

# The Catholic Weekly HERALD

## 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.

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And from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. *Rev 1:5-6*



Jubilarians celebrated at Mass

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Catechists complete basic course in Theology

■ P7



God lifted me from the depths of my despair

■ P12



JMJ Lisboa 2023 flickr

**VATICAN: To fully experience love and hope, young people must approach the journey of life as pilgrims and not just sightseers seeking the perfect selfie, Pope Francis said.**

"Do not be like superficial sightseers, blind to the beauty around you, never discovering the meaning of the roads you take, interested only in a few fleeting moments to capture in a selfie. Tourists do this," the Pope said in a message to young people in conjunction with the local celebrations of World Youth Day, November 24.

"Pilgrims, on the other hand, immerse themselves fully in the places they encounter, listen to the message they communicate and make them a part of their quest for happiness and fulfillment," wrote the Pope in the message.

The November celebrations of World Youth Day are taking place just a month before Pope Francis is scheduled to open the Holy Door of St Peter's Basilica and inaugurate the Holy Year 2025.

"The jubilee pilgrimage," he told young people, "is meant to be the outward sign of an inward journey that all of us are called to make toward our final destination."

While expressing his hope that many young people would be able to make a pilgrimage to Rome during the Holy Year, including the July 28-Aug 3 celebration of the Jubilee of Youth, the pope said he hoped the year would be an opportunity for all Catholics to have "a moment of genuine, personal encounter with the Lord Jesus, the

'Door' of our salvation."

Three attitudes should characterise Catholics' celebration of the Holy Year, he said.

"First, thanksgiving, with hearts open to praise God for his many gifts, especially the gift of life. Then, a spirit of seeking, as an expression of our heart's unquenchable thirst to encounter the Lord," he said. "And finally, penance, which helps us to look within, to acknowledge the wrong paths and decisions we have at times taken and, in this way, to be converted to the Lord and to the light of his Gospel."

Bernini's colonnade around St Peter's Square is meant to evoke an image of the Church as a mother embracing all her children, the Pope said. "In this coming Holy Year of Hope, I invite all of you to experience the embrace of our merciful God, to experience his pardon and the forgiveness of all our 'interior debts,' as in the biblical tradition of the jubilee years."

Knowing that one is loved and forgiven by God makes it possible to embrace others and help them sense the welcome and love of God, he said.

Pope Francis told the young people that he realises how challenging it can be to look to the future with hope, especially "in times marked by dramatic situations that generate despair and prevent us from looking to the future with serenity: the tragedy of war, social injustices, inequalities, hunger and the exploitation of human beings and the natural environment."

Too many young people, he said, are "tempted to live

without hope, as prisoners of boredom (or) depression" or destructive behaviours.

The key to overcoming those temptations, the Pope said, is to trust in the Lord and keep turning to him when the road gets rocky.

Getting tired is a normal part of any long journey, he said. But that is different from "ennui, the apathy and dissatisfaction that affect those who never set out, choose, decide, take risks, preferring to remain in their own comfort zone, closed in on themselves, seeing and judging the world from a distance, without ever 'dirtying their hands' with problems, with other people, with life itself."

Ennui is "a kind of wet cement in which we stand; eventually it hardens, weighs us down, paralyses us and prevents us from moving forward," Pope Francis wrote. "I prefer the tiredness of those who are moving forward, not the ennui of those who stand still with no desire to move."

The energy and nourishment to keep going, he said, are provided by Jesus in the Eucharist.

Pope Francis cited the example of Blessed Carlo Acutis, the Italian teenager set to be canonised soon, who "made the Eucharist his most important daily appointment!"

All Catholics should do the same, the Pope said, "In this way, in union with the Lord, we can walk without tiring, for he is walking alongside us. I encourage all of you to rediscover the great gift of the Eucharist!" **Cindy Wooden, CNS**

To read the full message, go to: <https://shorturl.at/OLA6X>



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# There is no time for indifference today

As the world confronts the escalating crisis of climate change, Pope Francis has once again used his influential voice to urge global leaders to prioritise the well-being of humanity and the preservation of our shared planet. In a message delivered on November 13 by Cardinal Pietro Parolin at COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan, the Pope emphasised the critical need for a united global response, especially in the face of growing disillusionment with multilateral institutions and the rise of dangerous isolationist trends.

Pope Francis' message comes at a critical juncture. The absence of key world leaders — such as US President Joe Biden, Chinese President Xi Jinping, French President Emmanuel Macron, and Brazil's Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva — from the summit added to the uncertainty surrounding international climate negotiations. Yet, the Pope's message cut through this uncertainty with clarity and conviction: the time for inaction has passed. "Selfishness — individual, national, and of power groups — feeds a climate of mistrust and division," the Pope warned, highlighting the pressing need for collective action in an increasingly interdependent world.

This lack of unity is especially troubling when weighed against the overwhelming scientific evidence demanding urgent action on climate change. Pope Francis, a long-standing advocate for environmental justice through his landmark encyclical *Laudato Si'*, once again reminded the global community of its responsibility. "The scientific data available to us do not allow any further delay," he cautioned, underscoring the need to limit global warming to 1.5°C by achieving net-zero CO2 emissions by the end of

the 2030s. This goal, he stressed, is not just an environmental concern but a moral imperative tied to humanity's survival.

The Pope also drew a direct connection between environmental degradation and global peace, emphasising that failing to protect the planet exacerbates inequalities and fuels conflict. His call for action is especially poignant in light of the growing political and social divisions around the world. As nations increasingly turn inward, prioritising short-term gains and self-interest, Pope Francis called for a renewed sense of global solidarity. "We should act and live as members of one family inhabiting the same interconnected global village," he reminded world leaders, pointing to the shared fate of all humanity.

One of the most pressing issues at COP29 is financing climate action, particularly for developing nations that suffer the worst impacts of climate disasters despite contributing the least to the problem. The Pope reiterated his long-standing plea for the cancellation of debts for the world's poorest countries, a point he previously raised in his papal bull *Spes Non Confundit* (Hope Does Not Disappoint). He framed debt cancellation not as an act of charity but as a matter of justice. "There is a true 'ecological debt' from the North to the South," the Pope declared, drawing attention to the disproportionate use of natural resources by wealthier nations over the centuries.

This concept of ecological debt is closely linked to global trade imbalances and the exploitation of resources, which have left many poorer nations vulnerable to both environmental and economic crises. In his message, the Pope called for a "new international financial architecture" that would

enable all countries — especially those most vulnerable to climate change — to pursue low-carbon development pathways that respect human dignity and promote equitable growth. Such a system, he argued, is essential for addressing the deep-rooted inequalities that fuel the climate crisis.

Pope Francis' message to COP29 participants was not just a call for justice but also a challenge to the complacency that often paralyses meaningful action on climate change. "We cannot wash our hands of it, with distance, with carelessness, with disinterest," he said, urging world leaders to confront the mechanisms of self-justification that allow inaction to persist. His appeal was particularly aimed at those who downplay the urgency of climate change or delay critical action for political or economic reasons.

Pope Francis offered a powerful reminder of the gravity of the climate crisis, warning, "There is no time for indifference today." He stressed that we cannot absolve ourselves of this responsibility, urging world leaders and individuals alike to confront the self-deception that allows us to ignore the problem. The true challenge of our century, he suggested, is not only to mitigate climate change but to overcome the complacency that stalls meaningful action. As climate disasters become more frequent and severe, the Pope's message serves as a moral wake-up call: short-term interests can no longer take precedence over the long-term survival of our planet. His call to action at COP29 challenges each of us — whether world leader or ordinary citizen — to take responsibility for the future of our common home.

Patricia Pereira

## His reign is eternal

President-elect Donald Trump has just made a stunning political comeback, winning his second US election and reclaiming his place as one of the world's most powerful leaders. Those of us who grew up in the '90s, may recall how America was seen as the "world's policeman," with the US President often regarded as the leader of the free world. After the Soviet Union's collapse, no nation dared challenge the dominance of the United States. As the saying went, "When America sneezes, the world catches a cold."

But by 2024, the global landscape had shifted dramatically. China, under President Xi Jinping, has risen as a formidable superpower, challenging American influence. Meanwhile, other nations, such as Russia, navigate a delicate balance between economic interdependence and their national interests. The dynamics between these global powers have transformed, reshaping the world order in ways that would have been unimaginable just a few decades ago.

Portugal, Spain, and Rome are favourite choices for pilgrimages. Did you know that these nations were once dominant global powers? Centuries ago, Portugal and Spain, with their mighty naval fleets, divided the world between them during the spice trade era. The Roman Empire, during Christ's time, was the most powerful state on earth, with Caesar revered as a god. Throughout history, empires such as Persia, Assyria, Great Britain, and Nazi Germany have also risen to power.

Why mention these kingdoms and leaders, past and present? Despite their might, none endured. All eventually crumbled into history. However, there is one King and one Kingdom that endures — the person of Jesus Christ and His Catholic Church. Unlike worldly empires, His reign is eternal.

The Feast of Christ the King, celebrated on the last Sunday of the liturgical year, invites the faithful to reflect on the kingship of Jesus Christ. Instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925,

this feast calls us to recognise and honour the supreme authority of Christ over all creation. It is a moment to examine His role, not only in the world but also in our hearts and lives.

In today's world, the concept of Christ as King can be difficult to grasp. Power is often equated with dominance and control. Yet, Christ's kingship stands in stark contrast to worldly authority. His reign is founded on love, justice, and humble service. As Jesus said in John 18:36, "My kingdom is not of this world." This reminds us that His reign transcends earthly politics and power, pointing to a higher, eternal reality.

Christ's kingship is characterised by humility and sacrifice. In Philippians 2:6-8, we are reminded that although Jesus was in the form of God, He did not count equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant and becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross. This profound humility and self-giving love define His reign and challenge our understanding of leadership.

Celebrating the Feast of Christ the King calls us to recognise Jesus' lordship in our personal lives. This acknowledgment goes beyond mere words — it requires a transformation that shapes our actions, decisions, and relationships. It prompts us to examine our conscience: Do we truly allow Christ to reign in our hearts? Are our lives reflective of His values of love, mercy, and justice?

One practical way to embrace Christ's kingship is through servanthood. Jesus taught, "Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant" (Matthew 20:26). By serving others, especially the marginalised, we embody the kingdom values that Christ exemplified. In our families, communities, and workplaces, we are called to manifest His love, kindness, and humility, living out His command to love one another.

The Feast of Christ the King also directs our attention to the broader implications of

## Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

### Christ the King (B)

Readings: Daniel 7:13-14;

Revelation 1:5-8;

Gospel: John 18:33-37

Christ's reign. We are called to be agents of His kingdom in a world that often resists divine authority. In a society marked by division, injustice, and suffering, the message of Christ the King is one of hope and a call to action. We are reminded that the kingdom of God is not a distant future reality but a present mission. Jesus proclaimed, "The kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15), inviting us to work for justice, peace, and reconciliation in our world.

The Eucharist, central to our Catholic faith, is a powerful expression of Christ's kingship. In receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, we are united with Him and one another, forming one body in Christ. This sacramental unity strengthens us to live out His kingdom's values, bringing His love and peace to those we encounter.

Unlike worldly rulers, Christ's crown is one of thorns, symbolising His sacrificial love. Jesus has no military or economic might, yet His Church has endured for over two thousand years. The Feast of Christ the King reminds us of who Jesus is and who we are called to be as His followers. It is an invitation to recommit ourselves to His lordship, allowing His love and truth to permeate every aspect of our lives.

As we celebrate this feast, let us pray for the grace to recognise and embrace Christ's reign in our hearts and in our world. May His example of humble service and sacrificial love inspire us to build a world that reflects the justice, peace, and mercy of His kingdom.

"Christ, yesterday and today, the beginning and the end, Alpha and Omega; all time belongs to You, and all ages. To You be the glory and power, through every age and forever. Amen."



# If you don't want to be a priest, who will replace us?



Bishop Cornelius Piong places the Book of Gospels in the hands of Deacon Nelbart Peter.

KENINGAU: *The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few* (Luke 10:2) was the theme chosen by seminarian Nelbart Peter (*pic*) for his diaconate ordination on November 10.

Bishop Cornelius Piong presided over the Eucharistic Celebration held at the Keningau Diocesan Square.

During the ordination rite, the candidate was presented as a candidate for ordination to the bishop by Msgr Gilbert Lasius. After reviewing his suitability, Bishop Cornelius accepted him for the diaconate.

The bishop then outlined the responsibilities of the diaconate, asking the candidate if he was willing to carry out these duties. The candidate was asked whether he would believe in and proclaim the mystery of faith, remain celibate, pray daily for the people of God and the world, and model his life on the example of Christ.

In his speech, Deacon Nelbart expressed

deep gratitude to all who had been part of his formation. He recalled an inspiring moment in 2013 when Bishop Cornelius visited his village, saying, "If you don't want to be a priest, then who will replace us? We, the priests, will grow old one day." These words left a lasting impact on him, motivating him to pursue the priesthood.

Bishop Cornelius, reflecting on the significance of the ordination, shared a personal memory from 46 years ago, when, as a young man, he walked to Simbuan — a place without a church at the time. He marvelled at the slow but steady growth of God's kingdom, now evident in the ordination of Deacon Nelbart. The bishop also thanked Nelbart's father and late mother for "giving" their son to God's service.

Bishop Cornelius announced that before his priestly ordination, Deacon Nelbart would serve at the Cathedral of St Francis Xavier, assisting the bishop and the priests.



Deacon Nelbart Peter hails from Kg Simbuan, Sook. He completed his ecclesiastical studies in philosophy at College General in Penang from 2018 to 2019, and then pursued his theological studies at St Peter's College in Kuching, Sarawak, from 2020 to 2024.

**KUALA LUMPUR  
ARCHDIOCESE**

**Diary of Archbishop  
Julian Leow**

**November**

24	Confirmation – Church of St Paul the Apostle, KKB
30	Parish Pastoral Assembly – Church of St Francis of Assisi, Cheras
30	Parish Pastoral Assembly – Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Puchong

**PENANG DIOCESE**

**Diary of Cardinal  
Sebastian Francis**

**November**

24	First Holy Communion and Confirmation – Church of Our Lady of Sorrows, Penang
25-29	Meeting – Office of Social Communications, Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences in Jakarta, Indonesia
30	Confirmation – Church of Christ the King, Sungai Petani at 7.00pm

**MALACCA JOHORE  
DIOCESE**

**Diary of Bishop  
Bernard Paul**

**November**

24	Kursus Evangelisasi Peribadi Commissioning Mass – Church of St Louis, Kluang
26	Board Meeting – Caritas MJD
28	Meeting – Graceville Board of Management, Graceville
30	Mass – Confirmation and Feast Day, Church of St Andrew, Muar

## Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #199

### Greetings dear friends of MJD

In-out or out-in! Democrats out, Republicans in! Biden out, Trump in! Out atheism, antisemitism and warmongering, in God, Bible and prolife! Attacks against the church, attack inside the church. A Singapore priest was stabbed at Mass.

Rejected incumbents, re-elected leaders. Mistrust is a threat to unity, which erodes shared foundations and clouds collective aspirations, said the Sultan of Perak.

Permanent positions granted to nearly 4,000 healthcare professionals in government hospitals by Public Services Department. More Malaysians crossing borders, more border towns flourishing.

