

HERALD

The Catholic Weekly

Mission Statement

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

TERHAD

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The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.

Hebr 7:23-24



Promote Peace: From home to the workplace and beyond

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Celebrating 500 years of Christian heritage in historic Melaka

■ P7



Take nothing for the journey

■ P12

Only love will save humanity

VATICAN: Pope Francis has called on a world that has become “heartless” and indifferent to war and greed, and a Church in need of revitalising its missionary joy, to open themselves to Christ’s infinite love. Through devotion to Jesus’ Sacred Heart, he invites the faithful to be filled with the “living water” that heals wounds, strengthens love for others, and inspires a collective journey toward a just, fraternal world.

The Pope made this appeal in his latest encyclical, *Dilexit Nos* (He Loved Us), which was released by the Vatican on October 24. This 28,000-word text, his fourth encyclical, focuses on the human and divine love of Jesus’ Sacred Heart. Though it stands on its own, Pope Francis encourages readers to understand it alongside his earlier encyclicals, *Laudato Si’* and *Fratelli Tutti*. He explains that these texts, which address care for creation and global fraternity, are deeply rooted in an encounter with the love of Jesus Christ.

Pope Francis first announced his intention to write on the Sacred Heart in June, explaining that it would illuminate the path for ecclesial renewal while offering a significant message to a world that seems to have “lost its heart.” In his encyclical, the Pope emphasises that contemplating the Sacred Heart can reignite the Church’s missionary zeal and inspire the faithful to embody Christ’s love in a world plagued by division and apathy.

The Pope reflects on how deeply human beings yearn to love and be loved. Yet, in a world increasingly marked by conflict, power struggles, and partisan interests, it can feel like humanity is losing its heart. He shares his sorrow over the sight of elderly women enduring the horrors of war, when they should be enjoying their twilight years. Their suffering, he writes, is a sign of a heartless world that has forgotten how to weep.

Central to the encyclical is the idea that humanity is



(CNS photo/Gregory A. Shemitz)

more than just reason and intelligence. Pope Francis highlights the emotional, spiritual, and creative dimensions of human beings that are often neglected or undervalued. He points to the simple, everyday treasures that animate the human heart — like childhood memories of helping family members bake or sharing a joke with loved ones — as sources of profound joy that no algo-

rithm or artificial intelligence can replicate. It is poetry, love, and the heart, he argues, that are necessary to save our humanity.

In a press conference presenting the document, Archbishop Bruno Forte of Chieti-Vasto described *Dilexit Nos* as a “compendium” of Pope Francis’ entire pontificate. Many critics have said the Pope focuses too much on social issues, but this encyclical underscores the theological and spiritual foundation that has driven his leadership over the past 12 years: that everything springs from Christ’s love for humanity.

Pope Francis draws inspiration from centuries of devotion to the Sacred Heart, including the writings of saints like St Ignatius of Loyola and his own religious order, the Society of Jesus. He invites Catholics to enter into the heart of Christ, to expand their own hearts, and to deepen their understanding of the Gospel’s message. Christ’s heart, aflame with infinite love, calls for love in return, especially through service to the most marginalised in society. This love compels us to recognise the dignity of every person, particularly those considered “unworthy.”

The Pope insists that the heart of Christ leads us to rebuild a civilisation of love, even amid the devastation caused by sin and evil. He encourages Catholics to embrace the practices connected with devotion to the Sacred Heart, especially Eucharistic adoration and the tradition of receiving the Eucharist on the first Friday of each month. These practices, he says, can help counter the frenetic pace of modern life, offering a source of nourishment and strength.

In this latest encyclical, Pope Francis reminds the Church and the world that mission requires hearts that are “enthralled by Christ,” unafraid to prioritise love over mere rules or structural reforms. Rediscovering the Sacred Heart, he writes, can rekindle the joy, beauty, and deep sense of meaning that come from knowing and loving Christ. **Agencies**

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Dilexit nos: The experience of a loving heart

In the first footnote of the encyclical *Dilexit nos*, Pope Francis reveals he drew inspiration for the first chapter from his fellow Argentine Jesuit Fr Diego Fares, who before his death in 2022 always emphasised the centrality of the 'heart' in the thought and work of the Pope.

"Many of the reflections in this first chapter were inspired by the unpublished writings of the late Fr Diego Fares, SJ. May the Lord grant him eternal rest."

Over the past few years, we have learned to recognise how important footnotes can be in Pope Francis' magisterial documents, and this is certainly the case in his new encyclical *Dilexit nos*, published October 24.

In the first footnote, the Pope confides that the inspiration for the introductory pages — which set the direction for the entire document — came from his Jesuit friend and disciple, Fr Diego Fares, who passed away at the age of 66 in 2022.

This reporter had the privilege of knowing Fr Diego during his years as a journalist for *La Civiltà Cattolica* and interviewing him many times about the spirituality, roots, and vision of Jorge Mario Bergoglio.

Reflecting on those conversations, it becomes evident how often Fr. Fares referred to the word "heart" when speaking of his spiritual director, who became the Archbishop of Buenos Aires and later the Bishop of Rome.

These references help us understand that Pope Francis' fourth Encyclical is not the result of theoretical study, but of his lived experience.

"If Pope Francis manages to reform the Curia and the Church," Fr Fares pointed out while reflecting on the value of the Spiritual Exercises



Undated photo of then Fr Jorge Maria Bergoglio with the late Fr Diego Fares, SJ. (Vatican Media)

at the Jesuit Colegio Maximo in Buenos Aires, "I think it will be a reform that comes from within, from the heart. It will not be a reform of purely external changes."

The heart is the soul of the Ignatian Exercises, which in turn are at the core of a true inner reform that goes beyond the superficial. Indeed, the experience of the Synod on Synodality, now in its final stages, was preceded by a retreat, an exercise of heartfelt listening to the Holy Spirit.

For Fr Fares, the heart is also central to the Pope's thinking on education, a concept much broader and deeper than mere instruction.

"It's true," observed Fr Fares, "that he [Pope Francis] is a great educator, a formator, as we say. Someone who sees education as a whole, as education of the heart."

He said the Pope believes that "educating the heart can only be done by a father or a mother. The heart always has the last word."

Fr Fares noted how "behind the pedagogical principles of *Amoris laetitia* there is a radical 'yes' and 'no.' The 'yes' is a strong affirmation of the joy of love. Joy enlarges the heart of the

family."

Particularly striking is what the late Argentine Jesuit highlighted about the characteristics that the Pope considers fundamental in a bishop.

For Pope Francis, the exemplary model of a pastor is St Joseph, who "watches over" the Child and the Mother.

"Supervision," Fr Fares explained, "refers more to the care of doctrine and morals, while 'watching over' refers more to ensuring that there is salt and light in hearts."

"Supervision and vigilance speak of a necessary control," he said. "Watching over, however, speaks of hope, the hope of the merciful Father who watches over the process in the hearts of His children."

Mercy and hope are the two central themes of Pope Francis' Jubilees: the special one of 2016 and the imminent jubilee of 2025.

As *Dilexit nos* now reminds us, mercy and hope are not distinct dimensions in the Heart of Jesus but an undivided expression of an infinite love that embraces all humanity. **Alessandro Gisotti, Vatican News**

God's Unconditional Love

I had lunch with a former student of mine, a very idealistic young man who teaches religion in a Catholic High School. He shared with me his struggles in trying to teach young people about God.

One of the major problems, as he sees it, is that his students' idea of God invariably contains too much of the notion that God is a petty tyrant, that God can easily be offended, that God is threatened by our joys and successes, and especially that somehow we have to earn God's love by being good.

This young man, for his part, tries to correct these notions by presenting a picture of God as a God whose essential countenance is that of blessing and not of frowning, a God who is an extravagant, unconditional lover, the father of a prodigal son, who cannot be put off by human infidelity.

Among other things, he likes presenting Julian of Norwich's picture of God as "sitting in heaven, smiling, completely relaxed, his face looking like a marvelous symphony."

However, when he tries to present this idea of God the response of his students is inevitably something to this effect: "then why be good? If God loves us no matter what we do, then why keep the commandments? If we are not to be punished or rewarded for our efforts, then why make sacrifices?"

Why indeed? Why be good and try to keep the commandments if God loves us anyway?

Simply put, we don't try to be good so that God loves and rewards us. God loves us no matter what we do and heaven is never a reward for a good life.

Are these glib statements? No.

God's love, as Jesus assures us, is always both unmerited and unconditional, nothing we do can ever make God love us, just as nothing we

do can ever stop God from loving us. God loves just as God does everything else, perfectly.

God loves everything and everybody perfectly. In fact, part of Christian belief (a dogma, in fact) is that God's love is what keeps everything in existence. If God stopped loving anything, it would cease to be. This (as the American theologian, Michael Hines, is fond of pointing out) raises an interesting question: If God loves everything and everyone perfectly, does God then also love Satan? Indeed, does God love Satan as much as he loves Jesus' mother, Mary?

The answer can only be "yes," God loves Satan as much as God loves Mary. The difference is not in how God loves them, but in how they, each in turn, love God.

God loves each of them in the same way, namely, perfectly. But obviously Mary's response is very different from Satan's. In that difference we see what creates hell, a certain attitude in the face of love. However notice that in neither case is the love either merited or deflected. God just loves us, pure and simple. God cannot be offended. God's love cannot be driven away. God does not reward or punish us on the basis of whether we have been good or bad.

God simply loves us.

Then why be good? Why keep the commandments? What difference does our response make?

Our response makes a big difference, but not in terms of offending God, driving God away, or making God punish or reward us. It makes a difference in how we stand and feel in the face of love.

We cannot offend against God, but we can offend against others and ourselves. We can, like Satan, live in bitterness and unhappiness right

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings with Fr Ron Rolheiser OMI

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

**Readings: Deuteronomy 6:2-6;
Hebrews 7:23-28;
Gospel: Mark 12:28-34**

within love itself and we can deeply hurt others. The spiritual and moral precepts of the faith, all of them, including the ten commandments, are therefore meant to do a couple of things:

For anyone who is mature in the faith, living out what faith and morality asks of us is in fact a natural response of gratitude for being loved and a natural expression of sensitivity to others.

The desire to be good and to keep the commandments, as Martin Luther once said, follows from genuine faith and love, the way smoke follows fire. The intent is never to earn love or reward, but to respond properly to them. This is true in the case of mature love and faith.

However, for those of us who are still struggling to be mature, the spiritual and moral precepts of the faith are meant as a discipline — precisely as a discipleship, that helps teach us what it means to be a spiritual and a sensitive human being.

Trying to be good should still not be an attempt to somehow earn love or heaven, but rather an acknowledgement, a humble one, that one still needs a lot of help in knowing how to live in the face of love.

Why be good if God loves us anyway? For the same reason that an artist doesn't deface a masterpiece and a lover doesn't violate his or her beloved. Ethics follow naturally when truth, beauty, and love are properly appropriated.





KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

November

- 3 Parish Pastoral Assembly – Church of Jesus Caritas, Kepong & Chapel of Kristus Aman, TTDI
- 4 Exco Meeting – Christian Federation of Malaysia
- 5 AGM – Catholic Welfare Services (CWS), Penang
- 6 Bishops' Seminary Staff Meeting – College General, Penang
- 9 Parish Pastoral Assembly – Church of St Joseph, Sentul
- 10 Parish Pastoral Assembly – Church of the Holy Rosary, KL
- 11 Board Meeting – Sri Seronok



PENANG DIOCESE

Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

November

- 4 Meeting – Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem – Penang Section at 3.00pm – Bishop's Office
- 5 Meeting – Catholic Welfare Services Stella Maria, at 2.30pm
- 6 Bishops' Seminary Staff Meeting – College General, Penang at 9.00am
- 7 Lecture for Initiation Year Seminarians at 8.45am – College General
- 9 Confirmation – Church of St Michael, Ipoh at 6.00pm
- 10 Confirmation – Chapel of St Joseph, Bidor at 10.00am
- 11 Thanksgiving Mass & Dinner at 6.30pm – Pusat Keuskupan Katolik, Penang
- 12-13 Council of Priests & Clergy Monthly Recollection – Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam
- 13 60th Sacerdotal Anniversary of Fr Robin Andrews at 6.00pm – Church of the Immaculate Conception, Penang



MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

November

- 5 AGM – Catholic Welfare Services (CWS), Penang
- 6 Bishops' Seminary Staff Meeting – College General, Penang
- 9 Confirmation – Church of Christ the King, Kulai at 6.00pm
- 11-15 Caritas Assembly in Kota Kinabalu

Five Sisters celebrate their jubilee

KUCHING: A Mass was held at the Church of the Blessed Sacrament (BSC) to celebrate the anniversary of perpetual profession for five Franciscan Sisters from the Sisters of St Francis of Sarawak (SSFS).

Family, friends, and fellow Sisters gathered to celebrate the remarkable milestones of Sr Sylvia Cheong and Sr Paula Foo, who marked their 60th Diamond Jubilee, Sr Lidwina Choo and Sr Maria Goretti with 50 years of faithful service (Golden Jubilee), and Sr Diana Butau, celebrating her 25th Silver Jubilee. The theme of the celebration was inspired by St Francis of Assisi: *All praise be to You, my Lord, through all You have made.*

Archbishop Simon Poh presided over the Mass, with Archbishop Emeritus John Ha, BSC rector Fr Leonard Yap, and various priests who have journeyed alongside the Jubilarians concelebrating. Friar Mathew Purayidathil OFM from Jaffna, Sri Lanka, was also present. He conducted a retreat for the Sisters.

In his homily, Archbishop Simon



The jubilarians lighting the candles before renewing their vows.

expressed gratitude to the families of the Jubilarians for their dedication in offering their loved ones to religious life. He echoed the sentiments of Bishop Joseph Hii of Sibiu, who described the Sisters' lives as "radical discipleship," highlighting their visibility in communities as a testament to their commitment to faith.

The Archbishop emphasised the authority of servanthood that comes with their vocation, encouraging the Sisters to renew their vows with humility and a spirit of service. He urged the congregation to pray for the

Sisters and for the growth of religious vocations.

