

# HERALD

The Catholic Weekly

## Mission Statement

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

TERHAD

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Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

1 John 4:7-8



A journey of 24 years in the making

■ P12



Melaka youth gather in faith to pray and discern vocations

■ P16



# Embrace ONE ANOTHER

**V**ATICAN: Pope Francis greeted some 50,000 members of Italian Catholic Action in St Peter's Square on April 25 as they gathered for their meeting between parents, grandparents, and children.

Speaking of the theme of the meeting, *With Open Arms*, the Pope noted that "embrace is one of the most spontaneous expressions of human experience" and that it is through an embrace that life begins.

For this reason, the Pope introduces three points of reflection: three types of embrace: the missing embrace, the saving embrace, and the life-changing embrace.

Speaking first of the missing embrace,

Pope Francis noted that sometimes, "the enthusiasm that you express so joyfully today is not welcomed in our world". At times, he continued, "it encounters closures and resistances, becoming not vehicles of brotherhood, but of rejection and confrontation, often violent."

Often, Pope Francis noted, "wars originate from missing embraces" and this leads to prejudices and misunderstandings that lead you to see someone else as the enemy. We see this all over the world, said the Pope, but "with your presence and your work, you can testify to everyone that the path of the embrace is the path of life".

Speaking then of the saving embrace, Pope Francis noted that "humanly embracing means expressing positive and fundamental values such as affection, esteem, trust, encouragement, and reconciliation" but that this becomes "even more vital

when experienced in the dimension of faith".

Pope Francis noted that at the centre of our existence is the merciful embrace of God that saves, "the embrace of the good Father revealed in Christ Jesus, whose face is reflected in every one of His gestures".

The reason this is shown to us, the Pope continued, is "so that we also learn to do the same". Let us allow ourselves to be embraced by the Lord, said the Pope, as, "in the embrace of the Lord, we learn to embrace others".

Going on to speak of the third embrace, the life-changing embrace, Pope Francis turned to the saints, many of whose lives have been "decisively marked by an embrace". "If this was valid for them, it is also for us", said the Pope.

Pope Francis went on to tell all those gathered that they will themselves be the

presence of Christ "the more you know how to embrace and support every needy brother with merciful and compassionate arms". In this way, he continued, you will be capable of making concrete signs of change.

Although Pope Francis had finished speaking of his three previous points, he chose to dwell on one final topic — the Synod. "Seeing all of you here together reminds me of the Synod," he said. To advance in synodality "there is a need for people shaped by the Spirit," and for this reason "I invite you to be athletes and standard bearers of synodality, in the dioceses and parishes to which you belong, for a full implementation of the path up to now".

Finally, Pope Francis thanked each person for what they "are" and for what they "do" before invoking the Madonna to accompany them, always. — *Vatican News*





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# I saw broken hearts — and dreams for a better future

Everybody able to visit the Holy Land observes how the prayers of the Bible come alive when spoken there. During my recent visit, I often halted at Psalm 34, “The Lord is close to the broken-hearted, and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”

“Here we speak not from our mouths, but in tears and trembling hearts,” as one woman told me.

One of the Franciscans with whom I chatted was worried about a “low-grade depression” haunting those who bravely minister in the Holy Land. “I’m not talking about clinical depression, although I guess there’s some of that,” he went on to explain. “I mean more the daily drudgery of frustrations, as we learn never to say, ‘Well, at least it can’t get worse,’ because it sure will.”

Those of us familiar with the hallowed narrative of salvation realise this has ever been the case in those acres chosen by the God of Abraham as his special arena of revelation. Yet even the longtime experts and observers admit it seems especially dismal now.

Because I went over to mark the 75th anniversary of the Pontifical Mission for Palestine, a major initiative of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association, much of my visit was with the tiny and beleaguered community of Christians, here since ancient times. Yet because of my love for and cooperation with the Jewish community here in New York, I could hardly pass up the chance of spending time with Israelis as well.

Both groups seem “broken-hearted” and “crushed in spirit.” Our Palestinian brothers and sisters especially mourn the devastation in Gaza, and they fear that their already precarious situation in the West Bank will become worse. And our Jewish ancestors in the faith all have horror stories of the vicious October 7 massacre and the constant attacks on Israel.

Then came the attack from Iran. We American visitors were jolted awake at 1.00am by air raid sirens, something even those of us from New York are not used to, and experienced a sobering stay in a bomb shelter. As one of my Jewish friends commented the next day, “So much for a secure homeland.”

And yet.... As our little group huddled the next morning outside the Notre Dame of Jerusalem Centre, we stopped to hear the Sunday morning church bells and watched the buses pass, filled with folks off to work, worship or family visits.

It was almost as if they were used to it! The fear, the frustration,

the unpredictability of the situation has prompted shrugs and yawns. Life goes on!

Perhaps this compounds the desperation, as evil and injustice can become banal and prosaic. But it also shows the grit and resilience of a people to whom the prophets preached and for whom Jesus wept.

So continue the radiant works of education, child care, housing, health care, prayer, worship, community and advocacy, all carried on by genuine confessors of the faith, only a step from martyrdom—those religious sisters, priests and devoted lay apostles who labour at the centres we visited, supported by the Pontifical Mission.

At the Crèche, a refuge for abandoned children in Bethlehem, one of the Daughters of Charity said while rocking a baby: “In this town we are daily aware of the birth of Jesus. Yet every time we receive an abandoned infant, it’s Christmas again!”

To be sure, there is plenty of heartbreak and crushed spirits to go around. Likewise, there are a lot of “experts” suggesting how the tense situation should be healed. I’m not one of them.

I remember two grandmas. One came in the group of Jewish survivors of Oct 7 with whom we visited. She is now in residence at a hotel because her home was destroyed by Hamas fanatics, her granddaughters spared from rape and beheading while hidden in the “safe room,” her son-in-law murdered. “I’m sure thankful for the care I’ve gotten and the nice hotel room where I’m staying,” she said, “but...I just want to go home!” Will she ever be able to? When?

Then a second grandma at the Palestinian refugee camp I visited near the ominous wall separating Israelis and Palestinians in Bethlehem. She wore around her neck the actual key to the house in Jerusalem from which she had to flee in 1948. Seventy-six years ago and she still had the key! “I just want to go home!” Will she ever be able to? When?

The dream of those two grandmas, one Israeli, one Palestinian, in a land of nightmares.

The daily rocking of babies by those sisters in Bethlehem.

The hidden prayers from the cloistered contemplative nuns on the Mount of Olives.

Good medicine for broken hearts and crushed spirits. — **By Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan, America**

It really is that simple... or is it? Is it that simple at all? For the last couple of weeks, the gospel lectionary reading has taken us into Jesus’ Farewell Discourse in John, and this week is 15:9-17. The whole discourse is a mix of conversation and prayer between Jesus and the disciples, and goes from chapters 14 through 17. So we have here just a snippet, and I find preaching from these passages especially challenging. It’s not really a narrative, but a mix of instruction, symbol, and theology. It feels sort of like preaching from the epistles, but richer and denser than most epistle passages. In just the eight verses of this week there are several possible themes: abiding/remaining, obedience, joy, love, choosing/being chosen, and bearing fruit.

One verse that has been drawing my attention this week is verse 12: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” As one person pointed out in a Bible study I led, the text offers a neat formula: The Father loves the Son, the Son loves the disciples, and the disciples are to love one another. The task of the disciples is actually framed as a “commandment,” a word that can be confusing to those who are steeped in a gospel of grace. How can Jesus be laying down a law?

I resonate with those who blanch at the word commandment: “loving one another” can easily become an old-fashioned law. We all have enough to do, our own projects and tasks. When the preacher stands and thunders, “love one another,” it often sounds like another project on



the to-do list, and not an easy one at that! We have to be honest that the “other” we are asked to love, like ourselves, is some mix of loveable and hard-to-love. The seemingly simple act of loving one another is often very demanding. It asks for sacrifice, forbearance, forgiveness, empathy, compassion, thoughtfulness, wisdom; it asks for time and attention, the most precious, and fleeting, and scarce thing we have.

If, after our sermons this Sunday, our congregations set out to “try and love one another,” then we’ve misled them and they’ve set off in the wrong direction. If we have “try and do it,” then

we’re just adding an impossible burden. Trying to love one another is a recipe for guilt-ridden religion, in which the commandment does indeed become a commandment, in every negative sense of the word. It’s not the gospel, not what Jesus meant, and we’re bound to burnout. The key to this “commandment” is in the last phrase, “as I have loved you.”

The love of the Son for His disciples is the source of the disciples’ love for one another. Often we interpret this phrase to mean that Jesus’ love is the example or model for our love; He calls us to the kind of radical love he shows. That’s true, but not nearly enough. Jesus’ love is also

## Reflecting on our Sunday Readings with Fr Joseph Lubula

### 6th Sunday of Easter (B)

**Readings: Acts of the Apostle 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48;  
1 John 4:7-10  
Gospel: John 15:9-17**

the fount of our love, the ever-flowing spring of the love that flows through the disciples. Loving one another is not meant to be a task, but a way of life. Loving one another is a natural outworking of being loved.

It might help us and our congregations this week to put our emphasis first on Jesus’ love for us. How has Jesus loved you? As the text says, He laid down His life for you. But what has that meant to you? What grace has Christ offered you? What mercy have you received? What help has God provided at a point of need? What renewal? We might even dare to change John’s verb. What if we read this line in the present tense, “Love one another as I am loving you.” When we are in touch with — when we abide — in the love of the living Christ for us and for all people, then love for one another flows as naturally as water from a fountain. It’s like a tree that bears fruit. The tree doesn’t try to bear fruit; it just does, because that is what a healthy tree does!





## KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

### Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

#### May

- 10 Book Launch of Archbishop Emeritus Murphy Pakiam
- 15-16 Clergy Recollection
- 16 Meeting – Archdiocesan Finance Committee
- 18 Confirmation – Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Klang
- 19 Confirmation – Church of the Sacred Heart, Bentong



## MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

### Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

#### May

- 6-9 Meeting – Episcopal Commission for Migrants and Itinerants, Sibul
- 15 Meeting – South Johor Vicariate Clergy, Church of Christ the King, Kulai
- 18 Annual General Meeting – Villa Paulos
- 18 Confirmation – Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, Johor Bahru
- 21-22 Clergy Monthly Recollection – Good Shepherd Catholic Seminary, Melaka

# Equipping catechists to lead their ‘little lambs’

By Charmaine Gurdev

KUANTAN: The Catechetical team of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur organised a dynamic one-day Catechetical Skill Workshop aimed at enhancing the abilities of catechists from the Church of St Thomas Church Kuantan, Kemaman Mission Centre, and the Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Mentakab.

Hosted at the Church of St Thomas on April 20, the workshop drew approximately 40 dedicated catechists eager to enrich their teaching methodologies. Led by Sr Retta Savariannan, FdCC, Stephanie Chia, and Adelina Wong, the event proved to be a pivotal opportunity for professional development within the catechetical community.

Commencing at 8.45am with an opening prayer by Sr Retta, the workshop delved into essential topics crucial for effective catechesis. Sr Retta underscored the vocation and mission inherent in the role of a catechist, emphasising the significance of transmitting the Gospel within the Christian community.

Stephanie Chia led the subsequent session on Catechetical Lesson Planning, illuminating the catechetical process and providing invaluable insights into lesson structuring and engagement strategies. Catechists were reminded of their pivotal role as facilitators in nurturing the spiritual growth of the children they teach.



Catechists from the East Coast parishes participating in the Catechetical Skill Workshop.

An engaging group activity followed, where catechists collaborated on practical demonstrations of catechetical lessons under the guidance of facilitators. Utilizing lesson plan templates as aids, participants showcased their creativity and dedication, receiving constructive feedback to further refine their teaching methods.

The workshop culminated in a reflective session, prompting catechists to ponder improvements and changes within their lesson plans. With a closing prayer

led by Stephanie, participants departed equipped with newfound knowledge and renewed enthusiasm to guide their catechism students towards spiritual growth.

Reflecting on the day's proceedings, catechists expressed gratitude for the invaluable insights gained and affirmed their commitment to nurturing the faith of their students. Armed with enhanced skills and renewed zeal, these dedicated educators stand poised to lead their “little lambs” towards a deeper understanding of their faith.



## Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #173



### Greetings to you, dear friends of MJD.

The Prime Minister was corrected by the King — divisive allies of the PM. The ETS is reaching Johor. Mt Ruang, Indonesia erupts. Dust clouds, dark skies and smoky air can be expected. Floods are reported in many states. TikTok featured unimaginable floods in Dubai and Saudi. Iran-Israel tensions raise fear. WW3, the Nuclear War and its destructiveness are becoming news items. Explosive! Upsetting!

**M.A.D. Time:** It is an acronym for *Making A Difference Time*. The *Maaf Zahir Batin* 365 days or MZB365 calls us to ‘fight hatred with grace daily’, with a reminder that forgiveness goes beyond *Ramadan*. Our *Muhibah Story*, a photo campaign on social media to showcase Malaysians of different races and religions coming together has been launched.

Pope Francis, at the Fourth World Gathering of the Global Christian Forum from April 15 to 20 in Accra, Ghana praised the global diversity present as reflecting “a beautiful mosaic of contemporary Christianity” and sharing a common identity as followers of Jesus Christ. The theme, *That the World May Know*, will explore how to bear witness to Christ in today's world to better proclaim the love and truth of Jesus Christ to the nations, with the aim “together, let's make a difference for God's glory”. Where there is love, mercy, unity, forgiveness and justice, the Kingdom of God reigns.

Pope Francis reminded us about the

virtue of fortitude, which is the ability to live with courage and to confront the inner — and outer — turmoil of life. He added further: “A Christian without courage, who does not turn his strength to good, who does not bother anyone, is a useless Christian”. To be M.A.D. we need courage.

### Thought for the Week: The Weak!

Paul was a persecutor of the Church. Moses was a murderer. Jonah ran from God's Will. Miriam was a gossip. Gideon and Thomas both doubted. Jeremiah was depressed and suicidal. Elijah was burned out. John the Baptist was a loudmouth. Martha was a worry-wart. Noah got drunk. These are well-known Biblical individuals who had flaws and weaknesses in their lives but God used their strength to glorify Himself.

