

The Catholic Weekly HERALD

Mission Statement

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

TERHAD

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Because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

1 Thes. 1:5



Diocesan
Pastoral
Assemblies

■ P4 & P5



Young priests
reminded to
show mercy
at every
opportunity

■ P7



Pope proposes
spirituality of
the Little Flower
for Church's
mission

■ P10

We LIVE and DIE together

JERUSALEM: “We are not worried about ourselves, but for the disabled children, bedridden elderly people and also for the 600 people who took refuge in our convent after losing their homes in recent days due to the bombings. Where will they go now?” say the Missionaries of Charity, the nuns of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who have been present in Gaza for 50 years.

“Our sisters in Gaza amaze me,” says the Jerusalem-based superior of the Missionaries of Charity in the Holy Land.

“It only takes one ten-minute phone call each day. It’s just enough time to give some news, offer reassurance, or ask for prayers. They always have a smile in their voice, despite the bombs, despite the lack of everything,” says the regional superior.

Since Hamas launched its war against Israel on October 7, almost 600 Christians have taken refuge in the Latin Rite parish complex in Gaza where the sisters from the Missionaries of Charity, the congregation Mother Teresa founded, run a centre. That’s about half of all Christians in the Gaza Strip, all of them Palestinians.

The Latin and Greek Orthodox parishes located in the north of the enclave were all given the same ultimatum as everyone else in the area: to withdraw to the southern part in anticipation of an imminent attack by the Israeli army.

“Virtually everyone has chosen to stay, considering it safer because the situation is increasingly delicate everywhere,” Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, explained on Oct 16 in an interview with Italian journalists.

Along with the other ordinaries of the Holy Land, the cardinal — an Italian Franciscan who has lived in the region for decades — called a day of prayer and fasting on Oct 17 for peace and reconciliation.

“Leave? And then go where?” asks the Missionaries of Charity’s regional superior.

“In Gaza, our sisters run a home that cares for 60 disabled Muslim children and



(CNA/Mahmud Hams/AFP)

some wounded. Their families are refugees, scattered all over the place, and no one could come and get them. They stayed and so did the entire community,” she says. “We live together, we die together — staying close to Jesus, close to the churches.”

Although the enclave is continually being bombed and now lacks water, electricity, food and fuel, the three Missionaries of Charity nuns are busy ensuring a semblance of normalcy in the “refugee camp” that Holy Family Parish has become. Working alongside them are three Sisters of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament and three Holy Rosary Sisters.

They point out that the well that provided the parish with an independent source of water has stopped working due to a lack of fuel to power the pumps.

“It’s overflowing. There aren’t enough sanitary facilities for everyone, not enough mattresses, not enough blankets,” the Jerusalem-based superior says, relaying the news she’s received from her sisters in Gaza.

“They live hour by hour, without thinking about tomorrow. They have completely put their lives in God’s hands. They always say to me: ‘God will help us’,” the superior tells us.

Mother Teresa’s nuns have been present in Gaza since February 1973. A presence marked from the beginning by sharing the suffering of this tormented land: they arrived in the Strip a few weeks after the killing of the then parish priest of the Latin community, Fr Hanna Al-Nimri. It was their turn to clean up the bloody walls.

Despite the countless difficulties due to the many wars and the blockade imposed on Gaza for years, the Missionaries of Charity are a fundamental presence in the parish of the Holy Family.

In their reception homes for children and vulnerable adults, they welcomed 70 people. But in addition to offering spiritual assistance in the small Catholic community of Gaza, they visit hundreds of homes of the poor, needy and sick. — *LCI/Fides* (<https://international.la-croix.com>)

A prayer for peace

*Lord, we pray to you
for the Holy Land, for the people of
Israel and Palestine who are under
the grip of unprecedented violence,
for the victims, especially the
children, for the wounded, for
those held hostage, for the
missing and their families.*

*Help us, Lord, to commit ourselves
to building a fraternal world so
that these peoples and those in the
same conditions of conflict of
instability and violence may find
the path of respect for human
rights where justice, dialogue
and reconciliation are the
indispensable tools
for building peace.*

HERALD

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The Kuala Lumpur Archdiocesan Pastoral Assembly (APA) held on October 14, has ignited a profound and thought-provoking reminder about the pressing need for leadership and succession planning. This imperative was one of the key findings that emerged from the Parish Pastoral Assemblies (PPA) conducted during 2022-2023 and the 2021 Synodal Journey.

In a world where change is a constant, the Church must continually adapt, evolve, and steadfastly pursue its sacred mission. A pivotal element of this adaptation is the infusion of new perspectives, a surge of fresh energy, and the inclusive involvement of younger generations in leadership positions. The core objective of the archdiocese, as emphasised during the APA, is to *Rebuild Our Church*, and an indispensable facet of this reconstruction involves nurturing the leaders of tomorrow.

While it was heartening to witness the presence of many 'new, young, and enthusiastic' faces at the APA, it beckons us to revisit a common concern that was brought to light during the PPAs — the matter of leadership. How often have we heard complaints about individuals who have seemingly held leadership positions within parishes and ministries indefinitely? Is this phenomenon attributable to a perceived dearth of willing successors, a scarcity of suitable candidates, or perhaps a reluctance to relinquish the power and responsibility they hold? Even though the present leaders may be doing an admirable job, there comes a moment when they must earnestly discern when it is appropriate to step down and pass the torch to the next generation.

Perhaps the establishment of clear guidelines delineating the duration of leadership tenures can play a pivotal role in promoting transparency, accountability, and an infusion of fresh perspectives, thus fostering a more dynamic and responsive Church leadership.

Pope Francis, in his message to the Synod on Synodality, underscored the significance of "journeying together" and "walking side by side." These words deeply resonate with our values and encapsulate the collaborative spirit at the very heart of the Church's mission, which finds its roots in the teachings of Jesus Christ. This mission is intrinsically tied to succession planning, mirroring how Christ mentored His disciples to perpetuate the Gospel message.

The message of inclusivity and active participation emanating from the Synod serves as an inspirational call to action for us. As Pope Francis aptly stated, "Every baptised person is a subject of synodality." This sentiment echoes the Catholic belief in the universal priest-



hood of all believers and underscores our collective responsibility for the well-being of the Church. Consequently, succession planning becomes a collective endeavour, encompassing both clergy and laity, guided by the spirit of synodality.

The call to *Rebuild Our Church* is a significant mission, and nurturing the leadership of the future stands as a crucial facet of this undertaking. By fostering an atmosphere of openness, collaboration, and inclusivity, we can ensure that the Church remains a beacon of hope and inspiration for all.

Succession planning transcends the mere facilitation of smooth leadership transitions; it embodies the principles of servant leadership, echoing the humility and love with which Jesus led His disciples and the world. In humility and service, we discover the genuine essence of leadership, where power and authority take a back seat to service and love, echoing the life and teachings of Jesus.

The central objective of succession planning is to ensure the uninterrupted continuity of the Church's mission to disseminate the love and message of Christ. It offers a transformative experience for both mentors and protégés, aligning with the Catholic values of discipleship. Through mentorship and guidance, experienced leaders can impart their wisdom, faith, and unwavering commitment to the next generation, igniting their passion to assume leadership roles within the Church.

As we look forward to the regional assemblies and the Malaysia Pastoral Convention in 2026, let us wholeheartedly embrace the principles of humility, inclusivity, and journeying together. Let us enthusiastically encourage young people to step forward, recognising that they are indeed the future of the Church. If we genuinely aspire to *Rebuild Our Church*, it is imperative that our youth play an instrumental role in constructing the blueprint for its future.

Patricia Pereira

Put love and you will draw out love

When C.S. Lewis tried to write his book *The Four Loves*, he thought to himself that the biblical maxim by St John: "God is love" would provide him with a simple panoramic view through the whole subject. However, during the course of deep reflective writing, he discovered that such a task was not as easy as he had thought it would be. This subject on "love" is surely one of the biggest subjects that Christianity had dwelt upon for centuries. We talk about it, we preach about it, and we try to live it out as much as possible, simply because Jesus Christ has taught us so, that is to love the Lord, our God and also to love our neighbour as ourselves (cfr. Mt. 22:37-39). However, what really is "love" in reality? What is the appropriate way to love and what gives us the strength to love?

In ancient times, as well as in today's reality, there are at least four types of known "love" which the Greeks have identified: *we have affection or familiar love "Storge", friendship "Philia", passion or eroticism "Eros", and last but not least, charity "Agape".* All these loves are relational but the first three sorts of loves are natural in their origin and they are not self-sufficient. They need to be rooted firmly in the love of God, preventing themselves from unwanted "extremes". So, before I explain that even further, let us look into the three natural loves.

Among the three, we have *affection or familiar love "Storge"*, which C.S. Lewis noted is an "affection that parents have towards their offspring" or "affection between old

friends". It is the least discriminating and humblest natural love because people whom we normally find unattractive or troublesome are still lovable in this realm. It does not expect too much and it teaches us to appreciate those who happen to be there in our lives. Such love can even ignore the barriers of species. For example, a child and his pet dog, a mother who loves her child regardless of his looks, or the affection between two old friends whose friendship becomes as familiar as family.

As for the second natural love: *friendship "Philia"*, unlike affection *storge* and passion *eros*, is the least biological, instinctive, and necessary, as humans can rely on their own herd without needing any friends to survive... Meaning, having a friend is a luxury. Therefore, when this love is practised and embraced well in a proper manner, it becomes sublime in nature. So, friendship is built on selection and companionship. It is also exclusive.

The third natural love: *passion or eroticism "Eros"*, refers to the kind of love which lovers are "in". In the sense of "being in love" or "loving someone". Although sexuality may operate as part of *Eros* or without (C.S. Lewis would prefer to coin "sexuality" with the Greek word "Venus"), the person who is in love, will most likely be preoccupied with the beloved in his or her totality as a person.

Now at this particular moment in time, having only these three natural loves in hand, do you think we can follow our Lord's commandment fully? Certainly not!

If people decide to follow their own natural instinct and their love interest, most likely they are only inclined to help out their own family, kin, tribe, friends, and their own lover. Hence, it is only accurate to say that such loves, without the help of that divine love of God — *Charity "Agape"* can easily become a subject of selfishness and self-centredness. Imagine for the good of our own kind or love interest, we would try our best to seek and demand things for those whom we love, in turn exploiting others. Chances are we might even be willing to go the extra mile to molest or oppress an alien just to make sure that our kind is well served and pampered; we might even wrong a widow or an orphan because they are not our friends nor are they our own wives nor children (cfr. Ex. 22:20-23). We would treat others without compassion because instinctively speaking, we are no way as compassionate as God!

However, being fashioned by God and sharing in many ways in His likeness, that is being rational and free-willed individuals, some of us through the grace of God, would like to freely, continually, and wholeheartedly seek our "final union" with God. We are not contented living life as it is, but willing to do all things to develop our relationship with God on a deeper level. That is exactly what Christ wants us to do — *Charity "Agape"*. This love is selfless echoing to the "Hymn of Love" that St Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 13. It is transcendent and, in many ways, unnatural, because it is a love that is not based on one's emotions but will. This love *agape* as odd and unnatural as it

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings with Fr George Ho, OCD

30th Sunday of Ordinary Time (A)

Readings: Exodus 22:20-26

1 Thessalonians 1:5-10;

Gospel: Matthew 22:34-40

seems, does not draw those who possess it to favour or respect those who can directly benefit from them, related to or dependent upon them, or love them for the sake of utilitarian value, but it makes them love and care for those who are unlovable, undeserving, and the ugly. It makes people give without asking anything in return, and makes people vulnerable even... just like Christ who gives us everything and all on the cross of nakedness and vulnerability! Yet, that is what Christ wants us to do during that moment in time. He wants us to depend on Him, the One who is our ONLY SUPPORT and SOL-ACE!

In a conclusion, as Christ's good disciples, let us love one another with a love that is so great that we all became models for all believers, even in times of great affliction and trials, even in times of those who contract and fail to love us, because just like St John of the Cross would say, "when there is no love, put love, and you will draw out love." (John of the Cross, Letter 26) May this love ever help you to get closer to God, just like He does to us.

Creating awareness on safeguarding children

KUALA LUMPUR: The Archdiocese Professional Standards Office (PSO) hosted a presentation featuring Dr Gabriel Dy-Liacco on October 10. Dr Gabriel holds a Ph.D. in Pastoral Counselling from Loyola University, Maryland and is a licensed professional counsellor. He represents the Catholic Safeguarding Institute and the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors.

This hybrid event brought together attendees from the nine dioceses in Malaysia to discuss the critical topic of Safeguarding

and the Protection of Children. The occasion was graced by Archbishop Julian Leow.

In March this year, Pope Francis promulgated an updated version of *Vos estis lux mundi*, a procedural policy aimed at investigating allegations of abuse or administrative negligence involving bishops and other prominent figures within the Church's leadership.

Dr Gabriel, currently an assistant professor at Regent University, Virginia, United States, clarified that this document signifi-

cantly expands its application by now encompassing not only children and minors but also includes "any vulnerable person".

Another significant change to the text of *Vos estis lux mundi* is the inclusion of lay leaders of international associations recognised by the Holy See. These individuals can now be subject to investigation for two key reasons: either they are suspected of personally engaging in abusive conduct or failing to properly investigate and address allegations of abuse or misconduct within

their respective communities.

During his talk, Dr Gabriel delved into various crucial aspects of the subject, including how to spot potential child predators, the elements of child sexual abuse, its profound impact on victims, and the essential healing process they must undergo. He also touched on the personality traits exhibited by sexual predators, the methods they employ to gain access to children, and the necessary steps in their rehabilitation process. — *By Laura Joseph*

Recollection for parish liturgy coordinators

KLUANG: In silent reverence, members of the Parish Liturgy Coordinators of the Malacca Johore Diocese made their way to the pews of the Church of St Louis for their Eucharistic Adoration recently.

Before that, a breakfast session was held in the hall. It kicked off with an introduction by the Malacca Johore Diocese's Liturgy Commission's (MJLDC) head Fr Adrian Francis, who shared the significant milestones and the challenges of the MJLDC since its inception in 2016.

Fifty-seven participants comprising leaders and coordinators from the four dominant language groups in the parishes gathered for the sessions. They were grouped by language into eight discussion groups. This division consisted of four groups for the Bahasa Malaysia-



speaking community with 30 participants, two groups for the English-speaking community, and one group each for the Mandarin- and Tamil-speaking communities.

The Spiritual Conversation ensued with three Questions as points of discussion:

1. Round One - Taking the floor

What is needed to enhance (improve) our liturgical celebrations in my parish community?

2. Round Two - Making Room for the Other

What must we eliminate and what can we build to ensure this can happen?

3. Round Three - Building Together

What do WE feel is important to say to ourselves and the whole Church as a "contribution" with respect to the topic?

Each group then shared key points of their discussions — the challenges they faced in their Churches with their parish priests and parishioners.

