Eucharistic hospitality" for interfaith couples.

These "matters of consideration," which



Pope Francis and members of the organising committee of his Synod of Bishops on Synodality meet during a group discussion in the Vatican's Paul VI Hall in October 2023. (Vatican Media)

could not find a consensus in the first synod assembly, are defined as "points on which we have recognised that it is necessary to continue theological, pastoral, and canonical deepening."

In addition, the synthesis report also calls for the establishment of a "special inter-continental commission of theologians and

canonists" to examine the definition and conceptual understanding of the "idea and practice of synodality" and its canonical implications, as well as the establishment of a joint commission of Eastern and Latin theologians, historians, and canonists.

According to Vatican News, the study groups will require a substantial amount

of time and will not "directly constitute the material up for discussion in the next session of the synod, which will focus on synodality itself."

The General Secretariat of the Synod, led by Cardinal Mario Grech, will coordinate the work of the study groups among the dicasteries, which will "involve experts from all continents" following a synodal process, the Vatican's state media outlet said.

Among the new synod consulters, Pope Francis chose three female professors — Sr Birgit Weiler, a professor of theology at the Pontifical Catholic University in Peru; Tricia Bruce, president of the Association for the Sociology of Religion; and Maria Clara Lucchetti Bingemer, professor of theology at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro.

The other appointees are Msgr Alphonse Borras, a Belgian canon lawyer and specialist in the theology of the diaconate; Fr Gilles Routhier, a professor of religious studies at Laval University in Quebec; and Fr Ormond Rush, a theology professor at Australian Catholic University. Rush addressed the first synod assembly in October with a speech that focused on Vatican II's discussion of tradition as the authority for the Synod on Synodality. — **Agencies**

Dalit Catholics seek representation in India's synodality process

MUMBAI: Catholics in India are exploring the role of marginalised people in the local Church as it uses synodality.

A two-day national conference on *Synodal Church: Voice of the Marginalised* was organised at the Indian Social Institute in Bengaluru on February 16–17. The conference was jointly coordinated by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), the Office for Scheduled Castes and Backward Classes, and the Tamil Nadu Bishops' Council's Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

"The purpose of the conference is for the implementation of Dalit Empowerment policy of CBCI which was released in 2016," said Fr Z. Devasagaya Raj, the former national secretary of the CBCI Office for Dalits and Backward Classes.

"Still, the leadership of Dalits in the Indian Church is not properly represented. Synod involves the voice of the marginalised. Even the CCBI does not have a commission for

scheduled castes [people in India belonging to marginalised groups]. There was also a serious concern that the voice of the Dalits is strangled when it reaches the Vatican," he said.

However, the priest acknowledged that participants expressed their joy for the appointment of Archbishop Anthony Poola of Hyderabad as the first Dalit Cardinal.

Dalits, previously known as "untouchables," are the lowest stratum of the castes in the Hindu system in India.

"The very focus of the Synodal Church is mission, communion, and participation. All should be included in the mission of the Catholic Church so that no one is left behind in this process, especially the voice of the marginalised, who should be heard and participate in the Church," said Cardinal Poola in his address.

However, he pointed out a long-standing issue within the Church, particularly concerning the Dalits in India and the diaspora,

who have faced centuries of alienation and discrimination. He highlighted the persistence of 'untouchable' practices within the Church, leading to unequal treatment, including segregated churches and cemeteries, and a lack of equitable justice and representation in Church decision-making at every level. "This has led to a situation where the fundamental aims of the Synodal Church are not being realised in the lives and faith of Dalit Christians," Cardinal Poola remarked.

Addressing these challenges, he called on Dalit Christians to champion the cause of an inclusive Church and to urge the Church hierarchy to implement meaningful reforms. These reforms include enacting the CBCI's Dalit Empowerment Policy of 2016, establishing a Dalit Desk within the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, enhancing Dalit leadership within the Church at all levels, and eradicating casteism.

The prelate stressed that the Synod must

take these issues seriously and incorporate them into future synodal discussions, focusing on the plight of marginalised groups, including Dalits, tribals, indigenous peoples, and Blacks. He underscored the importance of this for the integrity of the Synodal process.

The Dalit Christian Liberation Movement (DCLM) criticised the ongoing Synodality Process in India as insufficient if it fails to confront and end discrimination against Dalit Christians. Prof. Dr. M. Mary John, President of the DCLM, accused the Church hierarchy and clergy of hiding behind the guise of being led by the Holy Spirit while perpetuating caste-based discrimination.

"Their lips and tongues speak of the Holy Spirit, but their minds and hearts work with the caste spirit! That is why the discrimination against Dalits in the Church continues unabated," said Dr Mary, calling for an authentic commitment to ending this injustice."

— **By Nirmala Carvalho, *Crux***

Dicastery for Evangelisation offers resource for Year of Prayer

ROME: The Vatican's Dicastery for Evangelisation has issued a new resource on prayer aimed at inviting the faithful to "intensify prayer as a personal dialogue with God" and to reflect on their faith and commitment in today's world.

The new guidebook, entitled *Teach Us to Pray* (Italian: *Insegnaci a pregare*), is the latest in a series of resources provided by the Dicastery to assist the Church as she prepares for the celebration of Jubilee 2025.

The title is taken from the request of Jesus' disciples in the Gospel of St. Luke, which provides the framework for the Church's preparation for the Jubilee.

Inspired by the authoritative teaching of Pope Francis, *Teach Us to Pray* consists of chapters dedicated to prayer in the parish and in the family; the prayer of young people; prayer in cloistered communities; catechesis; and spiritual retreats; and concludes with a section on "The prayer of the faithful for Jubilee 2025."

According to a press release announcing the booklet, *Teach Us to Pray* is intended to offer "reflections, directions, and advice for living more fully in dialogue with the Lord, in relationship with others."

The Italian version of *Teach Us to Pray* is currently available to download at no cost from the website of the

Dicastery for Evangelisation. English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Polish versions will be made available soon.

Pope Francis announced the Year of Prayer ahead of the Jubilee during the *Angelus* on January 21, when he called on the faithful "to intensify your prayers in order to prepare ourselves to live this event of grace well, and to experience the strength of God's hope."

Explaining the purpose of the Year of Prayer, the Pope said the year is "dedicated to rediscovering the great value and absolute need for prayer in personal life, in the life of the Church, and in the world."

— **Vatican News**



"Teach us to Pray": new booklet for the Year of Prayer from the Dicastery for Evangelisation

The Pope's problem with today's seminarians and young priests

He's warned Catholic seminaries against the tendency to turn future priests into "little monsters". He's scolded the Church's presbyters for wearing ornate liturgical vestments that stem from a bygone era, telling them to stop dressing up in "granny's lace". And he's called it a "scandal" to see young priests and seminarians going into the ecclesiastical tailor shops of Rome and "trying on cassocks and hats, or lacey albs". This is all part of Pope Francis venting his aversion to clericalism. He has denounced it over and over again in his eleven years as Bishop of Rome, identifying it as a "scourge" and "plague" that wounds the Church and its members. Railing against clericalism has been a mantra throughout his entire pontificate. "The holy, faithful People of God go forward patiently and humbly, enduring the scorn, mistreatment and marginalisation of institutionalised clericalism," he said last October during the Synod assembly on synodality. "How naturally we speak of the princes of the Church, or of episcopal promotions as getting ahead career-wise!" Indeed.

Institutionalised clericalism

The Pope is right to point out that clericalism is ingrained in the very institution of the Church. It is a deeply-rooted mentality and ethos that is, without a doubt, most often identified in ecclesiastical ambition, certain forms of dress, and the language clerics and even many lay people tend to use. But these are only symptoms, perhaps, of a much deeper and more fundamental problem. It is this: the idea, drilled into the heads of seminarians and priests over the centuries, that they are special. They are the chosen ones. They are men "set apart", as some of the classic Catholic literature and manuals define those men who feel they have a vocation to the "holy priesthood". That is a problem. And Francis puts his finger on it, showing that it all begins in the formation (training) period before a man is even ordained. "Priestly formation should not be conceived as somehow 'set apart'," he said

If surveys and anecdotal evidence are correct, the younger generation of Catholic clerics are not fond of Pope Francis, which could hinder implementation of his reforms going forward.

recently, while addressing participants of the Vatican-sponsored International Conference for Ongoing Formation of Priests. "Rather, it should draw upon the contribution of the people of God: priests and lay faithful, men and women, celibates and married couples, the elderly and the young, without neglecting the poor and suffering who have so much to teach us," he told about a thousand priests from 60 countries that, according to Vatican News, attended the February 6-10 gathering. This is not the sort of thing today's seminarians and younger clergy, who are told by so many people that they are "set apart", like to hear. Scientific surveys (at least in the United States) and anecdotal evidence (from there and other parts of the world) suggest that these younger clerics and future clerics are more traditional in their views of Church and society than men who were ordained before 1980 and even those before as recently as twenty-five years ago, fully in the John Paul II era.

Tender, forgiving, and "generative"

Pope Francis has been trying to find a way to rid the Church of clericalism. And he believes the recipe is synodality, the notion that all we are all walking together, priests and people. "We can carry out our priestly ministry well only if we are fully part of the priestly people, from which we ourselves have come," he told the priests at the recent conference on ongoing formation. "Realising that we are part of a people — never feeling separated from the journey of the holy, faithful People of God — preserves us, sustains us in our efforts, accompanies us in our pastoral concerns and keeps us safe from the risk of growing detached from reality and feeling all-powerful," he said, warning that such detachment is "the root of every form of abuse". The 87-year-old Pope said a priest who sees himself as a man set apart from the

rest of the People of God is "an aristocrat who ends up becoming neurotic". The real "identity card" of a priest, he said, is to offer "generative" service. "When we put ourselves at the service of others, when we become fathers and mothers for those entrusted to our care, we bring God's life to birth. This is the secret of a 'generative' pastoral activity," he told the priests. And he added that this means being merciful and tender, especially when hearing people's confessions. "They come to ask for forgiveness and not to hear a lecture on theology. Please be merciful. Always forgive," he insisted. "Tenderness is strength," the Pope added.