Synod ends, conversion begins; no post-synodal apostolic exhortation, yes to direct implementation of the Synod's final document, said the Pope. Coming next, the final document will feature the five forms of conversion: spiritual, relational, procedural, institutional, and missionary. This in-out phenomena is a certain and unchanging rhythm of life. Yielding to shifting events means reading the signs, taking the good, and getting ready to build upon what's already there. Often there's too much dismantling.

### Unhappy Times:

Robin Williams and circus clowns made us laugh. Yet many of them died from deep sadness. These are fast paced, disrupting and challenging times. External events may affect us directly or trigger off reactions within. Some manage, while a good many give up. Our thoughts can heal or kill. Just know how your brain works.

First, there are *four Faulty Inputs* (Beliefs). They are Conditioning, Old Thoughts, Pent-up Emotions, and Triggers.

Secondly, be aware of the *three Defensive Mechanisms*: Reptilian Brain (avoids dangers); Mammalian Brain (seeks pleasure not pain); Rational Brain (analyses, plans and programmes)

Thirdly, we contend with *two Polarities*: the Right Brain (fires up when processing creative and emotional matters) and the Left Brain: lights up when tackling structured things like strategy and organisation)

Finally, our fixation with one *Bad Thought* causes unhappiness in our brains. Incessant thinking, rumination, and repeating negative thoughts become part of your programme and affect everything you do. It is an unhappiness that the Brain causes.

### A Thought For The Week: The Smile

During her internship, a young undergrad was working at her university's gift shop, at the counter. She saw an elderly couple come in with a little girl in a wheelchair.

As she looked closer at this girl, she realised that the girl had no arms or legs, just a head, neck and torso. She was wearing a little white dress with red polka dots.

As the couple wheeled her to the cash register, the student gave the girl a wink. As she was taking the money from the grandparents, the girl gave her the cutest and largest smile

That moment the student saw a beautiful girl, the handicap gone. The smile melted her. A new sense of what life is about filled the student. The poor, unhappy college student was transported into the girl's world of smiles, love and warmth.

*The lesson from the cashier:* Handicapped! Differently created! Dependent! Crushed! But it is how

we overcome them or live with them, that makes the difference. Overcomers smile, endure and are infectious.

### Announcements for the Week:

1. The MJD Counselling Ministry is organising *Reclaiming Joy: Healing Childhood Wounds and Restoring Peace*, limited to 100 participants, will take place at MAJODI Centre on November 24 from 9.00am to 5.00pm.
2. The *Pusat Kasih Caritas*, MJD's Social Mission Hub, opens on December 1.

### QnQ? Q asks: What do we do when people are against us?

YOU CHOOSE HOW YOU STITCH YOUR STORY, says James Clear. "If you look for evidence that people are conspiring to hold you back and the world is working against you, then it will take you no time at all to find precisely that. If you expect to encounter helpful people and experience a world that is working with you, then you find plenty of evidence to support that view as well. The raw material for a sweet life or a bitter life is always there. The story you emphasise is the one you notice." YOUR PERCEPTION DETERMINES YOUR REALITY.

**See The Holy Spirit @ Work:** Religion can reform a person's life, but it can never transform him. Only the Holy Spirit can transform. *Aiden Wilson Toze*

**Something To Tickle You:** Shine your light at all times; you never know who you are leading out of the dark. *Matshona Dhliwayo*

Bishop Bernard Paul



# Jubilarians celebrated at Mass

Liza Magnus

LIMBAHAU, Papar, Sabah: “Jubilees and anniversaries are special moments of joy and thanksgiving to be celebrated and shared in a community. This is more so if these events are related to one’s relationship with God in the form of a religious profession.

Archbishop John Wong said this during the jubilee celebration of six Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (FSIC) at the Church of the Holy Rosary, Limbahau, November 9.

“Today, I wish to join the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception in celebrating the Golden Jubilee of Sr Emily William Tangah, Sr Felicity Moduying and Sr Leonie Jokinin and also the Silver Jubilee of Sr Juliana Jalius, Sr Julianah Bating and Sr Maria Thomas Pusing. Together they have offered a combined service of 225 years to the FSIC and the local church!”

Archbishop John Wong presided over the Mass, with Bishop Cornelius Piong from the Diocese of Keningau, and various priests who had journeyed alongside the jubilarians concelebrating. Friar Joe OFM from the Philippines and Fr John Cheong from the Archdiocese of Kuching, were also present.

Nearly 1,000 people attended the event, including members of Papar and Limbahau Pastoral Councils, family members and relatives of the jubilarians, Superior General Sr Francisca Wong and members of the Franciscan Sisters of Immaculate Conception.

The jubilarians chose the theme of the celebration from psalm 103, *Bless the Lord O my soul, and all that is within me. Bless His holy Name.*

Speaking on behalf of her fellow jubilarians, Sr Julianah Bating thanked all those who had helped in their journey of faith in the religious life.

Superior General of the FSIC, Sr Francisca said in her speech, “Coincidentally,

the six of you have been, or are, educators! We are also celebrating today your lifelong fulfillment of the call of God that has taken each of you from the comforts of your homes into positions of leadership as principles or ordinary teachers, as well as actively immersed in the parochial life of the parish you were sent to. Praise the Lord for yourself- giving in the church, congregation and the people you serve.”

After the Mass, all adjourned to the parish hall for a simple reception and entertainment by various groups.

Born in Limbahau Papar, **Valilia William Tangah**, the daughter of William Tangah and Julitah Bustan Khan, entered the congregation in 1972, took her first vow in 1974

and became known as Sr Mary Emily W. Tangah of the Infant Jesus. She advised all young girls to “Come forward to serve the Lord Jesus, take courage, do not be afraid, Jesus is always with us till the end of time.”

Born in Penampang, **Johana Oswin Moduying**, the daughter of Oswin Moduying and Flora Sipulah, entered the congregation in 1972, took her first vow in 1974 and became known as Sr Mary Felicity of the Blessed Sacrament.

Looking back over the past 50 years, Sr Felicity said, “Celebrating my Golden Jubilee is the happiest moment, but what is gold? A stone to be shaped in the furnace of ore which then becomes precious gold in the eyes of God. A deep reflection for me.”



The jubilarians with Archbishop John Wong and the clergy.

Born in Penampang, **Helen S Jokinin**, the daughter of Julse Jokinin and Loura Lojinggu, entered the congregation in 1972, took her first vow in 1974 and became known as Sr Leonie. In her short reflection, she shared, “As I look back over the past 50 years, I cannot help but marvel in truth God’s goodness and blessings. His constant love and graces sustained me during these years and enabled me to preserve my love for religious life.”



Born in Kg Pamilaan, Tenom, **Sr Julianah J Bating**, the daughter of Jonas Bating Kilam and Beatrice@Saitim Ajiloh, entered the congregation in 1996, took her first vow in 1999 and made her perpetual vows in 2004. She shared, “I can see the love of God when I look back at my journey: love that is known to be unbreakable, unshakable, unconditional and infinite.”



Born in Kg Kalanggan, Bosusung, Kuala Penyu, **Sr Maria Thomas Pusing**, the daughter of Thomas Pusing Engah and Winnie Ninih Ajau, entered the congregation in 1996, took her first vow in 1999 and her final vows in 2000. She reflected on her 25 years as a religious, “I thank God for His unconditional love. I praise Him for the opportunity to serve Him, particularly in the parish work and education. All these wonderful experiences have helped me mature.”



Born in Kg Purak, Papar, **Sr Juliana Julius**, the daughter of Jalius Nandu and Maria Santioi Lampayung, entered the congregation in 1996 took her first vow in 2000 and made her final vows in 2004. “After 25 years of religious life, I would like to once again honour and praise God the Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is only Him and in Him that all things were made possible for me,” said Sr Juliana.



## Nilai parishioners support banana leaf lunch fundraiser

NILAI: The Parish Integral Human Development Ministry of the Church of St Theresa recently organised a banana leaf lunch to raise funds for the upcoming children’s Christmas party. The event was a heartwarming display of community spirit and generosity, bringing parishioners together for a good cause.

Prepared lovingly by parish volunteers, the vegetarian feast drew inspiration from the cultural and symbolic significance of banana leaves, representing unity, service, and a shared purpose. The room was filled with lively conversations, laughter, and meaningful connections as everyone savoured the meal, knowing their participation would help bring a joyful Christmas to the children in the parish. **Aileen Anthony**



Parishioners enjoying their meal.

## Kuantan parish prepares for monsoon season

KUANTAN: As November began, residents across the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia, particularly in the outskirts of Kuantan and interior areas of Pahang, have been closely monitoring weather patterns in anticipation of the monsoon season. In many parts of Pahang, a noticeable shift has occurred, with consistent rainfall during the night followed by clear skies in the day — early signs of pre-monsoon weather.

In response, the Parish Flood Relief Task Force (PFRTF) at the Church of St Thomas the Apostle has ramped up efforts to track weather forecasts and local updates. The task force has also begun laying the groundwork for flood preparedness, ensuring that the parish community is ready to assist those who may be affected by the impending monsoon rains.

The PFRTF invited an expert trainer, Amaladass from Port Klang, who led a three-hour session on November 12, providing the team and new recruits with vital guidelines and preparations for flood disasters. He had conducted an online session for the PFRTF members two years ago.

“With the monsoon season approaching, we are once again on standby for potential floods along the East Coast. This session serves as both a review and a team refresher. Together, we can ensure that our team is fully prepared and ready to be mobilised

effectively to support those affected by the floods,” said parish priest, Fr George Packiasamy.

“Over the past two years, we have faced several floods in Pahang, though fortunately, they were not severe. We were lucky that areas such as Kuantan, Kuala Rompin, Muadzam Shah, and Mentakab were not heavily affected. Throughout these challenging times, our community has always been ready to lend a helping hand, standing united in support.”



Pic top: Amaladass explaining the guidelines and preparations for flood disasters. Pic above: Members working in groups to share their ideas and plans.



# Fostering interreligious and intercultural dialogue

**Christopher Kushi**

GEORGETOWN: The Church of the Assumption hosted an ASEAN delegation of Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue Training officials from Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines, and Malaysia on November 12. The visit aimed to provide participants with an opportunity to engage directly with religious diversity, promoting mutual respect and understanding.

Fr Desmond Jansen of City Parish provided a historical overview of the early Catholic community in Penang and the founding of the Assumption Church, the third oldest Catholic church in Malaysia, which dates back to 1861. He highlighted the various changes and restorations made to the present-day building, describing key features such as the altar, stained glass windows, church bell, pipe organ, and the old pews. The delegation also visited the Ro-

man Catholic Penang Diocesan Museum, located next to the church.

In the spirit of engagement, the Indonesian delegate inquired about the intercultural aspects of the religious services, given Malaysia's multiracial and multicultural community. Fr. Desmond responded that the Catholic Church embraces the inculturation of the faith, integrating cultural practices and values with the theology and teachings of the Gospel. He highlighted that the Church holds multilingual Masses and celebrates various cultural events, such as the Chinese Lunar New Year Thanksgiving Mass, the Tamil Pongal festival, and East Malaysian Hari Gawai and Pesta Kaamatan harvest festivals. For the migrant community, the Church also celebrates the Filipino Santo Niño Feast Day.

The visit was organised by the ASEAN Institute for Peace & Reconciliation (ASEAN-IPR) in collaboration with the



*Fr Desmond Jansen sharing some insights on the Catholic church with the delegates.*

King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID). The attending officials, who play pivotal roles in shaping regional policy and fostering community engagement, are expected to bring

valuable insights from this visit back to their respective countries. This experience will contribute significantly to promoting inclusivity, cultural awareness, and interfaith understanding across the ASEAN region.

## Gading chapel celebrates feast of St Martin de Porres

DURIAN TUNGGAL, Melaka: The modest Chapel of St Martin de Porres in Gading celebrated its 36th anniversary and feast of its patron saint from November 7 to 10.

Deacon Anthony Chua preached on the theme *Celebrating, Listening, and Walking Together*, focusing on the Family, Church and Ecology. Fr Joseph Heng and Fr Neville Arul Sinnappah took turns to celebrate the daily Masses.

The grand celebration culminated on Sunday, November 10 where some 400 parishioners and faithful from near and far converged for the 3.00pm Divine Mercy Chaplet and 3.30pm Mass in Bahasa Malaysia.

Fr Albet Arockiasamy from Tampin, Negeri Sembilan was the main celebrant and preacher. Fr Joseph, the parish priest of the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Krubong and his assistant, Fr Neville, were the concelebrants.

In his homily, Fr Albet spoke about the challenge of giving our best to Christ and others. He reflected on how Jesus teaches us to love and forgive, even when the world encourages revenge. He reminded the congregation that forgiveness is a key part of the Christian life, and how, by loving others as ourselves, we follow Christ's example. He also emphasised that to truly love God and neighbour, we must become the "salt of



*Pilgrims praying before the statue of St Martin de Porres.*

the earth" and the "light of the world," as St Martin de Porres exemplified in his life.

Fr Albet also shared the story of St Martin's difficult upbringing and his eventual acceptance into the Dominican Order, despite the challenges he faced. St Martin's life was marked by humility, service, and love for others, especially the poor and marginalised. He showed that even in difficult circumstances, we can use our talents and gifts to bring God's love to others.

The priest also reflected on the recent Peninsular Malaysia Regional Pastoral Assembly 2024 at the Majodi Centre,

which focused on the four key areas of Family, Church, Ecology, and Society. He encouraged the faithful to pray together as a family, to read the Word of God daily, and to care for the environment. He reminded them that the Church calls us to extend our love and care to those in need, including the poor, and to build relationships with people of all faiths. St. Martin, through his works of charity and mercy, became a living example of how we, too, are called to serve others and walk together as a synodal Church.

Following Mass, Damian Loo, the Chapel's chairperson, expressed gratitude to the priests and Deacon Anthony for

their participation and contributions to the feast. He also thanked all the lay leaders and volunteers who helped prepare for the celebration, from setting up tents to providing food for the fellowship meal. "We walk together in unity," he said, echoing the theme of the celebrations.

Chapel Administrator, Fr Joseph, thanked Fr Albet for his insightful preaching and his presence at the chapel, as well as Deacon Chua for his reflections over the previous nights. He also introduced the chairpersons of the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) and Parish Coordinating Council (PCC), and thanked God for the beautiful weather. He then invited all for a fellowship meal.

The statue of St Martin situated outside the chapel was blessed by Fr Albet before all adjourned for the fellowship meal held on the chapel grounds.

The chapel is just a short drive from Durian Tunggal town and is surrounded by several local Baba Nyonya Catholic homes. Mass is held at the Chapel once a month.

St Martin de Porres, often depicted as a young, mixed-race man wearing the habit of a Dominican lay brother, is the patron saint of those of mixed race and of professions such as innkeepers, barbers, and public health workers. His life continues to inspire many to follow Christ's example of love, service, and mercy. **Bernard Anthony**

## STM choirs renew zeal and unity at formation day

SUBANG JAYA: In order to renew the zeal of its members and foster good relations between choirs, the Music Ministry of the Church of St Thomas More recently

held a day of recollection, formation and fellowship.

The event was organised in collaboration with members of the Servants of Yahweh



*The three choirs from the Church of St Thomas More.*

Covenant Community, who helped to lead the group in Eucharistic adoration and the subsequent group sharing session.

About 50 people across three choir groups participated in the formation, which saw members across the different groups getting to know each other through group sharing, games, and fellowship over meals.

