

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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But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Rom. 10:8-9



Strengthening social mission and spiritual collaboration

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Honouring the legacy of Pagar Tras

■ P7



In Remembrance of Fr Benedict Yee
Don't thank me, thank God

■ P12

Compare your life to a migrant

VATICAN: Pope Francis' message for Lent 2025 is a call to spiritual reflection and empathy, particularly towards those who are suffering, especially migrants. The Pope encourages Christians to examine their lives by comparing them to the hardships faced by migrants. This exercise goes beyond recognising physical struggles and invites believers to cultivate compassion and understanding, which deepens their spiritual lives.

The central theme of *Let us journey together in hope* underscores that Lent is not a solitary experience, but a communal journey where we walk with others in both suffering and hope. This reflects Pope Francis' vision of the Church as a place of solidarity, where believers move together toward healing, compassion, and ultimately, toward the house of the Father.

The Pope's message, dated February 6 and released by the Vatican on Feb 25, was writ-

ten before his hospitalisation for pneumonia. Despite his health challenges, his Lenten reflections remain central to his pastoral work. In his message, he urges Christians to reflect on the nature of their spiritual journey, asking whether they are truly on a pilgrimage or have become immobilised by fear, hopelessness, or the comforts of routine. He compares this spiritual journey to the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, who were freed from slavery and embarked on a difficult journey toward the Promised Land. Similarly, Pope Francis challenges Christians to consider whether they are actively pursuing a deeper relationship with God or if they have become stagnant in their faith.

The Pope highlights the importance of walking together in unity during Lent. He challenges Catholics to journey "side by side" without envy, hypocrisy, or exclusion. This Lenten journey, he emphasises, is not one of individual pursuit but one that requires walking in solidarity with others. He urges Christians to walk in the same direction, tending toward the same goal, and to be attentive to one another in love and patience. This vision of journeying together is inclusive, ensuring no one is left behind or marginalised. All are invited to share in the

hope that the season of Lent leads to — the victory of Easter.

A key theme in Pope Francis' Lenten message is the call to embrace hope, especially through Christ's resurrection. Reflecting on St Paul's words, the Pope emphasises that the resurrection offers eternal life and victory over death. In the face of suffering, hope serves as a steady anchor for believers. Pope Francis teaches that hope is an active force that motivates Christians to live justly, care for creation, and promote fraternity. He encourages believers to embody this hope by seeking forgiveness, committing to justice, and caring for their communities, thus living out a hope that does not disappoint.

Another key theme in the Pope's message is living in a synodal manner — journeying with others and resisting the temptation of self-absorption. He challenges Christians to examine whether they are truly walking with others or focused only on their own needs. The Pope writes, "This Lent, God is asking us to examine whether in our lives, in our families, in the places where we work and spend our time, we are capable of walking together with others, listening to them, resisting the temptation to become self-absorbed and to think only of our own needs." This

call to mutual care and attentiveness invites Christians to live more fully in community and see others as integral to the journey of faith.

In addition to personal reflection, Pope Francis emphasises the importance of recognising the struggles of others. He encourages Christians to reflect on the plight of migrants and refugees, who often face extreme hardships in search of a better life. "A good Lenten exercise," the Pope suggests, "would be to compare one's life to a migrant or foreigner, to learn how to sympathise with their experiences and in this way discover what God is asking of us so that we can better advance on our journey to the house of the Father." By reflecting on the experiences of others, Christians can deepen their understanding of how to respond to God's call to compassion.

Pope Francis concludes his message by urging Christians to trust in the promise of eternal life through Christ's resurrection. As they prepare for Lent, he calls on them to journey together with hope, embracing the message of the Jubilee Year: "Hope does not disappoint." **Agencies**

To read the full message, go to: <https://bit.ly/3XgdH15>



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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

International Women's Day, observed annually on March 8, offers a powerful moment to honour the immeasurable contributions of women to society, family, and the Church. Women have always been at the heart of the Church's life and mission. From the Blessed Virgin Mary, who said "yes" to God and brought Christ into the world, to Mary Magdalene, the first apostle, women have been bold witnesses of faith, courage, and love. Today, women continue to serve as pillars of strength, guiding the faithful with their steadfast commitment to prayer, service, and leadership.

Pope Francis has consistently highlighted the dignity and vital importance of women, advocating for their greater participation in the life of the Church. His papacy has seen women appointed to significant roles, such as in the Vatican's Secretariat for the Economy, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and as the first female governor of Vatican City State. These milestones reflect a growing recognition of the unique talents, wisdom, and contributions of women within the Church. Pope Francis' vision is clear — the Church must reflect the beauty and diversity of the people of God, and women must also be at the forefront of its leadership.

Perhaps the most significant step under Pope Francis' leadership has been his call for greater inclusion of women in decision-making roles. The establishment of the Women's Consultative Group within the Vatican demonstrates his deep commitment to listening to women on critical issues affecting the Church. It acknowledges that women's voices must be not only heard but actively integrated into the leadership and governance of the Church. This is a call for

justice, equality, and empowerment — a call that we must answer as a community of faith.

The role of women in family life is irreplaceable. Women often serve as the heart and foundation of the family, nurturing their loved ones with care, compassion, and wisdom. Pope Francis has frequently emphasised this, particularly in *Amoris Laetitia*, where he describes women as the "heart" of the family. In a world where family life is increasingly challenged by external pressures, women's steadfastness provides the emotional and spiritual strength that holds families together. The vocation of motherhood is both beautiful and demanding, yet Pope Francis recognises the difficulties women face in balancing this sacred calling with the pressures of modern society. He calls for a greater societal acknowledgment of women's contributions to family life, urging greater support for mothers and families.

But women's impact goes beyond the home. Women are leaders in politics, education, business, and social justice across the globe. Those who balance professional life with family responsibilities are especially remarkable. Figures like Jacinda Ardern, the former Prime Minister of New Zealand, and Angela Merkel, the former Chancellor of Germany, have demonstrated how it is possible to lead with strength and integrity while upholding personal values and nurturing family life. These women show us the power of resilience, faith, and the ability to make a difference in the world while remaining deeply connected to their families.

Catholic women also embody the transformative power of faith and action. Sr Norma Pimentel, a Missionary of Jesus, has dedicated her life to serving migrant

communities, and Dr Helen Alvaré, a legal scholar and pro-life advocate, demonstrates how faith and expertise can come together to create lasting change. These women, together with so many others, remind us of the incredible ways women live out their faith and contribute to society.

In this Jubilee Year, a time of reflection, renewal, and reconciliation, let us remember the many ways women contribute to building the Kingdom of God on earth. Let us embrace this moment to not only celebrate but also to deepen our commitment to supporting and empowering women in every area of life — whether as mothers, leaders, caregivers, or professionals.

Just as the Church is the body of Christ, with each member serving a unique and indispensable role, so too must the contributions of women be fully integrated into the life of the Church and society. Together, we must work toward a world where every woman is empowered to live her full potential, supported by the love of her faith, her family, and her community.

As we reflect on the beauty of the maternal vocation and the strength of women everywhere, may we always strive for greater inclusion and equality. The strength of women is the strength of the Church and the world. Just as the Blessed Virgin Mary's "yes" to God changed the world forever, so too can the "yes" of women in our lives — whether in the home, the workplace, or the Church — continue to transform our world for the better. May we all be inspired to say "yes" alongside them, working together to build a more compassionate, just, and loving world for all.

Patricia Pereira

Finding meaning and contentment in Lent

There's a well-known saying that money can't buy happiness, but celebrity Joey de Leon offered a deeper perspective. He pointed out that while money can buy us what we want and bring temporary happiness, it doesn't guarantee lasting fulfilment. Instead, he argued, money can't buy contentment. In reality, true happiness doesn't come from an endless supply of money, but from learning to be content with what we have.

Temptations can easily distract us, influencing our thoughts and actions, much like the impact of social media influencers (not to cast a negative light on them). They can push us to our limits, especially when the forces of evil try to lead us astray. Just as our Lord Jesus trusted in the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1), we, too, must place our trust in Him, especially during our Lenten practices, embracing a "Patient Trust" as inspired by the prayer of Teilhard de Chardin, SJ.

Lent should never be reduced to a mere ritual or observance. It's about deepening our relationship with the Lord, walking with Him through His suffering, passion, and death, and ultimately, rejoicing in the great hope of the Resurrection come Easter. Our lives must remain rooted in hope. We may be weak, but we are never hopeless. We are called to be the people of God — not just any people, but a people growing toward holiness, faithfulness, and walking the straight path with Jesus Christ toward our ultimate end. If our goal is not to be with God, then where else can we find true contentment or meaning in life? Life does not owe us pleasure, but it offers us meaning, and we can find that meaning through our relationships.

As we begin this season of Lent, we are

invited to reflect on what truly brings us contentment. Or, to put it another way, what gives our lives meaning in our relationship with the Lord? Does this meaning inspire gratitude for the Lord and for life in the Church? Today's readings remind us that with power comes responsibility. As the people of God, we have a responsibility — not just to observe our Lenten practices, which some might view as mere rituals that fade once Lent is over — but to enter into the deeper experience of meaning and unity with the Lord's suffering.

Lent calls us to embrace 'Mercy and Compassion,' to respond to the invitation to be merciful, just as our Father is merciful. The Gospel today highlights Jesus' temptation in two ways — relating to our daily bread and testing God when things don't go as we expect. Yet, there is a deeper message for us: the temptation did not stop at these two, for if it had, our world would surely be different. The Gospel tells us that after exhausting all forms of temptation, the devil left Him to return at the appointed time (Luke 4:13). This reminds us that temptation is ongoing, and our response should be rooted in trust and dependence on the Lord.

One of the practices we can engage in during this season of Lent aligns with the theme of the Jubilee Year of Hope. When Pope Francis opened the doors of the Jubilee Churches, he also opened a special, extraordinary door at a place where many would not expect to find God's presence — yet, as we know, God is present everywhere, the 'Emmanuel.' This door of hope was opened at the Rebibbia Prison in Rome, reminding us that true hope, as we are told in Romans 5:5, does not disappoint. Hope is about renewal, restoration,

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with Fr Aaron Alammalay

1st Sunday of Lent (C)

Readings: Deuteronomy 26: 4-10;

Romans 10:8-13;

Gospel: Luke 4:1-13

and healing. It is the assurance that, no matter what happens, we can always rise, repent, dust ourselves off, and continue moving forward on our journey.

The prison is not the only door of hope that reminds us to find meaning in our Lenten practices. There are many other doors we encounter in our lives, both in our ministries and within the life of the Church. For instance, there are the doors of hospitals, where patients enter hoping for healing from physical illness. There are also the doors at ports or immigration checkpoints, where migrants seek a better life in a new country, hoping to find work or a brighter future. Additionally, there are doors of hope at refugee camps, where refugees wait for a chance at a new life, hoping for repatriation or relocation to a more stable, peaceful environment.

In this season of Lent, we continue to be a hopeful people of God, seeking renewal in our relationship with the Lord and finding deeper meaning in our journey, despite the temptations we face daily. These challenges are overcome through our faithful devotion to our Lenten practices and by God's grace, especially through our regular reception of the sacraments.

Fr Aaron Alammalay is the assistant priest at the Church of St Andrew, Muar. He is also the bishop's delegate for the Diocesan Ministry for Migrants & Itinerants.



DIOCESE OF PENANG

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Notifications and Updates

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right, 'Honour your father and mother'...
Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the the Lord. Eph 6:1-4

1. Lenten 2025 Message

Wishing you a continued journey of Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving as you draw closer to God. I am pleased to share with you the Lenten message from the Holy Father. <https://shorturl.at/64OBZ>

2. Penang Diocesan Lenten Campaign 2025 - Rediscover, Proclaim, Build Hope

I am sharing once again the Lenten Kit which includes my message. Also available in the kit are the Lenten theme song, weekly videos on personal testimonies for reflection, other resources and relevant materials for Lenten Campaign 2025, suited for Parishes, Ministries, BECs, Families and Individuals. <https://shorturl.at/13aaF>

3. Sacrament of Reconciliation Schedule

Sharing with you the schedule for confessions at the parishes in the Diocese of Penang.

I pray for all of us to draw into a closer and intimate relationship with God through the gift and treasure of this sacred Sacrament. <https://shorturl.at/rPncG>

4. Annual Collection For Holy Land

The annual collection for Holy Land is on Maundy Thursday. Parishes can make their contributions by cheque or online transfer. Payable to: DIOCESE OF PENANG
 RHB Account No: 2-07082-0005132-4
 Kindly notify payment to: trcfm@gmail.com

5. Solidarity Fund

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

6. Conversion Experience Retreat (CER) for Clergy

Following the Jubilee Year of Hope 2025, the Clergy of the Diocese of Penang will be participating in a Conversion Experience Retreat (CER) conducted by His Eminence, Cardinal William Goh and team from the Catholic Spirituality Centre (CSC), Singapore. This retreat

will begin on March 23 evening to 28 afternoon at the Stella Maris Retreat Centre, Penang. I request for your earnest prayers for all our priests and deacons of the diocese as they, together with me, immerse in this experience of encounter and renewal with the Lord.

7. Parish Priest for Church of St Francis De Sales, Sitiawan

Fr Stanley Antoni has been appointed parish priest of the Church of St Francis de Sales, Sitiawan effective March 1, 2025. Let us pray for him as he embarks on his new mission in the parish at Sitiawan. My prayers and blessings for the parish community at Sitiawan. My heartfelt thanks to Fr Francis Andrew for having served tirelessly in his priestly ministry and is now released from his responsibilities as parish priest due to health reasons. Let us remember him in prayer as he recuperates at the Church of St Louis, Taiping under the care of Msgr Stephen Liew, the parish priest.

8. Administrator for Church of St Joseph, Bagan Serai

Fr Martin Arlando has been appointed admin-

istrator of the Church of St Joseph, Bagan Serai effective March 1, 2025. He will continue to serve as parish priest of Church of Our Lady of Good Health, Parit Buntar while assuming this new role. My prayers and blessings for him and the parish community of Bagan Serai.

9. Assisting Deacon at the Church of St Anthony, Teluk Intan

Deacon Richard Wilson has been transferred to the Church of St Anthony, Teluk Intan as assisting deacon to parish priest, Fr David Lourdes. We wish him the very best in his ministry.

10. Head of Diocesan Tamil Apostolate

Fr Arulnathan Joseph is released from his responsibilities as the Head of Tamil Apostolate effective March 1, 2025. Fr James Pitchay is replacing him. We thank Fr Arulnathan for his dedicated and committed services in this ministry. We thank Fr James for his generosity and availability to take on this new role as we pray for him and the Tamil Apostolate Ministry of our diocese.

Sebastian Francis

Cardinal Sebastian Francis



KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

March

10-14 Meeting – FABC Annual Central Committee in Bangkok

18-19 Clergy Monthly Recollection

20 Bishops' Meeting – College General, Penang



PENANG DIOCESE

Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

March

10 Handing Over of Parish – Church of St Francis de Sales, Sitiawan at 11.00am

11 Handing Over of Parish – Church of St Joseph, Bagan Serai at 11.00am

20 Bishops' Meeting – College General, Penang



MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

March

12 Meeting – South Johor Vicariate clergy, Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, JB

13 Meeting – MJD Young Peoples Network

14 Blessing of Altar & Chapel of St Joseph, Pulau Gadong, Melaka

15 Council of Pastoral Services 1st Assembly – Church of St Louis, Kluang

18-19 Clergy Monthly Recollection – Good Shepherd Seminary, Melaka

20 Bishops' Meeting – College General, Penang



Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #213



Dear friends of MJD, the diocese lost a dedicated priest recently. The Pope is critically ill. The RCIA Elect are getting ready for the three-week Scrutinies. Remember them in your prayers.