Stop judging

Pope Francis' insistence on not judging others and being welcoming of "everyone" is another aspect of his pontificate that greatly disturbs many of those priests who are more traditional and tend to be unwavering enforcers of Church doctrine without nuance. The younger clergy and seminarians, by and large, tend to be in this category (which also included many bishops appointed in the previous two pontificates). Rather than apologists or proselytisers, Francis says Catholics — all the baptised, whether ordained ministers or not — are called to be "missionary disciples" of Jesus. "Christ's missionary disciples have always had a heartfelt concern for all persons, whatever their social or even moral status," the Pope said in his message for next October's "World Mission Day", which was published on February 2. "The parable of the banquet tells us that, at the king's orders, the servants gathered 'all whom they found, both good and bad' (Mt 22:10). The wedding feast of His Son that God has prepared remains always open to all, since His love for each of us is immense and unconditional," he added. Not even one's "moral status" can keep a person from

entering the heavenly banquet, much less so doors of a Catholic Church! This is, in fact, the logic behind the controversial document the Pope approved for offering blessings to couples in "irregular situations", including individuals who are divorced and civilly remarried and those who form a same-sex couple. The reactions against this, especially among the seminarians and young clergy, was to be expected.

The next couple of generations of Catholic

The Pope's clericalist critics have called him "demoralising and bullying". They are incensed that he — the Church's supreme lawgiver — would even dare to say, "Who am I to judge?" It is, in their minds, a gross dereliction of his duty as Vicar of Jesus Christ on Earth. Judging is actually the Supreme Pontiff's job, they say! But, to them, Francis is too "progressive", aligned with the agenda of the political "left". Those who actually restrain themselves from going off the ecclesial reservation and stop short of calling him a heretic, clearly see his views and teachings as "heterodox" and undermining the Catholic faith. They, on the other hand, pride themselves for their own "orthodoxy, their *ars celebrandi*, their preaching, and their pastoral zeal," to quote a traditionalist priest from the United States. It's not clear where the People of God — "the merely baptised" — stand on all of this. Even lay people can harbour clericalist attitudes. Part of that is institutionalised, as the Pope has pointed out. But it is a problem that the younger ranks of the ministerial work force, and those who are currently preparing to join it, are not very fond of this Pope. They are the ones who will be "the servants" or "the aristocrats" of the next couple of generations of Catholics. And that means, if the man who succeeds the current Pope one day is more tolerant of and sympathetic to their traditionalist mentality and proclivities, the reforming vision of Francis will end up... You fill in the blank. — **By Robert Mickens, LCI** (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)

Struggle against tyranny continues in Ukraine

February 24 marked the sombre second anniversary of Russia's second invasion of Ukraine in this century. The initial invasion began a decade ago, on February 27, when Russian troops seized key installations on the Crimean Peninsula and instigated revolts in the Donbas region. Throughout history, Ukraine has often found itself under Russian or Soviet control.

These anniversaries are grim reminders of the ongoing conflict's toll. The exact number of casualties remains unknown, as the Ukrainian government closely guards the figures to prevent morale from plummeting. However, a civic group estimated last year that there were 24,500 combat and non-combat deaths among Ukrainians, with 15,000 individuals missing and presumed dead.

The number of Russian casualties is believed to be significantly higher, with most being combatants. The United Kingdom's Ministry of Defence estimates that 50,000 Russian soldiers and an additional 20,000 from the Wagner Group have been killed. Moreover, 240,000 Russian soldiers and 40,000 Wagner Group members have been

wounded.

In the struggle against tyranny, a recent casualty was Aleksei Navalny, who died in a Russian prison. While not Ukrainian by birth, he was a staunch supporter of their cause.

The conflict has also left a deep psychological impact on the Ukrainian population, with children forced to attend schools underground and civilians living in fear of Russian bombing raids targeting urban areas at night. Many families remain separated, with mothers and children fleeing the country while fathers stay behind to fight.

Despite these hardships, the flame of Ukrainian national identity burns brightly. While morale may have waned since the early days of the war, Ukrainian forces continue to resist in the Donbas region. Sea drones have reportedly sunk or disabled a third of Russia's Black Sea fleet, a significant blow to what retired Lt Gen Mark Herling describes as "the pride of the Russian Navy."

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has aged visibly over the past two years, yet he remains a leader of remarkable moral fortitude and political skill. His recent diplo-



Rescuers work at the site of a residential building in Kharkiv, Ukraine, January 23, 2024, that was heavily damaged in a Russian missile attack. (OSV News/Reuters/Sofia Gatilova)

matic efforts, including signing a bilateral security agreement with French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris and attending the Munich Security Conference in Germany to meet with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, demonstrate Europe's continued support for Ukraine.

The brave soldiers and citizens of Ukraine persevere in their fight to defend their homeland. It is incumbent upon us to assist them in their struggle; failure to do so would not only bring shame upon us but also destabilise Europe to its core. — **By Michael Sean Winters, NCR**

For the new martyrs

Pope's prayer intention for March

We pray that the New Martyrs inflame the Church with their courage and missionary enthusiasm.

"I do not believe in death without resurrection. If they kill me, I will rise again in the people of El Salvador", declared, the beloved martyr, St Oscar Romero, the former archbishop of El Salvador. Romero spoke out against social injustice and violence amid the escalating conflict between the military government and left-wing rebels that led to the Salvadoran Civil War.

As archbishop, Romero changed the Church's focus from aligning with the state to championing the cause of the impoverished. Traditionally, the Church had aligned herself with the ruling elite of El Salvador, but Romero deemed this partnership unacceptable given the widespread poverty perpetuated by the collaboration of the Church, state, and military. Emulating the efforts of progressive priests in rural areas, Romero firmly positioned the Church in solidarity with the marginalised. This marked the first instance where the people of El Salvador had the backing of a prominent institutional figure.

In 1980, Romero was shot by an assassin while celebrating Mass. He symbolises, for many Salvadorans, the spirit of a struggle to liberate the poor and powerless from the repression of the privileged few who wield social, economic, and political power in El Salvador.

In a world often marked by division and uncertainty, the role of faith and those who courageously spread its message becomes ever more significant. Pope Francis, in his wisdom and compassion, has highlighted a crucial prayer intention **"For New Martyrs: We pray that those who risk their lives for the Gospel in various parts of the world**



PRAYER PRISM

Fr Fabian Dicom

inflame the Church with their courage and missionary enthusiasm," that resonates deeply with the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of our times, while also resounding Romero's legacy.

At first glance, this prayer intention may seem abstract or distant from our daily lives. However, its essence touches upon fundamental aspects of faith, courage, and the missionary spirit that lies at the heart of Christianity. Let us delve into its significance and explore why it matters not just to the Church but to each one of us.

Who is a martyr? The word "martyr" derives from the Greek *martyria*, which indeed means witness. And therefore, a martyr is a witness, one who bears witness to the point of shedding one's blood. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (#2473) defines martyrdom as "the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith" and a martyr as one who, "bears witness even unto death". Who then are these new martyrs that Pope Francis is referring to?

In July 2023 Pope Francis set up a special commission tasked with identifying those he calls the "new martyrs" of the 21st century — Christians who have been slain, in some cases simply for attending Mass or for helping the poor, highlighting the diverse manifestations of martyrdom in the modern era.

"As I have said so many times, martyrs are more numerous in our time than in the first centuries," emphasised Pope Francis as he acknowledges that in today's world, martyrs

are abundant, encompassing clergy, laypeople, and families who have sacrificed their lives as a testament to their faith and charity.

In the quiet corners of the world, far from the spotlight, there exist heroes whose courage knows no bounds. They are not adorned with capes or hailed in grand ceremonies, yet their deeds resonate with the echoes of faith and resilience. They are the new martyrs, those who risk everything for the Gospel amidst the shadows of persecution and adversity.

These modern-day martyrs, often working in regions marred by conflict, persecution, or oppression, embody the essence of courage and unwavering faith. Their stories are not just tales of heroism but powerful reminders of the enduring power of belief in the face of adversity.

Consider, for instance, the plight of Christians in areas where practising their faith invites hostility and danger. From the Middle East to parts of Africa and Asia, countless individuals risk their lives daily to share the message of love, compassion, and redemption. They face persecution, imprisonment, and even death, simply for professing their belief in Christ.

Indeed, the stories of modern-day martyrs offer profound lessons in humility, selflessness, and unwavering devotion. Take, for example, the inspiring life of Shahbaz Bhatti, a Pakistani Christian and government minister who dedicated his life to advocating for the rights of religious minorities in his country. Despite facing constant threats and intimidation, Bhatti remained steadfast in his commitment to justice and equality, ultimately paying the price for his beliefs with his life. Similarly, the courageous witness of individuals like Sr Rani Maria, an Indian nun who was brutally murdered while working with marginalised communities, serves as a

great testament to the transformative power of faith in action. Their lives may have been cut short by violence, but their legacies endure as shining examples of the indomitable spirit of faith and love.

In conclusion, Pope Francis' prayer intention presents a profound challenge to the Church, particularly in regions like Malaysia where complacency, indifference, and apathy towards issues of justice and subtle persecution may prevail. It prompts us to re-evaluate the priorities of our faith community, moving away from an inward-looking approach centred solely on rites and rituals, and infrastructures, and instead, embracing a more proactive stance in advocating the cause of the marginalised and oppressed.