In these dark times, we sometimes lose our self-esteem and self-confidence. We question the quality of our lives and become uncertain about the gifts, talents, and abilities that we have been given. We find ourselves saying, “I'm not perfect. I have all kinds of problems. I have no ability. I have no gifts. I'm just not worthy. Why would God want me? HE wouldn't want to use somebody like me.”

**The lesson from the weak:** The good news is that God doesn't require a job interview for salvation. He doesn't look at financial gain or loss. He's not prejudiced or partial, not judging, grudging, sassy, or brassy, not deaf to our cry, or blind to our needs. He knows who we are and what we are

and loves us despite ourselves. God is ALWAYS with us. Sure, there are lots of reasons why God shouldn't call us. But if we are in love with Him, if we hunger for Him, He'll use us despite who we are, where we've been, what we have done, or the fact that we are not perfect!

### Announcements for the Week

1. Join MJD's Creation Justice Ministry's collaboration with Caritas MJD, the Forestry Department, on the **Mangrove Project**. Join us in Restoring Mangroves + explore Kukup Island + Stingless Bee Farm on Sunday July 28! Contact the Creation Justice Committee of your parish for more details.

2. A **Kursus Evangelisasi Peribadi (Personal Evangelisation Course)**, is being organised by the diocesan team, with the theme *Mari, ikutlah AKU, dan kamu akan Ku jadikan penjala manusia. (Mat 4:19)*. from July - Nov. For more information, email: [kepmjd@mjdioocese.my](mailto:kepmjd@mjdioocese.my)

3. **Mental Health & Stress of Teenagers Today!** organised by the diocesan family life ministry. Target audience: Parents, educators, guardians to teenagers and all those interested. On May 5, from 8.00pm-10.00pm with host, Andrew Chew. (Zoom Meet ID 89453900441; Zoom passcode 669939)

4. The **Special Children's Parents Support Group** want to reach out to parents with special children who have, autism or any mental or physical disabilities. Open to all

language groups. Contact Veronica Dass Tel: 016 2095001.

5. **Diocesan Priesthood Vocation Discernment Weekend in Mandarin** will be held on May 18-19 at the Church of St Louis, Kluang with the theme *Good for us to be Here (Mk 9:5)*. For more details, please contact Msgr Peter Ng

**QnQ: The Q asked: What is Earth Day?** EARTH DAY is the World's Largest Environmental Movement celebrated every April 22. Individuals from all backgrounds and walks of life unite in a global effort to advance sustainability and climate action. The theme for 2024 **PLANET vs PLASTICS**, aims to tackle the plastics crises head-on, by a bold 60 per cent reduction in plastic production by 2040 and forging a plastic-free future because recycling is not the answer. Plastics are a health risk. <https://www.earthday.org/earth-day-2024/>. Here is the link to the 49 sec video <https://youtu.be/xP-iLlHQsU>

Being filled and led by the Spirit may take you places you never planned, but the will of God will never lead you where the grace of God cannot keep you. Walk in the Spirit. A blessed week to all of you, out there.

Something to tickle you: “The will of GOD will never take you to where the grace of God will not protect you.” — **Bernadette Devlin**

Bishop Bernard Paul



## Importance of recognising God's voice



Archbishop Julian Leow celebrating the Mass with Fr Clement Lim.

RAUB: This year, the Church of the Annunciation celebrated its parish feast with a triduum from April 18 to 20.

Fr Clement Lim, who serves as the administrator here and also as parish priest at the Church of the Sacred Heart in Bentong, led the services on the first two days. The celebration culminated on April 20 with the feast day Mass participated by over 150 faithful from near and far. Archbishop Julian Leow presided over the Mass, with Fr Clement as the concelebrant.

Since April 21 was Good Shepherd Sunday, Archbishop Julian drew parallels between this feast and the feast of the Annunciation. "Today, as we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday and the Annunciation, we reflect on how Jesus, the Good Shepherd, laid down His life for us. Through His death and resurrection, He continues to lead us, just as Mary responded to God's call through the Angel Gabriel." The prelate emphasised the importance of recognising and following God's voice over worldly distractions.

Archbishop Julian encouraged the congregation to emulate Mary's faithfulness and obedience to God's will. He highlighted that Good Shepherd Sunday is also the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, expressing his hope for more young people to answer the call to priesthood and leadership in the Church, serving the diverse flocks within our communities. He also urged the faithful to reach out to those unfamiliar with Jesus Christ's message of salvation.

After the Mass, Fr Clement thanked Archbishop Julian for his presence and announced the archbishop's upcoming visits to the Catholic communities in Bentong and Genting Highlands the next day. He acknowledged the growing diversity of the parish in Raub, with newcomers from Flores, and stressed the collective responsibility to build the Church and support vocations.

The archbishop expressed his gratitude to Fr Clement for his dedication to the parishes in Bentong, Raub, Kuala Lipis, and Genting Highlands, emphasising the mission to find lost sheep and foster more vocations. He called for prayers for vocations and for building bridges with followers of other faiths.

The celebration concluded with a communal dinner, where local parishioners commemorated Archbishop Julian's twenty-second anniversary of priesthood with a cake-cutting ceremony.

— By Bernard Anthony

# St Peter's Church hosts cancer awareness talk

By Damian Prakash

MELAKA: The Church of St Peter buzzed with activity on a recent Sunday afternoon, with an enlightening talk on *Cancer Awareness and Patient Realities*.

This initiative was spearheaded by parish priest Fr Lionel Thomas who, after witnessing many of his parishioners battling this disease, felt compelled to address the issue head-on. While he had been organising special prayer vigils to offer solace to those affected, Fr Lionel believed that raising awareness was equally vital to support families facing this challenge.

It was fortunate when the National Cancer Society of Malaysia (NCSM) reached out to the cleric, offering to collaborate on this crucial initiative. Leading the session on April 21 was Madam Vijayalakshmi Silvathorai, affectionately known as Madam Viji, the community ambassador for NCSM. Madam Viji engaged the audience by first highlighting the impact of dietary choices on our health, reflecting on how modern lifestyles sometimes blur the lines between nutritious and indulgent foods. "In today's parenting landscape, what used to be considered 'junk' is now often perceived as 'healthy'," she observed.

She remarked that our bodies often send us signals, yet many people either ignore them or attempt self-diagnosis, downplaying their significance. Reflecting on her experience with cancer patients, she noted that many exhibit symptoms such as persistent coughs or unusual bodily discharges, which are frequently dismissed. Despite this, she reassured the audience that not all symptoms and test lead to cancer and urged us to get the necessary tests done to rule out any danger.

It is disheartening, she emphasised, to witness individuals seeking medical attention only in the advanced stages of cancer when signs were present much earlier. Stressing the importance of early detection,



Madam Viji and Puan Fadzilah with Fr Lionel Thomas.

she highlighted the significant benefits it offers, including saving time, money, and unnecessary stress for both patients and caregivers. Self-care emerged as a central theme, with a strong emphasis on the vital role parents play in instilling self-care practices in their children. The revelation that there exist more than twenty types of breast cancer startled many attendees.

Madam Viji illuminated various dimensions of the patient experience, offering invaluable insights into how to communicate with and support them. Through compelling case studies and firsthand anecdotes, she delved into the realities of interacting with patients and survivors. Recognising the sincere but occasionally insensitive questions posed to patients, Madam Viji championed a more compassionate approach to providing support. She highlighted how inquiries about a patient's cancer stage or chemotherapy experience, while well-meaning, can inadvertently dampen spirits. Instead, she suggested more uplifting and practical ways to help.

Rather than focusing solely on medical updates, Madam Viji proposed asking pa-

tients how one could best support them in their daily lives. Whether it's helping with tasks like childcare, grocery shopping, or transportation to medical appointments, she underscored the importance of tailoring support to meet the specific needs and preferences of each individual. By shifting the conversation from medical details to tangible acts of kindness, she emphasised the power of fostering a sense of community and solidarity in the face of adversity.

Drawing from her own journey as a cancer survivor, Madam Viji recounted the challenges she faced, and the pivotal role played by her family and close friends in her recovery. Her resilience stood as a testament to the profound impact of unwavering support and motivation in navigating the turbulent waters of cancer diagnosis and treatment.

Introducing the audience to the Patient Navigation programme, a flagship initiative of NCSM, Madam Viji outlined opportunities for individuals to undergo comprehensive training and become certified patient navigators. Puan Fadzilah, a fellow senior navigator, recounted her gratifying experiences of aiding cancer patients through the program, emphasising the profound impact of their support.

Amidst heartfelt discussions and shared experiences, the event concluded on a hopeful note, echoing the sentiment that life after cancer can indeed be beautiful. As attendees mingled over refreshments, many sought guidance from Madam Viji and Puan Fadzilah, eager to explore avenues for support or contribute to the cause as navigators. Fr Lionel expressed his commitment to hosting more such sessions, recognising the importance of ongoing awareness and support within the parish community.

To enquire about hosting similar talks in your parish or organisation, please contact NCSM through Hiba at [hiba@cancer.org.my](mailto:hiba@cancer.org.my) or Madam Viji at [vijaya@cancer.org.my](mailto:vijaya@cancer.org.my).

## HRC Klang committed to health and welfare of elderly

KLANG: In an effort to address the health needs of senior citizens in the community, the Church of the Holy Redeemer, recently organised a free health screening programme Coordinated by Professor Tan Maw Pin, Consultant Geriatrician at UMMC (University Malaya Medical Centre), the event aimed to provide essential health assessments for elderly parishioners.

The programme, which welcomed participation from senior parishioners, ministry members and elderly individuals from churches across the Klang District, featured a range of health screenings and assessments. A team of student volunteers from UMMC assisted in facilitating the screenings.

A total of 60 senior parishioners availed themselves of the opportunity to undergo health checks and assessments. These screenings included tests for memory, balance, mobility, upper body strength, and Bioelectrical Impedance Analysis.

As our population continues to age, ensuring the health and well-being of senior individuals becomes increasingly crucial. The screenings offered at the event aimed to identify potential health risks early on, enabling tailored interventions to enhance



The elderly consulting the volunteers for health advice.

physical and cognitive well-being. By addressing these issues proactively, the programme sought to promote independence and improve the overall quality of life for seniors.

Looking ahead, the parish is also in the

process of planning to establish its very own Elderly Response Team (ERT) in the near future. This initiative reflects the church's ongoing commitment to supporting the health and welfare of its senior members and the wider community.



LANGKAWI: The second Sunday of Easter saw the celebration of the 217th Police Day at the Chapel of Ave Stella Maris.

Led by Insp Alex and Asp Kevin from the Langkawi Police Training Centre (PULAPOL), 40 senior and junior officers from the Langkawi Police Headquarters gathered for this occasion.

Fr Michael Cheah, parish priest of the Church of St Michael, Alor Setar, celebrated the Mass, focusing on the Gospel passage from John 20:19-31. His sermon centred on Jesus' reassuring words to his disciples "Peace be upon you."

Throughout the sermon, Fr Michael emphasised the transformative power of forgiveness, echoing Jesus' teaching, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are re-



tained." He also reaffirmed the fundamental belief in Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

At the end of the Mass, Fr Michael extended blessings to all police officers pre-

sent, fostering a sense of unity and camaraderie. The event concluded with a fellowship, strengthening the bond between

the church community and the law enforcement officers. — **By Johnkuppasawary, PJP**

## Assumption parish's journey of love as one family

**By Macline Fernandez**

PETALING JAYA: The Church of the Assumption hosted a retreat for BECs to bond as a family came to fruition April 19-21 at the Golden Sands Baptist Centre in Port Dickson.

This was a suggestion by parish priest Fr Leonard, who was confident that the *Journey of Love as One Family* retreat would foster spiritual growth within our community. Indeed, our return home confirmed this, as many shared how the Holy Spirit had opened our minds and hearts, helping us recognise our vital roles within the broader Assumption Family.

Typically viewed as a congregation for the elderly, we were pleasantly surprised when 18 youth (out of 54 attendees) participated in the retreat. Their vigour, enthusiasm, and thoughtful contributions pushed us to

acknowledge them as insightful, dedicated Catholic youth.

During one session, the youth conveyed powerful messages, urging us not to compare but to compliment them; expressing their commitment to overcoming their flaws; advocating for setting a positive example for the younger ones; emphasising the importance of seeking out and returning the lost sheep, and stressing the need to ensure no one is left behind. They also emphasised the importance of community support.

Fr Leonard's discussion on Christian family values highlighted the crucial role parents play in equipping themselves with these values to guide their children in discerning their vocations, whether they be to the priesthood, religious life, single, or married life. His personal testimony about his path to the priesthood was deeply inspiring, revealing the mysterious ways in which



Members from the different BECs spending time in prayer.

God operates.

Other sessions focused on forgiveness and recognising each individual as a unique gift from God, evoking heartfelt reactions from many attendees. One mother recounted, "My daughter wept as she lit a candle, symbolising her dedication to God."

Fr Biju Mathew's talk on *Stewardship* emphasised our role as caretakers of God's gifts, encouraging respect and sharing of our resources as an expression of gratitude for His blessings. As Fr Biju prepares to leave the parish for his next assignment, the retreat served as a poignant farewell, marked by a special gift from all of us, highlighting the deep emotional connections formed.

As we concluded the retreat, many participants reflected positively on the experience.

For the BECCOT Organising Team, this retreat was a profound reminder of how God uses us to impact others. We are grateful to everyone who participated, especially to Frs Leonard and Biju for leading the sessions that glorified God. May His blessings continue to enrich us all!



## Music, dance and nostalgia for SMC Evergreens

IPOH: SMC Evergreens, of the Church of St Michael, celebrated their annual gathering with the theme *Memories of Yesteryears* recently. The get-together saw more than 150 elderly parishioners and friends heading for the parish's Peter Pang Hall on April 18, hoping to entertain and be entertained.

They were far from disappointed. The

atmosphere was vibrant, with a sing-along session in both English and Mandarin, led by the Sing-a-long Group members who gather every Thursday. Additionally, students from the Evergreens' Chinese classes, hosted at their clubhouse, the Oak, joined in. And to add to the energy, a Zumba dancer took the stage. Many of the guests

sportingly stepped forward to join her in the dances.

There were lots of Lucky Draw prizes to give away. Also, those born in the months of April and May had their birthdays celebrated with the cutting of the cakes and the singing of the birthday song. Many of those present had come dressed according

to the theme, and four were given prizes for their effort.