Many questions were asked of the commission, many pleas for assistance were made with regards to how to practise what we learnt during our formation sessions but are met with resistance from parish leaders?

To conclude, in order to have a more standardised liturgical celebration for the diocese, the GIRM (General Instructions of the Roman Missal) should be adhered to by the clergy and laity working together. — *By Angie Khoo-Silvester and Tina Lui-Thomas*




**KUALA LUMPUR
ARCHDIOCESE**

**Diary of Archbishop
Julian Leow**

October & November

30/10 Meeting – CFM EXCO

**5/11 Mass – Migrant Got Talent
2023, Church of St Anthony, KL**




PENANG DIOCESE

**Diary of Cardinal
Sebastian Francis**

October

**29 Meeting — CHARIS Penang
Leaders at Minor Basilica of
St Anne, Bukit Mertajam**



**MALACCA JOHORE
DIOCESE**

**Diary of Bishop
Bernard Paul**

November


**2 All Souls Day Mass @ Sg Tiram
Catholic Cemetery followed by
blessing of graves**

**3 Meeting — MAJODI Centre
Reporting**


**4 Meeting — Mandarin Language
Cultural Council in Kluang**

**4 Confirmation — St Henry Church,
Batu Pahat**

**8 Meeting — Bishop's Staff at
College General, Penang**



**Malacca Johore Diocese
News Update #151**



Greetings to you, dear friends and faithful. The call for prayer and fasting for peace are heard everywhere. The call to reinstate GST is back. The Budget 2024 hits the M40s the hardest. In the new apostolic exhortation on St Theresa of Lisieux, Pope teaches Christians the "little ways" of love, self-giving, concern for others and complete trust in the mercy of God.

Solidarity Times: No end to wars and human sufferings. No one wins. So much waste, so much lost and so much pain. Some rejoice! Some celebrate! Some profiteer. For many, it's misfortune, misery and being targets. The Holy See condemns wars and terrorism absolutely. There are no ideological, political, philosophical, racial, ethnic, or religious reasons to justify or excuse it.

Pope Francis remarked: "God's name is peace. The one who calls upon God's name to justify terrorism, violence and war does not follow God's path. War in the name of religion becomes a war against religion itself. With firm resolve, therefore, let us reiterate that violence and terrorism are opposed to an authentic religious spirit." Let the God of Peace make us one.

A Thought for the Week:
The Oak Tree
A carpenter and his apprentice were walking together through a large forest. And when they came across a tall, huge, gnarled, old, beautiful oak tree, the carpenter asked his apprentice: "Do you know why this tree is so tall, so huge, so gnarled, so old and beautiful?" The apprentice looked at his master and said: "No...why?"
"Well," the carpenter said, "because it is useless. If it had been useful it would have been cut long ago and made into tables and chairs, but because it is useless it could

grow so tall and so beautiful that you can sit in its shade and relax." (*Henri Nouwen, Out of Solitude*)

A lesson from the oak tree: The world says, "If you are not making good use of your time, you are useless." Jesus says: "Come spend some useless time with me." Detach yourselves from the idea of the usefulness of prayer and the results of prayer, and you become free to "waste" a precious hour with God in prayer. Gradually, we may find our "useless" time will transform us, and everything around us will be different. Prayer is being 'useless', unbusy, doing nothing useful or productive in the presence of God.

Announcements for this Week

1. The **Diocesan Pastoral Assembly 2023 ended on October 14**, with 260 leaders and representatives from Malacca to Johore. Like the Gospel of the 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time, the invitation went out, with a portion saying NO, a good number came and respected the process and grace moment; and some came, joined in with their own agenda and their own conditions. That's the synodal journey: living with differences, responding to new needs, the new poor and new orientations in pastoral care; and open to multiple action plans addressing local cries.

2. The Diocese calls on all Catholics to declare a **time of prayer, fast & abstinence for peace**, end of wars and the many victims **every Friday** till November 3. Come together as families, BECs or parish. All war is evil. No declaration of wars, acts of violence or attacks on civilians is justified.

3. The Caritas MJD initiates the first **"Beyond Borders" programme** for the first batch of Young Caritas to work and live with the poor in Cambodia from December

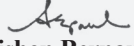
2-10, 2023. You can expect more opportunities next year onwards.

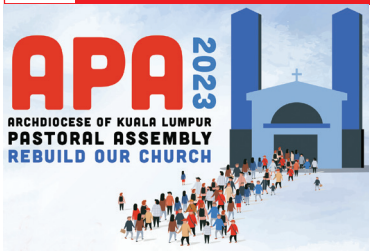
4. A two-day **Advent Formation** with Fr Geoffrey Plant, Archdiocese of Sydney, on the Infancy Narratives of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke to understand the Advent Jesus will be held at the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Krubong (November 17, 8.00pm-10.00pm; November 18, 9.00am-5.00pm), organised by the Diocesan Biblical Ministry. The fee is RM30.

This Week's QnQ? Q asks:
Can one find perfect joy?
On one occasion, as Francis and Brother Leo were walking through the cold of the winter, Francis was moved to share with Brother Leo the *nature of perfect joy*. He began by explaining what perfect joy was *not*: that perfect joy did *not* consist in a friar being able to perform many miracles; *nor* was it in being well versed in every language; *nor* was it in being a master of the Scriptures; *nor* was it in knowing the secrets of nature; *nor* was it in speaking with the voice of an angel, *nor* was it even converting the most hardened sinner, including the infidels.

After revealing to Brother Leo what perfect joy was not, Brother Leo cried out, "Father, I beg you in God's name to tell me where perfect joy is found." To that, Francis responded that *perfect joy is found in the endurance of every evil with peace and joy, accepting and embracing every suffering for the love of Christ. This is the discovery of perfect joy.*

Let us with the peace within, heal the world. Blessed you who are peacemakers. God bless you all.


Bishop Bernard Paul



By Julie Lim

KUALA LUMPUR: The Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur held her Archdiocesan Pastoral Assembly (APA 2023) on October 14 at the Church of St Francis of Assisi. The 333 delegates comprised clergy, religious and laity from parishes and ministries in the archdiocese.

In his keynote address, Archbishop Julian Leow said that APA 2023 is a mid-term review of PMPC IV (2016 – 2021), Synod on Synodality (2021 – 2023), and a summary of findings from the Parish Pastoral Assemblies of 30 parishes in the diocese.

Explaining the theme, *Rebuild Our Church*, Archbishop Julian said that to “rebuild” means to “tear down and reconstruct”.

When the foundation is weak, we need to redesign and rebuild it so that we can have a better and higher structure. The process may be pain-

ful, but it is necessary if we are to progress, he said.

The prelate added that the theme, *Rebuild Our Church* aims at walking together to discern the four thrusts of Family, Church, Ecology and Society.

Archbishop Julian revealed the current state of the Church. Firstly, people are hurting and demanding to be heard. Secondly, there are high expectations of the clergy as *Sacerdos alter Christus* (The priest is another Christ), and that priests should act *in persona Christi* (in the person of Christ). Priests are also unavailable around the clock to serve the people.

Archbishop Julian said that the diocese’s pastoral priorities and core needs have evolved since the 1976 *Aggiornamento*. “We have reflected on the current climate and anticipate the current needs. We have come up with strategies and suggestions on how to achieve these priorities.”

The prelate noted that during the COVID-19 pandemic, social com-

munication played an important role in keeping the people informed and updated. He also warned on the danger of misinformation, especially with the emergence of artificial intelligence that has caused discerning what is true to become more challenging.

He added that BECs have proven to be the bedrock of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, and must be expanded beyond geographical boundaries to include interest groups such as people with the same interest or activities. Such groups can be Basic Human Communities (BHC). It is crucial to revive BEC networks in order to respond to current challenges, he said.

Fr Dominic Tan then explained to the delegates the SEE-JUDGE-ACT method which is used to help identify the symptoms and root causes of the situation, as well as to find a Christ-centred solution to the crisis we are in.

He said that they need to SEE with the eyes of Christ, JUDGE with the



Spiritual Conversation

heart of Christ, and ACT as Christ would.

When seeing with the eyes of Christ, it is important to observe in an unbiased way the situation for the wellbeing of all. It is an inductive method that starts from reality, and aims to understanding the reality in its social, political, economic and cultural dimensions.

Judging with the heart of Christ is to judge reasons for the present situation using human and spiritual values. It is based on two dimensions, i.e. social analysis and theological reflection. Fr Dominic said that social analysis helps us to obtain a more complete picture of the social situation by exploring its historical and structural relationships. Theological Reflection explores the experience and its deeper analysis, in dialogue with the religious tradition of Scripture and Catholic Social Teaching. From this conversation, we gain new insights and meanings.

When acting as Christ would act,

it is acting to change dehumanising and unjust situations. When doing so, it is important to gather information (seeing), and to analyse the information with theological reflection (judging) that leads to ideas on how we can act upon the observed phenomenon in order to change the situation and address its root causes. Our aim here should be doing the will of God and changing the reality so as to bring it closer to the Reign of God, said Fr Dominic.

He noted that sin is the underlying cause of all problems, and that the antidote of sin is God’s mercy and grace. “We need to look for ways to make this grace available to all,” he said.

The delegates were then divided into groups to carry out a Spiritual Conversation using the SEE-JUDGE-ACT method related to the four thrusts of Family, Church, Ecology and Society.

The results was shared at the end of the day.



Growing in the footsteps of Jesus

Relationship

Walter emphasised that in the context of rebuilding our Church and following the path of Jesus, there are various interpretations of relationships. However, the fundamental essence of a meaningful relationship is honesty. It involves congregations coming together within our parishes and archdiocese, working as a unified entity. Cultivating a strong relationship within the Church is an ongoing journey that necessitates the faithful taking ownership and collaborating as one cohesive body.

It’s imperative for all involved — clergy, laity, and leaders — to become trustworthy team players. This transformation can expedite the growth process. The data also underscores the importance of combating silo attitudes, such as some individuals exclusively working within their established teams, and the erosion of trust between certain clergy and leaders and vice versa. Additionally, there’s a concerning trend of ministries competing rather than collaborating, which hinders the recruitment of new leaders for church and community roles.

One essential aspect is the ability to listen attentively. Are leaders dedicating sufficient time and attention, without bias, to understand the needs of others? Often, people tend to only hear what aligns with their preconceived notions.

In closing, Walter stressed the importance of avoiding common pitfalls, like engaging in arguments for the sake of proving a point. Developing a heightened level of tolerance and understanding towards the people we serve is vital for all members. By embodying the strength we aim to attract, we can elevate our relationships to a higher level.



Leadership

To rebuild our Church through leadership, Fr Gerard said, trust must emerge.

An essential aspect of leadership roles is the implementation of a consistent succession planning strategy.

“If you haven’t got people groomed to take over, you are failing in one area of leadership,” said the Cathedral of St John’s parish priest.

This underscores the importance of ensuring that there is a continuous pipeline of capable individuals ready to assume leadership roles. This approach facilitates the introduction of new and vibrant talent, even if the immediate successor may not be the absolute best for the position. By doing so, organisations can ensure a smoother transition and invigorate leadership roles with fresh perspectives and ideas.

Take note that Jesus too had a succes-



The final sharing by Sr Irene covered formation, which within the context of faith involves a multifaceted process aimed at transforming and translating

Walter Victor, Fr Gerard Theraviam and Sr Irene Chengann shared on the three areas of concern — Relationship, Leadership and Formation which emerged from the 2021 Synodal survey.



sion plan. In John 20:21, he said “As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.”

Leaders also need to provide spirit-filled directions. If we don’t know where we are going, we will end up nowhere. There has to be a plan but first, we must engage in prayer and listen to the Holy Spirit, so we are led by Him.

Galatians 5:25 reminds us that “If we

live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”

Fr Gerard explained that the clergy, laity and leaders also need to practise the model of servant leadership. He highlighted the act of washing another’s feet as a great example of servanthood. Unless we have the humility to serve with love, it becomes just a ritual.

We need to do what the other wants, not what we want. He said we are called to serve with love and humility by being servants of one another, highlighting 1 Peter 4:10, “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms,” we should ‘Turun Padang’ and do the work.

He also warned against clericalism. The priest should not be put on a pedestal, adding “If you put us there, it becomes too hard for us to come down.”

Formation

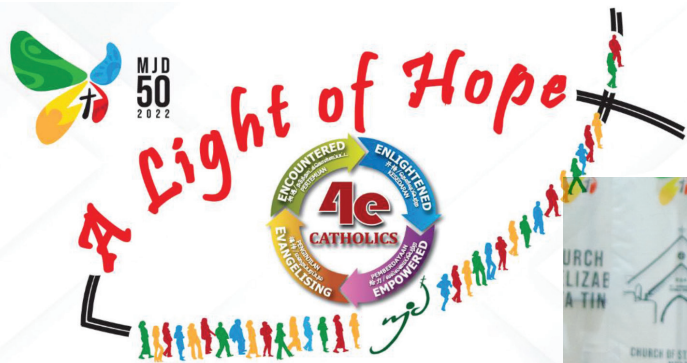
one’s belief system.

Sr Irene said the desired outcome of attending any number of formations is that we must change or improve on what is not right within us. This transformation occurs by permitting spiritual awakening, experiencing a shift in mindset, and undergoing inner conversion.

Permitting spiritual awakening implies creating an environment that allows individuals to connect with their spirituality on a deeper level, fostering a stronger bond

with their faith. Experiencing a mindset change suggests a shift in one’s perspective, encouraging individuals to view the world and their beliefs from a fresh, enlightened standpoint.

Undergoing inner conversion is the most profound aspect of formation, signifying a personal and spiritual transformation that leads to a deeper commitment and understanding of one’s faith. Together, these elements represent the core of the formation process, guiding individuals toward a more profound and meaningful connection with their faith. — **By Gwen Manickam**



Walking together

By Karen-Ann Theseira

JOHOR BAHRU: The Malacca Johore Diocesan Pastoral Assembly 2023 (DPA) took place on October 14 at Majodi Centre. The assembly brought together the clergy, religious and parishioners serving and leading in their respective churches and diocesan ministries. The assembly is a continuation of the journey that started at the Vicariate Pastoral Assembly on June 4. The DPA is not the end but an important decisive step of our journey to the Malaysia Pastoral Convention (MPC) 2026. Thus, participants had the opportunity to respond to the findings of the Vicariate Pastoral Assembly.

The goal of the DPA is to discern how we strengthen ourselves as a people *Walking Together in a Spirit of Communion, Participation, and Mission* in contributing to the building of the areas of Family, Church, Ecology and Society in parish communities, ministries and BECs of the Diocese of Malacca Johore, while we move towards MPC 2026.

Bishop Bernard Paul's keynote address set the tone for the DPA, with a call to come together, to serve together and to witness together. Bishop Bernard emphasised how we need each other and how we must allow ourselves to be led by the Holy Spirit.