The celebration concluded with entertainment and dinner at a local restaurant, where Archbishop Simon reflected on the event as a testament to God's blessings for the Archdiocese of Kuching and the Dioceses of Sibiu and Miri.

He also thanked Archbishop Emeritus Peter Chung for his role in establishing SSFS and expressed appreciation for the invaluable gift the Sisters represent to the Christian community. **Today's Catholic**



Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #196



Greetings dear friends of MJD.

On October 20, the Pope declared three 19th-century founders of religious orders and the 11 "Martyrs of Damascus" as saints to be venerated by the global Catholic Church, commending their lives of sacrifice, missionary zeal and service to the Church.

The new minimum wage of RM1,700 announced at the 2025 Budget tabling is not the starting salary for all employees, including graduates, says the human resources minister. Employers in Perlis, Kelantan and Sabah said that they were not ready to implement the minimum wage. The eradication of hardcore poverty is intended for everyone, regardless of ethnic background, says the government. The employers are frustrated when interviewing prospective job applicants, especially fresh graduates, by their lack of communication, innovation and leadership competencies.

Choon Guan Hainan Coffee 1956, outlets in Klang and Port Klang, is offering free meals to the needy that have been fully paid for by others. Sacrifices take many forms. If there is a will, there's a way.

Sacrificing Times: Discounts for traffic offences. Discounts for crimes against the nation. Court sentences, Pardon Board reduces fines and prison terms. People struggle while the elected splurge. Perks and self-rewards replace sacrifice and service. Greed, ambition and corruption appear to thrive everywhere. Will we ever see selfless service?

"I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat," said Winston Churchill, the iconic British statesman, as Prime Minister in 1940, at the height of the Second World War. The quote reflects Churchill's commitment to

sacrifice and hard work in the face of adversity. He encouraged individuals to approach challenges with resilience, determination, and a willingness to make sacrifices for the greater good.

The British people were rallied up to face Germany's air raids, infiltration and designs to conquer Britain. They survived and revived. Eventual victory comes with sacrifices.

A Thought For The Week: Smelly Potatoes

A kindergarten teacher asked each child in the class to bring along a plastic bag of potatoes, with the name of the person or persons he or she hates. That day, they brought the potatoes. Some had two, others had three and a few had five potatoes. They were told to carry them in plastic bags everywhere they went for one week. As the days passed, the children began to complain about the rotting smell; and a few, about the weighty burden. Finally, the one week was up, and the teacher told them the hidden meaning behind the game.

The lesson from the game: When you carry hatred for someone in your heart, the stench of hatred will contaminate your heart, and that stench will follow you everywhere. If one cannot tolerate the smell of rotten potatoes, can one live with the stench of hatred the whole life?

Announcements for the Week:

1. Dedication ceremony of Pusat Kasih Caritas on Sunday, December 1 at 12 noon followed by lunch. It is located between SRJK (C) St Joseph and Church of the Immaculate Conception, JB. For more details, please contact Albert Tan at 016- 8492346.

2. Reclaiming Joy: Healing Childhood Wounds and Restoring Peace (Serenity) on Sunday November 24 from

9.00am - 5.00pm at MAJODI. The cost per person is RM80 (inclusive of lunch and two tea breaks). For more inquiries, please WhatsApp Diana (013-7274147), Mary (012-7070750) or Michael (012-2104116). This event is organised by the MJD Counselling Ministry.

QnQ? Q asks: We are capable of being or doing more. It is believed that there are miracle killers? Who or what are they?

Four internal conflicts that tend to show up most often and that we must overcome. (Hal Elrod, *The Miracle Equation*)

1. We have a brain that registers new opportunities as dangerous.
2. We reject the notion that we are deserving of all that we want and instead settle for mediocre effort and results in one, several or all areas of our lives.
3. We lose sight of our innate gifts and fail to see all that we can accomplish.
4. Finally, we allow the world to influence our thinking and define us, which usually leads us to believe that we are less capable than we actually are. We are the miracle. We are the miracle workers. We are there to aid others in seeing or being the miracle.

See The Holy Spirit @ Work: "In the inner stillness where meditation leads, the Spirit secretly anoints the soul and heals our deepest wounds." **St John of the Cross**

Something To Tickle You: "Christ never was in a hurry. There was no rushing forward, no anticipating, no fretting over what might be. Each day's duties were done as each day brought them, and the rest was left with God." **Mary Slessor**

Bishop Bernard Paul

OLL parish leaders recharge at weekend getaway

Nesa Dhevashayam

PORT DICKSON: The Church of Our Lady of Lourdes (OLL) held a Leaders' Weekend Getaway at the Port Dickson Methodist Centre on October 12 and 13. Themed *Come Away with Me*, the event gathered 104 leaders from various ministries and BECs for a weekend of renewal, relaxation, and recharge.

The event began with a warm welcome from the parish priest, Fr Gregory Chan, followed by an engaging ice-breaking session led by Damian Prakash. The session successfully fostered connection and helped participants overcome initial barriers, setting the stage for meaningful engagement.

A key highlight was the session led by Elizabeth Lopez, Regional Development Director (Catholic



Group sharing

Context) for Alpha Asia Pacific. Elizabeth's sessions emphasised unity with a focus on collaboration, communication, and love. She shared insights on vision, mission, and unity within the diversity of the church community. A crea-

tive group activity had participants build a church using cardboard, symbolising the strength of collaboration and teamwork within the church.

Elizabeth also reflected on conflicts within parishes caused by

a lack of collaboration and communication among leaders. She stressed the importance of addressing these issues early to maintain unity within the community.

One of the memorable moments was the Taizé prayer session led by the youth. Through meditative chants and reflective silence, the session created a space for deep spiritual connection. The youths also led the praise and worship in three languages, showcasing the parish's unity and diversity.

Fr Gnana Selvam Berentis led a dialogue session where leaders inquired about the next steps following the programme. They sought updates on how the weekend's insights would be implemented in the parish. The assistant parish priest assured them that ongoing collaboration and future initiatives

would be discussed to maintain the momentum of unity and renewal fostered during the retreat.

The weekend also provided time for relaxation and bonding. Participants strengthened relationships through casual conversations during meals and free time, fostering a sense of belonging and support within the group.

As the weekend came to a close, participants left feeling spiritually renewed, inspired, and ready to bring the spirit of unity back to their communities. The Leaders' Weekend Getaway was a powerful reminder of the importance of communication, collaboration, and nurturing one another in faith. Leaders returned to their parish recharged, ready to continue building a stronger, more unified church family.

Seniors' pilgrimage to Segamat

SEGAMAT, Johor: On October 15, a vibrant group of 31 senior citizens from parishes across Melaka, embarked on a pilgrimage to the Church of St Philip in Segamat. Arriving around 3.45pm, they were warmly greeted by the Post Centennial Committee, the PPC chairman, the Chinese Apostolate, and the parish priest, Fr Paul Wong.

The visit began with a moment of prayer at St Philip's Church, where the seniors were deeply moved by the beauty of the church, especially the magnificent display of the twelve disciples at the entrance, a symbol of faith and

companionship. Their appreciation for the church's welcoming spirit was evident.

Over light tea, served generously by the church committee, laughter and joyful conversations filled the air as new friendships were formed and stories were shared.

As the afternoon drew to a close, a group photo captured the memory of this beautiful gathering before heartfelt farewells were exchanged. With spirits uplifted, the seniors boarded their bus, carrying with them the blessings of the day and a renewed sense of connection. **Richard Joseph**



Seniors enjoying tea together.

Caring for elderly, a shared responsibility

PETALING JAYA: On October 19, the Church of St Ignatius, in collaboration with the Medical Emergency Response Team, hosted a health screening event specifically designed for senior citizens.

In his welcoming remarks, parish priest Fr Lawrence Ng, CDD, emphasised that caring for our elderly is a shared responsibility. He reaffirmed the Church's commitment to meeting the needs of seniors, noting the growing number of older individuals in the congregation, and expressed enthusiasm for organising similar events in the future. He reminded attendees that the elderly, along with the poor, marginalised, orphaned, widowed, and sick, are among the 'Treasures of the Church', as stated by St Lawrence during his trial and martyrdom.

The health screening focused on cognitive and mobility assessments, facilitating the early detection of common health issues affecting seniors. Over seventy participants underwent various tests, including picture-based memory impairment screenings, hand grip strength assessments, standing blood pressure measure-



Health screening focusing on cognitive and mobility assessments for seniors.

ments, the timed-up-and-go test, bioelectrical impedance analysis, and individual consultations. A total of 24 volunteers, including 14 students from Universiti Malaya, assisted with the tests and consultations, while ACT4Health coordinated the event and provided the necessary tools.

The event also featured a presentation by Prof Tan Maw Pin, a consultant geriatrician from the University of Malaya Medical Centre, who discussed essential topics related to healthy ageing such

as nutrition, social engagement, and mental and physical activities. She underscored the importance of holistic health and self-empowerment in our later years.

Many attendees expressed their gratitude for the church's dedication to their health and well-being, highlighting the significance of such initiatives in fostering a supportive community. They left inspired to take proactive steps toward healthy ageing, viewing it as a way to honour God. **Emeritus Professor Ng Kwan Hoong**

Sacred Heart community celebrates as 'One Parish One Family'

KUALA LUMPUR: The parishioners of the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus came together to participate in their parish Family Day with the theme One Parish One Family on October 19.

The celebration commenced at 7.30am with the registration and breakfast session at Taman Rekreasi Ulu Pudu, Cheras. Msgr Stanislaus Soosamariam commenced the event with an opening prayer.

Various activities, such as yoga, a children's colouring competition and 15 game stations were set up

around the vicinity of the park for the kids and the adults to take part. All participants were segregated into five teams based on the colour bands distributed during registration. Thereafter, the teams were given a score sheet to participate in all 15 game stations and to collect points from there. Through the games, it is hoped that the value of family, community and teamwork within the parishioners was perceived.

It was a day full of fun and excitement for the parishioners and will definitely be a memorable occasion to be added as part of

future parish's events. In today's fast-growing world, such activities revive and rekindle the importance of developing a united community by reaching out and building loving relationships with everyone within the parish community, which is part of the parish's mission.

The fun-filled event was wrapped up with lunch distribution and the prize-giving ceremony at about 12.30pm. Msgr Stanislaus and the committee members are grateful to each and everyone who made this event successful. **Cecilia Grace Robert**



Parishioners having fun.

Promote Peace: From home to the workplace and beyond

Christopher Kushi

PENANG: The Asian Forum of Infant Jesus (IJ) Sisters and Lay Partners held their third gathering in Penang from October 17-22, 2024. The forum centred on the reflection theme: *If only you knew the gift of God, let us share this gift with our world, thirsting for life-giving water* (John 4:10). Participants engaged in deep reflection, focusing on sharing the gift of faith with a world yearning for spiritual nourishment.

The Asian Forum commenced with a warm welcome song performed by the choir of Convent Datuk Keramat, Penang. A total of 42 participants from the Provinces of Malaysia, Japan, Singapore, Thailand, and the District of Myanmar gathered for the event, aimed at fostering unity, deepening the IJ spirituality, and responding to the call of the IJ Mission. The forum provided a space for IJ Sisters and lay companions to discern and revitalise their shared charism, ensuring that it remains relevant and vibrant in today's realities, inspiring their work in various ministries with renewed energy and purpose.

Sr Mary Theresa Chua, Provincial of the Infant Jesus Sisters of Malaysia, via a video message, said that it is fortuitous that they meet in Penang to trace the footsteps of dear Mother Mathilde who spearheaded the IJ Mission, not only in Malaysia and Singapore but in Japan, a realisation of her dream. This is the time to get to know

each other, working towards a common vision of making Jesus Christ known and loved. The charism given to both IJ Sisters and Lay companions is a gift to be shared in this journey together in faith, hope and trust. She apologised for not being able to be present due to a medical condition but is with all in spirit.

Grateful thanks were also given to Sr Brigitte, our Mother General, together with Sr Marina and Sr Felicia of the General Council, who gave their blessings for this grace-filled gathering! Thanks also to Sr Elizabeth Wong, member of the Malaysian Provincial Team and Angela Tan, the secretary of the Asian Forum.

Sr Jane Sinprayoon, General Councillor, in her keynote address, exhorted that with the rich tapestry of IJ Sisters' diverse experiences, cultures and perspectives, the united common purpose is always to live out and advance the IJ Mission, in following the inspiring footsteps of Mother Mathilde Raclot. Mother Mathilde's legacy is one of courage, faith and unwavering commitment to education and service. This pioneering spirit led her to the far corners of Asia, establishing schools, orphanages and communities that have transformed countless lives. This nurturing of the minds and hearts of the young and elderly, supporting the communities and reaching out to the needy, embodies the love and compassion of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Sr Jane ended her speech with the call to journey together, holding in our hearts the words



of Mother Mathilde, "Let us be promoters of peace at all levels, from home to the workplace to the world". Let us open our minds and hearts to the Holy Spirit's guidance, trusting that our time together will bear much fruit for the glory of God and the good of those we serve.

Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang, addressed the IJ Sisters as dear daughters of Nicholas Barre of Asia. Cardinal Sebastian has a long history of association with the IJ Sisters. The IJ Sisters have transitioned through the years from the 50's and 60's highly visible presence to the 70's post Vatican 2 reforms and change of orientation with the option for the poor. Today, with Synod 2024, there is a new dynamic called Conversations in the Spirit, where we remain faithful to the process of discernment as a way forward. The Asian/Universal Church is Creative, Inclusive and Bridgebuilding and the IJ Sisters' Vision, Mission and Charisms fit into this by being home with the last, least, little, lost and lowly!

Cardinal Sebastian proposed a new paradigm for the Vision and Mission of the Church, from Clergy, Religious and Laity to a Synodal Church of Apostles, Disciples and People of God. We are all called to be Missionary Disciples of the Joy of the Gospel, Mercy of the Father and Hope in the Holy Spirit.