The crowning moment of the event unfolded with a captivating fashion show, featuring 14 not-so-young models as they graced the catwalk in their stylish ensembles. Remarkably, some of these garments had gracefully withstood the test of time, boasting a history of over 50 years. Among the models, 91-year-old Mary Therese AuYong stole the spotlight, donning a timeless *nyonya kebaya* paired with delicately beaded slippers acquired from Malacca decades ago. The runway also showcased a delightful array of attire, ranging from the elegant *samfoo* and vibrant saree to the chic Punjabi suit and nostalgic western fashion reminiscent of the 70s and 80s.

The morning's activities culminated in a buffet lunch for all present. The three-hour get-together was enjoyed by all, and many are looking forward to the next gathering in 2025 when the SMC Evergreens will be celebrating its silver anniversary! — **By Jennifer Duarte**





# Innovative teacher wins prestigious award

KENINGAU, Sabah: In the heart of Malaysia's lush landscapes, at Keningau Vocational College, a model of inspiration shines through Sydney Engelbert (*pic*), an English language teacher whose innovative spirit and dedication have not only captured the hearts of her students but have also earned her the prestigious title of regional winner of the 2024 Cambridge Dedicated Teacher Awards in Malaysia.

The Cambridge Dedicated Teacher Awards, now in its resplendent sixth year, celebrates the silent architects of our future — teachers. These extraordinary individuals craft the minds and souls of young learners, preparing them to step confidently into the complexities of the world. It's a platform where students, parents, and colleagues can honour those educators who go above and beyond to ignite a thirst for knowledge and a passion for growth in their students. Teachers like Sydney Engelbert play a crucial role, not only in imparting knowledge but in preparing young minds to navigate and thrive in the complexities of the world.

Sydney's triumph is not just a personal accolade but a landmark victory for her students and community. As a regional winner, she brings honour to her school with £500 (RM2,972.08) worth of books for her class, a trophy, and the opportunity to be celebrated at a regional awards



ceremony. More so, her innovative teaching approach will be recognised in a special 'thank you' page in new Cambridge textbooks, spreading her inspiring methods to classrooms around the world.

In the tranquil town of Keningau, where horizons may seem limited, Sydney has opened a vast world of possibilities for her students. Recognising the barriers posed by geographical isolation, she spearheaded an online exchange programme connecting her students with peers across Malaysia, the Philippines, Cambodia, and Indonesia. This cross-cultural initiative has not only enhanced her students' communication

skills but has also broadened their worldview, enabling them to explore and understand diverse cultures and perspectives.

Reflecting on her achievements, Sydney remarked, "I am greatly honoured to be awarded this recognition. We must create a learning environment rooted in cultural exchange to help students develop the practical and communication skills needed for the future. I am deeply proud of the success my students have had as part of our online exchange class that is centred around cultural competence and exploring topics beyond the standard curriculum."

Rod Smith, managing director of International Education, emphasised the global educational challenge, stating, "To achieve UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which aims for inclusive and equitable quality education, we need to recruit 44 million teachers by 2030. At Cambridge, we believe it's

critical to celebrate and spotlight the dedication of teachers who are nurturing a love of learning, often under challenging conditions."

He continued, "The Cambridge Dedicated Teacher Awards were initiated to honour these educators who are not only teaching academic subjects but are also preparing students to face global challenges, from climate change to cultural inclusiveness. It's my pleasure to congratulate Sydney Engelbert on her significant achievements, which undoubtedly will inspire teachers and students throughout Malaysia."

Sydney's story is a powerful reminder of a dedicated teacher's impact on the lives of many. Her approach, integrating cultural competence with practical learning, not only prepares students for future challenges but also instils in them the values of respect and understanding across diverse cultures. Educators can indeed change the world — one student at a time.

## Kajang parish hosts joyous Easter fellowship

KAJANG: The Church of the Holy Family's hall was filled with jubilant spirit as the parishioners gathered to celebrate Easter and strengthen community bonds at the very first Easter fellowship event organised by the BECCOT team.

Uniting more than 700 parishioners from near and far, the event served a dual purpose of commemorating the joyous occasion of Easter while fostering a deeper sense of community spirit among attendees. The presence of parish pastors, Fr Michael Chua and Fr Bonaventure Rayappan, added to the solemnity of the occasion.

The programme commenced with an opening prayer and soul-stirring hymns that set the tone for the evening. A heartfelt speech from the priest further uplifted spirits and reinforced the significance of Easter in the Catholic faith. Attendees were then treated to a sumptuous dinner, providing an opportunity for fellowship and camaraderie.

The highlight of the evening was the captivating performance by the catechism kids, whose talent mesmerised the audience and added to the festive ambience. The Easter Bunny Mascot's lively entry brought smiles to both young and old alike.

Moreover, the event featured an exciting lucky draw, adding an exciting element to the proceedings. However, it was the

overwhelming support and dedication of the parishioners that truly made the event a success.

Volunteers, including enthusiastic youth, generously contributed their time and energy to ensure the smooth running of activities, from planning and setup to assisting guests with warmth and hospitality.

The impact of the Easter Fellowship event reverberated far beyond the confines of the church hall. It provided a much-needed opportunity for parishioners to come together, rekindle friendships, and celebrate their shared faith after enduring the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Attendees responded enthusiastically to the experience, expressing their gratitude for the chance to reunite and their admiration for the meticulous planning and organisation that went into making the event a memorable one.

In conclusion, the inaugural Easter fellowship event at Holy Family Church was a resounding success, leaving an indelible mark on the community and reaffirming the importance of collective celebration and togetherness. As parishioners departed with hearts full of joy and spirits uplifted, they carried with them the cherished memories of a truly unforgettable evening spent in fellowship and love. **By Casandra Teresa**

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# Where does the money go?

MANILA: In an interview with *Radio Veritas Asia*, Kidapawan Bishop Jose Colin Bagaforo (pic) said that full transparency of the Church's expenditures can help dispel criticisms claiming it only exploits the poor and the needy for profit and selfish goals.

"The very issue here is on transparency..." he said. "The most important thing is transparency for everyone to know: 'Where does the money go?'"

Bishop Bagaforo also serves as the chairman of the Episcopal Commission and Social Action and Justice and Peace of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) and head of its social welfare arm Caritas Philippines.

Given these responsibilities, the prelate stated that proper social action transparency contributes to drawing in more donors to the Church.



"There are people who can afford to help, and they just do not know how to help," he explained. "When they would like to help, they would like that the little thing that they give would really go to those that they wanted to help."

Bishop Bagaforo also emphasised the Church's role as an intermediary in bringing people and resources together and allocating them to underserved sectors that urgently need them.

"Sometimes, donors think that they only have \$100 (RM476.65), and if they help the poor, they know it's nothing... But if they pull all that help together, it can become a big assistance."

In line with this, the bishop said that the CBCP-Episcopal Commission and Social Action and Justice and Peace has decided to expand its flagship programme Alay Kapwa to encourage more people to



From left: Fr Kasmir Nema from Radio Veritas Asia interviews Kidapawan Bishop Jose Colin Bagaforo. (RV photo)

provide monetary assistance to the Church.

The bishop said that the programme, which was initially a Lenten initiative, has now evolved into a year-round endeavour while maintaining its three primary components of resource mobilisation, formation,

and programme assistance.

"The very core programme of Caritas Philippines is Alay Kapwa, to be able to help others, extend our hands to others, and share our resources with others," he said. — *Radio Veritas*

## Our coffers are empty, says Indian archbishop

TRIVANDRUM: An archbishop in southern India has sought financial support from his people after the government cancelled its license to receive foreign funds following Catholic fishermen's protest against a seaport that threatened their livelihood.

Archbishop Thomas J Netto of Trivandrum (now Thiruvananthapuram), based in the capital of southern Kerala, sought his lay Catholics' contribution in a pastoral letter on April 21.

"The archdiocese fell into 'serious financial crisis'" after the pro-Hindu federal government, led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of Prime Minister Narendra Modi "canceled its permit to accept foreign donations," said Archbishop Netto.

The archdiocese's license was cancelled in February 2023 after the archbishop and senior priests joined a 140-day protest by the local people, most of them Catholics, who opposed the project, saying it would cause large-scale coastal erosion and threaten their shelters and livelihoods.

The protest was called off on Dec 6, 2022, after the government promised compensation.

The multi-million-dollar project, constructed under the public-private partnership model, was scheduled to be commis-



Priests from Trivandrum archdiocese take part in the protest against Vizhinjam international seaport. (UCA News Photo/latinarchdiocesetrivandrum.org)

sioned in 2019 but was delayed due to issues related to land acquisition.

The government "froze our bank accounts last year after the agitation in Vizhinjam. The situation continues even now," the archbishop said.

The prelate said in the pastoral letter that the archdiocese needs around 20 million rupees (RM1,142,902.00) each year to train priests and care for retired clergy. However, the archdiocese's coffers are empty.

"We are unable to manage the daily expenses. Therefore, the archbishop sought help," said vicar-general Fr Eugene H Pereira.

Fr Pereira said on April 23 that the Church's outreach programmes for economically weak families have suffered greatly.

The archdiocese had two license numbers to receive foreign funds — one for the archdiocese and one for its social service wing — and they were active until March 2022. In February 2023, the licenses were revoked, citing diocesan officials' involvement in the protest.

The port, called "India's gateway to international transshipment" due to its proximity to international shipping routes, became partially operational in October 2023 with the arrival of a Chinese ship carrying massive cranes.

The government promised to meet most of the protesters' demands. It agreed to pay a monthly rent of 5,500 Indian rupees to families of fishermen who had lost their homes due to the port construction and expedite the ongoing rehabilitation work.

"The government is yet to fulfil the promises," noted Fr Pereira. — *www.ucanews.com*

## South Korea has more Catholic lawmakers than ever

SEOUL: A total of 80 Catholics were elected from among the ruling and opposition parties during the recent parliamentary election in South Korea, the largest figure in the history of the East Asian nation.

Fifty-three Catholic lawmakers from the opposition Democratic Party of Korea won seats in the 22nd National Assembly election held on April 10, while 16 came from the ruling People Power Party, and the rest from other parties including the New Reform Party.

South Korea's unicameral parliament holds an election every four years. In 254 constituencies, elections were held via the 'first-past-the-post' voting system and lawmakers in 46 seats were elected through a 'proportional representation' system.

Overall, Catholics now make up 27 per cent



Democratic Party (DP) leader Lee Jae-myung reacts to the election results in Seoul, South Korea on April 10. (UCA News photo)

of the 300-seat parliament, an increase of two per cent from 25 per cent in the 21st National Assembly election held four years ago. — *www.ucanews.com*

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# Asian bishops urged to communicate with heart



Discussion at the Catholic Bishops' Meet in Bangkok. (Photo/vaticannews.va)

BANGKOK: The Vatican's communication head, Paolo Ruffini, told a group of Asian bishops that the Church should communicate through love and sharing more than technology and techniques.

Ruffini was speaking at the opening of the April 15-20 programme organised by the Bishops' Institute for Social Communication, which functions under the Asian bishops' Office for Social Communication in Bangkok.

"Evangelisation is not dependent on media," and the "secret of communication is not technique but love," Ruffini, the prefect of the Vatican's Dicastery for Communication, told the 13 bishops attending the programme, among whom was Cardinal Sebastian Francis of Penang diocese, who is the FABC-Office of Social Communication, Chairman.

The Church needs lessons from Asia on communication, Ruffini said, adding that Asia thrives on communication.

The word communication comes from the Latin word *communicare*, meaning to 'make

common' or share, Ruffini said and asked the bishops to stress the concept of sharing and togetherness for better communication.

"Christian communication, like Christ's, must be marked by self-giving and not self-satisfaction prevalent in business and marketing," he said.

Before the internet and social media networks arrived, the Church existed as a network. However, the Church must plan to welcome digital culture to "evangelise the world and strengthen communion among all peoples," Ruffini said.

Digital culture is always changing, and as the Church, "we must evangelise it with love, communion, and social justice."

Ruffini stressed that all Christians are "digital missionaries, called to be disciples in the environment where they are — parish, school, and even social media."

The five-day programme is the ninth such programme and is based on the theme: *Synodal Church: Episcopal Ministry and Communication*. — [ucanews.com](http://ucanews.com)

## South Korean youth criticise government's climate efforts

SEOUL: The South Korean government's "Framework Act on Low Carbon, Green Growth" is insufficient to keep global warming below 2 degrees celsius, a group of youth activists claim.

In 2020, nineteen young people filed a complaint before the nation's Constitutional Court, arguing that the government's insufficient response to climate change violates their fundamental rights, including the right to live and the right to a clean environment. Subsequent petitions from young people, including children and even infants, have increased the number of petitioners to 200 people.

In hearing the case, Lee Jongseok, the president of the Constitutional Court, acknowledged public interest in the case, saying, "The Court recognises the importance and public interest in the case, and will make efforts to ensure that deliberations are conducted thoroughly."

The lawsuit in South Korea is one of a growing number of cases against governments accused of failing to do enough to halt global climate change. In April, Europe's top human rights court ruled on three cases before it, rejecting two on technical grounds but agreeing with plaintiffs in a third that Switzerland had violated the rights of a group of Swiss women by failing to make adequate efforts to meet its emission reduction targets.



Constitutional climate change trial in South Korea.

Ahead of the hearing in South Korea, activists gathered outside the court to criticise the government's inaction on climate change. In a statement, plaintiffs argued, "South Korea's current climate plans are not sufficient to keep the temperature increase within 1.5 degrees Celsius, thus violating the state's obligation to protect fundamental rights."

During initial arguments, government lawyers rejected the argument that they were violating citizens' basic rights, and said the government was not discriminating against young people. They claimed authorities were doing everything they could to cut carbon emissions, while noting that adjustments could be made to annual goals for carbon reduction. — [Vatican News](http://VaticanNews)

## New document on discerning apparitions 'being finalised'

VATICAN: The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith is putting the finishing touches to a new document that sets out clear rules on discerning apparitions and other such supernatural events.

The dicastery's prefect, Cardinal Victor Fernández, told the *Register* April 23 that he and his staff are "in the process of finalising a new text with clear guidelines and norms for the discernment of apparitions and other phenomena."

The cardinal, who met with Pope Francis in private audience on April 22, did not divulge any further details on the document, nor exactly when it will be published.

The last time the Vatican's doctrinal office issued a general document on apparitions was in 1978, during the final months of the pontificate of Pope Paul VI.