The last time the Music Ministry organised a group-wide formation of this scale was over five years ago, so many members who were newly recruited since then were experiencing the formation for the first time.

Following the theme of Psalm 100, which talks about praising God and serving the Lord with gladness, the group sharing session provided an opportunity for choristers to share their motivations for joining the

Music Ministry and serving the church.

Individuals who volunteered to give their testimonials shared touching stories of how they found their calling to join the Music Ministry after God worked miracles in their lives to help them overcome personal struggles.

The event was deemed successful in its objective of fostering warm inter-choir relations and unity, inspiring choristers to continue serving the church with renewed enthusiasm.

Many attendees shared positive feedback that the formation was an excellent opportunity to refresh themselves spiritually and connect with members across different choir groups, creating a healthy, non-competitive environment in the Music Ministry. **Noel Foo**



# Empowering volunteers for the future

Stanislaus Emmanuel

SHAH ALAM: On November 9, the Catholic Prison Fellowship Association (CPFA) held its inaugural Study Day, a key event to strengthen the ministry's outreach and set future goals. Hosted at Montfort Boys Town in Glenmarie, Shah Alam, the event ran from 7.30am to 6.00pm, drawing dedicated volunteers from various states. The day was designed to equip participants with fresh insights, foster collaborative discussions, and chart a new course for the ministry's future. It was a transformative gathering for CPFA volunteers and leaders, unified by faith, purpose, and a shared mission to serve.

The event opened with a lively session of praise and worship, led by Perzeus James and his team from the Church of the Divine Mercy, creating an atmosphere of spiritual energy. Audrey Freeman then guided the volunteers in praying the Rosary, fostering a reflective mood ahead of the morning Mass celebrated by Fr George Packiasamy. During his homily, Fr George inspired the volunteers with words of hope, reminding them of the profound difference their service makes to those seeking redemption. He encouraged them to continue spreading Christ's love, reassuring them that their efforts bring light to even the darkest places. After Mass, the volunteers gathered for tea before diving into the day's impactful sessions.

The first presentation, titled *Inspiring Change: Planning for Enhancing Prison Ministry Outreach*, was delivered by Lt Dr

Col Enock and left a deep impression on the volunteers. He emphasised the importance of their roles within the ministry, inspiring them to continue their mission with renewed energy and purpose. Prior to his session, Dr Gary Liew offered encouraging words, stressing the need for solidarity within the ministry and urging everyone to trust in God's plan. He also highlighted that next year's Jubilee Year, with the theme *Pilgrims of Hope*, positions each member as agents of hope when engaging with the incarcerated. CPFA President Gnanadass Amaldass later spoke on the Current Scenario of the CPFA, outlining a strategic "blueprint" for the ministry's growth and outreach over the next decade, envisioning a dynamic future for the CPFA.

The Study Day was structured around five key topics, each aimed at fostering deeper collaboration and strategic planning among the volunteers: *Projects for Inmates over the Next five to ten years*; *Self-Financing and Sustainability for CPFA*; *Celebrating CPFA's 40th Anniversary*; *Continuous Improvement Programmes for Volunteers*, and *Enhancing CPFA Activities* (highlighting the need for more male volunteers to serve the 12 male prisons within the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur). Each topic was designed to spark thoughtful discussion and pave the way for the ministry's future growth.

The participants were divided into groups named after patron saints; St Maximilian Kolbe; St Matthew; St Mark; St Luke; St John and St Therese of Avila who demonstrated commitment and insights in tackling these important themes. Each group



The groups recording their insights in a Google form.

engaged in a focused 45-minute session, where they discussed, refined and presented their ideas. Their insights were systematically recorded through a Google Form, allowing CPFA to keep a record of the valuable feedback and ideas generated.

The final session, led by Head of Training and Development Stanislaus Emmanuel, offered volunteers practical guidance on sharing the Gospel with inmates. Stan introduced a new approach that combined both verbal communication and physical activities. Volunteers were encouraged to use creative methods, such as engaging inmates in symbolic activities to deepen their understanding of Gospel messages. Stan emphasised, "Each Gospel passage can be brought to life through an activity

that engages the inmates, fostering a more interactive and meaningful experience with the Word of God."

The success of the Study Day was made possible through the dedication of Project Chairman Charles Soosaimany and his team, including Gnanadass, Audrey, Nicholas, Rufina, Stella, Enock, and Gabriel. Their hard work and coordination, coupled with the gracious hospitality of Montfort Boys Town, ensured a seamless and impactful event. The CPFA also extends special thanks to Fr Bonaventure Rayappan for his valuable input, prayers, and spiritual support.

As the day drew to a close, President Gnanadass and Vice President Audrey expressed heartfelt gratitude to the volunteers. Gnanadass praised their commitment, acknowledging the effort of those who travelled long distances to attend. "Your dedication is the backbone of CPFA's mission," he stated. Audrey echoed this sentiment, noting that the volunteers' willingness to contribute ideas and solutions made the day a true success. Both leaders extended their blessings and appreciation, encouraging volunteers to continue carrying the light of Christ to those who need it most.

With deep gratitude, the Catholic Prison Fellowship Association (CPFA) celebrates this meaningful step forward in their mission. The Study Day was not only a success but also a powerful affirmation of the ministry's mission to bring hope and healing to those within prison walls.



The volunteers and leaders of the Catholic Prison Fellowship Association.

## Fr Albert Tan, SJ takes final vows

PETALING JAYA: After years of dedicated formation within the Society of Jesus, Fr Albert Tan, SJ, professed his Final Vows on November 13, during a Mass at the Church of St Francis Xavier. The day coincides with the Feast of St Stanislaus Kostka, a young Jesuit who is known for his holiness and iron determination to follow God's call.

Fr Francis Lim, SJ, the Regional Superior of Malaysia-Singapore Jesuit Region, accepted the vows on behalf of Fr General Arturo Sosa, SJ. The Mass was attended by the Jesuit community, clergy, guests, parishioners, family, and close friends.

Jesuits undergo a rigorous formation process, which includes five key stages: novitiate, first studies, regency, theology, and tertianship. Fr Albert Tan's journey included studies in the Philippines and Canada during his novitiate, leading to his

ordination as a priest in 2005. He served at SFX, PJ as assistant parish priest, and later parish priest from January 2013 to December 2015. He then went to Australia to pursue a Master's degree in Spiritual Direction. Fr Albert was assigned to the Philippines in 2019 as Socius to the Novice Master and retreat giver for the Sacred Heart Retreat House.

Returning to Malaysia in November 2021, Fr Albert assumed the role of Director of Maranatha House of Prayer. He has found retreat-giving and spiritual direction to be both life-giving and humbling experiences.

In his speech after Mass, Fr Albert related how a friend likened the final vows to a marriage vow which couples renew at their golden jubilee anniversary. "Although the vows remain the same as when they were first professed at a wedding, it car-



Fr Albert Tan, SJ right, signing his final vow formula in the presence of Fr Francis Lim, SJ, Regional Superior of the Malaysia-Singapore Region of the Society of Jesus.

ries a much deeper meaning for the couple who, over 50 years, went through the trials, tribulations and joys of marriage," said Fr Albert.

Fr Albert expressed gratitude to the Jesuit

community and reflected on his priestly journey. He described the final vows as a celebration and reaffirmation of his commitment to serve the Lord. **Cordelia Lee**



# Catechists complete basic course in Theology

KUALA LUMPUR: It was a joyful day for 65 participants when they received the Certificate of Completion after having completed the basic course in theology entitled, *Journey Through the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (JCCC) on November 9. Organised by the KL Archdiocesan Catechetical Ministry (KLACM), the objectives of the JCCC course are to provide participants with an understanding of the Catholic faith in a systematic manner and to help them use the CCC as a resource for self-study, lesson planning and group work.

In total, the course comprised ten sessions, each of which was

held once a month on Saturdays from February to November. There were two onsite and eight online sessions. The course, which was launched in February 2024, was mainly aimed at catechists, although non-catechists were also invited to attend. The sessions were presented by knowledgeable and experienced speakers, namely Fr Dr Lawrence Ng, Fr Leonard Lexson, Fr Michael Chua and Dr Steven Selvaraju.

The course covered the four parts of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. These are "The Profession of Faith" (Creed), "The Celebration of the Christian Mystery", "Life in Christ" (Commandments) and

"Christian Prayer" (Our Father). This arrangement corresponds to what the Church professes, what the Church celebrates, how the Church lives out her faith and how the Church expresses and deepens her faith.

In the concluding session, held at the Church of the Holy Rosary, Kuala Lumpur, Dr Steven presented the topic *How to use the CCC for group activities*. Firstly, participants were guided through the "Jigsaw Activity". It involved them firstly being divided into small groups. Each group was then given certain CCC references to read and discuss and members of a group were expected to "master" the ma-



Some of the graduates performing an action song.

terial which had been allocated to them. After mastering the material, each member, as an "expert", goes to another group to teach/share the material. In this way, each participant serves as a piece of the topic's puzzle. When all of them work together as a whole, they create the complete jigsaw puzzle.

The second activity involved participants creating an action song. Here, participants were placed into five groups and each group was allocated certain CCC references for discussion on a particular sacrament. Each group was asked to create an action song on the sacrament they had discussed. It involved composing original lyrics but using an existing tune. Each group had time to prepare the song and to practise their actions before presenting the "fruits of their labour" to the rest of the participants. It was wonderful to see the participants have fun as they took an active part in the activity.

At the end of the day, the participants who had fulfilled the requirements of the JCCC course

received their certificates. In his address, Dr Steven, the Director of the Archdiocesan Catechetical Centre, informed the participants that Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur, Most Rev Julian Leow and Fr David Arulanatham, Ecclesiastical Assistant of KLACM, conveyed their congratulatory wishes to them and thanked them for their dedication throughout the course.

Dr Steven also stated that the participants who graduated from the JCCC course are now eligible to enrol in the *Certificate in Catechetics* course which the KLACM is planning to organise in 2025. According to Dr Steven, "we hope that catechists who completed the JCCC course or who have attended a course in theology, whether at the parish or Archdiocesan level, will participate in the Certificate in Catechetics course. In this way, we hope to take steps to provide formal certification to the catechists in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur in the coming years." **KL Archdiocesan Catechetical Ministry**



The graduates.

## First Holy Communion at St Thomas Kuantan

KUANTAN: The Church of St Thomas the Apostle celebrated a joyful First Holy Communion for twelve children on November 10. In preparation for this significant milestone, a two-day camp was held on October 26-27, centred around the theme *Jesus Loves Me*. The camp provided the children with an opportunity to deepen their understanding of the Eucharist, reconciliation, and the Mass.

Catechists, along with facilitators Jillian, Sharon, and Philip, led a series of meaningful activities, including a parent-child letter exchange, affirmation jars, and creative art projects that symbolised faith and family. These activities helped the children build a deeper connection with their faith as they prepared for this special sacrament.

The camp also balanced spiritual learning with engaging games, praise and worship, and discussions that fostered family bonding.

The culmination of their journey was the First Holy Communion Mass, where each child received the Eucharist for the first time, with family and parish members gathered in support and celebration.

Parish priest, Fr George Packiasamy, shared a message with the children, reminding them that Jesus would now come to live in the sacred place of their hearts,

a bond that can never be broken. This special moment is just the beginning of their journey in faith and love for God.

The parents expressed feelings of relief, gratitude, and pride in seeing their children take this important step in their faith. They hope that receiving the Eucharist will encourage their children to grow deeper in their understanding

of Christianity. One parent shared, "After the Mass, I felt proud to have fulfilled an important responsibility for my child. I hope this will inspire them to continue exploring and living out their faith."

The children, too, were excited, expressing happiness and a newfound enthusiasm for participating in church activities, especially the Mass. One child shared, "I am so

happy because I can now receive Jesus just like my parents. I feel proud and joyful to be part of this."

The parish extends its gratitude to all catechists, facilitators, and volunteers who contributed to making this a memorable experience for the children, one that will hopefully guide and strengthen them in their faith journey for years to come. **Eunice Kok**



The young ones enjoying themselves during one of the activities.



The First Holy Communicants with Fr George Packiasamy.



Children from the Sitiawan parish participating in the colouring competition.

## All Saints' Day colouring contest inspires children

SITIAWAN: In celebration of All Saints' Day, the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion at the Church of St Francis de Sales organised a colouring competition for the children of the parish.

The contest was divided into four categories — kindergarten, lower primary, upper primary, and lower secondary — to encourage broader

participation from the parish. The main purpose of the event was to raise the children's awareness of the saints in our Church, particularly their history and characteristics, and to inspire them to look to these saints as role models in their own lives.

The judge for the event was Daniel Arvind Premraj, the son of one of the parishioners, who is experienced

in judging similar contests. The winners of the colouring competition were announced following the All Saints' Day Mass at the parish. Fr Michael Dass, from the Church of St Joseph, Batu Gajah, who celebrated the Mass in the absence of the parish priest, presented trophies to the top three winners in each category. **Dr Mary Thomas**



# Philippine Catholics urged to support vocations amid priest shortage

MANILA:

Tagbilaran Bishop Alberto Uy *pic* has made a heartfelt appeal to Catholic communities across the Philippines, urging them to actively support and inspire young people to consider vocations to the priesthood and religious life.



This call to action comes as the Philippine Church marked its first-ever National Vocation Awareness Month this November — a significant observance aimed at addressing the critical need for more priests within the nation and the broader Asian region.

With over 80 million Catholics in the Philippines but only around 11,000 priests, the country faces a shortage that leaves just one priest to serve every 7,000 parishioners.

This gap creates challenges for clergy striving to meet the spiritual needs of the faithful, and it reflects a wider decline in vocations across Asia.

Emphasising the communal dimension of a vocation, Bishop Uy



Archbishop Romulo Valles leads a Mass in which he ordained three new deacons at the San Pedro Cathedral in Davao City. (CBCP News/Archdiocese of Davao)

spoke to the faithful, explaining that a call to the priesthood is more than a personal path — it's a divine invitation that benefits the entire Church community.

"The call to the priesthood is not just a personal journey; it is a divine invitation that enriches the entire Church. We must actively encourage our young men to discern this sacred calling, reminding them of the profound joy and fulfilment that comes from serving God and His people," he said.

In his message on *Radio Veritas Philippines*, Bishop Uy underscored the crucial role that Catholic communities play in

fostering an environment that nurtures vocations.

He pointed to the essential elements of prayer, mentorship, and community involvement as powerful ways to support young people on their journey of discernment.

"Through prayer, mentorship, and community engagement, we can create an environment where vocations flourish, inspiring our youth to respond to God's call with courage and enthusiasm," he added.

The month-long observance of National Vocation Awareness Month officially began on November 3 with a Holy Mass celebrated by Novaliches Bishop

Roberto Gaa, chair of the Episcopal Commission on Vocations of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), at the Cathedral and Parish of the Good Shepherd in Quezon City.

This historic observance was declared by the CBCP in January 2024, emphasising a renewed focus on promoting vocations to the priesthood, religious life, and consecrated life across the Philippines.

This year's theme, *Tara, Magmisyon kasama si Kristo: Journeying Together as Pilgrims of Hope, Called to Holiness towards the Jubilee Year*, reflects the Church's call for community-based

faith journeys marked by hope and holiness.

The theme aligns with the journey toward the 2025 Jubilee Year, inspiring Filipino Catholics to deepen their commitment to fostering a new generation of religious vocations.

