

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.

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,  
To the church of the Thessalonians  
in God the Father and the Lord Jesus  
Christ: Grace to you and peace.

1 Thes. 1:1



Holy Rosary Church commemorates  
120-year journey

■ P5



Seeking  
peace and  
justice for  
all God's  
creation

■ P7



Fanning the  
Flames of  
Faith in  
Youth

■ P16

# Hearts on fire



photo/Missio Ireland

## feet on the move

**VATICAN:** In his message for World Mission Sunday celebrated on October 22, Pope Francis said that coming to know Jesus through the Scriptures and the Eucharist should fill Catholics with enthusiasm to joyfully share the Gospel with others.

“What the world needs is the love of God, to encounter Christ and believe in Him. For this reason, the Eucharist is not only the source and summit of the life of the Church, it is also the source and summit of her mission,” Pope Francis wrote, quoting the late Pope Benedict XVI.

The theme the Pope chose for the 2023 celebration is *Hearts on fire, feet on the move*, which he said was inspired by the story of Jesus and the disciples on the road to Emmaus after the resurrection. The Bible says the disciples’ hearts “burned within them” as Jesus explained the Scriptures and how they recognised Him when He broke bread with them, and they set off to share the good news with others.

World Mission Sunday 2023 will be celebrated during the assembly of the Synod of Bishops, and Pope Francis also used his message to talk about the missionary profile of the synod.

“The urgency of the Church’s missionary activity naturally calls for an ever-closer missionary cooperation on the part of all her members and at every level. This is an essential goal of the synodal journey that the Church has undertaken, guided by the key words: communion, participation, mission.”

The synodal process, he said, is “not a turning of the Church in upon herself, nor is it a referendum about what we ought to believe and practise, nor a matter of human preferences. Rather, it is a process of setting out on the way and, like the disciples of Emmaus, listening to the risen Lord. For He always comes among us to explain the meaning of the Scriptures and to break bread for us, so that we can, by the power of the Holy Spirit, carry out His mission in the world.”

While Pope Francis often warns against proselytism — using pressure or coercion to

get someone to convert — he insisted that the Church exists for mission and that every person in the world has the right to hear the Gospel.

“Today more than ever, our human family, wounded by so many situations of injustice, so many divisions and wars, is in need of the Good News of peace and salvation in Christ,” he said. “I take this opportunity to reiterate that ‘everyone has the right to receive the Gospel. Christians have the duty to announce it without excluding anyone, not as one who imposes a new obligation, but as one who shares a joy, signals a beautiful horizon, offers a desirable banquet.’”

A person who has truly encountered the risen Lord necessarily will be “set on fire with enthusiasm to tell everyone about Him,” the Pope said.

So, for the Catholic Church, “the primary and principal resource of the mission are those persons who have come to know the risen Christ in the Scriptures and in the Eucharist, who carry His fire in their heart and His light in their gaze. They can bear witness to the life that never dies, even in the most difficult of situa-

tions and in the darkest of moments.”

Just like the disciples who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus immediately went to tell others about their encounter with Him, the Pope said, “our proclamation will be a joyful telling of Christ the Lord, His life, His passion, His death and resurrection, and the wonders that His love has accomplished in our lives.”

Pope Francis thanked those who have dedicated their lives to sharing the Gospel with people far from their homelands and thanked all Catholics who pray for and donate to the Church’s missionary outreach.

“Let us set out again with burning hearts, with our eyes open and our feet in motion,” the Pope said. “Let us set out to make other hearts burn with the word of God, to open the eyes of others to Jesus in the Eucharist, and to invite everyone to walk together on the path of peace and salvation that God, in Christ, has bestowed upon all humanity.” — **By Cindy Wooden, CNS**

To read the full text go to: <https://bit.ly/3Mn13s3>



# HERALD

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## GUEST EDITORIAL

FR GERARD LOUIS CSSR



## The Synodal Church on a missionary journey

On October 22, the penultimate Sunday of October, the Church celebrates World Mission Sunday. This celebration goes back to 1926, when the Pontifical Society of the Propagation of the Faith requested Pope Pius XI to establish a "World Mission Sunday". The objective of this celebration would be to raise awareness of the Church's mission, encourage the lay faithful to live their missionary vocation and to raise funds in support of missionary dioceses. The first World Mission Sunday was celebrated in October 1927.

Every year, the Holy Father produces a message for World Mission Sunday and this year Pope Francis' message, based on the story of the Disciples at Emmaus, is entitled *Hearts on Fire, Feet on the Move*. He describes three movements that drive us towards mission: our hearts burn, our eyes are opened and our feet set out.

**Our hearts burn** — The disciples at Emmaus were downcast. They had placed their hopes on Jesus and now Jesus was dead. Their dreams for Israel were shattered. Many people today are just as downcast and hopeless. Think of those who have lost loved ones, struggle to make ends meet, think of the loneliness of the migrant and the trauma of the refugee. So many people who might well ask, "where is God? Is God interested in my story?"

God's relationship with the poor and the suffering is synodal, which means to journey together. The story of Emmaus reminds us that God makes a choice, takes the initiative to walk with those who suffer and to listen to their stories, dreams and anxieties.

Just like the disciples, our mission begins with an encounter with Jesus Christ who captures our hearts. It is an encounter that draws us into a lifelong relationship with Jesus and with those who are suffering.

**Our eyes are opened** — At supper, the eyes of the disciples were opened. They realised that they were not alone. Jesus had been with them all this while. Yet, as soon as they recognised Him, Jesus disappeared. Reminding us that often, many do not realise God's presence in their lives and in their suffering.

Our eyes must not only be opened to the presence of Christ but to the realisation that He is sending us to continue His mission of sharing the Good News of God's redemption. Our eyes are also opened to the signs of the times — to corruption and injustice, the exploitation of our planet, the plight of migrants, refugees and victims of trafficking, the rise of politics that divides people.

As Christ ate with and listened to the disciples, so we are sent to walk with, listen to and encourage our neighbours and those who are suffering.

**Our feet set out** — This is the moment when we make a commitment to dedicate our lives to sharing the love of God. The Asian bishops, at their 50th anniversary meeting in Bangkok earlier this year, spoke of the mission of the Christian in Asia. In a continent of great religions, ancient cultures, of vast economic growth alongside dehumanising poverty, where Christians are but a tiny minority — the mission of the Christian is to be a witness of God's love.

As our hearts burn and our eyes are opened, we desire that others also experience the re-

demption that Christ offers. This faith that we have received must be shared.

At the opening Mass of the Synod on Synodality, Pope Francis warned against a Church turned in on itself. Most often, our concerns centre around issues of our parish, logistical problems, the organisation of feast days and the governance of our parish ministries. However, Pope Francis calls the Church to be a field hospital, he urges the Church to go out to the peripheries. As Pope Benedict XVI put it, 'How can we communicate the reality of God to the people of today, in a way that it becomes salvation for them?'

This year, Mission Sunday also falls during the Synod on Synodality, where the Church is discerning how best it can share the Gospel in the modern world. Malaysia is truly Asia because the great religions and ancient cultures are present here. From the time they are children, people of different religions and cultures interact as neighbours, colleagues and classmates, these days even as relatives. In other ways, Malaysia is also sociologically and politically fragmented. It is this conflicting reality in which the Christian is called to witness to the love of God. The Church has a mission to listen and dialogue, to share the values of the Gospel, to foster unity, understanding and respect.

Who are those who are walking alone, dejected and hopeless? As Jesus walked with them, the Church is called to do the same. Our feet must set out.

● *Fr Gerard Louis CSSR is the Vice-Provincial Superior for the Redemptorists of Malaysia and Singapore.*

## There is only one God — the Creator of the universe

Every citizen has rights but also duties towards their country. Among such rights is religious freedom. This is the freedom to embrace a religion of one's choice and practise it freely. But there are countries where religious authorities encounter serious challenges from civil authorities.

Today's Gospel offers a fundamental principle to meet these challenges. In the time of Jesus, Palestine was a Roman colony. Its citizens had to pay taxes to Caesar, the Roman Emperor. As expected, they were not happy. The tension between their duty and unhappiness became an attractive issue for the Pharisees working in cahoots with the Herodians to "trap Jesus in what He said". As things turned out, it also became an occasion for Jesus to give a fundamental lesson on the relationship between the Jews' duty to Caesar and to God, as well as Caesar's duty to God through his obligations to his citizens.

The issue Jesus was challenged with was: "Is it permissible to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" It was a double-edged sword. A positive answer from Jesus would land Him in trouble with the Jewish citizens. On the other hand, a negative answer would bring the wrath of the powerful Roman Emperor on Jesus.

But Jesus "was aware of their malice"

because He was all-knowing. And so, He responded beyond His conspirators' expectation. Given a denarius, a Roman coin, as He requested, He asked them a very obvious question: "Whose head is on this? Whose name?" Obviously, Caesar's head and name were inscribed on the coin. The consequence too was obvious: the coin belonged to Caesar, the Roman Emperor.

Jesus' answer was simple and logical: "Very well, give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar." By virtue of the same logic, the next part of His response was: "and to God what belongs to God." At face value, Jesus' response seemed to make a clear separation between state and religion. The two were seemingly different spheres without one having to do with the other.

Nevertheless, at its deeper level, Jesus' response was not all that clear-cut. Paying taxes to the Roman Emperor was a duty insofar as the Jews were citizens not just of Palestine but of the Roman Empire. For sure, they enjoyed certain rights as Roman citizens. But paying their secular dues did not cancel out their religious duties. The Roman Emperor was their earthly ruler but not their God. There was only one God, the Creator of the universe, the One who sent Jesus into the world to

bring salvation to all fallen humankind.

God was God not only of the Jews but of all humankind, including the Roman Emperor. He had created every human person in His own image (Gen 1:27). Every human person therefore belongs to Him and must be given back to Him. The Roman Emperor, and for that matter, every earthly ruler must respect this property of His. On these grounds, every earthly ruler must first of all acknowledge God's universal lordship and accept his/her own position as reflective and representative of it. He/she must thus govern those under his/her charge with respect for God's Will.

This is clear in the First Reading. There Isaiah prophesied the rise of Cyrus, the Persian Emperor, towards the end of the exile of God's people in Babylon. This Persian King would issue a decree for the safe return of the exile to their homeland. The prophet saw the exile as God's punishment on His unfaithful people and their return as His care for them. In all of this, He made use of earthly powers: the Assyrians, the Babylonians and the Persians. God was in control and all earthly kings ruled as instruments of His.

So, in the time of Jesus, Caesar was also God's representative on earth. All citizens belonged to God and Caesar must give

Reflecting on our  
**Sunday Readings**  
with Archbishop  
Emeritus John Ha

**29th Sunday in  
Ordinary Time (A)**

**Readings: Isaiah 45:1, 4-6**

**1 Thessalonians 1:1-5;**

**Gospel: Matthew 22:15-21**

them back to God. An important part of this giving back was to allow them to practise their faith freely and duly. This would entail providing them, where necessary, with all they needed to practise their faith fully, without meddling with this practice.

Jesus' response provides the fundamental principle for challenging the harmonious relationship between state and religion in any country. Every lawful government is put there by God to look after the well-being of all its citizens. It must itself acknowledge that they belong to God and must give them back to God. They do this by governing the nation with due respect to God's Will which essentially consists in justice and equality. Adherents of a religion must fulfil their duties towards the state and comply with state laws. The state authority must respect and uphold the citizens' right to practise their faith freely and support it even financially where necessary. Caesar must also give back to God what belongs to God!





## KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

### Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

#### October

- 24 Meeting – Sri Seronok Board
- 28 Feast – Church of St Jude, Rawang



## PENANG DIOCESE

### Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

#### October

- 24 Signis Asia Assembly – Communicating the Gospel with the Heart in the Digital World via Zoom at 10.00am
- 24-26 CHARIS Malaysia AGM – Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu
- 27 Confirmation – Church of St Michael, Alor Setar at 7.30pm
- 28 Meeting – Responsible of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem (Lieutenancy of Australia – Western) at 10.00am – Bishop's Residence
- 28 Meeting – Fr Laurence Freeman OSB, Director of the World Community for Christian Meditation at 6.00pm
- 29 Meeting – CHARIS Penang Leaders – Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam at 2.00pm



## MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

### Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

#### October

- 22 Confirmation – Chapel of St James, Merlimau, Melaka
- 28 Feast – Church of St Simon, Labis
- 28 Confirmation – Church of St Philip, Segamat
- 29 Confirmation – Church of St Peter, Melaka
- 31 IFF Asia Online Session – The Plan of Salvation

# Asians speak at the Synod

VATICAN: Asia's sufferings but also its gifts echoed at the Synod Assembly in the Vatican on October 9 through the words of Vanessa Cheng, a lay woman from Hong Kong and a member of the Focolare movement, and Fr Dr Clarence Devadass, a priest from Malaysia, during the public session that opened the days dedicated to the examination of the second part of the *Instrumentum Laboris*.

"Hong Kong society has been torn apart after two years of social unrest, the synodal process has helped the Church to restart. 'Walking together' bears the fruit of healing," said Vanessa, citing the continent-level report.

In her description of the synodal path in Asia, she cited the image of "taking off our shoes," which is deeply connected to the sense of the sacred that inhabits local communities.

Although Christians are but a "small flock": 6.5 per cent, with Catholics just above three per cent, they stand side by side with other great religions born in the continent, as well as all those who have no faith of their own and await the Good News. This is why listening rooted in respect is so central.

For Vanessa, "we must also be aware that many Asian cultures do not favour outspokenness for a variety of reasons, such as the fear of making mistakes and losing 'face', of not being accepted by one's social circle, of being identified as problematic, disrespectful and challenging in front of all kinds of authority, and so on.

"As a result, many faithful may tend to re-



A file photo of Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha, Bishop Michael Yeung, and retired Cardinal John Tong celebrating the feast of Our Lady, Help of Christians at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Hong Kong on May 24, 2018. Inset photo: Vanessa Cheng, lay Catholic from Hong Kong.

main silent instead of voicing their own views and concerns. Therefore, we need to pay even more attention to those who are silent for whatever reason. It is very important that the experiences of joy and wounds and the issues raised in the report should be taken seriously."

For his part, Fr Clarence notes that dialogue is crucial. "We share many experiences of fruitful engagement with other Christians, persons of other religions and traditions, including in-

digenous spiritualities, and with the society as a whole. Some expressed reservations about these dialogues for various reasons, including mistrust and suspicion regarding the motives for such dialogues. Nevertheless, for unity in humanity, Churches in many parts of Asia play a pivotal role in building bridges for peace, harmony, reconciliation, and even justice and freedom." — *AsiaNews*

● See also page 10



## Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #150



**Greetings to you, dear friends and faithful.** The haze is around. The Malaysian contingent has gone beyond the targeted 27 medals. BN has won the Pelangai by-election. The Synod commenced on October 4 with 450 participants. The Cross of St Damiano was moved to St Peter's Rome for the Synod. The Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur and Diocese of Malacca Johore just concluded the Arch/Diocesan Pastoral Assemblies.

**Hazy Times:** The API readings for Selangor and Johore are disturbing. More coughing, respiratory infections and absentees at work and school can be expected. Repairs and renovations are expensive these days. Yet they have to be addressed. The churches of St Theresa Masai, Holy Family Ulu Ti-ram, Immaculate Conception JB, St Francis Xavier Malacca and Sacred Heart Cathedral are next in line. Things give way. And it is difficult to assess the wear & tear, the rot and damage over the years and due to the weather. Maintenance and damage control has to be ongoing. The haze requires us take precautions. Watch out for deterioration in your well-being and surroundings. Take care of them and they will take care of you.