MARRIAGE and parenthood have long been central to society, but shifting attitudes among younger generations suggest otherwise. The declining marriage, birth and divorce rates, the dipping fertility rates, and the rise of the “4B Movement” (from South Korea) where many women reject intercourse, dating, marriage, and childbirth is concerning. But is this generation truly turning away from marriage, or are they simply redefining its role in modern life? This is what they say:

a. marriage has always been my goal: the timing must be right; the relationship should be serious and mature.

b. building a life together is appealing: don't rush into it simply due to societal expectations

c. having a spouse and a family is my dream: a partner who is respectful, with common sense and religious values

These conversations, which reflect Gen Z's approach to marriage is not outright rejection but rather a shift in priorities and perspectives. While some remain committed to traditional ideals of love and family, others focus on self-growth, financial stability, and emotional readiness before making a lifelong commitment. Ultimately, marriage is still valued — it's just evolving in meaning for a new generation. (*Sinar Daily*)

“Just Do It” Times: It was reported that she was a rare presence in the world of caregiving. Her nightly rounds, lamp tightly clasped in hand, have become a symbol of her deep compassion and commitment to the residents under her care. When interviewed, Saraswathy Letchumanan, the manager and owner of Pusat Jagaan Warga Istimewa Kempas, said: “Even the smallest gestures can have the greatest impact, and each of us has the power to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those in need.”

The PM again said that the government

respects democracy, freedom of speech and differing views and will amend the Peaceful Assembly Act. The people wait to see.

The PAC heard horror stories of insurers hiking up health insurance premiums and private hospitals charging exorbitant bills. Profiteering continues.

A blind man was killed when he fell onto the tracks. Who is to be blamed? We need to be more sensitive to our neighbours and their needs. All of us can be environment, OKU, people and nation friendly.

A Thought for the Week:

The Reluctant Falcon

A king received a gift of two magnificent falcons from Arabia, the most beautiful birds he had ever seen. He gave the precious birds to his head falconer to be trained. Later the falconer reported that one flies high, while the other refuses to budge from the branch.

Healers and sorcerers were summoned from everywhere to make the falcon fly. But to no avail. In desperation, the king told his court to find a farmer, familiar with the countryside.

That morning, the king saw the falcon flying. He called for the farmer to explain the miracle. Bowing, the farmer said to the king, “It was very easy, your highness. I simply cut the branch of the tree where the bird was sitting.”

The lesson from the farmer: We are all made to fly, to realise our incredible potential as human beings. But instead of doing that, we sit on our branches, clinging to the things that are familiar to us and remain undiscovered. We are happy with the familiar and comfortable. Destroy the branch of mediocrity and fear we cling to, begin to fly.

QnQ! Q asks? Is the Kingdom of God already in our midst?

The 2025 Report from the Life Way Research presents nine encouraging trends that help us see how God is moving and working in our midst.

1. Christianity is growing. Currently, there are 2.64 billion Christians, representing one-third of the world's population.

2. The growth of the religiously unaffiliated have plateaued globally. A decline is projected from 906 mil to 867 mil by 2050.

3. Atheism is declining. Today the number has dwindled to 145 million, falling 0.2 per cent annually. By 2050, atheism is projected to drop to 133 million.

4. Evangelicals are among the fastest-growing Christian groups. Every group within Christianity is growing.

5. Christianity is exploding in Africa and Asia. Persecution is often severe in many areas in the Global South, but Christianity is growing in every region. By 2050, Africa will be home to more than 1.2 billion Christians, and almost 600 million will live in Asia.

6. Ministers and missionaries continue to be called and sent. The total number is expected to reach 17 million by 2050.

7. Martyrdom has fallen. While persecution remains a significant issue for Christians in many areas, the number of believers who are killed for their faith over a 10-year period has declined.

8. New Testament (NT) translations are available in more languages. With a continued focus on language efforts, technological advances, and mission works, by 2050 we will have the NT in around 4,400 languages.

9. The percentage of people without Gospel access is declining. From 54.3 per cent without Gospel access in 1900, to 27 per cent currently. *Zenit*

The Holy Spirit @work: The most important criterion for discerning divine inspirations is the one that Jesus Himself gives us in the Gospel: “A tree is known by its fruit.” An inspiration from God, if we follow it, will produce sound fruit: the fruits of peace, joy, charity, communion, and humility.” *Jacques Philippe*

Something To Tickle You: “You have to grow from the inside out. None can teach you; none can make you spiritual. There is no other teacher but your own soul,”

Swami Vivekananda

Bernard Paul

Bishop Bernard Paul

Strengthening social mission and spiritual collaboration

BUKIT MERTAJAM: Caritas Penang organised an assembly for parish Caritas representatives and social mission ministries within the Diocese of Penang at the Minor Basilica of St Anne, February 15 and 16.

The event gathered representatives from 17 parishes and three social mission groups under the diocese. Themed *Union of Minds, Hearts and Deeds*, inspired by 1 John 3:18, “Let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth,” Caritas Penang aimed to strengthen the connection and collaboration among the parish Caritas and social mission groups by fostering spirituality, enhancing knowledge, and encouraging networking.

The assembly commenced with a recollection led by **Fr Fabian Dicom**, National Director of Caritas Malaysia, focusing on the spirituality of Caritas. Fr Fabian began by reflecting on Caritas’ identity, vision, and mission, before emphasising the importance of both being and doing in social mission. During the recollection, Fr Fabian led participants in a reflective session on *Sanctity*, urging them to revisit their spiritual motivations. He reminded them that human development is not solely economic or social — it must be spiritual, as the Church teaches. The second part of the recollection addressed *Synodality and Solidarity*, emphasising the importance of journeying together, standing with the vulnerable, and striving for justice. Fr Fabian highlighted that immersing oneself in the lives of the poor is essential to the Caritas mission. After each recollection session, conversations in the spirit were held in small groups, providing participants with an opportunity to pause, reflect, and deepen their spiritual grounding, which often gets overshadowed by the rush to “do.”

Fr Fabian also spoke about the integral response to the *Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor in Malaysia*, drawing attention to the links between environmental damage, migration, and poverty. He highlighted how these crises impact jobs and livelihoods,



The delegates of the Caritas Penang assembly.

quoting Pope Francis: “The gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest.” He reminded the participants of the Church’s moral responsibility to “cultivate and care” for the earth (Genesis 2:15) and called for a united, stronger response to the environmental and social crises.

In the afternoon of Day 1, **Fr Simon Anand**, parish priest of the Church of the Sacred Heart, Kampar, shared insights on the Migrant Ministry in his parish, focusing on the comprehensive needs of migrants, including sacramental, medical, and educational support, as well as assistance with documentation. Fr Simon emphasised inclusivity, highlighting how migrants serve in various roles, such as Eucharistic ministers, lectors, choir members, and hospitality ministers. He also spoke about the broader challenges migrants face, noting that their struggles extend beyond financial assistance.



Later in the evening, **Magdalene Chiang**, from the Creation Justice Commission presented on the topic of *Ecological Parish*. She outlined practical steps that parishes could take to raise ecological awareness, suggesting the establishment



of ministries dedicated to ecology in every parish.

Fr Joachim Robert concluded Day 1 by synthesising the day’s sessions, helping participants see the connections between the various topics and the collective responsibilities of the Church’s social mission. Participants then engaged in a workshop focused on identifying their strengths and challenges, creating an opportunity for reflection and collaboration within their respective deaneries.



Day 2 began with shared experiences from two parishes. A migrant couple from the Church of the Sacred Heart, Kampar, shared their personal journey of overcoming challenges and helping other migrants. Representatives from the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Penang presented their “Sharing Hope” food bank and welfare aid project, which aims to improve the quality of life for vulnerable individuals. Caritas Penang also shared details about their recent Disaster Relief Response, explaining the steps for setting up Emergency Response Teams in parishes and how they can coordinate efforts in the event of a disaster.

In the afternoon, **Dr Mary Barathy**, a psychiatrist, discussed the psychological effects of child sexual abuse, followed

by Christopher Kushi from the Professional Standards Office, who spoke about the safeguarding of minors and vulnerable persons. Both speakers emphasised the role of the Catholic Church in addressing these critical issues.



The final workshop of the assembly focused on planning for the future. After hearing from the various parishes and ministries, participants were encouraged to draft plans for initiatives they would like to undertake at their respective parishes, identifying objectives, expected results, and potential collaborations within their deaneries or the wider diocese.

The assembly concluded with a Holy Mass celebrated by Cardinal Sebastian Francis. In his homily, Cardinal Sebastian spoke about the vital role of Caritas in bringing “a bit of heaven to earth” through its work, emphasising the Church’s efforts to network with various organisations, both within and outside the Catholic community. He highlighted the importance of organisations such as St Joseph’s Home, LSP, Simee Home, Hospital Fatimah, and others that contribute to human development and outreach to the marginalised.

Cardinal Sebastian also quoted St John Paul II, urging the assembly to “cast out our nets into the deep” with the beatitudes and blessings of God as a call to put charity into action. He ended his homily with a powerful message: “God has chosen you. You are few, but you are blessed and sent on mission. The field is vast, and the ocean is big. Do not be petty — take the risk and move forward in this Year of Hope. We are on a pilgrimage, guided by the Holy Spirit, to conversion and action.”

The assembly concluded with participants reflecting on the insights shared and the potential for future collaboration. Many expressed gratitude for the opportunity to learn, share experiences, and network, which would help strengthen their commitment to the social mission of the Catholic Church.

FORMED: A tool for evangelisation and intentional discipleship in the digital age

KUALA LUMPUR: In an era where faith and technology increasingly intersect, the Archdiocesan Pastoral Institute (API) hosted a transformative session introducing *The Catholic Faith on Demand* (FORMED) — a dynamic platform not just for spiritual content but a vital tool for evangelisation and intentional discipleship, on February 22.

Held at the API Formation Room, Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre, the session welcomed 37 participants from 15 parishes, including Holy Rosary; Kristus Aman; Kristus Cahaya; Holy Family; St Jude; St Francis of Assisi; Good Shepherd; Holy Redeemer; Sacred Heart; St Paul the Apostle; St Anthony; St Joseph; Christ the King; Divine Mercy and Visitation.

Led by Caroline Soon and the dedicated formation team from the Church of the Holy Rosary and the Church of the Good Shepherd, the session underscored that FORMED is more than just a “Catholic Netflix.” It is a tool for conversion, evangelisation, and faith formation, designed to guide Catholics in deepening their spiritual journey and fostering intentional discipleship.

A major highlight of the session was the discussion on how to become an intentional disciple. Participants explored the Five Thresholds of Conversion — trust, curiosity, spiritual openness, spiritual seeking, and intentional discipleship — key stages that help individuals grow in their faith journey. The session encouraged parish leaders and laypeople alike to use FORMED as a resource for nurturing this process within their communities.

Another focus was the Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic — pray, study, generosity, and evangelise — reminding participants that discipleship is a continuous journey. “We will never fully arrive; we are always on a journey,” Director of API Sr Margaretta Sta Maria (and the presenters) emphasised, “The mission of evangelisation, given to us by Jesus, is an ongoing calling.”

Participants also explored key FORMED series like *Symbolon*, *Forgiven*, *CST 101*, *33 Days to Morning Glory*, and the popular Brother Francis cartoon series, all designed to engage a wide range of audiences — from catechumens to young children. The session emphasized how FORMED can be integrated into parish ministries such as RCIA, catechism classes, parent groups, and even within family homes.

Helen Scott highlighted the platform’s potential, saying, “FORMED is more than a library of Catholic resources; it’s a tool for real transformation. It helps us answer the call to evangelise, reaching people wherever they are on their spiritual journey.”

The formation team from the Church of the Holy Rosary also shared personal testimonies on how FORMED has already made a difference in their parish community, from deepening faith conversations to strengthening family spiritual practices.

As the session concluded, participants left inspired, recognising FORMED as a cata-



Sr Margaretta Sta Maria FdCC.

lyst for nurturing discipleship and extending the Church’s mission beyond its walls.

For more information on FORMED or how to subscribe through your parish, contact Christina Joseph, Archdiocesan Pastoral Institute at 03-2026 6466.

In a world where digital tools shape much of our daily lives, FORMED offers Catholics a way to stay rooted in faith, live out their discipleship intentionally, and share the Gospel with others — fulfilling the timeless mandate of Jesus: *Go and make disciples of all nations*. **Dr Joanne Lim**

Permanent deacons of Penang diocese gather for jubilee celebration

Isaac Alfred Simbun

PENANG: The nine permanent deacons of the Diocese of Penang met for their first gathering of the year at the Monsignor Aloysius Spirituality Centre on February 22. The event also marked the Jubilee of Deacons, a special occasion proclaimed by Pope Francis in May 2024 as part of the year's

jubilee celebrations. The gathering provided an opportunity for the deacons to reflect on the transformative impact of their ministry, serving as visible signs of Christ's presence in their communities.

Joining the deacons were their spouses and candidates interested in the permanent diaconate. The gathering, held on February 22, included two enriching sessions

focused on the theme of the jubilee, with Fr Desmond Jansen as the guest speaker.

Fr Desmond led a thought-provoking session on the ministries and spirituality of a permanent deacon, drawing inspiration from the life of St Francis of Assisi. As the founder of the Franciscan family, St Francis, a permanent deacon himself, devoted his life to

serving the poor, the marginalised, and those in need. His example remains a powerful model for permanent deacons today, emphasising their vital role in ministering to the people of God.

Permanent deacons, especially those who are married, play a unique and invaluable role in the Church, particularly in the Diocese of Penang. After the sessions, the deacons, along with their spouses and candidates, participated in a roundtable discussion, sharing reflections on their ministerial experiences. The spouses' testimonies offered particularly profound insights, shedding light on the realities of being married to a permanent deacon. Their sharing highlighted both the beauty and challenges of marriage, inspiring all present to recognise and appreciate the vital role of family in ministry.

On Feb 23, the diocese commemorated the Jubilee of Deacons

with a Eucharistic celebration presided over by Cardinal Sebastian Francis. Deacon Lazarus Jonathan, the Head of Permanent Deacons, delivered the homily, reinforcing the significance of their ministry. During the Mass, Cardinal Sebastian emphasised that permanent deacons extend the bishop's presence within the communities they serve.

This year's gathering was particularly significant as it included four candidates discerning their call to the permanent diaconate in the Diocese of Penang. Their presence added a sense of hope and continuity to the diaconal ministry. As the deacons reflected on their mission, the candidates were given a glimpse into the profound commitment and service that define the role of a permanent deacon.

The gathering was a significant occasion that strengthened the bond among the deacons, their spouses, and the candidates.



Pope's intentions: A prayer of love

PETALING JAYA: The beauty of the Pope's monthly prayer intentions is that it is an invitation to Catholics worldwide to pray together for one another despite not knowing each other.

"It is only when we allow Jesus to live in our hearts that we can offer ourselves to others ... serving the needs of humanity the way Jesus loves us," said Fr Cristóbal Fones SJ, the recently appointed International Director of the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network (PWP).

He defined the Pope's prayer as "a devotion to the heart of Jesus" through a spiritual journey, called The Way of the Heart, "aligning our hearts with His heart's desires" and for "God's love awakening us to the meaning of love ... and to love like Christ". Thus, becoming praying-apostles and disciple-missionaries.

Fr Cristóbal was in Malaysia recently as a part of a visit to the region including Singapore, Indonesia and East Timor. During his stop-over here, he gave a talk at the Church of St Francis Xavier (SFX). Joining in the session was Archbishop Julian Leow.