The Philippine Church's call for vocations resonates globally. According to recent Vatican data, there are currently 407,730 priests worldwide, including 279,171 diocesan priests and 128,559 religious priests.

As the Church continues to rely on new vocations to fulfil its mission around the world, the importance of community support for vocations cannot be overstated.

In his closing remarks, Bishop Uy highlighted the need for young Catholics to see the priesthood as a path filled with purpose and joy.

His appeal for community action reflects a broader vision for the future of the Church in the Philippines and beyond — a future where young men and women find strength, encouragement, and support to answer God's call, embracing lives dedicated to service and faith. **Leahna Villajos, RVA News**

## Bangladeshi prelates seek Christian representation in governance

DHAKA: Catholic Bishops in Bangladesh have called on Professor Muhammad Yunus, head of the interim government, to ensure Christian representation in his administration and the ongoing reform process.

On November 7, a delegation from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh (CBCB), led by Archbishop Bejoy N D'Cruze, met Yunus to express concerns about the exclusion of Christians from the government, despite other minority groups like the Chakma and Hindu communities being represented.

The bishops highlighted the importance of involving all communities in reforms aimed at making governance more inclusive and democratic. They also urged

Yunus to address constitutional contradictions, particularly regarding secularism and Islam as the state religion, and called for the recognition of Bangladesh's 45 ethnic groups. Additionally, they requested the declaration of public holidays on Christmas Eve and Easter Sunday and raised concerns about government interference in church-run schools.

The Catholic Church's presence in Bangladesh was emphasised, with its eight dioceses and numerous schools, hospitals, and social service organisations like Caritas Bangladesh. The bishops also donated 2.5 million taka (RM93,954.00) to assist flood victims, with Yunus promising to consider their concerns. **ucanews.com**



The delegation of Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh (CBCB) with Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus (centre) in the national capital Dhaka. (ucanews.com photo)

## Workshop dispels fears of AI among educators

UDUPI, Karnataka: K Jayashankara came to a workshop organised by the diocese of Udupi with misgivings about Artificial Intelligence (AI).

"Now I am confident to explore the vast world of AI. I realise now that AI doesn't take away jobs if we learn to use it. It actually enhances our creativity when applied ethically," the principal of St Mary's PU College, Shirva, said after attending the November 11 workshop at the Anugraha Pastoral Centre, Udupi, in the southern Indian state of Karnataka.

Jayashankara was among principals, headmasters, technical staff from English and Kannada medium schools, and members of the pastoral centre team who participated in the programme organised by the Catholic Educational Society of Udupi Diocese (CESU) to prepare educators for the rapidly evolving educational landscape.

The programme aimed to equip participants with practical AI skills and insights to enhance classroom experiences while maintaining ethical standards in education.

"Before attending this workshop, I thought AI was beyond my understanding," admitted Jayashankara.

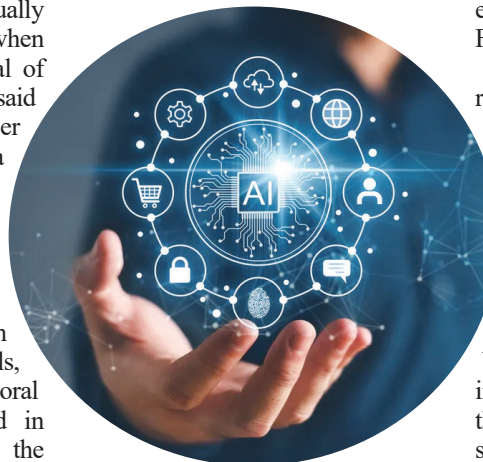
The event, was led by Fr Vincent Crasta, CESU secretary and director of the venue, in association with Canara Communication Centre, Mangalore, powered by AI Lumina — AI Learning platform.

It brought together key stakeholders in education to explore how AI can revolutionise teaching and

learning practices.

Fr Ferdinand Gonsalves, vicar general of the diocese and CESU vice president, the chief guest, he underscored the importance of embracing AI in education.

"Artificial Intelligence has the



potential to make education more inclusive and impactful. Through adaptive learning, it enables personalised instruction, ensuring that every student's unique needs are met effectively," he added.

The sessions were facilitated by AI experts — Fr Anil Ivan Fernandes, director of Canara Communication Centre, a Google-Certified AI Coach, and media professional, and Leo Victor Zalki, director of Oxidane Enviro LLP, an Oracle and Google-Certified AI professional.

They introduced participants to a range of AI tools and applications that foster personalised, interactive, and data-driven learning experiences. Key topics included adaptive

learning, ethical AI usage in education, and integrating AI for enhanced classroom engagement.

"Education today demands innovation. AI empowers teachers to tailor learning experiences, making education more dynamic and relevant to individual student needs," Fr Fernandes explained.

Zalki emphasised the supportive role of AI, stating, "Artificial intelligence does not replace teachers. Instead, it complements their creativity and expertise, enabling them to achieve greater impact in their teaching."

After the workshop, Joyce Vandana, a headmistress of a Kannada medium school in Udupi, found AI "incredibly useful in the field of education. It's a tool that every teacher across all schools should understand and incorporate into their teaching. It opens new avenues for both educators and students."

The workshop ended with the participants gaining hands-on experience in using AI tools and practical strategies to implement these technologies in their schools.

Fr Crasta said the workshop reflected CESU's commitment to staying at the forefront of educational innovation while upholding its mission of delivering holistic and value-based education.

By integrating AI into its academic framework, CESU plans to ensure its institutions are equipped to navigate the future of education while fostering excellence and inclusivity in learning, he added.

**Matters India**



# US bishop calls for return to meatless Fridays

BALTIMORE: A leading US Catholic bishop called on his fellow bishops to help revive the tradition of abstinence from meat on Fridays as a way to commemorate the upcoming 10th anniversary of Pope Francis' 2015 environmental encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

Archbishop Borys Gudziak, chairman of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, the committee charged with advancing Catholic social teaching, made his remarks at the conference's annual fall meeting in Baltimore on November 13.

In 1966, the USCCB (then called the National Conference of Catholic Bishops) removed the obligation of the faithful to abstain from meat on Fridays except during Lent. The tradition of fasting on Fridays dates back to the early Church but was codified in canon law in 1917.

"We could renew the tradition of Friday abstinence from meat," said Gudziak, the metropolitan archbishop of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia. "A return to Friday abstinence would be good for the soul and for the planet, maybe for



(Unsplash/Kamil Szumotalski)

something else, uniting our devotion to the Lord and reverence for the Lord's creation."

He noted that in 2011, the Catholic bishops of England and Wales introduced the pre-Vatican II practice, inspired by a pastoral visit to England by Pope Benedict XVI, who he said was known as the "Green Pope" for his emphasis on the importance of caring for creation.

Reintroducing fasting on Fridays would also bring the Roman Catholic Church closer to its Eastern brothers, he said.

"Furthermore, fasting could be an opportunity for synodal engagement, exploring ancient practices in the Latin rite, such as Ember Days or Advent fasts, and other rich Eastern Christian practices among Catholics and others," Gudziak said.

In addition to fasting, Gudziak suggested Catholics honour the Sabbath and turn to the sacrament of the Eucharist.

"In a world of constant work and stimulation, with ever-present photos, screens, and gadgets, in essence, our world does

not rest and struggles with leisure. Perhaps, providentially, 2025 memorialises not only *Laudato Si'* but also the jubilee, a special year rooted in Sabbath rest," he said.

"Our hyperactive world yearns for the Sabbath, which is expressed in the Sunday Eucharist when the Lord makes all things new," he continued. "On this theme, I would suggest efforts centred on contemplation of creation, leisure, and celebration. This could lead to a pilgrimage to a significant local shrine, basilica, or ecological site in your diocese or eparchy that evokes the marvel of God's creation."

He suggested bishops consider celebrating a special Mass for care for creation on the feast of St Francis or "preaching on the union of creation and the divine in the Eucharist."

"To be truly restful, such an initiative should be oriented to the sacraments and overflow with celebration and joy," he said. "The goal of this suggestion is not to do something but to experience something, the mystery of God's presence in the sacraments and in creation." **Zelda Caldwell, CNA**

## Vatican's Christmas tree controversy over 'Green Giant'

ROME: One might think that of all the things about the Vatican which generate controversy, its annual Christmas tree ought to be fairly near the bottom of the list. In fact, even the tree occasionally has been a lightning rod since 1982, when installing a tree for the holidays in St Peter's Square first became an annual tradition.

In 1999, for example, a riot broke out on the Via della Conciliazione, with helmeted police firing tear gas at protestors slinging rocks. The crowd, led by young Italian leftists, was incensed because that year's tree was being donated by the Austrian province of Carinthia, whose governor was the firebrand politician Jörg Haider, leader of the country's far right "Freedom Party" and a figure who sometimes appeared nostalgic for the Nazi era.

Once again this year, a polemic is brewing around the tree, though it seems unlikely to produce the same street violence as Christmas 1999 – which, just like this Christmas, also marked the opening of a Jubilee Year.

This time, it's the northern Italian region of Trentino which has the honour. Plans currently call for 40 fir trees to be transported from the region's forests of Val di Ledro to

Rome, including one 100-foot-tall fir that's believed to be about two centuries old, and which is known locally as the "Green Giant."

The prospect of chopping down a tree that's considered a local landmark has some residents up in arms. Roughly 40,000 people have signed a petition to stop the Green Giant from being cut down, slamming the entire exercise of putting up Christmas trees as an "anachronistic outrage," and one which has roots in Pagan winter rituals rather than Christianity anyway.

The petition, addressed to Pope Francis, cites his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'*, the first papal encyclical ever to be devoted entirely to the environment. The petition warns that once ancient trees are removed they're gone forever, and pleaded with the Pope to prevent "this useless massacre."

"In an historic moment, when climate change is evolving rapidly, it is necessary to give clear and transparent signals to change the approach towards respecting nature," it reads. It also calls on people to shun what it calls "the purely consumerist practice of using living trees for ephemeral ends, for mere advertising purposes and a few ridiculous selfies."

The petition also says the estimated \$64,000 (RM284,000) cost of the exercise could be better spent on "the common good."

All that, however, is strenuously disputed by Mayor Renato Girardi of Ledro, the community from which the trees are destined to come. Girardi has called the protests "nonsense" and "baseless nastiness."

First of all, he said, the "Green Giant" was set to be cut down anyway, as part of a lot of old-growth trees to be culled during routine forest maintenance in keeping with European Union guidelines. If it weren't going to the Vatican he, quipped, it would be heading to the sawmill.

For the other 39 trees, he said they're not really from Trentino anyway. They're being purchased from specialised nurseries, because the Vatican requested a special variety of fir tree that doesn't lose its needles – otherwise, imagine the clean-up operation in St Peter's Square – and that particular variety isn't indigenous to the region.

In any event, Girardi said the community is moving ahead with its plans despite the backlash. He said the trees will be loaded on trucks to begin their trek to Rome. Roads will be closed to allow the convoy to pass, and he's invited local residents to grab their smart phones and cameras and head to their balconies and terraces to capture the moment.

"The whole world will talk about the tree in the Vatican that comes from our precious woods," a communique announcing the initiative said. "The valley is aware of this extraordinary occasion and this extraordinary honour."

From December 6-8, a delegation of 600 people from Ledro will travel to the Vatican to watch the official lighting ceremony for the trees – unless, of course, the petition succeeds in persuading Pope Francis and his Vatican team to change their minds.

**Cruz**

## Archbishop of Canterbury resigns



LONDON: Archbishop Justin Welby resigned as Archbishop of Canterbury on November 12, citing his failure to ensure a proper investigation into abuse allegations involving John Smyth, a volunteer at Christian summer camps.

Smyth, a prominent attorney, abused boys and young men at camps in the UK, Zimbabwe, and South Africa over five decades before he died in 2018.

Welby acknowledged his responsibility for the Church of England's delayed response to the abuse after being informed in 2013.

In his resignation statement, he expressed deep sorrow for the victims, taking personal and institutional accountability. He hopes his decision will demonstrate the Church's commitment to change and safeguarding. Welby will continue meeting victims and delegate safeguarding duties until a full review is completed. **Vatican News**





# The End of the Synod...

## ...And the beginning of synodality

The Synod on Synodality, which began under Pope Francis' leadership in 2021, has catalysed significant changes within the Catholic Church. This synodal path aims to foster a more participatory, communal, and missionary Church, though the journey toward these ideals has been gradual. Initially, synodality was a concept that only ecclesiologists and historians discussed, but under Pope Francis, it has gained prominence. However, the synodal process, particularly the assemblies in October 2023 and 2024, faced challenges: balancing the diverse expressions of synodality across the globe, slowing down runaway initiatives like those in Germany, while also spurring synodal action in places where it was lacking, such as some US dioceses.

### A Participatory Church

Pope Francis envisioned a synodal Church inspired by Latin American models and infused with Jesuit spirituality. This complex process involved conversations at local, national, and continental levels, followed by dialogue at the central level. Unlike previous synods or the Second Vatican Council, which primarily followed a top-down approach, the synodal process this time incorporated a more participatory method. The first assembly in 2023 featured an informal "conversation in the Spirit," lacking deep theological integration. However, significant improvements were made by the second assembly in October 2024, with more theological input, demonstrating that theology still plays a crucial role in shaping the Church's direction.

### Handling Information and Media

Another notable shift in the Synod on Synodality was the handling of information. Unlike past synods, where speeches and interventions were shared publicly, this synod limited media access to ensure participants could speak freely. While this approach aimed to maintain focus on the spiritual dimension of synodality and limit sensational coverage, the social media age introduced new dynamics. Participants shared personal experiences on social media, including selfies and casual moments like dinner or gelato outings, leading to a "peri-council" atmosphere akin to the informal gatherings during Vatican II.

### Process over Events

The Synod's approach was rooted in the



Pope Francis gives his blessing to members of the Synod of Bishops on synodality after the synod's final working session October 26, 2024 in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican. (CNS/Vatican Media)

principles of Vatican II, emphasising process over events. This framework was laid out by the Synod's central office and Pope Francis, indicating that synodality is not just a theological theory but a lived reality for the Church. The final document, though not revolutionary, formalised synodality as a key teaching of the Church, suggesting that synodality should be an ongoing process. This shift makes synodality part of Catholic teaching for the first time and highlights its importance as the Church navigates contemporary challenges.

### Global Variations and Regional Challenges

The Synod's outcomes will likely be interpreted differently across the global Church, with varying implementations depending on regional contexts. Some proposals, such as those around transparency and accountability, have already seen partial implementation, particularly in Western countries, but they will face obstacles in other regions where legal and financial systems differ. Other suggestions, such as changes to the appointment of bishops, will encounter significant canonical and political hurdles. For example, appointing bishops in countries like China, Russia, or Vietnam involves a different set of challenges compared to places like the US or Germany.

### Controversies and Ongoing Discernment

One of the most contentious issues during the Synod was the diaconate for women. The question of women's access to leadership roles and diaconal ministry remains open for future discernment. The Synod's final document, though it received some opposition, expressed the belief that there is no reason to prevent women from taking leadership roles in the Church, reflecting an ongoing openness to the role of women in ministry. Despite this, Pope Francis and other Vatican leaders chose to keep discussions on sensitive issues, such as the diaconate, within the control of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. This decision, which mirrors past Vatican responses to controversial matters, highlights the tension between synodality and papal centralisation.