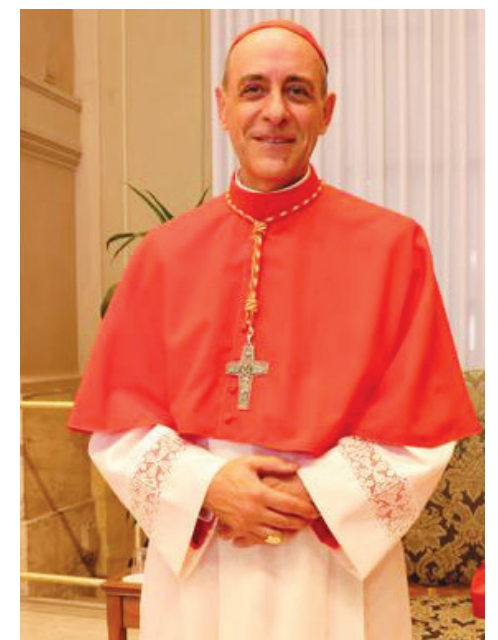
In "Norms Regarding the Manner of Proceedings in the Discernment of Presumed Apparitions or Revelations," the then-Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, headed by Croatian Cardinal Franjo Šeper, outlined the process the Catholic Church follows when investigating alleged apparitions or revelations.

The document stated that the Church's responsibility is to first judge the facts, then permit public devotion if the examination is favourable, and finally make a judgment on the authenticity and supernatural character of the event.

The document outlined the positive and negative criteria for judging the authenticity of such phenomena, and when and how competent ecclesiastical authorities should be involved, including eventually the Holy See. It stressed that "extreme prudence" should be used when investigating the facts.

The most recent Vatican document regarding apparitions was issued in 2001 by the then-Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. In a "Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines," the congregation drew on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and its references to private revelation.

That passage (No. 67) states that private



Cardinal Victor Fernández

revelations "do not belong ... to the deposit of faith," and adds that it is not their role to "improve or complete Christ's definitive Revelation, but to help live more fully by it in a certain period of history."

The *Catechism* adds: "Guided by the Magisterium of the Church, the *sensus fidelium* knows how to discern and welcome in these revelations whatever constitutes an authentic call of Christ or his saints to the Church."

Pope St Pius X also touched on apparitions in his 1907 encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, in which he stated that the Church exercises great prudence in this matter, allowing such traditions to be "narrated" only with caution and the disclaimer that the Church does not guarantee the truth of the facts narrated.

In an entry on "Private Revelations" written in 1913, the Catholic Encyclopedia stated that private revelations are constantly occurring among Christians, and that when the Church approves them, it declares only that there is nothing contrary to faith or morals, but does not impose an obligation to believe them. — **By Edward Pentin, Register**

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# Walking 'With Jesus for Jesus'

A 15-minute silent thanksgiving after receiving Communion helped lead a group of religious sisters to an upcoming 65-day pilgrimage on foot across more than a quarter of the country.

The timing was perfect. Because of it, one of the sisters got into a

breakfast line after Mass at the same time as Fr Roger Landry, who, on that morning in early March, had just given a presentation about the Eastern route of the National Eucharistic Pilgrimage as part of a parish retreat.

Their conversation led Fr Landry to sit at a table with several sisters

and, eventually, to invite them to join the pilgrimage.

There was a catch: They had to provide their own transportation for the driving portion and find their own places to stay.

That was about 9 in the morning. By 11.00am, a donor had offered all of the walking shoes the sisters would need. By 3.00pm, another donor had offered a truck and trailer that sleeps five.

"So it's just like the Lord was opening these doors, to say, 'Yes, I want you to come,'" said Mother Mary Maximilian, 56, the mother general.

## Eucharistic Devotion

She and the three other sisters planning to make the pilgrimage are members of the Daughters of Mary, Mother of Healing Love, what the Church calls a "private association" of religious women. It was formed in 2003 and is based in Manchester, New Hampshire, in a building owned by nearby St Marie's parish that is home to the association's 11 members.

The sisters' focus is families, particularly trying to heal what its founder Mother Paul Marie calls "the deep-seated brokenness that has come to the surface in mar-

riages and families of the Domestic Church."

To that end, the sisters emphasise devotion to the Eucharist as means of healing divisions.

The Catholic Church teaches that bread and wine consecrated by a priest at Mass become the actual Body and Blood of Jesus. But a poll published in August 2019 by the Pew Research Centre found that only 31 per cent of Catholics in the United States said they believe that.

As part of the Revival, between mid-May and mid-July this year, mega-pilgrimages from the East Coast (beginning in Connecticut), West Coast (beginning in California), Upper Midwest (beginning in Minnesota) and South (beginning in Texas) are scheduled to take place, ending in a National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis.

Each of the four simultaneous pilgrimages is like a Eucharistic procession that might take place outside a church on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, with a priest holding aloft a monstrance with a consecrated Host in it, followed by laypeople — only hundreds of miles long over the course of two months.



Clockwise from upper left: Sr Theresa Marie, Mother Mary Maximilian, Sr Mary Fatima and Sr Miriam Christe of the Daughters of Mary, Mother of Healing Love (Photo: M.J. McDonald/National Catholic Register)



## Why a 1,000-mile pilgrimage

The Eastern route — named for St Elizabeth Ann Seton — which the four New Hampshire sisters are participating in, is mostly on foot, though it also includes some boat rides and a stretch of driving between Washington, DC, and Altoona, Pennsylvania.

That means upwards of 20 miles a day of walking.

If it sounds daunting, it's worth noting that the sisters aren't unfamiliar with physical exertion. Several members of the association have participated in multiple five kilometre (3.1-mile) road races. "We used to be called 'the running nuns,'" said Sr Theresa Marie, 23, a second-year novice originally from Gilford, New Hampshire.

In August 2023, all four sisters climbed three mountains in New Hampshire, each known for its steep, rugged trails: Mount Eisenhower (4,760 feet), Mt Chocorua (3,490 feet) and Mount Pierce (4,310 feet).

Sr Miriam Christe, 39, a first-year novice originally from Brookline, New Hampshire, in 2018 walked about 1,200 miles of the Appalachian Trail.

Still, why do this?

"This pilgrimage is really a way that we are going to lift Jesus up to everyone, the whole world, so that all the souls that Jesus desires to bring to his heart may come," Sr Theresa Marie said.

The very test of endurance is itself a justification.

"Today, everything is so easy. But this is going to take a lot of effort. And this shows how much we love Our Lord," said Sr Miriam Christe.

"It's worth walking from

Connecticut to Indianapolis. He's worth doing that," she said. "But this is going to be so much more, because I'm going to be doing it with Jesus for Jesus. If I get through it, it's because he will get me through it."

Fr Landry, who is also planning to participate in the entire Eastern route pilgrimage, said the sisters will play an important role in it.

"Women religious teach all of us in the Church how to love Jesus with all our heart. By their prayer, their infectious joy, and their spiritual motherhood, they will be an enormous support to the perpetual pilgrims and priests, not to mention the tens of thousands we will encounter along our 65 days," Fr Landry said by text. "We are so lucky to have them."

The sisters expect big things to happen.

Sr Mary Fatima, 29, a junior professed sister originally from Dover, New Hampshire, said, "I'm excited about what Jesus is going to do."

Sr Theresa Marie said she hopes the pilgrimage leads to more 40-hour devotions, more perpetual adoration of the Eucharist in parishes, and more people attending Mass.

"This is a huge endeavour, and I know that the Lord is going to bless the entire United States," Sr Theresa Marie said.

## Running Start

The sisters have already been knee deep in the National Eucharistic Revival, at the invitation of Bishop Peter Libasci of Manchester, whose diocese covers all of New Hampshire.



Whether on the trail or on a city sidewalk, these religious enjoy strolling together. (NCR Photo/Jeff Dachowski)

In September 2022, the sisters planned and coordinated a diocese-wide pilgrimage to the state's Lakes Region. Later, they travelled to nine churches throughout the state with the relics of Blessed Carlo Acutis (1991-2006), the Italian teenager who created a website dedicated to Eucharistic miracles, and St Manuel González García (1877-1940), a Spanish bishop and founder of a religious congregation called the Eucharistic Missionaries of Nazareth.

More recently, the sisters have been giving retreats at parishes in the state that include a Holy Hour of adoration of the Eucharist.

Fr Paul Gousse, the chaplain to the sisters, told the Register he recently caught a little of a presentation on the Eucharist by one of the members of the association, Sr Eucharista, and unexpectedly felt driven to listen to the whole thing, as she weaved in references to St John Paul II's 2003 encyclical on the Eucharist and her

own experiences with devotion to the Eucharist.

"And so what is going on in these parishes is people are being compelled to listen to their testimony and their witness; and because they speak from the heart, it's having a very powerful effect," Fr Gousse said.

Bishop Libasci said the diocese "is truly blessed" to have the Daughters of Mary.

"The sisters consistently demonstrate their love for the Eucharist, which in turn inspires others to deepen their own understanding and love of this precious gift of Our Lord," Bishop Libasci said, in a written statement to the Register, through a spokesman.

Fr Gousse said it's a joy to be their chaplain.

"The thing I love about these sisters: They're real," Fr Gousse said. "If you were to sit down at a dinner table with them, you'd do a lot of laughing."



## Light for the Lost

The upcoming Eucharistic pilgrimage is not an exercise in preaching to the converted. Participants expect and hope to come across people who have lost their way and for whom a glimpse of Jesus might make all the difference.

"They're so lost, and they're struggling, because they've severed that communion with the Lord. They just need a little bit of light to guide them back on the right way," said Sr Miriam Christe.

Mother Mary Maximilian said the two-month Eucharistic procession will amount to God coming to His own.

"The Lord wants to be among His people," she said. "He wants to bring them joy, and He wants to be with them in their sorrow."

"We're just the women who follow." — By Matthew McDonald, Register



# Pope Francis more interested in big discussions than specific issues

“From the beginning, Francis has been more interested in the process of synodal conversation than in the specific issues,” said Anna Rowlands, the St Hilda Professor of Catholic Social Thought and Practice at Durham University in England.

“Rather than attempting to announce synodality, the Church, Pope Francis hoped, would grasp it by doing it and no one, in principle, would be excluded,” she said.

Rowlands, who is a theological adviser to the Vatican’s office for the Synod of Bishops, delivered her remarks during the annual Mary Ward Lecture hosted by the Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology at Cambridge University on April 17.

Her hour-long address served a sort of “State of the Synod” overview and was among the most sweeping and candid accounts of the process as yet offered by one of its own organisers. The presentation came shortly after the Vatican announced recently the Pope had created study groups to consider some of the synod’s most controversial issues, which will likely keep the discussions on those issues going past the second assembly of the synod, to be held in Rome this October.

In assessing the multi-year synod on synodality — a three-phased process that began with listening sessions across the globe, followed by continental assemblies and culminating in two sessions in Rome — Rowlands said that the synod process is helping to realise Francis’ 2013 apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), which has served as a blueprint for his papacy.

In that first major document as Pope, Francis declared that he wanted the Church to become “mission-oriented” and “to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open.”

According to Rowlands, “If the synod on synodality had been set up in making that vision in *Evangelii Gaudium* a reality, then its early stages can be judged to have produced remarkable results.”

In her analysis, many of Francis’ early aspirations in his 2013 exhortation — to invert the ecclesial pyramid to better involve parishes and episcopal conferences in decision-making, the need for better preaching, overcoming abuse of every kind, and renewed pastoral accompaniment of families, among others — have all been surfaced in the synod reports that were produced from almost every episcopal conference across

**A key synod adviser says Pope Francis is more interested in deepening the practice of synodality within the Catholic Church rather than wading into debates over the hot-button issues that have emerged from his major, three-year process to reform the global institution.**

the globe.

Rowlands went on to refer to *Evangelii Gaudium* and the ongoing synod on synodality as “two bookends” of the Francis papacy, now in its 11th year.

The synod, she observed, “enables the dynamic vision” of *Evangelii Gaudium* “to become a lived reality” in the Church, adding that Francis’ hope is for the legacy of the synod process to “a more genuine co-responsibility of the baptised for the future of the Church.”

While acknowledging that she operates as both an outsider and an insider to the synod — as both an autonomous academic theologian who is used to commenting on Church affairs but also a “civil servant” to the process — her assessment offered several observations on ongoing challenges to the synod, particularly at this juncture in between last October’s first session in Rome and the one to come this fall.

In particular, she identified four areas where there is more need for improvement: in participation; the development of better language; resolving issues of power and trust; and the service of theology to the whole Church.

## Participation and language

Despite the global COVID-19 pandemic and various levels of suspicion about the synod process — and acknowledging that individual participation at the local levels of the process was “lower than hoped and uneven” — Rowlands said that the synod provided an opportunity for many Catholics to have their voices heard and counted for the first time in their lives.



Anna Rowlands

While she praised efforts that prioritised reaching those on the social margins, citing synod listening sessions in refugee camps and prisons, she lamented the fact that many parishes acknowledged that those on the peripheries often proved hardest to engage.

Moreover, she said that parish clergy were the “most marginalised ecclesial group” in the process, citing a range of factors from being overwhelmed with other management responsibilities, to feeling disengaged or sceptical or fearful of speaking freely.

“It is difficult to see how this synodal process can take root as, Pope Francis hopes, without them,” she said, noting that a major meeting in Rome will take place at the end of the month, specifically designed to invite an estimated 300 parish priests to offer their voices to the process. “Understanding their silence is critical to any next steps.”

While the October 2023 synod assembly managed to achieve new consensus in a number of areas — the need for a better accompaniment of families, renewed formation of priests, better uses of canonical structures to improve decision-making and transparency — Rowlands said it was difficult to find a common language to discuss issues related to human sexuality and gender.

In this regard, she said pastoral issues have given way to ideological fault lines, particularly when it comes to questions of how to better welcome LGBTQ Catholics. On the role of women, she said there remains a “challenge of negotiating the legacy of re-mythologised accounts of sex and gender that have often been used to frame

and narrate the question of women’s ministerial and vocational roles.”

On this front, Rowlands said that finding a better language is an “urgent challenge” for the synod.

## Power, trust, theology

Among the other areas of widespread agreement during last fall’s first synod meeting in Rome was the shared recognition that there has been a failure to use the Church’s existing processes and structures in canon law to expand decision-making and governance within Church structures.

Rowlands observed that many canon lawyers noted that there are already many mechanisms in place that could help remedy this if only better utilised, and that new structures do not necessarily have to be invented.