In his talk entitled, *United in a Mission of Compassion for the World*, Fr Cristóbal introduced PWP as a pontifical work entrusted to the Jesuits 180 years ago at the service of the entire Church as a mission of compassion for the world through the Pope's prayer intentions. It is present in 92 countries and is made up of more than 22 million Catholics. It includes a youth branch, the EYM (Eucharistic Youth Movement).

Sharing some insight into the making of the Pope's intentions,

Fr Cristóbal said they passed through a process of discernment before submission to Pope Francis. The entire process takes 18 months. Work on the 2027 intentions will start in June 2025 when PWP calls for prayer proposals from all dicasteries and regional coordinators, including Continental Coordinator for Asia Pacific, Fr Alberto Irenus David SJ, who is also SFX's assistant parish priest. Proposals are collected also from multiple church groups.

"They send us thousands of proposals, and we group them according to topics," Fr Cristóbal said. After a series of discernments, 18 are presented to the Pope. "Here, I get to converse with Pope Francis in Spanish," quipped Fr Cristóbal who, like the Vicar of Christ, is from Latin America. Once the Pope has chosen 12 great challenges to mobilise humanity to intercede for the needs of the world, he prayed and discerned for about a week and reaffirmed his selection.

The 12 intentions are then published in January 2026 for further deliberation and research into the given topics before the final text can be crafted and ready for use in 2027.

Fr Cristóbal also spoke on the success of Pope Francis' monthly video message on his intention in reaching through 22 languages, bringing him into the homes of millions, even in faraway lands.

"We receive 240 million visits to our network," he said, adding that the videos were often localised with animation by the local community of Christ to suit their needs and even subtitled in their mother tongue, including Tamil and Swahili. Besides *The Pope Video*, PWP also introduced the app, *Click-To-Pray*.

In his closing remarks, Archbishop Julian spoke on the need to know the current affairs of the world "so that you know what and who to pray for". He reminded the faithful: "When you hold the Bible in one hand, remember to



Fr Cristóbal Fones, SJ (Conversation Hour facebook/Nicholas Augustin)

hold the newspaper in the other."

Earlier, Fr Cristóbal celebrated Mass with SFX parish priest Fr Alvin Ng SJ, Fr Alberto and former PWP coordinator, Fr Lawrence Andrew SJ, as concelebrants.

At the talk, Fr Cristóbal, a gifted composer and musician, also played his guitar and sang three songs, including Cancion de San Francisco Javier/Song of St Francis Xavier. The night included a fellowship dinner and a cake-cutting ceremony to mark the 180th anniversary of PWP. **Bob Ho**

Construction of new chapel delayed

BESTARI JAYA: The proposed construction of the one block new chapel in Bandar Seri Coalfields, initially rescheduled last year, has been delayed again due to several pending issues that are still to be resolved. These are expected to be settled or resolved in the coming months.



This new chapel to be built in Bandar Seri Coalfields is to replace the existing decades-old and dilapidated Chapel of St Anthony, situated in the flood prone area near Desa Coalfields, along Jalan Kuala Selangor.

Fr James Gabriel, the chapel administrator and parish priest of the Church of St. Paul the Hermit in Bestari Jaya, stated that following the client consultants meeting in January 2025, the architects have suggested a time line of three to four months for the preparation of tender documents. The tender is expected to be called in May or June 2025, with the award of the tender anticipated by July 2025. Construction could then begin, provided all outstanding issues are resolved by that time.

The construction is projected to take 18 months. The 800-seat capacity chapel is estimated to cost around RM7.5 million. **Bernard Anthony**



Some of the attendees with Fr Cristóbal Fones, SJ. (Conversation Hour facebook/Nicholas Augustin)

Thousands gather for Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes in Klang

Nesa Dhevasahayam

KLANG: The Church of Our Lady of Lourdes (OLL) celebrated its annual Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes from February 6 to 16, attracting thousands of parishioners and pilgrims. This year's celebration embraced the Jubilee Year theme, *Pilgrims of Hope*, inspired by Matthew 19:26: *Hope in God, all things are possible*. The nine-day novena focused on various Marian titles, exploring themes of Family, Church, Ecology, and Society.

The novena Masses were led by priests from the dioceses of Penang and Malacca Johore and the archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, with the opening ceremony featuring the raising of the feast flag by parish priest, Fr Gregory Chan, assistant parish priest Fr Gnana Selvam Berentis and members of the congregation.

Throughout the celebration, highlights included reflections on Mary's virtues. On Day 1, Fr Surain Durairaj preached on *Mary's Hope in God's Salvation*, emphasising her trust in God's plan. Day 2 saw Fr Stanley Antoni reflect on *Mary's Unwavering Faith*, drawing from the Wedding at Cana. On Day 3, Sunday Masses were celebrated in multiple languages, with Fr Stanley and Fr Desmond Jensen

preaching on *Mary, Queen of Our Home*, and highlighting the importance of faith in family life. Fr Andrew Manickam, OFM, Cap led Day 4's reflection on Mary, Mother of Nature, encouraging environmental leadership as an act of faith.

February 11 marked the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes and World Day of the Sick. The Mass and anointing of the sick, attended by 1,500 pilgrims, was presided over by Fr Albet Arockiasamy, with five priests concelebrating. Fr Albet's homily on Mary, Mother of Mercy, resonated with the crowd as he shared a personal story about his mother's compassion. The evening Mass was concelebrated by three 'sons' of OLL — Fr Peter Anthoney, Fr Vincent Thomas and Fr Bonaventure Rayappan, with several other clergy. Fr Peter's homily reflected on Mary's intercessory role, drawing connections to the Wedding at Cana and the Feeding of the Five Thousand.

Fr James Pitchay celebrated Mass on Day 6, focusing on the theme *Mary, Mediatrix of Grace*, explaining the meaning of Mary, full of grace. The following day, Fr Moses Rayappan preached on the theme *Mary Pondered and Cherished All Things in Her Heart*. He

shared a story about a group of monkeys on a retreat who were distracted by the scent of mangoes and abandoned their journey. Drawing a parallel to life's distractions, he highlighted Mary's steadfast faith, emphasising how she remained unwavering and cherished all things in her heart, even amidst uncertainty.

On Day 8, Fr Michel Dass preached on the theme *Mary, Servant of the Lord*. In his homily, he reflected on the profound significance of hope, emphasising Mary's unwavering service to God and her deep devotion to others. He urged the faithful to follow her example and embrace a life of service.

Pilgrims also took part in the Lourdes Wash, a sacred ritual inspired by the miraculous waters of Lourdes, France. Many testified to experiencing healing and inner peace through this profound experience. The spiritual atmosphere was further enriched by a healing rally led by the Putri Karmel Sisters, where participants shared powerful testimonies of renewal and transformation.

The festivities culminated on Feb 16 with a Mass for Children celebrated by Fr George Harrison, followed by an evening Mass led by Archbishop Julian Leow.

The theme *Mary, New Ark of the Covenant* was reflected throughout the liturgy. Approximately 1,500 faithful participated in a candlelight procession through Jalan Tengku Kelana, passing through 'Little India' before returning to the church. The Eucharistic procession with the Blessed Sacrament and the statue of Our Lady of Lourdes offered a deeply moving and reverent experience, concluding with a solemn benediction at the grotto.



The Blessed Sacrament and statue of Our Lady of Lourdes.



A pilgrim taking part in the Lourdes Wash.

Celebrating our Lady's feast



The parishioners at Sagga Chapel in Seremban.

SEREMBAN: The Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes at Sagga Chapel was truly an unforgettable journey, uniting hearts in faith, love, and devotion. From February 8 to 16, the nine-day celebration became a profound time of spiritual enrichment, drawing the community closer to the loving embrace of Mother Mary.

Each day of the celebration was marked by Masses that touched the hearts of all in attendance. The powerful hymns, inspiring sermons, and meaningful moments

of reflection offered everyone an opportunity to deepen their devotion. The vibrant fellowship and unity among the participants was a testament to the strength of the community, creating an atmosphere of warmth and shared faith.

On the final day, the chapel overflowed with prayers of gratitude as the faithful gathered for the closing Mass. The heartfelt devotion on display, along with the prayers and joyful spirit of the community, made for a truly memorable and spiritually fulfilling

conclusion to this beautiful feast.

A heartfelt THANK YOU goes out to all those who contributed to making this event a resounding success — the organisers, volunteers, speakers, and parishioners. Your dedication, support, and hard work were instrumental in bringing the celebration to life.

May the blessings of Mother Mary continue to shine upon each of us. We look forward to gathering again next year for another blessed celebration!

College General welcomes 22 seminarians

TANJUNG BUNGAH, Penang: College General marked the re-opening of its seminary for 2025 with an Inauguration Mass on February 17 at 6.00pm. The Mass, which signifies the beginning of the new Formation Year, took place at the seminary's Chapel of the Sacred Heart.

College General, located in Penang, serves as the Regional Major Seminary where Malaysian seminarians pursue their studies in Philosophy. The Bishop of Penang, Cardinal Sebastian Francis, is the President of College General. He, together with Archbishop Julian Leow of Kuala Lumpur and Bishop Bernard Paul of the Malacca Johore Diocese, act as the custodians of the seminary.

Cardinal Sebastian presided over the Mass, joined by the Fathers

of College General — who serve as staff and full-time formators at the seminary — as well as several priests from the Diocese of Penang. Some of these priests also serve as external formators and Spiritual Directors at the seminary.

College General welcomed 22 seminarians for this formation year, with individuals hailing from across Malaysia. Their seminary formation officially began following the Inauguration Mass. Additionally, five seminarians currently on pastoral attachment at various parishes in Peninsular Malaysia returned to join the celebrations. The clergy, seminarians, and staff were also joined by laypersons who assist in the seminary's daily activities, for the Mass.

In his sermon, Cardinal Sebastian reflected on the day's

reading which was about Cain and Abel, as well as the consequences of good and bad decisions. "Good decisions lead to good outcomes, bad decisions lead to unfavourable outcomes," he said.

After the Inauguration Mass, Cardinal Sebastian officiated the opening of the M.E.P. Fathers' bungalow and residences, located next to the chapel. These buildings are situated in the historic section of College General, known as Mariophile (meaning "Lover of Mary").

Originally serving as the rest house for the M.E.P. Fathers, who were the formators at College General since 1848, the bungalow and residences later accommodated Final Year and First Year seminarians at various times in the late 1980s. The space



The seminarians with the College General fathers.

was briefly used as the seminary's museum before undergoing recent refurbishments. It is now a dedicated residence for the first year seminarians, who will reside there starting this year.

Cardinal Sebastian Francis unveiled a plaque that highlighted the history of the bungalow, the seminary, and its connection to the M.E.P. Fathers. He was joined by the rector of the Seminary, Fr Ryan

Innas Muthu, and the Initiation Year Director, Fr Joachim Robert, as they walked around the bungalow, blessing it with holy water.

After the blessing, all present gathered to celebrate the opening with fellowship. The evening concluded on a joyful note, as it also marked Fr Ryan's birthday. A cake was presented, and the crowd gathered around to offer their well-wishes. **Brother Andrew Yee**

Honouring the legacy of Pagar Tras



YB Yeo Keng Chuan

Christopher Kushi

KULIM: The wooden tablet inscribed with the Chinese characters for “FAITH, HOPE, and LOVE,” salvaged from the abandoned heritage Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Pagar Tras, stands as a symbol of the enduring spirit of the Hakka Catholic Community. United in faith with their Missionaries of Paris (MEP) priests, Fr Jean François Allard and Fr François Terrien, they established the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in 1882 at Pagar Tras, Jalan Sg Lembu, Bukit Mertajam, Penang. Over the years, the community has expanded to Machang Bubuk; Kulim; Junjung; Bukit Mertajam; Berapit; Permatang Tinggi, and Butterworth.

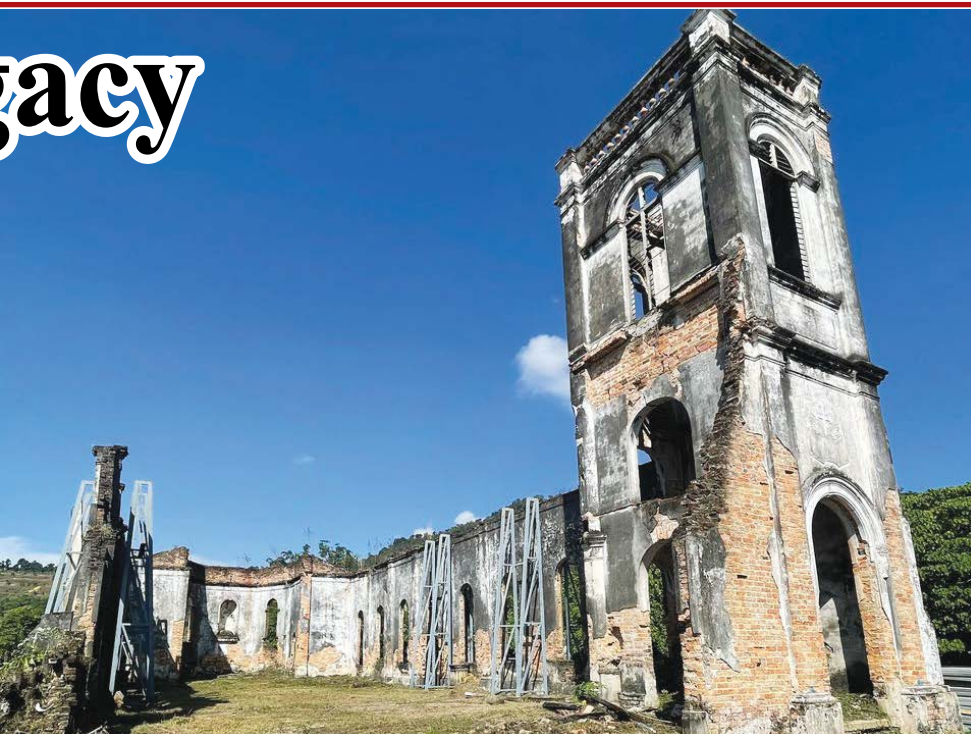
This church, often called the “Notre Dame in the Jungle,” was built in a Gothic style reminiscent of its namesake in Paris, France. In 1948, due to the communist insurgency, the church was abandoned, and a new church with the same name was constructed in Kulim town. Adjacent to the church is a cemetery that contains the graves of two parish priests: Fr Marcel Selier MEP, who was laid to rest there in accordance with his final wishes, and Fr Barnabas Gao.

A three-part collaborative workshop on the history and heritage of Pagar Tras was

organised by Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Think City, and the Diocese of Penang. The closing ceremony of the final workshop, held on February 22 at the new Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (SHJ) in Kulim town, was officiated by Cardinal Sebastian Francis.

Cardinal Sebastian expressed his gratitude to the project leader, Prof Dr Stephen Chia of USM; Vicar General Msgr Henry Rajoo, the parish priest of SHJ; Kishore Ramdas, programme manager for Seberang Jaya at Think City; Ong Zhan Hao, representing the Penang State Exco for Tourism and Creative Economy (PETACE); Clement Liang, president of the Penang Heritage Trust; Francis Chen, chair of the Penang Diocese Heritage Conservation Committee; former Adun of Kulim, YB Yeo Keng Chuan, as well as committee members, resource persons, and Friends of Pagar Tras. His appreciation was for their collective efforts that ensured the success of the project.

In 2021, the Diocese of Penang partnered with PETACE to launch the *On 100 Year Trail – Pagar Tras* project. This initiative aims to preserve the ruins of the Pagar Tras Church and transform it into a major tourist attraction, especially for mainland Penang. The first phase of the project has been successfully completed, which included soil analysis and



The old Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

the reinforcement of the church’s existing walls with steel girders to prevent collapse. The Diocese of Penang envisions the Pagar Tras site as a historical, tourist, and pilgrimage destination. In addition to landscaping efforts, plans are in place to construct a building that will feature an artefact gallery, an administrative office, a caretaker’s room, a café, and restrooms.