Sr Maria Lau, Provincial Councillor, gave the participants an overview of the seminar structures and objectives. Highlighted were the fruits of the past forums. The sense of belonging to the IJ family resonated with all. There was also a call for Asian inter-provincial collaboration to share resources and experiences. The Laos



One of the IJ sisters sharing the outcome from her group.

Mission Team was born from the first Asian Forum in 2019 and now have four schools to contribute to the growth and development of children and youth in Laos.

Fr Mark Raper SJ and Fr Lawrence Andrew, SJ were the facilitators who shared their experiences, and guided the discussions in the synodal way of listening, praying, and discerning together as a body of Christ in communion, participation and mission.

All guests were gifted the book *Lessons from my School - The Journey of the French Nuns and their Convent Schools* authored by Chen Yen Ling who aptly prefaced 'For the Sisters who risked, laboured and sacrificed their own lives to change those of others through education.'



Group discussions.

Health care professionals honoured at White Mass

PETALING JAYA: The Church of St Ignatius hosted the White Mass on October 18, celebrating the Feast of St Luke, patron saint of physicians and health care workers and also patron saint for the parish's Medical Emergency Response Team (SIC MERT).

The celebration brought together 49 members of the health care professionals, along with parishioners, in a heartfelt acknowledgement of the vital role health-care professionals play in the church and our community.

The Mass, celebrated by parish priest Fr Lawrence Ng, CDD, featured a special blessing for doctors, nurses, paramedics, religious, and other health care professionals. In his homily, Fr Lawrence em-

phasised the importance of compassion and service in the medical field, echoing St Luke's example of healing and care. He shared his personal experiences, reflecting on his encounters with his dying grandfather and his ministry to the sick and dying as a priest. He reminded everyone of the calling to serve with love and dedication.

Following the Holy Eucharist, a fellowship gathering fostered community spirit, allowing health care professionals to connect and share their experiences. The White Mass was not only a celebration of St Luke but also a reminder of our shared mission to promote healing and compassion in our communities. Emeritus Professor Ng Kwan Hoong



Fr Lawrence Ng CDD with the health care professionals after the Mass.

Chapel of St James celebrates 100th anniversary

Bernard Anthony

MERLIMAU, Melaka: The Chapel of St James marked its 100th anniversary on October 19 with a grand opening Mass that drew around 700 parishioners and guests from near and far. The celebration included the blessing of its recently renovated building.

Bishop Bernard Paul served as the main celebrant during the ceremony. He was joined by current chapel administrator, Fr M. Alexuchelvam, former administrator Fr M. Devadasan, and other clergy members, including Fr Michael Goh SJ from Melaka, Fr Jason Wong from Muar, and Fr James Rajendran from Skudai.

The blessing ceremony commenced at 7.00pm at the chapel's main entrance, where Bishop Bernard led the prayers. Fr Deva had the honour of ringing the chapel's bell, followed by the sprinkling of holy water to bless both the chapel and the congregation. Sacristan James Saverimuthu then unlocked the main door, allowing the faithful and clergy to enter for the Centennial and Confirmation Mass of seven young individuals. Tents were set up in the chapel's grounds to accommodate the large crowd.

In his homily, Bishop Bernard emphasised that the blessing of the renovated chapel represents not just a physical transformation but also a spiritual one, inviting God's presence among the congregation. He reflected on the chapel's origins, noting that it began in a home before its establishment in 1924 and has undergone several renovations over the years.

"Now that the Chapel is 100 years old, its future depends on you," Bishop Bernard remarked. "Without the love of God and the Word of God, the Church cannot thrive."

He underscored the importance of caring for the poor and living out one's faith through good works, warning that without such actions, the heart can wither, even if the body remains intact. He called on the congregation to follow Jesus, carry their crosses, and avoid seeking positions or titles.

After Mass, Clement Paul, the Tamil Group Coordinator, welcomed attendees and invited everyone to a dinner fellowship. Fr Deva expressed gratitude to Bishop Bernard for presiding over the celebration, as well as to the priests and parishioners for their presence. He reflected on the significance of the centennial celebration of St James' Chapel, urging everyone to create lasting memories while honouring their rich history and looking forward to their faith journey ahead, encapsulated by the celebration's theme, "All Praises to God."

Fr Deva also acknowledged the organising committee for their efforts in making the event meaningful and prayerful. He expressed gratitude to Bishop Bernard for facilitating the completion of the renovation and thanked all parishioners for their support in various forms.

Currently, the Catholic community in Merlimau consists of 120 Tamil-speaking families and 30 Mandarin-speaking families. Fr Deva, who served as the chapel's administrator from February 2019 to July 2024, played a key role in unifying parishioners and encouraging lapsed Catholics to return to worship post-COVID-19. He oversaw improvements to the chapel's amenities, including the renovation of the parochial hall and canteen area in 2013.

The latest renovation of the chapel building, which began in June 2024, cost RM194,000, with parishioners contributing



Bishop Bernard Paul incensing the altar.

RM150,000. The chapel now features a new roof, ceiling, fans, lighting, doors, windows, tiled flooring, and fresh paint. Notably, two parishioners donated a new tabernacle from India and a statue of St James the Great, which was blessed by Bishop Bernard.

Fr Deva acknowledged the efforts of past priests who served the community over the last century, particularly highlighting the arrival of Tamil-speaking families from the estates in 1978, which fostered a sense of unity among worshippers.

Following the celebration, attendees gathered in the chapel grounds for dinner, sponsored by the chapel, where commemorative fridge magnets were distributed. A photo area featuring decorations and the theme "100" was set up for guests to capture memories of the occasion.

Looking ahead, a subscription dinner for the 100th Anniversary of the Chapel of St James is scheduled for December 7, at SJK(C) Merlimau Hall, where a centennial magazine will also be distributed.

Equipping the faithful for spiritual warfare in modern times

PENANG: A talk on *Spiritual Warfare in the Last Days* was held at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit on October 12 and 13 in Mandarin and English respectively. The presenter was Agnes Lim, the formator of the Triumph Heart of Mary (THM) Ministry and who is also a case officer of the Deliverance and Exorcism Office (DEO) of the Malacca Johore Diocese.

This topic attracted a crowd of 114 participants in total for the two days; mostly parishioners from the northern region and Kuala Lumpur. They came to learn more about the modern ways the evil spirits are

influencing young minds and how we, as parents, guardians and family members, should be equipped with this knowledge. Among them were many members of the THM ministry.

The participants learnt to become aware of the godlessness and lawlessness of this era which was affirmed in Jesus' prophecy to John in his letter to the seven churches in Rev 1:9 to Rev 3:22. We learned of the many disguises of the evil spirits on social media (online games and movies, hand-phone apps), music (sound healing) and arts (spiritual dances), literature (self-help

books) and through education or institutions that promotes the culture of death and sin.

Agnes explained in depth how the invisible power of darkness is shaping our thoughts and desensitising our human thinking, especially among our vulnerable youth, by seducing them to be lover of self, lover of the world and lover of pleasure. She listed out the various challenges faced by youth, be it academic pressure, workplace competition or the loss of self-worth on social media. Agnes encouraged us to stand firm in faith and to find inner peace and strength.

Her sharing contained many practical suggestions to help us stay firm and vigilant in our faith in modern society. She also introduced combat strategies that would help us stay alert and strengthen our spiritual life. We learnt to put on the full armour of God to defend ourselves from the Evil One's tactics (Ephesians 6: 10-20). Agnes presented a variety of spiritual methods and prayer methods and encouraged us to practise them to overcome the various spiritual challenges and temptations in our daily lives.

Agnes, in her past five years of experience as a case officer, has seen many cases of how the Evil One is attacking the Church through our youth, because the Church is responsible in shaping the family's morals and virtues.

At the end of the talk, the THM members promoted they're Into the Deep Retreat, a three-day two-night stay at St Anne Domus, Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam, Penang from Nov 22 to Nov 24, and facilitated by Agnes.

The key topics include the introduction to the THM ministry, briefing on the first four chapters of the THM formation, namely Prayer, Silence, Solitude and Penance using contemplative prayer methods taught by St John of the Cross, St Teresa of Avila and St Ignatius of Loyola.

For further enquiries of this retreat, please contact: Dorothy Chew 012-474 9088 or Annie Liew 013-4852743.



The participants with the presenter, Agnes Lim.

Celebrating 500 years of Christian heritage in historic Melaka

Clementine Vikneswari

MELAKA: On October 19, the Christian community of Melaka, comprising 52 churches of various denominations, united in solidarity for a 4km walk through the heart of Melaka town. The route highlighted iconic churches and historic streets, commemorating 500 years of Christian heritage and faithfulness to God.

This initiative was undertaken by Rev Thomas Cherian, the Southern Region Priest and Pastor of the Anglican Church (Christ Church, Melaka) together with the help of both the clergy and laity of different language groups and churches here in Melaka.

The objectives of this walk were to exalt and glorify God; to witness as a united Christian community; to align with the Lord's Prayer, and to seek God's blessings and favour upon Melaka. Additionally, it aimed to appreciate and acknowledge the ethnic diversity of our society in Melaka. Rev Thomas Cherian noted that this walk aligns with the ongoing Visit Melaka 2024



Parishioners from the Church of St Francis Xavier, Melaka

Tourism programme, with a greater focus on spiritual awakening for both the young and the elderly.

To show unity, most participants, regardless of age, including the migrants and Orang Asli wore the same "Bless Melaka Parade" t-shirt provided by the organisers while some contingents highlighted the costumes of their heritage such as the Por-

tuguese community and the ethnic groups of Sabah and Sarawak. Each contingent carried banners which were decorated with either the gifts/ fruits of the Holy Spirit or Scripture verses. Some contingents hired colourful trishaws to play praise and worship songs during the walk. Contingents were briefed to pray during the whole walk while waving and interacting with crowds

so some opted to pray set prayers, read scriptures, pray the rosary, the Angelus and sing hymns while being mindful of those of other faiths around during the two-hour walk.

For those of us who participated in this walk, it was a blessing to experience such a faith-filled event, as opportunities to openly express our love for God are rare. Many felt thrilled to witness the enthusiasm of our fellow brothers and sisters, which captivated onlookers along the route. Some of the participants who were youths from the Church of St Peter, had only attended walks organised by their parish or the diocese before. This was their first time joining such an event, and they felt honoured to be a part of it.

Personally, this walk offered a powerful outlet for us to express our identity as Christians, embracing the faith passed down from our parents and praying in public without fear or prejudice.

We sincerely hope that more events like this will take place in other states in the future.

The Journey – Coming down from the Mountain

KUALA LUMPUR: In line with the recent Parish Pastoral Assembly's focus on Church and Society, the Formation Ministry of the Church of Our Lady of Fatima, Brickfields, in collaboration with the PPC and PCC, led by Fr Andrew Manickam, OFM Cap, organised their first countryside retreat for 2024.

The retreat was held from October 12 to 13 at the Mercy Centre of the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Kampar. With the theme *Teach Us to Pray* under the Spiritual Oasis: Year of Prayer initiative, a total of 84 retreatants took part in this inspiring and memorable experience, preparing spiritually for the upcoming Jubilee Year of Hope 2025.

It was completely an experience with God and an opportunity for us, humankind to sit back and reflect on the Word of God; while journeying with our Lord Jesus Christ through encouragement and fellowship.

The heart of any retreat is the silence and the time spent with God through prayer, adoration, holy hour, Eucharistic celebration, conferences and pilgrimages. The entire retreat was about going up the mountain remaining there and then coming down the mountain as a changed and much revived person spiritually.

The focus of the retreat was on *The Journey – Coming down from the Mountain*, just as how Jesus journeyed with his disciples from the top of part of Israel down to Jerusalem as outlined in Mark, chapters 9 and 10. These physical journeys up and down mountains mirror our spiritual walk closely. To be upon the mountain of the Lord is to be close to God. And, this requires great effort and determination. It is a time to talk about spiritual experiences, share encounters with God and evaluating high points in our



The retreatants at the Church of the Sacred Heart, Kampar.

life towards a moment of transformation. It was definitely a good place to get away from the hustling-bustling city life to retreat

in calmness and silence of nature nurtured in love, humility and prayer. **Kristen Priya Krishnan**

Letters to Editor

Creating child-friendly spaces in our parishes

Dear Editor,

As a parent and the first educator of my children in the faith, my heart swells with joy each time I bring my little ones to Mass. Yet, I also carry a concern about the lack of basic facilities for infants and young children in our parishes.

I vividly recall the discomfort of changing my infant's nappy on a cramped toilet seat, or worse, in the sweltering heat of the car. These experiences, though not universal, highlight a gap in our hospitality, particularly towards the youngest members of our faith community.

I know I am not alone in this sentiment. Many parents have shared similar stories, underscoring the need for dedicated nursing rooms and changing areas in our

churches. Some parishes have taken commendable steps in this direction, and we celebrate their efforts. However, for many others, this remains an unmet need.

Our Catholic faith teaches us to cherish and protect the most vulnerable among us. As Pope Francis reminds us, "Children are a gift. They are not an inconvenience." This reflects the essence of the Theology of the Body, which affirms the inherent dignity of every person, created in the image and likeness of God. Creating welcoming spaces for infants and their caregivers is not merely a matter of convenience; it is a tangible expression of our commitment to upholding the dignity of every human life, from conception to natural death.

Moreover, by prioritising the needs of families with young children, we foster an

environment where faith can be nurtured and passed on from one generation to the next. Children, as gifts from God, invite us to live out our call to love in a profound way. Imagine a parish where parents feel supported, and children feel safe and loved. This is the kind of community that truly reflects the love of Christ.

I understand that resources may be limited, and not every parish can immediately build state-of-the-art facilities. However, I urge you to consider simple, cost-effective solutions, such as designating a quiet corner for nursing mothers or installing a changing table in a restroom. Even small changes can make a world of difference.

Additionally, as we create welcoming spaces, we must ensure these areas are safe for exploration. Wide railings and other

hazards pose real risks to our little ones. Let us ensure that our parishes are places where children can explore and play without fear.

My dear fellow Catholics, let us rise to this challenge with open hearts and creative minds. Together, let us strive to create a nurturing environment where faith and love flourish, reflecting the heart of Christ. By caring for our infants and children, we affirm the beauty of our shared humanity and invest in the future of our Church and society.