### A Thought for the Week:

The Pessimist

A pessimist read his horoscope. It said, "Make new friends and see what happens." He made three new friends and nothing happened. Now he complains that he is stuck with three new friends. Lesson from the pessimist: That's the problem with having a negative attitude. No matter how good something is, *negative thinkers will always find something to complain about.*

### Announcements for this Week

1. The BM Charis of the diocese had a one and a half day retreat on Deliverance for 60 participants. They participated in the **Five-Key Approaches to Deliverance** i.e. **Repentance, Forgiveness, Renunciation, Taking Back One's Authority** and **Infilled With the Father's Blessing**.
2. The Family Life Ministry organised "**The Word of God Heals**" **evangelical nights** in Tamil and English for the three Vicariates, animated by two missionaries, Jocelin from India and Karen from KL.
3. The leaders and representatives from Malacca and Johore gathered at MAJODI for the **Diocesan Pastoral Assembly 2023** on Saturday, October 14 to listen, discern, design and prepare for next year's Peninsula Malaysia Pastoral Assembly 2024, and the Malaysian Pastoral Convention 2026. Confirmed number of 332 will be participating.
4. **Continue to pray** for the Synodal Gathering in Rome, a listening-discerning diocese, for Deacon Aaron Alammalay and his priestly ordination, and for more vocations to the seminary
5. The Caritas MJD initiates the first "**Beyond Borders**" programme to Cambodia for the first batch of Young Caritas to work and live with the poor from December 2-10, 2023. You can expect more opportunities next year onwards.

### This Week's QnQ? Q asks: What haunts us?

1. In essence, we are all haunted. "In each of us there is another whom we do not know." — C.G. Jung. It is the unconscious shadow that influences what we reactively think, feel and how we behave... and it does

the exact opposite of our persona, or who we want to be.

2. If you don't think that's true, consider throughout your life how many times you've said: "I can't believe I said that". "Why did I do that again, I can't believe I acted that way". "Why can't I stop thinking about this."
3. It's through embracing our fears, anger and self-pity that we can peel the onion and find the source of our inner darkness, and ultimately find our inner light. When you **find the creator of your darkness**, you have found the key to your peace and happiness because they are both created from the same source... our deeply rooted attitudes, outlooks and perspectives woven within the fabric of our own unconscious minds.
4. Once you realise that **you alone create all of your misery and joy**, it becomes imperative that one dives deeply within oneself, to find out exactly who or what is doing the creating. As it is written above the entrance to the temple of Apollo in Ancient Greece. "**Know thyself.**"

Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches." (Rev 2:29)

The world in which we live, and which we are called to love and serve, even with its contradictions, demands that the Church strengthen cooperation in all areas of her mission. It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium — LISTENING CHURCH. (Pope Francis, *Address Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Synod of Bishops*, 2015)

**Have a great week. Be safe. Keep safe. God bless.**

Bishop Bernard Paul



# Four hundred attend joint Parish Pastoral Assembly

By Jason Joenoi and Henry Chua

KOTA KINABALU: The Cathedral of the Sacred Heart (SHC) and the Church of Mary Immaculate (CMI) held their joint Parish Pastoral Assembly on September 28 at the Sacred Heart Parish Centre.

About 400 representatives from the various groups and ministries from the English, Bahasa Malaysia, and Chinese-speaking communities of both churches attended the assembly. However, their input was on a personal level rather than as a member of a group or ministry.

In preparation for the assembly, a joint committee representing both parishes was formed in 2021. Subsequently, four sub-committees were established for the four priorities namely Church, Social, Ecology and Family. The sub-committees were tasked to conduct study sessions for their respective members and opened it to interested pa-



Dr Jeffrey Soon presenting one of the sessions at the Parish Pastoral Assembly.

rishioners, on the Encyclical documents of Pope Francis — *Evangelii Gaudium* (Church), *Fratelli Tutti* (Social), *Laudato Si'* (Ecology) and *Amoris Laetitia* (Family). For each document, questionnaires were prepared based on the method of See, Judge and Act.

Archbishop John Wong launched the parish-level Malaysia Pastoral

Convention (MPC) 2026 at SHC on Feb 25, with the screening of his address on the purpose and journey of the local Church towards the MPC 2026 at MAJODI.

The same video was screened during the weekend Masses on Sept 23 and 24 to raise awareness on the assembly.

The assembly began with the En-

thronement of the Bible, followed by the Liturgy of the Word proclaimed in Bahasa Malaysia and Chinese. Fr Paul Lo proclaimed the Gospel (Luke 4:14-20). In his homily, Fr Paul explained that this assembly was to learn the experiences of the faithful from both parishes, and their thoughts on ways forward for the respective parish, archdiocese, and the Church in Sabah.

Archbishop John, who was present, likened the assembly to one who is investing in a business where one must work hard to get triple earnings back; similarly, he believed that if everyone worked harder in this assembly, and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, God's reward would be a hundred-fold.

The assembly consisted of a historical video presentation, an overview of MPC 2026, and a review of assembly preparations. Participants were divided into groups

based on priorities (Church, Family, Social, and Ecology) and language (English, Bahasa Malaysia, and Chinese). Each group discussed specific topics for an hour and reported their findings. The sub-committees then compiled and summarised these reports, which were presented at the assembly's conclusion before the closing Mass. The participants' dedication and open sharing led to valuable insights and productive discussions.

Although this assembly marked the end of the process on the parish level, the task of the parish main committee is not over yet. Reports gathered from the assembly would still need to be compiled for onward submission to the Archdiocese Main Committee, in preparation for the next assembly which is the Diocesan Pastoral Assembly; and to the parish priest, where certain issues need to be addressed on a parish level. — *Catholic Sabah*

## Teaching to change lives

PETALING JAYA: Catechists from the Church of the Assumption attended a one-day workshop entitled *Teaching to Change Lives* at the Assumption Family House recently.

The workshop was conducted by Alex Choong, a training and development coach, whose passion is to

equip individuals to evangelise in their spheres of influence to spread the Good News. The workshop was focused on the implementation of object teaching, storytelling and videos in lessons. One of his sharing on object teaching was how using a branch of thorns could be turned into

a crown of thorns that we can use to teach the Passion of Jesus Christ.

We often find it a challenge to grab our students' attention — be it the young or the older ones. Implementing storytelling and videos into our lessons not only captures their attention but also helps students connect with their mind and emotions.

According to Alex, although each catechist has different teaching styles, we have the same goals, to evangelise and inspire our students to learn about God and have a personal and intimate relationship with Him.

This workshop taught us key concepts of teaching and learning principles to enhance our knowledge and skills for a better engagement with students. It also taught us how to apply new ideas in teaching. — *By Cassandra Ashley*



Catechists from the Church of the Assumption at a one-day workshop.

## Masai church turns 86

MASAI: The 86th parish Feast Day celebration at the Church of St. Theresa was held on a modest scale this year due to the ongoing construction of a new church, which prompted parishioners to temporarily relocate for worship.

The festivities commenced with Triduum prayers on October 27, leading up to the multilingual Mass on the feast day, October 30.

During his homily, parish priest Fr Cyril Mannayagam provided an insightful overview of St Theresa's life journey and the core principles of her spirituality.



The picture below features a line of lovely ladies from the Tamil language group, all dressed in their choir attire, posing happily at the statue of St Theresa after the celebration."



## Multi-lingual formations for Kuantan parishioners

KUANTAN: Spiritual formation sessions themed *Mary, Filled with the Spirit*, for adults and youth were held at the Church of St Thomas.

Organised by the Formation Ministry, these sessions were conducted in the different languages during the month.

The session in Mandarin was conducted by Fr Clement Lim, the Senator of the Pahang and Terengganu district.

The English-speaking session was given by the SEEDS team from Penang. The team comprised eight members. Two sessions were held over two days one — for the adult and another for the youth, aged 15 and above.

A total of 47 adult parishioners and 30 young people attended the sessions which included talks, group sharing, personal testimo-



English session

nies, and Adoration with the Blessed Sacrament and Benediction.

The session in Bahasa Malaysia primarily for the East Malaysians was held at St Theresa's Chapel, Kuantan, on Oct 7 and 8. It was conducted by five members from

Kumpulan Umat Bahasa Malaysia Keuskupan Agung (KUBM Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur). The session was attended by 25 adults and 15 children, concluding with a Eucharist celebration and fellowship.



Formation for the youths.

According to the parish priest, Fr George Packiasamy, formations for the various language groups at the parish are scheduled to be held every two to three months if possible, so that everyone receives formations equally.

The parish's Formation Ministry aims to provide ongoing spiritual formation to help parishioners grow in their relationships with God, the Church, and self, and deepen their knowledge of God. — *By Dr Francis Leong*



# Holy Rosary Church commemorates 120-year journey

By Dempsey Fernandez and Bernard Anthony

KUALA LUMPUR: The Church of the Holy Rosary, founded in 1903, celebrated her 120th anniversary October 7. The nine-day celebration began on September 29, featuring daily novena and Rosary during the initial six days. The central theme was *Encourage One Another and Build One Another*, drawing inspiration from 1 Thessalonians 5:11.

During the triduum, Fr Andrew Wong CDD, from the Church of St Ignatius, focused on *Building Community for the Elderly* (Oct 5). On Oct 6, the Archbishop of Kuching, Most Rev Simon Poh, delivered a sermon on *Building Community for Youth*. On Oct 7 Archbishop Julian Leow spoke on *Building Community for Family*. The celebration concluded with a procession in honour of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary.

The church and hall were filled with parishioners on Oct 7. The day began with hymns to Mary and the novena, followed by the Mass, presided over by Archbishop Julian, with Archbishop Simon and Church of the Holy Rosary parish priest, Fr Dominic Tan, concelebrating.

Archbishop Julian expressed

gratitude for the majestic church and the Catholic community it housed. He emphasised the significance of prayer and Mary's intercession in overcoming life's challenges, citing the Battle of Lepanto in 1571 as a historical example. Archbishop Julian encouraged the congregation to emulate Mary's unwavering faith and her willingness to do God's will.

On the theme *Build Community for Family*, Archbishop Julian expanded the concept of family to include one's broader community, parish, nation, and the universal Church. He urged the assembly to focus on giving, rather than receiving, exemplifying Jesus' sacrificial love. He stressed the potential for positive change in the world through faith in Jesus' birth.

Archbishop Julian also reminded the congregation that Mary, at a tender age, must have been fearful of what the angel told her. Mary was as fearful as perhaps we are today with rising prices, a challenged world, children not coming to church anymore and other problems. Yet, the angel asked Mary to LISTEN. We too need to listen as attentively to what God is telling us. In this spirit, the Holy Father is listening also to the cries of the larger Church in this era



Archbishop Julian Leow celebrating the Mass with Archbishop Simon Poh and Fr Dominic Tan. (photo/Dominic Chung)

of the ongoing Synod, to understand and to respond as Church. "Nothing will be impossible as we listen and trust in God," said the prelate.

A procession featuring a statue of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary led the congregation in praying the Rosary. The celebration concluded with Benediction back in the church.

Fr Dominic expressed gratitude to all and invited everyone to a fellowship dinner at the hall.

Archbishop Simon praised the parish and her youth, encouraging them to continue the good work of their parents and be lights in the world. He extended an invitation to visit the Cathedral of St Joseph in Kuching.

During the Mass celebrated the day before, he reminded young peo-

ple to live in the NOW, as we are the NOW. He encouraged all young people today to not merely sit in the gallery or the balcony but to respond and relate to all that is happening around them. The world needs the strength of the young person as we encounter a period of change in the way we live.

In his closing remarks, Archbishop Julian stressed the importance of strengthening communities and building personal relationships with God and one another. He expressed confidence in Fr Dominic's leadership and wished everyone a Happy Feast Day.

At the hall, both prelates joined Fr Dominic in cutting the anniversary cake, symbolising the parish's

120th anniversary.

Throughout the celebration, parishioners also recited a special 120th anniversary prayer, and the church's facade featured decorations reflecting the anniversary logo and theme.

Looking back over 120 years, it's remarkable to see how the Church of the Holy Rosary has grown into a thriving, multi-racial community, blessing countless lives along the way.

The feast day celebrations witnessed joyful participation of the young and the seniors from all ministries in the parish, including BECs. Each ministry carried their banners to join in the walk to fittingly enthrone the Blessed Mother as Queen of the Most Holy Rosary.



Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Butterworth



Church of St Francis Xavier, P.J. (photo/Agnes Cheong)



Church of Divine Mercy, Penang.



Church of St Francis of Assisi, Cheras



Fr Leonard Lexson blessing an aquatic snail, Church of the Assumption, PJ



Church of the Risen Christ, KL



Church of the Holy Family, Kajang.

## Blessing of pets during the Feast of St Francis of Assisi



# SHEP partnership day

By Dalius Lobingang

SANDAKAN: After a five-year hiatus due to the pandemic, the Catholic Church recently hosted the SHEP Partnership Day 2023 (Sabah – Heilbronn Ecumenical Partnership).

The event, held at the Sandakan Diocesan Pastoral Centre, marked a significant revival of the Ecumenical programme between the Heilbronn German and Sabah Chapter. Around 50 members from the Catholic, Basel, and Protestant churches were in attendance.

Fr Raymond Lee, representing Bishop Julius Gitom, and the diocesan office staff were on hand to welcome the participants. In his opening address, Fr Raymond quoted Matthew 28: 16-20, the “Great Commission” for the participants to reflect on.

He said, “I believe Sabah-

Heilbronn Ecumenical Partnership is a relationship willed by God. Let us continue to work together to build a stronger and closer affiliation. Let us not focus on the differences, which may cause more pain and damage, but focus on our common mission, and continue building a stronger relationship.”

Sabah SHEP committee chairman, Dr Paul Porodong, extended his heartfelt thanks to the Catholic Church for graciously hosting this year's gathering. He applauded the tireless efforts and contributions of Raymond Wong, who led the Sandakan SHEP committee, especially considering that this marked the inaugural occasion of holding the SHEP Partnership Day in the eastern region of Sabah.

Dr Paul also provided a brief overview of the partnership's history and highlighted its primary



About 50 members from the Catholic and Protestant churches at the SHEP partnership Day in Sandakan.

objectives, which revolves around fostering awareness and cultivating a deeper understanding of Ecumenism among the partner churches in Germany (including the Catholic Deanery of Heilbronn and the Evangelische Kirchenbezirk Heilbronn) and Sabah (com-

prising the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu, and the Dioceses of Sandakan and Keningau, the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia, and the Protestant Church).

Also present were 12 representatives from Sabah who will serve as the official members of the

Sabah Chapter during this year's two-week Ecumenical exchange visit to Heilbronn, Germany.

The Partnership Day concluded with an intercessory prayer led by the three participating churches, followed by an enjoyable dinner fellowship.

## Journeying with Mother Mary

KUALA LUMPUR: Parishioners of the Church of the Risen Christ came together on October 7, to celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. The event, organised by BECCOT, featured enlightening talks by two passionate speakers, before and during the sunset Mass.

Dr Peter Pereira provided valuable insights into the mysteries surrounding Mary and addressed common misconceptions held by Catholics worldwide.

One key takeaway was the distinction between worship and veneration of Mary; Catholics venerate her as the Mother of God. Apart from this, the Assumption of Mary into Heaven, which we accept and believe in, was another point made, since there is no mention of her death and burial by the Apostles.