At the same time, she identified a “crisis of trust” that was mentioned in almost all synod reports related to multiple kinds of abuse within the Church, including spiritual, sexual, power and financial. Rowlands went on to describe this as a cross-continental concern raised by both those in the Global North and the Global South.

Under the newly revamped synod model, the monthlong October 2023 Rome meeting took place at roundtables that utilised small group discussions.

While Rowlands praises the depth, dignity and energy of sharing that took place at these tables throughout the month, she said the lack of integration of theologians was a real problem — but not one unique to the synod process.

Instead, she characterised it as an “honest representation of the position of Catholic theology and theologians globally with regards to ecclesial processes.”

“This is not a problem invented by the synod, but it is manifesting in the synod,” saying it exists in dioceses, episcopal conferences and at the level of the universal Church and the synod has put a spotlight on this challenge.

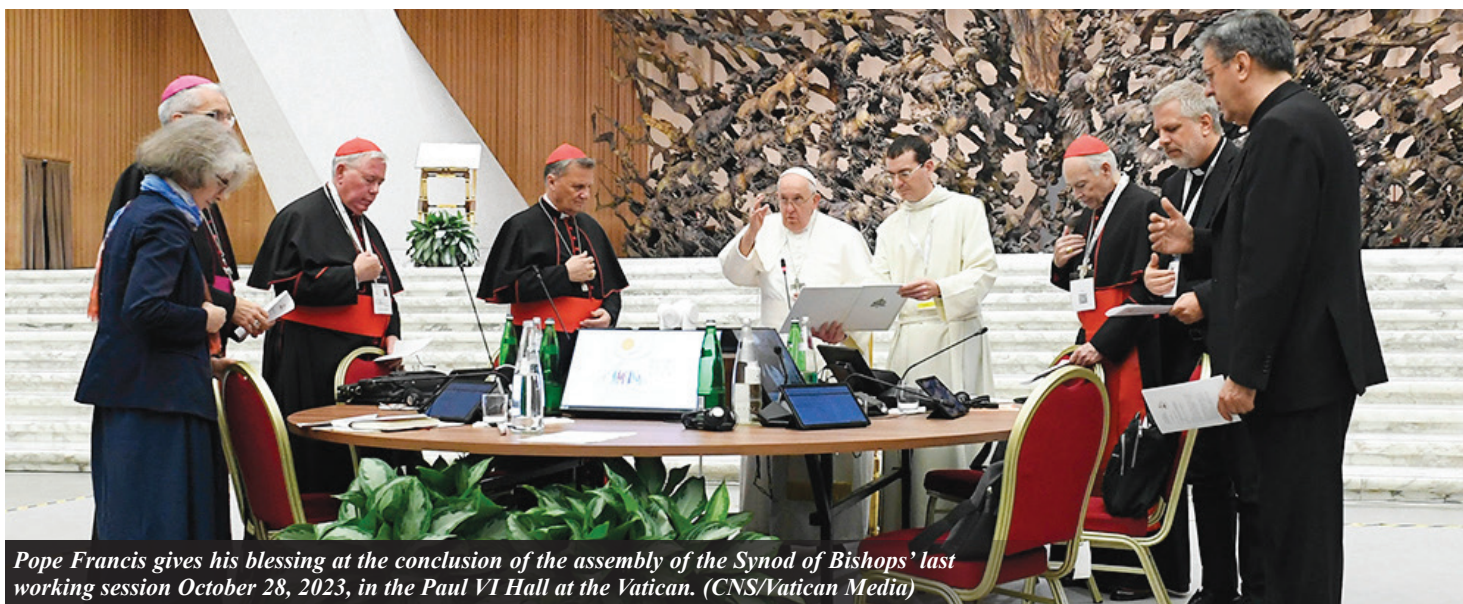
## The synod and Church renewal

Looking ahead to the final session of the synod this October and what it will mean for the future of the Catholic Church, Rowlands said that the Pope is using synodality as the main mechanism to help further the reception of the Second Vatican Council and a vision of the Church that invites greater participation at every level.

While lamenting the “uneven reception” of papal documents by Francis — specifically, his 2015 encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si’, on Care for Our Common Home* and his 2016 exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of the Family) — she said that Francis knows that reform does not come top down through documents.

In putting so much stock in the synod, she said she is confident that the synod “has not created new problems or tensions that did not already exist and arguably has proved a hugely positive catalyst for renewal, encounter and mission across the globe, even if unevenly so.”

“The Pope, instead of trying to sell an idea to the cardinals and trying to cascade it down through documents, invited and convoked the whole world in synod, hoping that we would learn it by doing it,” said Rowlands. — **By Christopher White, NCR**



Pope Francis gives his blessing at the conclusion of the assembly of the Synod of Bishops' last working session October 28, 2023, in the Paul VI Hall at the Vatican. (CNS/Vatican Media)



# For the formation of religious and seminarians

## Pope's prayer intention for May

Reflecting on Pope Francis' prayer intention for May: **For the Formation of Religious and Seminarians.** We pray that religious women and men, and seminarians, grow in their own vocations through their human, pastoral, spiritual and community formation, leading them to be credible witnesses to the Gospel, reminded me of his words:

*"The priest who seldom goes out of himself ... misses out on the best of our people, on what can stir the depths of his priestly heart. ... This is precisely the reason why some priests grow dissatisfied, lose heart and become, in a sense, collectors of antiquities or novelties — instead of being shepherds living with 'the smell of the sheep.' This is what I am asking you — be shepherds with the smell of sheep."* — Pope Francis' address to the world's priests at the Chrism Mass on Holy Thursday March 28, 2013.

From the beginning of his pontificate the Holy Father has been very concerned about the life of priests and religious, constantly seeking ways to help us live our call to the fullest. Pope Francis often emphasises the importance of humility, simplicity, and service as key concerns and challenges for priests and religious. He frequently calls on clergy to be close to the people they serve, to live lives of simplicity and modesty, and to prioritise caring for the marginalised and vulnerable, thus establishing the Lord's kingdom of justice and peace.

And therefore, I reached out to lay faithful in Malaysia to understand their expectations of priests and religious women and men. I was heartened by the response: 117 individuals eagerly shared their insights through a brief questionnaire. I commend each of them for their deep, honest, and constructive feedback. Although this article cannot fully capture the richness of their input, I assure the respondents that I will compile all the responses and provide them to those responsible for formation in seminaries and religious houses.

The respondents' contributions provide valuable insight into the expectations of the lay faithful and offer recommendations to help these expectations become reality. Their perspectives, summarised here, reflect a collective desire for a deeper engagement and understanding between clergy, religious, and the communities they serve.



### PRAYER PRISM

Fr Fabian Dicom

According to the survey, today's priests and religious are expected to embody compassion, humility, and authenticity while addressing the needs of their community. They are to also embody a genuine care and understanding for their congregations, effectively guiding, and collaborating for community improvement. Addressing contemporary issues, offering practical spiritual guidance and support, and living lives reflecting Gospel teachings while adapting to modern challenges are inherent. They are expected to actively engage and include, particularly the youth, utilising technology for communication and outreach. Promoting gender equality and serving as mentors and role models are expected as well.

To meet these expectations, the respondents in general feel holistic formation is key, integrating theological studies with practical skills such as human psychology, oratory, basic accounting, and corporate managerial skills. It is crucial to incorporate Church history, Catholic apologetics, and evangelisation training. Emphasis should be placed on practical application, with training focusing on real-world use of theological knowledge. Continual formation is vital, with regular refresher courses, continuing education modules, and exposure to secular workplaces providing ongoing development.

And the following are more concrete suggestions:

#### Nurturing a Personal Relationship with Jesus

This involves deeply internalising His teachings and personifying His compassionate and selfless spirit. The ethos is centred around Jesus Himself, aspiring to become true disciples who walk in His footsteps and emulate His love, mercy, and wisdom. Cultivating this intimate connection with Jesus is seen as foundational, guiding seminarians and religious individuals to take on the heart and mind of Jesus, thus shaping their lives and ministry in His image.



Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (FSIC) during the Eucharistic Celebration of the World Day of Consecrated Life.

#### Formation for Religious Women and Men

A deeper understanding and practice of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience are essential. Training should focus on spirituality, community living, and service. Additionally, training in theology, human psychology, leadership skills, and practical oratory skills is crucial for effective ministry.

#### Leadership and People Management Training

One crucial aspect of religious leadership is effective people management. Continuous training in people management equips them to navigate the complexities of parish and community life and make informed decisions on behalf of the congregation and members of the community.

#### Public Speaking and Sermon Construction Formation

Formation in public speaking and sermon construction is crucial for crafting and delivering engaging homilies. This training involves mastering techniques such as capturing attention, articulation, pacing, and strategic pauses. Continuous improvement and adaptation to the audience are key aspects of honing these skills.

#### Pastoral Immersion

Priests and religious benefit greatly from immersive pastoral experiences, including

caring for the sick and living among marginalised communities. It's essential for all seminarians and religious women and men to spend at least a year living among the poor, those in the periphery, and migrant and refugee communities during their formation. This experience offers them a first-hand encounter with the struggles, sufferings, and challenges faced by these communities, fostering a deeper understanding and empathy. Also, multilingualism is increasingly crucial for priests to better serve diverse communities with varying language needs.

#### Financial stewardship

Financial stewardship is crucial for responsibly managing the finances of a parish, religious institution, or an ecclesial project. Proper training ensures transparency and effective resource allocation, allowing future priests and religious women and men to manage fund raising and allocate resources efficiently. This promotes responsible handling of church finances and transparency in financial matters, ensuring resources are used effectively for the community's benefit.

#### Self-Care and Well-Being

In the formation of seminarians and religious men and women, prioritising self-care and well-being is crucial. This involves regular medical check-ups to maintain physical health, personal time off for rest, and mentorship to prevent burnout. Medical check-ups ensure early detection of health issues, while personal time off allows for rest and balance. Mentorship helps identify signs of burnout and teaches stress management and coping skills, fostering holistic well-being and equipping them for their vocation.

In conclusion, I believe that the above insights, while not exhaustive of all the responses, nevertheless, both affirm and challenge our seminaries and religious formation houses. They remind us of our mission: to form women and men into credible witnesses of the Gospel. Let us, as we pray for this intention, pray also for all involved in this vital task of formation, both formators and those being formed.

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



Young priests and seminarians spending time in prayer.



# Reflecting on the Dedication of Divine Mercy Church, Skudai

## A journey of 24 years in the making

By Fr Dr Lawrence Ng

The Church of Divine Mercy (CDM) was dedicated on Divine Mercy Sunday in a multi-lingual Mass at 10.40am, April 7, 2024, by Rt Rev Bernard Paul, Bishop of Malacca Johore.

About five hundred people attended the dedication. The bulk of the congregation was seated on the first floor where the main Church is located. The people on the ground floor followed the Mass via LED TVs and speakers that were connected to the main Church.

### Background of the Divine Mercy Parish

The Divine Mercy parish is unique in the sense that it is the only shop house church in the Diocese of Malacca Johore. It is located near Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) and started as a Skudai Catholic Centre of Students in June 2000.

The housing development of the Skudai area over the past decades has impacted

the parish. Over the decade, hundreds of Catholics have moved into the Skudai area, including a great influx of Catholics from Sabah and Sarawak. Even as I write, hundreds of new houses are being built within a radius of 10 kilometres. Today, the parish comprises of four main language communities, that is, Tamil, Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese, and English.

One reason for the growth of the Skudai area is due to Catholics from all over arriving in Johor to seek employment in Singapore. It is also one of the reasons why, despite the number of Catholics amounting to over thousands, many find it difficult to contribute to the parish. There are also many parishioners who send their children for catechism but attend Mass mostly in the parishes in Johor Bahru. Many of them do not feel obliged to contribute or serve the parish in any way.

The Bahasa-speaking community from Sabah and Sarawak appears to be the largest community in the parish. However, many do not come regularly or have only just started practising their faith seriously. Efforts must



Bishop Bernard Paul with Fr Dr Lawrence Ng and Fr James Rajendran.

be made in this area, including reaching out and re-evangelising them. Many of them identify themselves as Catholics but do not know what that means. They are the current sleeping giant of South Johor in the diocese.

Currently, there are less than a hundred students from UTM. The Campus Ministry

is divided into Bahasa-English and Chinese-speaking students. There are about 20 Chinese-speaking and the rest mostly attend the Mass in English. They are the main contributors to the liturgical life for the liturgy in English, from music, servers, to lectors.

## Renovations and preparation



Bishop Bernard Paul blessing the congregation with holy water.

The Skudai Catholic Centre was decreed a parish at the Feast of the Divine Mercy last year. Since then, the parish has been renovated before the dedication. Among the works were making more space at the multi-purpose hall for community gatherings, classrooms, and storerooms, including a small chapel for funerals, weekday Masses, and the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. The altar was upgraded to give it some beauty and in the works is a Divine Mercy Mosaic with St Pope John Paul II and St Faustina, and a wooden picture of Our Mother of Perpetual Help.

### Multilingual dedication Mass

During the dedication, Bishop Bernard impressed upon the people during his homily how God's Mercy counters the world's philosophy that the human person is sufficient by themselves. Faith in God continues to empower us with hope and enriches our lives. Giving the acronym M.E.R.C.Y as Mighty Eternal Redeemer Carries You, Bishop Bernard tells the people that God carries us through the darkest times.

Bishop Bernard added that the Feast of Divine Mercy reminds us to carry others as God has carried us. We can do this by learning from the early Christian community by sharing to overcome selfishness. We can learn from nature to be giving. Nobody is so poor that they cannot share from the abundance that they have. Finally, learn from the risen Christ who has overcome darkness and death. This enables us to move forward in our life journey with faith and courage.



## Not a word of thanks

As parish priest, I felt I should acknowledge a word of thanks for this day though I usually avoid giving speeches when possible. During my short speech, I did not say a word of thanks to the people behind the scenes. They include the Divine Mercy groups from each language community who practised their chants so that we could have multilingual chaplets during the nine-day novena. I also skipped the people who came for the *gotong-royong*, the multilingual choir that made the dedication a truly vibrant Mass, and others who worked quietly behind the scenes. Nor did I thank the countless people who supported our building projects and fundraising.