Chancellor Fr Dr Lawrence Ng, went through the day's programme with the other three facilitators on the panel, Sr Shanti Mariadass, Fr Cyril Mannayagam parish priest of the Church of St Theresa, Masai and Msgr Peter Ng, parish priest of the Church of St. Louis, translating to Bahasa Malaysia, Tamil and Mandarin where needed.

The proceedings commenced with a summary presentation of the findings of the Vicariate Pastoral Assembly. A ten-minute silence followed to give participants time to pray and reflect on what was presented. An open forum allowed participants the opportunity to share their thoughts, concerns, to comment and ask questions. The first responder then provided a response on the side of the diocese while the second responder gave a reflection on the analysis and open forum. This sequence applied to all the four areas of Family, Church, Ecology and Society.



A delegate giving his comments during the assembly.

Family

First responder, Fr Paul Sia, assistant parish priest of the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, reassured participants that all comments and suggestions were heard. Fr Paul added that the Church is well aware of the challenges faced by the family today which is becoming less traditional in its makeup, in this time of social media.

Second responder Deacon Dr Leslie Petrus, from the Church of St Joseph, Plentong reiterated how preparation before marriage sets a strong foundation for family life. Some points in the presentation on the findings on the Family included the role of parents as transmitters of the faith to their children, a revival of the BEC and a commitment to daily prayer.

One participant at the assembly, Lawrence Nuluhon Jos, from the Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Pontian commented, "Formations after marriage would give me time to spend with God and my wife. This will strengthen my marriage and equip me to pass down my faith to my child."

Church

Some points brought up during the open forum in the area of Church were to have our national language, Bahasa Malaysia,

used more widely to instruct and educate, a call for ministries to work together and not in silos, have a transport system to bring students, young couples and migrants to church and for the clergy to wear their cassock when out and about.

First responder Msgr Michcel Mannayagam, parish priest of the Church of the Holy Family, Ulu Tiram, reminded participants that we are people of God and how our Church is both human and divine. We are going through a process, and in this process we have to come together with the talents we have been given to build up our Church.

Francis Balasamy from the Church of St Theresa, Masai said, 'It would be helpful if all priests in all parishes followed a similar SOP for First Holy Communion, Confirmation and so on... some priests are strict while some are less strict about meeting the requirements.'

Ecology

Fr Paul Wong, parish priest of the Church of St Philip, Segamat, was the first responder on Ecology. Fr Paul's message was simple yet powerful; *Laudato Si' Mi Signore* — Pope Francis' encyclical, is not just a slogan but a way of life. Fr Paul also got everyone on their feet and moving to the beat of the official *Laudato Si Mi Signore* song!

Second responder Dr Maria Lee, Head

of the Creation Justice Commission of the Malacca Johore Diocese (CJCMJD) went on to explain that our earth is having a fever and that fever is rising fast towards a dangerous and unlivable three-degrees.

Suggestions from the floor to reduce our carbon footprint ranged from carpooling, to reducing the amount of single-use plastic at church events, to teaching children to plant.

Society

A need to place Christ at the centre of all our activities and not just focus on keeping things fun was a comment made by a young adult as the assembly entered the final area of Society.

Knowing who our neighbours are, taking personal responsibility for our actions and 'bringing back' the Saints into our lives were some other comments made.

The first responder was happy to discover that Malaysians as a society are peace-loving people. That we would choose discussion and diplomacy over confrontation and violence.

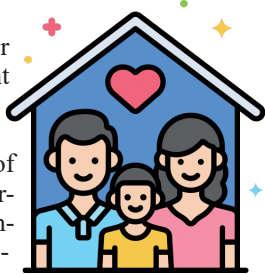
Second responder, Fr Martinian Lee, assistant parish priest of the Church of the Holy Family, Ulu Tiram offered excellent advice on how real transformation takes time; we can work slowly but we must work with purpose, we can still build and grow even when we don't agree and to address conflicts — not conceal or ignore them. Be patient. Don't allow fear to distort reality.

Conclusion

Fr Dr Lawrence Ng at the close of the forum thanked all present for making an effort and taking the time to attend the DPA. Fr Lawrence expressed confidence that we can walk together on this journey despite the challenges, despite knowing that the 'nail that stands out, is the nail that gets hammered.'

The DPA concluded with a Mass celebrated by Bishop Bernard Paul with Msgr Michcel Mannayagam and Msgr Peter Ng concelebrating with Deacon Dr Leslie Petrus assisting.

In Bishop Bernard's homily everything was put in perspective, leaving us recharged and determined to press on. Bishop assured us that the plan of God goes on, the mission moves forward, come what may. We need to see everyone as our brother and sister, walking together, listening together to the Holy Spirit. Amen.



Labuan's PPA ignites dialogue, reflection and collaboration

By Jocelyn Yeo

LABUAN: The Church of the Blessed Sacrament's recent Parish Pastoral Assembly (PPA) brought together representatives from various ministries and apostolates in the parish.

The one-and-a-half-day event, aimed to ignite dialogue, reflection, and collaboration among parishioners. With a total of 90 participants, the assembly proved to be an exceptional gathering of minds, resulting in an invigorating roadmap for the future of the parish.

The assembly commenced with a brief overview by Fr Thomas Madanan on *What a Pastoral Assembly is*. He also talked about the journey leading towards the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 themed *The Catholic Church in Malaysia coming together as clergy, religious and laity to Celebrate, Listen and Walk in the Light of the Lord* (Isaiah 2:2-5).

A walkthrough of the synod questionnaires and the input set the stage for the thought-provoking discussions that followed.

The focal point of the assembly was the presentation of four documents *Amoris*



The group discussions.

Laetitia Evangelii Gaudium, Fratelli Tutti and *Laudato Si'* presented by members of the parish's Malaysian Pastoral Committee.

Each document was summarised, shedding light on its relevance and implications towards the parish community. The presentations served as a catalyst for discussions and reflections. Participants were divided into smaller groups, enabling them to en-

gage in meaningful conversations and share their perspectives on the questions posed using the "See, Judge, Act" methodology. These questions encouraged a diverse range of opinions, ensuring inclusivity and active participation.

The second day witnessed the culmination of these discussions. The presenters skilfully synthesised the wealth of ideas and

insights shared during the group sessions. By presenting the summarised reports, they ensured that the collective voice of the participants was accurately represented, fostering a sense of transparency and ownership among all attendees.

The moderator, captured the essence of the discussions in a comprehensive summary. Her report encapsulated the key themes, concerns, and aspirations that emerged.

Fr Thomas, in his closing remarks, expressed gratitude for the participants' commitment and active engagement throughout the assembly. He emphasised the significance of continued discernment and prayer, urging everyone to remain steadfast in their dedication to the parish community's growth and development.

The assembly served as a platform for individuals to voice their concerns, share their aspirations, and contribute to the shaping of the parish's future. The identified key themes and concerns will guide the development of the pastoral plan, ensuring it addresses the evolving needs of the community. It also paved the way for ongoing dialogue, reflection, and growth within the parish community.

Canon law defines and protects the rights and responsibilities of all

KENINGAU: The Catholic Church's Code of Canon Law is an instrument that must serve the Church's pastoral mission of bringing God's mercy to all and leading them to salvation.

The Catechetical ministry of the Cathedral of St Francis Xavier hosted a study day on September 23, dedicated to comprehending the canon law of the Catholic Church. The event drew the participation of 298 catechists.

The primary focus of this Study Day was

the 1983 Canon Law — to delve deeper into the essence of canon law, encompassing its historical development and the specific areas it addresses. The main speaker, Msgr Gilbert Lasius, explained that canon law comprises divine law and ecclesiastical law. Divine law is unchangeable and applies to every human being — for example, the law against murder. Ecclesiastical law is rooted in Church law and is not infallible, although it is authoritative — for example, the laws regarding fasting and abstinence.

Msgr Gilbert went on to say that canon law provides processes so people can obtain their rights in the Church such as privacy, employment, knowing their marital status in the Church etc. The purpose of canon law is to protect personal rights, provide justice to victims and a means to resolve disputes. Canon law does not take its "marching orders" from secular or political concerns, but rather, from the theological principles of the Catholic Church.

Msgr Gilbert then considered the connection between canon law and the synodality of the Church.

"The synodal spirit must be lived in every aspect of your juridical duties. Journeying together in reciprocal listening while invoking the Holy Spirit is an indispensable condition for being just."

Last but certainly not least, canon law defines and protects the rights and responsibilities of all people, according to their status in the Church. Law is intrinsic to Christian relationships within the Church. For example, canon law defines the sacraments, which are essential to defining our Christian relationships. It is meant to facilitate peace, justice,



Msgr Gilbert Lasius

equity and fairness among all members of the Church.

At the end of the day, there was a question answer session. Many asked about the Sacrament of Matrimony, the obligations and rights of all Christian faithful and the punishment of offences in general.

Rita Titing, the organising chairlady, thanked everyone for attending the study day and for their dedication to the ministry. The study day was a huge success and participants left with great enthusiasm to implement what they learnt in their respective churches, so they could better help in the catechetical ministry. — *By Caroline Liew*



A catechist posing a question during the study day.

Understanding addiction and effective interventions

KUALA LUMPUR: The Archdiocesan Mental Health Ministry hosted a webinar via Zoom on *What is Addiction and How to help* October 7.

Addiction is a complex issue that has long been a subject of debate: Is it a matter of choice or a disease? Dispelling misconceptions and gaining insight into its various facets is crucial for providing effective help and support.

One of the fundamental questions about addiction revolves around its nature. While some may view addiction as a choice, mounting scientific evidence suggests that it's a disease that affects the brain. It's characterised by compulsive drug seeking and use despite harmful consequences, which is

a hallmark of addiction as a disease.

Common misconceptions about addiction often perpetuate stigma. It's vital to debunk these myths. Addiction is not a sign of moral failing or a lack of willpower; it's a complex interplay of genetic, environmental, and neurological factors.

Addiction isn't limited to substances like drugs and alcohol. It can also encompass behavioural addictions such as gambling, gaming, and even internet addiction. Recognising these various forms is essential for tailored interventions.

Addiction profoundly affects an individual's ability to make rational decisions. The brain's reward system, which involves the release of hormones like dopamine, is

hijacked by addictive substances or behaviours. This disrupts the brain's capacity to weigh consequences and make healthy choices.

Effective interventions for addiction take a multi-pronged approach. They often involve a combination of therapy, medication, and support networks. Behavioural therapies, like Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Motivational Enhancement Therapy (MET), can be highly effective in helping individuals regain control over their lives.

One of the most significant challenges in addiction intervention is denial. Individuals grappling with addiction often downplay its severity or refuse to acknowledge the prob-

lem altogether. Overcoming this hurdle may require the support and guidance of trained professionals and a strong support system.

In conclusion, addiction is a complex issue with profound implications for both individuals and society. Understanding that addiction is a disease, not a choice, is a critical first step. By dispelling misconceptions, recognising the various forms of addiction, addressing how it impacts decision making, and utilising a combination of interventions, we can help individuals break free from the cycle of addiction. Overcoming denial remains a significant challenge, but with compassion, patience, and the right support, recovery is possible. — *By Jimmy Ong, Licensed Counsellor and Psychotherapist*

Young priests reminded to show mercy at every opportunity



By Juanis Marcus

KENINGAU: The annual Young Priests Gathering (YPG 2023) brought together 53 priests from Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei from October 9 to 12. This gathering is organised to provide ongoing formation for priests ordained five years or less.

Bishop Cornelius Piong presided over the opening Mass. After the Eucharistic celebration, the prelate extended a warm welcome to the young priests and hoped their visit to Keningau would allow them to catch up, reminisce, and learn a thing or two from their pastoral challenges.

The YPG was also attended by Bishop Richard Ng of Miri, the prelate in charge of ongoing formation for priests under the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei.

On the second day, the priests visited the Keningau Diocese's

Holy Family Pilgrimage Centre, Nulu Sosopon.

They were briefed on the pilgrimage programmes currently conducted within the diocese. Patrick Marius, a team member responsible for these pilgrimages, presented information on the Marian pilgrimage. Following this, they participated in Mass presided over by Bishop Richard. During his homily, Bishop Richard reflected on the parable of the Good Samaritan and the story of Martha and Mary.

The prelate explained that the parable of the Good Samaritan serves as a guide for Catholics, emphasising the importance of showing mercy whenever the opportunity arises and actively seeking opportunities for charitable service.

However, he cautioned against allowing genuine service to devolve into mere busyness, akin to Martha, who became preoccupied with many tasks. He encouraged the congregation not to let their service to others divert them from the core purpose of their service, which is ultimately centred on Jesus. This distinction was exemplified by Mary, who chose the better path, one that would remain with her and not be taken away.

Subsequently, the priests shared dinner with the local community at the Cathedral of St Francis Xavier in Keningau. In the evening, they were entertained by various cultural dances and musical performances.

The next day, the priests set off for Tambunan to engage in mission activities and were hosted by local adoptive families. The YPG concluded with Mass on Oct 12 at the Church of the Holy Cross in Toboh, Tambunan.

There, it was announced that the Diocese of Sibu will host YPG 2024!

“Every year, this gathering is an event I eagerly anticipate. It offers a unique opportunity to openly share our struggles and faith among our peers, reminding me that I’m not alone on this challenging journey.”

“Having served for 20 months as a deacon and priest in the Diocese of Penang, I, a Sabahan, found myself back in Sabah (hosted by Keningau Diocese) for the YPG this year. This experience reconnected me with the local people, its traditions and traditional local cuisine which I missed a lot!

“As a Franciscan friar, I was also fortunate to meet the Secular Franciscan family in Tambunan, where I encountered some familiar faces from my time in Sandakan, when I served in my parish as a youth, a long time ago.

“One of the highlights was living with my foster family in Toboh,

Tambunan. Though our time together was brief, they welcomed me and another priest as if we had known each other for a lifetime.

“During my visit to Nuhu Sosopon, Toboh, and Tatal Retreat Centre, I was inspired by their long-standing practice of using reusable cutlery and plates. This sustainable effort has the potential to significantly reduce plastic pollution and single-use plastics, aligning with the Malaysian dioceses’ commitment to becoming an ecological dioceses in perpetuity.

“I hope that events like this will enable religious and diocesan priests, particularly those who received their priestly formation outside Malaysia, to deepen their connections and strengthen their bonds with those who studied locally.”

— **Friar Crispus Mosinoh, OFM, Diocese of Penang**

“I am truly grateful for the opportunity to attend the YPG. This gathering is my second one and it has been an extraordinary experience that has immensely enriched me. Throughout the event, I was able to connect with fellow young priests from other dioceses of Malaysia and Singapore.

“One highlight was the session by Fr Michael Raymond OFM Cap who shared the reality and struggles of young priests. The messages behind it resonated deeply with me and inspired me to reflect on my own calling as a young priest. The session by Msgr Nicholas Stephen, who shared his stories of joy and perseverance in

his priesthood helped me renew my sense of purpose and reminded me of the incredible privilege and responsibility that comes with serving in the ministry.

“Above all, the pilgrimage and fellowship among brother priests, the parishioners and my foster family reminded me that I am not alone on this journey and that I can lean on these newfound friends for support.