The legacy of martyrs like St Oscar Romero and the countless modern-day witnesses to the Gospel serves as a powerful reminder of the transformative power of faith in action. Their courage in the face of adversity challenges us to break free from the shackles of indifference and actively engage with the pressing social, economic, and political issues of our time.

Embracing the spirit of solidarity and compassion exemplified by these martyrs is imperative. It entails speaking out against injustice, standing in solidarity with the marginalised, and actively working towards building a more just and equitable society. It means moving beyond the comfort of our pews and actively seeking out ways to embody the love and mercy of Christ in our daily lives.

May we find the strength and inspiration to become true witness to the transformative power of faith, both in our local communities and beyond.

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

Vatican shows new film on Coptic martyrs killed by ISIS in 2015

"We are called the nation of the cross," explains Samuel Armnius, the Coptic-born filmmaker, at the beginning of his new documentary. Like all children of the Egyptian Coptic Church, he learned in catechism about the martyrs who died for their faith — St Menas, St Moses the Ethiopian, and many others. The legacy of these and other martyrs was handed down by the Desert Fathers from Egypt, the very first monks and hermits in the history of the Church.

Now the much more recent story of the martyrs of ISIS has been added to this somewhat distant historical list. It was nine years ago — February 15, 2015 — that 20 Coptic Orthodox Christians, mostly from Egypt, and one Ghanaian Catholic, were beheaded by members of ISIS on a beach in Libya.

The 21: the Power of Faith, The Village of the Martyrs is the title of Armnius' new documentary on their story, based on the testimonies of the martyrs' families. The film, which was first broadcast on Ash Wednesday on the French-language Catholic television network KTO, was screened the next day at the Vatican Film Library.

It was shown just after of an ecumenical prayer service in St Peter's Basilica to mark the Catholic Church's first-ever Feast of the Coptic Martyrs. The liturgy — which was led by Cardinal Kurt Koch,

Documentary featuring testimonies from family members of the 21 men killed nine years ago in Tunisia is unveiled as Catholic Church marks first-ever Feast of the Coptic Martyrs.

Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity — was the result of a meeting that Pope Francis held last May at the Vatican with the Coptic Orthodox Patriarch, Pope Tawadros II. During that encounter Francis officially inscribed the names of the 21 Christians who were killed in Tunisia in the Roman Martyrology.

The new documentary opens with excerpts from the execution video taken by ISIS. The images are chilling, especially knowing that they were broadcast live and seen by the victims' own families. These men were mostly from the village of Al-Our, located 250 km south of Cairo, and had migrated to Libya in the province of Sirte to find work. Seven of them were captured by terrorists on December 29, 2014, while trying to return to Egypt, and five days later, the other 13 were abducted from their homes. None of them wanted to renounce their Christian faith.

Quickly revisiting the context of the Arab Spring in Egypt, the film's director recalls the two bloody years for Christians, in 2013 and 2014, until the rise to power of Marshal Sissi. The Egyptian president even helped build a basilica in memory of the 21

martyrs at Al-Our, as requested by the local Coptic Orthodox bishop, Anba Pafnotios.

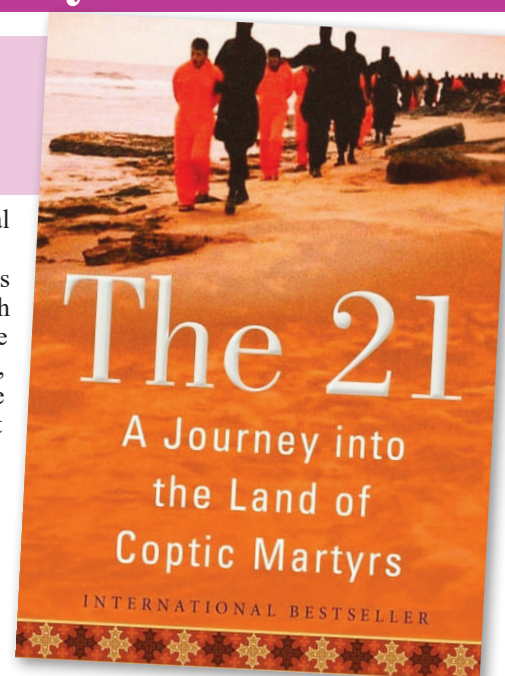
The documentary prominently features testimonies from relatives, and through their stories, viewers relive the events. The wife of one of the martyrs, Ezzat Boshra, notes that her husband was aware of the danger from the very start but was not afraid to die for his faith.

During the forty-five days of captivity, the families experienced a long period of anxious waiting.

"When they became martyrs in the name of Christ, it became a joy for us," says the mother of two of the victims, Bishoy and Samuel. "Martyrdom is hard," she adds, her face marked by pain nonetheless.

The most moving lesson these families offer is forgiveness. When the father of Luka Nagaty is asked how he would react if he were to meet the man who killed his son, he says, "I would take his hand, the one that held the knife, and I would kiss it and thank him, saying 'You have led my son to heaven'."

The father of martyr Gaber Munir recalls the Gospel's command to love one's enemies.



"For the man of faith, it's not difficult," he says.

The last scene of the documentary shows the two popes — Francis and Tawadros II — in St Peter's Square.

"Blood brings us closer to one another," says the Coptic Orthodox Patriarch, citing what the Catholic Pope has come to call "the ecumenism of blood". — **By Guillaume Daudé, LCI** (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)

Journaling towards healing

By Marilyn Gerard

I recently participated in the fourth meeting of the Bereavement Support Group (BSG). This monthly session provides a safe space for widows and widowers to come together, sharing our coping mechanisms and supporting each other through the challenges of losing our spouses.

The topic for this session was *Journaling Towards Healing*. It began with a heartfelt prayer, acknowledging the profound pain of losing a husband, the intense anger, and the crippling fear of the unknown future that many participants were experiencing. Despite these challenges, the prayer expressed a deep faith in God's presence, asking for His help to navigate through grief and to trust in His unseen work of mending our brokenness.

According to research, the loss of a spouse is often cited as the most emotionally wrenching of all losses, and it's also considered the most challenging to overcome (Homes & Rahe, 1967; Henricks, 2017; Seiler, 2020).

When I was invited to share my journey of journaling, I initially accepted without much hesitation. However, when I sat down to gather my thoughts, I found it to be far more emotionally challenging than I had anticipated. Seeking guidance, I turned to online resources and came across various authors offering insights on journaling, predominantly from self-help and business perspectives. Dishearteningly, I found scarce literature reflecting the experience of losing a spouse.

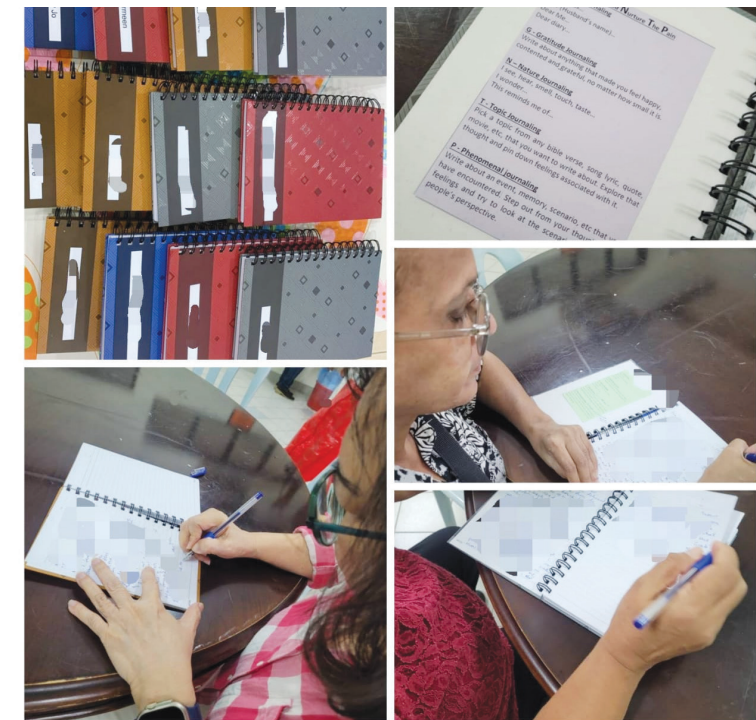
Realising the inadequacy of these resources for my fellow widows, I felt a divine prompting to revisit my own extensive journal, which I've kept since the age of 13. It became clear to me that I had a wealth of personal insights and coping methods to offer, tailored specifically to our shared journey of loss and healing.

I must admit, Jesus gave me quite a challenge. As I delved into my journal spanning the 10 months since my husband, Paul Pretheban, passed away, I realised the profound role journaling played

in navigating the depths of my grief. It became a means to articulate the most agonising moments of my life, capturing thoughts and feelings too complex to share with anyone else. In this journey of loss, there are times when even I struggle to comprehend myself amidst the overwhelming grief.

The loss of a beloved forever alters us; a piece of ourselves seems to depart with our loved one. Throughout my own grieving process, journaling became my lifeline. These methods I share are deeply personal, born from my own experiences, and thus, you won't find them in any scholarly citations or references. They are raw and authentic excerpts from my own journals, offering a glimpse into my journey of healing.

After my sharing with the group, the members were given about 45 minutes to select any one journaling method that they would be most comfortable with, and write their stories in the notebooks prepared for them. Several members shared their raw grief and their journey of how they're coping and that was



truly inspiring. Others shared how this journaling session brought out the best in them by looking at their grief journey for the first time in writing. Our painful stories in the support group could serve as a sur-

vival kit to the many others who are also journeying in grief. As it states in Hebrews 2:18, "Because He Himself was tested through what He suffered, He is able to help those who are tested".