Delving into the origins of the Rosary, Ignatius Wang emphasised the importance of this prayer as a potent weapon against Satan. He shared the promises associated with faithfully reciting the Rosary and meditating on significant mo-

ments in Christ's life during each decade.

After Mass, the parishioners gathered for refreshments, fostering lively conversations and fellowship. The day's grand finale was the recitation of the Rosary by representatives from each BEC, conducted in English, Bahasa Malaysia, and Urdu.

The Mission Rosary, a simple yet profound idea by parish priest Fr Edwin Peter, was used. A representative from each BEC lit tea-light candles as the Rosary was recited. The attendees gathered around the table near Our Lady's grotto in prayer. This experience left a profound impact on the parishioners, and a significant number of them voiced their excitement about the possibility of future gatherings of the same nature.

In the true spirit of togetherness, everyone stayed behind to help clean the church compound, and a group photo was taken to preserve the memories of this remarkable day. — **By Cathy Marshall**



A volunteer lights the candle as the parishioners recite the Rosary.

## LSS reaffirms God's love

KUCHING: The Emmaus Servant Community, a charismatic renewal ministry of the Church of the Blessed Sacrament (BSC), organised a Life in the Spirit Seminar recently.

For many of the 107 participants, the seminar “reaffirmed God's love” for them.

Among the participants were 61 Confirmation students accompanied by their faith formators.

In his opening address to the participants, Fr Leonard Yap, the Rector of BSC and head Shepherd of Emmaus, told the confirmands to “ask the Holy Spirit to protect you and guide you” and to “let

the seminar help you understand what the Sacrament of Confirmation is.”

He reminded the students that they had received “new life” at Baptism and the “Body of Christ” at Communion.

To prepare the participants to receive spiritual, emotional and physical healing, as well as the gifts of the Holy Spirit, Pauline Lim, Christina Eng, Thomas Ngu, Adeline Bong, Ivonson Kwee and Ivy Chai from the Emmaus Teaching Ministry, spoke on the following topics: *God's Love, God's Plan, Sin and Effects of Sin, Repentance to Inner Healing, Who*

*is the Holy Spirit?, Baptism of the Holy Spirit*, to grow their faith.

Aided by counselling and Confession before participating at Mass, the Inner Healing and Baptism of the Holy Spirit sessions that ensued, resulted in a powerful manifestation of God's love on the participants.

Many of them testified to feeling the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit, transforming them, and freeing them from most of the challenges they faced before attending the seminar.

The counselling and inner healing sessions revealed an alarming trend of insecurity leading to unhealthy mental issues affecting the young.

However, at the end of the seminar, many participants projected an aura of peace and love as they had learnt about and experienced, the wholeness of God's love through the Holy Spirit.

The Emmaus Teaching ministry was supported by other Emmaus ministries, namely Healing, Greeters, Music, Media, Intercessory, Counselling and Martha, to bring about the success of the seminar. — **By Ivy Chai, Today's Catholic**



Participants offering thanks at the altar after the inner healing session.

## An extended moment with the Lord

RAWANG: The Church of St Jude remained cloaked in darkness after the 7.30pm Mass on October 6, save for the gentle glow of candles encircling the altar.

This sacred time drew many parishioners to personal prayer before the Holy Eucharist, from 8.00pm to midnight.

Parish priest Fr Vincent Thomas, initiated this event to unite parishioners in prayer for the well-being of pilgrims and the patrons of the church, who are expected during the nine-day novena celebration of the church's patron, St Jude from Oct 20 to 29.

“When we take part in the Holy

Hour, we stay awake and remain with Jesus. It's a powerful and beautiful way to grow closer to Him,” said Fr Vincent.

Catechist Justin Roy described the Holy Hour as his dedicated, personal prayer time. During this hour, he engages in meditation to guard against the temptation of seeking external distractions to alleviate his worries and troubles.

“Today, I found the splendour of God's power during the extended Holy Hour in front of the blessed Body of Christ. I am sure everyone who took time to come, experienced God speaking to them in the silence of their heart

through prayer,” shared Edward Innasi, after the Holy Hour.

Thomas Jaya Sooria said the extended Holy Hour was a great opportunity to spend extra time in the presence of the Lord. Rose-line, his wife and a member of the Legion of Mary shared, “Our fellow English-speaking legionaries kept a continuous vigil of prayer through the Rosary for those four hours”.

We believe the Lord spoke to everyone who came to spend time in prayer with Him and left with their hearts aglow with God's blessed assurance. — **By Mercy Almeida Stellus**



# Seeking peace and justice for all God's creation

By Marilyn Menezes Simon

KUALA LUMPUR: The Creation Justice Ministry (CJM) of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur had several activities, during the Season of Creation from September 1 to October 4, reminding everyone that our actions matter — from carpooling, to using minimal lights while praying the Rosary together as a family, to giving public transport a try.

Using the pink Kloth bins in parishes and neighbourhoods was encouraged as an effective way to recycle and properly dispose of used clothing. All items dropped in have to be clean and dry.

On Sept 15, 51 enthusiastic primary school children from SJKT Bukit Rotan Baru, Kuala

Selangor, gathered to plant Eucalyptus saplings in their school compound, after which, each child was given a succulent to nurture at home.

A 'Care for Creation' fun video contest, to share ideas and tips, was on throughout the Season of Creation. All the participants received a certificate of appreciation. The videos can be viewed on Facebook hashtag #careforcreationarchkl.

In conjunction with World Beach Day (observed on Sep 1), 130 participants spent the day at the Pantai Cunang beach on Sept 28, appreciating its beauty and being mindful of how we use and care for it. The cheerful participants, aged between two and 83, travelled in three coaches, committing to the



Planting Trees with Primary School Children at Kuala Selangor.



Participants during the beach clean-up at Pantai Cunang.

Year 4 PROTEC theme *Cut Fuel Consumption*. Participating in the various games organised for different age groups gave everyone something to talk about — the kindling of new friendships, flying kites, a dip in the sea, collecting shells, catching fish with the locals, playing football, sharing a meal etc. Eco-conscious warriors also picked up trash from the beach.

Continuing its focus on Care for Creation, CJM collaborated with the Catechism students from the Church of St. John Marie

Vianney, Tampin and planted 10 saplings on Oct 1. The young children, their catechists, mentors, ministry leaders and parishioners displayed a great sense of responsibility and ownership towards their plants.

On the feast of the patron saint of Ecology, Oct 4, a Holy Hour was held at the Church of St Francis of Assisi, Cheras to thank and pray for creation and its stewards.

CJM encourages everyone to take small steps to care for our environment and appreciates the support they continue to receive.

KLANG: In conjunction with the parish's 53rd anniversary celebration, the Church of the Holy Redeemer organised a Life in the Spirit Seminar. It was facilitated by Charis KL Service of Communion on October 7 and 8.

The two-day seminar was lined with a series of Praise and Worship sessions, talks and sharing which reminded me of God's unconditional love and getting to know, reflect and finally, totally surrendering to the love of the Holy Spirit.

On the first day, Patrick Anthony from the Cathedral of St John's heartfelt story about searching for his toddler daughter in the mall was very touching. He described how, once he found her, he hugged her tight, saying "I don't want to let go of you". This poignant moment was likened to how God embraces us when He rescues us from going astray. Sadly, sin is a destructive force that severs our connection with God and leads to spiritual death. To save us, our saviour must be perfect, and Jesus, the beloved Son of God (John 3:16) is the only one who meets this criterion.

Jesus not only saved us by dying on the cross but also promised us new life through the Holy Spirit. This promise felt like the



missing piece of the puzzle in our lives. Many were burdened by fear and emotional scars, so we longed to receive God's gifts once again. With repentance and a surrender to the Holy Spirit for inner healing, day one ended with everyone feeling lighter.

The next day, we eagerly anticipated the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, particularly the gift of tongues. Most participants were equally thrilled, and an air of reverence permeated the environment as we offered Praise and Worship to God. His presence was remark-

ably tangible, even when a sudden blackout occurred, and He promptly restored the power.

During the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) team laid hands and prayed for everyone. Some participants were seen resting in the Spirit and some were speaking in tongues.

It was a truly "amazing love" experience, impossible to convey accurately with words. Several brothers and sisters shared their overwhelming joy, and some, including a few

from the CCR team, recounted the obstacles they overcame to attend the LSS. All of them testified to God's unfailing love. As for me, God assured me not to worry, and His message hit the mark.

Vincent Nathan from the Church of Jesus Caritas spoke on how God uniquely transforms each one of us. Undoubtedly, the 100-plus participants, like the woman at the well, experienced a change of heart and a renewed sense of purpose to live their lives in the Holy Spirit. — *By Margaret Chia*

## Personal Testimonies

In the early days of my widowhood, I found it difficult to even function. The constant loneliness made it hard to do even the simplest tasks, like making meals for myself. Festive seasons were especially tough, as they served as reminders of the moments I had shared with my late husband. It felt like there was no meaning left in life. I was angry with God and felt lost in my pain.

The turning point for me was when I met and spoke with another widow. Despite having only just met, there was an instant connection between us. There was a unique comfort in speaking to someone else who experienced what I had gone through. Each time we spoke it was such a relief to feel heard and understood. There was no judgement or shame in admitting how I truly felt.

That's when I realised that widowhood is an intensely isolating journey, one that calls for a safe space where widows can find solace in each other and simply be themselves. I saw the need for a community, one that would allow other widows to experience the same comfort I felt in speaking to another widow. With the support and guidance of my parish priest, Fr Norris Seenivasan SJ, from the Church of St Francis Xavier (SFX), I set up *Widow to Widow*, a support group for widows, led by widows.

Through our regular fellowship gatherings, we offer a non-judgmental space where widows can speak honestly about their feelings and receive support from those who understand what they are going through. We also run a "buddy" system that pairs each

widow with another member of *Widow to Widow*, who would become their "buddy." The buddies are responsible for checking in on each other regularly, provide a listening ear, and offering encouragement and support.

It's been almost two years since my husband's passing and I still have my difficult days. But now I know that I am not alone. I have found solace and healing in listening to my fellow widows share their experiences, stories, and even their grief. Their willingness to bare their hearts constantly reminds me of the remarkable strength and resilience that resides within each one of us.

Belonging to a sisterhood of widows committed to supporting one another, has undeniably made the most challenging days more

bearable. Even amidst our grief, we can support each other to face each new day with courage and resilience.

Sometimes, all a widow needs is another widow to be there for them. Whether you have recently lost a spouse or are further along in your grief journey, we welcome you to join us and find solace in the company of others who understand.

The next *Widow to Widow* workshop on *Grief and Holidays Survival* by certified Grief Educator Christina Goh-Leong is on November 4 from 1.30pm to 5.30pm at Canisius Hall, SFX. Kindly RSVP by October 28. If you are interested, please get in touch with me, Caroline Tay, at 012 701 8185, or visit <https://sfx.com.my/widow-to-widow/> for further details on our ministry.

## A Sisterhood of widows – a unique comfort



# Future looks dark for Christians in besieged Gaza

GAZA: "We're in mortal danger, but we help anyone who asks," says Holy Rosary Sr Nabila, who is based at Holy Family Parish in Gaza City. She says the Israeli air strikes that have been pounding Gaza since October 7, hours after Hamas carried out its surprise and brutal attack on Israel, have destroyed the homes of most of the 150 Latin-rite Catholics who belong to the parish. Some have fled to less-affected neighbourhoods, while others have taken refuge in the parish church.

"We took in around 120 displaced persons," says Sr Nabila, pointing out that there were also Muslims among them.

Nearly a thousand Christians — most of them Orthodox — live in the besieged Palestinian enclave that is under the rule of Hamas,

which many Western nations regard as an Islamist terrorist organisation. And like everyone else they are now caught in the middle the Hamas attack and Israel's retaliation. Gathered under the small Catholic bell tower, the faithful and religious pray the Rosary every evening for an end to their nightmare.

"We can only hope for a swift end to the conflict," Sr Nabila says.

"Unfortunately, the population is used to wars," sighs Fr Gabriel Romanelli, the parish's pastor. "But this time, the intensity is much higher. Hundreds are dead, thousands wounded."

Romanelli, an Argentinean priest from the Institute of the Incarnate Word, was unable to return to his community. He had gone to Rome to attend the consistory at which



*Palestinian families evacuate Gaza after an Israeli bombardment, October 11, 2023. (Photo by Bashar Taleb/APAImages/IMAGO/MAXPPP)*

the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Pierbattista Pizzaballa, became a cardinal. Upon his return, he stopped off in Israel to buy some medicine. But the "total siege" of the Gaza Strip, which Israel had

since decreed, has prohibited him from returning to the parish. Pope Francis has phoned him twice in recent days.

"He expressed his concern, his closeness and his prayers," the

priest explained. "We've passed on his message to the faithful, which is a small consolation."

Romanelli is now staying in Bethlehem, from where he is keeping abreast of developments. "My vicar and the sisters are safe, but terrified," he said. "The violence is raging, and Gaza is starting to run out of fuel and medicine."

In fact, Israel cut off Gaza's supply of electricity on Oct 11.

Fr Romanelli has condemned the violence "on both sides". He said the future of Gaza's Christian communities seems more uncertain than ever. Strained by endemic poverty and insecurity, those who once numbered over 7,000 faithful just 15 years ago now fear being totally decimated. — LCI (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)

● See also back page

## Church in India begins preparations for Jubilee 2025

BENGALURU: The Church in India has initiated preparations for Jubilee 2025, aligning with the universal Church's efforts, with the release of the 35 Council Notebooks.

The Council Notebooks centred on the theme "Pilgrims of Hope" and unveiled the roadmap for the upcoming celebrations.

Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrão of Goa-Daman led the launching of the Council Notebooks in Bengaluru, the capital city of southern Karnataka state recently.

He emphasised that as the Catholic Church moves toward the First Session of the Final Phase (Universal Phase) of the Synod for a Synodal Church 2021-2024, it is also gearing up for Jubilee 2025, marking 2025 years since Jesus' birth. He encouraged integrating the Jubilee 2025 celebrations with the synodal journey.

Cardinal Ferrao, who heads the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI), presented the CCBI Roadmap for Jubilee 2025 preparations and celebrations.

Cardinal Ferrao said the purpose of Jubilee 2025 is threefold: to celebrate Jesus, to celebrate the Church, and to celebrate their faith.

The preparations span two years: 2023 as the Year of the Council (Year of Learning) and 2024 as the Year of Prayer.



*Church leaders during the launch of the 35 Council Notebooks in preparation for the Jubilee 2025 in Bengaluru in the southern Karnataka state, India. (LiCas News photo)*

Pope Francis encourages the study of the four Constitutions of the Second Vatican Council to provide direction and guidance for God's people.

The Dicastery for Evangelisation has produced 35 booklets providing background information on the Second Vatican Council and the Four Constitutions addressing the Word of God, the liturgy, the Church as the people of God, and the Church in the modern world.

These Notebooks have been translated into English for the global market and are distributed by ATC Publishers India, published by the CCBI.

CCBI will integrate the preparations for the Jubilee 2025 into the Church in India's synodal journey and strategic planning.

The local churches in India will inaugurate the preparations for the Jubilee on November 26, 2023, the Solemnity of Christ the King. This will involve unveiling the jubilee logo and encouraging people to revisit the treasures of the Second Vatican Council and revamp their prayer life.

The National Facilitating Team plans to visit all 132 Latin dioceses of India, igniting hope in every faithful individual.