“As I reflect on this gathering, I express my gratitude to all those involved in organising and facilitating such a remarkable event. Thank you and God bless.” — **Fr Terans Thadeus, Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu**

• More sharings on our website heraldmalaysia.com

Letters to Editor

Synodality missing at APA

Dear Editor,

I was one of the participants of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Assembly (APA) held at the Church of St Francis of Assisi, Cheras, on October 14.

Having been a ‘veteran’ in several parish, archdiocesan and peninsular level assemblies, I must say that I am disappointed by the lack of vision by the archdiocesan team who were in charge of this assembly.

The lack of preparation on the part of the organisers was so evident. Not much thought was given to the programme and the time allocation — there was a lot of unnecessary wasting of time in between. The only ‘positive’ thing that we benefitted from this ‘waste of time’ was that we were able to catch up and have a gossip session with others. Yes, a gossip group is relevant as mentioned by Archbishop Julian Leow in his

keynote address.

Cluster groups were mentioned, but with all due respect to the archbishop, the cluster groups did not meet their intended aim. The so-called five-year plan post PMPC IV was just a waste of time and I’m surprised that the archbishop is not aware of this.

Even the second five-year plan (2022-2026) shared lacked anything concrete. The so-called emphasis on family came and went with no fanfare except, if I am not mistaken, an opening and closing Mass.

There was talk on synodality, but it was not evident.

There was talk on the youth being the forefront — of being decision makers — but they were instead relegated to registration and logistics duties. If I’m not mistaken, hadn’t we cast aside the mindset of getting young people to only carry tables and chairs sometime back? Looks like the

archdiocesan team has decided to ‘resurrect’ this again.

There was talk of lay participation, but even the divine office prayers were led by the clergy. Even the archdiocesan ministries were not involved.

Where were the religious? They were not part of this synodality.

One thing that was very glaring in this assembly is that the participants were not given the opportunity to question or give their two cents worth towards the end of the assembly. I heard that the Malacca Johore Diocesan Assembly held on the same day had an open forum for the delegates to have their say. In our case, it was just sit there and listen to what we (the APA team) have to say. Sadly, the spirit of synodality was missing at our Archdiocesan Pastoral Assembly.

**Disappointed Veteran
Kuala Lumpur**

We are still lacking in direction

Dear Editor,

I am very disheartened by the recently concluded APA. In the letter given to parishes and diocesan ministries, the emphasis was placed on getting younger people to attend the assembly.

Many leaders in diocesan ministries and in the parish are older than the requirement for those attending the APA. That is a proven fact. If the organisers wanted a younger crowd, this concept should have been implemented earlier to actually ensure that those attending knew what they were there for.

Material of the history of the Peninsular Malaysia Church was given two days before the APA. What was the point? Did these leaders or representatives actually have time to look through all the material?

While some have attended nu-

merous assemblies, for others this was a first-time event. So many were just listening blindly.

We were asked to reflect and share based on the See-Judge-Act method on what was shared by one of the presenters. Why was the material not given to the delegates to help in their reflection?

After the presentation of the fruits of the APA, we were informed that the results will take time to be shared. Why is this so?

I understand that the diocesan action plan will take time, but the results of the sharing should not. Thank goodness for hp cameras. Many already have them.

The organising committee, should pray and discern so that we will have some sort of direction for the diocese and parish moving forward.

**JayKayTee
via email**

'Let's End Poverty' launched in UK

MANCHESTER: The 'Let's End Poverty' founding assemblies took place on October 14 as over 250 leaders gathered in nine different spaces across the United Kingdom and online to explore building a movement where poverty can't hold anyone down.

Participants explored what it might look like to build a movement of people united under the banner of 'Let's End Poverty'. Leaders from diverse organisations and communities, including a range of Catholic Social Action Network (CSAN) members, shared what they are seeing happening in communities, where more and more people are being locked in poverty and are struggling to afford life's essentials. Alongside this was the knowledge that people are ready for change and want to see a society

where poverty does not exist and no one is trapped in hardship. This was the energy that gathered people together.

Ben Gilchrist, CEO of Caritas Shrewsbury, said: "We're here because we know that levels of poverty are rising in our communities, and that the challenges our neighbours are facing are deepening. After facing the pandemic and responding to the cost of living crisis, communities and charities that many of you will



be part of and support, are working tirelessly to support your neighbours in hardship under increasing pressure.

In our communities and across our nation, more and more people are being locked into poverty.

"But we're also here because we believe in a future where poverty is no longer allowed to keep anyone down. Where everyone has enough to eat, has a good quality of life and is supported through hard times, where food

banks, clothes banks and warm hubs aren't the accepted norm. Where all of us are able to wake up in the morning with hope, opportunities and options for living a fulfilling life."

Patrick O'Dowd, Director of Caritas Salford, said: "We need our political leaders to step up and take responsibility. We need urgent, coordinated action on poverty and everything that locks people in it — including the cost of living, poor quality work, inequalities in education, ethnicity and health, an inadequate social security system and the lack of affordable, decent quality homes. We believe that with a shared vision, commitment and understanding, and with the right policies, services and support, we could all be free from poverty in the UK." — *ICN*

Church challenges Sri Lankan draft law to stifle social media



COLOMBO: Church and rights groups, including media organisations and political parties have challenged the legality of the Sri Lankan government's "online safety bill" listed for debate in the parliament.

Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, who filed the petition in the Supreme Court on October 16, said certain clauses in the draft law seriously curtail freedom of speech and fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution.

The bill reportedly proposes to compel social media platforms to divulge the identities of anonymous users who post information that government regulators consider to be "false" or "offensive."

It stipulates a five-year prison sentence for social media users and a 10 million rupee (RM572,550) fine on social media platforms for non-compliance.

Rights groups have called it "a wholesale effort" to stifle criticism of the island nation's beleaguered government.

Cardinal Ranjith said the law plans to give "arbitrary and unreasonable wide-ranging powers to the president" to appoint or remove the president and members of the Online Safety Commission.

He urged the Supreme Court to order a referendum on the issue and ensure the bill cannot be approved by parliament without a two-thirds majority vote. — *ucanews.com*

25,000 attend mega Bible procession

DUMKA, India: More than 25,000 people, including Hindus, walked on the streets of Dumka, the second capital of Jharkhand state in eastern India, to conclude the four-day convention of the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) Synod.

People from seven deaneries of the Dumka diocese, dressed in Santhali costumes, sang, danced and played musical instruments as they carried posters depicting the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit in the October 15 mega Bible convention.

Bishop Julius Marandi of Dumka enthroned the Bible on a decorated vehicle carrying the globe. At the end of the procession, Bishop Marandi presided over the Eucharist along with Archbishop Thomas D'Souza of Calcutta and Emeritus Bishop Salvatore Lobo of Barupur and about 100 priests on St Paul's Cathedral grounds, Dumka.

"The Word of God strengthens all. We not merely respect, but need to read, reflect and share in the BECs," said Bishop Marandi during the homily.

Niraj Kumar Dikshit, a Hindu lawyer who participated in the procession, found it different from any held in Dumka. "It was beautiful, peaceful and prayerful. I heard

about it from some of my friends, and was curious. So, I attended some of the convention sessions and the procession," he said.

Fr Charles Hansda, the main organiser of the Bible procession, said the Catholic youth of the diocese had done "a marvelous job of directing the traffic and guiding the people in the Bible procession which lasted more than two hours."

Suboth Khan Soren, a youth of Dumka, said they need more conventions to bring unity among the Christians and to deepen their faith.

The participants promised to work to strengthen the BECs and to enlarge the tents to welcome the people of other faiths to experience the mercy of God. The convention participants felt more unity, belonging and communion among themselves, said Akash John Ekka, a youth from Kolkata.

Sr Christin Joseph, a member of the National BEC Service Team of the Conference of Catholic Bishops in India, said they plan similar conventions in each diocese welcoming BEC animators from all the parishes to participate and to learn from one another to enlarge the tents for people of good will in the neighbourhood. — *By I P Sarto, Matters India*



The participants promised to work to strengthen the BECs and to enlarge the tents to welcome the people of other faiths to experience the mercy of God.

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• BUILDING OF MONUMENTS • SUPPLY OF CONDOLENCE WREATHS •

'Too much emphasis' on women priests, says theologian

VATICAN: Spending too much time on the "niche issue" of women priests or deacons distracts the Church from addressing what women really need, a theologian participating in the Synod on Synodality has said.

"As a woman, I'm not focused at all on the fact that I'm not a priest," Renée Köhler-Ryan, one of 54 women delegates to the Synod on Synodality, said at a press briefing October 17.

"I think that there's too much emphasis placed on this question," the Catholic professor added. "And what happens when we put too much emphasis on this question is that we forget about what women, for the most part, throughout the world, need."

Köhler-Ryan is head of the School of Philosophy and Theology at the University of Notre Dame in Sydney, Australia. She participated in the Church in Australia's plenary council and is writing a forthcoming book on St Edith Stein's *Essays on Woman*.

Paolo Ruffini, president of the synod's information commission, told journalists that synod discussions on the afternoon of Oct 16 focused a lot on the role of women in the Church, including whether women should be able to preach the homily at Mass and the "reinstatement of the female diaconate."

Köhler-Ryan said "some people are very focused on this idea that only if women become ordained will they have any kind of equality."

But, equality is "not a one for one thing" in the Church, she said, pointing out that the Synod on Synodality has focused a lot on the idea of unity in diversity.

"Well part of that diversity is that there are realities of motherhood and fatherhood that are both spiritual and biological and that are really important for understanding what is going on across the whole Church," the wife and mother added.

She said the issue of women's ordination "distracts" the Church from what it could be doing to help women in other ways, like offering greater support to families and working mothers.

"I think that's a far more interesting conversation for most women than what I tend to think of as a kind of niche issue," Köhler-Ryan said.

Köhler-Ryan's comments came shortly after another delegate described women's participation in

the Synod on Synodality, where they are full voting members for the first time, as "setting the stage for future changes."

Sr Maria de los Dolores Valencia Gomez, a Sister of St Joseph, led the Synod on Synodality assembly Oct 13 in her capacity as one of Pope Francis' 10 president-delegates. She described the experience of sitting with the Pope "as a symbol of this opening, this wish that the Church has ... for something that places all of us at the same level."

Another synod participant, one of 13 people tasked with helping put together a summary document of the Oct 4-29 assembly, told the *National Catholic Reporter* last week that he would be open to a female diaconate.

"The question of the ordination of women is clearly something that needs to be addressed universally. ... And if it were to be that the outcome was for ordination to

the diaconate to be open to women, I'd certainly welcome that," Bishop Shane Mackinlay of Sandhurst, Australia, said in a podcast interview.

About women deacons, Köhler-Ryan said what the synod is "identifying at the moment is where there needs to be more theological consideration of different issues, and I think I can safely say this is one where there needs to be more consideration, knowing that this has been an issue that has been looked at before."

During his pontificate, Pope Francis has formed two temporary commissions to study the question of women deacons.

The first, in 2016, examined the historic question of the role of deaconesses in the early Church. In 2019, it was announced that the 12-person commission had not reached any consensus on the question.

In April 2020, the Pope formed a



"As a woman, I'm not focused at all on the fact that I'm not a priest," Renée Köhler-Ryan, one of 54 women delegates to the Synod on Synodality, said at a press briefing Oct 17, 2023. (CNA/Daniel Ibañez)

second commission after the topic of female deacons was discussed at the Amazon Synod the prior October, together with a request for the 2016 commission to be reestablished.

At the end of the October 2019 meeting, synod members recommended to Pope Francis that women be considered for certain ministries in the Church, including the permanent diaconate, which is an order within the sacrament of holy orders.

But in his apostolic exhortation on the Amazon, published in February 2020, Pope Francis called for women in the South American region to be included in new forms of service in the Church, but not within the ordained ministries of the permanent diaconate or priesthood.

The subject of women deacons has previously been studied by the Church, including in a 2002 document from the International Theological Commission (ITC), an advisory body to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. — **By Hannah Brockhaus, CNA**



Women at the Synod on Synodality, Vatican. (16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops facebook)

Women are the secret behind vibrant parishes in rural Benin

BENIN, West Africa: St Hilary of Poitiers parish in the small rural village of Djigbé in southern Benin was already bustling with activity at 5.00am on Sunday. Under the supervision of Françoise Kponnon, vice-president of St Hilary's pastoral council, the women of the parish were busy setting up for the 6.00am Mass, while in the sacristy, the choir was rehearsing its liturgical hymns in anticipation of the procession.

One of the first things that

strikes the casual visitor to this parish is the predominance of women, followed by children, young people and, finally, men.

"More women than men come to Mass here," explains the 52-year-old Kponnon. She estimates that "four out of five parishioners are women".

A similar observation applies to the neighbouring St Joseph de Hozin parish.

"Men don't often have the time," observes Noelic

Dasilikonon, secretary of the parish's Caritas office. "We women, on the other hand, are more sensitive to the tasks of the parish and help the priests the bishop sends us."

In northern Benin, the situation is no different. The Rev Roméo Amézotchi assures us that "women occupy a special place in the diocese of Djougou, especially in rural areas".

Director of the diocese's Pontifical Missionary Society (PMS), he attests that "the women are very organised" and that "thanks to them, our rural communities are vibrant communities". Involved in many activities — choirs, prayer and service groups, etc. — they "give of their time to work for the evolution of the Church and the proclamation of the Good News". But this commitment, it seems, hides many challenges.

While their presence and effectiveness within rural parishes is recognised by all, the women living in these environments nonetheless face certain challenges.

"Increasingly, with climate change, agriculture — the main activity of women in these ar-

reas — no longer provides them with a steady income," observes Maurice Gbatodonou, the pastor at St Hilary of Poitiers parish in Djigbé for the past three years.

"Especially since traders from urban areas often come and buy from them, at a low price, the little they do harvest, only to sell it dearly in town," he points out.

"They (the women) are also the ones who run the households and are often left to struggle alone to feed and educate their children," adds Maxime Noumonhessi, the priest who administers the neighbouring St Joseph de Hondji parish, lamenting the lack of support from their husbands.

"What are we, as pastors, doing for young girls in these rural environments where, when they fail to complete their schooling, they find themselves reduced to trading or farming?" asks Gbatodonou of St Hilary's.

In this priest's view, preparatory work is needed from an early age.

"We have to start at the grassroots," he insists. But how?

"Priests working in these areas must take an interest in the basic

education of these girls, training them to be self-reliant, while encouraging those who are in school to invest themselves fully in their studies," Gbatodonou says

To this end, Noumonhessi of the neighboring parish is conducting an experiment that consists in "holding conferences and other awareness-raising activities on the role of women within the family, to awaken them to their responsibilities as mothers in this environment".

Roméo Amézotchi, the priest in charge of the Pontifical Missionary Society in Djougou, goes even further.

"The Church must also help these women to become financially autonomous through micro-projects," he says. "Empowering rural women means saving families," he argues.