Instead, I was also thinking about those who have always been faithful in building the community. Many worked quietly in the background and offered their service for the love of God without the need to be thanked. I do not think it even occurred to them. Dozens have contributed their time, money, and talents generously without counting the cost. This can be in liturgy, catechetics, BECs, youth, and so on. The humility I found in many of them humbles and inspires me.

What I did was talk about service, mission, and not being tired or giving up. This dedication was not an achievement or something that we should rest our laurels on. It is a continued call to serve and to mission, marked by the mercy of God. I have come to be convinced over the years that rot and decline happen when there is an absence of a sense of mission. Divine Mercy Parish Skudai, I pray that we will press on together in a spirit of communion, participation, and mission, while always reciting in our hearts, "Jesus, I trust in you."



Bishop Bernard Paul anointing the walls of the church and the altar.





## REMINISCING CHURCH

Richard Chia

# Profile changes of parish communities in Malaysia

One aspect of Malaysia's colonial legacy on the Church was the separation of the lay faithful for Sunday worship based on language. Churches were designated as English-speaking, Chinese-speaking, Tamil-speaking, or Bahasa-speaking, leading Catholics to attend services where their preferred language was spoken. Often, this resulted in the faithful travelling long distances to reach these churches.

As the decades passed, with the dwindling of missionary priests – specifically the French and Chinese missionaries – the local Malaysian priests stepped up to fill the shepherd's role. Naturally, they are multi-linguistic, as with most Malaysians brought up in the Malaysian education and culture. Churches in Malaysia became multi-linguistic, catering to the diverse language-speaking community.

The lay faithful still had the option to worship in their language of preference, but with one major difference, they no longer had to travel far. The parish community evolved to become a neighbourhood community of diverse language-speaking parishioners. Parish structures, ministries, events and catechism was developed to cater to the various language-groups. At times, they came together to celebrate as one parish community, eg parish feast days, Corpus Christi celebrations, etc.

At the turn of the millennium, when the nation opened its doors to foreign university students and developed policies to attract more foreign business investment, a surge of foreign nationals flooded in. A sizable number of these foreign nationals are Catholics, and started worshipping in many of the Churches

in Malaysia. As they congregated in the Church, they started playing an active role in the life of the parish.

The World Bank, East Asia Pacific region, in its 2013 report said that more than two thirds of the foreign nationals in Malaysia are found in Selangor, Sabah and Johor states. In these states, the influx of foreign students and workers mainly came from Philippines, Indonesia, China, India, and a large number from the continent of Africa. Under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees programme, many more came from the sub-continent of Indo-China, namely Myanmar. In some city parishes, pockets of Catholic lay faithful hailing from South Korea, Japan, South American nations, in addition to the many expatriate professionals from Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand became prominent.

The increase and profile changes in the Catholic population may not be significant on a parish-by-parish level, but looking at it from a macro level, over a span of thirty years, it is significant.

According to statistics from the Catholic Directory and Ordo 1990 until 2020, published by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, the increase in Catholic population in Malaysia had jumped from 0.5 million in 1990 to 1.1 million in 2020, or growth of 125 per cent. In comparison, the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) estimates of population in Malaysia in 1990 was 18.1 million, while in 2020 was 32.4 million, with growth of 79 per cent only.

Another notable difference, based on censuses conducted by the Archdiocese

of KL in 2015 and Diocese of Malacca Johore in 2019, are the population of female Catholics in our churches, which shows a ratio of 53 per cent female versus 47 per cent males. DOSM's statistics shows an average of 106 males for every 100 females (or, 48.5 per cent female vs. 51.5 per cent male) in Malaysia.

### What this means for our churches in Malaysia are:

1. The parish communities need to welcome and integrate the various foreign national Catholics in our midst, as well as cater for the multilingual Malaysian population.

2. The impact of these changes are not only at the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, but also at the sacramental, pastoral and parish administrative level. Young foreign national couples wishing to get married in church, married foreign national couples bringing infants for baptism and catechism, or adult foreign nationals wishing to join the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. Not to mention bereavements, homebound, house blessings, etc.

3. Our Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) too have to re-look its method of outreach, and objective. It has to be open to foreign national Catholics living in the neighbourhood, who may call Malaysia home (be it temporary or long term).

4. Female Catholics are playing a significant role in our parishes, and have naturally assumed some leadership role in the various ministries and groups in the Church.

Another prominent change for the Church in Malaysia is the growing number of aging parishioners seated in the church pews. In the two censuses conducted, parishioners aged 20 years and below are only 24-26 per cent, while those aged 50 years and above are 29-32 per cent. In many parishes, the senior citizen groups are the only ministry that is growing. The Archdiocese of KL has a ministry for grandparents.

Numerous reasons can be given for the declining youth population in church – busy lifestyle (tuition, long hours at school/work, career-track, 24x7 work mentality), low birth rates (one or two child families), migration (either for studies or work opportunities), boring sermons, late marriages (put on hold until job stability), etc. As the clergy ages, so does the Catholic lay faithful.

As the Universal Church heads towards Synod 2024 in October, many issues are escalated by different countries. One prominent global issue is the declining call to priestly and religious vocations. This had led many western countries to suggest alternative candidates to the clergy, rather than address the real elephant in the room, namely, the need to intensify the call to vocations, prayer and evangelisation. Is this a wake-up call for the Church in Malaysia? We too may be heading in that direction, as many of our clergy are aged 50 years and above.

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



## FROM THE OTHER SIDE

Regina William

# The shadows of caste in a baptism certificate

left an indelible mark on the country's social fabric. Defined by rigid hierarchical divisions based on birth, occupation, and perceived purity, it has governed every aspect of life, including religion.

The caste system is part of the Indian culture present in Christianity today. Those who converted to Christianity brought the caste system, which is purely a Hindu tradition, along with them.

However, what many may not realise is the extent to which the caste system permeated even the most unexpected corners, such as baptism certificates within the Catholic Church.

Despite being outlawed in 1950, the caste system remains a powerful force in Indian society. It dictates social roles, professions, and even personal relationships.

The caste hierarchy, which predates Hinduism, divides people into rigid groups based on their karma (work) and dharma (duty). These castes are ranked from highest to lowest, with the Dalits (formerly known as 'untouchables') at the bottom.

Dalits often perform tasks like manual scavenging, cleaning sewers, and other menial jobs. This system is deeply entrenched and sanctioned by Hindu religious beliefs.

While the Catholic Church in India has made efforts to address caste discrimination, challenges remain.

Mom used to tell us stories of how

when she was growing up, she would not be allowed to enter the home if she had ventured out of their village into the "prohibited" area where the population from the "lower caste" lived. Each time, she had to take a dip in the river to "cleanse" herself before being allowed into the house.

Just recently, while on a flight to Chennai from Kuala Lumpur, I was surprised when a lady sitting next to me actually asked about which caste I belonged to, while stating hers nonchalantly as if we were talking about the weather.

In Malaysia, the caste system is not as overtly structured as it has been historically in some other regions.

Growing up in Malaysia with my mom's older sister, my siblings and I also experienced how the caste system was also very much "alive" here years ago.

My aunt would not even have a drink or eat at any of the homes or weddings we were invited to attend, and we were also not allowed to invite friends over during festive occasions. It used to frustrate me so much as I could not understand why this was an issue to begin with until I was much older.

These days, many Malaysian Indians do not actively refer to the caste system within their families. It is considered outdated and irrelevant in today's society. Many believe that the caste system should not

be practised, and individuals should not be judged based on their so called "standings" among the community.

Though the caste system is not outwardly known to be practised here, it is still a major denominator when matchmaking among Indians, even Catholics.

Combating caste discrimination within the Catholic Church is essential for fostering inclusivity and promoting the fundamental equality that Christianity upholds.

Jesus did not speak specifically about the caste system but He spoke on the issues surrounding social justice, commanding us and all men to love God and one another as they love themselves. That includes feeding the poor and treating everyone justly, so the principles of the Indian caste system are not harmonious with the principles of Christianity.

All said and done, I'm glad that this practice is slowly dissipating in Malaysia as caste is no longer an issue in Malaysia, with inter marriages being the norm these days.

● **Regina William** is an ex-journalist turned head of communications, now full-time grandmother to three children aged between five and 1.5 years old, crisscrossing the globe to play the role. She can be reached at regina.william1223@gmail.com

My mom was born in India, 90 years ago in a village in Karaikal, Pondicherry. Recently, thanks to technology and the ability to connect the historical dots remotely, through a distant relative who lives in France, we managed to obtain an extract of her baptism certificate from the Church of St Andrew, Kurumbagaram in Karaikal.

Mom did not have her birth certificate, hence no one could ascertain her date of birth for official documents and the family was thrilled with the baptism certificate, which recorded her date of birth and date of baptism 90 years ago.

As I delved into the document, I stumbled upon a detail that surprised and unsettled me. As the extract of the baptism certificate had the word "caste" on it.

Born and raised in India, my mother's journey intertwines with the complex tapestry of Indian society, where the caste system has long dictated social norms and hierarchies. Yet, what intrigues me even more is the revelation that this societal construct found its way into the sacred confines of the Catholic Church.

The caste system, with its origins deeply rooted in ancient Indian civilisation, has





Fr Ron Rolheiser

# Civility has left the building

Why do we no longer get along with each other? Why is there such bitter polarisation inside of our countries, our neighbourhoods, our churches, and even in our families? Why do we feel so unsafe in many of our conversations where we are perpetually on guard so as not to step on some political, social, or moral land mine?

We all have our own theories on why this is so, and mostly we choose our news channels and friends to bolster our own views. Why? Why this bitter polarisation and nastiness among us?

Well, let me suggest an answer from an ancient source, Scripture. In the Hebrew scriptures (our Old Testament), the prophet Malachi offers us this insight on the origins of polarisation, division, and hatred. Echoing the voice of God, he writes: "Therefore, I have made you contemptible and base before all the people, since you do not keep my ways, but show partiality in your decisions. Have we not all the one Father? Has not the one God created us? *Why do we break faith with one another?*"

Isn't this particularly apropos for us today, given all the polarisation and hatred in our houses of government, our churches, our communities, and our families, where for the most part we no longer respect each other and struggle even to be civil with each other? We have broken

faith with each other. Civility has left the building.

Moreover, this afflicts both sides of the ideological, political, social, and ecclesial spectrums. Both sides have their particular ideological wings which are scornfully unsympathetic to those who don't share their view, paranoid about hidden conspiracies, rigidly uncompromising, and disrespectful and belittling of anyone who does not share their perspective. And, for the most part, they preach, advocate, and practise hatred — believing that all this is done in service of God, truth, moral cause, enlightenment, freedom, or nationalism.

Someone once said, not everything can be fixed or cured, but it should be named properly. That's the case here. We need to name this. We need to say out loud, this is wrong. We need to say out loud that none of this can be done in the name of love. And we need to say out loud that we may never rationalize hatred and disrespect in the name of God, the Bible, truth, moral cause, freedom, enlightenment, or anything else.

This needs to be named, irrespective of wherever we find ourselves amid all the divisive and hate-filled debates that dominate public discourse today. Each of us needs to examine himself or herself vis-a-vis our partiality, namely, how little we even want to understand the other side,

how much disrespect we have for some people, how civility is often absent from our speech, and how much hatred has unconsciously crept into our lives.

After this, we need a second self-scrutiny. The word "sincere" comes from two Latin words (*sine* – without and *cere* – wax). To be sincere is to be "without wax", to be your real self, outside of others' influence. But that's not easy. How we picture ourselves, what we believe, and our view on most anything at a given moment is heavily coloured by our personal history, our wounds, who we live with, what work we do, who our colleagues and friends are, the country we live in, and the political, social, and religious ideologies we inhale with the air we breathe. It's not easy to know what we really think or feel about a given issue. Am I sincere or is my reaction predicated more on who my friends and colleagues are and where I get my news? At the core of my being, who am I really, without wax?

Given our struggle for sincerity, particularly in our present climate of division, disrespect, and hatred, we might ask ourselves, how much of what I am passionate about enough to generate hatred inside me, is really rooted in sincerity as opposed to ideology or my instinctual emotional or intellectual reaction toward something I dislike?

This is not easy to answer, understandably so. We are pathologically complex as human persons, and the quest for sincerity is the quest of a lifetime. However, while on that journey towards sincerity there are some non-negotiable human and spiritual rules. The biblical prophet Malachi names one of them: "Do not show partiality in your decisions and do not break faith with each other". When we parse that out, what is it saying?

Among other things, this: You have a right to struggle, to disagree with others, to be passionate for truth, to be angry sometimes, and (yes) even to feel hateful occasionally (since hate is not the opposite of love, indifference is). But you may never preach hatred and division or advocate for them in the name of goodness; instead, in that place inside you where sincerity resides, you need to nurse a congenital distrust of anyone who does proactively advocate for hatred and division.

Civility has left the building.

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



## As I was contemplating

Fr Gerard Steve Theraviam

# Living life in the Spirit

Moving on in the season of Eastertide, we will soon celebrate the Ascension. The Apostles had to experience the physical absence of Jesus and hence, a sense of loss. Yet there is also the promise of His abiding presence. *And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.* (Matt. 28:20). That surely is a great assurance as we are also reminded that we are not left orphans, but are gifted with the Holy Spirit, even at our baptisms. *I shall ask the Father, and He will give you another Paraclete to be with you for ever* (John 14:16)

In fact, the nine days between Ascension and Pentecost were the first original Novena. Jesus had told the Apostles not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for what the Father had promised (Acts 1:4). And so they did just that, waiting and praying in anticipation, probably not knowing what to expect. After all the recent happenings, they were probably afraid as well.

The Holy Spirit descended upon them spectacularly — with the sound of violent wind and the tongues of fire. It was indeed a life-changing experience. The Pentecost event inaugurated the age of the Spirit, as the fledgling community of Jewish disciples slowly exploded into a dynamic growing crowd of people who spoke a myriad of languages, whose linguistic ability meant that foreigners could understand them and were brought to faith. No longer afraid, Peter and the others went out boldly preaching the Good News of

salvation, and winning disciples, much to the dismay of the Jewish authorities who tried to stop them and soon unleashed persecution upon them in retaliation.