Cardinal Sebastian noted that 143 years later, we honour the memory, history, and heritage of Pagar Tras Church through this workshop. The signboard inscribed with the characters “FAITH, HOPE, and LOVE” holds a special place in our hearts. This year, as the Universal Catholic Church celebrates the Jubilee Year of Hope, he reminded those present that “Hope does not disappoint.”

Prof Dr Stephen emphasised that this initiative aims to foster community pride, raise awareness, and engage the public in the history and heritage of Pagar Tras Church. Kishore extended Think City’s congratulations on the successful workshop, noting how it facilitated community interaction and expressing hopes for a book and video documenting the project. Clement highlighted the importance of preserving this significant heritage site as an essential part of Penang’s history. YB Yeo, who grew up in Sg Lembu, shared that he has been



The wooden tablet, engraved with the Chinese characters for ‘Faith, Hope, Love,’ serves as a powerful symbol of the enduring spirit of the Hakka Catholic community.

advocating for the State to develop this iconic site since 2015 and expressed optimism about the success of the restoration project.

Msgr Henry led participants on a tour, providing an insightful explanation of the Pagar Tras artifacts, stained glass, statues, and sacred liturgical items preserved at the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Kulim. Francis noted that the sacred relics from Pagar Tras Church, now housed at SHJ Kulim, are authenticated by a Latin document from Paris, dated April 27, 1900.

Cardinal Sebastian encouraged everyone to continue honouring the legacy of those who came before us by sharing their stories with future generations. Together, we can ensure their memories endure, and the spirit of hope remains strong in our hearts.

Mt Miriam Cancer Hospital celebrates 49 years of compassionate care

PENANG: Mount Miriam Cancer Hospital marked its 49th anniversary with a Mass and gathering, reflecting on nearly five decades of dedicated cancer care. The Mass was held in the hospital’s chapel, a reminder of the enduring legacy of the Franciscan Missionaries of Divine Motherhood and the continued spiritual support provided by the Catholic Church.

Cardinal Sebastian Francis presided over the Mass with Fr Crispus Mosinoh, OFM concelebrating and assisted by Deacon Paul Kang.

Since its founding in 1976, Mount Miriam has been a pillar of support for cancer patients, both local and international. Established as a non-profit hospital, it is driven by a mission, not only to treat cancer but to care for the person behind the disease. The hospital’s holistic approach integrates medical care with psychological and palliative support, ensuring patients receive well-rounded, compassionate treatment.

Over the years, Mount Miriam has evolved from a small initiative to a renowned centre for cancer care, known for its commitment to high-quality treatment, patient-centred care, and innovative treatment methods. The hospital continues to embrace advancements in oncology, ensuring it remains at the forefront of cancer treatment.

In his speech, CEO Deacon Paul Kang



Cardinal Sebastian Francis and Mt Miriam honoured guests with the anniversary cake. (photo/Samuel Gopal)

reflected on the hospital’s journey and expressed gratitude to the hospital’s various supporters. “Today, we are privileged to celebrate 49 years of service,” he began, highlighting the hospital’s foundation by the late Bishop Francis Chan, who envisioned a cancer care facility based on his own experience as a cancer patient. “We are blessed that His Eminence Cardinal Sebastian Francis continues to inspire us with tangible support,” he continued.

Deacon Paul also recognised the role of the Franciscan Missionaries of Divine Mother-

hood (FMDM) sisters, whose commitment has been instrumental in the hospital’s development. He thanked the hospital’s partners, donors, and volunteers for their vital contributions, noting that in 2023 alone, Mount Miriam provided RM3.2 million in subsidised treatment, double the amount from the previous year.

“Last year was a significant year for us,” Deacon Paul shared. “We saw a remarkable increase in patient numbers and are on the path to financial recovery. It’s not just about numbers — it’s about continuing to serve

with love and compassion, with the help of God guiding us.”

Dr Francis Tan, representing the Board of Directors, spoke about the hospital’s enduring values as it approaches its 50th anniversary. “Mount Miriam’s legacy is built not on photographs or buildings, but on the values of respect, compassion, and integrity that run through the heart of every team member,” he said. “These are the qualities that set Mount Miriam apart from other healthcare facilities. It’s not about the profits or the number of patients — it’s the humility, fraternity, and love for humankind that define us.”

Dr Francis emphasised the importance of remembering the hospital’s history while looking toward the future. “As we approach our Golden Jubilee, let us pause and reflect on the values that have sustained us,” he said. “We thank all who have supported Mount Miriam, including the patients, staff, volunteers, benefactors, and the Catholic community of Penang.”

As Mount Miriam Cancer Hospital enters its 50th year, it remains steadfast in its mission to provide compassionate care for cancer patients, guided by its founding values of integrity, respect, and compassion. The hospital’s board, staff, and supporters are united in their commitment to continue the work of healing and hope for many more years to come.

Nineteenth century 'gem in the jungle' designated as pilgrimage centre

SIBU: A significant milestone in the history of the Diocese of Sibu was celebrated on February 22, as Bishop Joseph Hii officiated the soft launch of the newly renovated Sacred Heart Chapel at Sg Bawan, Kanowit. The chapel, which has stood since 1898, was officially designated as a pilgrimage centre for the diocese.

The ceremony was attended by over 350 local parishioners together with Fr George Omuto, Fr Ravi Pulagam, and Fr Olivier Lomboto.

The Sacred Heart Chapel, often referred to as a "Gem in the Jungle," holds a place of deep cultural and spiritual significance for the local community, particularly the Iban people.

Located next to Sungai Bawan, the chapel serves as an outstation of Kanowit Parish and is one of the oldest Catholic chapels in the region. Its renovation and designation as one of three pilgrimage centres for Jubilee 2025 highlight its historical and spiritual importance. Pilgrims from across Sarawak and beyond will visit the chapel to reflect, pray, and renew their faith, marking a key moment in the Catholic Church's celebrations of the 2,000th anniversary of Jesus Christ's resurrection.

Jubilee 2025 is a significant event for Catholics worldwide, focusing on spiritual renewal, forgiveness, and faith. Bishop Joseph Hii has designated three pilgrimage centres within the region, each representing a unique aspect of the area's Catholic heritage. The other pilgrimage sites include St Anthony's Heritage Centre in Sarikei and St Teresa Oratory in Sibu.

Significance of Sacred Heart Chapel

Historical Importance: The Sacred Heart Chapel is one of Sarawak's oldest Catholic chapels, established by the Mill Hill Missionaries, who played a crucial role in spreading Catholicism among the indigenous Iban people. It stands as a testament to the enduring faith of the Iban Catholic community and the cultural integration efforts by the missionaries.

Cultural Synthesis: The chapel embodies the harmonious blending of Iban traditions and Catholic teachings. Its architecture and religious art incorporate Iban motifs, offering a unique experience for pilgrims seeking a deeper connection to the cultural heritage of the Iban Catholic community.

Spiritual Significance: As a pilgrimage centre, the chapel offers a space for prayer, reflection, and spiritual renewal. Surrounded by the natural beauty of Sarawak's rainforests, it provides a peaceful environment for contemplation and connection with God.

Community and Faith: The chapel has served as a focal point for the Iban Catholic community for generations, marking their journey from animism to Christianity. During Jubilee 2025, the chapel will host special Masses, processions, and cultural performances, bringing together the local community and pilgrims from across the region.

The soft launch of Sacred Heart Chapel as a pilgrimage centre for Jubilee 2025 marks a new chapter in its rich history, inviting pilgrims to experience its unique blend of spiritual devotion and cultural heritage.



Sacred Heart Chapel (1898)



The newly renovated Sacred Heart Chapel.



The congregation.



Bishop Joseph Hii with the Mill Hill priests at Mass.

St Teresa Oratory welcomes first pilgrims on their sacred journey

SIBU: St Teresa Oratory welcomed its first group of pilgrims on February 22. Leading the 70 plus pilgrims was Fr Raphael Samosir, OFM Cap, from the St Francis Friary in Sibu.

Established in 1960, St Teresa Oratory is one of the three designated pilgrimage centres in the Diocese of Sibu. The other two are St Anthony's Heritage Centre in Sarikei (est.1940) and Sacred Heart Chapel in Bawan Kanowit (est.1899).

Before entering the 'Door of Hope' at St Teresa Oratory, Fr Raphael led the group in reciting the Litany to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This was followed by the Enthronement of the Bible. Richard Lim of the Neocatechumenal Way community then provided a brief history of St Teresa Oratory, along with a catechesis on the Oratory's Icon painting of the Crucifixion.

In his prayers, Fr Raphael blessed all those in attendance and expressed grati-

tude to St Teresa Oratory for opening the Door of Hope to welcome all. "The Holy Door is called 'Holy' because it invites all who enter through it to walk in holiness," Fr Raphael explained. "In the spirit of the Pope's pilgrimage, during the singing of the Jubilee hymn, representatives of the entire People of God crossed its threshold, as a prelude to the countless pilgrims of hope from every country who will visit St Peter's Basilica and celebrate the mysteries of salvation during the Holy Year."

He also noted, "For pilgrims who cannot visit St Peter's Basilica, they can choose to make their pilgrimage to local designated pilgrimage centres."

Fr Raphael concluded by blessing the pilgrims with a special prayer for their continued journey to their next pilgrimage stop, St Anthony's Heritage Centre in Sarikei, with a brief stopover at the Church of Christ the King in Bintangor.



Fr Raphael Samosir, OFM Cap blessing the pilgrims.

Rededication of the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart

JOHOR BAHRU: After months of extensive repairs and restoration, the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart is once again ready to welcome the faithful into its newly restored spaces. In his homily during the dedication on February 19, Bishop Bernard Paul reflected on the significance of this project. "Countless hours of work and significant financial investments have gone into this project, but as we step back to admire the intricate designs, the art, and the engineering marvel that is the cathedral, we must also reflect on a deeper question: Do we truly need a church building?" he asked.

The restoration of the cathedral is a remarkable achievement, but Bishop Paul's question invites us to reflect on the true purpose of a church building. While Solomon's Temple in 2 Chronicles was built to house the Ark of the Covenant as a sacred space for worship, in the New Testament, Paul teaches that the Church is not a building but the people, with Jesus as the foundation and the Holy Spirit as the Life-giver. John's Gospel emphasizes that true worship is not about location but about worshipping God "in spirit and in truth," focusing on the heart of the worshiper.

The Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, as the mother church, exists to fulfil the mission of worship, the Word, works, and witness — the 4Ws. The true purpose of the Church is not confined to its physical space but extends into the world, serving and witnessing to those in need.

Recent global events have highlighted this truth. The US government's pause on foreign aid programmes and the dismantling of USAID have caused concern among faith-based organisations and humanitarian aid groups. With the possibility of millions being denied access to healthcare and poverty relief,



Bishop Bernard Paul anointing the walls. (Cathedral of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, JB facebook)

commentators are warning of an impending humanitarian crisis.

However, history reveals a different story — one of hope and resilience. The Church has always been at the forefront of addressing society's needs, long before governments took action. The countless hospitals, schools, orphanages, and social services established by the Church stand as a testament to its unwavering commitment to serve the marginalized. The first universities were founded by the Church, and human rights were championed by the Church long before they were enshrined in law.

The Cathedral of the Sacred Heart stands as both a beautiful, restored building and a symbol of the Church's enduring mission. Its rededication reminds us that the Church's true purpose goes beyond brick and mortar — it is to live out the Gospel, bringing hope, healing, and help to a broken world. As the people of the Church, we are called to serve, witness, and live the Gospel in spirit and truth, through acts of service and compassion. The time to act is now, and it is up to each of us to make a lasting difference.

New church in Ur to promote interfaith unity

BAGHDAD: The upcoming inauguration of a church of the Chaldeans in Ur, four years after Pope Francis' visit, is being seen as a "message" and a symbol of "openness," according to Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako, Chaldean Patriarch of Baghdad. The church, he hopes, will become a place of pilgrimage not only for Iraqis but for believers worldwide, both Christian and Muslim, since "Abraham is their common father," said the prelate.

Originally scheduled for March 6, the anniversary of Pope Francis' apostolic journey, the opening will now take place after Easter, following Ramadan and Lent. This delay accommodates the participation of Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani and other Muslim leaders, making it preferable to wait until after the Islamic fasting and prayer period.

The church is envisioned as a landmark and pilgrimage destination, akin to the Church of the Baptism on the Jordan River or the Abrahamic House in the United Arab Emirates. Cardinal Sako emphasised that such places are crucial for uniting humanity, as they serve as meeting points for all religions.

This church holds significant meaning for Iraq and its people. As a Christian "symbol" in a predominantly Muslim country, it aims to foster understanding and respect for Christianity. By focusing on shared values and



Ibrahim Al-Khalil Church in Ur of the Chaldeans.

embracing diversity, the church hopes to contribute to peaceful coexistence and stability.

Four years after Pope Francis' visit — his first apostolic journey abroad during the COVID-19 pandemic — the Catholic community in Iraq is ready to inaugurate the Ibrahim Al-Khalil Church of the Chaldeans in Ur. Named after Abraham, the father of Jews, Christians, and Muslims, the church is part of a larger complex in the desert with a striking pyramidal shape. It is not just a place of worship but also a centre for religious, social, and cultural activities, closely linked to the Pope's message of unity among the three monotheistic faiths.

The church's opening builds on the Pope's 2019 signing of the Document on Human

Fraternity in Abu Dhabi with Grand Imam Ahmed el-Tayeb and his meeting with Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Iraq's leading *Syiah* cleric. The site also aims to support Iraq's dwindling Christian community, which has shrunk from around 1.5 million to several hundred thousand over the past two decades.

Spanning 10,000 square metres, the church features a 600-square-metre worship hall and a 23-metre-high bell tower. While serving the Christian community, it is also expected to attract tourists, particularly Christian pilgrims from around the world.

"Four years after the Pope's visit, everyone still remembers him," Cardinal Sako remarked. "He has often said that Iraq is in his heart." *Asia News*

Marriage seminar reinforces domestic church

CHIANG MAI: Married couples from across northern Thailand, Bangkok, and even Singapore, gathered for a transformative two-day marriage seminar and retreat, themed *Family, Journey of Hope 2025*.

Held February 15–16 at the International Youth Training Centre in Chiang Mai, the event aimed to provide couples with practical tools to enhance their family life and strengthen the Domestic Church.

Organised by the Office of Family Life of the Diocese of Chiang Mai in collaboration with Focolare Chiang Mai, the seminar focused on improving communication, deepening relationships, and reinforcing the sacred bond of marriage.

Bro Anurak Nithipatharaporn of St Gabriel de Montfort served as the main facilitator, guiding participants through key discussions and interactive workshops.

"We have experienced that God calls those who truly need this seminar. Some who had confirmed attendance were unable to come, yet those who arrived found exactly what they needed," said Achara Narinrak of Focolare Chiang Mai.

"With 80 participants, including married couples, single parents, and children, we had to be flexible in organising meals, lodging, and activities, but the experience was truly

enriching," Narinrak added.

The retreat centred on four key themes: *Family in God's Plan; The Role of Family; The Differences Between Men and Women; and Communication Between Parents and Teens*.

While these topics were profound, real-life testimonies and shared experiences made them relatable and impactful for all attendees.

Prior to the Holy Mass, a Betharam priest provided essential spiritual preparation by addressing the importance of the sacrament of marriage and married life.

His message encouraged everyone to examine their conscience and seek forgiveness through the sacrament of reconciliation, setting a reflective tone for the seminar.