LET GOD NURTURE THE PAIN

ACRONYMS	JOURNALING METHOD	DESCRIPTION
L Let	Letter	Write your thoughts and feelings through a letter. Address the letter to anyone you want to write to, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dear Jesus...• Dear (husband's name) ...• Dear Diary...• Dear Me...
<p>Dear Jesus,</p> <p>March 12, 2023, exactly one week ago, at 6.20pm, Paul returned to you in heaven. The last 30 minutes before his heart stopped, it was a battle between You and me. The intensity of my prayers to You to save Paul was just me crying out and begging You with everything that I had in me to save Paul. But You were definitely stronger and You pulled much harder; and Paul returned to You. I shook the doctor's hands and I hugged her when she told me, "We tried our best but he is no more." I said, "Thank You for trying your best and respecting my request to go all out and save him." As I then walked to Paul's bedside in the hospital, I told him, "Sayang, don't worry about me. I am an independent person. I will take care of our children. I may not know how to cope, but I will learn how to cope. As for you, Jesus is waiting with arms wide open, so run into His arms. You are at the best place to be. You can finally be with your parents' again; you can lie down on your mother's lap. All your suffering and pain has come to an end."</p>		
G God	Gratitude	Write about anything that made you feel happy, contented and grateful, no matter how small it is.
<p>Two days ago I felt your presence around me. I talked to you and I know you could hear me. It has been very lonely these past 12 days. I feel your absence as I have no one to talk to and share all that is going on.</p> <p>Our daughters have been great; they always talk about you. We said the Divine Mercy prayer and the Rosary today, the two prayers we always said every day as a family. Although I feel so dry and empty inside, I say these prayers for the sustenance of life for us all in heaven and on earth.</p>		
N Nurture	Nature	Sit amongst nature; in a park, garden, the beach, house porch, etc. Using your senses, mention what you see, hear, touch, smell and taste. I see/hear/touch/taste/smell.... I wonder... This reminds me of...
<p>I see the clear blue sky and I hear the silent chirping of the birds.</p> <p>I wonder what it is like to be in heaven. I have the most precious person, my husband, up there in heaven.</p> <p>This reminds me of all the times when Paul travelled abroad for work, he would call me several times throughout the day upon reaching to inform me of his whereabouts, describe the hotel, the environment and his work schedules. But it has been 111 days since he told me anything. Only You know how is he, Jesus, as You are with him now. I never imagined that at the age of 38, I would be a widow. Every day I speak to Paul in my heart, he's so close to me. Every day I cry as I miss him. I can't see him, I can't hold him, I can't hug him. I still smell the scent that lingers on his shirts hanging in his cupboard.</p>		

ACRONYMS	JOURNALING METHOD	DESCRIPTION
T The	Topic / Theme	Pick a topic from a Bible verse, song lyric, movie, quotation that you feel you want to write about. Usually, it would derive from what you are feeling and/or thinking. Explore that thought and emotion and write about it.
<p>The topic I chose was "Void".</p> <p>This weekend I feel very sad. I cried my heart out sitting in the hall, looking at all of Paul's photos on the wall. What's the point of freezing moments and seeing them when our loved ones are no longer with us? Not one of these photos would mean anything to us when we die, only those who are living would cherish it, as that's what they have got to hold on to: mere photos.</p> <p>So, I lost it today. I am tired of living, tired of having to make decisions and care for my children and parents. I am not doing a good job anyway. I am always in my own world, almost always angry, I shout at my kids, I am irritated with my parents, I hate my life. What good can ever come from keeping me living this life? You might as well take me too, at least I can be with Paul. I don't want this painful life.</p> <p>I miss Paul so much. I don't know if I should wish for him to come back to me or for him to be in heaven where there is no more pain and suffering. How can I not know what I want? To some, without a doubt, they would want their loved ones to return to them. But for me, I really don't know. I am afraid to wish and hope for anything. How screwed up is that? I am always feeling exhausted, the more I can be alone in silence, the better. I just keep thinking and crying until it gets exhausting, then I will cry some more and fall asleep.</p> <p>What happened to us, Paul? How could all these happen and now I don't have you physically with me anymore? How am I going to make it on my own in this world? How am I going to single-handedly raise our seven and two-year-old daughters? What kind of life is this? I might as well be gone. I am just so tired. Nothing in this life is permanent; no people, no things, absolutely nothing. My life is a huge void. Nothing can fill it up again.</p>		

P Pain	Phenomenal	Write about a particular event, scenario or memory that you have encountered. Now step out from your thoughts and feelings and write about the same scenario from another person's perspective.
<p>Paul is in the ICU. The doctors and nurses are doing their best in taking care of him. Some say the life of a medical person is a calling, some say it is a mere job. But I see it as a choice one consciously takes every day to assist the sick and helpless. There is no obligation there, just a matter of choice.</p>		



REMINISCING CHURCH

Richard Chia

Doing God's work or working for God?

I have heard several times of people saying they are “glad to suffer for Christ” while serving in their church ministry or church group. This is when they face difficulties, challenges or criticisms — something quite common in the church circle.

My response to these people is “God doesn’t need us to suffer for Him. He wants us to serve with joy and love”. It is normal that anyone who has served in any area of church ministries or church groups, will experience at some point “desert moments” or “dry days” when they feel tired, exhausted and want to give up. Especially when they feel that their “sacrifice” is unappreciated, or taken for granted. I would be lying if I say I never had those moments. In fact, I do and still have that feeling occasionally, even after being active in church for so long.

At times like these, I reflect on a spiritual talk given by then Fr Paul Tan SJ, (now Emeritus Bishop Paul Tan). His words still ring clearly in my head — “do we see ourselves doing God’s work, or are we working for God?” Church work usually starts with enthusiasm and passion, perhaps after we encounter the touch of God. We feel exhilarated and excited serving in church. Many will join ministries or groups where they can contribute best based on their skills and ability. They may perhaps even hold a position. It is a great privilege to serve and be able to do God’s work.

As years go by, fatigue creeps in. The excitement and joy of serving in church soon becomes a chore. The numerous

tasks, challenges and commitments begin to take its toll on our personal life. At times it will also affect our family life. We find ourselves mostly alone, especially when we have day jobs or family commitments or bills to pay. What started off as great, slowly becomes stressed and painful.

This is the reason why most churches recommend that all church ministries and church groups regularly organise spiritual retreats, weekends away or reflection sessions to “re-charge” and “re-energise” its members. These spiritual moments are necessary for us to reflect, contemplate and review our spiritual life and most importantly, spend time with God. Sadly, few are able to make time from their busy schedule.

One of the much-quoted phrases from Malaysia’s first cardinal, the late Cardinal Soter Fernandez, are “Be, Beget, Be gone”. By this he reminds everyone of our true mission on earth. Not to overstay our service in the church, not to hold on to positions or remain in the same ministry or group, but to do our part in serving, mentoring and developing others to succeed us.

When we look to the Bible, we see successor planning throughout the Old and New Testaments. Abraham passed on his leadership to his son Isaac, who then passed it on to Jacob his son. Moses was called to appoint Joshua as his successor. Prophet Elijah appointed Prophet Elisha as his successor. In the New Testament, we see Jesus called the twelve apostles and appointed Peter as their leader. Apostle

Paul trained Timothy. The list goes on.

Returning to my opening remarks, how did people who have been serving faithfully find themselves in a down state? Perhaps it is because we are benchmarking ourselves against the secular world standards of efficiency and quality. Today, we expect all products and services to be top quality and flawless. Meaning, the end outcome of any tasks, activities and services must be perfect, or near perfect. If not, there will be many dislikes, thumbs down or comments circulating on social media or anywhere anyone cares to post.

When the church organises any event or initiative, it relies on volunteers to step forward. Those who do will certainly see themselves doing God’s work, serving God. This will mean giving their time and energy to attend meetings, performing the tasks required and incurring expenses. If it was a one-off, short term task, it could be treated as a project assignment with a clear start and end date. This may be bearable. But, if it was a long-term task with a position attached, expectations of that person are high.

This is when comments and criticisms coming from the general community may be hurtful and damaging. Being human, the volunteer church worker will feel disillusioned. Without spiritual nourishment, what started as doing God’s work soon becomes doing work for God.

Doing God’s work requires us to be prayerful and submissive to God’s calling. It is not about doing what we like or doing our best within our skills or knowledge,

but trust in God always. If we apply today’s human resource standards to the first apostles called by Jesus, none would have made the cut. Jesus chose to call fishermen and a tax collector, a far cry from any qualifications expected to serve in any organisation. But they had one qualification that Jesus wanted. They left everything and followed Him. The rest, as we say, is history.

The question we need to reflect on is, ‘How can we respond to God’s call to serve Him?’ He may not be calling you to hold a position, join a ministry or group, or take up a church project. Instead, God may be calling you in the quiet of your heart, to serve Him in your family, in your neighbourhood community or workplace. For those He chooses to call to serve in the Church, whenever you feel stressed and unhappy, do pause a moment in silent contemplation. Seek comfort and reflect on the words of Jesus “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest”.

Reflecting on the late Cardinal Soter’s quotes, he wisely told us to BE who God calls us to become, then do our duty to BEGET (bring forth) another to succeed us. Finally, BEGONE, either move into another ministry or group, or step away from active ministry and be an advisor.

● **Richard Chia** shares his experiences on the journey of the Church in Malaysia in the past forty years. Its challenges and achievements as it moves towards synodality.



FROM THE OTHER SIDE

Regina William

Philippians 2:3-4 - “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”

From the word go as we entered into the season of Lent on Ash Wednesday, I’ve been asked multiple times what I’ve given up this time around. Most people give up eating meat, or even go vegetarian during this time. Some give up smoking, or consuming alcohol, and the list goes on.

Although we are already into the third week of Lent, perhaps this Lent, instead of giving up something, maybe we can all do something extra to make the season much more meaningful and impactful.