*You will receive the power of the Holy Spirit which will come on you, and then you will be My witnesses, not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judaea and Samaria, and indeed to earth's remotest ends.* (Acts 1:8) What was a localised experience was soon to be exported to other lands as the early disciples had to flee their homelands and move to new locations to escape persecution, which brought the opportunity of sharing faith with the people they came into contact with. Indeed, the Acts of the Apostles records how the faith was shared with people in the region and beyond, thanks to the missionary efforts of Paul and his companions. Soon the Jewish component of the adherents of the faith were outnumbered by the Gentiles that were converted, not without the problems that ensued due to the insecurity among the former, who insisted on Jewish practices such as food laws and circumcision. Today the Good News has been proclaimed virtually in every country, even as new adherents to the faith respond positively to missionary activity.

So, what does Pentecost mean for us today? Most of us receive the Sacrament of Confirmation as teens and sadly, some see it as a sort of 'graduation' from Catechism (and sadly, even church attendance). Yet, the truth is that it is a completion of our initiation as Christians and being sent out on mission in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We are given the Holy Spirit not just for

mere personal sanctification. Yet this is in itself important! *All who are guided by the Spirit of God are sons of God; ... for what you received was not the spirit of slavery to bring you back into fear; you received the Spirit of adoption, enabling us to cry out, 'Abba, Father!'* The Spirit himself joins with our spirit to bear witness that we are children of God. (Romans 8:14-16) The Holy Spirit helps us to walk away from our fear and rediscover our identity as daughters and sons of God. It is this intimacy with God that must be owned and built upon — for that is the foundation of our relationship with God, it is what gives us the confidence and trust as we encounter uncertainty in our journey. The Holy Spirit helps us to pray in our weakness even when we don't know how to. (Romans 8:26) We are also led by the Spirit to discover the truth, whether it be about ourselves or beyond. (John 16:13)

Nevertheless, personal sanctification is not all it is about — we are ultimately given the Holy Spirit that we may be empowered for mission! *When the Paraclete comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who issues from the Father, He will be My witness.*

*And you too will be witnesses, because you have been with Me from the beginning.* (John 15:26-27) What that mission might be requires discernment, but often people think that mission is about going elsewhere to preach. Our mission starts where we are right now, where we are, as we authentically proclaim the presence of God in our lives in the way we live.

For instance, are the fruits of the Holy Spirit evident in my life that it might lead

others to ask questions about what makes me tick and discover God in my life? Am I an authentic witness by the way that I live that I am 'salt and light' to people around me? *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control...* (Galatians 5:22-23) Are people able to see good fruit in me and hence, come to discover God or is rotten fruit all they see? This is certainly more important than being able to boast about other more spectacular charismatic gifts of the Spirit, such as prophecy or tongues and their interpretation. We shouldn't doubt the gift but if the fruits are missing, then one would want to ask questions about the authenticity and provenance of those gifts.

The Holy Spirit is possibly the least known Person in the Trinity. Perhaps if you would like to experience the Holy Spirit in your life, consider a programme like the *Life in the Spirit Seminar* or even the Alpha course. Above all, pray for the Spirit to envelope your life and empower you for mission. Let us be led into the fullness of Life!

*Come, Holy Spirit,  
fill the hearts of your faithful  
and kindle in them the fire of your love.  
Send forth your Spirit  
and they shall be created,  
and you shall renew the face of the earth.*

● **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.



## THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT PUZZLE

One of the scribes came to Jesus and asked him, "Which is the first of all the commandments?"

Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God  
is [2] alone! You shall [4]  
the Lord your God with all your  
[6], [5] all your soul,  
with all your [3], and with all  
your [1]. The  
[9] is this: You shall love  
[8] neighbor as [7].

**LORD  
HEART  
YOUR  
SECOND  
LOVE  
YOURSELF  
WITH  
STRENGTH  
MIND**

A simple line drawing of three men standing side-by-side, facing left. They are wearing long, light-colored robes over white tunics. The man on the left has a long beard and is looking slightly down. The man in the middle has a shorter beard and is looking forward. The man on the right has a beard and is looking slightly to the right. They are standing on a plain surface.

$$\begin{array}{r} 1. \quad \overline{\phantom{0}1} \overline{\phantom{0}2} \overline{\phantom{0}3} \\ 2. \quad \overline{\phantom{0}4} \overline{\phantom{0}5} \overline{\phantom{0}6} \overline{\phantom{0}7} \overline{\phantom{0}8} \overline{\phantom{0}9} \end{array}$$

*Answer to what is the order of importance of those we must love? 1. GOD 2. Others*

Find these objects on the right: BOOK, MAGNET, FISH, STAR, SNAIL, FOOTBALL, SOCK, CAKE, NEEDLE AND THREAD, MOON, BADGE, SPOON.



Aunty Eliz





# YOUTH

May 5, 2024

## MELAKA YOUTH GATHER IN

# FAITH TO PRAY AND DISCERN VOCATIONS



**Sr Shanti Mariadass, FdCC**

**K**RUBONG, Melaka: In the stirring embrace of the thematic call “Called to sow seeds of hope and to build peace,” 90 youthful souls, from the Malacca Vicariate, gathered for the observance of the World Day of Prayer for Vocations at the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Alongside them stood a multitude of religious priests, brothers and sisters and our diocesan priests.

The vigil commenced at 9.00pm with the solemn enthronement of the Bible, an act laden with significance, followed by a poignant elucidation of the Pope’s message for the Day.

The Single Adult ministry from the parishes of St Francis Xavier, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and St Theresa, Gajah Berang, imbued the

evening with luminosity and empowerment through a captivating display of praise and worship. Their harmonious melodies, delivered with fluency in both English and Bahasa, captivated our senses and ushered us into the very essence of the day — a dedicated period of prayer.

The introduction of the various religious orders in the Diocese of Malacca Johore (MJD), together with the diocesan priesthood, provided a profound opportunity for the young attendees to gain a deeper understanding of the diverse religious landscapes within our diocese. The unique customs and traditions observed by each order were showcased with both reverence and delight, leaving a lasting impression on the youthful participants. Their eagerness to inquire further and engage with the representatives underscored their genuine appreciation for the rich tapestry of religious life within our community.

Following the spirited interlude of games and skit plays, participants gleefully showcased their talents, eliciting hearty laughter from the audience. The sharing of vocational stories proved to be another poignant high-

light, offering a profound insight into the nurturing and eventual answering of one’s calling despite the inevitable hurdles encountered along the way.

As the night wore on, the atmosphere remained charged as participants embraced moments of Adoration and Taize prayer, despite the late hour. Their palpable eagerness to forge a deeper connection with the Divine illuminated the sanctity of the occasion, reaffirming the unwavering bond between the Good Shepherd and His flock.

The culminating Eucharistic celebration, presided over by Fr Adrian Francis and celebrated by fellow clergy in attendance, served as a reminder of the importance of cultivating a closer relationship with the Good Shepherd. In his impassioned homily, Fr Adrian, the MJD Vocation Director, urged the young attendees to shed their inhibitions and courageously respond to the call that beckons them.

No gathering would be complete without the nourishment of both body and soul. Gratitude abounded towards the parish of Our Lady of Guadalupe, special thanks to the cler-

gy of the parish, Frs Joseph Heng, Fr Neville Arul Sinnappah and all the volunteers, whose generous hospitality extended not only to the sharing of their premises but also to the provision of sumptuous meals, ensuring that every aspect of the day was attended to with care and abundance.

The final tally revealed a robust attendance of 124 individuals, comprising participants alongside the esteemed presence of priests, religious brothers and sisters, and devoted volunteers. Their collective presence enriched the event, fostering an atmosphere of camaraderie and spiritual fellowship that resonated deeply with all who were fortunate to be in attendance.

A heartfelt expression of gratitude extends to the dedicated priesthood, as well as the religious congregations, whose steadfast commitment to their vocation and unwavering dedication to the nurturing of youth needs cannot be overstated. Indeed, their selfless service has laid the foundation for our collective journey of sowing seeds of hope and peace, igniting a flame of inspiration that shall continue to illuminate our path forward.





# Penang youth leaders go on retreat

PENANG: The inaugural Penang Diocesan Youth Network (PDYN) Leadership Retreat was held at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit from April 9 to 12. This retreat was designed to nurture and equip young individuals, aged 18 to 29, with leadership skills inspired by *Christus Vivit 64* – 'You are the "now" of God'. It targeted mainly parish youth and campus students throughout the Diocese of Penang.

Day 1 began with registration by the Local Organising Committee (LOC) from the host parish. A total of 44 participants, including parish youth, campus students, and working adults, attended the retreat. That evening, an opening Mass was celebrated by Fr Simon Anand, head of PDYN, with Frs Francis Anthony, Desmond Jansen, and Esmond Chua, OFM as concelebrants. Following the Mass, Fr Simon delivered a keynote address.

The focus of Day 2 at the retreat was *Spirituality*, designed to help participants understand their identity in Christ and to develop self-leadership before leading others. The day kicked off with the Lauds prayer, followed by a praise and worship session led by David Chan and his team. Samuel, a key member of the main organising team, facilitated an icebreaker to warm up the group. Audrey Cheah then took the stage to discuss *Identity*. She explored our identity in Christ and our call to respond, prompting participants to reflect on their life's purpose. This was followed by a session on "Emotional Well-being" led by Dr Mary Bharathy, which provided valuable insights into managing stress, mental health, and resources for support. The day wasn't just filled with sessions; one of the highlights was an outdoor Scavenger Hunt, emphasising the retreat's dynamic approach to learning and

engagement.

Day 3 of the retreat was guided by the theme *In the World but not of the World*. The day began with morning prayer, followed by a session led by Stanley Sudhagaran. The session started with the interactive card game 'Build Your Town,' where participants assumed the roles of parliament members tasked with town development, emphasising good governance and reforms. The game was not only enjoyable but also encouraged the development of strategic thinking.

The subsequent session, led by Johnny Bong, focused on "Financial Literacy." Participants gained insights into financial prudence and explored the biblical perspective on stewardship, raising awareness about managing finances in their lives as youth, students, and for their future. Following this, the sixth session was on the topic of *Sexuality*, with separate sessions conducted for male and female participants. Fr Michael Raymond, OFM, Cap, led the session for males, while Sharon Nicholas conducted the session for females.

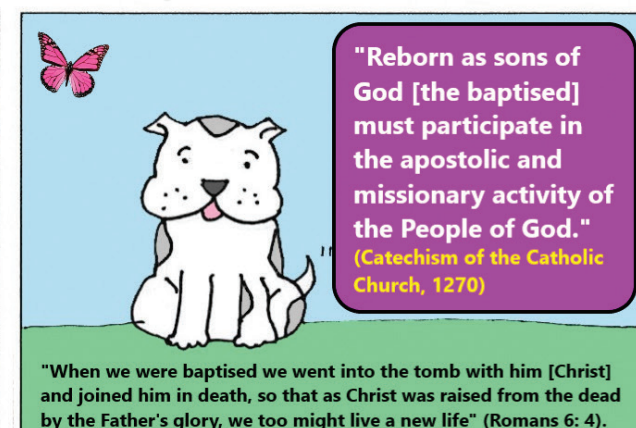
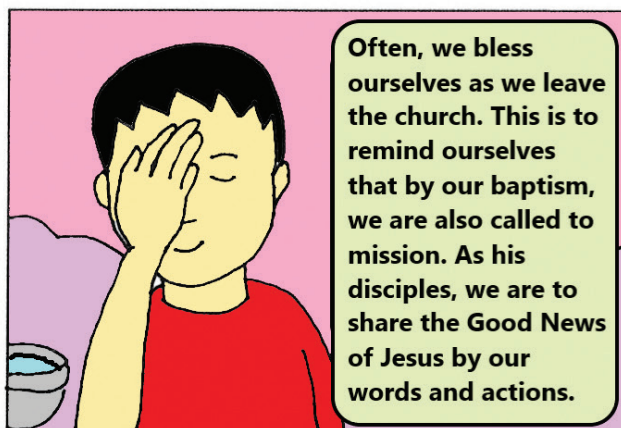
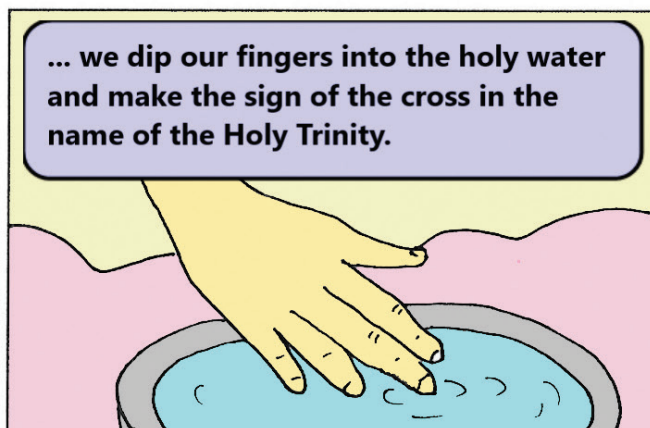
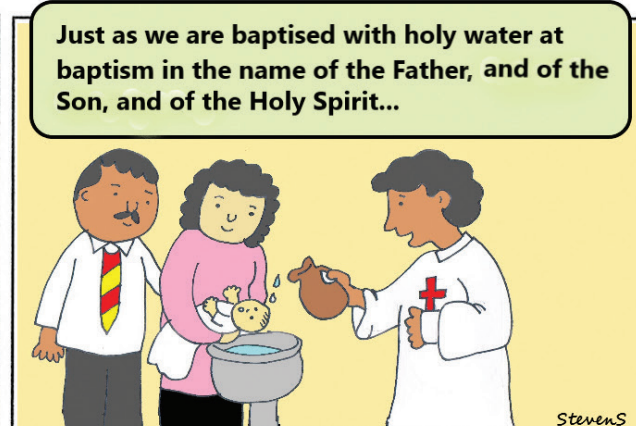
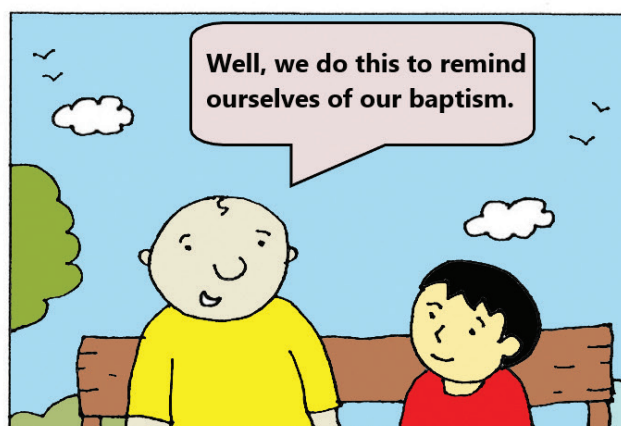
The last session was the Healing Mass and Confession, celebrated by Fr Simon and Fr Desmond. This was an intentional element of the retreat, providing participants with personal time with God, to reflect on their purpose for attending the leadership retreat and experiencing a renewed encounter with Him.