May the Holy Family, who knew the joys and struggles of parenthood, guide and inspire us in this important endeavour.

Brian & Christina Lazaroo
via email



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

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

Bishop Syukur declines cardinal appointment

VATICAN: The Vatican announced on the evening of October 22 that Pope Francis had accepted the request of Indonesian Bishop Paskalis Bruno Syukur, OFM *pic*, not to be made a cardinal in a December consistory as had been previously announced.

The bishop's request "was motivated by his desire to continue growing in priestly life and in service to the Church and the people of God," a brief message from the Holy See Press Office said.

While thousands of Indonesian Catholics enthusiastically extended their best wishes to congratulate him on being appointed as a new cardinal on Oct 7, Bishop Syukur told his closest friends and allies that Pope Francis's decision had 'really surprised' him. "Even I myself never expected such news," he said.

Most Catholics in Indonesia rejoiced at Pope Francis naming Syukur as a cardinal. Born on the Catholic-majority island of Flores, he would have been the first cardinal in Indonesia to come from outside Java.

His naming was considered a form of Vatican recognition of the diversity of the Catholic community



in Indonesia.

Bishop Syukur, 62, was born in Rangu, on Flores, Indonesia's Catholic-majority island. A Franciscan, he was ordained a priest in 1991. In 2001, he became the provincial superior of the Indonesian province, before being appointed in 2009 as the superior for the Asia-Oceania region within his order. In November 2013, Pope Francis named him Bishop of Bogor. As the general secretary of the Indonesian Bishops' Conference, he played a key role in preparing for Pope Francis' September 3-6 visit to his country.

However, within hours of the

news of his selection as cardinal, a wave of protests emerged on social media.

One of the main criticisms against Bishop Syukur was his failure to take adequate action in response to two serious sexual abuse cases in his diocese in 2020, both involving children and teens as victims:

First, several altar boys were allegedly abused by their mentors at St Herculanus Parish Church.

Second, children and teens were reportedly abused by a former religious brother at a local orphanage."

Both incidents occurred in Depok Regency, which falls under the administrative jurisdiction of Bogor Diocese. At that time, Indonesian media outlets sharply criticised the bishop for not adequately addressing these issues.

His critics resurfaced the day the bishop was officially declared a cardinal candidate from Indonesia, along with 20 others worldwide.

"Pope Francis's decision to nominate (Bishop Syukur) as a cardinal will only reinforce the character of the Catholic Church of Indonesia as being detached from marginalised people seeking justice.

If a bishop has failed to safeguard

victims of sexual offenses, then what can be expected from a new cardinal — something beyond basic safeguarding?" wrote Made Supriatma on social media.

"Frankly speaking, I am utterly mad and disappointed with the Pope's choice to elect him, mostly because of his irresponsibility and failure to ensure proper justice for the perpetrators of the sexual abuse cases in Depok Regency. I am done with the Catholic Church and its clerical figures," he concluded.

"This news is indeed very shocking and surprising," said Bishop Antonius Subianto OSC of the Bandung Diocese, also located in West Java Province. He currently serves as the president of the Indonesian Bishops' Conference (KWI), where Bishop Syukur is the Secretary-General.

"We must respect Bishop Syukur's decision not to accept the cardinalate status, as he knows what is best for him personally, for Bogor Diocese, and for Indonesian Catholics. We are expected to pray for him," Bishop Anton added while still in Rome attending the synod sessions.

Addressing the breaking news

that shocked Indonesian Catholics, a senior priest issued a statement emphasising that "today's news raises an urgent issue for both our Indonesian hierarchy and our church-goers: safeguarding protocols must be more rigorously enforced."

A close friend of the bishop attempted to contact him for clarification regarding his decision to decline the Pope's nomination. "So far, I have not received any hints," he said.

In Indonesia, both bishops and priests often enjoy a privileged status as "communal leaders" of their congregations, which can sometimes make them appear "distant" from the people.

A friend also complained that even sending texts to bishops or priests asking for information or confirmation often goes unanswered.

He criticised the feudalistic attitude of clerics, which is sometimes reinforced by the Catholic congregation's tendency to treat them as "super" figures.

Even the *Vatican News* only hinted that Bishop Syukur wanted to focus on his personal growth "in service to the Church and the people of God." **Agencies**

Christian programmes violate student rights, Seoul school told

SEOUL: A privately run Christian school in the South Korean capital, Seoul, has been accused of violating students' rights for its in-class worship programmes and choir competitions.

Student Human Rights Education Center, attached to the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education, urged an unnamed Christian high school to allow students the freedom to join or stay out of religious activities, the *Korea Times* reported on October 21.

"The school currently does not guarantee this right, violating the city's law on student rights," the center said.

The center investigated the case after a student accused the school of not providing the choice to opt out of certain activities, such as choir contests.

The center said the school plans to hold 22 worship sessions, choir competitions, and Bible quizzes for the 2024 academic year.

The center found the school included certain courses on religion, including one on philosophy, in the curriculum. However, it said, they were selected "without any process

to survey student demand or ensure student choice."

The rights center also objected to the school asking students and teachers to collect donations and bring fruits for religious services.

The rights center said several teachers had raised concerns since the schools' "calls for donations were unclear."

"It is necessary to clarify the details through a separate procedure to ensure transparency in the school's operation and enhance trust in education in general," the Kyunghyang Shinmun reported, quoting the rights center.

The rights center also rejected the school's arguments that it was founded upon Christian principles and had informed the student applicants and parents of its religious activists and curriculum, which include teaching religious subjects, the *Korea Times* reported.

"Such rules cannot be justified and should not be prioritised over" the law on students' rights and the constitution, which guarantees freedom of religion, the rights center said. **ucanews.com**



Moral theologians address challenges in biomedical ethics in India

SECUNDERABAD: Around 60 Catholic moral theologians from across India have spent three days in Secunderabad, Telangana, to address mounting ethical challenges in the country's healthcare system.

"Biomedical Ethics: Developments and Challenges in the Indian Scenario" was the theme of the October 18-20 conference of the Association of Moral Theologians of India (AMTI).

Keynote speaker Doctor P. Ranganadham, a renowned neurosurgeon in the state, lamented the erosion of ethical standards in the medical field. The senior consultant in neurosurgery from Aster Prime Hospitals expressed concern over the commercialization of healthcare. He stressed the need to view medicine as a service rooted in compassion, not a profit-driven business.

The doctor commended the government's Ayushman Bharat initiative for enhancing access to

healthcare for economically disadvantaged populations.

Bishop Gerald John Mathias of Lucknow, who inaugurated the event, highlighted the vital role of moral guidance in healthcare, setting the tone for three days of profound reflection.

Bishop Udumala Bala of Warangal, who led the final day's Mass, emphasised the importance of healthcare professionals upholding ethical principles and urged moral theologians to promote these values amid rapid advancements.

The conference addressed a variety of pressing bioethical issues, including assisted reproductive technologies (ART), surrogacy, euthanasia, and the ethical dilemmas surrounding the withdrawal of life support for terminally ill patients.

Other topics included medical tourism, organ donation, mental health, challenges faced by the transgender community, and the growing role of artificial

intelligence in healthcare. Pope Francis's appeal for a "culture of encounter," where no individual is marginalised or excluded from medical care, served as a moral compass for the discussions.

The participants highlighted the need for a strong ethical framework to brace these complex issues. They frequently referred to Pope St John Paul II's message from *Evangelium Vitae*, highlighting the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death as a fundamental ethical principle.

The conference also provided a collaborative space for theologians to share ideas and work towards solutions centred on human dignity and the common good.

The conference organisers expect the insights gathered from the 34th annual meeting to play a significant role in shaping ethical practices in the country's healthcare sector as it grapples with rapid developments. **Carlos Luis, Matters India**

Cardinals working at the Vatican take a pay cut

VATICAN: The 18 cardinals who head Vatican offices will find a little less in their pay envelopes starting November 1.

Maximino Caballero Ledo, a layman who heads the Dicastery for the Economy, informed the cardinals October 18 that the Vatican would pay only their salaries and no longer provide allowances to help cover personal secretarial expenses and other costs.

According to the Italian news agency ANSA, the amount the cardinals will receive each month will be reduced by just over 10 per cent. The base pay of a cardinal who heads a Vatican dicastery is just over

5,000 euros a month (RM23,433.84) and the allowances were just over 500 euros (RM2,342.99).

A cardinal who heads a dicastery told *Catholic News Service* that the ANSA article was accurate.

Pope Francis already had reduced the salaries of cardinals by 10 per cent in March 2021 as part of a package of Vatican cost-cutting measures.

In September, the Pope had written to all the world's cardinals asking them to help reduce the Vatican's budget deficit.

"The economic resources at the service of the mission are limited and must be man-



aged with rigor and seriousness so that the efforts of those who have contributed to the patrimony of the Holy See are not lost," the Pope wrote in the letter to cardinals dated Sept 16 and released by the Vatican Sept 20.

"Additional effort is now needed on everyone's part so that a 'zero deficit' may not only be a theoretically, but effectively

achievable goal," the Pope said.

According to a July report in the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*, the approved operating deficit for the Holy See in 2023 was just over 83 million euros. The Vatican has been using contributions to Peter's Pence and investment income to cover the deficit. CNS

Synod prays for "warrior of peace" priest killed in Mexico

VATICAN: On October 20, Fr Marcelo Pérez Pérez, parish priest of the Cuxtitali parish in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Mexico, was killed after celebrating Mass.

Sister María de los Dolores Palencia Gómez, a Mexican nun from the Congregation of Sisters of Saint Joseph and Delegate President of the 16th Ordinary General

Assembly of the Synod, spoke to *Vatican News* about the assassination.

At the opening of the synodal assembly on October 21, a prayer was offered for the late priest's soul. Sr María said the Synod delegates expressed their solidarity with the universal Church and the Mexican people.

She described Fr Marcelo as a warrior of peace who tried to bring dialogue and justice to the poorest of the poor. A member of an indigenous tribe in Mexico, he had advocated for the rights of the Tzotzil community and spoke out against violence in the country.

Sr María called the priest's murder a sign that there are people trying to create division in the communities.

Forced migration has led to a rise in the culture of violence in Mexico, particularly in the state of Chiapas — where Fr Marcelo was from.

Chiapas borders Guatemala, where there is a constant flow of migrants from South America, Asia, Africa, and European countries. Sr María stressed this migration is "not for tourism, relationships, or studies; it is migration driven by necessity," and

people arrive with numerous needs.

Chiapas is one of the states, Sr María explained, that faces "intense violence due to territorial struggles among the cartels that traffic drugs." According to Insight Crime, a nongovernmental organisation, Chiapas state is key for trafficking drugs, arms, and migrants towards the United States.

Sr. María said the violence, rivalries, thefts, and kidnappings have led to internal migration and, "in some cases, divisions among communities, disputes, and distrust among brother peoples who have lived together for a long time."

The Mexican religious sister stressed the need for Fr Marcelo's murder "to not go unpunished and that justice be served" and to ensure "that what is happening in these territories is not forgotten."

His death is the most recent in the state this year. From January to August, there have been around 500 assassinations, an increase from last year's number of 309.

"We need to shout and make the world understand and hear," Sr María explained, "that there are a series of situations that go against humanity and also against creation." **Kielce Gussie, Vatican News**



Fr Marcelo Pérez (inset) advocated for the rights of the indigenous peoples in Mexico.

VATICAN: Msgr Mirosław Stanisław Wachowski, the Under-Secretary for the Holy See's Relations with States, has called on the international community to safeguard the "independence, unity, and territorial integrity" of Lebanon.

He made the remarks October 24 at a conference in support of Lebanon organised by the French government, bringing together representatives from 70 different states and international organisations.

In recent years, Lebanon has been in the grip of a dire economic crisis. In October, Israeli forces invaded parts of the country's south.

Msgr Wachowski began his speech by stressing that the Holy See "shares the suffering of the Lebanese people".

He said that it was "imperative" that the international community address the crisis in the country, in particular by pushing for an immediate ceasefire on all fronts.

The Monsignor then went on to stress the example that Lebanon sets of "harmonious coexistence among its various religious communities". According to most

Holy See 'shares the suffering' of Lebanese people



Families flee into Syria following airstrikes in Lebanon. (UCA News Photo/United Nations)

estimates, around a third of Lebanon's population is Christian.

In this regard, said Msgr Wachowski, the Holy See is concerned about the current lack of a President of Lebanon, a role

always held by a Maronite Catholic. Political deadlock has meant that the country has had no president for around two years.

"The appointment of a President" Msgr

Wachowski stressed, "is not merely an option but a necessity in order to safeguard the independence, unity, and territorial integrity of Lebanon" and a question of the "upmost urgency".

Turning to the conflict currently raging in the south of the country, Msgr Wachowski said the Holy See calls for "upmost respect" for international humanitarian law, including the protection of hospitals, clinics, schools, educational institutions and places of worship.

He also expressed the Holy See's support for the UN peace-keeping forces in southern Lebanon, which have been fired at a number of times by Israeli forces.

Msgr Wachowski brought his speech to a close by quoting Pope Francis' words at an ecumenical prayer for Lebanon in the Vatican in 2021: "No more using Lebanon and the Middle East for extraneous interests and profits! The Lebanese must be given the chance to be protagonists of a better future, in their own land and without undue interference." **Joseph Tulloch, Vatican News**

Dialogue not optional in Asia, it's a 'matter of survival'

Joseph Masilamany

With a population of 4,815,671,322 people in over 40 countries, including China, India, and Indonesia which are the world's most populated countries — and hosting a mosaic of people and cultures who speak 2,300 languages, Asia is truly an enigma — being the birthplace of 11 major religions.

Hinduism, Taoism, Judaism, Shintoism, Zoroastrianism, and Buddhism are the religions of Asia's people, along with Jainism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, and the Bahá'í faith.

Christians number 383 million people and among them are 153.3 million Catholics who also make up the face of Asia. Against this juggernaut of Asia's complex matrix, the Church in Asia is called to live in synodality — unarguably, a tightrope odyssey requiring amicable navigation via harmony and dialogue.