For instance, we can commit to performing a specific act of kindness every day during Lent. This could be helping or volunteering at a local charity, or simply offering a listening ear to someone in need.

Besides attending Mass on Sundays, why not consider going to weekday Masses as well? This additional time spent in worship and communion can help us to focus more deeply on the Lenten season.

This can also be a time where we set aside time for prayer and meditation by dedicating extra time each day to prayer, meditation, or reflection. We can use this

time to deepen our spiritual connection and focus on gratitude and mindfulness.

It can also be a time for learning. Let’s try to make a commitment to learn something new during Lent. This could be studying Scripture, reading spiritual books, or exploring topics related to personal growth and development.

More often than not, we shy away from getting involved in service-oriented projects within our communities. It does not have to be a church activity and I’m sure there are other activities that require manpower, like organising a food drive, participating in a cleanup effort, or volunteering at a shelter or home.

It is also important for us to use this time to seek forgiveness and take the first step towards reconciliation. Use Lent as a time to mend relationships and practice forgiveness, by reaching out to someone you’ve had a falling out with, or make amends for past wrongs.

Instead of giving up a particular food or habit, why not consider fasting with a specific intention in mind. For example, you could fast from excess spending and donate the money saved to a charity, or fast from negative self-talk and focus on cultivating self-love and acceptance.

Rather than giving up something for yourself, consider sacrificing something for the benefit of others. For example, you could give up a luxury item and donate the money saved to a worthy cause.

By embracing selflessness during Lent,



(File photo SYD-5)

we can follow the example of Jesus Christ, who taught us to love and serve one another with humility and compassion.

Overall, Lent is a time of spiritual renewal and preparation for the celebration of Easter, the most important feast in the Catholic liturgical calendar. It is a time for us to focus on prayer, fasting, and alms giving as we journey with Christ towards the joy of His resurrection.

We should always remember that the goal of Lent is to grow closer to God and to cultivate a spirit of self-discipline. The observance of Lent is a time for reflection,

self-examination, and repentance, as we seek to renew our relationship with God and grow in our faith.

Whatever you choose to do during this time, let it be guided by your faith and a desire to deepen your relationship with God and others.

● **Regina William** is an ex-journalist turned head of communications, now full-time grandmother to three children aged between 4.5 and one, crisscrossing the globe to play the role. She can be reached at regina.william1223@gmail.com

Try something different this Lent



Fr Ron Rolheiser

After the bloom has left the rose

What is our deepest centre? Normally we take that to mean the deepest part of our heart, the deepest part of our soul, our affective centre, our moral centre, that place inside of us which Thomas Merton called *le pointe vierge*. And that is a good way of imagining it. But there's another.

The classical mystic John of the Cross saw things differently. For him, the deepest centre of anything is the furthest point attainable by that object's being and power and force of operation and movement. What does he mean by that? In essence, this is what he is saying: The deepest centre of anything, be it a flower or a human being, is the furthest point to which it can grow before it dies.

Take a flower for example: It begins as a seed, then grows into a tiny bud that sprouts into a young plant. That plant eventually bursts forth in a beautiful bloom. That bloom lasts for a while and then begins to dry out and wither. Eventually, what was once the substance of a beautiful bloom turns into seeds, and then in its very act of dying, the flower gives off those seeds to leave new life behind.

Thus, for John of the Cross, the deepest centre for a flower is not its moment of spectacular beauty or its bloom, but its

last moment when its bloom has turned to seed and it is able to give off that seed in its very act of dying.

There's a lesson in that which goes against how we commonly assess things. When are we the most generative potentially? When do we have the greatest capacity to use our lives to give off the seeds for new life? What is our deepest centre of growth?

Normally, of course, we think of the deepest centre as the bloom, namely, that period or moment in our lives when a combination of good health, physical attractiveness, talent, achievement, and influence make us someone who is admired and, perhaps, envied. This is the time in our lives when we look our best and, as they say, are at the peak of our game. This is our bloom! The best we will ever look!

John of the Cross wouldn't denigrate that moment in our lives. Indeed, he would challenge us to be in that moment, to enjoy it, be grateful to God for it, and to try to use the advantages and privileges that come with that to help others. But, he wouldn't say this is the peak moment of our generativity, that this is the moment or period of our lives when we are giving off the most seeds for new life. No, like a flower that gives off its seeds in its very

act of dying, we too are potentially most generative after the bloom has given way to the grey of age and our achievements have given way to a different kind of fruitfulness.

Imagine a young woman who is beautiful and talented and becomes a famous movie actor. At the height of her career, she is in full bloom and is given the gaze of admiration. Indeed, she is adulated. Moreover, in her life outside of the movies she may be a generous person, a wonderful wife, a dedicated mother, and a trusted friend. However, that bloom is not her furthest point of growth, her deepest centre, that time in her life when she is giving off the most vis-a-vis generating new life. Instead, when she is an aged grandmother, struggling with health issues, her physical looks diminished, facing the prospect of assisted living and imminent death that, potentially, like the flower whose bloom has dried and turned to seed, she can give her life away in a manner that helps create new life in a way she couldn't do when she was young, attractive, admired, envied, and in full bloom.

A similar case might be made for a star male athlete. At the height of his career, winning a championship, becoming a household name, his envied youthful ath-

letic image seen everywhere in ads and on billboards, he is in full bloom; but at that time, he is not optimally generative in terms of his life giving off seeds to bring about new life. That can happen later, in his old age, when his achievements no longer define him, and he, like everyone else, with his hair greying, is facing physical diminishment, marginalisation, and imminent death. It's then, after the bloom has left the rose, that in his dying, he can give off seeds to create new life. We tend to identify a spectacular bloom with powerful generativity. Fair enough, that bloom has its own importance, legitimate purpose, and value. Indeed, one of our challenges is to give that bloom the gaze of admiration without envy. Not easy to do, and something we often don't do well. The bigger challenge however is to learn what we ourselves are called to do after the bloom has left the rose.

● **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



As I was contemplating

Fr Gerard Steve Theraviam

We are well into Lent now and I guess many are fasting in some way or another, whether it is abstaining from certain foods, or partial or whole day fasts and perhaps it's also the time when some of us might feel like giving up as well. Not so fast! Perhaps what might help is to check on our motivations as to why we fast or even abstain. If we are doing it because it has always been done in the family, we need to pause, ponder and see if we can claim it as something that I want to do for God and myself, and not because of family or other obligations.

Maybe we might need to look beyond food and drink and also see if there are any other attachments that we need to put aside, at least for a while – for instance, our phones and social media.

Fasting is certainly evident in both the Old and New Testaments. Moses fasted for forty days and forty nights after receiving the Ten Commandments from God on Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:28). Likewise, Elijah fasted for forty days and nights while journeying to Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19:8). Jesus fasted for forty days and nights overcoming temptation in the desert “*Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God*” (Matthew 4:2-4). He thus pointed to a far greater need in our lives. In the Acts of the Apostles, the early Christians fasted and prayed before appointing leaders and sending out missionaries (Acts 13:2-3, 14:23). Paul fasted as he prayed and tried to understand what he had experienced in his conversion on the road to Damascus and what Christ was calling him to do (Acts 9:8-9). Paul too spoke of fasting (2 Corinthians



11:27) as something he endured in his ministry.

Do not worry about what to eat... this is the injunction in Mt 6:25. In fasting, we shift our focus from ourselves and our bodily needs towards God. Initially perhaps we might be still focussing on ourselves as we moan and groan about how hard it all is, but when we settle down, it can be a powerful shift towards recognising that all we need comes from God and we turn our gaze towards God.

Our bodily thirsts and hunger remind us that all things come from God. Food is not our god. God is our God! Instead of thinking ourselves to be self-sufficient, we are led to look towards the Provider of all that we need. In this, we are learning humility, and not seeing ourselves as being the centre of everything but we nurture our spiritual well-being by turning towards God, in our pain and suffering, we turn towards and call out to God and we encounter the Crucified One, who is no stranger to vicarious suffering —

that is, suffering for and on behalf of others.

Perhaps one of the important lasting lessons will be to move from gluttony towards self-control and self-discipline in all we consume. We might learn also to have empathy towards those who struggle to have enough food and drink to survive, instead of carrying on in the path of unbridled consumption. We put ourselves in the shoes of those who suffer, as Jesus did. Hopefully, this does not remain a mere intellectual exercise but compels us to actually befriend the poor.

Fasting also helps us connect with another important Lenten practice – almsgiving. Fasting and abstinence, as well as a simpler lifestyle, should also help us channel the money we save towards those in need. Thus, we see a connection between fasting, almsgiving as well as prayer, since prayer enables us to keep the dialogue with God over all that we are going through and discover what God might be wanting to lead

us towards. Fasting and prayer can help us regain the intimacy that we might have felt missing in our lives and help us experience something of our ‘first love’ with God.

Matthew 6:16, Jesus said, “*When you fast, do not look sombre as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting.*”

The Ninevites fasted to show their repentance and sorrow for sin (Jonah 3:7-8). When King David's baby son was close to death, he fasted to show his sorrow and to dedicate himself to prayer (2 Samuel 12:16).

The pain and self-denial of fasting can also help remind us of the pain and self-denial that Jesus endured in order to accomplish our salvation.

● **Fr Gerard Theraviam** is the Parish Priest of the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist in Kuala Lumpur, as well as the Spiritual Director to the World Community for Christian Meditation, Malaysia.

Little Catholics' Corner



Here are the Ten Commandments that God gave to Moses for His people. The only problem is that they are in the wrong order! Can you put the right numbers in the spaces?

Dear children,

In the old times, people would bring animals to offer as sacrifices to God. By the time Our Lord was born, some people were selling animals right in the Temple.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus drives the animals and money changers out of the sacred space.