Cardinal Ferrao emphasised that during Jubilee 2025, the Catholic Church invites the faithful to be 'Pilgrims of Hope,' encouraging them to extend hope in places like hospitals, orphanages, homes for the destitute, prisons, refugee camps, and others. — By Rita Joseph, LiCAS News

## Nun is first woman secretary of dicastery for religious

VATICAN: Pope Francis has appointed a religious sister to serve as the number two official at the Holy See office, which oversees religious orders.

Sr Simona Brambilla (pic), 58, is from Monza in northern Italy and is a member of the female branch of the Consolata Missionaries. She led the order for 12 years until May 2023.

Sr Simona trained and worked as a nurse before entering the Consolata order in 1988 and later worked in youth ministry in Mozambique. She received a doctorate in psychology from the Institute of Psychology at the Pontifical Gregorian University and was a lecturer there.

Her appointment as Secretary of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life is the latest appointment of a woman by the Pope to a senior position in the Vatican. She follows Sr Alessandra Smerilli, who has been secretary at the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development for over two years.

The secretary of a Vatican dicastery is charged with the day-to-day running of the office and has traditionally been held by bishops. Francis has also appointed Sr Nathalie Becquart as joint number two of the Synod of Bishops' office, giving her a crucial role in the



ongoing synod process and Sr Raffaella Petrini as secretary-general of the Vatican City State administration.

For decades, women religious and many bishops decried the lack of women in top leadership roles at the dicastery which is called to promote religious life, including approving the statutes of religious congregations, when the vast majority of them are communities of women.

Sr Simona's new role at the dicastery, which oversees communities of nuns worldwide, is a post that female superiors of religious orders have repeatedly called to be held by a woman. It was only four years ago that Francis appointed the first female members of that office. Sr Simona was one of them. — Agencies



## Indonesian archbishop urges Catholics to quit alcohol

MERAUKE: An Indonesian archbishop has called on Catholics to stop drinking alcoholic beverages and termed alcohol traders as big enemies of the Church, who destabilise social peace and progress.

Sacred Heart Archbishop Petrus Canisius Mandagi of Merauke in Christian-majority South Papua Province issued a circular letter on October 8 expressing concerns

about reported violence caused by alcoholism in several areas in his archdiocese.

"Suppliers of branded liquor, as well as locally produced alcoholic beverages are big enemies of the Catholic Church and of the Archdiocese of Merauke," he said in the letter circulated across the archdiocese.

Mandagi asked the police "to

take firm action against individuals who sell liquor both from outside the region and locally."

"Individuals who are found to be intoxicated due to alcoholic beverages must also be dealt with firmly by the authorities," he wrote.

The letter was addressed to episcopal vicars and parish priests throughout the region and was asked to be read out at official

Church celebrations.

The letter was issued after receiving information that some Catholics were involved in a fight after drinking alcohol, said Mandagi.

"As a result of drinking alcohol, clashes between ethnic groups also occur. So, alcohol must be eradicated," he said. — ucanews.com



# Listening and learning

Rather than seeing synodality as a way of changing the Church and its teaching, José Manuel De Urquidí came to understand it as a way of listening to people so the Church can better know how to help them encounter Christ.

"Here, everyone talks. Everyone is being listened to," De Urquidí said. "The value of doing this for a month is very rich; not just individually for each one of us participating, but as a Church."

The 39-year-old digital entrepreneur is participating in the October 4-29 assembly as one of the synod's few married laymen, his trademark ball cap and suitcoat-over-T-shirt look stick-

ing out in Paul VI Hall amid the plethora of black clerical shirts and religious habits. Although he currently resides in Dallas, the native Mexican is part of the delegation from Latin America and the Caribbean.

But De Urquidí understands that some Catholics might have concerns about the synodal process, which began in October 2021 and has included diocesan, national and continental stages and will conclude with another assembly at the universal level in October 2024.

At an earlier point in the multi-year global consultation process, he had his own doubts, too.

The founder of Juan Diego &

Co, a marketing service that helps connect Catholic organisations in the US with Latinos, recalls his hesitation when he was asked by the Vatican in November 2022 to help lead a "Digital Synod." The online consultation was aimed at asking Catholics more present in digital environments than in their parishes to share their experiences with and desires for the Church.

"Are we sure we want to do this? To listen to people on the Internet?" De Urquidí recalls asking at the time.

But De Urquidí said that the experience helped convince him of the value of synodality in the life of the Church. Because while some of the responses, 31 per cent of which were from non-practising Catholics, were in tension with the Church's teaching on ordination and sexuality, the underlying takeaway was that people wanted one thing:



José Manuel De Urquidí (left) chats with a fellow delegate during the synod. (NCR photo/María Langarica)

"The Gospel!" said De Urquidí. "They want to know God, they want to be reached in their heart and soul; they want to be loved and welcomed."

And rather than seeing synodality as a way of changing the Church and its teaching, the Catholic influencer came to understand it as a way of listening to people so the Church can better know how to help them encounter Christ — similar to how a doctor listens to his patient before mak-

ing his diagnosis.

"It's the most simple stuff — that we should be doing anyway," said De Urquidí, who has a long-time passion for evangelisation and operates the Juan Diego Network of Catholic podcasts.

As the assembly progresses, De Urquidí says that he is confident that the synod's focus on listening, encounter and prayer — and the absence of an ulterior agenda — will bear real fruit in the life of the Church.



## Listening to God — and to each other

Part of De Urquidí's confidence in the synod is due to its emphasis on ongoing prayer as an essential part of the process — which was evident even before the synod assembly officially began on October 4.

In a first for a Synod of Bishops, a three-day spiritual retreat (held 20 miles north of Rome) preceded the discussions and deliberations. While most media coverage of the retreat focused on the controversial comments of the designated retreat master, Dominican Fr Timothy Radcliffe, De Urquidí highlighted the value of time for communal prayer, silent reflection and simply the opportunity to get to know some of the other 450 or so synod participants before the assembly began.

That emphasis on prayer has continued — not just with ample opportunities for liturgical and devotional prayer outside of Paul



VI Hall, but within the synod assembly itself. Each day's work not only begins with morning prayer at 8.45am, but is punctuated by prayerful moments throughout the proceedings. For

instance, De Urquidí shared that during small-group discussions, members pause for multiple minutes of silent prayer after every few contributions.

The lay member quipped that

the synod "wastes" two hours of prayer every day — an intentional focus on listening to God that he believes could make a big difference.

"If we continue this way, I am hopeful healing inside of the Church, real communion, can in fact be reached," he said.

While prayer gives participants the opportunity to listen to God, De Urquidí says another synod feature has helped the 365 voting members listen to each other: the "conversation in the Spirit" methodology guiding discussions in the synod's 35 small groups.

Born into a charismatic community in Mexico founded by his parents, and currently a part of three small groups back home in Dallas, De Urquidí is no stranger to the experience of sitting in a circle with others and discussing important topics. But he says that

the conversation-in-the-Spirit method helps avoid some of the pitfalls common in this kind of setting — such as the conversation being dominated by the loudest voices, or missing the contributions of more reserved members.

Instead, he says the conversation-in-the-Spirit methodology allows for each member at the table to contribute equally. Members take turns sharing their reflections on the topic at hand, and then each individual has a chance to comment on what "burned in their heart" as they listened to the contributions of others — either because it resonated with them or because they found it troubling.

Members also get to comment equally on whether they think the final report from their table accurately reflects what was shared and can ask for changes before voting to accept it.

## Opportunities for encounter

De Urquidí said the synod small-group format has allowed him to listen and learn from other Catholics from different walks of life — especially those from other parts of the world. In fact, despite Spanish being his first language, he chose to sit at an English-speaking table for the synod proceedings to get a more global experience.

During the synod's opening phase, De Urquidí was seated at a table with members from every other continent — except for the Middle East, which synod organisers have classified as its own entity.

The experience has helped him realise "how the Church is living" in different parts of the world — from contexts where the Church is experiencing a springtime, to places where per-

secution is a live and ongoing threat. Depending on participants' own local context, words like "evangelisation," "inclusion" and even "vocations crisis" can mean entirely different things.

"That's the Church in all its richness," he said. "It's always good to get out of your bubble."

Coffee breaks and other periods in between sessions also provide ample opportunity to meet and get to know other members — from high-ranking cardinals to religious sisters.

De Urquidí also talked about the importance of meeting those with very different ideas about what is needed in the Church today. In such encounters, De Urquidí says that he tries to engage to "get a sense of what they have on their minds."

## Synod's agenda?

On the question of "an agenda" at the synod, De Urquidí says that it's "safe to assume" that the different members of the synod each have their own ideas and their own hopes for what they would like to see in the Church. But in terms of some overarching "agenda" or master plan steering the direction of the synod toward predetermined

outcomes, "I haven't experienced an agenda at all on those lines," said De Urquidí, adding that he has spoken to other participants about "having our eyes and ears open" to detect things that could contradict the Church's teaching.

Rather, De Urquidí says the only overarching agenda at the synod that he has noticed is to listen to

the Holy Spirit and to the members gathered.

As for his own "agenda" at the synod, De Urquidí said he simply feels called "to be Catholic, in what that really means."

"That's why I try to engage with everyone in the Church," he said. "We are meant to be one. We have to be [Christ's] instruments for this dream and call he has of us as a Church. I take this very seriously and intentionally in my everyday life and ministry."

He also emphasised that, despite some unhelpful characterisations, this is really what being a "Synodal Church" is all about.

"When people say it's a new way of being Church — no, it's not! It's not about changing doctrine. It's being open to and listening to each other — that's it." — **By Jonathan Liedl, Register**



Delegates during the Synod on Synodality. (NCR photo/Edward Pentin)



# A communion that radiates

Asia is the world's largest continent by land area and population and is diverse in its geography, demography, and political systems. Asia also has diverse cultures, religions, languages, and ethnicities. It is the birthplace and cradle of major world religions like Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shintoism, and others.

Though the systems of beliefs, values, and symbols vary from place to place, the human community's interconnectedness draws the churches and the Asian peoples together. The Asian importance of being relational (with God, self, other human beings, and the cosmos), a characteristic of a synodal church, brings with it the unity of the human family and the unity of the peoples of Asia.

Except for the Philippines and Timor Leste, Christianity remains a small minority in most parts of Asia. However, the vibrancy and richness of the individual traditions and cultures bring joy and life to the Church.

Among the four billion people in Asia, the Catholic Church comprises only 3.31 per cent of the population. Some may see us as small and insignificant, but we consider ourselves as unique and valuable parts of not just the Church, but also building and transforming human society. In many parts of Asia, the Church takes the lead in the service of integral human development and the common good, especially in the fields of education, healthcare, and reaching out to the poor and marginalised groups in society beyond the boundaries of our churches.

While some may consider the Church as only a drop in the vast ocean, her ripples are far-reaching. Synodality for Asia is more than the Church existing for herself, she exists for the sake of all. In a pluralistic Asian society, the Church seeks to continue spreading the Gospel message despite

Synodality for Asia is more than the Church existing for herself but for the sake of all. In a pluralistic Asian society, the Church seeks to continue spreading the gospel despite the challenges. Fr Dr Clarence Devadass, one of our Malaysian delegates at the Synod Assembly, spoke on 'How can we be more fully a sign and instrument of union with God and the unity of all humanity' from an Asian perspective.

the challenges. How can we be more fully a sign and instrument of union with God and the unity of all humanity?

The diversity of religions in Asia makes engaging in various forms of dialogue compelling to build peace, reconciliation, and harmony. We share many experiences of fruitful engagement with other Christians, persons of other religions and traditions, including indigenous spiritualities, and with the society as a whole. In formal and informal settings, dialogue towards peacebuilding, reconciliation, and harmony must permeate every aspect of the Church's life in Asia.

Some have expressed reservations about these dialogues for various reasons, including mistrust and suspicion regarding the motives for such dialogues. Nevertheless, for unity in humanity, Churches in many parts of Asia play a pivotal

role in building bridges for peace, harmony, reconciliation, and even justice and freedom.

In the context that we live in, the Church in Asia cannot be self-referential and, therefore, seeks to engage in renewing the world. Our union with God spurs us to be the light and salt of the earth. One way has been to build Basic Ecclesial Communities, BECs (in some places known as Small Christian Communities or Basic Human Communities). They bring about not only spiritual transformation but also social transformation. They have been the beacons of hope for Gospel witnessing in society. The BECs become a leaven of Christian life, caring for the poor, and committing to transforming society through a



Fr Dr Clarence Devadass speaking during the reflections on Module B-1 of the Instrumentum Laboris on October 9, 2023 at Paul VI Hall. Fr Dr Clarence was also elected as a member of the Commission for the Synthesis Report. The Commission will supervise and oversee the drafting of a "synthesis report" that will sum up what was discussed during the confidential conversations and speeches during the 2023 October assembly. The task of the Commission is not to write, but of periodically supervising, amending, and approving the preparation of the draft that will be published at the conclusion of this first Synod on Synodality assembly. (HERALD pic courtesy of Fr Dr Clarence Devadass)

lived Gospel experience. These communities demonstrate a communion that radiates to Christians and non-Christians alike. They are our visible signs of a synodal Church that is relevant and, at the same time, relational.

Dialogue, *ad intra* and *ad extra* remains an integral characteristic of the Church in Asia in a continent as diverse as ours. While bridge-building and reconciliation efforts are ongoing, we also experience increasing religious and social intolerance, leading to persecution, worsening conditions of people's lives, and even threats to human life. Amid opportunities and challenges, these persecuted Churches remain faithful to God in new and creative ways. Despite living in a minority and sometimes harsh conditions, the Churches of Asia see hope for the future and strive to be authentic expressions of communion, participation, and mission — for a synodal Church. — *Vatican News*

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## Synod guest shares how process reduces anger, builds community

Luca Casarini (*pic*), a long-time and well-known Italian activist, is a special guest at the assembly of the Synod of Bishops; he's encouraged to speak, but has no vote. And he said he is learning a lot.

Joining the synod briefing for journalists October 11, Casarini was asked about his past — his arrest for involvement in the violent protests during the G8 Summit in Genoa, Italy, in 2001 and the Italian government's current investigation of him for promoting illegal immigration by rescuing migrants at sea.

"I can respond by saying that in the Gospels, Jesus welcomes publicans and prostitutes. He goes in search of sinners," Casarini said. He was found not guilty of the 2001 charges, he added, and does not believe it is a crime to rescue people at risk of drowning.

Migration figured prominently in the preparation for the synod, and it was a key issue in the assembly's speeches and group discussions Oct 10-11, officials said. Other topics included the tension between welcoming LGBTQ people and affirming Church teaching, promoting Christian unity, valuing the Eastern Catholic churches, responding to



the clerical sexual abuse crisis, ensuring women are not treated like "second-class" citizens in the Church and a host of other issues connected to promoting communion in the Church and unity in the world.

Paolo Ruffini, prefect of the Dicastery for Communication, told reporters he felt no "polarization" in the synod discussions, although clearly members had different opinions on many of the topics covered.

Casarini is a controversial figure in Italy, and his participation in the synod was surprising to some. One journalist asked him how he handled being in the synod with people from countries that claim they are Christian, but oppose opening more routes for legal immigration. He also was asked if he was comfortable with all the praying and protocol and moments of silence at the synod.

"Well, first of all, I really consider all those who are present at the synod my brothers and sisters," he responded. "I am learning to transform my anger, my resentment, into pity or something else because it is something I want to do for myself. The time of resentment and hatred is over."

"The secret that I am slowly trying to learn is how to put myself in another's shoes," Casarini said.

The attempt, he said, is having "crazy" results, "like the fact that I'm at the synod. It's crazy."