Another controversial issue was how the Synod would address LGBTQ Catholics. While the final document does not explicitly address this issue, the Synod demonstrated a much more open and respectful approach compared to earlier synods, such as the 2014–2015 Synod on the Family. However, the issue remains sensitive and was not a central focus. Similarly, the document made only marginal reference to the sex-abuse crisis, reflecting the reluctance of leaders in non-Western churches to engage with the topic.

### Centralisation vs Synodality

The Synod's process has been marked by a clear intention to continue with the "synodal turn," though the specifics of what this means for the future of the Church remain uncertain. Pope Francis' decision not to issue a post-synodal exhortation, a first since Vatican II, signals a departure from the past. Instead, the Synod's final document is seen as a more modest outcome compared to the final documents of previous synods. This shift highlights a difference in approach between the 2024 Synod and earlier synods under Pope Francis, such as the 2020 Amazon Synod, where many recommendations were ignored.

### Will Bishops Maintain Dominance?

In considering the future of synodality, questions remain about how the Synod will evolve as an institution. Will bishops continue to dominate, or will there be more representation from clergy, religious, and laypeople? While the final document maintains the episcopal nature of the Synod, it leaves room for further development. Pope Francis has reshaped many institutional features of the Church, but much remains in his hands, including decisions about the future of synodality and the role of the Roman Curia.

### Tensions and Coexistence

Papal primacy is also a key issue in the context of synodality. Although the Synod emphasises collegiality, Pope Francis has maintained the central role of the papacy. His leadership, culminating in his act of venerating the relic of St Peter's chair at the conclusion of the Synod, underscores the continuing importance of papal primacy within the synodal process. This act suggests that synodality and papal authority can coexist, though tensions between the two remain.

### Local Governance and the Spread of Synodality

The Synod on Synodality may lead to new forms of governance at the local level, mirroring the changes of the 1970s when local synods flourished. Pope Francis has extended the concept of synodality beyond the episcopal collegiality of Vatican II, aiming for a more inclusive model of the Church that incorporates both clergy and laity. However, in some regions, synodality has yet to take root, and much will depend on Pope Francis' leadership in guiding this process.

### Uncertainty Ahead

The future of synodality in the Catholic Church remains uncertain. The Synod's final document offers a vision for a more collaborative, participatory Church, but its implementation will depend on how the Church adapts to diverse local realities. The balance between papal primacy and synodality, and the role of bishops within this framework, will shape the trajectory of the Church's future governance. The next steps in the synodal process will reveal whether this path leads to deeper reform or remains an ongoing experiment in ecclesiastical structure. Massimo Faggioli, *Commonweal*

This summary highlights key points from the original article. For the full article, visit: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/end-synod>



Pope Francis and members of the Synod of Bishops offer a prayer of thanks to God after the synod's final working session October 26, 2024 in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican. (CNS/Vatican Media)



# What we do about elder abuse will be our legacy as a society

My heart shattered into a million pieces when I read the headline *Old Folk's Home Owner had their residents chained to their beds at a run-down place*. I'm certain you would have felt the same pain as well. This incident starkly exposes the grim reality of eldercare in our country and highlights how far we are from true reform. Our pain is twofold — it stems not only from the horror of the act itself but from the deeper realisation that we can treat the frail and vulnerable, those most in need of care and protection, with such cruelty and neglect.

If being a vulnerable elderly person means suffering abandonment, hurt, humiliation, and abuse, then this isn't just a geriatric issue. It is the disproof of our shaky pudding, technology, science, medical advancement, so-called progress, and all. Reports of elder abuse are rising, threatening to become a new pandemic that cuts deeply into the fabric of our society. Our once-cherished values of



## Dancing with Dementia

DR CECILIA CHAN

respect and care for the ageing population are dissolving, replaced by a troubling rise in neglect and mistreatment.

Recently, while visiting a friend in a care facility, I witnessed a heartbreaking scene. My friend sat beside a woman whose four limbs were restrained to her chair. She cried out in agony, with no one there to comfort her — completely alone. Across from them, another woman was also restrained, but she was silent, her eyes drained and lifeless. I

later learned that both women were living with dementia, and tragically, they were not the only ones in such distress.

I find myself at a loss, trying to explain to the young people I mentor why kindness, respect, and empathy seem to be fading in the society they're growing up in. The irony is overwhelming. How can I help them understand that, despite all our so-called progress, we're still shackled by such glaring hypocrisy? How can we expect them to respect and care for us when we are old, frail, and need their support, if we don't show them what true compassion

looks like now?

One of my favourite Chinese stories succinctly points this out. It tells of an old woman who's too weak to work in the field or help with household chores. She just sits on the porch, gazing out across the fields, while her son tills the soil and runs the farm. One day, the son looks up at the old woman and thinks, "What good is she now that she's so old? All she does is eat up the food! I have my family to think about. It's time for her to be done with life!" He then makes a big wooden box, places it on a wheelbarrow, rolls it up to the porch, and asks his mother to get in. The mother lies down in the box and the son puts the cover on, then wheels it toward the cliff. At the edge of the cliff, there is a knock from the box. "Yes, mother?" the son asks. The mother replies, "Why don't you just throw me off the cliff and save the box? Your children are going to need it one day."

To deny humane support to the vulnerable elderly raises serious moral and ethical concerns. We, who are part of society, who are more capable — and therefore more powerful — must take responsibility for those who are more vulnerable and less powerful. How we

carry out the responsibility of caring for vulnerable individuals says much about us, as individuals and as a society. Thus, dementia presents as much a social and moral challenge as it does a medical one and decisions concerning "what to do" with those living with dementia are inextricably tied to the moral foundation of our society. Since for now, a cure for dementia is still not available, we owe it to our Malaysians living with dementia to carefully examine the elements of care practices that are the most effective in sustaining and supporting them. The measure of a society can be determined by the way it treats its most vulnerable members.

Honestly, elder abuse reflects a decay of basic human rights in a major segment of our society. How do we move forward? It starts with us. It starts with our human heart.

I would like to end by reminding us of what St Francis of Assisi once said, "Preach the Gospel at all times, and when necessary, use words."

**Dr Cecilia Chan** is a Gerontologist and Dementia Advocate and Activist. She can be contacted via WhatsApp 013-4384388.

## Embracing the innocence and potential of children

A wise grandfather once shared that the world has only two wonders he truly admires. The first is nature's breathtaking beauty, which he believes reflects God's greatness and glory. The second, however, is his grandson, a constant source of surprise and joy. As the child played outside, interacting with an elderly man seeking help, the grandfather commented, "These little children always amaze us with their purity of mind, their hearts full of kindness, and their actions untouched by life's complications."

Children have an incredible ability to express themselves freely, offering us glimpses of untainted innocence and unfiltered generosity. Their pure hearts and sincere actions are living examples of wonder, reminding us of the beauty of a childlike spirit. As Henry Ward Beecher wisely said, "Children are the hands by which we take hold of heaven." Through a child's wonder and joy, we are reminded that heaven is not a distant place, but a feeling, a shared moment, a glimpse of something greater that exists in our midst.

However, in today's busy world, many parents, overwhelmed by work and responsibilities, miss these moments. The greatest gift parents can give their children is their time. Children might not directly ask

for it, but simple phrases like "Papa, can you play with me?" are an invitation to engage in meaningful moments. One day, I watched a mother patiently wait while her young son observed rabbits at a school's pet cage. His genuine fascination was met with her undivided attention, instead of rushing him along. She understood that time, love, and attention were more valuable than hurrying him to the next task.

When parents are truly present with their children, it sends a powerful message: "You are more important than anything else." This foundation of trust and connection stays with children for life, giving them a sense of security and love. Time cannot be wrapped in a box or bought, but it is in the daily sacrifices parents make for their children that shape their emotional well-being and future. Every child is unique, with their own gifts and talents, and it is a parent's role to understand and celebrate these qualities, rather than forcing them into pre-determined moulds.

I once advised a set of parents whose child was more interested in reading and computers than sports. They had hoped to push their child into football, but understanding the child's true interests was key to nurturing his talents. Parents are called to support their children's natural

abilities and passions. When both parents and teachers create environments where children are free to explore their interests, they help build their confidence and self-esteem.

Children thrive when they feel appreciated and accepted. They eagerly seek affirmation from their parents and teachers. I've often seen young children excitedly sharing their accomplishments with their parents, hoping for their recognition. "Papa, I got four stars today!" some exclaim, eagerly awaiting a hug or kiss in response. But sometimes, children are met with indifference, and this lack of encouragement can be disheartening.

One day, a child approached me in tears after performing on stage. He shared that his mother had promised to watch but wasn't there. This child, who loved his mother deeply, had been waiting for her approval and appreciation. It was a reminder that small gestures of support and presence can make all the difference in a child's life. Parents' presence and encouragement transform small moments into cherished memories, motivating children to strive for more and feel confident in their abilities.

As author Catherine M. Wallace said, "Listen earnestly to anything your children want to tell you, no matter what. If you don't listen eagerly to the little stuff when they are little, they won't tell you the big stuff when they are big." This advice emphasises the importance of being attentive to children's voices, no matter how trivial their concerns may seem. They need to feel heard and understood, and this connection forms the foundation for open communication later in life.

Sometimes, children act out due to underlying struggles. Rather than reacting with frustration or punishment, we must pause and consider the reasons behind their behaviour. Annette Breau, an expert in education, reminds us, "Everyone in

the classroom has a story that leads to misbehaviour or disobedience. Nine times out of ten, the story behind the misbehaviour won't make you angry. It will break your heart." Many children face challenges like family instability or struggles with self-esteem, which can manifest as misbehaviour.

I recall a boy who consistently failed to maintain his school uniform properly. Despite several meetings with his teachers, he continued to neglect his appearance. Eventually, I sat with him for a longer conversation and discovered that his parents, overwhelmed by their busy lives, had not provided him with the attention and support he needed. This conversation opened my eyes to the often-hidden reasons behind children's actions. When we take time to listen and understand, we can offer the support they truly need.

In today's world, many parenting styles are rooted in control rather than connection. Control-oriented parenting relies on criticism, punishment, and intimidation to modify behaviour. While this might bring short-term results, it can lead to resentment and rejection from the child in the long run. In contrast, connection-oriented parenting focuses on building a respectful, mutually supportive relationship with the child. This approach encourages children to feel valued and understood, making them more receptive to guidance and discipline.

Parenting should be about love, compassion, and understanding. Children are deeply influenced by those who make them feel respected and emotionally secure. When parents nurture a deep emotional connection, children are more likely to internalise the values and lessons they hope to teach. Ultimately, the most important thing a parent can do is to offer time, love, and attention — gifts that shape the future of their children. **Roy Alex, Matters India**



(iStock photo)



# God lifted me from the depths of my despair

**Carmel Dominic**

At first glance, Samuel Edmund Theivendran might not immediately strike you as someone who is a full-time Catholic lay missionary. Yet, the 27-year-old, with his robust and energetic presence, has wholeheartedly left his former life behind to embrace the calling of missionary work. In July 2024, he was officially commissioned as a full-time missionary by the bishop of Penang, Cardinal Sebastian Francis. Samuel is also a pioneer member of The Seeds Ministry, actively contributing to its mission from the very beginning.

Samuel was born in Penang and raised in Bidor, Perak. He moved to Penang Island to further his education and was later accepted into the engineering faculty at USM. After graduating as a materials engineer, he quickly secured a job with a company producing circuit boards for electronic devices. The company placed him in a junior management programme, which required participants to rotate through different departments every three months. Samuel's first assignment was in the Program Management Department, where he oversaw the entire manufacturing process of the product. Although he excelled in his role, Samuel's true passion lay in engineering, and he eagerly awaited his rotation into that department. However, his superiors were so impressed with his performance that they kept him in the business department for more than six months, delaying his move. This left Samuel feeling frustrated, as he longed to apply his skills in engineering.

"I was really upset and found myself arguing with God," Samuel recalls. "It felt unfair that I wasn't allowed to rotate into engineering as promised. That's what I studied and that's where my passion was. In my frustration, I stopped praying altogether. Looking back, I realise it was a small issue to be so upset about. I mean, I had a job, and this was during the height of COVID. I should have been grateful, especially when so many others were being retrenched. But at the time, all I could think about was getting into engineering.

As I distanced myself from prayer and any connection with God, I began to give in to sin and live a double life."

At this point, Samuel, who was the youth director of The Seeds Ministry, found himself living a double life, wearing two 'masks.' One was his public face in ministry — smiling, laughing, and praising God. But the other, the mask he wore privately, was slowly eroding his spirit. As time passed, Samuel became emotionally drained, struggling to maintain a joyful façade while feeling empty, lonely, and distant from God. It wasn't that he had stopped loving God or forgotten who God is; rather, it was the weight of how far he had strayed from grace and the deep shame that came with it.

Unsurprisingly, Samuel soon sank into depression. On top of everything he was already struggling with, he decided to change jobs, which required him to commute daily from Kulim to the island. The long travel left him physically exhausted, and he began experiencing suicidal thoughts, teetering on the edge of a mental breakdown. Noticing that something was wrong, Paul Julianose, the founder of The Seeds Ministry, encouraged Samuel to rent a room with him on the island to lighten his burden. However, Samuel, fearing that living with Paul would further drain him emotionally, initially declined. But Paul, sensing his long-time friend wasn't himself, persisted. Eventually, Samuel agreed and moved to the island, renting a room in the same apartment as Paul. Despite the move, Samuel's pride kept him from opening up about his struggles to Paul or others in the ministry. He spiralled deeper into depression, battling suicidal thoughts in isolation.

"I was constantly hiding my true self," Samuel admits. "I didn't talk about it to anyone. I wasn't spiritually or emotionally invested in any of the Seeds' programmes I participated in — I was just there physically. It was exhausting, pretending to be someone I wasn't."

After three months of living on the island, God intervened, pushing Samuel to confront his struggles head-on. During a faith-building programme at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Samuel felt the Holy Spirit urging him to receive the Sacrament of Confession. Initially hesitant and fearful, he eventually took the leap and confessed everything he had been carrying and concealing. The priest asked him a simple yet profound question: did Samuel truly believe in his heart that God could forgive all his transgressions and free him from depression and suicidal thoughts?

This question shook Samuel to his core, challenging his belief system. But deep down, he knew who his God was and realised that no matter how far he had strayed, God's

love could always reach him. After Confession, he felt an immense weight lifted from his heart and knew he had been forgiven. Samuel had become a living testament to Ephesians 2:1-10.

In the days that followed, Samuel began discerning his true calling with greater clarity and conviction. Although he had once dreamed of becoming a missionary, his double life had kept him from pursuing it seriously. Now, with a clean slate, he allowed himself to fully embrace the idea of becoming a full-time missionary. As a member of The Seeds Ministry, Samuel found joy in meeting new people, helping them navigate their daily struggles, and encouraging them to build a relationship with God. This gave him a deep sense of purpose and fulfilment. He realised that his calling went far beyond the routine of a 9-to-5 job; his soul longed for something more meaningful.

As Samuel began discerning his calling, he sought guidance from three key individuals: Paul Julianose, Derek Chong — a fellow Catholic full-time missionary and spiritually mature brother in Christ who had walked alongside Samuel in his faith journey — and a third trusted person who played the role of devil's advocate. Each of these men played a pivotal role in Samuel's decision-making process. Paul helped him reflect on his intentions and motivations for pursuing this path, Derek reignited his passion for full-time mission work, and the third offered a critical perspective to challenge his thinking. In most cases, receiving three different viewpoints might lead to confusion, but because all three men were led by the Holy Spirit, they provided Samuel with the clarity and direction he needed. Even so, Samuel felt it was important to test his desire for this calling before making a final decision.