The priest is also encouraging his fellow pastors in these areas to work on literacy for the many women who have not attended school so that they can at least read and write in their mother languages. — **By Juste Hlannon, LCI, ([https:// international.la-croix.com/](https://international.la-croix.com/))**



The Hanyé choir at the Mary Mother of the Church station in Yénawa, a station of the Saint Hilary of Poitiers Parish in Djigbé, in the municipality of Dangbo and the Diocese of Porto-Novo. (LCI Photo/Juste Hlannon)

Pope proposes spirituality of the Little Flower for Church's mission

Pope Francis has issued a major document to propose the spirituality of St Thérèse of Lisieux, the 19th century French Carmelite nun most English-speakers know as the “Little Flower”, as a model for the Church’s mission.

“One of the most important insights of Thérèse for the benefit of the entire People of God is her ‘little way’, the path of trust and love, also known as the way of spiritual childhood,” the Pope says in a new apostolic exhortation titled *C’est la confiance* (“It is confidence”).

The text was published on October 15, the midway-point of the current Synod assembly on the Church’s future, and comes amidst yearlong celebrations to mark the 150th anniversary of the 1873 birth of the woman who was baptised Thérèse Martin and later declared a saint and Doctor of the Church.

A spiritual treasure

Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face (her religious name) had just one year to live when — on July 17, 1896 — she wrote these now-famous words to her religious superior and elder blood sister, Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart: “It is confidence and nothing but confidence that must lead us to Love.” The Pope chose that quote to open his new apostolic constitution. But he said he chose not to issue it on the actual anniversary of Thérèse’s

In a new apostolic exhortation, the Pope invites Catholics to follow the “little spiritual path” of St Thérèse of Lisieux, underlining the Church’s true priorities.

birth (January 2, 1873) or the centenary of her beatification (March 19, 1923) “so that this message may transcend those celebrations and be taken up as part of the spiritual treasury of the Church”.

The exhortation takes up the spiritual journey of the little Carmelite who died at the age of 24, revealing all her pastoral relevance.

“Her genius consists in leading us to what is central, essential and indispensable,” insists the Pope.

“As theologians, moralists and spiritual writers, as pastors and as believers, wherever we find ourselves, we need constantly to appropriate this insight of Thérèse and to draw from it consequences both theoretical and practical, doctrinal and pastoral, personal and communal. We need boldness and interior freedom to do so,” he says.

In four parts, the Jesuit Pope takes the reader from the discovery of the Teresian spiritual message to lessons for the governance of the Church.

Drawing on his reading of her spiritual autobiography, *Story of a Soul*, the Pope emphasises Thérèse of Lisieux’s “appreciation of the fact that evangelisation takes place by attraction, not by pressure or proselytism”.

In a paragraph entitled “The grace that sets us free from self-absorption”, the Pope writes: “In place of a Pelagian notion of holiness, individualistic and elitist, more ascetic than mystical, that primarily emphasises human effort, Thérèse always stresses the primacy of God’s work, His gift of grace.”

Growing in holiness

It is a reading with meditative overtones that the Pope immediately tempers with these words: “That once gratuitously justified by sanctifying grace, we are changed and enabled to cooperate by our good works in a process of growth in holiness.”

And who better to embody this vocation of small steps towards holiness than the Little Flower, the Carmelite nun from Normandy who anticipated addressing God as follows: “I will appear before You with empty hands”.

Thérèse of Lisieux is still remembered for her words: “In the heart of the Church, I shall be love”.

As the synodal debates continue, it’s hardly surprising that Francis, in a very political reading, recalls this cry.



Pope Francis prayed before a relic of St Thérèse of Lisieux at the beginning of his general audience in St Peter’s Square, before going to the hospital for an abdominal surgery, on June 7, 2023. (CNA/Daniel Ibanez)

“This heart was not that of a triumphalistic Church, but of a loving, humble and merciful Church... This discovery of the heart of the Church is also a great source of light for us today. It preserves us from being scandalised by the limitations and weaknesses of the ecclesiastical institution with its shadows and sins,” he insists.

Going to the source

On several occasions, the Pope returns to his first apostolic exhortation (2013): “In *Evangelii Gaudium*, I urged a return to the freshness of the source, in order to emphasise what is essential and indispensable.

I now consider it fitting to take up that invitation and propose it anew.”

It’s also a way for Francis to respond to his opponents, through the voice of a simple Carmelite nun who is, nonetheless, a doctor of the Church.

“By her words and her personal experience she shows that, while it is true that all the Church’s teachings and rules have their importance, their value, their clarity, some are more urgent and more foundational for the Christian life,” he writes. “That is where Thérèse directed her eyes and her heart.” — **By Christophe Henning, LCI** (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)

What story would you tell at the synod?

If you had three minutes to give an intervention inside the Synod on Synodality, what would you say? Would you declare that something is wrong in the Church and call on the synod to change it? Would you express your fear or hesitancy that the synod might change something that is “unchangeable”? Would you say something about your local parish or community that, though meaningful, isn’t as relevant to advancing the discussion on synodality? I would tell a story such as below:

Two young Filipinos stepped up to a microphone in front of 30,000 other youth and an old man dressed in white at the University of Santo Tomas in Manila, Philippines.

Jun, age 14, and Glyzelle, age 12, both formerly homeless, unfolded a piece of paper and began telling their life stories to Pope Francis. They must have been nervous, but it didn’t show. In their short lives, they had seen and experienced much more traumatic and nerve-racking things.

Jun began living on the streets of Manila when his family couldn’t afford to send him to school. He searched for cardboard to sleep on and ate what he could find in the garbage. On the streets, kids lose any respect they had for adults, he said. They are taught to steal, kill if necessary, and some of them start using drugs.

Glyzelle confirmed the problem of drug use among street kids and added that many are completely neglected by their parents.

They become easy prey for human traffickers and are forced into prostitution. Then, bursting into tears, she asked a question: “Why is God allowing this to happen to us, even if it is not our fault?”

As they put aside their text and walked toward the Pope, Francis met them and embraced them. Now it was his turn to speak. Putting aside his prepared address, the Pope said: “This girl has asked the one question that doesn’t have an answer. And she couldn’t say it in words. She had to say it with tears.”

It was a question with no easy answer. In an era when we often feel compelled to offer our own definitive answers, the Pope admitted he didn’t have one. “Only when our hearts can ask this question and weep, can we begin to understand,” he said. “Dear young men and women, our world today needs weeping. The marginalised weep, those who are neglected weep, the scorned weep, but those of us who have relatively comfortable lives, we don’t know how to weep. Certain realities of life are seen only with eyes that are cleansed by tears.”

I’ll never forget this powerful insight offered by Pope Francis in Manila in January

2015. What is real and true can be known through eyes that have been cleansed by tears. We can all attest to the experience of crying and wiping away tears. It often happens when we realise we’re not in control and we’re facing an unanswerable question.

At that moment our sight is blurry, but crying opens in us space for profound empathy and compassion, which can ultimately change the way we see things. Tears flow when sincere listening takes place, without judgment or the compulsion to immediately rebut or respond.

There are many different kinds of interventions being made inside the synod hall this month. Undoubtedly, some members are sharing powerful stories of deep hurt, persecution and exclusion, and also of resilience and hope. Many of the questions being discussed at the small tables do not have easy answers. How will the synod respond?

At the conclusion of his conversation with the young people gathered in Manila, Pope Francis said: “Pardon me that I read practically nothing of what I had prepared. But there is a phrase which gives me a little bit of consolation: ‘Realities are greater than ideas.’ And the reality [which the young people

who spoke] described, your reality, is greater than the ideas which I had prepared.”

Realities are greater than ideas. It’s a framework for Francis’ papacy through which we see his proclivity for pastoral nuance. It’s why he responded as he did to five cardinals who, prior to the synod, raised doctrinal questions about the authority of the synod, women’s ordination and blessing homosexual unions. The Pope reiterated established Church teaching but added: “In dealing with people, however, we must not lose the pastoral charity that must permeate all our decisions and attitudes. The defence of objective truth is not the only expression of this charity, which is also made up of kindness, patience, understanding, tenderness, and encouragement. Therefore, we cannot become judges who only deny, reject, exclude.”

The press has been given very little information about what’s happening inside the synod hall, but the synod’s communications team has confirmed that difficult conversations — for which there are no easy answers — are happening. The methodology is structured to facilitate deep listening and discernment. This synod, more than any other, is built on the premise that realities are greater than ideas. To what extent stories are shared and tears are shed, we don’t yet know. But it seems to me that those powerful interventions could have the greatest potential impact on the unfolding communal discernment. — **By Sebastian Gomes, America**



Anger over a Eucharistic procession?

There was a gargantuan Eucharistic procession through New York City on October 10, led by a bishop and joined by hundreds of habited sisters and clergy in flowing vestments, replete with candles and incense and song, and followed by thousands of lay people. It was immense.

I love Eucharistic processions — not because they trigger some kind of fond nostalgia for the good old days (how old do you think I am?), but because it is literally Jesus and people following Him. What's not to love?

Plenty, it turns out. I found out about the procession by scrolling through social media, and then instantly found out how many people didn't like it.

Let me pause here and say that I don't know much of the context of the procession. It was, I gather, organised by the Napa Institute as part of the National Eucharistic Revival. I have been avoiding learning very much about either the Napa Institute or the Eucharistic Revival because every time these topics come up, people start getting nasty. I'm a slow student, but one thing I've finally learned is that Jesus and nastiness do not mix. If I can't stop being a jerk, at the very least I can try not to be a jerk to people about Jesus. So, I stay away from certain conversations. I have made a choice to de-contextualise certain spiritual things. This means I'm less well-informed about some current events, but my prayer life is stronger, and I'm okay with that trade-off.

That being said, I was taken aback by just how mad people were about this Eucharistic



A few hundred Catholics marched through the streets of Washington, DC, to publicly pray and adore the Body of Christ during a Eucharistic procession. (CNA photo/Joe Portolano)

procession. I like processions so much, I guess I naively assumed everybody did. I had forgotten that sometimes, people use processions as a power move, as sorties in the culture war. Apparently, people will sometimes organise a Eucharistic procession as a way of saying "This is the old school church, and we're taking back this space from you modernists and secularists; we're gonna stop traffic and you're gonna have to accept it" or something along those lines ... and that is not very Christ-like.

And I gather that some people objected to the procession because it strikes them as tone-deaf for the Church to do something so showy and ceremoniously, publicly pious while several dioceses in New York state have filed bankruptcy because of lawsuits from victims

of sex abuse by priests; but there they go, walking by slowly in their pretty white robes. So, if you look at it in a certain light, you might think, "Why are these rape apologists, who have dug themselves so deep into such an ugly hole, getting dressed up in fancy clothes and parading slowly through the streets with candles and music, as if they have anything to be proud of?"

The answer is, of course, we do. We have Jesus. That's what we have to be proud of. That's the full answer. If anyone in that procession is proud of anything else — and it's very likely that they are — then they're wrong. But that doesn't change the fact that it's Jesus at the head.

Maybe this procession was intended, by

some people, as some kind of power move. So what? People have always tried to use Jesus as a tool or a weapon in the current culture war. This isn't a 21st-century phenomenon. That is precisely what they did when they crucified Him. They had a political, cultural situation, and they decided to use Jesus as a weapon in that culture war. They made a procession through the city and up the hill, and then they stuck Him on a tree where everyone could see Him. Talk about a power move.

But it didn't work, because He is Jesus. It didn't work, because He ignored their intentions and instead, He did what He came to do, which was to redeem us. His death still brought about the salvation of the world, and He still rose again, because that is who He is. Always transcendent. Always immaculate. Always worth following, no matter what the context.

As far as our own potentially impure intentions in joining in: This, too, is an old story. This is how it is any time we follow Jesus in any way, in prayer, in the Mass, in our personal devotions, in our public devotions, in our daily life, all the time. We're always falling short. We're always doing what we do for partially wrong reasons, if not completely, wrong reasons. It's called "original sin," folks.

Show me one thing that Catholics do, in public or in private, that isn't mixed up with some kind of garbage in one way or another—some kind of culture war, or some impure intentions, or some insincerity, or some nastiness, or some hypocrisy or something. So what? What are you going to do about it? Not follow Jesus?

This is why we follow Jesus! Because we're wrong and we know it. That's the whole point. I know this sounds simplistic, but that's because it's actually very simple. Eyes on Jesus. Follow Jesus. That's all there is. If you wait until conditions are perfect and everyone's intentions are pure, you will die waiting. We know we're doing it wrong; we know He is the only man who is always right. Find Him, go the way He's going and the hell with the rest.

— By Simcha Fisher, *America*

● Simcha Fisher is a speaker, freelance writer and author of 'The Sinner's Guide to Natural Family Planning'. She blogs daily at simchafisher.com and weekly at *The Catholic Weekly*.



(CNA photo/Joe Portolano)

No excuse for the violence, but it's not without cause

The Hamas-Israel war and the reflections of a Catholic bishop living in a Muslim world

The absolutely Machiavellian barbarity staged by Hamas in its surprise attack on the Israeli population has shocked the Western world. It immediately and obviously provoked an outpouring of unanimous condemnation.

My own shock and condemnation blocked me from maintaining a minimum of distance and the space of inner freedom we need to reflect. This is the trap set by Hamas, and we have largely fallen into it.

I do not wish to paint the belligerents with a broad brush without any nuance. We can also see that the military response it provoked has offered Israel the perfect opportunity, not only to try to put an end once and for all to Hamas, but also to further reduce Gaza's already limited autonomy. The Israeli prime minister has even called Gaza "the city of evil that must be destroyed" like Sodom. But are there not fifty, or forty, or thirty, or twenty or even ten righteous people left in Gaza (Gn 18, 22-33)?

Abandoned

Unfortunately, although there's no excuse whatsoever for Hamas' barbaric violence, it

is not without cause. I've experienced some of the injustice and humiliation that are the daily lot of Palestinians in Gaza and elsewhere, in territories that the governmental, or "savage", colonisation has methodically fragmented to the point of making sovereign territorial unity, however modest, impossible. Historical and daily injustice, the use of disproportionate balance of power and permanent humiliation are the bedrock of a violence that is not blind. But we struggle to see this.

Before this latest bolt out of the blue, who cared about the abandoned peace process that had definitively ruined the hope of a viable Palestinian state? We heard nothing more, the lid seemed hermetically sealed and all was going well for us. And today, are we outraged by the words of the Israeli minister of defence, when he says "we are faced with animals and we must treat them like animals" to justify depriving an entire population of water, food, gas and electricity, thus presenting a war crime in the eyes of the world?

Are we outraged to see men, women and children drowned under a deluge of bombs,

taken hostage both by Hamas and by governmental vengeance with unlimited military means? These men, women and children are not Hamas. For the most part, they too are victims.

A conflict that touches us all from within

I live in a Muslim world, where indignation, to the point of unspeakability and sometimes to the point of excess, has been focused entirely on the plight of the Palestinians for decades. The rift with the Western world on this and other issues is staggering, and it continues to grow.