As for being in such a formal, religious environment, Casarini said he is especially enjoying the moments of silence, "but I always feel out of place and inadequate in every situation."

Ruffini told reporters that a small group of poor people joined Pope Francis for lunch Oct 10 at his residence, forming a new synod "small group." When asked what they wanted from the synod, he said, they replied, "Love, only love."

On the question of how the Church can be more welcoming to those who feel excluded, including LGBTQ Catholics and the divorced and civilly remarried, Ruffini said synod members had obvious differences when it came to their points of emphasis.

He said one point made repeatedly, though, was that "love and truth always go together." It follows that pastoral outreach to people who feel excluded cannot ignore Church teaching on marriage and sexuality, but Christianity never teaches "truth without love," he said.

At least one synod member, he said, asked

for further discernment by the Church on the topic of sexual identity while "others said that was not necessary."

"Everyone, almost, who intervened, said every form of homophobia must be refuted," Ruffini added.

Canadian Cardinal Gérald Lacroix of Québec told reporters that the synod was not called to change the Church's doctrine, but to find better ways "to walk together, to listen together, to discern together" so the Church can respond to the "big questions" that Catholics are facing in their real lives.

The synod cannot function, he said, if each member simply presents what he or she thinks about a certain topic and is not willing to listen to the others.

"But if I am able to express what I think, and listen to the other, and another, and another, and after listening, maybe I will change a little what I think, or maybe the others will change what they think," then some movement happens, Lacroix said.

"It's about having this humility not to think I alone have the truth and the right point of view," he said. "We seek together. In the light of the Spirit and the Word of God," slowly "we find convergences, we end up finding a path that helps us move forward," he said. —

By Cindy Wooden, CNS/NCR



# Singing is praying twice

Christians sing in Praise and Worship. Christians have hymns and songs of praise, thanksgiving, adoration and worship. Why is this so? The best answer I learned points to the Old Testament when King David sang his Song of Praise after winning his battle (2 Sam 22), and the song of triumph by Moses and the children of Israel after their deliverance from the Egyptians at the Red Sea (Ex. 15:1-19).

It was their way of expressing thanks and appreciation to God. This tradition of singing and songs of praise and thanks are found throughout the Old and New Testaments, and down through Church history, especially during the times of persecution when the early Christians sang triumphantly as they were led to their death.

Christian churches all over the world sing in worship. Most, if not all, Catholic churches in Malaysia have one or more choir groups in their parishes. This is the most common point of entry for anyone who wishes to join, participate or be involved in the church. Church music and church choir has helped draw many people — young and old — back to church. Music makes us happy, joyful and sometimes relaxes us. Christian songs inspire, invigorate and uplift us when we feel down. Christian hymns may be sung, hummed or used for reflections.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC #1156) says “The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art. It forms a necessary or integral part of solemn liturgy. The Church continues and devel-



## REMINISCING CHURCH

Richard Chia

ops this tradition. He who sings prays twice”.

The church choir is an integral part of our Catholic worship. It falls under the Liturgical Ministry of the parish, and carries an important role in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. For anyone who has ever attended Mass without the presence of a choir or an organist, they may feel somewhat different. The singing of hymns helps create the solemnity, the joyfulness or the glorious atmosphere for the Catholic liturgical seasons.

Yet, how many of us church-goers seldom pause a moment to think about the people who make the singing in church possible? The choir members, the choir conductor, the pianist or the organists, the other musicians. These are our unsung heroes that are mainly volunteers who have committed their time and talents every week, including on holy days of obligation and feast days, to be present in church for practice, and at every Mass.

For many, singing in church brings them closer to God and to the people of God (the Church). It creates a community, a fellowship and bond with our fellow choir mates. The commitment to attend choir practices, the singing of spiritual songs and to be in church on time every week has done wonders for the development of a person's spiritual life. In

some cases, involvement in the church choir has also given life to their professional singing career. I know of at least four local celebrities who started their professional singing careers from the church choir.

Singing in the church choir builds character, discipline and commitment. It makes the person confident and helps to develop the individual's vocal chords. Some will move on to cantoring in church, and perhaps participate in concerts and musicals, be it in church or elsewhere. The rigorous week-in, week-out practices does wonders for a person's personal life as well.

In some parishes, members of the music or liturgical ministry are required to attend liturgical formations so as to better understand and appreciate the songs they sing and the selection of hymns. The official Catholic hymnal of the Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei region *Sing Your Praise To God* (SYPG) edition 2021, which was introduced by the Episcopal Regional Liturgy Commission (ERLC) on June 8, 2022 assists the faithful to better sing and worship God in spirit and in truth at every Mass, and to sing with joy this source and summit of our Christian lives”. (HERALD, Sep 17, 2022)

For the musically inclined, the new SYPG includes music scores to ensure the tempo, tune, pitch and rhythms are preserved. Back in the 1980s and before, people mostly memorised the tune and sang from reading the lyrics only. Even today, we see many “oldies” sing from memory when popular hymns are sung at Mass. There were no minus one, ipod, itune, YouTube, smartphones to assist with

the singing. We sang from the heart.

After the 1976 *Aggiornamento* in Peninsular Malaysia, many of the churches introduced electronic and electric instruments — organs, pianos, guitars — and newer sound systems, speakers and sound mixers, to replace the pipe organs used in some of the older churches built during the colonial days. This revival brought in youth involvement, livelier music, participation by the lay faithful and thus better appreciation of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

From the late 1980s onwards, several liturgical formations, particularly on sacred music, were conducted for the liturgical groups in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur. Combined choirs from various parishes were formed during special diocesan events — e.g. during the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur's Golden anniversary in 2005, the Marian Rally in 2013, Archbishop Julian Leow's episcopal ordination in 2014, elevation of the First Malaysian Cardinal in 2016, etc. Choirs from the four language groups — English, BM, Chinese and Tamil — worked together for many weeks to create a truly harmonious celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

Church music, Christian songs and hymns will always be an integral part of our Christian life. Singing soothes, calms and puts us in touch with God. It gives us strength. It gives us hope. It gives us joy.

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

**The government is planning to re-introduce the National Service Training Programme (PLKN) 3.0. FRANCISCO PIER PNG shares his experiences of the programme.**

In 2013, I found myself donning a uniform, boots, and a spirited attitude as I took part in the *Program Latihan Khidmat Negara* (PLKN). I was drafted to serve at Segari, Lumut which at that time, was under the direction of the Malaysian Navy. As a Chindian — a unique blend of Chinese and Indian heritage — from a Catholic background, I was a testament to Malaysia's rich tapestry of diversity. What unfolded during those months was an eye-opening experience, one which I hope to share with my Catholic brethren and shed light on the government's decision to reintroduce PLKN in 2024.

One of the moments that stands out is the *Wirajaya* outing. With the overarching canopy of the Malaysian jungle over us and the forest floor beneath, we were tasked with building our shelter using minimal tools. This was not a task that could be accomplished by brute strength or individual genius. It demanded collaboration, innovation, and above all, trust in our fellow Wira and Wirawati. My group, a diverse mix of ethnicities and religions, was initially struggling. But as hours ticked by, we recognised that our disagreements were leading us nowhere. That night, as we huddled together, attempting to cook with a military kit and minimal resources, the boundaries faded. We shared stories of our families, our favourite festivals, our fears, and our dreams.

It was then, under our makeshift canopy, that I realised the value of comradeship. While we were diverse in many ways, we learned to lean on each other's strengths. The resilience, the resourcefulness, the spirit, and the deep connection with nature we had as a unit — all combined to teach us a lesson. As a Chindian and a Catholic, I often found myself straddling multiple worlds. But here, at that moment, it wasn't about being a Chindian, Malay, Chi-

nese, Indian, or Bumiputera. It was about being human, about being one.

From being a regular participant, my journey took an unexpected turn when I was promoted to Ketua Keseluruhan Wira, leading 299 Wira and Wirawati of four companies. Alpha, Bravo, Charlie and Delta. (*Delta is the best by the way!*) It was a leadership role that was both challenging and rewarding. It was an affirmation that unity, regardless of one's racial or religious background, is possible. My promotion also reinforced that meritocracy, hard work, and dedication could bridge cultural gaps.

However, it would be a disservice if I painted only the rosy picture. PLKN had its challenges. The curriculum, while designed to promote unity, sometimes veered into areas of forced assimilation. There were instances where participants felt their identities were being overshadowed by a singular narrative. Some aspects of the training were seen as militaristic and rigid, which could be daunting for young individuals.

Furthermore, as with any large-scale pro-

gramme, implementation varied from camp to camp. While I was blessed with understanding instructors, some of my friends in other camps recounted tales of favouritism and biases.

### Looking Ahead: PLKN 3.0

The government's decision to reintroduce PLKN in 2024 has elicited mixed reactions. The benefits are clear: forging unity, fostering leadership skills, and creating a platform for the younger generation to understand the nation's rich cultural and religious tapestry.

In a world increasingly divided by misunderstandings and prejudice, programmes like PLKN can serve as a beacon of hope, showing that unity in diversity is not just a slogan but a lived reality. It prepares our youth to be global citizens, embracing differences with open arms.

However, it's essential that the reintroduced programme learns from past shortcomings. It must be sensitive to the pluralistic nature of Malaysian society, avoiding the pitfalls of forced assimilation or a one-size-fits-all ap-

## PLKN resonates with our faith



New friends forged across different races and backgrounds.

proach. Flexibility, understanding, and inclusivity should be at its core.

From a Catholic standpoint, the programme resonates with many teachings of our faith. We are taught to love our neighbours, understand their struggles, and be instruments of peace. The essence of PLKN, when executed with empathy and understanding, aligns well with these principles.

However, the Church also emphasises the importance of individual conscience and the respect of human dignity. It's essential that in promoting national unity, the individual identities and faiths of participants are not sidelined or suppressed.

My PLKN journey was transformative. I saw unity in action, experienced the joys of leadership, and felt the warmth of Malaysia's multi-ethnic embrace. While not without its flaws, the programme has immense potential. As the government reintroduces PLKN in 2024, I hope they strike a balance, creating a programme that not only fosters unity but celebrates the myriad identities that make Malaysia truly Asia.

However, like all grand initiatives, the PLKN has its flaws. It's essential for us to critique it constructively so that future iterations can be even more impactful. After all, unity in diversity is not just a slogan; it's a journey, one that every Malaysian must undertake in their unique way.



Francisco Png (fifth from the left) with his leadership team. Ketua-ketua Wira & Wirawati Kem PLKN Segari, Lumut (Kumpulan 1 / Siri 10)



# Commitment seminar led to religious calling

By Sophia Soo

**S**r Martina Nari Sang, SSFS celebrated her silver jubilee of religious profession at the Church of Mater Dei in Lutong, Miri, recently.

Bishop Richard Ng of Miri presided over the jubilee Mass, with four priests concelebrating. Hundreds of faithful including friends and families of the silver jubilarian gathered at the Eucharistic celebration which was followed by dinner and entertainment at the church hall.

Born on March 3, 1972, in the village of Teru, Tinjar, Baram, Sr Martina was one of 12 siblings and spent her childhood with her Iban parents. Her faith journey began when she received her Catholic baptism during her fourth year in secondary school. Upon completing her Fifth Form, Sr Martina attended a Commitment Seminar in Miri, where she believes she first heard her calling.

Sr Martina said her path to religious life was illuminated by the teachings of the New Testament, particularly the life of Jesus, who exemplified total self-giving as a sacrifice. She recounted that her school friends, who were dedicated to prayer and attending Sunday Mass regularly, further influenced her decision.

During the Commitment Seminar in Miri, hearing the song *Here I Am Lord* deeply moved her, as she vividly remembers the part where the Lord asks, "Whom shall I send?"

With tears in her eyes, she responded by singing along with the hymn, "Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard You calling in the night. I will go, Lord. If You lead me. I will hold Your people in my heart"

Despite the calling, Sr Martina delayed her entry into religious life and spent two years working in her village as a shop assistant and a kindergarten teacher. However, a transformative experience during a Sunday Mass reignited her sense of purpose. She said, as she gazed at the crucifix, once again she heard the call, "Whom shall I send?" Overwhelmed with emotion, she obediently answered, marking the beginning of her journey as a religious sister.

In 1993, Sr Martina made her official commitment to the Order of the Sisters of St Francis of Sarawak (SSFS). Following a demanding five-year period of formation, she celebrated her First Profession on June 20, 1998. Then, on August 1, 2005, she achieved a significant milestone in her religious journey when she made her Final Profession, and received her ring.

Since that pivotal point in her life, Sr Martina has remained unwaveringly dedicated to her faith and her mission. She continues to be profoundly drawn to the SSFS, highlighting the spiritual legacy of its founder, St. Francis of Assisi, and the Franciscan way of life. This way of life includes a commitment to the vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience, all within the supportive embrace



Sr Martina Nari Sang SSFS at the Children's Christmas Party 2022.

of a close-knit community.

Today, as a full-time catechist at St Joseph's Cathedral in Miri, Sr Martina dedicates herself to spreading the Word of God and supporting the faith formation of others. Her compassion extends to visiting families in need and members of the deaf community, with whom she communicates using sign language.

Within her community, Sr Martina serves as a faith animator, helping to nurture and strengthen the faith of those around her. In her leisure time, she enjoys hiking, sharing meals with friends and community members, and

engaging in heartfelt conversations about life experiences and faith.

When asked about advice for those considering religious life, Sr Martina urged individuals to be grateful for the gift of life and to cherish every experience as part of their earthly pilgrimage. She emphasised that God is always present and loves everyone. A religious vocation, she noted, is a divine calling, and individuals should consider it as an opportunity to serve in God's vineyard, echoing the question, "Whom shall I send? Your turn to answer now." — *Today's Catholic*

## German congregation celebrates 50 years in India

**T**he Medical Sisters of St Francis of Assisi celebrated their 50 years of presence in India on October 7 at their first Indian house at Pithora in Raipur Archdiocese of Chhattisgarh.

Thanking them for their presence and services, Archbishop Victor Henry Thakur of Raipur, the main celebrant of their Golden Jubilee celebrations, remarked, "Pithora is your Bethlehem, your birthplace... We can see the Church and the people's development due to your presence... 50 years is not our accomplishment, but God's... It is not accomplished, but accomplishing."

Their German Mother General, Margarete Ulager, who was present along with nuns from other provinces, remarked, "Those first sisters laid the invisible cornerstone for the Indian province here in Pithora, supported by so many good-hearted people. Pithora is the heartbeat of the Indian province. You have beautifully contributed to build the church. It was the work of the Holy Spirit."

The jubilee celebration was attended by their many nuns, besides a number of priests, nuns and lay people from and outside the archdiocese.

"We have a very humble origin," says their Indian Provincial, Sr Johnsy Kurisunkal.

The congregation was founded in Munster, Germany, on July 2, 1844, by Franciscan Fr Christopher Bernsmeyer.

These German nuns landed in Raipur in central India, on the invitation of the first Raipur Prefect Apostolic German Pallottine, Msgr John Weidner. The Raipur prefecture had been entrusted to the Society of the Catholic Apostolate (Pallottines) of the Southern German province in 1951, bifurcated from the neighbouring Nagpur archdiocese.

The first German nun, Sr Vulmara Hannover, reached India on January 7,



The congregation was founded in Munster, Germany, on July 2, 1844, by Franciscan Fr Christopher Bernsmeyer. (Matters India photo)

1973. Initially she stayed 68 km away in the Chhuhipali mission parish with German Catholic lay doctor Adelheid Huffer, who began the Pushpa Catholic mission hospital there.