"I needed God to give me a clear sign, a stamp of approval, and I wanted the assurance that He would provide for me if I left my stable job. So, I made a bold request — I asked God for a promotion. I figured that if He gave me this promotion, which I wasn't technically eligible for until two years later, it would be His way of showing me that He would always provide, even if I embraced the life of a full-time missionary. It was kind of like reverse psychology: if God could give me the promotion now, I'd trust that He would continue to provide for me in the future. And guess what? Not only did I get the promotion, but I also received one of the highest percentage pay increases in the company!

I'll admit, I hesitated for a moment because it was such a lucrative offer. But I knew deep down it would never bring the fulfilment that serving God does. After that, I handed in my resignation letter with a clear mind and a joyful heart."

Of course, his superiors were reluctant to accept his resignation and encouraged

him to sleep on it, urging him to reconsider his life's choices. But Samuel was

resolute, deeply convicted by God's call on his life. Nothing was going to stand in his way now. While his family initially resisted, concerned about his financial stability, they eventually came to support him when they saw his firm resolve in pursuing his mission work.

Samuel is now fully engaged in the young adults' ministry under The Seeds and is also discerning the possibility of joining the priesthood.

If you would like to learn more about Samuel's mission work or offer financial support, please contact him at 014-241 9434.

To learn more about The Seeds, visit [www.theseedsministry.com](http://www.theseedsministry.com).



Samuel with his parents James Sundram Theivendran and Christina Marks and Cardinal Sebastian Francis.



# The book I never wanted to read

In 1971, a Peruvian Catholic theologian and philosopher, Gustavo Gutiérrez, wrote a book called *A Theology of Liberation*.

He was among a few theologians and thinkers like Leonardo Boff and the Jesuits Juan Luis Segundo and Jon Sobrino, who seemed to be radically interpreting the Gospels to connect the message of salvation with the experiences of the poor.

This thinking did not occur in a political vacuum. The world back then was caught up in the Cold War. Anyone working with the poor and questioning unjust structures was viewed suspiciously as “Marxist”. In fact, several church workers in Malaysia and Singapore in the late 1980s were among scores of people detained without trial under harsh security laws.

This coloured my naïve thinking back then or, perhaps, it was ‘safer’ not to think about it. Moreover, I did not want my belief system to be influenced or coloured by what was regarded a deviation from mainstream Christianity.

So, I deliberately stayed away from reading material that espoused liberation theology. Instead, I told myself I would only read the Scriptures and learn from the teachings of the Church. At most, I would look up the social teachings of the Church.

At an overseas students’ hostel run by evangelicals, who espoused the concept of being “born again”, I attended regular Bible study and read it from cover to cover.

Yet, years later, I would realise there something was missing from this fundamentalist or literal reading of the Bible.

When I got involved in social activism alongside people of other faiths from the late 1980s, I felt that everyone, not just Christians, could make a difference in the world.

But as I looked around the reality of the world through the lens of faith, the questions of poverty, injustice and oppression haunted me. It was around this time I realised that the Bible is replete with verses about justice

and poverty – over 2,000 such passages.

I looked at God intervening in history and calling Moses to rescue the people in Egypt from slavery. I read the prophets like Amos and Micah and the Psalms, extolling people to practise “righteousness” (aka justice).

This made me realise that justice and compassion for the poor lie at the heart of the Good News. When Jesus outlined His mission statement, He began with: “I’ve come to bring the good news to the poor...”

Eureka! That was the thrust of the Gospel message, Jesus’ mission statement.

Meanwhile, throughout the 1990s, Gutiérrez, Boff and company were shunned by the mainstream. The Church — and its people — it would seem, were not ready for them.

Still, other leading lights on the fringe of the Church working among the poor captured my attention. I devoured stories about the life and times of Mother Teresa, the late Dorothy Day (founder of Catholic Worker Movement), the assassinated Oscar Romero and the civil rights campaigner Martin Luther King Jr. They were not liberation theologians, but their compassion for the poor and the oppressed shone through.

That solidarity with the poor made me wonder about the poor in Jesus’ time and how He related to them. Was His ministry among them a central part of the Gospel or was it just incidental to God’s salvation for a fallen world though Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection?

I got the nagging feeling I was missing something even in the Gospel texts. At the back of my mind, I wonder about the political and socioeconomic milieu in which Jesus was operating.

That was when I stumbled on the work



## Sunday Observer

ANIL NETTO

of New Testament scholars exploring the historical Jesus and the world He lived in. Writers like John Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg shone fresh light into the “domination system” that Jesus found Himself in.

Jesus was not working in a vacuum. God chose to send Him when the Roman Empire was around its zenith. Jesus was born around 4 BC during the reign of the mighty Emperor Augustus Caesar, who ruled from 27 BC until 14 AD.

But He was born not in Rome.

His infant cries pierced the night sky in a tiny hamlet on the distant eastern periphery of the empire. The peasants, already feeling the pain of colonisation, oppression, exploitation, were drawn to Him.

Added to that was a new phenomenon, the advent of “Roman Mediterranean globalisation”, as Crossan puts it. This was a prototype of a market economy when land and labour were subjugated in the quest for profits. Small farms producing food for the people were gobbled up and turned into large commercial estates producing cash crops for export. The result: a small group people grew fabulously wealthy while many independent farmers lost their land. Sound familiar?

Even the fishing waters were not spared this commercialisation, leading to overfishing for export markets. No wonder the early followers of Jesus struggled to catch enough fish, despite working long hours.

In sharp contrast to the dictates of the Empire and the Market, Jesus proposed an alternative kingdom — not based on Profit over People but where distributive justice — the heavenly banquet — would ensure that everyone had a place at the table.

But as Crossan puts it, Jesus’ passion for the kingdom and God’s distributive justice led Him to the Passion and Caesar’s “retributive

justice” through crucifixion.

When I caught glimpses of the writings of Gutiérrez, Boff and company over the last decade or so, they provided the theological assurance that the preferential option for the poor lies at the heart of the Gospel message. So did Catholic Social Teaching.

It is not that their interpretation of the Gospels was radically different. It was really a matter of perspective. They looked at the message of salvation not from the perspective of Empire and top-down domination, including colonialism and economic exploitation.

Instead, they looked at it from the bottom up — from the eyes of the teeming masses of exploited people across the centuries, their struggles for justice and their experience of faith. Their poverty, Gutiérrez observed, was a “scandalous state” and underpinned his thinking.

“We have to break with our mental categories, with the way we relate to others, with our way of identifying with the Lord, with our cultural milieu, with our social class, in other words, with all that can stand in the way of a real, profound solidarity with those who suffer, in the first place, from misery and injustice” (Theology of Liberation).

This theology of liberation is not so much about life after death. It is about living the meaning of Jesus’ liberation of the world from sin, which is at the root of injustice, exploitation and oppression of the poor. It is about transforming people and unjust structures that hinder the kingdom.

When Gutiérrez passed away on October 22, 2024 at the age of 96, he was vindicated when the Bishop of Rome, Francis, paid tribute to him: “Today, I think of Gustavo. Gustavo Gutiérrez. A great man. A man of the Church.”

It is time for me to finally read his book.

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



## A Blessed Life

TIANNE PEREIRA

I am not one to usually stand and look at myself in the mirror, but on the rare occasion that I do, I sigh heavily at the sight of my scar and the rolls my C-section have created on my body. However, very recently, I went for a massage and when the masseur turned me over, a sense of pride trickled upon me as I exposed this unsightly mark. It was at that moment I realised that this blemish on my body was not just a mark on my skin, but a map of strength and resilience. In that momentarily eureka moment, it dawned upon me that this was a physical reminder of a moment when my body did the most incredible thing — it brought life into the world.

The idea of a permanent mark may seem strange and, at times, unsettling, but this was about to change as I went on to scrutinise all my other physical scars and flaws.

When I was about five years old, I was adventurous, curious and mischievous, I remember climbing up the window glass panes at home only to come crashing down. I was left with a huge gash on my feet that had to have 15 or 18 stitches. I remember my mother running with me in her arms to get me attended to. All this while I hated the scar on

## Scars to my beautiful...

my left foot that often leaves people thinking I have a lizard on it, but now, I look at this scar as a bodily reminder of my mother, her commitment to protecting me and her love.

I then started recalling other marks, some from fighting with my sisters, playing basketball, falling off my bicycle, the mark on my finger from almost losing my life by electrocution and began to see these not as a flaws, but as a testament to my journey — one that is and was, filled with challenges, triumphs, fun and a depth of love I never consciously grasped. It also reminded me of God’s infinite presence, mercy, and protection.

As with all “defects” there is the sting of vulnerability, the lingering sense that something about my body had been altered, irrevocably. I always imagined and hoped for that perfect body that was flawless and something to be strived for. But with age I am starting to realise that scars are just as beautiful, and each carries its own story. It serves as a symbol of a journey we take and the person we become because of it.

The most prominent example of scars in our faith are the wounds of Jesus, especially those on His hands, feet, and side. After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples and showed them His scars, even inviting Thomas to touch them. These scars served as proof of His identity, His sacrifice, and His victory over death.

This idea is so simple yet so significant when understood. It’s an idea that I always knew theoretically, but never really gripped onto the depth of it.

Scars, in all their varied forms, are not weaknesses, but rather, ciphers of survival. Every scar on my body tells a story of resilience. My C-section scar is now a mark of strength, proof that my body had done what seemed to be impossible. It had nurtured, protected, and finally, with quiet determination, brought life into the world. And it is not just the outcome that matters, it is the process, the struggle, and the courage that saw me through. As I learn to embrace this scar, and the other scars I carry — both visible and hidden, some physical and some emotional, some healed and some healing, I know that as painful as some may be, none of these scars are mistakes.

I write this for anyone who needs to hear it, our scars are powerful in the way they hold stories of endurance. If you are going through something now, or are holding on to a wound, know that it will pass and it will heal. Psalm 147:3 says, “He heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds,” emphasising that God can heal both our physical and emotional wounds. You will be able to look back one day and speak of battles fought — some of which are won, others that leave lasting marks. Know that our scars empower us. They remind us that we are capable of withstanding more than we ever thought possible. They remind us that we are not defined by the things that have hurt us, but by how we rise above them.

In our journey of becoming more Christ-like, I guess our struggles and crosses are part of God’s work in moulding us. Just as scars may mark a healed wound, our trials leave us

stronger, more compassionate, and closer to God.

What is truly remarkable about scars is that they do not only mark the past; they illuminate our future. They stand as silent witnesses to our growth, as proof that we have evolved from each experience, each moment of pain, into something stronger, wiser, and more compassionate. There is power in that. There is power in knowing that I am not the sum of my struggles, but the sum of my ability to rise above them. And it is through experience we can relate to and uplift someone who is struggling.

And so, as of a few weeks ago, I have come to love my scars, my wrinkles, my fine lines and every other imperfection that is ever so evident now. I wouldn’t call them flaws anymore, nor is it something to be hidden away, it is a part of my story, one chapter in a much larger narrative of strength, transformation, and empowerment.

If we can learn to see our scars as marks of empowerment, we unlock a deeper understanding of ourselves — marks of grace and redemption. We begin to realise that we are not unscathed, untouched, pristine — we are warriors, healers, survivors, and in that realisation, we find our greatest strength. May every scar be a reminder that we are living, growing, and evolving, always moving forward, one beautiful, imperfect mark at a time.

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





Fr Ron Rolheiser

# Lighter thoughts on a heavy subject

A friend was facing the birth of her first child some years ago. While happy that she was soon to be a mother, she confessed openly her fears about the actual birth process, the pain, the dangers, and the unknown. But she consoled herself with the thought that hundreds of millions of women had experienced giving birth and managed it. Surely, she felt she could manage it, too.

I sometimes take those words and apply them to the prospect of dying. Death is the most daunting, unsettling, and heaviest topic there is, our occasional false bravado notwithstanding. When we say that we are not afraid of dying, mostly we're whistling in the dark and, even there, the tune comes out easier when our own death remains still an abstract idea, something in the indefinite future. Full disclosure, my own thoughts about dying no doubt fit that description, whistling in the dark. But why not? Surely whistling in the dark is better than torturing ourselves with unnecessary fear.

And so, I employ my friend's methodology for steeling her courage in the face of having to give birth and face that unknown. Simply put, millions and millions of people have managed the process of dying, so I should be able to manage it too! Moreover, unlike giving birth to a child, which affects less than

half the human race, in the case of dying, everyone, including myself, is going to have to manage it. A hundred years from now, everyone reading these words will have had to manage his or her death.

So, here's a way to look at our own death: Billions and billions of people have managed this, men, women, children, even babies. Some were old, some were young; some were prepared, some were not; some welcomed it, some met it with bitter resistance; some died from natural causes, some died through violence; some died surrounded by love, some died alone without any human love surrounding them; some died peacefully, some died crying out in fear; some died at a ripe old age, some died in the prime of their youth; some suffered for years from a seemingly meaningless dementia with those around them wondering why God and nature seemed cruel in keeping them alive; others in robust physical health with seemingly everything to live for, took their own lives; some died full of faith and hope, and some died feeling only darkness and despair; some died breathing out gratitude, and some died breathing out resentment; some died in the embrace of religion and their churches, some died completely outside of that embrace; and some died like Mother Teresa, while

others died like Hitler. But every one of them somehow managed it, the great unknown, the greatest of all unknowns. It seems it can be managed.

Moreover, nobody has come back from the other world with horror stories about dying which suggests that all our horror movies about being tormented after death and ghosts and haunted houses are pure fiction, through and through.

Most people, I suspect, have the same experience that I have when I think about the dead, particularly about persons I have known who have died. The initial grief and sadness of their loss eventually wears off and is replaced by an inchoate sense that it's alright, that they are alright, and that death has, in some strange way washed things clean. In the end, we have a pretty good feeling about our dead loved ones and about the dead in general, even if their departure from this earth was far from ideal, as for instance if they died angry, or through immaturity, or because they committed a crime, or by suicide. Somehow it eventually all washes clean and what remains is the inchoate sense, a solid intuition, that wherever they are now, they are in better and safer hands than our own.

When I was a young seminarian, we once had to translate Cicero's treatise on aging and

dying from Latin into English. I was nineteen years old at the time, but was very taken by Cicero's thoughts on why we shouldn't fear death. He was a renowned stoic; but, in the end, his lack of fear of dying was a little like my friend's approach to giving birth, that is, given how universal it is, we should be able to manage it!

I've long since lost my undergraduate notes on Cicero, so I looked up the treatise on the Internet recently. Here's a nugget from that treatise: "Death should be held of no account! For clearly the impact of death is negligible if it utterly annihilates the soul, or even desirable if it conducts the soul to someplace where it is to live forever. What, then, shall I fear, if after death I am destined to be either not unhappy or happy?"

Our faith tells us that, given the love and benevolence of the God we believe in, only the second option, happiness, awaits us. And we already intuit that.

**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)

## Choosing faith over convenience

### Why Sunday Mass matters more than ever

We've all been there — encouraging someone to go to church, only to hear them say, "I can pray anytime, anywhere. Why do I need to go?" It's a common response in today's world, where convenience and flexibility are celebrated. But this mindset misses something essential, something irreplaceable. The reality is that Sunday Mass offers a depth and presence we simply can't find on our own.