At one time, the men who sold the animals for sacrifices were probably really helping the people who came to the Temple from far away.

But now they were just trying to make money and they were taking up space that was supposed to be used for people to worship God.

We also have sacred spaces like the Temple. Every Catholic church is a special place made for worshipping God in the Mass.

We should always behave respectfully in church, and remember that Jesus is really there in the tabernacle.

We can show our respect by walking quietly, not talking inside the Church unless it is necessary, and by paying attention when Mass is going on.

Maybe you can be a good example to your friends of how to act in church!

Till we meet again, be good, okay?

Love
Aunty Eliz

Answer: Left: 4,9,3,5,10 Right: 7,6,1,8,2



Jesus says that if we drink His living water, we

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
10 11 12 13 14 15



Answer: will never thirst

Let's Colour

Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days. (John 2:19)



Fill-in-the-Blanks

Fill in the blanks with the words in the box. Use the marked letters to fill in the blanks at the end.

And hope does not disappoint,
1. _____ the love of God has
been poured into our 2. _____
through the Holy 3. _____ who
has been 4. _____ to us. For
Christ, while we were 5. _____
helpless, died at the appointed
6. _____ for the ungodly. Indeed,
only with 7. _____
does one die for a just person, though
perhaps for a good person one
8. _____ even find
9. _____ to die. But
10. _____ proves his love for us in that...
...WHILE WE WERE STILL SINNERS

_____ FOR US.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

COURAGE	DIFFICULTY	HEARTS
GOD	TIME	GIVEN
SPIRIT	MIGHT	STILL
		BECAUSE

YOUTH

March 3, 2024

YOU ARE INCREDIBLY LOVED

ANAHEIM, California: As 6,500 young people made their way into the Anaheim Convention Centre to kick off the Youth Day portion of the 68th Los Angeles Religious Education Congress, several attendees made up a sea of coloured T-shirts to celebrate their attendance at the event. Some red, some yellow. Others wore blue or purple.

But while their shirts differed, what they all had in common was a unity, a shared purpose of faith where they were free to feel welcomed, supported, and unified.

That feeling of an open-armed reception — to be undeterred in a world that may shame, mock, or criticise their Catholic faith — was something that many guest speakers and leaders tried to emphasise with those in attendance.

For Michael Marchand, who spoke at a workshop titled *Awkward: When following God gets uncomfortable*, he underscored the importance of young people feeling good about themselves and their faith in the face of a culture of likes, followers and validation.

“The No. 1 thing that we hear from young people — people your age, your generation — is that they struggle with feeling seen, loved and wanted,” Marchand said. “If you hear nothing else from what we shared today, hear me say: You are incredibly loved.”

Gabriel Canonoy, 20, was a chaperone for Confirmation students from St Christopher Church in Moreno Valley — part of the Diocese of San Bernardino — and shared in the struggles young people are going through.

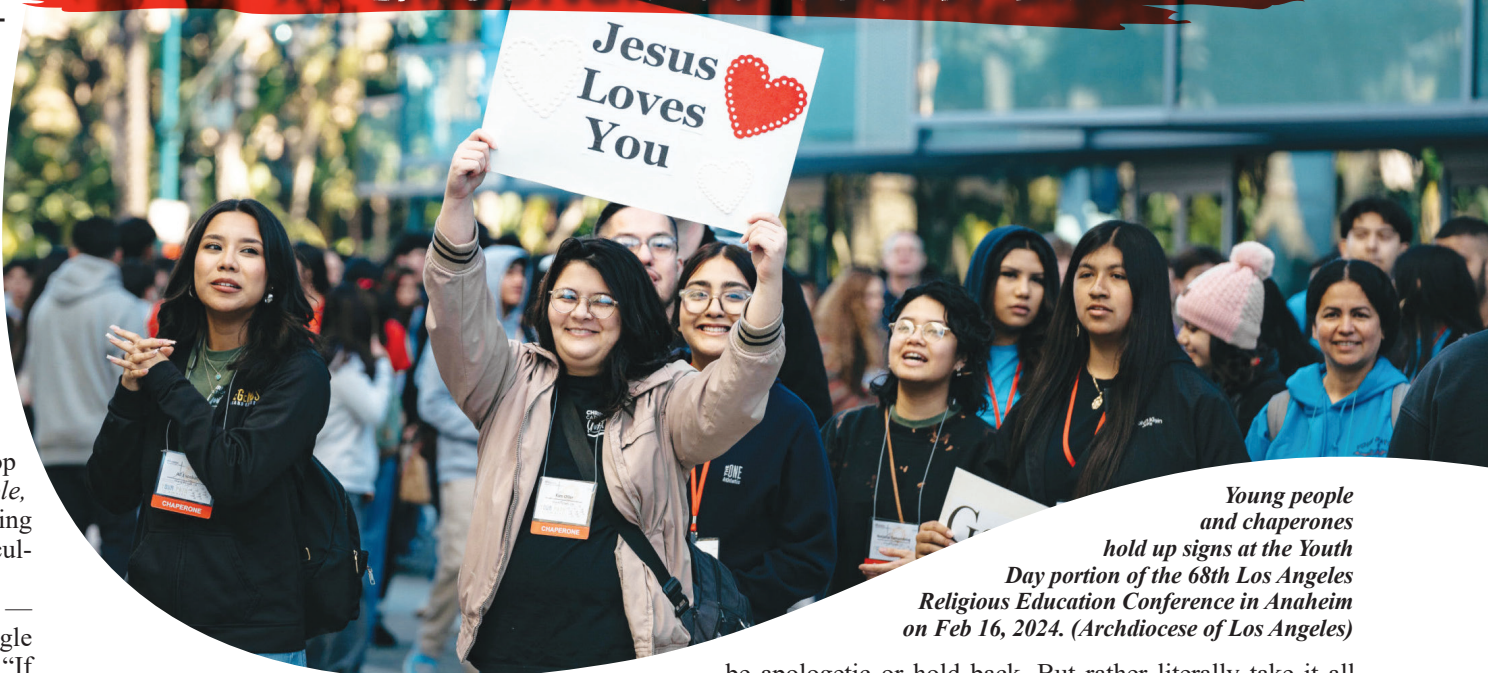
“The struggle that teenagers are facing right now is accepting their faith,” he said. “Because some are either saying it’s not cool to be this, or there’s media or pop culture where anti-religion is kind of prevalent.

“(Youth Day) is showing there are many people that are actually willing to, but sometimes they need an incentive or they need to be in a community that allows them to express themselves fully.”

Chris Padgett spoke to young people about allowing God to help them in troubled times.

“What’s the solution? You have to let Jesus into these wounds,” he said. “The scary thing about this is we’re ashamed. Jesus is not afraid of your mess. There’s nothing you can do that will make Him stop loving you.”

Those words of encouragement seemed to resonate with many of the youth in attendance.

MESSAGE TO 6,500 YOUNG PEOPLE
AT LA CONGRESS YOUTH DAY

Young people and chaperones hold up signs at the Youth Day portion of the 68th Los Angeles Religious Education Conference in Anaheim on Feb 16, 2024. (Archdiocese of Los Angeles)

Hannah Artehea, 16, was one of those who attended Marchand’s workshop.

“God created you to be your own person and to not care about what anyone else thinks,” she told *Angelus*, the on-line news outlet of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. “That caught my attention a lot.”

Brian Barragan, 16, said he’s often ridiculed by his friends for praying before meals, but was happy to be surrounded by like-minded young people like himself.

“Sometimes, as a high schooler, you feel like as a follower of Christ in this Catholic community, you can feel alone,” he said. “Most kids don’t care about God or religion. But coming here, you see thousands of kids that believe in the same stuff that you believe in and it inspires you to continue your faith.”

Prior to helping celebrate the Youth Day’s ending Mass, Los Angeles Auxiliary Bishop Matthew G. Elshoff was seen roaming the hall, speaking with young people, handing out blessings and generally soaking up the scene.

“I’ve been just walking around, just watching them interact, seeing their enthusiasm, looking at the smiles on their faces,” Bishop Elshoff said. “There are so many negative things, whether it’s about youth or just about the world. To be in a place that’s filled with light, it just warms my heart.”

Bishop Elshoff was especially encouraged by the youth turnout.

“It deepens their enthusiasm and their desire to follow Jesus,” he said. “And they can do it in a way that they don’t have to

be apologetic or hold back. But rather literally take it all in and give themselves to what they believe and what they love.”

Themed *Your Path Awaits*, this year’s Youth Day was filled with unique ways to engage the high-school-aged attendees, whether it was illusion from magician and keynote speaker Giancarlo Bernini, video games with author Bobby Angel, or caring for the environment with guest speaker Kayla Jacobs, program manager of youth mobilisation for the Catholic Climate Covenant.

At Angel’s “Gaming, God, & the Heroic Life” session, he encouraged gamers to embrace their quest for Jesus as much as their favourite video game.

“You have in your heart a desire that nothing on this finite planet will satisfy,” Angel said. “That’s not an accident. Video game developers know this more than anything. All the areas of your life, God can redeem. Your athletics, your hobbies, your interests, even video games.”

Guest speaker Mike Patin, who has worked with teens and ministry leaders for over 35 years, used all of his high energy to wake students up from a post-lunch lull with interactive activities that got the youth thinking about their faith.

By the time Los Angeles Archbishop José H. Gomez, Bishop Alberto Rojas of San Bernardino and LA’s auxiliary bishops presided over the day’s closing Mass — in the convention arena decorated with colours, angels and featuring youth singers and musicians — the mood was downright festive.

Towards the end of Holy Communion being distributed, an impromptu light display broke out, with the crowd holding up their cellphone’s lights in response to the emotional song playing. Archbishop Gomez and several of the other concelebrating bishops and priests joined in.