There are many other conflict situations that are more or less ignored, but this one is a hotbed of infection for the whole world. It touches us all from within, because it touches Jerusalem, city of peace always at war, city of the Divine Presence, city of the three inextricably intertwined monotheistic religions.

In this conflict, geopolitics and religions, sacred history and the imperatives of justice are intertwined, and it is as concrete as the despoiling and destruction of olive groves to build a wall that is supposed to enclose

some and protect others. Not forgetting, of course, the weight of the tragic memory of the Shoah.

How can I keep myself between the equal dangers of falling into indifference or prejudice, for which I'm sure I'll be criticised? Certainly, by being aware of our powerlessness to influence a conflict that is holding the world hostage, and at the same time being aware of our ability to take concrete action to prevent this evil from spreading. There are two ways: prayer and relationships. Words are the bulwark against violence.

Finally, I am convinced that lasting peace cannot be won by chaos. It can only be built on justice. "Love and truth meet, justice and peace embrace", says the psalmist (Ps 84). And again, "Peace on Jerusalem, peace to those who love you" (Ps 121). — By Jean-Paul Vesco OP, LCI (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)

● Jean-Paul Vesco is a Dominican friar who has been ministering in Algeria for more than 20 years. Appointed Bishop of Oran in 2012, he is currently the Archbishop of Algiers.

Walking alongside those experiencing miscarriage, child loss



About 10 to 20 per cent of pregnancies end in miscarriage, with 80 per cent of miscarriages happening in the first trimester before 12 weeks of gestation. A ministry in the Archdiocese of Denver aims to accompany parents and families who have experienced miscarriage, stillbirth, prenatal diagnosis, or infant loss.

Behold Your Child, which originally launched in the Archdiocese of Dubuque, Iowa, is in its beginning stages in the Denver Archdiocese. Deacon David Simonton and his wife, Gail, began the ministry at St Thomas More Catholic Parish in Centennial, Colorado.

Soon after David was ordained in June 2019, he was assigned to the apostolate of family life ministry at St Thomas More. Later that summer, he and his wife attended the National Association of Catholic Family Life Ministers National Conference in Denver. It was there where they heard about *Behold Your Child* for the first time.

"When we started thinking about it and praying about it — what is this family life ministry apostolate? What should it look like? The Holy Spirit really put it in our hearts to focus on this particular issue because we have a personal connection to it," David said in an interview with *CNA*.

Early in their marriage, Gail suffered four miscarriages in four years, which David called "particularly difficult."

He explained that thinking about their own experiences and knowing how many young couples go through this, they felt this kind of ministry was extremely needed.

"The more we looked at it, the more we explored it; we didn't have a real formulated ministry of that type here in the Archdiocese of Denver," he said.

The ministry makes it clear that they are not professional counsellors; instead, it is a "ministry of accompaniment" — having people pray for you, answer questions, offer resources, and walk with you through your

loss, Gail explained.

"In our own experience, when we were at the bottom of our bottom, a deacon and his wife came and visited us in the hospital," she shared. "So, I think that in people's times of suffering that it is still a way of evangelising to walk alongside."

"We want to be able to share Jesus' hope with families."

David added: "It's one of those things where we just want them to know that they're loved and supported with whatever experience that they've gone through and that they're not alone in this loss and that there is hope."

One of the first events the couple launched as part of the ministry is an annual memorial Mass, held for parents grieving the loss of their child, followed by a reception. Whether they lost their child years ago or days ago, parents are invited to come together for prayer and worship and to share their stories with others afterward in the hope of finding comfort and understanding that they are not alone.



The *Behold Your Child* ministry is a Catholic-based bereavement ministry that supports couples who are faced with miscarriage, still-birth, infant/child loss, and fatal perinatal diagnosis. (CNA/*Behold Your Child*)

"What we hear so often from folks that have gone through this, and we experience this ourselves, is this real sense of loneliness," David expressed. "So, we really wanted this to be an opportunity for people to come together and be a support for each other."

He shared the story of one couple who attended a memorial Mass in honour of the child they lost 40 years ago.

"They came to the Mass because they never really felt, especially the husband, like he was able to have a sense of closure or to do anything for that little one they lost," he said.

"One couple had heard about the Mass on Sunday, they were still pregnant, and then miscarried on Wednesday, and then came to the Mass on Friday," he added. "They were just coming off a miscarriage that very week but to have the opportunity to come to a

Mass and to remember that little one was a huge thing for them."

"So those kinds of stories are just affirmations that we knew that this was needed with folks."

Ruth Barnes, a Catholic mother who experienced a miscarriage in 2021, has been a part of the *Behold Your Child* ministry since it first started two years ago.

"The first time I went to the memorial Mass I truly felt like my baby in heaven was seen," she shared. "I felt that even though the world may not view me as a mother to two beautiful babies, that indeed I am a mom no matter if my babies are on earth or in heaven."

Barnes expressed that the memorial Mass helped her connect with the Blessed Virgin Mary, "as she has also grieved the loss of her Son and understands this unbearable pain."

She added: "It helped me grow closer to the Church when it easily could have been a time when I turned away."

As for her advice for someone experiencing a pregnancy loss?

"Any feeling or emotion you're feeling during this healing journey is valid and normal," she said. "If it is hard to attend the baby shower, show up for the pregnant friend, or be at the family gathering, that is okay. This time where you're healing physically, mentally, and spiritually is so important."

"Most importantly, I would tell them to lean on God, as He has been the only reason I have been able to keep going for myself and my family after our loss."

Barnes said she hopes that this ministry can help someone "find connection and community during a time that can feel so dark and lonely" and that it would serve as a "home away from home as they navigate the hardest time of their lives." — *CNA*



Beatification cause for 14-year-old killed like St Maria Goretti

The Catholic Church in Nigeria has begun the process for the beatification and canonisation of 14-year-old Vivian Uchechi Ogu of Umuelem, Eniogu (*pic*), who was shot dead November 15, 2009, by gunmen for resisting an attempted rape.

If the cause, initiated Oct 14 is carried out, Vivian would become the Catholic Church's second blessed in Nigeria after Blessed Cyprian Iwene Tansi who was beatified by Pope John Paul II on March 22, 1998.

Like St Maria Goretti, the young Italian woman killed for resisting violence, Vivian resisted attempts by a gang of robbers to rape her and her older sister after they were robbed and kidnapped.

Indeed, Vivian had taken St Maria Goretti

as her role model in the Catechism class she last attended after Mass on Sunday, the day she was killed. Vivian had urged her fellow classmates to emulate St Maria Goretti and to never succumb to rape or any form of immorality.

But that evening, a gang of three robbers managed to enter the young woman's family home. After restraining the people present, including her father who was injured, the thugs fled, taking Vivian and her older sister with them. Led into a nearby bush, the kidnappers attempted to abuse the two girls but Vivian resisted to the point that the thugs killed her.

"Since her reputation for martyrdom and holiness has been growing since her death, and after having been formally invited to

open the Cause of Beatification and Canonisation of the Servant of God, bringing it to the attention of the Church community, we invite all the faithful who can give a valid testimony to come forward and contact the Archdiocesan Curia with their information, whether favourable or contrary to the reputation of martyrdom and holiness of the said Servant of God," reads the decree presented by Archbishop Augustin Obiora Akubeze, Archbishop of Benin City.

Vivian was president of the Pontifical Society of Holy Childhood, and at the age of nine, raised funds to pay for the care of several destitute children in the central hospital in Benin City. She organised several visits to orphanages where she touched the lives of many poor orphans. — *Fides*



SUNDAY OBSERVER

Anil Netto

Long ago, when I attended catechism in secondary school at a mission school, a religious brother told us matter-of-factly that Jews from around the world were returning to the state of Israel, established in 1948.

“And when they all return to Israel, that’s when the end of the world would come.”

Somehow, I doubt there are sound theological grounds for that prediction for, after all, no one knows when ‘the end’ will come.

But it shows us how closely Middle East politics is embedded within the thinking of people of the Abrahamic faiths.

Much blood has been spilt over the centuries as empires and peoples coveted this land. The violence in the land that Jesus, the Prince of Peace, lived in, continues unabated to this day.

People, even outside the region, have taken sides — pro-Israeli or pro-Palestinian.

Yes, we should take sides, the side of justice — for there can be no lasting peace without justice.

At the heart of the Israel-Palestine issue today is the question of land and occupation. The tale is one of occupation by one group and dispossession of another. When the state of Israel was created, following the inward migration of Jews from Europe and elsewhere in what was then known as Palestine, it was followed by the Nakba, the Catastrophe: hundreds of thousands of inhabitants were driven from their homes and villages and became refugees overnight.

Most people have a problem distinguishing Zionism, a political project, from Judaism, the religion. They are also unable to distinguish between ordinary Palestinians

and Hamas, and between ordinary Jews and some of their fascist leaders.

This is not a ‘war’ between parties of equal strength. One side is the occupier, armed to the teeth, with superpower backing; the other is the oppressed and occupied, defenceless and dispossessed from their land and property.

What is happening now in the region is an abomination. How would you describe a hospital in Gaza destroyed after Israeli strikes, with 500 lives lost? And the lives lost in a music festival in Israel after Hamas’ brutal attacks?

But the cycle of violence and bloodshed did not begin with Hamas’ terrible atrocities in Israel. The violence has been ongoing.

The Gaza Strip, about 1.2 times the size of Penang Island, has been under siege for 16 long years, a pressure cooker waiting to explode. Peaceful demonstrators there gunned down.

Over at the West Bank, Palestinian territories have been ghettoised by Israeli troops and encroached upon by Israeli settlers.

Some people describe Gaza as an open-air prison, as entry points to the strip are heavily controlled. But even this is inaccurate. A prison houses convicted criminals. But the civilians of Gaza, descendants of refugees driven out of their land, are innocent. What crimes have ordinary families committed?

To cut off water, electricity, food and fuel supplies for one million people in the north of Gaza is a terrible war crime that in any other place and time would have been denounced for what it is. But because of superpower and mainstream Western media ‘protection’, no such condemnation is heard.

In Jesus’ time, the territories were divided between Judea in the south and Galilee in the north and Samaria in between.

The people of Samaria were shunned and looked down on because their faith and blood were thought to be diluted by other foreign elements. They even worshipped at a different Temple on Mount Gerizim, rather than the massive Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

But much to the surprise of His followers, Jesus reached out to the Samaritan woman, who was taken aback (John 4):

19 ‘I see you are a prophet, sir,’ said the woman.

20 ‘Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, though you say that Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.’

But Jesus tells her the hour is coming when true worshippers will worship the Father neither on Mount Gerizim or in Jerusalem: 23 ... the hour is coming — indeed is already here — when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth: that is the kind of worshipper the Father seeks.

Many Christians are sympathetic to Israel, because they see it as the promised land for God’s ‘chosen people’, the Jews.

But surely God wants His followers, chosen or otherwise, to abide by justice, compassion and love. On the question of justice, He does not play favourites. Among the Palestinians are Muslims and Christians, though many Christians have resettled abroad.

What would Jesus say or do? A friend of mine noted how Jesus wept over the fate of the people of Jerusalem (The Romans destroyed first the Temple and then the city decades after Jesus ascended.): “I believe Jesus would weep today because the people dwelling in this land of milk and honey have not stood for peace and missed many opportunities to secure peace (we know from the many attempts to sign a lasting peace treaty).

“Instead, they have wrestled and fought over

the land with more powerful and sophisticated weapons and brought suffering to both sides.”

The same Jesus who wept over Lazarus’ death would today weep over the loss of innocent lives, especially the children whom He considered precious.

Today, there are two million Palestinians in Gaza (more than half of them refugees), three million in the West Bank and another two million in Israel. That’s almost 7.5 million or 51 per cent of the population squeezed into ever-shrinking territories. (Another 4.5 million live abroad, many of them refugees.)

Seven million Jews live in Israel, including over 200,000 more settlers in occupied East Jerusalem. Another half a million Israeli settlers live on the occupied West Bank. That’s another 7.5 million.

Given how the Palestinian territories have shrunk due to Israeli occupation and settlements, the two-state solution — Israel and Palestine — in existence side-by-side, looks a distant dream.

It is impossible to drive out the 7.5 million Palestinians from their homeland. To do so would amount to ethnic cleansing, even genocide. It will not be easy to remove the illegal Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank.

The land in the entire region, ultimately belongs to God. The only solution is for Israelis and Palestinians, the children of God, to live together in a common land, in peace and justice — without bloodthirsty or fascist leaders egging their followers to violence and hatred.

Perhaps this is the only lasting solution that will find favour with God?

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



WORD MADE FRESH

Nicholas Lye

“Go down to the potter’s house and there you will hear what I have to say.” (Jeremiah 18:2)

Last month, I collaborated with two Catholic potters to create a *Prayer through Clay* workshop. When they told me they were willing to work with 20 participants, I was initially doubtful that we could attract that many. Yet within three days after sending out the publicity, my registration numbers hit 25 sign-ups, and I actually had to close registration and put people on a waiting list. This had never happened to me before, for I was more used to dealing with disappointment when sign-ups are low, and at times had even considered giving this up altogether. Yet, before the workshop even started, God was already (showing off) and showing me what it means for Him to be the Potter, and for myself to be the clay. He was inviting me not to focus on the numbers, but to focus on Him and trust in the way that He works in my life.

This same lesson was also being taught to my two potter friends. Given that it was their first time conducting such a workshop (as they were more used to creating clay figurines as part of their business), they were looking for wooden boards on which participants could work with their clay. The first company they had turned to quoted quite a high price for such boards. It was not until a few days later that they ‘stumbled’ upon an old uncle who had many spare wooden boards that he so kindly offered to cut them into the size that my friends wanted. On top



of that, they also ‘stumbled’ upon someone who was offering free aprons as the person was closing down her business and had lots of aprons to spare. Such was the providence of God and the workings of the Potter when we continue to place our trust and works in His hands.

On the day of the workshop, we introduced the first activity to the participants, which was to get a feel of a given lump of clay, playing with it using their hands, and taking notice of any thoughts or feelings that may arise from their first encounter with the clay. Surprisingly, one of the participants shared how an old memory of her mom surfaced, how her mom used to make dumplings with her hands and even taught her children to do the same. This memory gave the participant a greater appreciation for her mother, and the work of her hands. Another participant also shared how pressing his hands into the clay reminded him of how he currently helps to massage the frail hands of his father, who

struggles to even hold a cup. It made the participant realise how he can so easily take for granted the use of his hands, and how he can now use his own hands to soothe his father and show him his love. It was so amazing to witness God speaking so personally to the participants through such a simple activity.