Speaking during the Synod on Synodality in Rome, October 22, Malaysian delegate Fr Dr Clarence Devadass cautioned: "For Asia with a minority Christian population and an even smaller population of Catholics, the experience of living synodality will be unique within the Church (ad intra) and with Asia's gigantic pluralistic demography (ad extra)."

He said: "Apart from the Philippines and Timor Leste, Asia is a continent where

Catholics are a minority. While the faith is very much alive, it does not mean that the negative impacts of secularisation and other problems are not present.

"The public space for the expression of faith seems to be getting smaller and smaller, in many places, not least due to political and religious extremism. In such a context, one must seek harmony by engaging in dialogue."

He pointedly said: "Dialogue is not an option for the Asian Church but rather a matter of survival. It is not a novelty but a necessity and is part of the experience we live daily within a pluralist culture in Asia," he added.

The challenge in Asia involves learning to do theology "from the perspective of living with others" and learning to evangelise "where faith cannot be expressed in a public way."

Synodality, he said, is "at the foundation of all this" and is being lived everywhere, starting with the family, and it continues to bear fruit. This means synodality is "at the very base" of all faith communities in Asia.

Touching on the phenomenon of migration, which has led many Asians to live in other parts of the world he pointed out: "They are the new missionaries because when they leave their homes, they are not just looking for an income but they take their faith with them, he said, adding:

"And I know that in many places in the world, they animate the churches in the communities where they live and work, contributing to keeping the faith alive."

Speaking to *HERALD* by phone from the sidelines of the synod, Fr Dr Clarence, who is the director of the Catholic Research



Fr Dr Clarence Devadass

Centre defined "dialogue" in its pastoral context.

He reiterated that beyond formal discourses between groups and organisations "what we do" for our neighbour constitutes "active dialogue" which must prevail in Asia and more so in Malaysia, a multi-racial, multi-cultural, and multi-religious nation.

"During the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw how people reached out to one another to help and care. Acts of kindness and charitable exchanges like these "bear witness" as to who we are, in the model of the Good Samaritan in the Gospel."

He said dialogue among different races and people of different faiths has always been a natural norm among people in Asian communities and in Malaysia.

"This positive trait must continue to counter the negative impacts of polarisation which is increasingly becoming a trend among people and cultures."

Fr Dr Clarence, is also one of the elected members from the seven geographical regions to serve on the Commission of 14 members for drafting the final document.



The panel at the press briefing. (Vatican Media)

'People of God' should be involved in selecting bishops

Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost, prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops cited some of the "gifts" that candidates for bishops must have, a decision reserved to the Holy Father but whose selection process will increasingly involve the participation of the "people of God."

At the beginning of his October 23 address to journalists in Rome at the daily Synod on Synodality briefing, the cardinal said the question of the selection process for bishops in each episcopal conference and the way in which it is carried out has been one of the

issues discussed during the synod.

"The question is: How can this process of searching for candidates be made more synodal and include the greatest participation not only of bishops but of priests, religious, and laypeople?" Prevost said.

One of the most important functions of the apostolic nuncios is to participate in this selection process. The Vatican "ambassadors" play a crucial role in the selection of candidates.

This new approach oriented toward a "synodal" style requires, according to the

cardinal, that the nuncio "know the people well" during pastoral visits and that they not just be "received by the parish priest" and participate in the ceremonies.

It is also necessary to "get in touch with parish groups" to listen to their problems and reflect on the ways in which the Church can be strengthened.

Asked about the "criteria" necessary for selecting bishops, Prevost emphasised both their universal character and, at the same time, their specificity due to the particular areas in which they are carried out.

"We ask the nuncios to draw up reports that will then be sent to the dicastery and subsequently presented to the Holy Father," which include a series of aspects about the candidate.

Among some of these requirements, the prelate mentioned the candidate's "worthiness" in addition to the study on whether he has had "serious problems that no one knows anything about," certain health problems, "or if there are other aspects" in his background "that would make him not a good candidate."

"But we also look at the specific dioceses and their needs. That's why the apostolic nuncio is in charge of reporting not only about the bishops but also about the priests, laypeople, and religious. To know what the diocese is like, its needs, and what bishop they need," he added.

The cardinal pointed out that this closeness to the people of God should exist as long as the apostolic nuncio "does his job correctly" — that is, studying the local situ-

ation, speaking with the people, and looking for ways to find the best candidate.

He noted that Pope Francis has spoken many times about these criteria, highlighting "the smell of sheep" that bishops must have as a result of walking alongside the people of God and even "suffering with them."

In addition, he pointed out that a candidate must also have the gift of leadership, sometimes even in "communities that have many good priests," but without a good leader, "they're going nowhere."

Prevost spoke about the pastoral duties of bishops, who are not "business administrators only dedicated to organisations and structural and ceremonial matters."

"They have to be shepherds who walk joyfully with the people of God," he said.

The prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops, which is responsible for everything related to the constitution and provision of the particular Churches and the exercise of the episcopal function in the Church, emphasised that prelates are also called to be "judged and evaluated" on their actions and attitudes. For the cardinal, "the tension of being pastors and being evaluated is what it means to be bishops."

In this regard, he quoted the Holy Father, recalling that the only authority of bishops "is to serve," and he insisted on the importance of "changing the entire dynamic and paradigm of the structure of power," with an eye to the service that a bishop must exercise toward all the members of his diocese.

Almudena Martínez-Bordiú, CNA



Episcopal ordination of Msgr. Gian Luca Perici. (Vatican Media)

The Heart of a Grieving Parent: A Story of Loss and Love

I woke up early one morning to find a message on my phone. It was from a very dear friend, and as I read her words, my heart sank: her daughter, a very lovely young lady, had passed away earlier that morning. Just the evening before, I had anointed her in the hospital, and her mother had been filled with hope and optimism for her recovery. It felt surreal to think that, within those few hours, the vibrant light of her young life had been extinguished, leaving her loved ones devastated.

Remembering that day, her mother expresses the depth of her heartache:

"In the nineteen years that have elapsed, there has never been a day that I have not thought of her. She was such a vibrant young person, innately happy and kind. In her late teens, she fell ill, and although she recovered, it weakened her. Over the years, her health deteriorated, and she suffered greatly. It was agonizing to watch her in pain, hearing her whispered 'feelings of despair' which was destroying her 'love of life and will to live'."

The mother prayed constantly for her daughter's healing, but it was not to be. That fateful day, she says, is etched in her memory: *"I lost my child. In the natural order of things, children are expected to outlive their parents, not the reverse. I held myself accountable for what I failed to do and begged God's forgiveness."*

She shared that, for a long time, she had exhorted her daughter to think positively, hoping it would help her get better. Now, she wonders if offering comfort and simply walking with her daughter through her suffering might have been better.

Though her loss is immense, she holds onto the memory of her daughter's moments of happiness: *"There were times when she would wake up with a smile on her face, her eyes sparkling, saying, 'I feel better!' These precious times, our shared Moments of Happiness, are forever embedded in my heart. I thank God for the gift of my daughter."*

Now, years later, she reflects on her journey: from days of sadness and despair with only some moments of peace and joy, to her current days of peace and tranquillity with only some moments of sadness. This story encapsulates the depth of parental grief—a grief that stays but transforms with time.

Lorraine and Woon Wee's Journey with Ian

Another powerful example comes from Lorraine and Woon Wee, who lost their son Ian after a long journey of hope and heartache. From the beginning, Ian did not develop like other children, and despite exhaustive tests and treatments, they never found a clear answer to his condition.

"We did everything we could," Lorraine shares. *"We travelled abroad for treatments, including stem cell therapy in India and surgery in Japan. But even after all that, Ian's condition didn't improve much. It was hard to accept."*

Ian's final months were the most difficult. His health deteriorated rapidly until his body could not hold on any longer. Lorraine and Woon Wee were left

Pope's prayer intention for November

Praying for parents who have lost a child



PRAYER PRISM

Fr Fabian Dicom

devastated, their daily lives once filled with Ian's care suddenly became empty. Yet, through the sorrow, Lorraine finds peace: *"I did everything I could. I have no regrets. That's how I cope now. I gave my all, and because of that, I can live with this loss."* Woon Wee echoes her feelings, acknowledging the immense support they received from their community. *"I'll always be proud of how we, as a family, treated Ian. He was part of us, and that pride and acceptance are what get us through the hard days."*

"We miss him deeply," Woon Wee says, *"but knowing he's at peace now brings us some measure of peace too."*

A Community of Support: The Call of the Church

These stories highlight the deep, enduring pain of parents who lose a child. As Pope Francis calls us to remember his prayer intention for this month, ***we pray that all parents who mourn the loss of a son or daughter may find support in their community and receive peace and consolation from the Holy Spirit.***

As a Church, we have a responsibility to stand with these parents. Grief is not something that can be "fixed" with words, especially not with spiritualised platitudes like "God needed another angel" or "It was His will." These well-intentioned phrases often wound more than they heal. Instead, our role is to accompany the grieving, to hold space for their pain, and to allow them to share their stories without fear of judgment or discomfort.

In Lorraine and Woon Wee's story, we see the importance of community, namely their families and friends. "It wasn't just us who raised Ian," Lorraine says. "Our entire family and friends loved him as much as we did. Ian brought out the best in all of us." This support did not fade after Ian's death but continues to help them navigate their grief.

The Consolation of the Holy Spirit

While the love of the community is critical, the Holy Spirit offers a unique and irreplaceable source of comfort. As promised in John 14:26-27, the Spirit brings peace that the world cannot give — a peace that softens grief without erasing it. For parents mourning the loss of a child, this peace may come in quiet, unexpected ways: a sunset, a kind word, or a memory that brings a fleeting smile.

The Holy Spirit does not take away the sorrow but transforms it into something



bearable. It is a peace that allows grieving parents to carry their child's memory in a way that honours both their love and their loss. Lorraine's ability to say, "I have no regrets," is a testament to this transformation.

The Unseen Grief: Parents Estranged from Their Children and the Loss of Unborn Life

As we reflect on parents who have lost a child, we must also remember those whose grief arises from broken relationships with their living children. For many, the pain of estrangement is a profound kind of loss. These parents may live in hope — sometimes painfully prolonged — of reunion or reconciliation. Though their children are alive, the emotional separation can feel like an unhealed wound and a deep loss, leaving them with a constant sense of absence. This grief is deeply personal, often carrying unspoken sorrow and longing for restoration.

In addition, we must also acknowledge the delicate and often unspoken grief of those who have lost a child through miscarriage, medical treatment or termination of pregnancy. These parents bear a hidden kind of mourning, sometimes carried in silence, as they grapple with the weight of loss. Whether their grief is rooted in the loss of an unborn child or in the choices that were made, it is a sorrow that touches the deepest parts of their being. The Church's call is to extend tenderness and compassion to these parents, offering

them the space to grieve without judgment and to find healing in God's mercy.

In the face of such profound loss, the Holy Spirit becomes a quiet companion for all parents mourning their children — both living and unborn. He offers not just peace but also the strength to carry their grief and the grace to find moments of healing.

A Call to Prayer

As we lift up the Pope's intention this month, let us commit to praying for all parents who mourn the loss of a child — not only for parents who have lost a child to death but also for those who live with the pain of broken relationships or carry the loss of a child unseen. May they feel the peace and consolation of the Holy Spirit guiding them through their sorrow, offering the quiet assurance that God walks with them even in their deepest grief. May their journey through grief lead them toward healing, where sorrow is accompanied by love, and despair transforms into hope.

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



Take nothing for the journey

Carmel Dominic

When Jesus sent out the twelve disciples to proclaim the Kingdom of God and heal the sick, He instructed them to take nothing for the journey except the tunic on their back and sandals on their feet. This was to teach them to rely entirely on God's grace and providence (Luke 9:1-6). Jonathan Charanraj embraced this same spirit when he answered his call to missionary work. The 28-year-old who is a member of The Seeds Ministry, was commissioned to be a full-time Catholic lay-missionary by Cardinal Sebastian Francis in July 2024.

The Seeds Ministry (The Seeds) is a non-profit organisation under the Diocese of Penang, made up of young men and women from diverse backgrounds. Their mission is to share and spread the Gospel, focusing on reaching youths aged 18 to 40.

Since its humble beginnings in 2016, The Seeds has earned recognition for running programmes that are relevant and responsive to the needs of today's youth. While some members balance day jobs and volunteer, others, like Jonathan, serve as full-time missionaries. As a result, they rely entirely on God's gracious providence for their sustenance.

According to Paul Julianose, the founder of The Seeds and a full-time missionary, their ministry is sustained in three key ways: first, through love offerings collected at the end of their programmes; second, through mission partnerships, where The Seeds full-time missionaries approach past supporters who share their mission of spreading the Gospel and ask for financial backing based on their capacity; and third, through what they call "God's surprise," when God provides for them in unexpected, creative ways.

Jonathan has been a member of The Seeds since 2016, but his journey toward becoming a full-time missionary was marked by uncertainty, anxiety, and moments of miraculous victory. A native of Ipoh and the eldest of two brothers, Jonathan first felt the stirrings of his call during a session he led for youths at a Seeds programme at the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Penang. There, he sensed a deep longing among young adults for someone to truly see and connect with them — both spiritually and emotionally. As he got to know them better and learned about their struggles, he realised how much they needed Jesus in their everyday lives.

However, Jonathan was uncertain whether it was the Holy Spirit prompting him or if it stemmed from his own ego. To discern his calling, he embarked on a spiritual journey. Initially, he sought clarity on his own through daily devotion, immersing himself in the Word of God. He also turned to his long-time friend Paul Julianose for guidance, asking him to help identify whether his motives and intentions were inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Just as Jonathan was preparing to embrace life as a missionary, he faced an unexpected challenge: he needed to resign from his job to pursue this calling but was still under contract with the company. This situation prompted him to delve deeper into his discernment process. Recognising the significance of this phase in shaping his future,



Jonathan reached out to Fr Robin Lomangkok, a former advisor of The Seeds who is currently serving in Australia. The period of

discernment is when an individual takes time to determine

their purpose and role as servants in God's Kingdom with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is a crucial and an important part of their decision-making process, to hear God's voice and call over one's life.