One particularly compelling instance involved a couple from Chiang Mai who had been contemplating divorce. Invited to attend the seminar, they sought a deeper understanding of the sacrament of marriage.

Engaging in an hour-long conversation with Chanwit-Duangta Tharathipkul — a Focolare member from Bangkok with nearly 30 years of marital experience — the couple returned with smiles and renewed understanding.

Ultimately, they chose to move forward together in their married life, embracing the

sacrament with fresh commitment.

"In today's world, families face countless challenges. The question remains: What will hold families together and help them walk according to God's plan of love?" reflected a member of the organising committee.

"In this Jubilee Year 2025, a time of God's grace, we have taken the opportunity to reflect deeply on our roles as family members and the ways we can nurture love and unity in our homes," a participant said.

At the conclusion of the retreat, participants shared a renewed sense of purpose. Reflecting on *Familiaris Consortio*, St John Paul II's apostolic exhortation, they were reminded that the mission of the family is to safeguard, reveal, and communicate love. Inspired by the insights and experiences shared throughout the seminar, participants expressed a deepened commitment to strengthening their family relationships. *Chainarong Monthienvichienchai, LiCAS News*

Korean Church to support undocumented migrant kids' health care

SEOUL: Catholic dioceses across South Korea are joining forces to provide medical support to undocumented migrant children who lack access to adequate healthcare services in various parts of the country.

The initiative is led by the Migrant Pastoral Committee of Seoul Archdiocese, which signed an agreement with the migrant committee of all Catholic dioceses for the purpose recently.

The Medical Expense Support Project for the Healthy Growth and Development of Undocumented Migrant Children was signed during a meeting of the Migrant Pastoral Committee of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea (CBCK) on February 20.

The project, also known as *Wings of Hope*, seeks to build a nationwide support network to offer medical support to the children of undocumented migrant workers aged 0-6 years.

Under the project, a child will receive up to 5 million won (RM15,408) for the treatment of critical medical conditions and up to three million won (RM9,245) to be allocated for pregnancy and childbirth expenses in a hospital.

Initially, the project period is from February to December of this year, and may be extended until 2027.

Migrant families can apply for support through each diocese's migrant committee and receive the benefits once the application is accepted and approved.

Fr John Baptist Yoo Sang-hyeok, head of the Migrant Pastoral Committee of Seoul Archdiocese, said that the project seeks to address vital medical needs of the children of migrants.

"Undocumented migrant children who are in 'the blind spot of welfare' are often not protected from social and physical violence and crime, not to mention educational opportunities, and often do not receive appropriate medical benefits," the priest said.

"This project aims to thoroughly protect the 'lives' of these children, and since one of the most important spirits of the Church is the protection of life, the need for this project is great," he added.

The Church move came about two weeks after a group of South Korean lawmakers proposed a bill requiring medical institutions to register babies born to undocumented foreign nationals in a bid to protect the rights of children. *ucanews.com*



Participants at the Family, Journey of Hope 2025 marriage seminar and retreat in Chiang Mai receive Holy Communion during the concluding Mass. (LiCAS News/Focolare Chiang Mai)

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- Hao Jia Zhuang (Mary apparition) 郝家庄堂
- Terracotta Army 秦始皇兵马俑
- Our Lady Mountain in Huxian 户县【圣母山】
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Be apostles of forgiveness and selfless servants

Celebrating Holy Mass for the Jubilee of Deacons on February 23, Archbishop Rino Fisichella read Pope Francis' homily in which he encourages deacons to be apostles of forgiveness, selfless servants and builders of communion. During the celebration, twenty-three deacons received the sacrament of Holy Orders. Below is the text of the homily prepared by the Holy Father.

The message of today's readings can be summed up in a single word: "gratuity". That is surely a word dear to you as deacons, gathered here for the Jubilee celebration. So, let us reflect on three specific aspects of this fundamental dimension of the Christian life in general and your ministry in particular: forgiveness, selfless service and communion.

First: forgiveness.

The proclamation of forgiveness is an essential part of your ministry as deacons. Indeed, forgiveness is an indispensable element of every ecclesial vocation and a requirement of every human relationship. Jesus points to its necessity

and importance when He says, "Love your enemies" (Lk 6:27). This is certainly true: if we are to grow together and to share in one another's strengths and weaknesses, achievements and failures, we need to be able to forgive and to ask forgiveness, to rebuild relationships and even to choose not to withhold our love from those who hurt or betray us. A world that feels nothing but hatred towards its adversaries is a world without hope and without a future, doomed to endless war, divisions and vendettas. Sadly, this is what we are witnessing today, on many different levels and in all parts of the world. Forgiveness means preparing a welcoming and safe future for us and our communities. Deacons, personally charged with a ministry that carries them to the peripheries of our world, are committed to seeing – and teaching others to see – in everyone, even in those who do us wrong and cause us suffering,

"...we need to be able to forgive and to ask forgiveness, to rebuild relationships and even to choose not to withhold our love from those who hurt or betray us."

a hurting sister or brother, and hence one in greater need than anyone of reconciliation, guidance and help.

Today's first reading speaks of this openness of heart, presenting us with David's loyal and selfless love for Saul, his king but also his persecutor (cf. 1 Sam 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23). We see this again in the exemplary death

of the deacon Stephen, who forgives those who are stoning him (cf. Acts 7:60). Above all, we find it exemplified in Jesus, the model of all *diakonia*, who, in "emptying" Himself to the point of giving His life for us on the cross (cf. Phil 2:7), prays for those who crucify Him and opens the gates of Paradise to the good thief (cf. Lk 23:34, 43).

This brings us to the **second point: selfless service.** The Lord describes it in the Gospel in words that are simple and clear: "Do good and lend, expecting nothing in return" (Lk 6:35). A phrase that is brief, yet evokes the beauty of friendship. First, God's friendship towards us, but also our own friendship. For you as deacons, selfless service is not a secondary aspect of your activity, but an essential dimension of your very being. Indeed, through your ministry, you devote yourselves to being "sculptors" and "painters" of the merciful face of the Father, and witnesses to the mystery of the Triune God.

In many Gospel passages, Jesus speaks of Himself in this light. He does so with

"...selfless service is not a secondary aspect of your activity, but an essential dimension of your very being."



Archbishop Rino Fisichella blesses a deacon during Mass. (Vatican Media)

Philip, in the Upper Room, when, shortly after washing the feet of the Twelve, He says: "Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9). And again, when He institutes the Eucharist, He says: "I am among you as one who serves" (Lk 22:27). Yet even earlier, on the way to Jerusalem, when His disciples had argued among themselves about who was the greatest, He had explained that "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (cf. Mk 10:45).

Brother deacons, the "gratuitous" work you carry out as an expression of your consecration to the charity of Christ thus becomes your primary proclamation of God's word, a source of confidence and joy for those who encounter you. As often as possible, perform it with a smile, without complaining and without seeking recognition, supporting one another, also in your relationships with bishops and priests, "as the expression of a Church committed to growing in the service of the Kingdom by appreciating all the grades of the ordained ministry" (Italian Episcopal Conference, Permanent Deacons in the Church in Italy. Guidelines and Norms, 1993, 55). Through your cooperation and generosity, you will be a bridge linking the altar to the street and the Eucharist to people's daily lives. Charity will be your most beautiful liturgy and the liturgy your humblest service.

Now, we come to the **final point: gratuity as a source of communion.** Giving and expecting nothing in return unites; it creates bonds because it expresses and nurtures a togetherness that has no other

aim but the gift of self and the good of others. St Lawrence, your patron, when asked by his accusers to hand over the treasures of the Church, showed them the poor and said: "These are our treasures!" That is how communion is built: by telling your brothers and sisters by your words, but above all, by your actions, both individually and as a community: "You are important to us;" "We love you;" "We want you to be part of our journey and our life." This is precisely what you do. Those of you who are permanent deacons do so as husbands, fathers and grandparents who, by your service, choose to extend your families to include the needy in all the places where you live.

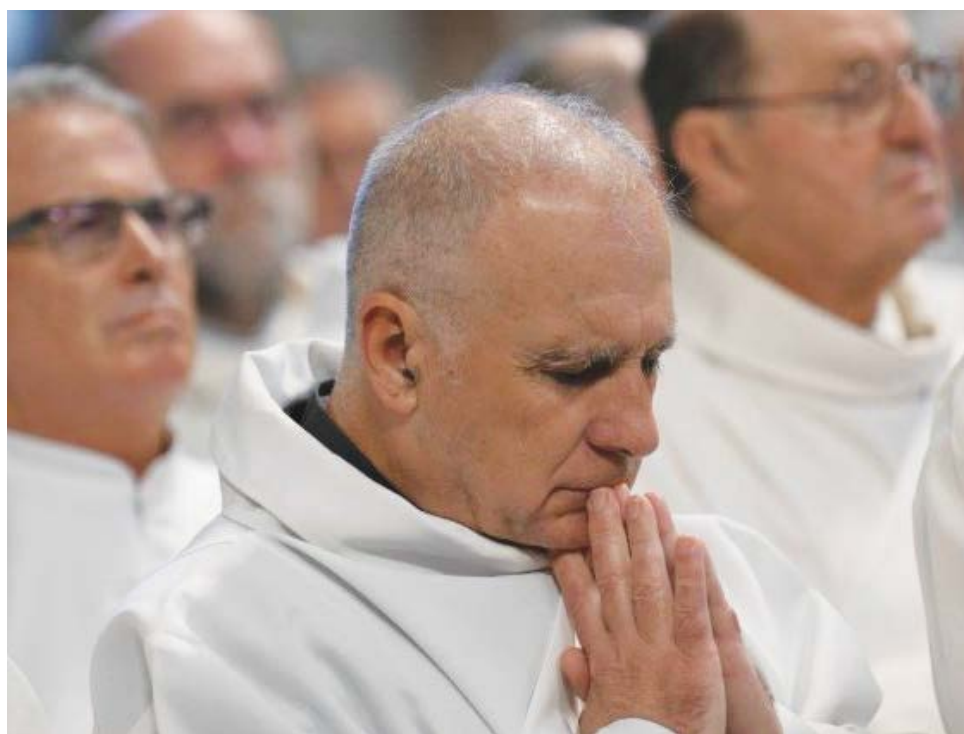
Dear deacons, your mission sets you apart from society only to be re-immersed in it in order to enable it to be an ever more open and welcoming place for everyone. It is one of the finest expressions of a synodal Church, one that "goes forth."

Soon some of you, in receiving the sacrament of Holy Orders, will "descend" the steps of the ministry. I deliberately say "descend," and not "ascend," because being ordained is not an ascent but a descent, whereby we make ourselves small. We lower ourselves and divest ourselves. In the words of St Paul, through service, we leave behind the "earthly man," and put on, in charity, the "man of heaven"

"Giving and expecting nothing in return unites; it creates bonds because it expresses and nurtures a togetherness that has no other aim but the gift of self and the good of others."

(cf. 1 Cor 15:45-49).

Let us all reflect on what we are about to do, even as we entrust ourselves to the Virgin Mary, the handmaid of the Lord, and to St Lawrence, your patron. May they help us to experience every expression of our ministry with a humble and loving heart, and to be, in "gratuity," apostles of forgiveness, selfless servants of our brothers and sisters, and builders of communion. **Exaudi**



Deacons attending Mass for the Jubilee of Deacons at St Peter's Basilica. (Vatican Media)

Reflecting on Lent as a family

Fr Dr John Singarayar SVD

As we enter the sacred season of Lent, we are invited to embark on a pilgrimage — a journey of faith, sacrifice, and hope. This journey is not one we undertake alone; it is a shared endeavour, a family pilgrimage, where we walk together toward the light of Easter. Lent calls us to pause, reflect, and realign our hearts with God's will, and it is in the context of family that this journey takes on its deepest meaning.

Family life, much like Lent, is a pilgrimage filled with both trials and triumphs. There are moments of joy and moments of struggle, times when the path feels clear and times when we wander in the desert. Yet, through it all, God is with us, guiding us, strengthening us, and reminding us of the hope that lies at the heart of our faith. As a family, we are called to support one another, to lift each other up, and to bear witness to the

transformative power of God's love.

One of the most beautiful aspects of Lent is its emphasis on intentionality. It is a time to examine our lives, to let go of what distracts us from God, and to make space for what truly matters. In our families, this might mean setting aside time for prayer, engaging in acts of service, or simply being present to one another in a deeper way. It is in these small, intentional acts that we create a culture of faith and hope within our homes.

Prayer, in particular, is a cornerstone of our Lenten journey. As a family, we are called to pray together, not just for our own needs but for the needs of the world. Whether it is through the Stations of the Cross, the Rosary, or quiet moments of reflection, prayer unites us as a family and draws us closer to God. It reminds us that we are not alone on this journey and that we have a loving Father who walks with us every step of the way.



Almsgiving is another important aspect of our Lenten pilgrimage. As a family, we are called to be generous, not just with our resources but with our time and talents. By involving our children in acts of charity, we teach them the value of giving and the importance of living in solidarity with those in need. These acts of love and service are not just expressions of our faith; they are expressions of hope — a hope that reminds us that we are all connected and that we have the power to make a difference in the lives of others.

Sacrifice, too, plays a central role in our Lenten journey. By giving up something we cherish, we create space for God to work in our lives. But sacrifice is not just about what we give up; it is about what we gain — a deeper sense of purpose, a greater awareness of God's presence, and a renewed commitment to living as disciples of Christ. As a family, we can support one another in these sacrifices, encouraging each other to persevere and reminding one another of the hope that lies ahead.

Finally, Lent is a season of hope. It reminds us that even in the darkest moments, there is always the promise of new life. As a family, we are called to be witnesses of this hope — to live in a way that reflects the joy and peace of the Gospel. By walking this Lenten journey together, we not only grow in faith but also become a beacon of hope for the world.

As we embark on this pilgrimage of hope, let us pray for the grace to be open to God's transforming love. Let us support one another in prayer, sacrifice, and acts of charity. And let us never lose sight of the light that shines at the end of our journey — the light of Christ, who leads us to the joy of Easter.

May this Lenten season be a time of renewal and transformation for your family. May it deepen your love for God and for one another. And may it fill your hearts with the hope that comes from knowing that, no matter what challenges we face, we are never alone — for God is with us, now and always.



(Lightstock)

Approaching Lent with prudence bears spiritual fruit beyond 40 Days

Has this ever happened to you? Without warning, I wake up one morning and it's Ash Wednesday. I search for the Mass times at all the parishes in my area to find one that might work with my schedule. Then, even with a smear of last year's palm branches on my head, I have to remind myself all day: "No snacks. No meat. No snacks. No meat." In small, frantic gaps between my daily tasks, I brainstorm Lenten practices I could take up this year, rejecting them all as either too easy or too hard. By dinner, I haven't settled on one, so I default to giving up chocolate for the next 39 days. I fail by Friday.

I have a hard time with Lent. A chronic overachiever, sometimes I take Lent way too far, assigning myself multiple disciplines and creating rules and requirements that are not necessary. Other years, embarrassed by the shame that I often feel during Lent or overwhelmed with my responsibilities as a mother of young children, I have given myself permission to skip Lent entirely.

Prudence, or the ability to make a good decision in conversation with God, has helped me navigate this sometimes rocky time of year with peace and grace, and transformed this season for me into the time of spiritual growth it is meant to be.

Frustrated by my uncomfortable and often scatterbrained relationship with the season, I decided to take a different approach to Lent a few years ago. By the grace of God, I started thinking about Lent several weeks in advance. Then I invited



God into the conversation as I carefully decided on my Lenten discipline.