“We have a lot of choices nowadays for how we can live,” Archbishop Gomez said. “Open up social media and you’re going to find a lot of people telling you what makes them happy and trying to influence you to follow their way of thinking and living.

“God is telling you the truth. About who He is. About who you are. And about what will truly make you happy in life.”

— By Mike Cisneros, OSV

MAD OUTREACH TO THE DIFFERENTLY-ABLED

By Malani Sivarajan

KUALA LUMPUR: Participants of CEKL105 from CHOICE English KL, a programme for single adults, came together to organise a MAD (Making a Difference) project recently. With the approval of CHOICE KL's spiritual director, Fr Simon Lau, their aim was to raise awareness about the differently-abled community, including individuals with autism, Down syndrome, slow learners, cerebral palsy, and intellectual disabilities, at Pusat Penjagaan Kanak Kanak Cacat Taman Megah. This facility is home to 138 occupants, ranging from nine months to 56 years old, representing diverse races and regions across Peninsular Malaysia.

The team dedicated three months to ensure the success of this project. Previous CHOICE participants joined in the effort to spread joy, laughter, and smiles among the centre's occupants through various activities. These activities included dancing to music to encourage movement, singing to boost confidence, playing games to enhance fine and gross motor

skills, enjoying a delicious lunch while assisting with feeding, and distributing goody bags filled with daily essentials.

These collective endeavours fostered an unforgettable and welcoming atmosphere, cultivating empathy, compassion, and unity. Witnessing the happiness on the faces of the centre's occupants underscored the significance of building an inclusive society that offers support and services to the differently-abled community.

After engaging in these activities, it was time for the occupants to rest. CHOICE participants enjoyed some bowling before attending Mass at the Church of Jesus Caritas. The day concluded with a fellowship gathering for CHOICE participants at the church canteen. This fellowship included a delightful dinner and the sharing of experiences from visiting Pusat Penjagaan Kanak Kanak Cacat.



Choicee 105 with Fr Simon Lau.

Ensuring children are back to school with a smile



Fr. Vincent Thomas and PIHDM members with Dr Satiya and his family members.

RAWANG: On February 17, the Church of St Jude once again welcomed Dr Satiya Prakash, founder of SP Care, who provided schoolbags for the school-going children of the church's adoptees. This annual event, organised by the SP Care team, ensures the provision of schoolbags to these children as well as monetary gifts. This year, Dr Satiya, accompanied by his parents and other family members, distributed schoolbags and ang paws to 52 underprivileged children.

Subsequently, the Parish Integral Human Development Ministry (PIHDM) of the church, through its Back-To-School Programme, escorted the 52 children and their parents to a nearby textile shop to purchase school uniforms, socks, track bottoms, and school shoes. After nearly three hours of shopping, the tired yet elated chil-

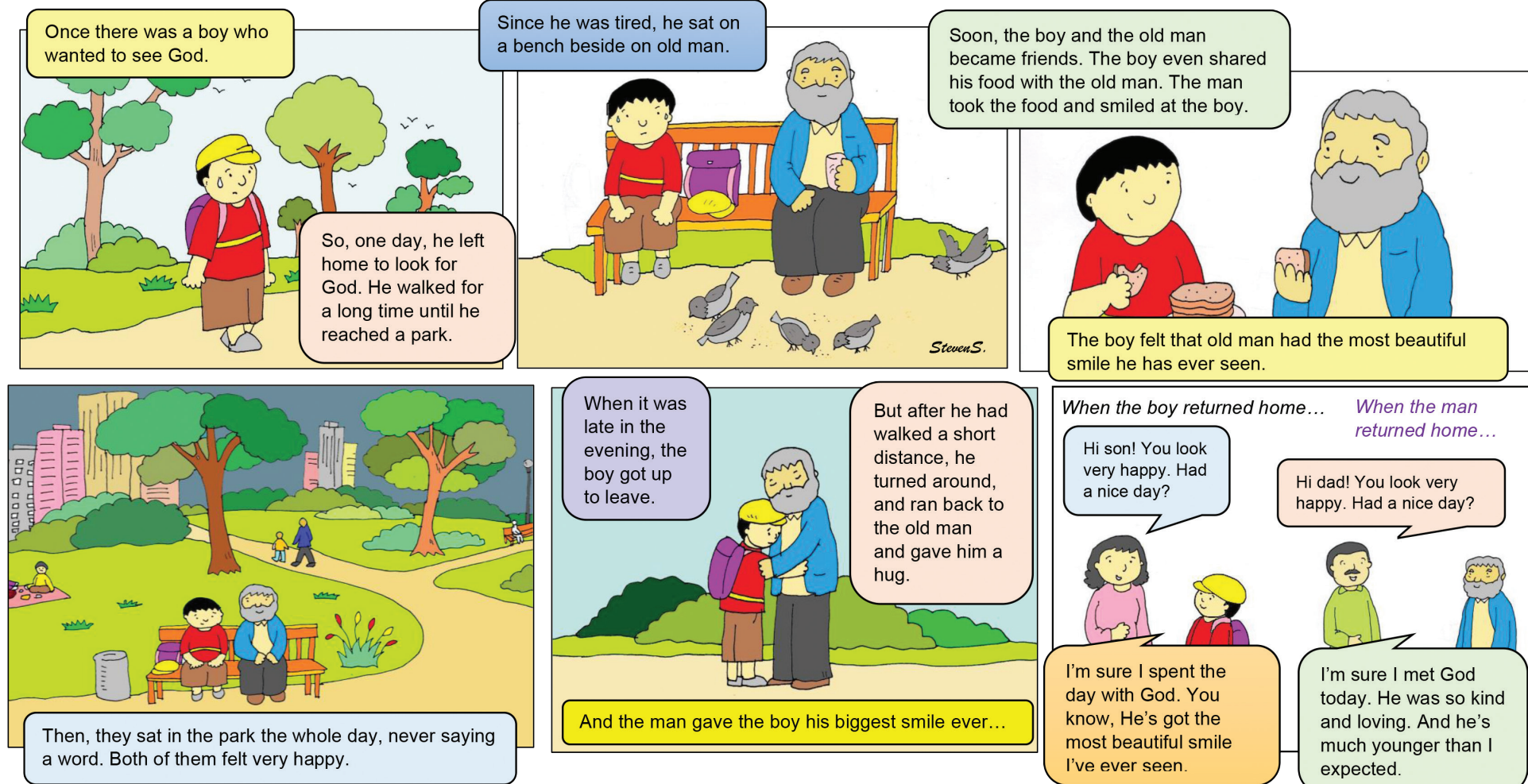
dren emerged with all the necessary items required for their return to school when it reopens. At a cost of RM250 per child, every essential was secured.

The fund raising drive for this programme was spearheaded by parish priest, Fr Vincent Thomas. Generous donations poured in from parishioners, well-wishers, and friends of the church in support of this noble cause.

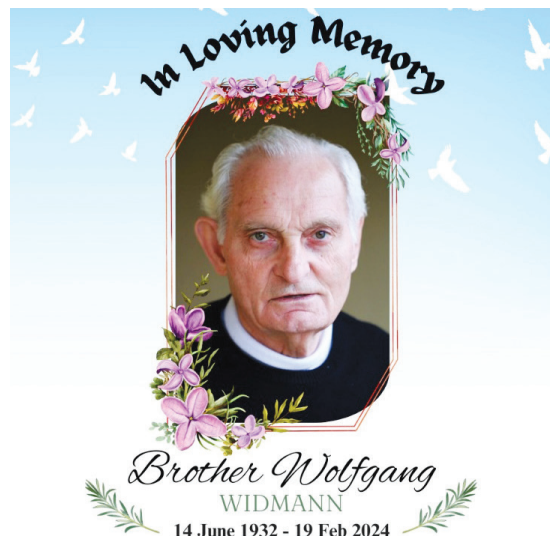
Fr Vincent reminded the children not to take this act of kindness for granted. He encouraged them to utilise this opportunity to study diligently and strive for success. Furthermore, he urged them to pay it forward in the future by assisting other children in need, when they achieve success in their own lives. — *By Mercy Almeida Stellus*

THE SIMPLE LIFE...

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



Bro Wolfgang passes away



Brother Wolfgang Widmann of the Brothers of Mercy peacefully returned to the Lord in Trier, Germany on February 19, 2024, at the age of 91.

In July 1975, the Superior General of the Brothers of Mercy of Our Lady of Perpetual Help dispatched Bro Wolfgang to Malaysia as a delegate to support the management of Hospital Fatimah in Ipoh. He dedicated eight years of his life to serving Hospital Fatimah before returning to Germany in 1983 for a 12-year period.

In 1995, in response to Hospital Fatimah's request, he returned to Malaysia and continued his service until 2015, when he eventually went back to Germany.

The Wolfgang Cancer Centre and Wolfgang Suites at Hospital Fatimah proudly bear his name as a tribute.

Bro Wolfgang is fondly remembered by the staff of Hospital Fatimah for his compassionate and loving nature. He will be deeply missed. May his soul rest in peace.

MEMORIAM

For enquiries, please contact:
Email: memoriam@herald.com.my
Tel: 03-2026 8291

*FIND REST O MY SOUL
IN GOD ALONE
~ Psalm 62:5*

**1st Anniversary
In Loving Memory of**



**Indra Thavy
(Mrs Peter)**

**Called to the Lord:
8 March 2023**

*Your life was a blessing,
your memory a treasure.
You are loved beyond words
and missed beyond measure
by family and friends.*

**60th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of**



P. C. Gomez
Founder - President of National
Union of Bank Employees

Born: 27-07-1918
Died: 03-03-1964

*"Eternal rest grant unto him,
O Lord, and may perpetual
light shine upon him. May his
soul rest in peace. Amen"*

Fondly remembered by:
sons, daughters-in-law,
daughter, son-in-law,
grandchildren and loved ones.