In the following year, German Sr Gerburg Aufderheide was sent to Raipur to assist her.

But Sr Vulmara had to return to her country soon since the government refused to renew her visa.

Msgr Weidner directed these pioneer sisters to serve in Pithora mission parish, 101 km away from Raipur, the capital of present Chhattisgarh.

Initially, Sr Gerburg ran a small health centre in this rural mission and brought up abandoned babies in a low-roofed, tiled hut.

Sr Gerburg was joined in 1978 by the late German Sr Hedwig Kappelhoff, who died due to cancer in 2000. Due to visa problem, many foreign nuns came to assist them on tourist visas.

Inspired to begin their congregation in India, they began to recruit Indian girls from various regions and trained them from 1979.

It was declared a region in 1994. The Indian

province is managed by the team of native nuns since February 1998 when they appointed their first Indian member Sr Rosily Menacherry as their regional superior.

It was raised to be a province on February 2, 2013, appointing native Sr Lima Arackal as its first provincial superior.

The congregation now has 95 professed Indian nuns. Over the last 44 years, the congregation has trained the Indian nuns in various professional and religious studies.

They are serving in 17 centres in 10 Indian arch/dioceses of Raipur (Chhattisgarh), Jabalpur (Madhya Pradesh), Nagpur (Maharashtra), Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh), Bareilly (Uttarakhand), Ranchi and Hazaribagh (Jharkhand), Trivandrum, Thamarassery and Ernakulam-Angamaly (Kerala).

Two of them are serving in their General Leadership as General Vicar and General Councillor. Two of them are involved in the pastoral ministry in Kiel, Germany; three Indian nuns take care of their elderly nuns in the US and two of them are doing their ecclesiastical studies in Rome.

Following their charism, "Healing Presence", they bring "the healing presence of Christ into the lives of the needy and the abandoned children" by running schools, kindergartens, health centres, a leprosarium, visiting families and involving in socio-pastoral activities, says Sr Johnsy.

They are also planning to expand their ministries in other Indian dioceses too. But they feel the crunch in religious vocation. They are also endeavouring to be financially independent.

The international congregation has four provinces: Germany, Poland, Japan, India and a canonical house in the US. They serve in Africa, Haiti, Kazakhstan, Japan, Korea, Poland, US and Germany, besides India.

Octogenarian Sr Gerburg is enjoying her retirement at Pithora by caring for birds, animals, flower garden, their young members and their orphan kids, in the true spirit of their spiritual father St Francis of Assisi. They call her "Amma," meaning Mother. She will celebrate 50 years of her presence in India next year on January 25. — **By F.M. Britto, Matters India**



# Looking at poverty beyond statistics

We are in the Budget season again, where Malaysians carefully eye what will be in store for them in the coming year. Civil servants will be looking out for bonuses, pensioners will be looking out for special payouts, while the rest of us will be looking at what to add or subtract from our income tax brackets for the coming year, how much are the exemptions given for books, education and so on.

Of less importance to us is the allocations to the various ministries, though it does affect us. Lower allocations for **Health** means longer lines in hospitals, and maybe getting generic instead of brand drugs at the pharmacy, especially towards the end of the year.

Lower allocations for **Welfare** mean that charitable organisations, such as Church outreach ministries, may have to pick up the slack in our ration distribution and food basket programmes.

The rising cost of goods, inflation and weakening ringgit add to the difficulty in sustaining aid programmes, both by the government and welfare assistance groups.

Perhaps it is time for the focus to be on hastening the eradication of poverty rather than the alleviation of it.

B40, as a classification, will always exist. The bar of poverty needs however, to be rationalised. In Malaysia, it is technically defined by those with a lower household income of roughly RM4,900 monthly. B1, the lowest of the B40 group, or “hardcore” poor, stands at about RM1,900. Most entry level jobs in Malaysia now technically pays a B1 salary.

This is the category of poor that the present administration targets to eradicate by the year



## MAKING SENSE

Emmanuel Joseph

end, a target that seems unlikely.

A combination of issues makes eliminating poverty a tricky problem.

First, the focus on groups instead of individuals.

Successive administrations tend to look at the poor as demographics, rather than individuals, simply due to the sheer numbers.

We often hear ‘poor’ bundled with an ethnic group (Indian or Orang Asal for instance), educational background (school dropouts or technical trained students), geographical location, family conditions (such as orphans or single mothers) or even occupations, and as such, tend to tailor programmes addressing the latter, rather than the actual problem of poverty. For example, instead of addressing the root cause, we attempt to solve an issue of ‘assimilation’, or criminal association. Or with an occupation — to solve farmers’ poverty, throw more subsidies their way. But there is also a bigger proportion of successful Indians, farmers, early school leavers and so on.

The numbers also only tell half the story — B40, even B1 (the bottom 10 per cent), is a broad stroke term that tells you little more than income — not the health status, accommodation, employment status of the affected folk, nor does it fully consider the real cost of living. It is worth noting that Singapore’s B40

would qualify as an upper tier M40!

The second is the tendency of trying to classify these problems into one of two solutions — education or entrepreneurship. Often these are in the form of short-term seminars without long term follow up or impactful results. The ones that do include mentorship and guidance for the medium to long term are few and far between.

This creates a disconnect between what the helpers, often well meaning, are trying to achieve and its eventual results, if any. In the best-case scenarios, the initiatives are dovetailed by other efforts that complement it and concludes the effort started and attains its goal of lifting families out of poverty, and in the worst-case scenarios, leave them in a worse position than when they began, as the participants have expanded their own time, effort and sometimes money to participate in these programmes. Often though, they are left somewhere in between these two.

A lot can be solved by simply speaking to the ones needing the help. What do they really need, and what tools do they already have at their disposal? What can we do to help, really? An honest discussion, with honesty, and not the assisted simply telling the assisting what they think they would like to hear.

Matching a want or need in society with something that can be realistically done, reasonably well, by parties wishing to be assisted, is the most sustainable way to end a poverty circle.

In many ways, charitable organisations and religious ones, like churches, are leading the way.

Cognizant of the importance of education

in uplifting society, our Church, for example, via the many religious teaching orders, opened hundreds of schools across Malaysia. In these schools, pioneering initiatives like St Xavier’s bakery in Penang trail blazed the way for upskilling to teach students, usually from humble backgrounds, a means to provide for themselves and their families.

Some churches even organise talks for these communities on budgeting and family planning. Some religious communities, like the recently ended long term project in Port Klang by the Franciscan Missionaries of Divine Motherhood, saw near end-to-end care for underprivileged families including healthcare, education, scholarships and so on.

On a smaller scale, these same churches, and communities, via the many organisations like Parish Integral Human Development inistry or Society of St Vincent de Paul, can consider shifting focus on these programmes, even coordinating with other similar minded organisations, to offer such. This can run parallel to programmes like street feeding and food baskets.

The flexibility of self-funding and the smaller size of projects run, gives these organisations the freedom to experiment and tackle issues on a more personal, customised basis, and the higher odds of success that comes with it.

● **Emmanuel Joseph** oversees IT as his 9-5 job and from 5-9, he serves a few NGOs, think tanks and volunteer groups. He serves as an advisor for Projek Dialog and is a Fellow with the Institute of Research and Development of Policy.



## ... meanwhile

Joanne Lim

“Open this gate now!” shouts a parishioner to a **migrant guard**. Soon after, as the church was starting to fill up, another angry voice is heard, “don’t teach me how to park, you don’t even know how to drive!”; “Yuck, her singing is atrocious — the psalm was so bad. Why does she even think she can sing?” a lady in the front pew whispers to her husband. The **sacristan** too is often an easy target — whenever anything goes wrong, it’s possibly his fault. “He’s not adequately trained, he’s getting too old, let’s just make him redundant.” Never mind the countless years that he has been serving the church. All is forgotten because those “in the hot seats” call the shots on who goes and who stays. What about the **cleaners**, the hired staff who clean day in and day out to make our short stay in God’s house pleasant?

Yet these cheerful souls continue to serve the Lord, and **God loves a cheerful giver** (2 Cor 9:6) Oftentimes, these are not the ones who malign or judge you, until we really get under their skin. They are human too, lest we forget. Yet how quickly and easily people who serve in church are judged and injudiciously neglected, especially by those who have somehow assumed “high positions” in church — we can all suddenly find friends in ‘high’ places.

Look at that fellow teaching *Catechism* — who does he think he is? He’s probably leading the children astray, his life isn’t exactly spotless, eek — he even looks like a sinner! What was the parish priest even thinking?! And yet that dedicated **catechist** spends hours on a Friday night reading the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* alongside slides he had prepared a year ahead, printing worksheets, designing games and quizzes to ensure that our children are

‘engaged’ and can fully participate in the faith. He’s the one addressing the difficult issues posed by the learners, whether with LGBTQ issues or paedophilia. He’s defending the faith, like the sweeper, the cleaner and the guard — they simply make our stay pleasant.

Another catechist devotes her Saturdays to cutting up coloured papers for art and craft activities which she incorporates into her lessons...she enters the classroom with the biggest smile on her face despite bearing the trials of being a single mother and having to care for a disabled child at home, an ageing parent, worrying about the next meal and how to make ends meet. Strangely, these are the people heeding the call to serve. Jesus reminds us that tax collectors and prostitutes are making their way to Heaven; let’s really ask ourselves whether we are getting to know the right people. Like the exhausted yet dedicated **RCIA leader** who prepares the deep discourses to present to adults who are seeking to convert — he is indeed obeying the command of Jesus to share the Good News.

We learn so much when we stop to reflect on what really goes into “giving our best to the Lord” through the work (and lives) of these people. There’s the **old choir leader**, with no professional music background — she meditates on the readings before selecting the hymns that best reflect the message of the week. Sometimes she must work along the constraints of music equipment and sound systems, a faulty mixer, old microphones, but she tries and people like her deliver, every time! They dress up, stand up and show up, for you and me, whether it’s for a funeral or a wedding. The **cantor**, despite having sung in the choir for over 20 years, continues to have sweaty palms and mild palpitations each time she hears the end of the First Reading — as she approaches the lectern, she silently prays... “O Lord, please use me as your instrument to touch the hearts

of your people present here today through this psalm...” The **choir members** and musicians spend hours practising (try learning a new tune at the age of 65!), some playing the songs on repeat at home for an entire week just to ‘get it right’. And while they come with their gifts for Mass, they also bring with them their brokenness, their sicknesses, their past hurts. Yet it seldom shows. God comes first, always. He will heal the brokenness, the sicknesses, the hurts...in His time. Have we stopped to ‘hear their brokenness’...it has a story too.

When was the last time we stopped to speak to an **altar server**? Every foot that steps forward, every gesture, every action is calculated — there is a rhythm and beat to follow in ensuring they exude a reverence throughout the Mass. “What if I drop the ciborium, or trip on my vestment? What if the thurible carrying the incense tips over and coal is strewn all over the altar?” The anxiety is real. And yet they remain calm and composed...guided always by the Lord, trusting that it is okay to make mistakes...God allows it. In an age where children face so much competition to outperform at school in studies and extracurricular activities (the endless pursuit for PAJSK marks for those in public schools), these young boys (and now girls) spend their weekends practising, to serve the Lord as best as they can. What about the friendly **hospitality ministers** who greet us — are they the only ones who are supposed to smile and reach out? Can we participate in the **Society of St Vincent de Paul** activities at our parish or is our contribution limited to paying toward the weekly collection?

Do you know an **altar lady** in church? She drove all the way to town at 6.00am this morning to select the freshest flowers that arrived from Cameron Highlands and at wholesale price just to save the church some money. She was pricked by quite a few thorns while arranging the large bouquets of flowers, and yet she

returned home past midnight on a Friday filled with immense joy and warmth in her heart, knowing that she has done her part to beautify the church for the weekend.

At almost every Mass, these ministries plead for parishioners to join them as catechists, altar servers, singers and musicians, altar ladies, commentators, lectors...we will never be “ready”, and there will never be a “right time” for now is the time... if we’re waiting for God’s voice or a text message from Heaven to invite us to serve, it was indeed in the announcement you heard, or from a casual chat with a friend who simply said “come join us next week”.

**COME** just as you are, with all your inhibitions, your sorrows, your anxieties, your sins, your brokenness, and just give it all to the Lord. All of Scripture teaches us that *God oftentimes calls the unqualified as he qualifies them later*.

There is so much we can do online, the vineyard is plenty, the workers are few. Publications like **HERALD** and **CANews** need you if you are willing to volunteer; so too with other mission fields like **AOHD** and the like. Maybe you are waiting for the ‘big call’. Let’s remember what St Theresa of Calcutta said: “to do small things with great love” and God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. (2 Corinthians 9:6-8)

...meanwhile, perhaps we fear the ridicules, the insults, the judgements, the sacrifices we have to make, or the most common of all, that we are simply inadequate to serve. Let God be the judge, everything else matters not. He knows who to draw to Himself and He ALONE knows our fullest potential. **Indeed, happy are those who serve the Lord!**

● **Professor Joanne Lim** shares the faith in *Catechism* and music in Church. She is Deputy Dean and lectures on media and society at the University of Nottingham Malaysia.





Fr Ron Rolheiser

# Our lifestyle and our over-strained planet

In a book, *The Book of Hope*, which he co-authored with Jane Goodall, Douglas Abrams makes this statement: *Creating the human race may be the single biggest mistake evolution ever made.*

He says this tongue-in-cheek, since he recognises that the emergence of the human race was clearly intended by the evolutionary process and that rather than being a colossal mistake, it is the apex of the process. Nonetheless, today, the human race is a huge threat to planet earth. Simply put, there are now over seven billion people on the planet and already in many places we have used up nature's limited resources faster than nature can replace them. By the year 2050, there will probably be ten billion of us. If we carry on with business as usual, the planet simply cannot sustain us, at least if we continue in our present lifestyle.

And the lifestyle referred to here is not, first of all, the lavish lifestyle of the rich who can be reckless and consume more than their share of resources. They, of course, contribute to the problem and unduly influence the rest of us in our own habits of consumption; but, the lifestyle referred to here is what you and I, conscientious consumers, are living, even as we conserve, recycle, compost, drive electric cars, and try to live simply.

I can take myself as an example. I'm trying to be sensitive to what my own consumption is doing to mother earth. By comparison to those who have a luxurious lifestyle, I can claim to live pretty simply. I don't buy what I don't need, have a very small wardrobe, and am cautious about the amount of electricity and water I use. I drive a second-hand compact car and try to drive it only when necessary. I help assure that the thermostat in our house is set so as to ensure the minimal use of electrical energy, and I live in a relatively small house, recycle, and try to use as little plastic as possible.

But, on the other hand, I have two computers, a desktop in my office and a laptop at home. I have a handphone which, through the years, has had to be updated four different times in terms of buying a new model and junking the old one. I shower daily and, depending upon physical work and exercise, sometimes take a second shower. I drive a car. I get on an aeroplane at least once a month for conferences and meetings and I fly internationally several times a year to visit family. I don't have a lot of clothes, but my ministry and work require a certain standard of dress (which I meet minimally).

I think I can claim a simple lifestyle, given where I live and the work I do.

However, realistically, if all seven (plus) billion people in the world lived as I do, there wouldn't be enough resources to sustain us. Bottomline, the world cannot support eight billion people if everyone lives as I do, and as most of us do in the more affluent parts of our world. What's the answer?