Lovingly dubbed 'the Indian Jesus', Jonathan submitted himself to intense self-reflection sessions via zoom with Fr Robin who acted as his spiritual director for ten days.

"Throughout the ten days, through all the sessions, personal reflections and daily readings, it became increasingly clear to me that I was meant for a life of a missionary. It was also in this time, that God showed me in various Bible verses that I could trust Him to always provide for my needs."

The aerospace engineer who graduated from USM, was at that time, working with an airline company as a management trainee. The contract that he signed with them stated that he was bonded to the company for four years since he started working for them in 2021. Though he had already served two years of the contract, he would have had to fork out an exorbitant amount of money to get himself out of that bond. He then spoke to his supervisors and the human resource (HR) department and told them of his decision to become a missionary. They respected his decision but told him that he would still have to honour the terms of his contract.

It is common knowledge that all big companies have policies in place for situations like this which can make it challenging for employees to leave. So now, Jonathan found himself in a legal situation. The terms of his contract required him to pay the remainder of the bond within the next two years. That would mean, he would have to come up with RM 1,800 a month for 24 months. Jonathan felt that this payment plan was too much for him to bear. Consequently, he made a counter offer whereby he would pay a lesser amount for a longer period of time. But the legal department didn't agree to it. However, his friends at the HR department helped him by appealing his case to the legal department.

Anyone who might find themselves in a situation like this, would understandably look for loopholes to sidestep the financial hassle of paying back the bond altogether. And this is what Jonathan did too. But, the Holy Spirit convicted him to honour the terms of his contract and trust God to provide.



Jonathan, his mother and brother after his Commissioning by Cardinal Sebastian Francis. His father was unable to attend.



The Seeds Ministry

Jonathan obeyed the promptings of the Holy Spirit and proceeded to concentrate on appealing his situation with the legal department. Now, because Jonathan was obedient, God's showed up with so much grace and favour. Jonathan's friends in the HR department not only helped with appealing his case but took it upon themselves to gather all the relevant documents he would need for his appeal. In essence, Jonathan didn't have to lift a finger for his appeal. Then, miraculously, the legal department agreed to Jonathan's suggestion of the payment plan which gave him the green light to put in his resignation letter. To date, Jonathan has made two payments to his former employer while going about his mission work and trusting God to provide for his monthly payments and other financial needs.

On the family front, Jonathan had a hard time convincing his parents to let him become a full-time missionary. They had hoped, that as the oldest son, Jonathan would now take over the family's finances now that he had a promising career. They were also concerned how he was going to survive on his own without a stable income.

"I prayed very hard for God to touch and change my parents' heart. I wanted their blessing. It is important to me that I have their support in my life's choices. This time, God provided by sending other family members to reassure my parents of my choice because they had been exposed to missionaries like Martin Jalleh and Jude Antoine and saw how God worked in their lives. My parents finally relented and were extremely proud at my commissioning."

As part of his work as a missionary, Jonathan is also involved in men's ministry, reaching out to young men who do not have strong male figures in their life such as growing up in a fatherless household either emotionally or physically. He recognises that there is a deep cry in the young men today to rediscover their identity in masculinity and to be faithful to God's calling over their lives, as they work through their griefs and trauma.

If you would like to know more about Jonathan's mission work and/or would like to support him, kindly contact him at 010-3806270

For more information on The Seeds Ministry log on to www.theseedministry.com

In 1991, Emeritus Bishop Paul Tan Chee Ing (then Fr Paul Tan), wrote a book titled *In DEFENCE of ...* a follow-up from his first book *Straight to Catholics. Why I Believe in What I Believe* was published in 1984 by the Catholic Research Centre, Kuala Lumpur.

In his first book, Fr Paul Tan addressed many of the common Catholic beliefs, namely, the sacraments, papacy, infallibility of the Pope, devotions to Mother Mary, communion of saints, salvation, Bible and traditions of the Church. In his second book, he delved into the sensitive topic of interreligious dialogue (something very new in the 1990s). Fr Paul Tan was a founding member of the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST). He answered the attacks from a Muslim scholar of the Christian Bible, published in the 1980s.

Fast forward thirty years, many of these issues remain, if not worsened. The attacks against the Christian world have intensified manifold. It is no longer just a multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-cultural Malaysian issue. Today, it has become a global attack at magnified proportions. Countries are at war over religious differences, mass riots and protests are occurring everywhere, sparked by some mere viral message about ethnicity and religion.

The challenges to Christianity today are not just about religion, but come from all angles: secularism, materialism, commercialism, pro-choice versus pro-life, same-sex affiliations and globalisation. All these are replacing the “fear of God”, “belief in God” and “the love of God”, taught to us in catechism.

In his article titled *On Not Being Defensive* (HERALD, May 28, 2023), Fr Ron Rolheiser wrote that the Christian Church need not be hard and defensive against

In defence of...

the numerous local and global attacks and criticisms against it. His rationalisation is “that our 2.5 billion Christians in the world, with 2,000 years old tradition, a universally accepted Scripture and 2,000 years of doctrinal entrenchment and refinement, have massive centuries old institutions that are strong, stable, blessed by God, and is hardly a reed shaking in the wind”.

Fr Ron’s article is about “the Church in much of the secularised world where we live in a climate that is anti-ecclesial and anti-clerical”. In short, a world that places individualism, freedom and free-to-do whatever one wishes, being the norm. He also acknowledges the faults that the Church is also guilty of and how it has healthily humbled us towards a more courageous internal purification.

All these are valid, as the Church has undergone tremendous reforms in the wake of the many scandals, abuses and internal conflicts happening at the highest level of the Church hierarchy. However, how much of these reforms have trickled down into our grassroots laity? The Church’s response in most times will be in the form of papal encyclicals and pastoral statements, worded in deep theological jargon. How many of our lay faithful can comprehend or are aware of such responses?

In the Final Document of the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality released by the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) dated March 16, 2023, there is no mention



Reminiscing Church

RICHARD CHIA

of the need to defend the faith against anything or anyone, except the need for the Church to defend the voiceless, the powerless and the environment. What is highlighted are the tensions of living in a Christian community, leadership and decision-making, the decrease in priestly vocations, women’s involvement in the Church, and pastoral priorities for the youths, the poor and religious conflicts.

Christianity is only a minority religion in Asia, and thus the Church has always strived to live harmoniously with the people around us. Tensions and challenges between traditional values and modernity, and the inclination towards individualism, are not sufficiently serious to invoke a defence.

In article #130, the FABC document articulates one of the challenges, that “interreligious dialogue remains an integral characteristic of the Church in Asia. Despite bridge-building efforts, we noted that religious and social intolerance was on the increase, which leads ultimately to persecution and the worsening conditions of the lives of the people, especially religious minorities”. It highlights the gaps inherent in the Asian region, care for our common home – planet earth, the environment, the land and its people, sharing of resources, youth, family, marriage, corruption, the poor and the indigenous people of the land.

The Asian bishops opted to take a positive and affirmative response, rather

than a defensive approach. It prioritised six pastoral responses: namely, formation – ongoing formation at all levels, inclusivity and hospitality – the women, youths, the poor, the marginalised, migrants, the wounded and all, missionary disciples – to be witness to the Gospel in our everyday life, accountability and transparency, prayer and worship, and care for our common home – our planet, environment and Mother Earth.

Returning to Fr Ron Rolheiser’s article, he proposed that “the primary task of the Church is not to defend itself, or ensure its continuity, or protect itself from being crushed by the world”. Quoting Jesus’ life, he goes on to say that “at the very heart of the Gospel lies a call to risk beyond defensiveness, and to absorb unjust criticism without fighting back. Forgive them, they know not what they do”.

The Church in Malaysia is no stranger to criticisms and attacks. Instead of merely waiting for the Church hierarchy to respond, perhaps it is time for the lay faithful to stand up. Not in open rebellion or mass protests, but by deepening our faith, getting more involved in societal issues and making a difference in local communities, not as Christians, but as citizens of the world, living our Christian values.

Quoting from a speech I remember given by Emeritus Bishop Paul Tan in the early 1980s, he said “When you see a swimming pool that is dirty, we can choose to find a clean pool, or we can jump in to help clean it”. Individual efforts may seem futile, but collectively, with each person playing a small part, will create ripples.

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

Embracing diversity: The role of culture in the Catholic Church

Romans 12:4-5: “For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.”

We are blessed that the Catholic Church celebrates various cultures through several practices and events that highlight the richness of diversity within the faith.

Worldwide, many parishes host special Masses that incorporate elements from different cultures such as music, prayers, and liturgical practices. These celebrations allow communities to express their heritage within the context of the Catholic faith.

Many parishes hold ethnic festivals that showcase traditional food, music, dance, and crafts, allowing congregants to share their cultural heritage while promoting fellowship and understanding.

Certain saints’ feast days are celebrated with particular cultural significance.

The Mary Queen Church in Friendswood, Houston, which we belong to (whenever I’m not in Malaysia) recently celebrated the Feast of Our Lady of La Salette with an International Luncheon hosted by parishioners from various backgrounds and ethnicities.



From the Other Side

REGINA WILLIAM

Pardon my ignorance but it was the first time hearing about Our Lady of La Salette, which I never knew about, unlike the more internationally prominent ones like Our Lady of Fatima, Our Lady of Lourdes, Our Lady of Velankkani, Our Lady of Guadalupe, among others.

The Feast of Our Lady of La Salette is celebrated on September 19. The devotion is also recognised within the Catholic Church, and the

Saletine Order was founded to promote the message and spirit of La Salette.

For the uninitiated like me, Our Lady of La Salette refers to an apparition of the Virgin Mary that occurred in 1846 in La Salette, France. Two young shepherds, Maximin Giraud and Melanie Calvat, reported seeing the Blessed Virgin, who conveyed a message of reconciliation and conversion, urging people to turn back to God and to repent for their sins.

The message of Our Lady of La Salette also emphasised the importance and necessity of prayer, especially on Sundays, encouraging people to keep the Sabbath holy. She also expressed concern about the misuse of God’s name and the growing indifference towards faith.

The message also highlighted God’s love and desire for all to repent and seek forgiveness but also, was a clear message

of hope, encouraging believers to trust in God’s mercy.

The apparition, as with others which have taken place, serve as a reminder to live a life of faith, compassion, and dedication to God.

The Feast of Our Lady of La Salette is celebrated every year at the Mary Queen parish with a nine-day Novena which culminates in an International Luncheon after Sunday Mass where more than 20 different ethnicities host a feast for those attending.

Taking the opportunity to talk about Catholicism in Malaysia, my daughter and I roped in some Malaysian friends here to help in preparing favourite Malaysian delicacies like *nasi lemak* and various types of *nyonya kuih*. We were also asked to decorate the table in the country’s theme and talk about Catholic aspects of the country including Saints, apparitions etc.

We chose to highlight St Francis Xavier and his mission in Malaysia and since we are from Bukit Mertajam, we also talked about St Anne.

Most of those who attended the luncheon hardly knew Malaysia even existed and we had a great time promoting Malaysia.

The Catholic Church also recognises different liturgy which incorporate specific cultural practices and languages into worship, enriching the overall Catholic experience.

The Church often promotes

initiatives that encourage dialogue and understanding between different cultural groups, fostering a sense of community and collaboration while in multicultural parishes, services may be offered in multiple languages, reflecting the linguistic diversity of the congregation and ensuring everyone can participate fully.

Through these celebrations and practices, the Catholic Church embraces and honours the diverse cultural expressions of its members, promoting a sense of unity while respecting individual identities.

By embracing various cultural expressions, the Church not only deepens its understanding of the universal message of the Gospel but also honours the unique contributions of each community.

This celebration of diversity reflects the beauty of God’s creation and serves as a testament to the Church’s commitment to inclusivity and respect. As we come together in faith, let us continue to learn from one another, celebrating our differences while finding strength in our shared beliefs, ultimately building a more vibrant and harmonious Church.

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



Fr Ron Rolheiser

A double primordial branding within

From Pierre Teilhard de Chardin we get these words: *"Because, my God, though I lack the soul-zeal and the sublime integrity of your saints, I yet have received from you an overwhelming sympathy for all that stirs within the dark mass of matter; because I know myself to be irremediably less a child of heaven and a son of earth."*

These words, like the words that open St Augustine's famous *Confessions*, not only describe a lifelong tension inside its author; they also name the foundational pieces for an entire spirituality. For everyone who is emotionally healthy and honest, there will be a lifelong tension between the attractions of this world and the lure of God. The earth, with its beauties, its pleasures, and its physicality can take our breath away and have us believe that this world is all there is and all that needs to be. Who needs anything further? Isn't life here on earth enough? Besides, what proof is there for any reality and meaning beyond our lives here?

But even as we are so powerfully, and rightly, drawn to the world and what it offers, another part of us finds itself caught in the embrace and the grip of another reality, the divine, which though more inchoate, is no less unrelenting. It also tells us that it is real,

that its reality ultimately offers life, that it needs to be honoured, and that it may not be ignored. And, just like the reality of the world, it presents itself both as promise and threat. Sometimes it's felt as a warm cocoon in which we sense ultimate shelter and sometimes we feel its power as a threatening judgment on our superficiality, mediocrity, and sin. Sometimes it blesses our fixation on earthly life and its pleasures and sometimes it frightens us and relativises both our world and our lives. We can sometimes shield ourselves from it by distraction or denial; but it stays, maintaining always a powerful tension inside us: we are irremediably children of both heaven and earth; both God and the world ask for our attention.

That's how it's meant to be. God made us irremediably physical, fleshy, earth-oriented, with virtually every instinct inside us reaching for the things of this earth. We should not then expect that God wants us to shun this earth, deny its genuine beauty, and attempt to step out of our bodies, our natural instincts, and our physicality to fix our eyes only on the things of heaven. God did not build this world as a testing place, a place where obedience and piety are to be tested against the lure of earthly pleasure, to see if

we're worthy of heaven. This world is its own mystery with its own meaning, a God-given one. It's not simply a stage upon which we, as humans, play out our individual dramas of salvation and then close the curtain as we leave. It's a place for all of us, humans, animals, insects, plants, water, rocks, and soil to enjoy a home together.