**13th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of**



**Mr Jagarow Rathinam
s/o Anthony Rathinam**

Departed: 06-03-2011

To live is to love with
all our heart. The greatest thing
in all his life was serving you,
Heavenly Father. Please grant
him eternal Rest and Blessings.

Deeply missed
and remembered by
Family & Loved ones.

**10th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of**

**Janet Lim
Swee Kim**

Born on
February 24, 1938
Called home on
March 6, 2014

*"It has been ten years now Mama
And we still miss you so very much
Your unfailing love for us Mama
Remains always in our heart."*

Deeply loved and remembered by
husband Francis Koh Hong Seng,
children, grandchildren and loved ones.

**In Ever Loving Memory of
Our Dear Amma**



**A. Agnes
Rajaratnam**
**08-08-1929 ~
17-03-2009**

*You left me
beautiful memories,
Your love is still my guide,
And though I cannot
see you I feel you
by my side...*

Fondly remembered by
Children / Spouse
Sylvester / Mary
@ Queenie
Isabel/Andrew
Elias/Roseline
Jude/Arasu

Grandchildren
Priscilla, Naomi, Aaron,
Arnold & Trice, In-Laws
& loved ones.

**7th Anniversary
In Precious Memory of Our Beloved**



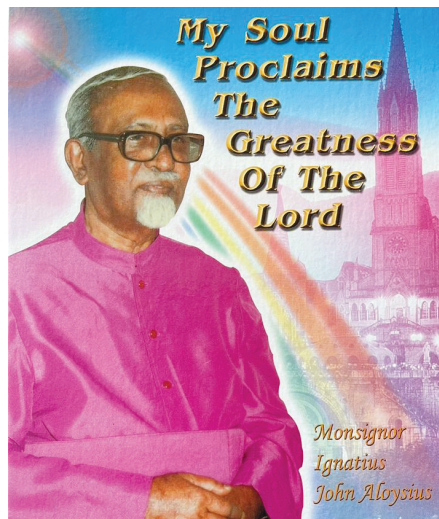
SYLVESTER RAJARATNAM
26/10/1948 ~ 03/03/2017

*Our Darling Athan & Anyah
It has been seven years
And we miss you so much.
You were the most important
Part of our life.*

*And we treasure the memories
Of everything we shared together.*

Deeply loved and forever cherished by:
Wife: Fatimah Mary
@ Queenie Arokiasamy
Children: Priscilla Ann Raj &
Aaron Jeevan Raj,
In-Laws, Grandchildren & Loved Ones.

In remembrance of Msgr IJ Aloysius



PENANG: Cardinal Sebastian Francis presided over the 30th-year memorial Mass commemorating the life of Msgr Ignatius John Aloysius on February 17 at the Church of St Francis Xavier, where he dedicated 25 years of service. Bishop Emeritus Antony Selvanayagam, Fr Anthony Pillai, Fr Martin Arlando, Fr Edmund Woon, and Fr Desmond Jansen, concelebrated the Mass.

We reflect with gratitude on Msgr Aloysius' legacy as the first Vicar General for the Diocese of Penang. Recognised for his six decades of pastoral dedication to the faithful in Malaya and Singapore, he was conferred the title of 'Monsignor' as an Honorary Prelate of Pope Paul VI in 1978, and was appointed as an 'Honorary Mem-

ber of the MEP' in 1982. In 1983, Pope John Paul II honoured him with the title 'Supernumerary Apostolic Protonotary'.

Addressing the spiritual needs of the community, Msgr Aloysius played a pivotal role in establishing the Church of St John Britto, Sg Pinang in 1969, the Chapel of St Mary on Gottlieb Road, and the St Joseph Chapel in Hong Seng Estate.

Cardinal Sebastian also announced that, as a tribute to Msgr Aloysius' memory, the Catholic Pastoral Institute, situated at the compound of the Church of St Francis Xavier, will be renamed 'The Msgr IJ Aloysius Pastoral Centre or Spiritual Centre', with Fr Edmund Woon of City Parish overseeing the finalisation of the details.

A Tribute to TWO Precious Souls

9th Anniversary ✝ **18th Anniversary**



**SAVARIMUTHU s/o
SOOSAIMUTHU**

(ex-KTM, Sentul)

Began Eternal Life:
March 2, 2015



**THOMAS
SAVARIMUTHU**
(GSM, GREAT EASTERN LIFE)

Began Eternal Life:
March 1, 2006

*"The Legacies You Both Lived & Left Continue
In The Lives You Touched & Transformed..."*

Gratefully cherished by:
Wife Roseammal, Daughter Jessie & Family,
and Sons, Benedict & Robert & their Families.

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“Church every day” initiative to bring back Catholics

SEOUL: “I no longer go to church; it has become much more convenient to stay at home and attend Mass with the live broadcast on YouTube,” confesses Samuel Lee, a 29-year-old Catholic in Seoul, South Korea.

Although the East Asian nation is known for its usually very active parish life and missionary dynamism, but like elsewhere, the coronavirus pandemic and its restrictions have profoundly affected the Catholic Church here, which has seen a significant decline in Sunday Mass attendance.

“Like work, everything was done remotely via live videos during the pandemic, and this habit has continued,” Lee points out.

About eight per cent of South Korea’s 52 million people belong to the Catholic Church. But in-person attendance at the Sunday liturgy dropped 35 per cent between 2019 and 2022. Many of those who stopped going to church have not returned. They prefer to follow the celebrations from their couch.

“It must be said that it’s rather well organised, even for the collection, you can donate with your credit card or by bank transfer,” Lee notes.

Even though many dioceses continue to broadcast their liturgies live on the Internet, the South Korean Church leaders are looking for ways to bring their people back

to the pews. At the beginning of 2024, the Korean Catholic Research Centre published a white paper about the effects the pandemic has had on religious life and the measures needed to initiate a spiritual renewal.

“Even beyond Sunday Mass, participation in parish volunteer activities has decreased,” explains Fr Stephanus Lee Cheol-soo, the priest who directs the centre. “More than half of the people we interviewed say they have lost this habit since the pandemic.” He says this is where the heart of the problem lies, and so he is encouraging people to come celebrate together again. Of the seven major post-COVID-19 orientations developed in the more than 300-page white paper, four are particularly focused on the renewal of ecclesial life.

“This is the need for synodality, as Pope Francis mentioned,” says Fr Lee Cheol-soo. “Our lives have been fragmented, our world has changed, and the Church must adapt, as we still need to commune together.”

Among the proposed measures, the white paper calls for dioceses to bring to life a “Church every day” that includes young and old outside of Mass. They include outdoor activities, meal gatherings, and tutoring. Indeed, there is no shortage of ideas.

At his parish in the Seongsang-dong neighbourhood of Seoul, Fr Michael Kim

Jong-wook is putting these recommendations into practice, especially for young adults. He holds a “post-Mass” evening buffet with music once or twice a month at the parish rectory “It’s an evening reserved for the youth, where they can meet, talk, have fun; that’s also the spirit of a parish, it’s the community,” the priest explains. “We know that young people can feel lonely and isolated; I hope this will encourage them to come back more often.”

Many of the young set, like 30-year-old Min Ki-beum, welcome this “in-person” return to Mass. “Like everyone, I followed the Mass from a distance,” she says. “But praying together, sharing this moment with other people, I missed it a lot.”

Yet, the Church in South Korea does not intend to completely break away from the online spiritual life that was developed during the pandemic.

“Without replacing Mass at church, even after the health crisis, the online service can be a supplement for patients or elderly people with reduced mobility,” argues Fr Lee Cheol-soo. He says it is necessary to find the right balance between the two practices for a ‘Church every day’ that can reach as many individuals as possible.

Since the health restrictions were first introduced, internet apps have been devel-



(UCA News photo/Catholic Times of Korea)

oped to keep a link with parishioners at a distance, to give them news and accompany them with prayers and daily readings. “It’s a good idea,” the priest continues. “Korea is a country advanced in these communication technologies; if it can help us maintain the link with the faithful, then why not use it.”

On the eve of Jubilee 2025, and as Seoul prepares to host World Youth Day (WYD) in 2027, Catholics in South Korea are working to rekindle the flame of their community.

“The Church is a life of brotherhood,” insists Fr Lee. “It’s important that everyone can come together under the same roof to share this moment together.” — **By Célilo Fioretti, LCI** ([https:// international.la-croix.com/](https://international.la-croix.com/))

Chrism Mass celebrations in Malaysia



The Chrism Mass is usually held during Holy Week in every Catholic (arch) diocese. However, due to pastoral reasons, the celebration can be held earlier. During this Mass, the priests, deacons and representatives of the entire arch/diocesan community gather around the Arch/bishop, who blesses the Holy Oils for use in the

coming year.

These are:

- Oil of the Sick
- Oil of Catechumens
- Sacred Chrism

Whenever the Holy Oils are used in a diocese, the ministry of the bishop who consecrated them is symbolically present.

Here is the schedule for Malaysia:

March 13 – Diocese of Miri, Cathedral of St Joseph at 7.30pm

March 14 – Diocese of Sandakan, St Mary Cathedral, at 7.30pm

March 18 – Diocese of Penang, Church of the Immaculate Conception at 8.00pm

March 19 – Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, Church of Christ the Light at 7.00pm

March 20 – Diocese of Sibul, Cathedral of the Sacred Heart at 7.30pm

March 21 – Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu, Cathedral of the Sacred Heart at 7.30pm

March 26 – Diocese of Keningau, Dataran Keuskupan at 6.30pm

March 26 – Diocese of Malacca Johore, Church of St Philip, Segamat at 8.00pm

March 27 – Archdiocese of Kuching, Cathedral of St Joseph at 7.30pm



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