#### Encountering Christ in the Eucharist

When we attend Mass, we participate in the miracle of the Eucharist. Jesus didn't simply ask us to remember Him; He offered us His body and blood, saying, "Take and eat." In the Eucharist, we are receiving God — the one true God — physically and spiritually. Unless one doesn't truly believe in His real presence, there's no substitute for this profound, intimate encounter with Christ.

While personal prayer is essential, it can't replace the unique grace of receiving the Eucharist. It's the difference between a heartfelt message and a personal embrace. Through the Eucharist, God is with us in a way that transcends what we can experience alone, nourishing us in ways that words alone cannot.

#### A Commitment Beyond Convenience

Choosing to attend Mass is a choice to prioritise God, even when it's not convenient. Love isn't just a feeling; it requires action. Imagine if your partner told you, "I love you," but never showed it through their actions. It would ring hollow, wouldn't it? In the same way, our love for God is more than words — it's a commitment that we live out.

When we make the effort to attend Mass, we demonstrate that God deserves more than what's "easy." There's something transformative in setting aside time specifically for worship, even when other options call. This choice reshapes our priorities, strengthens our relationship with God, and reaffirms our

devotion. It's a statement that faith is more than words; it's a lived reality.

#### Choosing God Beyond Our Needs

It's easy to turn to God when we're in need — to ask for help, strength, or comfort. But what happens when life feels smooth, when we feel self-sufficient? Often, we let our relationship with God fade into the background, thinking Mass or prayer isn't as necessary because we don't "need" anything right now. Yet this attitude treats God like a convenience, a lifeline only for emergencies, rather than the centre of our lives.

True love and commitment to God mean choosing Him even when we don't have pressing needs. Just as in any close relationship, presence matters. Imagine only connecting with a friend or loved one when you needed something from them. Such a relationship would feel shallow, one-sided, and distant. Mass is our opportunity to show God that He is essential to us — not because of what He can give, but because of who He is.

By attending Mass regularly, we're not just asking God for something; we're giving Him something back — our time, our attention, and our presence. It's a declaration that we value our relationship with Him, that we seek Him not only in times of need but always, recognising that our faith isn't based on convenience but on a deep, abiding love.

#### Responding to God's Love with Faithfulness

It's true — God is infinitely loving, merciful, and compassionate. His love isn't something we can "earn" by attending Mass, nor does missing one mean He'll stop loving us. But perhaps the question isn't whether God minds if we miss Mass; rather, it's whether we value Him enough to be there.

Imagine someone who loves us unconditionally — a parent, a close friend, or a partner.

Because they love us so deeply, they'd forgive our absence, but wouldn't we still feel

the desire to be present for them? Out of respect, gratitude, and love, we'd want to be there, not out of obligation but as a response to the depth of their care for us.

In the same way, attending Mass isn't just about following a rule; it's about reciprocating God's love. He doesn't demand our presence to love us, but in showing up, we demonstrate that we cherish His love enough to spend time with Him. It's a way of saying, "Your love is important to me, and I want to be with You, to honour You, and to strengthen our relationship."

When we think of Mass as a response to God's love, it becomes less about "having to go" and more about "wanting to be there." It's a small, yet meaningful way to give back to God, choosing faithfulness even when we know He loves us regardless.

#### Focusing on God Amidst Imperfections

Sometimes, it's challenging to attend Mass when we feel out of harmony with others in the church, whether it's people we've had conflicts with or even the priest whose style doesn't resonate with us. But perhaps this very struggle invites us to shift our focus from human imperfections to the sacred purpose of why we're there: to encounter God.

The church is filled with imperfect people — ourselves included. We're all on a journey, each with our own flaws and failures. Mass isn't a gathering of perfect people; it's a place where we all come, broken and in need of grace, seeking God's healing and strength. The priest, too, is human, serving as a vessel to bring God's presence to us despite his own limitations.

When we choose to look beyond personal feelings, we allow ourselves to experience the true power of Mass. We're there not because we approve of everyone or get along with them, but because we seek God's grace. Mass becomes an act of humility and a moment of transformation — a chance to

release judgement and focus on the divine.

By placing our attention on Christ present in the Eucharist, we remind ourselves that we're there for God, who meets us in our humanity and loves us despite our imperfections.

Attending Mass in this way teaches us patience, forgiveness, and resilience, helping us grow spiritually by seeing beyond human limitations. It's a reminder that we go to church not for the approval of others but to encounter God, who calls us to rise above resentments and distractions and draw closer to Him.

#### Finding Time for What Truly Matters

It's easy to feel like we simply don't have the time to attend Mass. Our days are filled with work, responsibilities, and endless to-do lists. And when someone encourages us to go to Mass, it can feel like just another demand, another item to add to our overflowing schedules. But perhaps it's precisely because we're so busy, so stretched thin, that we need Mass more than ever.

Attending Mass isn't about adding to our burdens; it's about lightening them. It's a chance to step away from the constant demands of life, to pause and reset. For just one hour each week, Mass allows us to refocus, reconnect, and receive the spiritual strength we need to face our challenges with renewed clarity and peace. By giving this time to God, we're not taking away from our obligations; we're enriching our ability to meet them with a calm, grounded spirit.

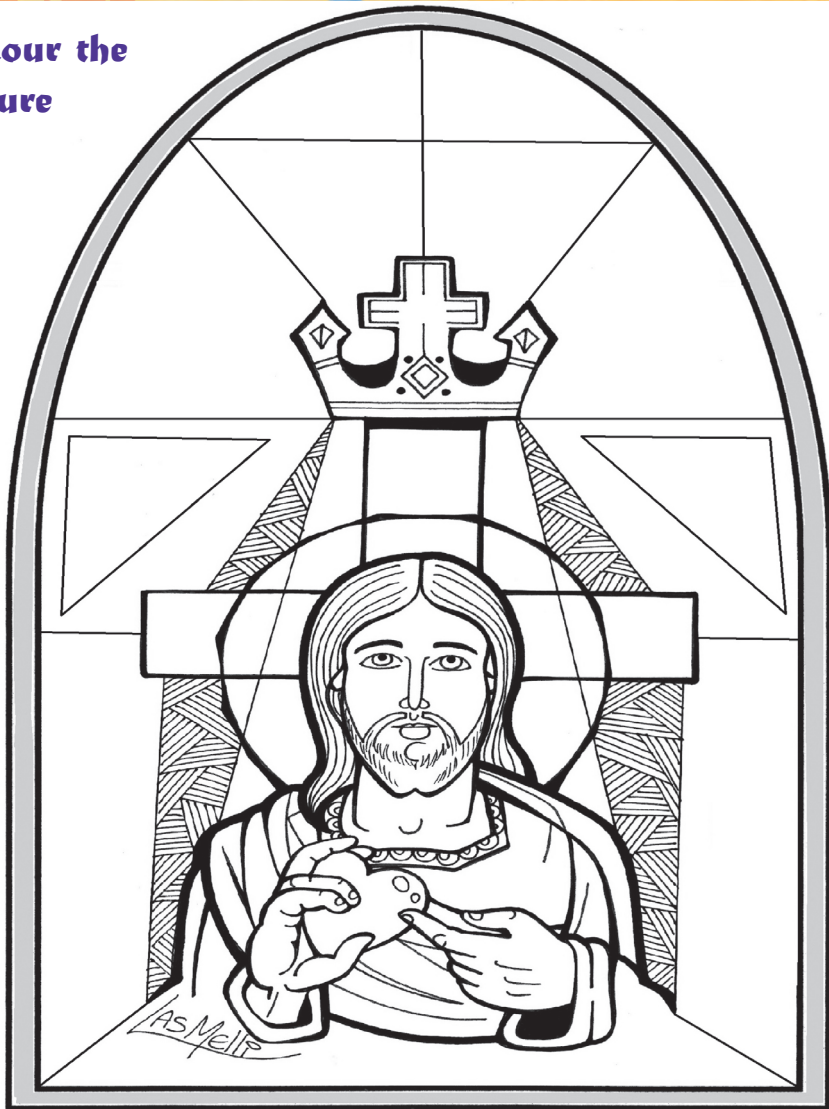
In the end, finding time for Mass isn't about squeezing it in — it's about choosing to prioritise what truly matters, even when life is hectic. After all, it's only one hour out of 168 in a week. And in that hour, we receive a gift that empowers us to handle the remaining 167 with greater grace and resilience.

**Thomson Emmanuel Wong** is a parishioner of the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Klang



# Little Catholics' corner

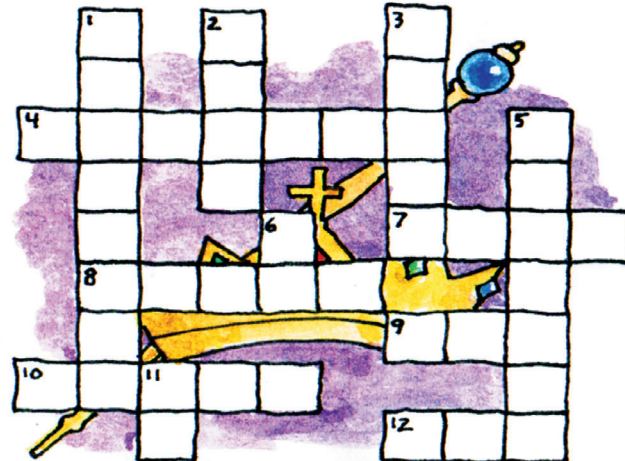
Colour the picture



**"You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." (John 18:37)**

## Christ the King Crossword

Revelation 1:5-7



Here is a part of today's second reading. Use the words at the bottom to fill in the blanks and the puzzle.

D=down  
A=across.

(3D) \_\_\_\_\_ Christ is the (1D) \_\_\_\_\_  
(4A) \_\_\_\_\_, the firstborn (11D) \_\_\_\_\_  
the dead and ruler of the (2D) \_\_\_\_\_s of  
the earth. To (12A) \_\_\_\_\_ who loves us and  
has (8A) \_\_\_\_\_ us from our (7A) \_\_\_\_\_  
by his blood, who has made us into a  
(5D) \_\_\_\_\_, priests for his (9A) \_\_\_\_\_ and  
Father, to him (6D) \_\_\_\_\_ (10A) \_\_\_\_\_  
and power forever and ever. Amen.

**OF GLORY BE HIM WITNESS  
GOD FAITHFUL SINS KING  
FREED KINGDOM JESUS**

Down: 1.faithful 2.king 3. Jesus 5.kingdom 6. Be 11.of  
Across: 4.witness 7.sins 8.freed 9.God 10.glory 12.him

## WORD SEARCH

### BORN TO BE KING

(John 18: 33-37)

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

IDEA	PLACE	RIGHT	WORLD	SERVANTS
TESTIFY	KINGDOM	TRUTH	ARREST	LISTENS
FACT	PEOPLE	REASON	BORN	FIGHT
SAYING	PALACE	PRIEST	KING	EVERYONE

Dear children

Every year on the last Sunday before Advent, we celebrate the feast of Christ the King. Jesus is a good king who loves His people so much that He died so we could go to Heaven.

During the last days of His life on earth, Jesus was arrested and put on trial. He was asked by Pilate, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

"Is that your idea, or did others talk to you about Me?" Jesus asked.

"It was your people who handed you over to me. What have you done?"

Pilate replied.

"My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, My servants would fight to defend Me. My kingdom is from another place."

"So, you are a king then," said Pilate.

Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason, I was born, and for this, I came into the world."

He was born to be King, but not the kind of king that wears a crown and rules an earthly kingdom. His kingdom is in Heaven where He rules now and forever.

Love  
Auntie Eliz

**CHRIST  
THE KING  
NOV 24, 2024**







# UMPSA CATHOLIC STUDENTS' WELCOMING GATHERING

Jennifer Sak

**K**UANTAN: More than 30 students of the Catholic Student Varsity Fellowship (CVSF) of Universiti Malaysia Pahang Al-Sultan Abdullah (UMPSA) gathered to welcome new and returning students.

Themed *Growing in Faith, United in Faith and Purpose*, the gathering held from November 8 to 10 at the Chapel of St Theresa in Gambang, introduced freshmen and other new students to CVSF's supportive community, shared values, and mission. Also in attendance was Fr George Packiasamy, parish priest of the Church of St Thomas the Apostle; the CVSF Core Team, and other UMPSA Gambang and Pekan Campus students.

The three days were filled with meaningful activities and five talk sessions led by Fr George and the CVSF Core Team, designed to foster friendship and faith among the students.

The students were split into four groups for some games. The event provided a platform for students to bond, reflect, and establish a sense of belonging within the UMPSA Catholic community.

Fr George, in his talk *Fidelity to Jesus in a Changing World*, highlighted the struggle among students to keep their faith in Jesus in a world full of challenges. Fr George shared insights with the students on living as children of God, reminding them of the importance of maintaining their faith and trusting in God's guidance throughout their lives.

Four members of the CVSF core team also delivered talks: Jennifer Sak



spoke on *Trusting God in Uncertain Times*, encouraging students to lean on their faith amid life's challenges. Deidrel Ezekiel presented *Fostering Faith in Jesus*, emphasising the importance of building and nurturing a personal relationship with Christ. Brandon Xavier shared insights on *Personal Spiritual Discipline*, highlighting the role of daily practices in strengthening faith. Lastly, Dodi Pressly delivered a talk on *Mission and Weakness in a Challenging World*, addressing the power of vulnerability and the strength found in embracing mission despite difficulties. Together, these talks offered students essential guidance for spiritual growth and resilience, inspiring them to deepen their faith and discover purpose in their spiritual journey.

CVSF has hosted the welcoming gathering at the start of each semester for three consecutive years, making it an established annual event. This gathering has become a cornerstone for strengthening the unity of its members and guiding them as they begin a new academic year. Participants leave with renewed spirits, new friend-



ships, and valuable insights to carry forward throughout their journey.

Looking ahead, CVSF plans to organise a variety of faith-based and community outreach events, including the Christmas celebration, as well as a collaboration with the Catholic community from other universities across Peninsular Malaysia. While CVSF continues to thrive as a community, it is hoped that events like the welcoming gathering will continue to inspire and strengthen the faith of all who participate.

CAMEROON: Helping young people, nurturing their talents, and praising God — these are the three pillars behind an original competition launched by the Archdiocese of Douala, located in Cameroon's second-largest city, modelled after the popular TV show "The Voice."

On November 1, some 30 contestants took to the stage set up at the All Saints Parish in Soboum, a district of Douala, to kick off the competition's first edition. Coming from seven different parishes, each participant had to perform a song solo to vie for one of the 20 spots in the semi-final, set for December 6.

"The goal is to give these young people the opportunity to sing for God, to love one another, become familiar with each other, and discover themselves," explained Fr Rodrigue Fozing, director of the competition in the Wouri 6 pastoral zone of the Archdiocese of Douala. "These young people are seeds for the church; we simply need to trust them."

This idea emerged as part of the ongoing diocesan synod in the Archdiocese of Douala. Announced two years ago

## ARCHDIOCESE LAUNCHES SINGING COMPETITION TO ENGAGE YOUTH

by Archbishop Samuel Kleda, the synod's theme is *Young People, Come and See*. It has fostered a dialogue between priests and youth to identify and support their challenges.