But that's the root of a great tension inside us. Unless we deny either our most powerful human instincts or our most powerful religious sensibilities, we will find ourselves forever torn between two worlds, with seemingly conflicting loyalties, caught between the lure of this world and the lure of God.

I know how true this is for my own life. I was born into this world with two incurable loves and have spent my life and ministry caught and torn between the two. I have always loved the pagan world for its honouring of this life and for its celebration of the wonders of the human body and the beauty and pleasure that our five senses bring us. With my pagan brothers and sisters, I too honour the lure of sexuality, the comfort of human community, the delight of humour and irony, and the remarkable gifts given us by the arts and the sciences. But at the same time, I have always found myself in the grip of another re-

ality – the divine, faith, religion. Its reality too has always commanded my attention – and, more importantly, dictated the important choices in my life.

My major choices in life incarnate and radiate a great tension because they've tried to be true to a double primordial branding inside me, the pagan and the divine. I can't deny the reality, lure, and goodness of either of them. It's for this reason that I can live as a consecrated, life-long celibate, committed to religious ministry, even as I deeply love the pagan world, bless its pleasures, and bless the goodness of sex even as I renounce it. That's also the reason why I'm chronically making an apology to God for the world's pagan resistance, even as I'm trying to make an apology for God to the world. I have torn loyalties.

That is as it should be. The world is meant to take our breath away, even as we genuflect before the author of that breath.

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

Grief ... an unavoidable yet necessary journey towards Hope

November is a difficult month for many. Our visits to cemeteries and columbaria around All Souls' Day force us to face up to memories of our dear departed loved ones. When their deaths are recent, it may all seem so raw and difficult, but unless we have encountered and accepted our grief, we may feel stuck and unable to move on. Even if the deaths were long ago, there are memories that may cause us to tear and be sad – after all, the pain of loss never really goes away but it may become less intense with time and healing.

Grief is an emotional and physical reaction to the loss of someone or something. This may be death or a life-threatening illness, loss of a job, the breakup of a relationship. We experience deep feelings of sadness and sorrow. We would like to turn the clock back to status quo. We also can feel emptiness, numbness – even worry and anger. It may also affect us physically – sleeplessness or a loss of appetite for food. Life loses its lustre and our reason for existence may seem very dark indeed. We may feel all confused, even depressed, and are unable to adequately articulate our feelings.

There is no quick-fix to grief. We all grieve differently and we need to take our time and space to work through our grief. Faith certainly helps, but sometimes we may be angry even with God and so it may be that our religious practices seem meaningless. Shout at God if you feel like it – that is also a form of prayer! Be honest with God and let God know exactly how you feel. God is not going to be upset with our ranting and raving – rather, it may help to let it all out!

We all grieve differently to different situations. When my father died suddenly of a heart attack at 75, I was rather numb and



**As I was
Contemplating**

FR GERARD THERAVIAM

because of my busy schedule, I didn't have the time and space to grieve properly until I went away overseas to study and had more time to work through my grief. A good book and spiritual direction helped – as did silent prayer, often before the Blessed Sacrament, allowing me to get in touch with my feelings and thoughts. Writing it down in a journal was helpful as I was finally able to articulate pent-up feelings and memories that I wasn't aware of.

It was very different with my mother's death. I actually started the process of grieving when she was diagnosed of cancer at 84 since we knew then that there was no cure, just palliative care. In the two years when I saw her deteriorate, a part of me died each time I realised that she was losing her bubbly, independent personality and became more quiet and dependant on others. Finally when she died it was almost a relief because I did not want to see her suffer any more – I had even asked God to take her because she was suffering so much in her last few days and I knew she was ready to meet her Maker.

In my grief, I appreciated the support of people around me, most of all when they were simply there for me. Words didn't matter – presence did. Pious platitudes like "God loved her more, so God took her" or "Never mind, she is in a better place now" irritated me, but I held my tongue. A warm hug communicated much more than words did as did also presence of persons who were just there.

Suppressing our feelings or 'being strong' for others does not help at all. In fact when we express our grief openly, we allow family members and others also to grieve themselves. Otherwise we all hold

it in unhealthily until we later 'burst'. Grief often comes in waves sometimes strong and overwhelming. Triggers might be places or occasions. For instance, someone recently widowed might find it difficult to be at a wedding as it reminds them of their aloneness. It surely is hard initially but it gets better when we slowly step out in trust and faith.

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's five stages of grief may also be of help.

She suggests that people go through five stages of grief which include denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Again, these are not chronological stages but we may go up and down the stages or be in more than one stage at a time. While her work came out of working with terminally-ill persons, they are helpful in understanding Grief.

❖ **Denial** – At this stage, we pretend that we haven't encountered our loss. Maybe we want to turn back the clock. But soon the reality stares us in the face.

❖ **Anger** – We may be angry with ourselves, or the person who died for leaving us or God for allowing the person to die.

❖ **Bargaining** – Often we may try to bargain with God to see if there is anything we can do or change to make your loved one come back.

❖ **Depression** – We lose our meaning and purpose in life. Nothing makes sense or is worthwhile and we want to withdraw and avoid even our loved ones.

❖ **Acceptance**: Slowly we come to terms with our loss and recognise that we can indeed go on.

In my own experience I saw this happening, before my mother's death. At first I thought it was a bad dream and I hoped it would be gone when I awoke. I was angry with her initially for not seeking medical help earlier but a wise doctor suggested she might

have been numbed with fear and confusion. I certainly bargained with God, hoping for a miracle. Yet, I also came to accept her dying, knowing that I had to be prepared to help her and my family to journey towards her passing.

After her death, there was some anger at myself and others for not having done enough although I look back and see that there was nothing more we could have done. As I said earlier, much of the grieving had already been done so acceptance was easier to arrive at.

During this month of November, let us resolve not to run away from our grief. Recognise that there will be residual grief that needs to be worked through. The Mass of All Souls' Day may be a source of strength. In fact, remember your loved ones in prayer for we pray for the dead at each Mass. Do visit the grave or columbarium. Create rituals that help us remember them with love.

If your parish has a Remembrance Book, inscribe your loved ones names in it. Offer a Mass for them. Some parishes may have talks or programmes like Griefshare – do join in.

The Preface at Funeral Masses reminds us: 'For your faithful, O Lord, life has changed not ended; while our earthly dwelling is destroyed, a new and eternal dwelling is prepared for us in Heaven.' This reality gives us hope – especially as we know that one day, we will be united in heaven.

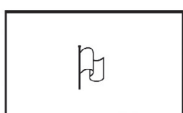
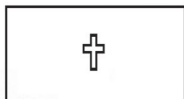
Grief takes time. It also takes courage. But we walk in faith, buoyed by the grace of God and the support of our family and community. Allow others to journey with you. We are never alone!

Let's journey together in HOPE!

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

Little Catholics' corner

Love
Aunty Eliz



(John 13:34)

John 14:15: If you love me, you will keep my commandments.


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I give you

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loved you

9

A new command

R

love one
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**Love one
another**



Synod leaders address challenging questions from university students

Linda Bordoni

VATICAN: Some 140 university students, primarily from North America, gathered in the Paul VI Hall on October 18 to engage directly with leaders of the Secretariat of the Synod.

The event, titled *University Students in Dialogue with Synod Leaders*, featured a series of relevant questions posed by the students and answered by Cardinal Mario Grech, Secretary General of the Synod, Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, Relator of the Synod, Sr Leticia Salazar, Chancellor of the Diocese of San Bernardino, and Bishop Daniel Flores of the Diocese of Brownsville in south Texas.

The roundtable setup, which mirrored that of the ongoing second Session of the Synod on Synodality, symbolised Pope Francis' vision for the Church to walk together on a journey of listening and engagement.

Addressing the challenge of listening

The first question came from Asia Chan, a student from Trinidad and Tobago, who shared her struggle to express her faith in a different culture and asked how the Church could improve future consultations to ensure more voices are heard.

Cardinal Grech responded, acknowledging



(Vatican Media)

the challenge and sharing that the Church's current synodal process is unprecedented in its scope of listening. He noted that while there is still room for improvement, this synod has involved significantly more people than previous ones.

"During the Synod on the Family" the Cardinal said, "Only 80 out of 114 Bishops' Conferences participated. This time 112 out of 114 submitted their report: that means a good chunk of people have been heard."

He also noted that this time more than 20,000 people participated on a digital platform, so "Participation has been very good and promises to be better in future."

"Listening is fundamental," he continued, stressing the importance of hearing not only opinions but also the Holy Spirit's guidance in a process that "will help the Church be-

come more synodal, creating a culture of encounter rooted in listening to both God and to each other."

Engaging young people on the margins

Alejandra, a Venezuelan student who grew up in the Middle East, asked why young people not engaged with the Church should care about synodality, and how the Church could create spaces for those who feel hurt by it.

Cardinal Hollerich emphasised the importance of listening to people, not just their opinions, in today's polarised world.

He pointed to the clash of opinions that currently characterises the USA and said "polarisation is a way of thinking very far from synodality, as is the digital world, where you only follow people who have the same opinions as you – and if you disagree it

becomes very oppositional."

But, he added, "A person with a different opinion is not an enemy; we are part of the same humanity. We have to find common solutions."

In the Church, he said, it is easier because we are sisters and brothers; we share the same Baptism.

"I think the world can learn from that," he said, "and it would be nice if we could open up to other beliefs and religions to discuss in global fraternity the big issues of our world" as synodality offers a way to bring people together, recognising their shared humanity.

The world, Cardinal Hollerich said, could learn from the Church's approach to synodality, particularly in creating spaces for respectful dialogue that addresses global issues like peace, justice, and ecology.

Faithfulness to tradition amid synodal change

Sondra, a student from San Francisco, raised concerns about how the emphasis on experience in the synodal process might affect faithfulness to tradition and truth.

Bishop Flores responded by reassuring her that synodality does not compromise the Church's mission to proclaim the Gospel. He acknowledged the challenge of listening to those with different views but affirmed that it is essential to understanding the realities

people face.

"How do you remain faithful to the Church? The church has been messy for 2000 years, but the Spirit keeps it together. What do I bring to Rome from South Texas? I do not worry that the faith of the Church will be compromised if we listen to each other," he said.

The synodal process, he explained, helps deepen understanding without undermining

the Church's core teachings.

Moving from discussion to action

Joseph, a student from New Orleans involved in youth ministry, asked how the synod could transform discussions into concrete action.

Sr Leticia Salazar spoke on the transformative nature of the synodal process. She likened it to St Ignatius of Loyola's invitation to experience scripture as if one were pre-

sent in the scene. Sitting at the same tables as synod participants, she said, is a powerful experience that fosters communion and transformation.

Sr Leticia expressed hope that the students would carry this experience back to their communities, making synodality a lived reality. She added that the process is not merely theoretical but a way of discerning and building together as one Church.

"What is going to happen after this time here? It will continue in San Bernardino and hopefully in the whole Church," she said. "It is a way of finding Jesus in one another, it is not an idea, it is building together and discerning together God's will."

In this time of polarisation, Sr Leticia continued, "Synodality has a gentle way of announcing the Good News in a very respectful way."

"I am very hopeful for the United States to see you here," she concluded, "The beauty is we are not by ourselves. Pope Francis does not want to do his mission by himself; he called the whole Church to do it with him. Make it real!"

Continued on Page 16



JOIN THE WINNING TEAM, cardinal urges confirmands

TAIPING: The Taiping Catholic Church celebrated the Sacrament of Confirmation for its young people on the Feast of Our Lady of Fatima, Oct 13. The Mass was presided over by Cardinal Sebastian Francis, who delivered an inspiring homily focused on the Holy Spirit's role in guiding the faithful.

In his homily, Cardinal Sebastian encouraged the 34 confirmands to embrace the Holy Spirit in their journey of faith. "We have a choice from now until death," he said. "I pray that each of us, especially the young disciples being confirmed today, will make the right choice with the help of the Holy Spirit. Join the winning team – Team Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will lead you to an adventurous life of creativity, inclusivity, and bridge-building. The evil spirit, on the other hand, will lead you to divide and rule through superiority, domination, and manipulation. May you have the Spirit of Wisdom to make the right choice."

The parish community played an active role in preparing the confirmands for this significant milestone in their faith jour-



ney. Besides attending weekly Sunday classes, the confirmands received support from various ministries and parishioners. They participated in a series of activities, teachings, and formation sessions designed to deepen their understanding of the sacrament.

A key highlight of the preparation was



Confirmands with Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Msgr Stephen Liew and Deacon Charles Lazaroo.

the Confirmation camp held at the Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam which offered the confirmands an opportunity to reflect on God's grace and its transformative power. During the camp, they learned that through God's grace, they are called to love others and bear witness to the Gospel.

As they received the Sacrament of Confirmation, the newly confirmed pledged to serve the Lord by contributing to the parish through their talents and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They expressed their commitment to actively participate in various ministries, continuing their journey as faithful witnesses of Christ.

MERLIMAU, Melaka: Seven young Catholics received the Sacrament of Confirmation during the Centennial Mass at the Chapel of St James, officiated by Bishop Bernard Paul. The candidates included five from St James and two from the Church of the Holy Spirit in Jasir.

During the ceremony, Chapel Administrator Fr M. Alexuchelvam presented the candidates to Bishop Bernard following the Gospel reading. The bishop asked, "Are you ready for Confirmation?" The candidates confidently responded with a firm "Yes."

In his homily, Bishop Bernard urged the Confirmands to deepen their relationship with God while reminding them of their responsibility to serve the poor and those in need. He emphasised the importance of prioritising the Word of God, worship, and good works in their Christian journey.

"Many want to follow Jesus, but some are more interested in seeking status or comfort," Bishop Bernard said. "However, Jesus calls us to embrace the cross. As Christians, we may face discrimination

and hardship, but we are called to die to self and serve others, not to seek name or position."