We can lay a guilt trip on ourselves and on others, though this isn't necessarily helpful. What can be helpful? There's no easy answer. Those of us living in the more affluent parts of our world can make changes, but can we simply stop using computers and mobile phones? We can conserve water, but can we abandon our present standards of hygiene? We can conserve electricity, but can we simply stop driving our cars and darken all our city buildings at night? We can be more scrupulous on how much we travel on aeroplanes, but can we live without aeroplane travel? We can cut back on what we buy in terms of excess food, excess clothing, and excess luxuries and entertainment. We can recycle, compost, and not use plastic bags — and all of this, cumulatively, will make a difference. Indeed, all of this needs to be done. However, helpful though this is, it alone will not solve the problem.

For Jane Goodall, beyond these individual things, we need to do some collec-

tive things to solve the existential threat to this planet. Goodall names three: First, we must alleviate poverty. If there are people living in crippling poverty, it is understandable that they will cut down the last tree to grow food or catch the last fish because they are desperate to feed their families. Second, we must eliminate government corruption and corporate greed. Without good government and concern for the common good in business, it is impossible to solve our enormous social and environmental problems. Moreover, those who, for their own benefit refuse to face the problem, will go on unchallenged. Finally, collectively too, we must realistically face up to the tension between our lifestyle and the ever-growing population on this planet.

Thoughtless consumers are part of the problem — but so are the rest of us, me included, who fancy ourselves as living simply.

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

## ENVIRONMENT

# Pope Francis' urgent plea



**Making a Difference**  
Tony Magliano

Reflecting on the worsening climate change crisis in the eight years since he wrote his environmental encyclical letter *Laudato Si'* — concerning the urgent importance of caring for our common earth-home — Pope Francis laments, "I have realised that our responses have not been adequate, while the world in which we live in is collapsing and may be nearing breaking point."

And so instead of understandably giving up in frustration and saying to himself "I have done all I can do. Government leaders, corporate CEOs, and most people are not listening — not listening to me, not listening to our wounded earth, not listening to the suffering masses of humanity, and not listening to the Creator." CEOs, and most people, are not listening — our indomitable Pope Francis puts pen to paper and writes a bold sequel to his earlier environmental encyclical, this time titling it *Laudate Deum* (Praise God), addressed to "all people of good will on the climate crisis."

Purposefully released on October 4, the feast day of St Francis of Assisi, patron saint of ecology, *Laudate Deum* boldly, even bluntly, challenges all of us to get out of our comfort zones to make the necessary government, corporate, ecclesial, and individual changes required to save the

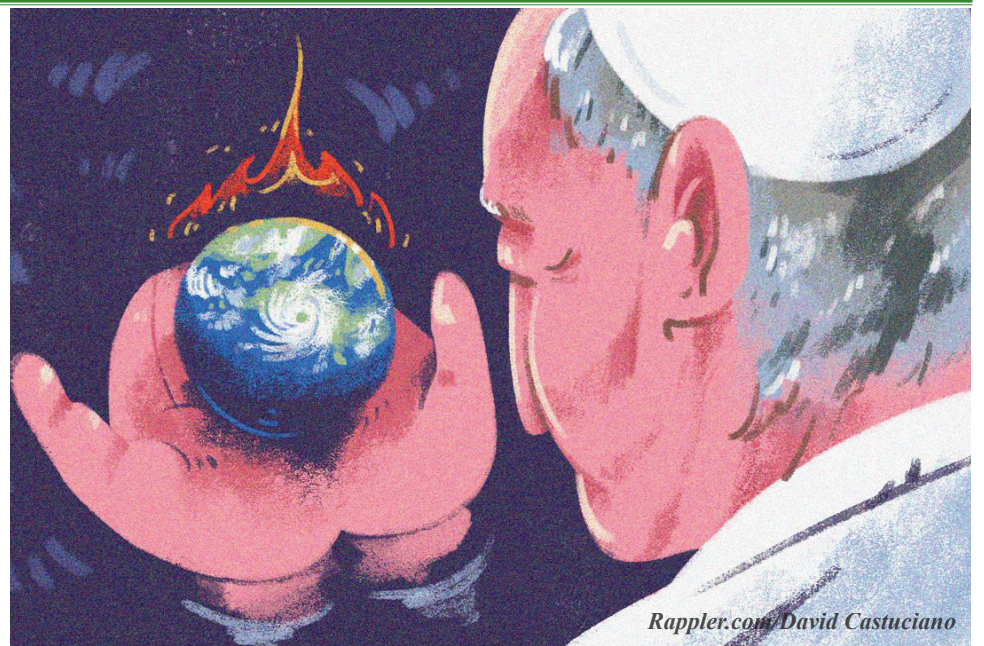
earth, the vulnerable, and future generations from catastrophic ruin.

Clearly challenging the position of climate change deniers, Pope Francis writes, "Despite all attempts to deny, conceal, gloss over or relativise the issue, the signs of climate change are here and increasingly evident. No one can ignore the fact, that in recent years, we have witnessed extreme weather phenomena, frequent periods of unusual heat, drought, and other cries of protest on the part of the earth that are only a few palpable expressions of a silent disease that affects everyone."

Some charge the Holy Father with speaking outside the realm of his spiritual authority, saying he is not a climatologist. This sort of objection is nothing more than a red herring, designed to distract us from the objective scientific evidence that modern highly accelerated climate change is real, and is overwhelmingly due to human activity — mainly the burning of the fossil fuels coal, gas, and oil. See NASA's website "How do we know climate change is real?" (<https://climate.nasa.gov/evidence/>).

Supporting the fact that the pontiff has done his scientific homework, Italian physicist, Giorgio Parisi, winner of the 2021 Nobel Prize in Physics, said it is significant that Pope Francis begins this apostolic exhortation with "a striking list of scientific facts."

Pope Francis continues *Laudate Deum*'s prophetic challenge by defending poor people and poor nations who have contributed the least to climate change and its resultant global warming, but have suffered the most from the wealthier industrialised nations' high use of oil, gas,



Rappler.com/David Castuciano

## on behalf of planet Earth

and coal.

He writes, "The reality is that a low, richer percentage of the planet contaminates more than the poorest 50 per cent of the total world population, and that per capita emissions of the richer countries are much greater than those of the poorer ones. How can we forget that Africa, home to more than half of the world's poorest people, is responsible for a minimal portion of historic emissions?"

"The necessary transition towards clean energy sources such as wind and solar energy, and the abandonment of fossil fuels, is not progressing at the necessary speed," warns the Pope.

I hope this short column has whet your appetite to want to read the Holy Father's prophetic apostolic exhortation *Laudate Deum*. It will inspire and motivate you!

Here's the link <https://bit.ly/45mk44f>.

From the Bible's first book of Genesis to Pope Francis' *Laudate Deum* ("Praise God"), it is crystal clear that God has a wonderful plan for humanity and all of creation. But when we think and act in ways contrary to the Creator's plan, we sooner or later bring sadness and even catastrophe upon ourselves.

The Holy Father concludes his apostolic exhortation with this wake-up call: "Praise God" is the title of this letter. For when human beings claim to take God's place, they become their own worst enemies."

● **Tony Magliano** is an internationally syndicated Catholic social justice and peace columnist. He can be reached at [tmag6@comcast.net](mailto:tmag6@comcast.net).



# Little Catholics' Corner

Hello children of God,

The Pharisees in today's Gospel reading were trying to trick Jesus and make Him say something wrong. They asked Him whether they should pay taxes to the pagan emperor. If He said no then He would be speaking against the emperor, but if He said yes then it would seem like He was saying that it was good for the Jews to be ruled by the pagan Romans.

But Jesus knew what the Pharisees were trying to do. He told them to show Him a coin, and asked them whose picture was on it. They said it was Caesar's (the Roman emperor) so Jesus told them, "Then pay to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." He was telling them that they should obey the rulers of the land, but also that they should obey God.

We have two kinds of laws: God's laws and the laws of our governments. Both are for our own good, but God's laws are more important. We should obey the government's laws as long as they agree with God's laws, but we must always obey God's laws. Can you think of some laws that the government makes that are for our good?

Love Aunty Gwen

Draw pictures of things you need, want and must-have in the boxes below.

needs

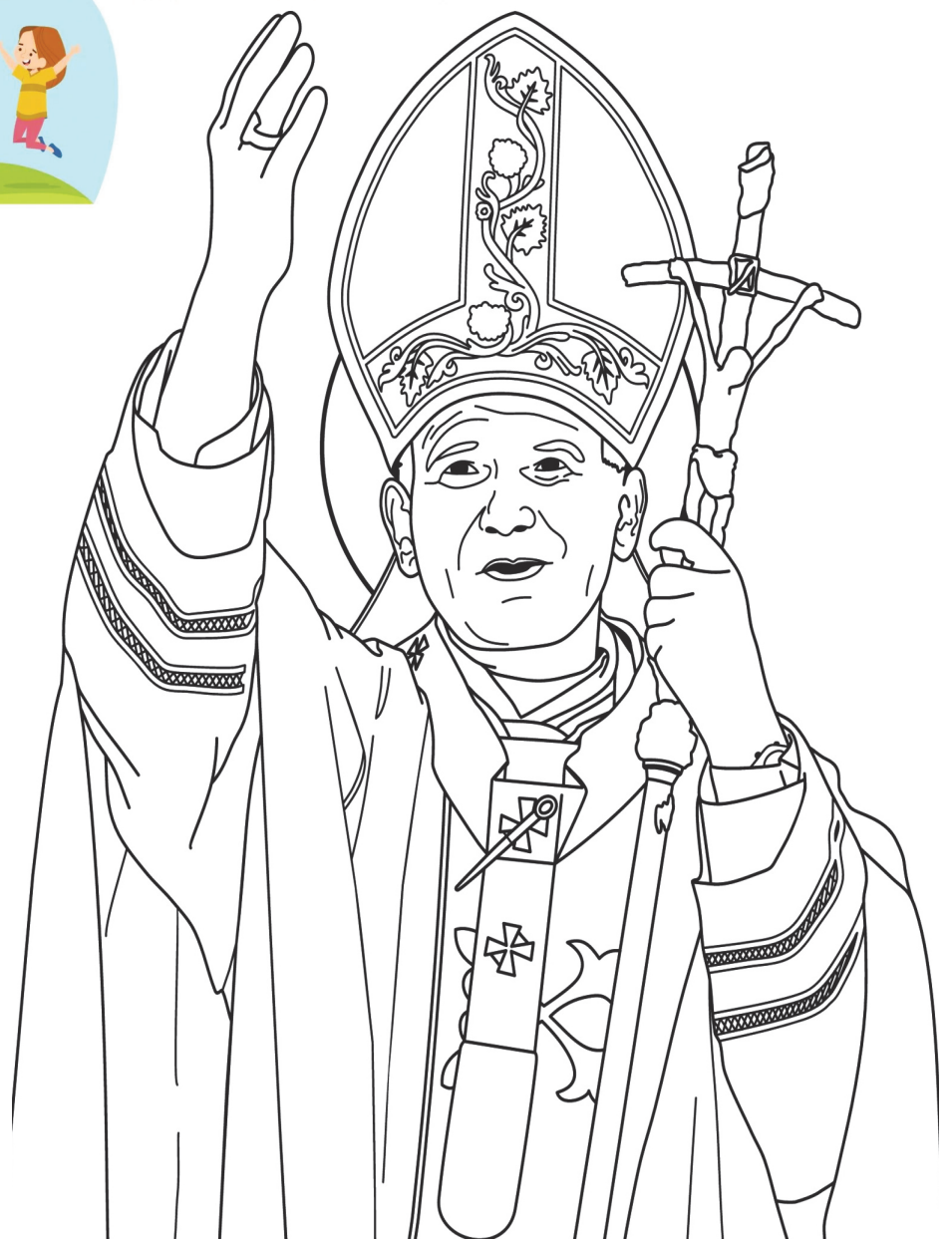
wants

MUST-HAVES



## TAXES FOR CAESAR

Spot 8 differences between the two pictures.



Polish national St John Paul II was the head of the Catholic Church from October 16, 1978 until his death on April 2, 2005.

Born Karol Józef Wojtyła, his feast day is on Oct 22.

He spoke 15 languages, was the first non-Italian pope in 455 years and the second longest-serving in history.

He was also the first pope to visit the White House, and a mosque.

He travelled to 129 countries during his papacy, more than any other pope before him.

He is famous for starting the recurring World Youth Day in 1985.

St John Paul II is the patron saint of Young Catholics, World Youth Day, Poland and families.



# YOUTH

OCTOBER 22, 2023

## FANNING THE FLAMES OF FAITH IN THE YOUTH

**B**UKIT MERTAJAM: The Islanders' Tamil Youth Network (ITYN) embarked on a spiritual journey with its day camp, *Ablaze*. Held from September 30 to October 1, it was coordinated by Alvinus Bryan, Rina Domani, Linda Shalini, and the team. This 24-hour programme saw the enthusiastic participation of approximately 130 youth coming from 16 parishes, transforming it into a spiritually enriching experience.

The inaugural event commenced with a heart-warming welcoming session, where parish representatives came forward, bearing a cross, a Bible, and candles, as symbols of unity and faith. This gesture set the tone for the spiritually charged day ahead.

Subsequently, the youth gathered for Mass celebrated by Fr Raymond Raj and animated by volunteers from various parishes. In his homily, Fr Raymond underscored the pivotal role of the Holy Spirit in our lives, delivering a profound message that resonated deeply with all in attendance.

The day continued with an illuminating session held at the auditorium. ITYN advisor, Simon Joseph, led this session, focus-

ing primarily on igniting the spiritual flames within, aligning with the over-arching theme of *Ablaze*.

A key highlight of the event was the immersive experience of the "Way of the Cross" around the Minor Basilica. This unique concept was born from the inspiration of several volunteers who attended the recent World Youth Day in Lisbon. Their goal was to provide participants with a similar transformative experience.

The Way of the Cross text was carefully translated into Tamil. The journey featured three altar servers, six Roman soldiers, three High Priests and three Youth Cross bearers leading the youths through each station, culminating at the 11th station. The 12th to 14th stations were at the church porch, where the attendees bore witness to a live re-enactment of the Passion play.

The Passion play concluded with a moving liturgical dance, allowing participants to express their emotions, seek repentance, and return to Jesus. Symbolising the welcoming of the Holy Spirit, four pigeons were released as Jesus was carried away, ushering in a period of high worship.

Following this worship, a Taize session, led by the Music Ministry, enriched the evening, culminating at midnight with Eucharistic Adoration (similar to WYD 2023) and Benediction, conducted by Fr Nelson Joseph.



Passion Play

The following day, the camp came to a close with a reflective session led by the Taiping Catholic Church Parish Youth Council leader, Joshua Joel. The participants shared the impact they experienced during the one-day event.

The day ended on a celebratory note with two uplifting songs and the programme's theme song *Akkiniyaai Iranggiduvaar*. Participants then gathered for lunch and took group photos, cherishing the memories of a spiritually charged weekend.

The weekend proved to be a blessed and spiritually transformative experience for all involved. Despite its brevity, it left a profoundly positive impact on participants, organisers, and volunteers alike. The sight of volunteers from various parishes within the diocese working tirelessly exemplified the inclusiveness encouraged by Pope Francis. As we look to the future, we hope for more spiritually enriching camps that will continue to ignite the flames of faith within our Tamil-speaking youth. — *By ITYN*



Way of the Cross



Adoration



World Youth Day volunteers



# Finish what you start

MELAKA: The Church of St Francis Xavier (SFX) celebrated the conferment of the Sacrament of Confirmation recently for 17 students.