On the final day, we engaged in Spiritual Conversations and listened to testimonies from the participants. Subsequently, everyone prepared for the Mass. As the candles illuminated the space, they symbolised the participants' commissioning to be the light of the world and good shepherds within their parishes and campuses.



## THE SIMPLE LIFE...

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





# Filipinos pay tribute to human rights champion



Filipinos have paid rich tributes to Rene Saguisag, a top human rights lawyer and former senator who defended victims of rights abuses during the Martial Law years.

Saguisag died on April 24 at the age of 84, his family members confirmed. The cause of his death was not disclosed.

"As we mourn his loss, we take solace in the enduring impact of his legacy. Rene Saguisag was a dedicated public servant, and his tireless endeavors as a human rights advocate, senator and writer stand as a testament to his unwavering commitment to justice, truth, and democracy," the Saguisag family said in a statement.

Philippine Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri issued a statement to mourn his death.

"He may have just served one term in the Senate, but his entire life was devoted to pursuing justice and fairness for every Filipino, particularly through such initiatives as the Free Legal Assistance Group," Zubiri said.

"While leaving an indelible mark as a true statesman, he also emulated and lived out the principle that those who have less in life should have more in law by giving free legal services to the poor and needy," he added.

The Philippine flag was flown at half-staff on April 24 in honour of the former senator.

Saguisag rose to prominence for his role in lending legal support to martial law victims of Ferdinand Marcos, the father of the current president.

The fall of Marcos in 1986 due to the *People Power* revolution catapulted him to the political spotlight.

Saguisag was elected to the Philippine Senate in 1987 and became a fierce advocate of pushing accountability and ethics among state officials and workers.

On Sept. 16, 1991, when the Filipinos were divided about the United States military bases in the country, Saguisag was remembered for his brand of nationalism.

"I vote YES to friendship. I vote YES to cooperation. I vote NO to the basing rights agreement - one thousand and one times NO," Saguisag said in his vote to close the US military bases.

The Constantino Foundation, a non-profit organisation, remembered the late senator "as a symbol of the possible".

"He was sometimes called a patron saint of lost causes, because he persevered regardless of the power of his adversaries, and he won the fights that truly mattered not because his was the superior force but because he chose to fight regardless of the forces arrayed against him or outcomes that often seemed out of reach," the foundation said in a statement. — [ucanews.com](http://ucanews.com)

## MEMORIAM

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Tel: 03-2026 8291

### Tenth Anniversary Forever In Our Hearts



**Anthony Lily**  
Returned to the Lord  
on 7th May, 2014

**John 11:25**  
*Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: For we were truly blessed when the Lord gave you as our beloved Mother and Grandmother We love you and miss you always*  
"Those we love do not go away, they walk beside us everyday... unseen unheard but always near. Still loved, still missed and very dear"

Missed dearly by children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, in laws, relatives and friends.

### 5th Anniversary In Memory of Our Beloved Jennet Fernandez d/o Walter Joseph Fernandez Called home: 25 April 2019



*If we live, we live for the Lord; if we die, we die for the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord*  
**Romans 14:8**

### UNTIL WE MEET AGAIN

*We think about you always  
We talk about you still  
You have never been forgotten  
And you never will  
We hold you close within our hearts  
And there you will remain  
To walk and guide us through our lives  
Until we meet again.*

Dearly missed and forever in our hearts  
Husband: Patrick Dianand  
Children: Dwayne, Daryl and Sandra,  
Siblings: George and Mabel, and a host of relatives.

### 23rd Anniversary In Loving Memory of



**Boniface Anthony Gomez**  
Departed: 07-05-2001

*Even after we lose one we hold so dear,  
The warmth of his love keeps his memory near.*

Sadly missed by  
Loved ones.



### 8th Year Anniversary In Ever Loving Memory of Michael Edward Called to the Lord on 5th May 2016

*We thought of you today,  
But that is nothing new,  
We thought about you yesterday,  
And the days before that too.  
We think of you in silence,  
We often speak your name,  
Now all we have are memories,  
And your picture in this frame.*

*Your memory is Our keepsake,  
With which we'll never part,  
God has you in his keeping,  
We have you in Our hearts.*

Greatly missed and cherished by  
Wife, Son, Daughter, Son-in-law,  
Granddaughters, Relatives and Friends.

40th Day Memorial

*"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith"*  
2 Timothy 4:7

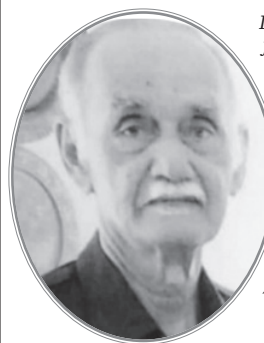
**MARY PHILOMINA ANTHONY**  
nee FERNS (Phamy)  
1944 - 2024

Masses will be offered on Saturday, 11th May 2024  
at the following chapel & churches in the Klang Valley:

Chapel of St Louis Marie de Montfort  
Church of St Francis Xavier  
Church of St Ignatius  
Church of St Thomas More

Church of the Assumption  
Church of the Divine Mercy  
Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe

### In Loving Memory of Solomon Rayan Money (1/12/1934 - 28/04/2020)



*It's been four years since we bid farewell to our beloved Solomon, whose presence continues to be deeply missed everyday. He was a beacon of light, full of kindness, wisdom and love in our lives, leaving behind cherished memories that will forever be etched in our hearts.  
He had truly enjoyed serving tirelessly for the Penang Diocese @ Minor Basilica of St Anne, BM with 65 years of serving the church as Communion Minister & Hospitality Minister.*

As we commemorate this 4th Year Anniversary of passing, we find solace in the words of John 11:25-26: "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.' Forever remembered and dearly missed by loving wife, Anthonia, daughters, Pamela and Sheila, grandchildren and great grandchildren.  
"You Will Always Live In Our Hearts, We Love You."

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# Tech giant signs pledge for ethical AI development

VATICAN: Cisco Systems, a global leader in digital communications technology, has now joined Microsoft and IBM in signing the Pontifical Academy for Life's *Rome Call for AI Ethics*, committing to an ethical approach to artificial intelligence.

Cisco CEO Chuck Robbins met with Pope Francis privately April 24, prior to signing the *Rome Call for AI Ethics*. The *Rome Call* aims for shared responsibility among various sectors to ensure digital and technological advancements, particularly AI, respect human dignity and benefit all.

"We are very pleased that Cisco has joined the *Rome Call* because it is a company that plays a crucial role as a technology partner for the adoption and implementation of artificial intelligence by offering expertise in infrastructure, security and protection of AI data and systems. From now on, we will look at how this can further grow to combine the already present corporate

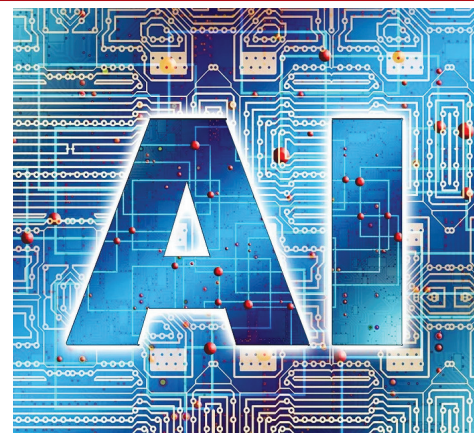
commitment with the ethical principles of the *Rome Call*," said Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, president of the Pontifical Academy for Life and its RenAIssance Foundation.

"Today we know that AI is no longer a topic just for experts, and reflecting on the ethics of its development is more urgent than ever. This new signing of the *Rome Call* demonstrates this," he said during an event where the CEO of Cisco System Inc. signed the *Rome Call* document already endorsed by entities such as Microsoft, IBM, FAO, universities, private corporations and NGOs.

Robbins acknowledged AI's potential and challenges, emphasising the company's role in building networks and infrastructure critical to the AI revolution. He affirmed that the principles of the *Rome Call* align with Cisco's belief in technology based on trust to foster an inclusive future. "AI is fundamentally changing our world –

presenting vast opportunities, but also new challenges. For nearly 40 years Cisco has built the networks that connect people and organisations across the globe, and today we are building the critical infrastructure and security solutions that will power the AI revolution," said Robbins. "The *Rome Call* principles align with Cisco's core belief that technology must be built on a foundation of trust at the highest levels in order to power an inclusive future for all," he said.

Fr Paolo Benanti from the Pontifical Gregorian University who is also Scientific Director of the RenAIssance Foundation and member of the United Nations Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence, underscored the importance of developing robust, unbiased AI data sets, enhancing AI skills, creating governance frameworks, and ensuring AI systems are transparent, accountable, and uphold human values.



"One of the key elements in addressing the transformations of AI is the enabling of its capabilities, which are rapidly advancing and transforming many sectors. Enabling AI capabilities in an ethical manner requires action in multiple directions: developing large, high-quality, unbiased data sets to train AI models; providing access to cyber infrastructure; building AI competencies; establishing governance frameworks to manage AI development; and providing AI systems that are transparent, accountable, and aligned with human values. Today, Cisco's signature of the *Rome Call for AI Ethics* is a step forward in this process," Fr Benanti said. — LCI, (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)

## Catholic Answers alters AI priest character after backlash



A screenshot of "Father Justin," an AI chatbot simulating a priest in order to answer questions for teaching apostolate Catholic Answers. (OSV News screenshot/Catholic Answers)

CALIFORNIA: Catholic Answers, a non-profit apologetics organisation, recently faced significant pushback after launching an AI application named "Father Justin." The interactive AI, designed to provide educational responses about Catholicism, was introduced on April 23 but quickly criticised for its portrayal of a clergy member.

The AI character, modelled after St Justin Martyr, a second-century convert and apologist, was initially designed as a bearded, bushy-browed cleric in clerical attire, positioned against the backdrop of the Basilica of St Francis of Assisi in Italy. Chris Costello, IT director of Catholic Answers, explained that "Father Justin" was meant to honour the role of real-life priests by being authoritative yet approachable.

However, the character soon generated controversy over its capacity to address users as "my child" or "my dear friend," and even suggest it could administer sacraments like absolution and matrimony. This

led to an outcry on social media, with critics arguing that the AI could be misleading. By April 24, the character had been transformed into "just Justin," now depicted in a casual button-down shirt rather than clerical garb.

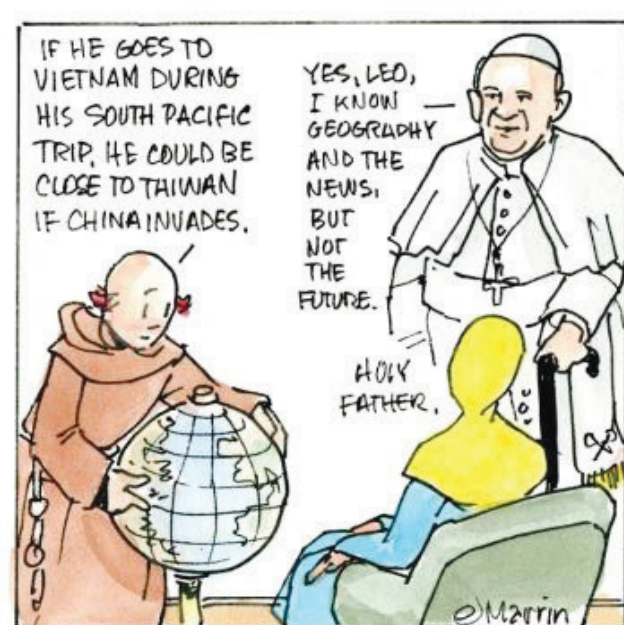
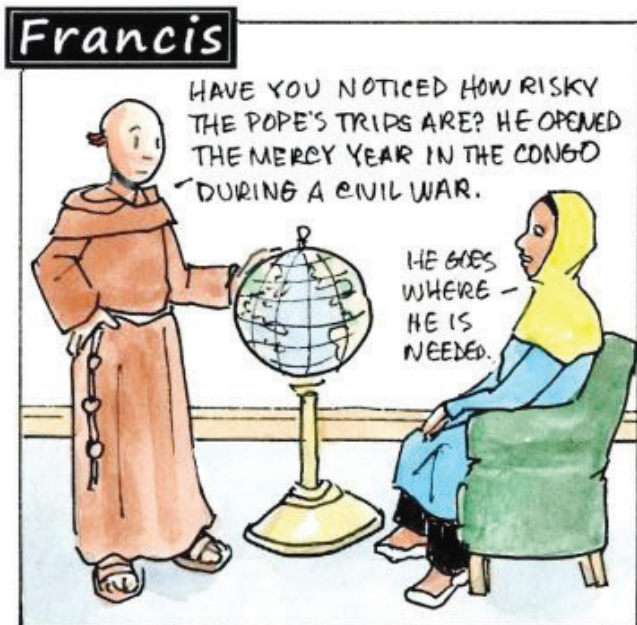
Christopher Check, President of Catholic Answers, addressed the controversy, stating that the intention was never to replace human interaction with priests but to leverage AI technology for apologetics. "We hear these concerns; and we do not want the character to distract from the application's important purpose," said Check. He emphasised that a new lay character would replace "Father Justin" to avoid any confusion about the AI's non-human status.

The app, described as leveraging the power of large language models (LLMs), aims to provide an engaging experience for those exploring the Catholic faith, though not substituting for direct pastoral care. Users can access the app via desktop, entering

their email for a chat session where they can ask questions about Catholic teachings.

Despite the initial setbacks, Catholic Answers remains committed to utilising AI in their mission. The response to the app has highlighted both the potential benefits and challenges of integrating technology with faith-based content. Costello noted that the app was never intended to lead someone astray but to start them on a journey of deeper understanding and discussion.

As Catholic Answers plans the next steps, they are considering the feedback to improve the app's design and function, ensuring that it aligns more closely with both church teaching and user expectations. Meanwhile, Check reassures that this experience will not diminish the organisation's long-standing reputation but will guide future projects, reflecting their commitment to evangelisation and apologetic work through modern technologies. — OSV News



NCRonline.org/cartoons