When it was time for us to pray with the clay, and create something that reflects who we are as inspired by the Spirit, I decided to participate in the activity myself. What I first noticed upon touching the clay was how cold it felt. It seemed to have absorbed the coldness of the air-conditioned room, as if reflective of how easy it is for us to unknowingly absorb the coldness of the world and all the pain and hurt that it brings. Yet when I started pressing onto the clay with my hands, I noticed that the clay started to absorb the warmth from my hands, once again reflective of the warmth and love of God that He wishes to pass onto us if we allow Him to hold us in His hands. This ties in with the

warmth and love that me and my potter friends experienced when we placed the workshop in His hands and witnessed Him providing the numbers and materials, and removing any doubt or disappointment from our hearts.

As I proceeded to think about what I wanted to create, I decided to press my right hand tightly into the clay, which left a lot of excess clay at the side. When I started peeling off the excess clay, it reminded me of the “old wineskins” (Mark 2:22) that God has been inviting me to remove from my life, all the false mindsets about not being good enough or needing to prove my worth, as well as the hurts and lies that I had been clinging on to for far too long. What was left after removing the excess clay was a beautiful piece of clay that fitted snugly in my hand, almost as if God was holding me lovingly in the palm of His hand, where I was safe, protected, and held. This was the new identity that God was inviting me to hold on to, a piece of clay that would only fit perfectly in my hand for that is how unique He created me.

Still, when I left the piece of clay on the wooden board, it started to get cold again after a while. This was a stark reminder for me to constantly keep myself in the hands of the Potter, if I wish to keep out the ‘coldness of the world’ and remain in His warmth and love. This was truly what He wished to say to me (and you) in the Potter’s house.

● **Nicholas** is a lay missionary and creative evangelist who loves to create safe spaces for people to encounter God and discover more about themselves, particularly through the use of art and creativity. Check out tinyurl.com/prayerthroughart for the various prayer workshops he offers both physically and through online platforms.



Fr Ron Rolheiser

A subtler kind of poverty

There are different ways of being excluded in life.

Earlier this year, one of my older brothers died. By every indication, he had lived an exemplary life, one lived mainly for others. He died much loved by everyone who knew him. His was a life lived for family, church, community, and friends.

Giving the homily at his funeral, I shared that, while he almost always brought a smile, a graciousness, and some wit to every situation, underneath he sometimes had to swallow hard to always do that. Why? Because, even though through his entire adult life he gave himself to serving others, for much of his life he didn't have much choice in the matter. Here's his story.

He was one of the older children in our family, a large second-generation immigrant family, struggling with poverty in an isolated rural area of the Canadian prairies where educational facilities weren't easily available at that time. So, for him, as for many of his contemporaries, both men and women, the normal expectation was that after elementary school (an eighth-grade education) you were expected to end your school days and begin to work to support your family. Indeed, when he graduated from elementary school, there was no local high school for him to go to. Making

this more unfortunate, he was perhaps the brightest, most gifted mind in our family. It's not that he didn't want to continue his formal education. But, he had to do what most others of his age did at that time — leave school and begin working, giving your entire salary over every month to support your family. He did this with good cheer, knowing this was expected of him.

Through the years, from age sixteen when he first entered the work force until he took over the family farm in his mid-thirties, he worked for farmers, worked in construction, and did everything from operating a backhoe to driving a truck. Moreover, when our parents died and he took over our farm, there were a number of years when he was still pressured to use the farm to support the family. By the time he was finally freed of this responsibility, it was too late (not radically, but existentially) for him to restart his formal education. He lived out his final years before retirement as a farmer, though as one who found his energy elsewhere, in involvement in ongoing education and lay ministries programmes where he thrived emotionally and intellectually. Part of his sacrifice too was that he never married, not because he was a temperamental bachelor, but because the same things that bound him to duty also, existentially, never af-

forded him the opportunity to marry.

After I shared his story at his funeral, I was approached by several people who said: *That's also my brother! That's also my sister! That was my dad! That was my mother.*

Having grown up where this was true of a number of my older siblings, today, whenever I see people working in service jobs such as cooking in cafeterias, cleaning houses, mowing lawns, working in construction, doing janitorial work, and other work of this kind, I am often left to wonder, are they like my brother? Did they get to choose this work or are they doing it because of circumstances? Did this person want to be a doctor, or writer, a teacher, an entrepreneur, or a CEO of some company, and ended up having to take this job because of an economic or other circumstance? Don't get me wrong. There's nothing demeaning or less-than-noble in these jobs. Indeed, working with your hands is perhaps the most honest work of all — unlike my own work within the academic community where it can be easy to be self-serving and mostly irrelevant. There's a wonderful dignity in working with your hands, as there was for my brother. However, the importance and dignity of that work notwithstanding, the happiness of the person doing it is sometimes predi-

cated on whether or not he or she had a choice, that is, whether or not he or she is there by choice or because factors ranging from the economic situation of their family, to their immigrant status, to lack of opportunity, have forced them there.

As I walk past these folks in my day-to-day life and work, I try to notice them and appreciate the service they are rendering for the rest of us. And sometimes I say to myself: *This could be my brother. This could be my sister. This could be the brightest mind of all who was not given the opportunity to become a doctor, a writer, nurse, a teacher, or a social worker.*

If in the next life, as Jesus promised, there's to be a reversal where the last shall be first, I hope these people, like my brother, who were deprived of some of the opportunities that the rest of us enjoyed, will read my heart with an empathy that surpasses my understanding of them during their lifetime.

● **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**

On prayer, Catechism offers the appealing elevation of a heart seeking God

When we feel a call to pray, we want to know what prayer is or how to pray. While there are many resources available to help us, none of them can compare with the substance or superiority of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The fourth part of the *Catechism* is a synthesis of the best of the spiritual wisdom and insights of the Christian theological tradition.

Placing itself within the other parts of the *Catechism*, the fourth part begins by explaining: "Great is the mystery of the faith! The Church professes this mystery in the Apostles' Creed (Part One) and celebrates it in the sacramental liturgy (Part Two), so that the life of the faithful may be conformed to Christ in the Holy Spirit to the glory of God the Father (Part Three). This mystery, then, requires that the faithful believe in it, that they celebrate it, and that they live from it in a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God. This relationship is prayer."

Historically, catechisms can read like plumber's manuals. They can be very formal, systematic, and dry. They are written to be an echo of divine revelation and the formal teachings of the Church and, at times in the past, they have come across as removed and disconnected with the lives and struggles of believers.

In a remarkable move, but not surprising knowing the lives of the people behind it, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is unique in the catechetical tradition. Each part is engaging, easy-flowing, and approachable.

In terms of the fourth part on prayer, many have commented that the section is

less a catechism and more a treatise on the spiritual life. Such observations are meant as a compliment as the fourth part is a beautiful and powerful expose of the Church's spiritual treasury.

With such a tremendous resource made readily available to believers and all people of goodwill, it's pressing that we dive into the *Catechism's* teachings on prayer and the spiritual life.

The fourth part of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is the shortest of the catechism's four parts. It consists of two sections. The first section has three chapters, while the second section consists of only one chapter.

Section one is entitled, "Prayer in the Christian Life." After the initial placement of the fourth part within the context of the other three parts of the *Catechism*, as we saw above, the section begins with a quote from St Therese the Little Flower (pic): "For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a

cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy."

The quote sets the stage for the catechesis on prayer, and it's a heartfelt plea of a soul desiring to know and have communion with God. There is no stuffy or distant assertion of ascetical truth. The truth is there, but enveloped in a warm and appealing elevation of a heart seeking God.

Every human being, no matter where they might be in their relationship with God, can relate in some fashion to the sentiments of St Therese. We all desire recognition and love, especially through life's trials and joys.

This is the position and starting point for the Church's universal teaching on prayer and the spiritual life, and it only gets better as the fourth part progresses in its introduction to what it means to be in a vital and personal relationship with God. Building on the foundation of the Little Flower's prayer, the *Catechism* explains prayer in a three-fold way as gift,

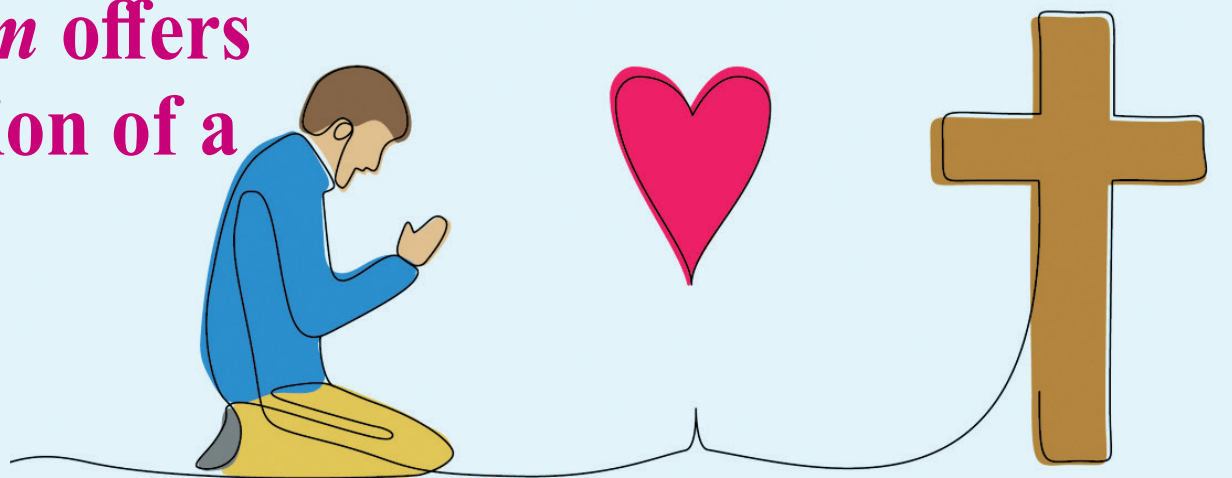
covenant, and communion.

Citing many other saints, the teaching of prayer as a gift is centred around the conversation of the Lord Jesus with the woman at Jacob's well. The *Catechism* gives the summation: "Whether we realise it or not, prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for Him... Paradoxically our prayer of petition is a response to the plea of the living God."

The presentation of prayer as a covenant focuses on a biblically rich explanation of the spiritual heart and its role in choosing God and desiring him. The *Catechism* tells us: "It is the action of God and of man, springing forth from both the Holy Spirit and ourselves, wholly directed to the Father, in union with the human will of the Son of God made man."

And, lastly in the three-fold teaching, prayer as communion is placed within the New Covenant and our call to union with God in Jesus Christ. The *Catechism* teaches: "Thus, the life of prayer is the habit of being in the presence of the thrice-holy God and in communion with Him."

This is only the beginning of the fourth part and already it touches the human experience, provokes the heart, and inspires us to act on the impulse to pray and so seek union with God. — **By Fr Jeffrey F. Kirby, Crux**



Little Catholics' corner

Hello children of God,

What is the most important thing Jesus teaches us to do? You might think that it's about not hurting anyone, but that's not it! The most important thing is to LOVE GOD with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This means doing everything out of love for God and living your whole life for Him. How can we love

God so much?

Well, we can practise little by little, by loving Him more each day. Pay attention at church on Sundays and say a prayer every day.

In the morning, tell God that you will do everything for Him that day. At night, before you go to sleep, thank God for everything He's done for you and say sorry for any mistakes you made that day. Try to think about God during the day.

Jesus also tells us the second most important thing is to love others as much as we love ourselves.

If we truly love God, we'll want to love other people because God loves them! If you don't love others, it means you might not love God as much as you should.

What can you do today to start loving God more?

Love
Auntv Gwen

God is Love mobile

Material: pieces of string, glue and marker pens

Instructions

1. Cut out the rainbow and hearts.
2. Turn the rainbow over and stick one end of the strings to it.
3. Write the names of your loved ones on the coloured hearts and stick them on the strings.
4. Hang the paper mobile in your room as a reminder of God's love and our love.

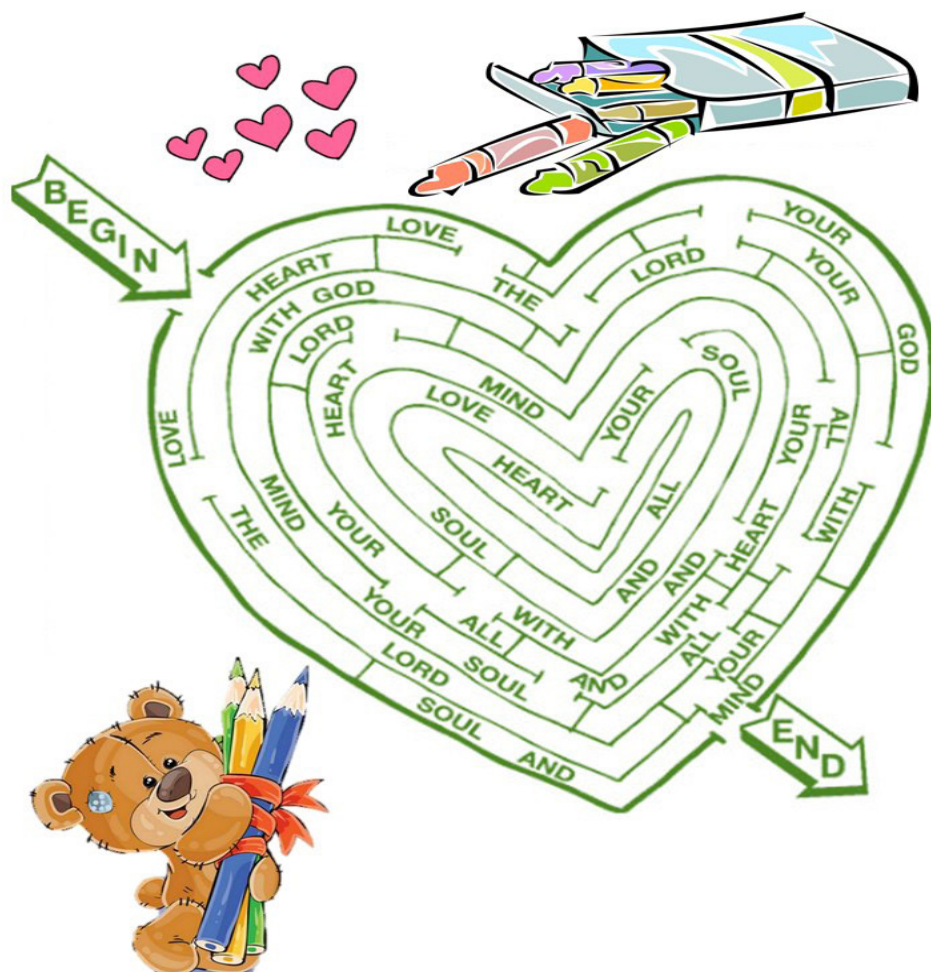
Love God
Love your neighbour



Colour this poster



FIND THE CORRECT PATH THROUGH THE HEART BELOW. WRITE THE WORDS IN ORDER, AS YOU FIND THEM, ON THE LINES BELOW.



“ _____

 _____” MATTHEW 22:37

We celebrate All Saints' Day on November 1. Saints are like the superheroes of goodness and love, and they are remembered for the wonderful things they did to help others. On this day, we thank God for their example and remind ourselves that we should try to be more like them. After all, they were ordinary people, just like us. Who is your favourite saint? Can you name the saints in the picture below?