As the church is undergoing major renovations, the celebration was held at the Chapel of the Infant Jesus, Infant Jesus Convent, Bandar Hilir. Prior to that, the parents and students thoroughly cleaned up the chapel, transforming it into a clean and beautifully decorated house of worship.

Bishop Bernard Paul presided over the Mass, with SFX parish priest, Fr Moses Rayappan and assistant priest, Fr Alexuchelvam Mariasosai, concelebrating.

The prelate, in his homily, shared some vital insights for the confirmands. He stressed the importance of being “rocks and not lalang”. He reminded them that the Holy Spirit can be seen, heard, felt, touched and dialogued with. What is now started must be finished, just as when we put our hand on the



*Bishop Bernard Paul prays over the confirmand.*

plough, we cannot turn back.

After Mass, newly confirmed Joel commented, “Being confirmed means I am giving my heart and soul to Jesus. Raelynn said, “Confirmation is a sacred gift God gives His children and to receive this gift is an ultimate blessing for me”.

Erishaa commented, “It’s making me gain faith in God and helps me grow spiritually/mentally as a person”.

The celebration concluded with a fellowship meal after which Fr Moses presented the Confirmation certificates to each student.

Some of the activities the students participated in during the two years of preparation and formation included a food sale to raise funds for the church, a visit to a home that caters to people with special needs, and a retreat cum camp with formator Martin Jalleh.

— *By Teresa Fernandez*



## BK TRAINING WORKSHOP ENLIGHTENS STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

CHERAS: The Church of St. Francis of Assisi (SFA) played host to an enriching Bible Knowledge (BK) Training Workshop, drawing the participation of 23 teachers and 36 students from various churches across the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.

The workshop featured three experienced presenters and members of the Teachers Christian Fellowship, Malaysia. They were retired school principal Tan Heng Chan who was part of the National SPM BK Quiz I Team and SPM BK Project Coordinating Team, retired Maths teacher from Temerloh, Tay Bee

Lian who teaches Bible Knowledge online for Form Three and Four students and retired English Language teacher from Kuala Lumpur, Satkunamary Gnanakkan, who teaches Bible Knowledge and runs the National SPM Bible Knowledge Quiz. They each brought a unique perspective to the table.

The training workshop started with SFA’s parish priest Fr Paul Cheong, OFM Cap saying the opening prayer before touching on the importance of Bible Knowledge. Fr Paul emphasised cultivating the eight habits of SFA where Habit No 2, daily Bible reading, is a

discipline that will help us to grow deeper in our relationship with God.

The programme consisted of three workshops:

- 1) Tips and Techniques to learn and answer BK questions,
- 2) Answering practice for students to get familiar with the SPM BK Format,
- 3) Marking techniques and marking practices for teachers.

The presenters were able to use students’ answers as examples to offer valuable insights and tips for addressing questions. Students were given hands-on practice in answering SPM BK questions while the teachers were guided on how to apply the marking schemes provided. Additionally, students were allowed to engage in revision exercises and classroom activities to reinforce their understanding. The workshop concluded with a closing prayer led by Fr Paul, followed by a gesture of gratitude with tokens presented to the facilitators before the customary group photograph. In summary, the workshop received a positive reception from both students and teachers.

### STUDENTS’ FEEDBACK:

“Through this workshop I’ve gained lots of insight into what is required of me to score an A in BK, such as in the way I answer questions and the type of facts I include. The facili-

tators were very helpful and the handouts they gave were useful for my studies because they helped me understand the text better. Also, I learnt new techniques on how to revise and study effectively for this subject. Overall, this workshop was very fun and beneficial.” — *Trasilla Annette SM Andrew, Church of St Francis of Assisi*

“The workshop was quite beneficial for me, especially with trial exams and SPM around the corner. The insights and notes provided during the workshop were really useful as well, especially when it came to answering personal opinion questions, I’m glad the workshop covered it and now I am certain I have a better idea of how to score for personal opinion questions!” — *Benjamin Chew Fong Meng, Church of the Sacred Heart*

“I had a great time during the workshop. I learnt how to understand and answer exam questions while making some new friends.” — *Abigail Amala Nathan Church of Our Lady of Lourdes*

“I gained a lot of knowledge and confidence from this workshop. The facilitators were great because they guided us on the best ways to answer SPM questions. Thank you for organising the session and a very special thanks to the great speakers.” — *Jacquelin A/P Yesumani, Church of St Francis of Assisi*



*Ms Tay Bee Lian giving insights on Bible Knowledge.*

KUALA LUMPUR: The Archdiocesan Office for Human Development (AOHD)’s Ministry of the Poor collaborated with the Society of St Vincent de Paul Conference of the Holy Family, Kajang and organised an outing for 26 children from Rumah Keluarga Kami and 30 youth from Yayasan Chow Kit on October 7. The day at i-City WaterWorld and SnoWalk, filled with excitement and adventure, marked a significant milestone as it was the first major excursion for many of them since the pandemic.

The day started with a safety briefing and a game for both these groups to get to know one another. AOHD also arranged the St John Ambulance to be on standby during this entire event. A highlight for the youths and children was when Anthony of St. John Ambulance gave a tour of the workings of an ambulance as many had never seen one up close before.



The St John Ambulance team also gave a live demonstration of an emergency with one of the teenagers, teaching everyone gathered how to use an automated external defibrillator (AED) and even turning on their sirens to the delight of everyone present.

As soon as they entered the waterpark, the

children were quick to blend well with each other and had a great time.

The children, regardless of their age, race, or religious beliefs, effortlessly bonded and enjoyed themselves. The organisers designated the teenagers who were proficient swimmers to watch over each other, with a particular fo-

cus on ensuring the safety and well-being of the children under 11-years-old.

Following a hearty lunch, the children, guardians and volunteers headed to SnoWalk, the country’s largest indoor snow world. Many children and teenagers were thrilled to experience snow for the very first time. It felt like a scene out of a movie as the children took to the snow so naturally, playing and making friends.

By 5.00pm everyone was exhausted and headed back to their respective transportation after a few group photos and some emotional goodbyes, as they said farewell to their new friends. All sides expressed their gratitude and wishes to meet again as new friends and memories made in the spirit of being true Malaysians. — *By Aaron Koh*

*(Photo used with permission)*



# Remembering Asia's first tribal cardinal

Cardinal Telesphore Placidus Toppo of Ranchi died on October 4 due to age-related ailments. He was 84.

The cardinal was born on October 15, 1939, the eighth of ten children of an Oraon family in Jhargoan, a remote village in Chainpur parish in Gumla district in India.

As a young boy, Telesphore received his lower primary education in their village. However, due to the absence of an upper primary school in any of the nearby villages, he had to travel to the distant village of Barwaynagar for his upper primary education.

Following his matriculation at Lievens Barve Boys' Secondary School in Chainpur, he was inspired by the Belgian priests' way of life and joined St Albert's Seminary.

He graduated with honours from St Xavier's College, Ranchi. He completed his MA in history from the University of Ranchi. Later, he continued with philosophical studies at St Albert's College, Ranchi. For his theological studies, he was sent to the Pontifical Urban University in Rome.

On May 8, 1969, he was ordained a priest by Bishop Franciskus in Basel, Switzerland. He returned to India as a young priest and was assigned to teach at St Joseph's High School, Torpa.

He soon became the acting principal of the school. In 1976, he founded the Lievens' Vocation Centre, Torpa, and became its pioneering director. Later, he was made the secretary to Archbishop Pius Kerketta, SJ, then the Archbishop of Ranchi.

On June 8, 1978, he was elected as the Bishop of Dumka and selected the motto, *Prepare the way of the Lord*. He was ordained Bishop of Dumka on October 7, 1978, by the late Archbishop Pius Kerketta at St Teresa Girl's School, Dudhani. On November 8, 1984, he was nominated by Pope John Paul II as the Coadjutor Archbishop of Ranchi. He was appointed as the Archbishop of Ranchi on August 7, 1985. The installation as archbishop took place on August 25, 1985.

He was elected President of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI) for two terms (2001–2004 and 2011–2013). He was the President of the CBCI (2004–2008). Pope St John Paul II honoured the thriving and blossoming Adivasi Church of Jharkhand by raising Archbishop Telesphore Toppo to the College of Cardinals on October 21, 2003.

He was the first and only Asian tribal to have been accorded such a distinguished ecclesiastical office. He participated in the conclave of April 2005, which elected Pope Benedict XVI and in the conclave of March 2013, which elected Pope Francis.

Pope Francis named Cardinal Telesphore Placidus Toppo as his Special Envoy to the XI Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, (FABC) which took place from November 28–December 4, 2016, in



Colombo, Sri Lanka.

In 2002 he received the Jharkhand Ratan Award for distinguished social work done in Jharkhand.

Endowed with exceptional perception and a sharp observation, Cardinal Toppo was a chosen instrument of God for guiding the marginalised as well as righteous living and religious thinking. He was a person dedicated to the service of the poor and needy.

His generosity, availability, and compassion made him an outstanding figure, respected by all people. His affectionately disarming personality won him friends and admirers in all circles. He was noted to be committed to and concerned for the growth of the Church, solace for the poor and needy, and, in a very special way, the welfare and multidimensional progress of the Chotanagpur Tribals.

Cardinal Toppo was a person of manifold qualities, some inborn and others acquired through self-discipline and insightful observation. He was starkly down-to-earth and fiercely demanding for excellence. Orderliness and regularity were his hallmarks. His honesty, humility, simplicity, generosity, serenity, gentleness, courage, and self-confidence were the pearls of his great personality.

The spiritual life of Cardinal Toppo is extraordinarily simple and remarkable. He was a man of prayer and deep faith. His confidence in Christ and his union with the universal church was unshakable. His fondness for the Holy Eucharist, devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and affectionate attachment to Mother Mary were the sources of his committed and inexhaustible personality. The source and secret of his energy lay solely in the holy sacraments and prayers. Regardless of pressing schedules and severe conditions of life, he never missed the Holy Eucharist, Rosary, or prayers of the Church.

He was a priest for 54 years, a bishop for 44 years and a cardinal for 19 years. — *Matters India*

## MEMORIAM

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### In Ever Loving Memory of

14th Anniversary

4th Anniversary

3rd Anniversary



**Gertrude Gomes**  
Departed: 20-9-2009



**Gerard Gomes**  
Departed: 18-06-2019



**Cytian Gomes**  
Departed: 23-10-2020

*"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."*

Deeply missed and remembered by family and loved ones.

*fear not,  
for I am  
with you;  
be not dismayed,  
for I am  
your God;  
I will strengthen  
you, I will  
help you,  
I will uphold  
you with  
my righteous  
right hand.*

Isaiah 41:10



**33rd Anniversary  
In Loving  
Memory of**

**Aisu s/o  
Sinnathamby**

**Born:  
01-05-1937**

**Departed:  
25-10-1990**

*"I have the strength to face all conditions by the power that Christ gives me."*

- Philippians 4:13

Lovingly missed by  
wife, daughter, sons, daughters-in-law,  
grandchildren & loved ones.

## NOTICE

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**14th Anniversary  
In Loving Memory of**



**Mr Arokiasamy  
s/o Gnanapragasam**

**From the Lord:  
17-08-1939**

**To the Lord:  
28-10-2009**

*Dad*

*You are the greatest gift that we ever had  
in our life that came from God.*

Deeply missed and forever remembered by:  
Wife: Madam A. Mangalamary,  
Children, Grandchildren,  
Sons-in-law & daughters-in-law.

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REST IN PEACE



# Pope Francis expresses concern for Gaza civilians

VATICAN: Pope Francis condemned Hamas' terrorist attacks on Israel and pleaded with the militants to free their hostages unharmed, but he also expressed concern about Israel's tightening siege on Gaza and its impact on innocent civilians.

"I continue to follow, with sorrow and apprehension, what is happening in Israel and Palestine. So many people killed, and others injured," the Pope said October 11 at the end of his weekly general audience.

As the Pope spoke, the Israeli Defence Forces website was reporting more than 1,200 Israelis killed by Hamas and more than 2,800 Israelis injured. At the same time, the Gaza Ministry of Health was reporting a death toll of more than 950 Palestinians and said 5,000 others were injured as Israel continued its airstrikes on Gaza.

The initial Hamas attack Oct 7, the Pope said, took place on the Jewish holiday of Simchat Torah, which marks the completion of the annual cycle of reading the Torah scroll. "I pray for all those families that saw a day of celebration be transformed into a day of mourning," the Pope said.

"And I ask that the hostages be released immediately," he continued. Israeli government officials have estimated that Hamas is holding some 150 Israeli hostages.



Pope Francis prays during his weekly general audience in St Peter's Square at the Vatican.

"One who is attacked has the right of self-defence," the Pope said, "but I am very concerned about the total siege under which Palestinians are living in Gaza, where there also have been many innocent victims."

"Terrorism and extremism will not help reach a solution to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, but only increase hatred, violence and vengeance and only make each other suffer," Francis said. — By Cindy Wooden, CNS/NCR

In Malaysia, Cardinal Sebastian Francis Lof Penang called for a Day of Prayer and Fasting, which was observed from 6.00am on Friday, October 13, to 6.00am the following day, Saturday.

He also recommended the readings of the Friday of Week 27 in Ordinary Time as a guide for reflections during that day.

There were also practical suggestions for observing this day of prayer and fasting:

His call was echoed by Archbishop Julian Leow of Kuala Lumpur.

Many parishes heeded the call of the prelates and organised Holy Hours to pray for this intention.



Holy Hour by the Kuala Lumpur Archdiocese Prayer Ministry led by Fr Andrew Manickam, OFM Cap, on October 13 at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre.

## Indonesian leader seeks support from Papuan church

JAYAPURA: Indonesian Vice President Ma'ruf Amin met with Christian leaders in Papua seeking collaboration for peace and development in the restive Christian-majority easternmost region.

Amin held a special meeting with church leaders in the provincial capital Jayapura on October 11 where he called them "game changers towards accelerating economic development and prosperity in Papua."

"I consider religious leaders to have a big influence in guiding and providing understanding to the Papuan people," he said in a meeting with the leaders of the Papuan Union of Churches, the West Papuan Churches Council, and the Papua Christian Centre.

Amin said he hopes that religious leaders in this religiously diverse region with a Christian majority "will work together with the government in realising development."

He said that the government would also help construct the Papua Centre building, with the construction expected next year.

During the meeting, Fr Bahang specifically asked Amin to support the church's programme to train teachers in institutes under the supervision of the church to be sent to remote areas.

He said they hoped the government would not prepare other institutes or universities and would support the already existing Church-run schools.

Bahang said that churches have always prioritised the commitment of teachers to live in remote areas, something that is difficult for teachers from other universities to have.

Because of that, we remain adamant about holding this at institutes that are under the supervision of churches, so the commitment is there," he added.

The meeting was held in the midst of escalating tension and conflict in Papua between the security forces and pro-independence groups. Rights groups have accused Indonesia of violating human rights in Papua.

Theo Hesegeg, a human rights activist, said the meeting appeared to be an effort "to embrace the churches" who have been critical voices against the government.

"Of course, the meeting is good in the context of increasing development in Papua, but I hope that meetings like this do not become a tactic to weaken the prophetic voice of the Church," he said.

"The request for the Church to support development in Papua must not close the Church's eyes to ongoing humanitarian problems," he added.

The meeting with religious leaders was held on the same day after Amin met with human rights activists and ethnic community leaders.

During the meeting, he said that the government was building ways to "find the root of the problem of every conflict and bridge what the Papuan people want."

"We hope that misunderstandings will disappear," he said. — ucanews.com

## 2024

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