The Ignatian practice of discernment helped me in this pursuit. For several days in a row, I paid careful attention to my daily routine. I asked myself again and again, "How can I make more space for God?" I listened for God's response in the form of consolation and desolation. Slowly, I started to notice how often I turned on music as soon as I was alone — getting ready in the morning, driving to school, exercising, and taking care of my home and work in the evenings. It was on constantly, and it didn't bring me the consolation I expected. Instead, it often left me feeling depleted and far from God.

The Scripture and spiritual masters I have read over the years offered a solution by reminding me that God comes to us in silence. That Lent, I decided to give up listening to music when I was alone. It was a discipline that was neither "hard" nor "easy." At that moment in my spiritual life, it was prudent, and because of that, it bore great spiritual fruit.

The year I prudently chose silence was different: For the first time, Lent did not feel uncomfortable or scattered. Certainly, the silence was uncomfortable at first. I missed the company of the music and the way it sparked my emotions and imagination. Yet as Lent continued, the silence — and the presence of God I could feel in it — started

to feel warm and welcoming, strong and steady. Many years later, I still enjoy the silent company of God as I get ready in the morning or wash the dishes in the evening.

So often I have tossed my Lenten disciplines away as soon as the first Alleluia resounds on Easter Sunday. I think that's because when I choose a discipline in haste, it becomes a self-improvement exercise or a race against time. Instead of a spiritual journey closer to the heart of God, Lent becomes a competition with myself, grounded in human willpower alone. Uncomfortable and fruitless, indeed.

But when I take the time to pray for prudence as I discern my Lenten practices, I can find something that is just right for me. I have discovered that a discipline chosen with prudence can bear great spiritual fruit, not just during Lent alone, but long afterward and far into my spiritual life.

This year, I am trying to approach Lent with prudence once again. In the coming weeks, I will be asking myself and God the following questions and paying careful attention to the answers. I invite you to do the same.

- What in my life is getting in the way of making time and space for God?
- How can I remove those obstacles one piece at a time?
- How can I refill that time and space with one tested and true practice that will bring me closer to the heart of God?

❖ Catherine Anne Sullivan, Everyday Ignatian

Don't thank me, thank God



On February 19, the Diocese of Malacca Johore mourned the loss of 84-year-old Fr Benedict Yee Yat Chong, who passed away after suffering a stroke. Just days before his sudden decline, he had celebrated Mass at St Francis Chapel, Graceville, on Feb 7, continuing his lifelong dedication to the priesthood.

When Fr Ben (as he was fondly known) was appointed Chief Exorcist for the Malacca Johore Diocese and head of the diocese's Deliverance and Exorcism Office Ministry by Bishop Bernard Paul on April 1, 2019, he defied the typical image people had of an exorcist. Many envisioned a tall, imposing figure with a deep voice and commanding presence. But when they met him, they were surprised to find a petite, unexpectedly endearing man. With a warm smile, a twinkle in his eye, and a calming presence, he immediately put people at ease. There was no aura of fear or foreboding about him. Instead, Fr Ben was a man who loved to laugh, enjoyed good food, and, above all, had a deep passion for leading others back to Jesus.

Many expected an exorcist to be intense and serious, weighed down by the gravity of confronting evil. But Fr Ben approached his mission with a lightness that came from deep faith, not ignorance. He fully understood the reality of spiritual warfare, yet he never allowed it to overshadow the greater truth of God's power and love.

Fr Ben had a unique gift of making even the most serious matters feel both light and profound. Whether casting out

spirits or simply sharing a meal, his message remained constant: Keep your eyes on Jesus — that's all that truly matters. He often reminded others that fear had no place when you truly knew who was in control.

Despite his pivotal role in the deliverance ministry, Fr Ben never sought attention for himself. He never made exorcisms about power, mysticism, or spectacle; for him, it was always about

drawing people closer to God. The true victory, in his eyes, was not in casting out demons but in helping individuals rediscover their faith. Fr Ben believed that spiritual oppression was best overcome not only through prayers of deliverance but through a life fully surrendered to Christ.

His humility shone through in everything he did. Fr Ben never acted as though he possessed some special power; instead, he saw himself as a humble

instrument — a servant guiding others back to Jesus. When people thanked him, he would always respond with a gentle smile, saying, "Don't thank me, thank God."

Even in the darkest moments, Fr Ben found joy, trusting that light would always triumph. His laughter was contagious, and his joy unshakeable. He cherished simple pleasures — good food, good company, and sharing the love of Christ. He saw God's presence in the everyday: in a shared meal, a warm conversation, or a heartfelt prayer.

And perhaps that's what made him so unforgettable: his humility, his laughter, his love for good food — each of these was a reflection of his greatest love, Jesus Christ. His life served as a powerful reminder that faith should not be burdened by fear but uplifted by joy, and that, in the end, God's love will always triumph over darkness.

Bishop Bernard, during the funeral Mass on Feb 21, spoke with deep reverence about Fr Ben's remarkable 54 years of service. "He was a devoted priest, teacher, and shepherd," Bishop Bernard reflected. "Fr Benedict gave so much of himself, touching countless souls and serving God with unwavering commitment. He was a good and faithful servant until the very end. Over the years, he had faced many 'near-death experiences,' always emerging stronger. But this time, the Lord he loved called him home, saying, 'Cukup! Time to come home.' And so, one chapter of his life closes, and he enters into the eternal embrace of God. It is time for Fr Benedict Yee to go home to the Lord."



He dedicated his life to serving God and His people

Born on September 1, 1940, Fr Benedict Yee was the fifth of eleven children and received his early education at the Catholic High School in Singapore.

Answering the call to the priesthood, Fr Ben pursued seminary formation and was ordained a priest on February 23, 1971. He began his ministry during a time of significant change in the Catholic Church following the Second Vatican Council. His first pastoral assignment was as Assistant Priest at the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Johor Bahru, where he served from 1971 to 1975. During this time, Fr Ben was particularly dedicated to pastoral outreach among the Chinese-speaking faithful.

In 1975, he was appointed to the Church of St Mary in Ayer Salak, Melaka, where he took on the responsibilities of parish

administration and pastoral work. The following year, he was granted study leave by the then bishop of Malacca Johore diocese, Bishop James Chan to pursue further studies at Fordham University, USA. Specialising in Religion and Religious Education (Adult Education), Fr. Ben returned to Malaysia in 1977 with new ideas and approaches to catechetics and pastoral ministry.

In 1978, Fr Ben became the Director of the Diocesan Formation House in Plentong, where he mentored seminarians and nurtured future vocations. His ministry faced a serious setback in 1980 when he was involved in a life-threatening motor accident, requiring extensive sick leave and rehabilitation. However, his faith and perseverance saw him return to active ministry, continuing to serve with devotion.



Fluent in English, Mandarin, Teochew, and Cantonese, Fr Ben was known for his remarkable pastoral versatility, particularly in his ministry to Chinese-speaking Catholics. He played a crucial role in their religious education, overseeing the production of catechetical materials and leading Life in the Spirit Seminars (LSS) and

retreats.

Fr Ben's steadfast faith and dedication to his calling were evident throughout his life. Despite personal challenges, he remained a steadfast servant of God, dedicating his life to the Church and its mission. His legacy of faith, love, and commitment to service will be remembered by all who knew him.

Meeting Jesus on the rocks

When a friend invited me to rock climb, I was hesitant at first. It was years since I last did so, and I was not sure if my 40-year-old body was nimble enough to make the climb all the way to the top. Still, I felt the Lord inviting me to yet another adventure with Him, this time on the rocks. So, I went for it, and not only enjoyed it thoroughly, but I learnt many valuable lessons about life and the spiritual journey through it.



Word Made Fresh

NICHOLAS LYE

1. Firm Foundation

"So, then, anyone who hears these words of mine and acts accordingly is like a wise man, who built his house on rock." (Matthew 7:24)

In my first few climbs, even though I had chosen the easier routes for beginners, I realised that my forearms started to ache very quickly. I gradually realised that I was using my arms to pull myself up rather than also using my legs to push myself up. It was only when I started consciously trying to get a good foothold to push myself upwards did I strain my arms less and eventually found myself getting further ahead more easily.

Similarly in life, we may often use our arms to grab what we want, or pull ourselves towards what we think is best. This can take the form of worldly goals or achievements that we strive for, or even prayers that we wish God to answer in the way that we think best. Yet this can tire us easily, especially from all the frustration and anxiety of not getting what we want.

But when we eventually learn to rely more on the Rock (Christ) whom we are invited to stand on, and establish a secure footing and foundation on Him who lifts us

up. The Lord can actually lead us to places that give us more life and joy, which takes up 'less energy' once we let Him provide for us and support us in our journey forward.

2. Being More Than Achieving

"Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire." (St Catherine of Siena)

After a few climbs, I decided to challenge myself to more difficult routes, which involved more unusual rock shapes. There was

one particular route where I kept falling halfway. It was frustrating at first, but after some time, I decided that my goal was not to climb to the top, but just have fun trying out the path and learning from the process. Eventually, I enjoyed these routes even more, not because I could get to the top, but because I was able to creatively explore different ways of holding on to the rocks, and discover more about my body and how to better let it serve me in making my way up.

Through this, I realised that life is not always about getting to the top. Sometimes the greater joy and goal is to simply learn and grow from the process and even from the 'mistakes', and gradually discover our true value and worth from within, our true gifts and charisms that we have already been blessed with, and simply enjoy each moment living our true and authentic self.

In my case, it was only after letting go of the need to be a priest or to figure out where my life was heading exactly, that I gradually began to appreciate the unique person God created me to be, and enjoy each moment being more of myself, and being a creative evangelist for the Lord

through my love for creativity and His people.

3. Choose What's Available

Take a step, step again

It is all that I can do

The next right thing

I won't look too far ahead

It's too much for me to take
But break it down to this next breath

This next step

This next choice is one that I can make (The Next Right Thing, Frozen 2)

Over time, I realised that rock climbing mirrors making choices in life. We do not always get rocks (choices) placed in the way that we want, but we can observe what is available, and choose one that seems most fitting. Even if we find that the choice made does not give a good grip, that choice is not wasted, but simply teaches us what we did not know, and helps us make better choices moving forward.

Similarly in my own journey, after choosing to live life as a lay missionary, I was initially lost and clueless as to where to go from here. I did actually try to be a corporate coach, thinking that God wanted me to serve in the marketplace. But when it did not bring me as much life as I thought it would, I changed paths, and started responding to invitations to run retreats or provide spiritual direction to individuals, and even tried running my own workshops which someone suggested to me. Gradually, through the people and opportunities that God placed in my path, I now have found a path that truly brings me fuller life and joy, even if I still have no clear picture of what exactly is ahead for me.



But as I learnt from this rock-climbing adventure, if we do not try, we shall never know. What it takes is listening to and depending on the Lord as our Rock, enjoying the process of self-discovery, and choosing the things God makes available in our lives. Through meeting Jesus on the rocks, not only shall He support and guide us on the journey forward, He shall eventually lead us on the unique path that was specifically meant for us, one that does not require us to try too hard to receive the deeper life and joy that we were chosen to receive.

Nicholas Lye is a lay missionary and creative evangelist who loves to use creativity and various art forms to share the faith and help people encounter God's truths in a fun and meaningful way.

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

All geared up to celebrate the Jubilee Year of Hope

A Jubilee Year in the Catholic Church comes every 25 years. It is a time for renewal, forgiveness and celebration, making it one of the most significant events in the Catholic Church. We are now in the Jubilee Year of Hope that began on Christmas Eve, December 24, 2024 and will end on the Feast of the Epiphany on Jan 6, 2026.

The beginning of awareness

The Jubilee Year of Hope began in a subtle and unexpected way for me, when someone asked in a chat group about the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy that took place in 2015. She had read about that particular jubilee year in social media and thought that the Catholic Church was celebrating the same jubilee in 2025. As people say about the internet, whatever posted in social media has a digital footprint and will remain in cyberspace forever. So, when the person in the chat group had confused the two jubilee years, I read up about the Jubilee Year of Hope and clarified to the misinformed person. That was how awareness about the Jubilee Year began in me.

The opportunity to welcome pilgrims

In the Jubilee Year, there are certain



Faithfully Speaking

JULIE LIM SEET YIN

parishes that have been designated as pilgrimage centres. Catholics may visit these centres to receive a plenary indulgence.

The Cathedral of St John the Evangelist, which I belong to, is a designated pilgrimage centre in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur. In preparation to welcome pilgrims from far and near, a Jubilee Committee has been set-up to ensure that pilgrims are attended to when they visit the cathedral.

What an opportunity it is to be able to provide hospitality to pilgrims from other parishes and dioceses.

Whilst the cathedral is geared up to receive pilgrims, there are also ministries and groups in the cathedral who are planning their own pilgrimages to other pilgrimage centres, giving these centres in turn, the opportunity to welcome us as pilgrims. It is an exchange of hospitality and kindness that comes with celebrating the Jubilee Year.

Celebrating the Jubilee Year as a BEC

At the time of writing, my BEC St Mary is organising a pilgrimage on March 8 to the Church of St Mary in Ayer Salak, Melaka, which is a designated pilgrimage centre in the Diocese of Malacca Johore. We thought it would be meaningful to kick off

the season of Lent by going on pilgrimage to a parish with the same name as our BEC.

Whilst at the parish, we are planning to do the Way of the Cross on The Path of Repentance, pray the Rosary and do The Path of Purification.

Perhaps my BEC should organise another pilgrimage to St Mary's Cathedral in Sandakan, Sabah which is also a designated pilgrimage centre in this Jubilee Year.

My personal Jubilee Year mission

When I was looking at the list of pilgrimage centres in Malaysia and Singapore, I was inspired to make pilgrimages to the 12 centres in Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore. Since a Jubilee Year comes once every 25 years, might as well do something memorable like completing these pilgrimages to remember the Jubilee Year of Hope.

There are three pilgrimage centres each in the Diocese of Penang and Diocese of Malacca-Johor, five centres in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, and one centre in the Archdiocese of Singapore.

Over in East Malaysia there are 25 pilgrimage centres spread out across six dioceses in Sabah and Sarawak. Many of these centres are in locations that are not easily accessible by public transport, thus I aborted my idea to visit all 25 centres in East Malaysia.

Stamping the Pilgrim Passport

One of the unique features of the Jubilee Year of Hope is that pilgrims may obtain a pilgrim passport and get it stamped at pilgrimage centres when they make their pilgrimage there.

I thought that the Pilgrim Passport is a brilliant, novel idea to inspire Catholics to go on pilgrimage. Countries like Japan and Taiwan have a similar concept where stamps of various designs are available at train stations and tourist spots for tourists to stamp in their notebook or postcard as a souvenir. As an avid traveller and inspired by the Pilgrim Passport, I may bring my expired Malaysian passport and stamp the empty pages with stamps from the pilgrimage centres.

We have already entered into the third month of the Jubilee Year of Hope, with nine more months to plan what we are going to do in this Jubilee Year. Seize the opportunity that comes once every 25 years. It is going to be an exciting journey with reflections and lessons to ponder along the way.

Julie Lim Seet Yin believes that a satisfied life measured by one's heart, mind and soul is better than a successful life measured by worldly yardsticks.

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



Fr Ron Rolheiser

Love and faith as fidelity

Several years ago, a friend of mine made a very unromantic type of marriage proposal to his fiancé. He was in his mid-forties and had suffered several disillusioning heartbreaks, some of which, by his own admission, were his fault, the result of feelings shifting unexpectedly on his part. Now, in mid-life, struggling not to be disillusioned about love and romance, he met a woman whom he much respected, much admired, and with whom he felt he would like to build a life. But, unsure of himself, he was humble in his proposal.