The bishop further encouraged the candidates to remain faithful to their



Confirmands with Bishop Bernard Paul and clergy.

beliefs, saying, "If asked who I believe in, I will answer that I believe in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and in the Catholic Church."

The Rite of Confirmation followed,

with the seven candidates stepping forward alongside their godparents for the anointing of the Chrism. Bishop Bernard sealed each with the words, "Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit," to which the Confirmands responded, "Amen."

Former Chapel Administrator Fr M. Devadasan, in his congratulatory speech, praised the candidates' parents and catechists for nurturing them in the faith. Bishop Bernard also extended his congratulations to the newly confirmed Catholics, who received their Certificates of Confirmation before gathering for a group photo.

The newly Confirmed expressed their joy in receiving the sacrament, feeling strengthened by the seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit and better equipped to witness to Christ in their daily lives. **Bernard Anthony**

Seven receive Confirmation during St James' centennial Mass

Interfaith dialogue and global synodality

Continued from page 16

Mika from Cincinnati asked the 6th and last question regarding how the Church could support the laity in promoting interfaith dialogue and what lessons synodality could learn from other faith traditions.

Cardinal Hollerich reflected on his experience in Japan, where he taught students of various religions. He shared how this encounter helped him recognise that God is already present in all cultures and religions.

The Cardinal emphasised that synodality can teach the world that religion should not be a source of conflict but rather a path to greater fraternity and called for the Church to act together with other faith traditions to address global challenges, such

as social and ecological justice, as brothers and sisters united by a common mission.

"We have to show we do not just speak, we have to act together, to meet together and grow in esteem, love and friendship and take action for the good of humanity. That is part of our mission, and part of that mission is also proclaiming God," he said.

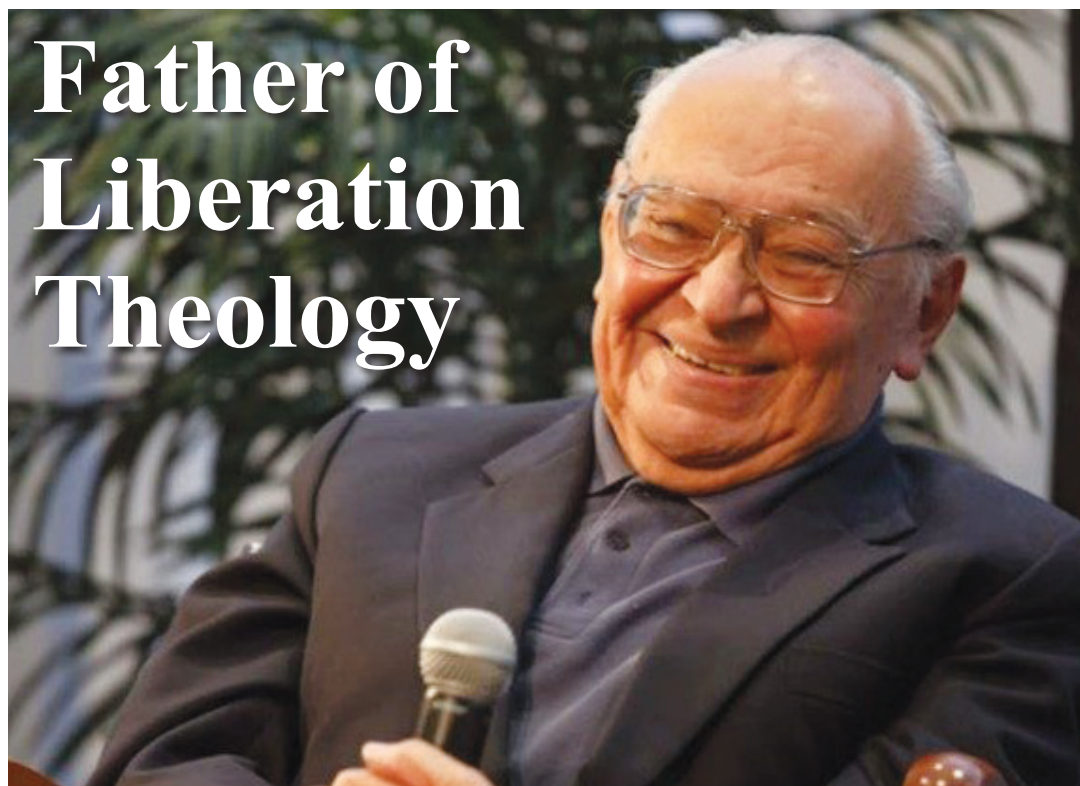
A mosaic of prayers and questions

At the conclusion of the session, the students presented a mosaic artwork representing the prayers and questions that had arisen during their time in Rome. Each of the panellists was invited to contribute a prayer, symbolising the collective hope for a more synodal, inclusive, and listening Church. **Vatican News**



University students meet with Synod delegates in the Paul VI Hall. (Vatican Media)

Champion of the poor, Father of Liberation Theology



VATICAN: Fr Gustavo Gutiérrez, who died October 22 at the age of 96, challenged the Church to reconsider its role in a world marked by social inequality and commit more fully to the defence of the weak.

Fr Gutiérrez was a pioneer of liberation theology, a movement advocating for social justice and the liberation of the poor.

Emerging in the 1960s as a response to massive social inequalities in Latin America, liberation theology emphasised that the Christian faith must tackle social issues of poverty and exclusion in order to remain credible.

Fr Gutiérrez's 1971 book *A Theology of Liberation* was foundational to this movement and has deeply shaped theological thought in Latin America and beyond.

Fr Gutiérrez was born in Peru in 1928, and initially studied medicine before turning to philosophy, psychology, and theology.

He was ordained a priest in 1959 and entered the Dominican Order in 1999.

For decades, he taught at the Catholic University of Lima, focusing on the social challenges facing people in his homeland and across Latin America.

In an interview with Vatican Radio in 2015, Fr Gutiérrez stressed that care for the poor is central to the Christian message.

"Poverty is death", he said, "it destroys people and families. The Church understands this better than in the past."

One of the most charming stories about Fr Gutiérrez was his friendship with the German theologian Cardinal Gerhard Müller, one-time

head of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith — the same office that had once voiced its concern about aspects of liberation theology.

Cardinal Müller spoke to *Vatican News* about the death of his friend, whom he called "one of the great theologians of our time."

Liberation theology had a far-reaching impact on the Catholic Church and on society. It challenged the Church to reconsider its role in a world marked by social inequality and commit more fully to defending the weak.

In this and in many other ways, Fr Gustavo Gutiérrez's legacy lives on.

"Today, I think of Gustavo. Gustavo Gutiérrez. A great man. A man of the Church."

Pope Francis made the remark in a video message shown at the funeral of Fr Gutiérrez in Lima, Peru on October 24.

In his message, Pope Francis recalled that Fr Gutiérrez "knew how to remain silent when he needed to be silent; he knew how to suffer when he had to suffer".

The then-Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, led at the time by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI), carried out an investigation into liberation theology. The investigation cleared Fr Gutiérrez's writings of any doctrinal error.

Fr Gutiérrez, said Pope Francis in his message, "managed to carry forward so much apostolic fruit and such rich theology. May he rest in peace."

In 2014, Pope Francis wrote the introduction to a book entitled "Poor for the Poor: The Mission of the Church," to which Fr Gutiérrez contributed two chapters. *Vatican News*



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In Loving Memory of
Lucy Elizabeth
Isabella Yoong
Beloved wife of the
late Emile Victor Lessler



Departed: 5.11.2023

"Give thanks to the Lord,
for he is good; his steadfast
love endures forever."

Lovingly remembered by
children - Julie, Rita, Bunny,
Linda, Hazel, Gerard, Kelly,
Selena, their spouses,
grandchildren and
great-grandchildren.

1st Year Anniversary
In Loving Memory of



Selvanayagam A/P Pappu

Departed on 4th November 2023

A Memorial Mass will be celebrated on
9 November 2024 at 7am & 6pm at the
Church of Our Lady of Fatima, Brickfields,
Kuala Lumpur.

You are forever in our hearts and minds.
Deeply missed by family, relatives and friends.

*You shall
love the Lord
your God
with all your
heart and
with all your
soul and
with all your
might.*

Deuteronomy 6:5

1st Anniversary
In Loving Memory of
Julia Gomes

9.3.1929 – 27.10.2023



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.

Dearly missed by children, grandchildren
and great-grandchildren.

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2nd Year Anniversary
In Loving Memory of

Richard Francis
Dorall

Born:
23.8.1947

Departed:
30.11.2022

Forever loved and dearly missed by:

Wife: Violet Dorall

Sons: James & Louis

Sister: Cheryl

Daughter-in-law: Anne

Family and friends.

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‘Just listen, console and forgive’

VATICAN: “Always forgive everything, because we are here to forgive; let others argue!”

Pope Francis reiterated this refrain on October 24, as he addressed the community of the Vatican College of Penitentiaries on occasion of the 250th anniversary of the entrusting of the Ministry of Confessions in St Peter’s Basilica to the Conventual Franciscans. This ministry has been under their care since 1774.

Addressing the 60 Vatican confessors accompanied by their Rector, Fr Vincenzo Cosatti OFM.Conv., in the Consistory Hall, the Pope highlighted the vital importance of their service in the Basilica, both for those who go there to confess and also for other

visitors.

He said the ministry “bears witness to them that the Church welcomes them first of all as a community of the forgiven, who believe, hope, and love in the light and strength of God’s tenderness.”

The Pope framed his reflections around three key aspects of their service: humility, listening, and mercy. Drawing from the example of the Apostle Peter, who learned humility through his own failures and need for forgiveness, Pope Francis urged the confessors to see themselves first as “penitents” who continually seek God’s mercy. He encouraged them to reflect this humility in their prayers and actions within the sacred space of the Basilica.



Pope Francis hears a man’s confession during a Lenten penance service. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)



Pope Francis meets the Vatican Penitentiaries in the Consistory Hall. (Vatican Media)

Pope Francis also highlighted the importance of active and empathetic listening. He urged the confessors to be present, especially for the young and vulnerable, but cautioned that they are not psychiatrists. “The less you talk, the better,” he said. “Just listen, console, and forgive.” He emphasised that listening goes beyond hearing — it involves receiving the penitent’s words as a gift from God, which can aid both the confessor’s guidance and their own personal conversion. By listening with an open heart, the confessor facilitates a personal encounter between the penitent and Christ.

Mercy was the final focus of Pope Francis’ message. He encouraged the

confessors to be compassionate and gentle, recognising that those who come for confession are already humbled by their sins. He urged them to be “men of mercy,” generous and understanding, following the example of Saint Leopold Mandic, known for his merciful approach, and Cardinal Luis Pascual Dri, whom the Pope has often praised as a model confessor.

In closing, Pope Francis thanked the Vatican Penitentiaries for their service and encouraged them to continue their ministry with humility, deep listening, and boundless mercy, always reflecting God’s tenderness and compassion to those they serve. **Vatican Media**

Let us work to give women more space and power

VATICAN: During the afternoon Synod meeting on October 24, with members of the ‘Group 5’ working group, Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernández, the Prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, explains why he did not consider the decision on the female diaconate to be ‘mature,’ saying it does not mean closing off the possibility. This meeting, held at the Paul VI Hall, followed an earlier session on Oct 18 where some had expressed dissatisfaction with his absence, though this had been previously announced.

The Synod’s session involved an hour and a half of open, frank dialogue with about 100 Synod participants, including members, guests, and experts. The Cardinal listened to their concerns, accepted proposals, and provided an update on the work of ‘Group 5’, which is focused on exploring potential ministries for women in the Church.

The Cardinal, in agreement with the Secretariat of the Synod and the participants in the meeting moderated by the Prefect of the Dicastery for Communication, Paolo Ruffini, decided to make the full audio recording public exceptionally with respect to Synod rules.

It is therefore made available here on Vatican News, after the proposal to publish it was greeted by applause from the participants.

Cardinal Fernández outlined the work of his Dicastery, which had been assigned the task of exploring the role of women in the Church even before the Synod began. The Dicastery has been collaborating with a large group of women consultants, listening to their



Synod participants sharing their experiences at the WUCWO: School of Synodality webinar. (World Women’s Observatory facebook)

experiences and insights, and expanding the consultation to voices outside the official Dicastery group.

Two ordinary assemblies of the Dicastery’s Cardinals and Bishops have already taken place, and the work is coordinated by Fr Armando Matteo, Secretary of the Dicastery’s Doctrinal Section. The process is being conducted in a synodal manner, incorporating diverse perspectives from Bishops and Cardinals around the world. Contributions have also been gathered from Synod members, considering real-world examples of women leading communities in places like the Amazon, Africa, and Asia.

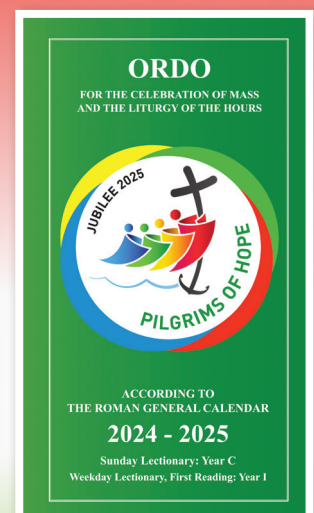
Cardinal Fernández emphasised that the group’s focus is on the broader role of women in the Church, rather than solely on the female diaconate. While the possibility of women becoming deacons remains under discussion by a commission led by Cardinal Giuseppe Petrocchi, many women seek to

be valued and given leadership roles, rather than being ‘clericalised’ through ordination.

He stressed the importance of distinguishing between Holy Orders and leadership power in the Church, noting that it is possible to give laypeople, including women, significant leadership roles without ordination. The Synod is also exploring whether historical instances of women preaching or exercising authority in the Church without being ordained might offer a model for the future.

Fernández concluded by affirming that while Pope Francis believes a decision on the female diaconate is not yet ‘mature,’ this does not mean the discussion is over. The Church will continue to study the issue, and concrete steps will be taken to further empower women in leadership roles. He encouraged participants to remain open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit as the Church explores these possibilities. **Vatican News**

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