The competition borrows the format of the television show. Each participant is blind-auditioned by a panel of four music professionals. In addition to judging, the panel's role is to motivate and reassure the young contestants. "I'm thrilled to be in 'The Voice' to showcase my talent," Corine Kemsop from All Saints Parish in Soboum shared. "Two coaches turned their chairs when I sang. I will give my best to go as far as possible!"

"I am very excited to participate in the first edition of 'The Voice' competition," said Signe Dario from Pentecost Parish in Newton Airport. "It's a great opportunity to con-

nect with my brothers and sisters and live out our fraternity in a warm, friendly way."

At the end of the competition, the most promising talents will receive support to pursue professional music careers, thanks to the backing of benefactors. "This event is a wonderful opportunity for our youth, as music professionals and patrons have decided to mentor the top performers in this event sponsored by the Archbishop of Douala," noted Fr Paul Noel Nzepang, pastor of the host parish.

Fr Guillaume Omgba, the youth chaplain at St Thaddeus Parish in Bobongo, echoed this sentiment, saying he came to "celebrate the efforts and talents of the young people." **Yannick Mene, LCI**



## Talitha Kum trains nuns, youth against human trafficking and forced marriage in Bangladesh

DHAKA, Bangladesh: Talitha Kum Bangladesh is empowering religious sisters and youth communities in the South Asian country to fight against human trafficking, child marriage and forced marriage with its new training program.

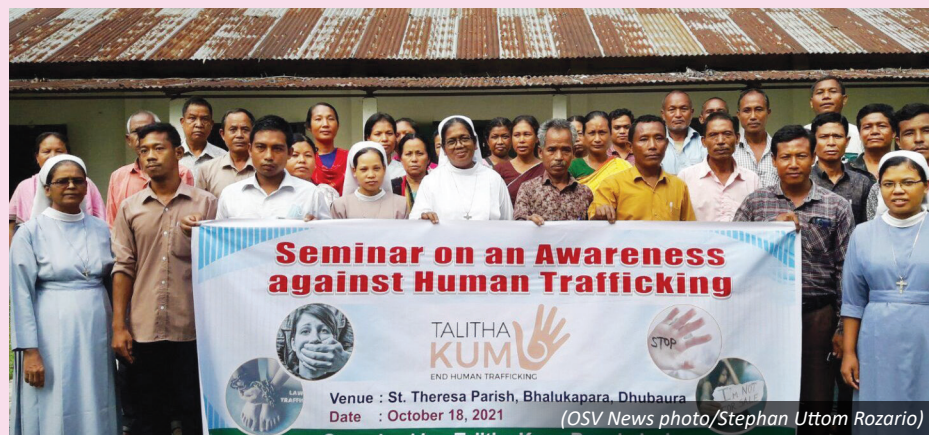
One of the world's leading groups combating human trafficking arranged its second national training programme in Dhaka, the country's capital, Oct 24-26, with 20 sisters from different congregations, 25 youth from Bangladesh's eight dioceses and a religious brother.

The first training programme was held in 2023 with 19 sisters and 18 youth.

Sr Josephine Rozario of the Salesian Missionaries of Mary Immaculate, coordinator of Talitha Kum Bangladesh, led both training programs.

"Bangladesh is the most vulnerable country in the world in terms of human trafficking, forced marriage and child marriage ... all these crimes are more organized in Bangladesh due to poverty," said Sr Josephine.

She said that poor girls and boys are easily recruited by traffickers due to a lack of funds for living, and parents also want to



marry their girls as they can't afford to raise them. The youth are trafficked abroad or inside the country.

The network helps reach not only the religious but also youth communities in Bangladesh.

Talitha Kum Bangladesh is now working in schools, colleges, Catholic girls and boy's hostels, and other professional youth organisations. They are also seeking to expand their network, but are seeking more funds from donors to do so.

"For every work we need money. ...

If Talitha Kum Bangladesh gets enough funds, we can easily reach more youth — even from the marginal territory of the country," said Fr Liton Gomes.

"But we are trying our best to engage more youth and religious with the network and make a trafficking-free and well-aware Bangladesh," Fr Gomes added.

According to a 2023 report by UNICEF — the United Nations' agency advocating for the rights of children — approximately 51 per cent of girls under 18 in Bangladesh were forced into early marriage.

"Bangladesh has the highest prevalence of child marriage in South Asia and is among the 10 countries worldwide with the highest levels. There are 41.6 million child brides in Bangladesh, 22.3 million of whom were married before the age of 15," the report said.

Bangladesh has passed laws against child marriage, setting official marital age at 21.

Fr Gomes said however that the law can't tackle child marriage and forced marriage. To do so, awareness should be built across the country.

Sangita Marak, a 21-year-old Catholic university student who joined the Talitha Kum Bangladesh training programme in the Diocese of Sylhet, said that the training is very helpful "because I was just admitted to the university and I didn't know about the kinds of trafficking."

"Talitha Kum Bangladesh finally taught me trafficking means not only being trafficked abroad — but that illegal migration to other places within the country is also trafficking. TKB also taught me how to tackle child marriage and forced marriage," another participant said. **Stephan Uttom Rozario, OSV News**

## Confirmation at SMC, Ipoh

Jennifer Duarte

IPOH: Eighteen youth were confirmed at the Church of St Michael on November 9. Eleven of them were from the English-

speaking classes and seven from the Chinese-speaking classes.

Based on the readings of the 32nd Sunday of Ordinary Time (Year B), Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop

of Penang, in his homily, advised the confirmands and the congregation about their spiritual companions on the journey. In the First reading, the widow was rewarded for sharing her last bits of food and drink with Prophet Elijah. In the Gospel, we see that Jesus was pleased with the poor woman who gave the little that she had for the use of the Church. Bishop Sebastian asked all present to reflect on these two important questions: What is Jesus observing about our disposition today? Will He be pleased with us?

In the second reading from the Letter to the Hebrews, the Cardinal spoke about the purpose of Jesus' second coming, which is to reward us with salvation. The key message is that we should be waiting as baptised disciples for His second coming. The St Theresa's Choir sang the hymn *Companions on the Journey* as the recessional hymn, which was apt.



The confirmands walking in the entrance procession.



Cardinal Sebastian Francis confirming a candidate.

Going for the Theology of the Body (TOB) camp was an excellent experience. Not only was it about finding a true and faithful relationship in romantic terms, but also within family, friends and the community. Not only that, there were lots of group discussions where candidates were able to participate and discuss their own personal views about TOB. I also appreciate all the speakers and hosts in that camp for their assistance in understanding the Theology of the Body and making the TOB Camp a really enjoyable event. All in all, to put it simply: TOB camp is amazing and thank you TOB camp team! **Chloe Yap, Church of St Ignatius, Petaling Jaya**



## Shape your life on the foundation of truth with Jesus

Hello readers, today, we celebrate the feast of Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, a solemnity in our Church, and also World Youth Day. As I reflect on today's Gospel (John 18:33-37), I see Jesus not only as the King of the Universe but as the King of my life. In every area of my life — as a son, brother, friend, university student, and member of the Catholic Fraternity Movement (CFM) — I feel His divine presence guiding me. With this conviction, I am empowered to face life's challenges courageously, without fear.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells Pilate that His kingdom is not of this world. This reminds me that Jesus' kingdom transcends worldly notions of power and authority. His kingdom is spiritual, and I am called to return to it. Every time I reflect on Scripture, I connect with Jesus' presence and realise

that I am living in His Kingdom here on earth.

At the end of the passage, Jesus declares that He came to bear witness to the truth. The truth is that God loves us, and for that truth, Jesus died for us — saving us from eternal separation from God.

The line that strikes me most is: "All who are on the side of truth listen to My voice." This verse challenges me to examine my conscience: Am I truly listening to Jesus? Am I standing by the Truth? What in my life is blocking me from fully listening to Jesus and standing with Him in truth?

I recall a story shared during a prayer meeting about a construction worker nearing retirement. His boss, before leaving for a long business trip, asked him to build one last house. The worker was already looking forward to his retirement and so

his heart was not in it. The worker rushed through it, using cheap materials and cutting corners. When the boss returned, he gave the worker the keys to the house as a gift for his many years of service. The worker, now regretful, realised that had he known the house was for him, he would have built it with greater care.

This story makes me reflect on my life here on earth — what I do now shapes my life in the world to come. As a young person, I pray for the grace to align my life with God's will, placing Him at the centre of my life through active service and involvement in the Church's ministries. May I continue to build my life on the foundation of truth, with Jesus as my King.

**Keegan Ng Hong Tzen (18)**  
Church of St Theresa, Gajah Berang, Melaka



# Priest slain by Nazis to be inducted among 'Righteous of the World'

ROME: A Catholic priest executed by the Nazis in 1944, who's today a candidate for sainthood, will be memorialised, along with four other figures, in a "Garden of the Righteous of the World" located on the island of Sicily.

Fr Alcide Lazzeri will be honoured in a ceremony, November 29, which will feature the installation of a star bearing his name in the garden, which was launched in 2015 as a joint project of a cultural institute based in Agrigento, Sicily, and local park authorities.

The idea of the garden is to honour moral heroes of humanity, and, given the location in Sicily, it's no surprise that anti-mafia campaigners figure prominently on the honour roll. Among the first honourees was Fr Giuseppe "Pino" Puglisi, gunned down in 1993 for his success in persuading youth in his Brancaccio neighbourhood of Palermo to reject organised crime.

Puglisi was beatified by Pope Francis in 2013, becoming the first figure to be officially recognised as a martyr to the mafia.

Among others memorialised in the garden are Khaled al-Assad, a Syrian archaeologist beheaded by ISIS in 2015 for hiding historical artefacts so they couldn't be destroyed; Alganesh Fessaha, an Eritrean human rights activist known for her protection of migrants both in Africa and on the Italian island of Lampedusa; and Jakob and Elizabeth Künzler, a Swiss couple who aided countless sick and injured persons during the Armenian genocide of 1915-1917.

Now Lazzeri will join the list, honoured not only for his death at the hands of German troops but also for attempting to save the lives of his flock.

It was June 29, 1944, the feast of Sts Peter and Paul, when the "Hermann Göring" division of the Germany Luftwaffe, then in retreat from the Allied campaign in Italy, arrived in the small town of Civitella in Val di Chiana, located in the northcentral region of Tuscany. Lazzeri was saying Mass for the community when troops stormed into the church and ordered everyone out.

According to witnesses, Lazzeri told the soldiers, "Kill me and let my people go free."

Unfortunately, it was not to be. The troops did indeed execute Lazzeri, but they also proceeded to kill 243 other people in and around Civitella, representing one of the worst atrocities of the



Second World War in Italy. The massacre was carried out in reprisal for an earlier raid by Italian partisans that left three German soldiers dead.

A beatification cause was opened in 2018 by the Diocese of Arezzo-Cortona-Sansepolcro on the 75th anniversary of the priest's death.

"Still today, his fame as a martyr is very much alive," said Archbishop Riccardo Fontana upon signing the decree. "This is our choice; our Church wants

to hand on to future generations the message that the faith knows how to resist evil."

Born in 1887 in Chitignano, another small town in Tuscany, Lazzeri entered the Franciscan order at a young age and was ordained at 23. He was a chaplain to young Italian soldiers during the First World War. He later opted to leave the Franciscans and became a diocesan priest, ending up in Civitella.

Fontana noted that Lazzeri had shown pastoral concern for all parties during the conflict, even conducting a funeral ceremony for the three slain German soldiers.

After killing Lazzeri, the German forces proceeded to burn much of Civitella to the ground while murdering scores of residents. To this day, the diocese still conserves Eucharistic hosts trampled by the German troops during the massacre, as well as shreds from the vestments Lazzeri was wearing at the time he was shot.

One eyewitness to Lazzeri's death was an altar boy serving his Mass that day, a 10-year-old boy from Civitella named Luciano Giovannetti, who would go on to become a priest and, eventually, the bishop of Fiesole, always saying that he owed his vocation to Lazzeri. Giovannetti died this past June 29, marking the eightieth anniversary of the massacre.

To be inducted during the Nov 29 ceremony into the "pantheon of good" along with Lazzeri are the late Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador, known as the "martyr of the poor"; Mohammed V of Morocco, the country's last sultan who supported decolonisation and also protected Morocco's Jewish population; Giorgio la Pira, a longtime mayor of Florence and a principal architect of Italy's post-war democratic constitution; and Salvo D'Acquisto, a member of the Italian carabinieri who gave his life to save 22 civilians during WWII, who is also the subject of a beatification cause. **Cruz**

## MEMORIAM

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**1st Anniversary**  
**In Loving Memory of**

**PRECIOUS  
IN THE  
SIGHT OF  
THE LORD IS  
THE DEATH  
OF HIS  
FAITHFUL  
SERVANTS**

**Rev. Fr. Arul Sagayaraj Mariadas OFM  
(1st Malaysian OFM Priest)**  
From the Lord: 09-02-1963  
Ordained as a priest: 18-07-1997  
To the Lord: 28-11-2023

*Your life as a Priest was a blessing,  
Your memory was a treasure,  
You are loved beyond words and missed beyond measure.*

Forever loved and dearly missed by  
family, friars, parishioners, relatives, and friends.

*Psalms 116:15*

**5th Anniversary**  
**In loving memory of**  
**Mdm. Philomena Francis**

*15.3.1938 - 13.11.2019*  
*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all  
the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the  
house of the Lord forever. Ps 23:6*  
*Deeply missed and fondly remembered by  
family and loved ones.*

**In Loving Memory of**

**Peter & Stella Dass**

**24th Anniversary**      **11th Anniversary**  
From the Lord:      From the Lord:  
16 July 1921      6 June 1931  
To the Lord:      To the Lord:  
17 June 2000      29 November 2013

*Close in our hearts you will stay,  
loved and remembered everyday by  
Children, Grandchildren and loved ones.*

**1st Anniversary**  
**In Ever Loving Memory of**

**A. Innasiamal Florence**  
**Departed:**  
**27th November 2023**

Deeply missed and  
fondly remembered by:  
Daughter, Brothers, Sister,  
Brother-in-law, Sister-in-law,  
Niece, Nephew, Relatives  
and Friends.

**1st Anniversary**  
**In Loving Memory of**  
**Faustina Pereira**  
**2.2.1931 – 29.11.2023**

*In Our Hearts*  
*We thought of you with  
love today, But that is nothing  
new. We thought about you  
yesterday, And 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 a frame. Your memory is  
our keepsake. With which  
we'll never part. God has you  
in his keeping. We have you  
in our hearts.*

A Memorial Mass will be celebrated on 1st December 2024  
at 9.30am at the Church of The Visitation, Seremban.  
Deeply missed by family, relatives and friends.

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*And without  
faith it is  
impossible to  
please him, for  
whoever would  
draw near to  
God must  
believe that he  
exists and that  
he rewards  
those who  
seek him.*

Hebrews 11:6

**40th Day Memorial Prayer**  
**Celebrating the life of**  
**Mr John Moses Gomez**

**Departed: 15 October 2024**  
*Grief and love are conjoined, you  
don't get one without the other.  
All I can do is love him and love  
the world, emulate him by living  
with daring, spirit and joy.*

Memorial Mass will be celebrated  
on Saturday, 23 November 2024  
at the Church of Our Lady of  
Guadalupe, Taman Perindustrian  
Krubong, Melaka at 6.00pm.  
Deeply missed and remembered  
by family, relatives and friends.



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