In essence, this was his proposal: I'd like to ask you to marry me but I need to put my cards on the table. I don't pretend to know what love means. There was a time in my life when I thought I did, but I've seen my own feelings and the feelings of others shift too often in ways that have made me lose confidence in my understanding of love. So, I'll be honest, I can't promise that I will always feel in love with you. But I can promise that I'll always be faithful, that I'll always treat you with respect, that I'll always do everything in my power to be there for you to help further your own dreams, and that I'll always be an honest partner in trying to build a life together. I can't guarantee how I will al-

ways feel, but I can promise that I won't betray you in infidelity.

That's not exactly the type of marriage proposal we see in our romantic movies and novels, predicated as they mostly are on the naïve belief that the passion and excitement we initially experience when we fall in love will remain that way forever. His was a mature proposal, one that didn't naively promise something he couldn't deliver.

Moreover, beyond pointing us toward a more mature understanding of love, this is also a good image for how faith works. Faith too, in the end, is more about fidelity in our actions than it is about fervour in our feelings. Here's an example.

When I was in the seminary, a classmate of mine set off one summer to make a thirty-day retreat. His aim was to try to acquire a faith that he would feel with more fervour, which would more effectively warm his heart. He suffered from what he described as a "stoic" faith, a gut-sense of God's reality and love, but one which didn't much translate into warm feelings of security about God's existence and love. By his own admission, he lacked effectivity, fire, emotion, and warmth about his faith and he went off in search of that.

He returned from the retreat still stoic, though changed nonetheless: "I never got what I asked for," he said, "but I got something else. I learned to accept that my faith might always be stoic, and I learned too that this is okay. I don't necessarily have to have warm and imaginative feelings about my faith. I don't need to be full of emotion and fire. I only need to be faithful in my actions, to not betray what I believe in. Faith for me now means that I need to live my life in charity, respect, patience, chastity, and generosity. I just need to do it; I don't need to always feel it."

Faith and love are too easily identified with emotional feelings, passion, fervour, affectivity, and romantic fire. And those feelings are part of love's mystery, a part we are meant to embrace and enjoy. But, wonderful as these feelings can be, they are, as experience shows, fragile and ephemeral. Our world can change in fifteen seconds because we can fall in or out of love in that time. Passionate and romantic feelings are part of love and faith, though not the deepest part, and not a part over which we have much emotional control.

Thus, unromantic though it was, I like the stoic approach that was expressed in

the marriage proposal of my friend, particularly as it applies to faith. For some of us, faith will never be, other than for short periods of time, something that fires our emotions and fills us with warmth. We know how ephemeral feelings can be.

Like my colleague with the "stoic" faith, some of us might have to settle for a faith that says to God, to others, and to ourselves: I can't guarantee how I will feel on any given day. I can't promise I will always have emotional passion about my faith, but I can promise I'll always be faithful, I'll always act with respect, and I will always do everything in my power, as far as my human weakness allows, to help others and God.

Love and faith are shown more in fidelity than in feelings. We can't guarantee how we will always feel, but we can live in the firm resolve to never betray what we believe in!

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

Hope does not disappoint!

As I write this, the Holy Father, Pope Francis is seriously ill in hospital and the focus of most Catholics is on his wellbeing and health. There has been also a strong positive response by many non-Catholics who might not share his belief but have admired and been touched by his down-to-earth humility and love for the poor and marginalised. His bridge-building openness to people of different faiths and cultures has touched many. His travels to our part of the world recently have made him more visible to us in the Asian context, helped by the fact that the media have recognised him as truly newsworthy.

Hence, it was shocking to find a Catholic commentator sensationally stating he had a mere 72 hours left and the fact that this was shared again by someone I know on Facebook incensed me. I did not mince my words when I commented that we should let God be God! For me, anyone trying to put exact times on a person's life was usurping God's role and playing 'god'! I have seen people who have been given days to live by doctors go on for years while the reverse is also true – people who seem healthy suddenly fade away.

My response, while swift and strong, stayed with me that day. As I reflected on it in prayer, I realised it came from a place of great love and admiration for Pope Francis. I am unashamedly one of his admirers who hopes that he might continue his mission on earth, but respecting God's will in this. While I also appreciate that we may not agree with him in all things, a sense of respect for the office of the successor of Peter is surely the least we can expect of Catholics. Some nasty comments from purported Catholics in the comments in



As I was Contemplating

FR GERARD THERAVIAM

social media rile me. Pope Francis has bravely allowed those who have disagreed with him to have their say without silencing them, as has been done by some of his predecessors. Surely, we can have our different opinions and agree to disagree, but when we affix obnoxious labels on people we disagree with, we really have lost it! We all need to distinguish between issues and persons! If indeed we have nothing nice to say

about persons, then the most loving thing would be to shut up!

Coming back to the questions of Life and Dying, the reality of Life is that Death is a part of it too. The Christian is invited to welcome death as the doorway to heaven, rather than despairing. The death and resurrection of Jesus is the heart of our faith and the basis of our hope. In the words of Pope Francis himself in *Spes Non Confundit* the bull concerning the Jubilee Year of Hope 2025:

"I believe in life everlasting". We, however, by virtue of the hope in which we were saved, can view the passage of time with the certainty that the history of humanity and our own individual history are not doomed to a dead end or a dark abyss, but directed to an encounter with the Lord of glory. As a result, we live our lives in expectation of His return and in the hope of living forever in Him. In this spirit, we make our own the heartfelt prayer of the first Christians with which sacred Scripture ends: "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20). (SNC19)

Thus, Death, whether that of myself or anyone else, is not something that we should be unduly worried about. Of course,



(Vatican Media)

we will indeed miss the earthly presence of the ones we have loved. As for ourselves, we may feel as if we haven't finished all that we intended. Yet, ultimately, Life is God's gift! As Job says, the Lord gives and the Lord takes back! When it is our time to return, we do so without despair but instead, hope in the Risen Lord who leads us to our eternal home with Him. Therefore, Hope does not disappoint. Trusting in God, we live Life to its fullest now, with the certainty of Hope in the Risen Life to come.

In the words of Pope Francis: "What, then, will become of us after death? With Jesus, beyond this threshold we will find eternal life, consisting in full communion with God as we forever contemplate and share in His infinite love. All that we now experience in hope, we shall then see in reality." (SNC21)

Yet, before Death comes a-calling, the reality is that we might have to undergo suffering in our illnesses and infirmities. Even in these circumstances, we need to

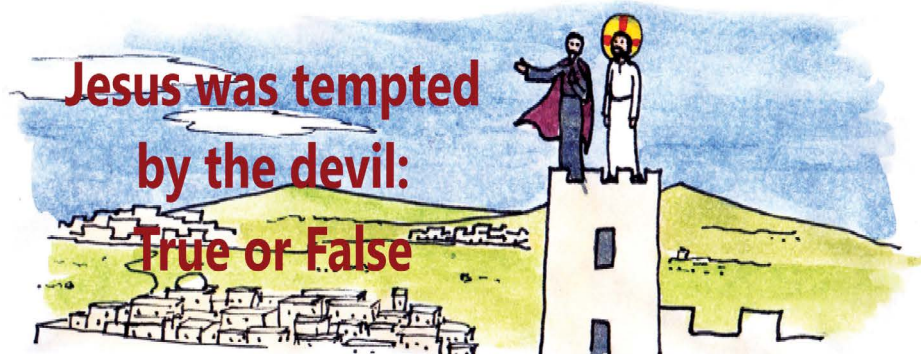
trust and hope in God who decides our length of days here. "We boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope" (Romans 5:3-4). Indeed, whatever our circumstances, God continues to work in and through us, making us a better, hopeful version of ourselves!

"Hope does not disappoint, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Rom 5: 1-2, 5)

In the love your Spirit pours into our heart, we entrust Pope Francis and all who suffer to You, Heavenly Father – confident and hopeful in Your Will, and Your mercy and compassion that the Lord Jesus, Your Son shows us. Amen

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



How well do you know the story from today's Gospel reading?

1. Jesus went to the desert and didn't eat anything for 40 days. True or False?
2. Jesus was never tempted by the devil. True or False?
3. Jesus wasn't hungry, even after 40 days with no food. True or False?
4. The devil said that all the kingdoms of the world belonged to him. True or False?
5. Jesus said that He would only worship the devil if he gave Him all the power first. True or False?
6. Jesus wouldn't throw Himself off the Temple because He said it was "putting God to the test." True or False?
7. The devil kept bothering Jesus, even when he ran out of things to tempt him about. True or False?

Answers: 1. True 2. False 3. False 4. True 5. False 6. True 7. False



Luke 4:1-13

Jesus spent 40 days in the desert preparing for His work. During Lent we spend 40 days getting ready to celebrate Jesus' death and resurrection.

Can you find your way into the desert to be with Jesus?

The Temptation of Jesus
Colour the picture



Dear children,

Lent is the special time when we prepare for the celebration of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection.

We get our souls ready by praying, fasting and almsgiving.

Prayer is talking with God. We need to talk with God even

more than we need to talk to our family and friends.

Lent is a good time to get into the habit of talking with God every day.

Fasting is eating less than you normally would.

It's a good idea to give up a little something you like for Lent. Giving things up

helps us remember we need God, not just food.

Almsgiving means giving to those who are in need.

It helps us to be generous like God. Maybe you have a bit of money you can give to the poor or to the Church.

Love
Aunty Eliz



Dealing with harassment

Priyanka Bernadine

BUKIT MERTAJAM: The Saint Anne Youths (STAY), from the Basilica of St Anne, organised a talk on *Dealing with Harassment* recently. The primary objective of this event was to enlighten young individuals about the latest legislation related to harassment and to equip them with the necessary knowledge regarding their rights and protections against all forms of harassment.

Deacon Dave Kameron, the Spiritual Advisor of STAY, recognising the importance of raising awareness and addressing concerns regarding harassment, supported the youths in organising the talk. Deacon Dave emphasised that this initiative marks the beginning of a series of discussions aimed at tackling issues that matter most in the daily lives of young people. STAY will invite speakers who can share their expertise and guide the youths effectively on a variety of topics.

Lawyer Christopher Kushi, who presented the talk, explained that with the coming into force of the Anti-Sexual Harassment Act 2022 (ASHA 2022), the legal definition of what constitutes sexual harassment is defined as such; "sexual harassment" means any unwanted conduct of a sexual nature, in any form, whether verbal, non-verbal, visual, gestural or physical, directed at a person which is reasonably offensive or humiliating or is a threat to his well-being". The ASHA 2022 provides redress for persons who have been sexually harassed and establishes the Tribunal for Anti-Sexual Harassment under the Ministry of Woman, Family and Community Development.

The criminalisation of 'Stalking' whether physical or online, is another step in protecting individuals from such harmful behaviour. Under Section 507A of the Penal Code, stalking is defined as "whoever repeatedly by any act of harassment, intending to cause, or knowing or ought to know that the act is likely to cause distress, fear or alarm to any person of the person's safety". This includes following or tracking, communicating or attempting to communicate, loitering at the place of residence or business, giving or sending anything. Here, repeatedly shall refer to at least two occasions to constitute stalking.

Also addressed were the various forms of cyber-bullying that occur via internet messaging platforms. Types of cyber-bullying include cyber trolling, doxing, cyber-stalking,

flaming, exclusion and impersonation. Notably, Malaysia faces an alarming rate of 10 cyber-bullying cases daily as the government prepares to introduce the Online Safety Bill.

Highlighted also were the various forms of workplace harassment, which include personal harassment, physical harassment, verbal harassment, psychological harassment, power harassment, and online harassment.

Samantha San, STAY youth leader, now feels more prepared to deal with harassment cases as she is aware of the elements of harassment. According to Samantha, "In school, we don't really learn about harassment in detail, and some of us are afraid to speak up about this and ask questions." As one of the leaders, she now has the courage to look out for the youths. Another youth attendee also spoke about a friend who was facing a form of harassment and now, this attendee understands better and is ready to advise. Attendees gained a deeper understanding of the legal frameworks to safeguard them in both physical and digital spaces. They now understand how to recognise, respond and report harassment, fostering a safer working environment.

Youths who feel they are victims of harassment can seek advice and assistance by reaching out to the Professional Standards Office (PSO), Diocese of Penang. The PSO provides support and guidance to those in need, ensuring that concerns are addressed promptly and effectively.



(Freepik/Storyset)



The Malaysian Catholic Youth Day (MCYD) is the first national assembly of young Malaysian Catholics.

Who

Delegates are selected individuals aged 18 and above, representing young Catholics from across Malaysia, including urban, suburban, and rural parishes and communities. The assembly is a collective effort of Malaysia's young Catholics, guided by the Malaysian Catholic Youth Ministers Committee (MCYMC) and the Bishop for Young People, Archbishop Simon Poh.

When and Where

The assembly will take place from Mar 31 to Apr 6, 2025 in the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu with delegates being hosted at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart (KK), Church of the Holy Nativity (Terawi), Church of Stella Maris (Tanjung Aru), Church of St Thomas Moreh (Kepayan), Church of Mary Immaculate (Bukit Padang), Church of St Paul (Dontozidan) and Church of St Michael (Penampang).

How

- Preparation for the assembly began in 2023 with the MCYMC Initiatives, where each diocesan youth office implemented a mission or initiative in their respective dioceses to reach out to young people who were 'distant from the Church.' These initiatives aimed to amplify the voices of young people on the 'peripheries,' listen to their concerns, and ensure their needs were integrated into the MCYD.

- Using the Synod Framework and Conversations in the Spirit, MCYD delegates will have the opportunity to share and reflect on their joys, struggles, and personal encounters with Christ as young people, while also listening to one another's experiences.

- Through these exchanges, and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we aim to deepen our understanding of the needs and realities of young people, learning from their experiences to better serve them.

- Throughout MCYD, a Synthesis Team will be compiling the stories and testimonies shared, creating a comprehensive report that reflects the 'Joys and Blessings,' 'Anxieties and Struggles,' and 'Hopes and Aspirations' of young Malaysian Catholics.

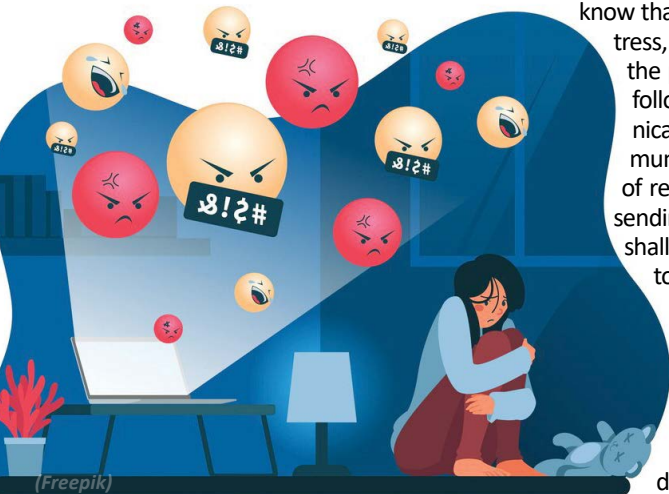
- By combining the findings from the MCYMC Initiatives and the Synthesis Report of MCYD, we hope to illuminate the path forward in better understanding and addressing the needs and realities of young people.

THE EVENTS:

Listening and Interpreting our Journey Assembly and Festival Youth Assembly.

- The first part of MCYD (Apr 1-2), includes the Conversations in the Spirit (CIS) in small groups and Sharing from the CIS in the large group.

- The second part of MCYD (Apr 3-5), includes the Youth Festivals in different areas of sports, music and vocations, activities with Bishops, a cultural night, different sharings, the call to Youth Ministry, a presentation on the Synod on Synodality and the presentation of the Synthesis Report.



(Freepik)

WYD Seoul 2027 LOC Blesses NEW SPACE

SEOUL: Bishop Paul Lee Kyung-sang, General Coordinator of World Youth Day Seoul 2027 with the Local Organising Committee (LOC), blessed the new space for the WYD Seoul 2027 on February 24. It is located next to the Myeongdong Cathedral of the Archdiocese of Seoul and is currently used as a spiritual center for confession and catechesis. The WYD office will be on the 4th floor, while the

5th and 6th floors will be used as spaces for young people.

Back in Apr 13, 2024, Bishop Paul blessed the newly inaugurated workplace, designed to resemble a lounge, aims to provide young people with a relaxed and comfortable environment to gather, socialize, and exchange ideas about the upcoming World Youth Day (WYD) Seoul 2027. Located strategically within the Archdiocese of Seoul main office building, the workplace serves as the operational hub for the LOC's planning and coordination efforts. The office also boasts designated spaces tailored for meetings and individual offices tailored to accommodate the diverse needs of LOC staff members, ensuring optimal functionality and efficiency in their respective roles.

During the ceremony, Bishop Lee ad-



Bishop Paul Lee Kyung-sang blessing the van.

dressed the participants, expressing his sentiments: "As Paul the Apostle said, let us collectively recognise the significance of our individual roles and responsibilities within the one body of Christ, and work diligently together in preparing for the forthcoming World Youth Day." Catholic Korea



The new WYD office.

PILGRIMS OF HOPE

OLL Youth Rally

KLANG: The Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, hosted the annual OLL Youth Rally 2025 from February 7-9, bringing together young Catholics from various dioceses and parishes, under the theme *Pilgrims of Hope*. The event aimed to provide guidance on faith, resilience, and hope in contemporary society.

This year, the youth rally was in collaboration with ASAYO, the office of the Single Adult and Youth of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.

The event featured two speakers, Fr Desmond Jansen and Fr Stanley Antoni from the Diocese of Penang, who delivered impactful sessions and addressed various aspects of faith and perseverance. Their sessions were tailored in a way that made it easy to keep youths engaged. Some sessions even commenced with short games to lighten the atmosphere. These sessions provided insights into navigating spiritual challenges and strengthening personal commitment to faith.

The weekend was filled with dynamic activities, including praise and worship sessions, games, skits, and group reflections. These included team-building activities like icebreakers and games by ASAYO that encouraged cooperation and interaction

among participants. These activities were designed not only for entertainment but also to foster teamwork, creativity, and personal reflection. Participants engaged in reflections and interactive sessions aimed at fostering dialogue and encouraging personal spiritual growth. The skits, performed by the youth, while funny, to keep participants engaged, also depicted real life struggles and triumphs in faith, making the lessons relatable and impactful.

A Religious Dialogue was conducted by Sr Mary Antoinette from the Little Sisters of the Poor, focusing on religious life and the role of service within the faith community. Attendees had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the significance of religious vocations in modern times. Sr Mary Antoinette shared her personal journey, providing valuable insights into the sacrifices and rewards of dedicating one's life to religious service. This session encouraged young Catholics to reflect on their own calling and the various ways they could contribute to their faith communities.

Participants were also given a chance to buy T-shirts designed by the youth themselves to reflect the theme "Pilgrims of Hope," featuring an inspiring logo and vibrant colours that symbolised faith and uni-

ty. Wearing these T-shirts fostered a sense of belonging among attendees, serving as a lasting reminder of the rally's message.

As the weekend ended, participants gathered for a deeply moving Adoration led by Fr Desmond Jansen. This was followed by the Novena and 6.00pm evening Mass, celebrated by parish priest, Fr Gregory Chan, and assistant parish priest, Fr Gana Selvam Berentis, along with Fr Desmond. The Eucharistic celebration served as a fitting conclusion, filling hearts with gratitude and a renewed sense of purpose.

As the rally came to an end, many attendees expressed their gratitude for the experience, highlighting the friendships formed, the knowledge gained, and the inspiration received. Plans for future youth events were already being discussed, ensuring that the momentum of faith and fellowship continues beyond the rally weekend.

The OLL Youth Rally 2025 proved to be a transformative experience, empowering young Catholics to live out their Faith courageously and to continue their journey as true Pilgrims of Hope. As the echoes of praise and joy faded, one message remained clear. – Hope is alive, and shines brightly in the hearts of the youth. **Clarissa Maria Fernandez**

Participating in the OLL youth rally this year was an amazing experience. The whole flow of the event was great. I made a lot of new friends from different parishes too. The games organised by Asayo were super fun. The emcees from the rally did an amazing job interacting with all the participants. At the same time, I felt my relationship with God grow closer through the CT confession and adoration on the last day of the rally. Truly a fun filled event. Thank you OLLYM and Asayokl. **Cris Jonathan**

The Youth Rally 2025 was an unforgettable and memorable event. The praise and worship touched my heart. The speakers and youth delivered spiritual and meaningful messages to the audience. I really enjoyed the games. Overall, the rally created a positive spirituality that truly empowered the youth. **Velvina Victor**

Attending the youth rally was an incredibly uplifting and transformative experience. I felt a deep sense of spiritual renewal, surrounded by like-minded individuals who shared the same faith and passion. The atmosphere was filled with joy, worship, and unity, reminding me of the beauty of fellowship in Christ. Each message and testimony encouraged me to grow deeper in my faith and trust in God's plan.

I was especially grateful to be part of the committee, which allowed me to serve meaningfully and witness the impact of our efforts. A highlight of the event was Asayo, who entertained us with fun games and delivered powerful spiritual talks about God. Their presence brought excitement and encouragement to everyone.

I was also thankful to participate in one of the skits. It was an amazing experience to share meaningful messages through drama and see the audience engaged. Beyond that, I enjoyed all the performances, especially praise and worship, which deeply moved me and strengthened my connection with God.

Overall, the youth rally was a blessing. I left feeling renewed, motivated, and grateful for the experience, the people, and the opportunity to serve and grow in faith. **Andrea Pinto**



RCC PARISH LAUNCHES YOUTH-LED RECYCLING PROGRAMME FOR A GREENER FUTURE

AYER ITAM, Penang: Risen Christ Church (RCC) has officially launched a recycling programme to support environmental protection. Spearheaded by the youth, this initiative is inspired by Pope Francis' call in *Laudato Si'* to care for our Common Home.

The programme, which began last year, has already diverted 1,186.5 kg of waste from landfills, including 408 kg of plastic, 667 kg of paper, and 111.5 kg of metal.

At the programme's launch on February 15, RCC released a video explaining the details of the initiative, how it works, and how people can get involved. Youth leaders and volunteers shared their dedication to reducing waste and fostering a culture

of recycling. In addition to maintaining a recycling station, they aim to introduce more eco-friendly projects in the future.

The youth are encouraging the community to actively participate by sorting and dropping off recyclables at designated collection points. They believe that even small actions can lead to a significant impact.

Through this initiative, RCC is demonstrating that faith and environmental stewardship go hand in hand. With continued effort, they hope to build a greener future for Ayer Itam and beyond. **Isaac Kishen Vincent**

A video can be viewed at: <https://bit.ly/438L3mx>



Pope paves the way for new saints

VATICAN: In a recent audience with Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin and Archbishop Edgar Peña Parra, Substitute for General Affairs, Pope Francis authorised the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints to promulgate several decrees regarding those on the path to sainthood.

The Holy Father acknowledged the "offering of life" of two Servants of God: Fr Emil Joseph Kapaun, a US Army chaplain who served in World War II and the Korean War, and Italian layman, Salvo D'Acquisto.

The "offering of life" category is a unique cause introduced by Pope Francis in 2017, distinct from martyrdom and heroic virtue. This new cause recognises Christians who, by closely following the example of Jesus, voluntarily and freely offer their lives for others and persevere in this act of love unto death.

With the decrees on "offering of life" and heroic virtue, both Fr Kapaun and D'Acquisto have been declared Venerable. The next step in their canonisation process is Beatification, which requires the confirmation of a miracle.

Fr Emil Kapaun

Born on April 20, 1916, in Kansas, Fr Emil Joseph Kapaun served as a chaplain during World War II, and later in Korea. He was captured by enemy forces during the Korean War and died in the Pyoktong Prison Camp. Ordained a priest in 1940, he joined the US Army Chaplain Corps in 1944 and continued to minister to fellow prisoners during his captivity.



Salvo D'Acquisto

The Holy Father also recognised the offering of life of Salvo D'Acquisto, a lay faithful born in Naples on Oct 15, 1920. He died on Sept 23, 1943, in Palidoro, Italy, after sacrificing his life to protect others. D'Acquisto was a member of the Italian Carabinieri during World War II.



In addition to these "offerings of life," Pope Francis recognised the heroic virtues of three other Servants of God:

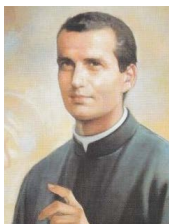
Michele Maura

Montaner, diocesan priest and founder of the Congregación de las Hermanas Celadoras del Culto Eucarístico, born on Sept 6, 1843, in Palma de Mallorca, Spain, and died there on Sept 19, 1915.



Didaco Bessi

diocesan priest and founder of the Congregation of the Dominican Sisters of Saint Mary of the Rosary, born on Feb 5, 1856, in Iolo, Italy, and died there on May 25, 1919.



Cunegonda Siwiec, lay faithful, born on May 28, 1876, in Stryżawa-Siwówka, Poland, and died on June 27, 1955.



Furthermore, the Pope approved the favourable votes from the Ordinary Session of the Cardinals and Bishops of the Dicastery for the canonisation of two Blessed:

Blessed Jose Giuseppe Gregorio Hernández Cisneros

lay faithful, born on Oct 26, 1864, in Isnotú, Venezuela, and died in Caracas on June 29, 1919.



Blessed Bartolo Longo

lay faithful, born on February 10, 1841, in Latiano, Italy, and died in Pompeii on Oct 5, 1926. A lawyer from Naples, Longo initially opposed the Church but later converted and played a key role in establishing the Shrine of the Holy Rosary in Pompeii. **Vatican News**



MEMORIAM

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

40th Day Memorial Prayer

In Loving memory of
Madam Angeline @ Kamachee
30th March 1952 – 5th February 2025



Your presence we miss.
Your memories we treasure.
Loving you always.
Forgetting you never.

40th day memorial prayer on 16th March 2025 at 8pm at our residence 86, Kampung Alor Semadom 05250 Alor Star Kedah.

Dearly Missed and Fondly Cherished by husband Mr Sawariapen, children and family members.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
Matthew 5:8

A Tribute to TWO Precious Souls

10th Anniversary ✕ 19th 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.

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

2nd 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.

NOVENA PRAYER TO ST JUDE

O Holy St Jude, Apostle and Martyr, great in virtue and rich in miracles, near kinsman of Jesus Christ, faithful intercessor of all who invoke your special patronage in time of need. To you I have recourse from the depth of my heart and humbly beg to whom God has given such great power, come to my assistance.
Help me in my present urgent petition, in return I promise to make your name known and cause you to be invoked.

3 Our Father
3 Hail Mary
3 Glory Be

St Jude pray for us and all who invoke your aid. Amen.

- Julia Nair -

2nd Anniversary In Loving Memory of ALFRED SIOW MEI SHIN 蕭美勝



Born: 7 September 1947
Departed: 9 March 2023

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

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Message for the month of Ramadan and Aidil Fitri

Christians and Muslims: what we hope to become together

Dear Muslim brothers and sisters,

At the beginning of the month of *Ramadan*, the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue offers you its warmest greetings and friendship. This time of fasting, prayer and sharing is a privileged opportunity to draw closer to God and be renewed in the fundamental values of religion, compassion and solidarity. This year, *Ramadan* largely coincides with Lent, which for Christians is a period of fasting, supplication and conversion to Christ. This proximity in the spiritual calendar offers us a unique opportunity to walk side-by-side, Christians and Muslims, in a common process of purification, prayer and charity. For us Catholics, it is a joy to share this time with you, for it reminds us that we are all pilgrims on this earth, and that we are all seeking to live better lives. This year, we wish to reflect with you, not only on what we can do together to live better lives, but above all, on what we want to become together, as Christians and Muslims, in a world in search of hope. Do we want to be simple co-workers for a better world, or genuine brothers and sisters, bearing common witness to God's friendship with all humanity?

More than simply a month of fasting, *Ramadan* appears to us Catholics as a school of inner transformation. By abstaining from food and drink, Muslims learn to control their desires and turn to what is essential. This time of spiritual discipline is an invitation to cultivate piety, the virtue that brings one closer to God and opens the heart to others. As you know, in the Christian tradition, the holy season of Lent invites us to follow a similar path: through fasting, prayer and almsgiving we seek to purify our hearts and refocus on the One who guides and directs our lives. These spiritual practices, though expressed differently, remind us that faith is not merely about outward expressions, but a path of inner conversion.

In a world marked by injustice, conflict and uncertainty about the future, our common vocation involves much more than similar spiritual practices. Our world is thirsting for fraternity and genuine dialogue. Together, Muslims and Christians can bear witness to this hope, in the conviction that friendship is possible despite the burden of history and ideologies that promote exclusion. Hope is no mere optimism: it is a virtue rooted in faith in God, the Merciful, our Creator. For you, dear Muslim friends, hope is nourished by trust in divine mercy, which forgives and guides. For us Christians, it is grounded in the certainty that God's love is stronger than all trials and obstacles.

We want, then, to become, together, brothers and sisters in humanity who deeply esteem one another. Our trust in God is

a treasure that unites us, far beyond our differences. It reminds us that we are all spiritual, incarnate, beloved creatures, called to live in dignity and mutual respect. What is more, we desire to become guardians of this sacred dignity by rejecting all forms of violence, discrimination and exclusion. This year, as our two spiritual traditions converge in celebrating *Ramadan* and Lent, we have a unique opportunity to show the world that faith transforms people and societies, and that it is a force for unity and reconciliation.

In a world where "the temptation to build a culture of walls, to raise walls, walls in the heart, walls on the land in order to prevent this encounter with other cultures, with other people" is reappearing (Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 27), our challenge is to build, through dialogue, a common future founded on fraternity. We do not want simply to coexist; we want to live together in sincere and mutual esteem. The values we share, such as justice, compassion and respect for creation, should inspire our actions and relationships, and serve as our compass in constructing bridges rather than walls, defending justice rather than oppression, protecting the environment rather than destroying it. Our faith and its values should help us to be voices that speak out against injustice and indifference, and proclaim the beauty of human diversity.

In this season of *Ramadan* and the approach of *Aidil Fitri*, we are happy to share this hope with you. May our prayers, our gestures of solidarity and our efforts for peace be tangible signs of our sincere friendship with you. May this feast be an occasion for fraternal encounters between Muslims and Christians, in which we can celebrate together God's goodness. Such simple but profound moments of sharing are seeds of hope that can transform our communities and our world. May our friendship be a refreshing breeze for a world that thirsts for peace and fraternity!

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

From the Vatican, February 4, 2025

George Jacob
George Jacob Cardinal Koovakad
Prefect

Kankanamale
Msgr Indunil Kodithuwakku Janakaratne
Kankanamale
Secretary



(Vatican News filepic)

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- United Nations Square
- Protectorate Square
- Royal Palace gates
- Hassan II Mosque
- Kasbah Oudayas
- Hassan Tower
- Volubilis Roman Ruins
- Borj Nord
- Sand Dunes of Merzouga
- Kasbah Ait Ben Haddou (UNESCO)
- Dubai City Tour

06 NOV



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- Mozart's Birthplace
- Mirabell Gardens
- Pletna Boat Ride, Bled
- Ljubljana Castle
- Gornji Grad, Zagreb
- Plitvice Lake (UNESCO)
- Lake Balaton, Tihany
- Fisherman's Bastion
- Budapest Parliament
- Danube River Cruise

22 NOV



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