YOUTH

OCTOBER 29, 2023

Teens thirst FOR GOD

MIRI: The “Teenagers’ Rally,” previously known as the “Youth Rally,” is an annual event designed for teenagers to deepen their understanding of God’s power, authority, and sovereignty while fostering a personal connection with the Almighty. This event was meticulously organised by the Christ Teens team, a group of dedicated youths, many of whom are teenagers themselves, actively engaged in the planning and execution of this three-day programme.

The recent Teenagers’ Rally, held at the Imperial Hotel, saw a remarkable turnout, with over 800 attendees from various parishes in the Miri Diocese. These parishes include Miri, Batu Niah, Bintulu, Limbang, Sungai Asap, Tatau, Sebauh, Marudi, Long San, Lapok, and Belaga. Additionally, the event drew participants from other dioceses who united with enthusiasm under the inspiring theme *The Lord is My Refuge*.

This rally is the first since the pandemic, which left an adverse impact on the emotional and spiritual well-being of the children. Thus the theme *The Lord is My Refuge. a very present help in trouble* (Psalm 46:1) aptly fitted the programme.

Hailing from St Joseph’s Cathedral, Fr Sylvester Ngau and Fr Henry Saleh helped guide the teenagers in recognising God as a sanctuary and an enduring source of strength.

Throughout the rally, numerous topics were explored. The initial talk, titled *Life Behind My Mask*, acknowledged the reality that many of us construct facades to shield ourselves from life’s unpleasant circumstances. Fr

Sylvester reassured the attendees that, despite the challenges and obstacles encountered in relationships and life, “Jesus loves us just as we are and desires us to embrace our true selves as He intended.”

During Fr Henry’s talk, *He’ll Call on Me and I Will Answer Him*, he reminded us that no matter what challenges come our way, we must keep in mind that Jesus is constantly by our side, holding our hands, protecting us from any danger. It is only when we put our faith in Him that we will find the strength and courage we need in this life. Jesus is our only salvation. Although God gave mankind free will, He patiently awaits our response to His call for salvation.

In another enlightening talk, *Selfless, not Selfie*, Fr Henry discussed the themes of love and service. As children of God, he encouraged us to shift our focus outward, towards our fellow men, rather than becoming self-absorbed. We are called to love and to serve God and fellow man as instructed by Jesus through the two great commandments found



Fr Sylvester praying over the teens.

in Matthew 22:36-40, instead of being self-serving. Fr Henry extended a warm invitation to the young attendees to contemplate a life-long dedication to serving God and humanity, suggesting that they consider the path of priesthood or religious service.

After the final talk, *Maximum Strength for God*, Fr Sylvester urged the teenagers to “Be faithful to God where you are now, giving Him your best”. He said we should give God our total being, our joys and sorrows, our fears and anxieties, our triumphs and despairs, our everything. At all times, we are called to wholeheartedly devote ourselves to God, making Him the top priority in our lives.

Throughout the event, teenagers openly shared their feelings and the struggles they faced during the pandemic, a time when their familiar, “normal” existence seemed to disappear overnight. They learnt to open up and surrender the emotions they repressed, and experienced the power of the Holy Spirit working in them.

During the altar call, there was a tremendous response as the young people accepted Jesus as their Saviour and Healer, humbly offering up their hidden pains and burdens. Amid the healing session, many experienced a sense of relief in their spirits and emotions. The Holy Spirit’s presence could be felt in the hall during the daily Praise and Worship sessions.

Various fun activities took place, with prizes awarded to the participants. Teams from the different parishes competed in the Bible quiz, faith quiz, and Scripture memory quiz,

competing for top positions. In addition, the drama competition, titled “Mercy”, showcased the remarkable acting skills of the teams from three parishes.

The vibrant rally ended with a Mass celebrated by Fr Sylvester, with Fr Henry and Fr Stephen Esguerra, a visiting priest from the Diocese of Sandakan, concelebrating

It is our sincere hope that the young participants depart with a refreshed connection to the Holy Spirit, a closer relationship with God, a reignited faith, a clarified sense of purpose and mission, newly formed friendships, and a deepened sense of solidarity with their fellow Catholic peers. — **By Natasha Ch’ng** (Christ Teens Miri), *Today’s Catholic*

WHAT DO THE TEENS SAY?

1. “The talks touched me and related to me in many ways, especially in the aspect of life as a Christian youth. I was impressed that Fr Sylvester and Fr Henry were able to make their talks appealing and interesting to youths and yet deep on a spiritual level.” (19-year-old girl)
2. “I feel closer to God after the rally. I encountered His presence during the healing session.” (14-year-old boy)
3. “The rally brightened my days. From the clueless person I was, I now understand more about what God’s role should be in my life. I hope I can join again next year.” (15-year-old boy)
4. “I felt very happy and I had so much fun. And I know now that Jesus is my Saviour and my Healer.” (15-year-old girl)



“Mercy”—a drama team in action.

TRIO CONFIRMED IN BAGAN SERAI PARISH

BAGAN SERAI, Penang: The newly appointed Cardinal Sebastian Francis confirmed three youth from the Church of St Joseph, on October 15.

In his homily, Cardinal Sebastian expressed his joy in meeting the Holy Father and said he spoke to Pope Francis on behalf of the community. The prelate emphasised the important role of the Holy Spirit in guiding the Church.

The choir led the congregation in song, elevating the worship experience with heart-felt Tamil and English hymns, all within the

sacred walls of a church constructed in 1905.

On behalf of the parishioners of St Joseph, the parish pastoral council chairperson, Yobin Antoni, congratulated the prelate on his elevation to the rank of cardinal. She also thanked the parishioners for making the celebration truly special.

The three girls chose the names of saints: Zita, Clare and Anne as their confirmation names. Their families were in jubilant spirit, celebrating the joy of their loved ones receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation — **By Rozanna Alfred**



The confirmands with Cardinal Sebastian Francis and Deacon Charles Lazaroo.

Youth embrace what it is like to be Chosen for Christ

By Aaron Lim

PENANG: A group of passionate youth embarked on a spiritual journey of faith, friendship, and self-discovery at the *Chosen for Christ* camp recently. Held at a serene retreat centre in the heart of Balik Pulau town, the camp provided a unique opportunity for the youth to grow spiritually and connect with their peers.

This camp was organised by the City Parish Catechetical Ministry headed by Valentino Alfred and attended by youths between the ages of 13 to 17 years old. The camp was aimed at equipping and preparing the youths with the experience of being called by God through His word and His Church, all while strengthening and build-

ing their relationship with God, and awakening their desire to serve the Church. The camp featured a diverse range of activities, workshops, and discussions centred around faith, community, and self-reflection.

One of the highlights of the camp was the *God With Us* session, where attendees had the chance to come together and strengthen their faith through prayer and worship during the encounter night which ended with the youth having a quiet reflection time in God's presence.

"I have been struggling with anxiety and depression, but I believe I was freed from this negative emotion because I experienced God's immense peace over me," said Joyce, 15.



"I came to the camp with an injured shoulder. During a praise and worship session, I asked God to heal me from my pain and to my surprise the pain left me on the first night of the camp itself," said Jia Ming, 17.

The youth also took part in sessions and discussions that covered topics such as *The Mass: Explained* and *Love So Great* by assistant parish priest of City Parish, Fr Desmond Jansen. *Holy Spirit — Teacher and Friend* by catechist, Gabriel Peter, *Heart of Worship* by catechist, Amelia Gabriel, *Mary — My Mother* by guest speaker, Joanna Ng. These sessions were a chance for them to not only deepen their understanding of their faith but also to learn how they can apply it in their daily lives.

Beyond the spiritual aspect, the camp was a hub for fun and fellowship. The youth enjoyed an

array of team building activities, from outdoor water games to indoor interactive games. The sense of camaraderie that blossomed throughout the weekend was a testament to the power of faith in building connections.

"I never knew the importance of asking the Blessed Mother's intercession and how powerful it is. Then I began to realise that I have a humble and loving mother who never ceases to intercede for us after the *Mary — My Mother* session," said Nazarus, 17.

"During the *Love So Great* session, I recognised God's love is unconditional and it made me understand that He is a loving Father who longs for our fellowship," said Monica, 17.

As the camp came to a close, the youth left with a renewed sense of purpose and a deeper connection to their faith. *Chosen for Christ*

camp had not only strengthened their relationship with God but also instilled a strong sense of community and belonging. Many expressed their excitement about having another camp next year.

This camp serves as a reminder of the positive impact that faith-based events can have on the lives of young individuals. By combining spirituality, friendship, and personal growth, the *Chosen for Christ* camp continues to be a source of inspiration and renewal for the Catholic youth who attend.

In a world filled with distractions and fast-paced living, initiatives like the *Chosen for Christ* camp play a vital role in nurturing the faith and values of the younger generation. These young people, armed with their renewed spirituality and lasting friendships, are well-prepared to make a positive impact on the world around them.



Hear, listen and do the Father's will

KRUBONG, Melaka: A total of 43 parishioners (39 students and four adults), from the English-, Bahasa Malaysia- and Mandarin-speaking communities of the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe (OLG) received the Sacrament of Confirmation earlier this month.

Bishop Bernard Paul presided over the Mass and shared the day's Gospel about the two sons who were asked to work in their father's vineyard. He reminded the confir-

mands that they are anointed in the Holy Spirit and are adults in their faith. Just like the first son from the Gospel passage, they should also hear, listen and go do the Father's Will.

The Holy Spirit is God's gift to all of us. We should listen to the Holy Spirit, learn and be led by Him. As disciples of Jesus, we are expected to be strong like 'rocks' and not weak and easily swayed like 'lalang'; we must finish strong and complete the race.

Becoming adults in the faith

TAIPING: This October 15 held a special significance for everyone at the Taiping Catholic Church as they came together to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation.

It was also the first time we had the honour of welcoming the Bishop of Penang, Cardinal Sebastian Francis since his elevation to cardinal in a consistory at St Peter's Square in the Vatican on Sep 30.

The Sacrament of Confirmation is a significant event in the life of young Catholics. This sacred moment, marked by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, signifies the beginning of their mission to place Jesus at the core of all they do and

to share His love with all. The cardinal delivered an insightful homily centred on the theme *The Holy Spirit is leading the Church*.

The parish priest, deacons, parents, teachers and parishioners of Taiping Catholic Church played an important role in supporting and leading the 38 confirmands closer to God and building their faith through the various activities, teachings and formation in the church.

After Mass, the confirmands joined the cardinal in a celebratory cake-cutting ceremony in honour of his elevated post.

— By Jacklin Victor



Cardinal Sebastian Francis anoints a confirmand.

Hundreds killed in Gaza hospital rocket strike

on the Day of Prayer, Fasting for Peace

JERUSALEM: While Christian faithful across the globe prayed and fasted for peace in the Holy Land on October 17, a rocket struck the Christian hospital in Gaza City where hundreds of people were being treated, but also where hundreds were taking shelter.

The hospital was sheltering more than 5,000 people at the time of the strike, said Joseph Hazboun, regional director for CNEWA's Jerusalem office. CNEWA, Catholic Near East Welfare Association, is a pontifical charity founded by Pope Pius XI in 1926 to help residents of "historic but unstable" lands of the ancient Eastern churches — the Middle East, Northeast Africa, India and Eastern Europe. The Catholic organisation supports the hospital.

"The rocket hit the children's playground and the courtyard in front of the library, at the back of the hospital," Hazboun said. "The area hit was the place where most of the psychosocial programme activities were organised in recent years."

"It's the only Christian hospital in Gaza," Michael La Civita, director of communications for CNEWA USA, said hours after the attack. "It's one of the most important institutions in our network of partners for decades. It's a significant player in the region."

La Civita also said the hospital was accommodating "about 5,000 people" who had been seeking refuge there.

"That includes those who were in the hospital itself seeking treatment, the medical staff, as well as folks who were seeking refuge, because it's in northern Gaza and was under a mandatory evacuation order from Israel," he said.

La Civita described his reaction as one of "disbelief" and "horror."

A surprise terrorist attack by Hamas on communities along the southern Israeli border with Gaza on Oct 4, killed more than 1,400 Israelis. Some 199 Israelis are now being held captive in Gaza and family members fear they may be killed in the Israeli retaliation attacks. More than 2,800 Palestinians in Gaza

have died since.

An estimated 1 million people have been displaced in Gaza in one week, a United Nations spokesperson said after Israel also issued warnings to Palestinians in northern Gaza to evacuate to the south as they aim to eliminate Hamas' leadership.

Jerusalem churches held prayers for peace throughout the day on Oct. 17. Abbot Nikodemus Schnabel led the monks and students at the Benedictine Dormition Abbey in a 24-hour recitation of the 150 psalms. These are uniting prayers recited by all Christians and Jews, similar to prayers in the Quran, he said.

"The emotions contained in the psalms, the fears and lamentations, the anger and sadness, but also the longing and hope, ultimately the gratitude in God are to be spoken out loud in this way, and carried before the cross on behalf of so many people especially in this country," he said. "There are new wounds, new blood, new hate going into a deeper dimension."

He normally enjoyed giving interviews and speaking his mind, he said, but now he was at a loss for words and shocked at the "enormous crime" committed by slaughtering civilians in Israel's south, noting that some of those murdered were migrant workers including Filipinos and Thai nationals.

At the Franciscan St Saviour Monastery, Fr Francesco Patton, custos of the Holy Land, joined in noon prayer with the friars.

Samy Helou, 48, the head of the monastery's IT department who came to the prayer, said that when missiles fall in the Tel Aviv area he calls his Jewish Israeli friends to make sure they are safe. He has even invited them to come to his house in Jerusalem.

"I plead so my God will open hearts and remove hate from this world," he said, despite differences in political and religious beliefs. "People don't deserve to die, and there should only be justice and peace for all." — **By Judith Sudilovsky and Gina Christian, OSV**

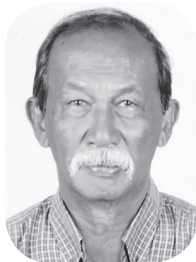


Injured people are assisted after what Gaza Health Ministry said was an Israeli airstrike on the CNEWA-supported al-Ahli Baptist Hospital in Gaza City October 17, 2023. (OSV News photo/Mohammed Al-Masri, Reuters)

MEMORIAM

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In Loving Memory



Mark Raphael Pereira
(1952 – 2020)

Forever loved and remembered by:
Wife: Mary Antoinette Morris (Dolly)
Children & in-laws:
Annette, Reuben/Hsu Wen
Grandchildren: Delphina,
Dareena, William Raphael,
Benjamin Francis.

8th Anniversary JM EMMANUEL



**18th Dec 1955 –
30th October 2015**

*Words seem feeble
in moments like this.
Life is so precious
and death, such a thief.
It's been eight years since
we've lost you, Emmanuel
but we will wait
to meet again.
In the sweet bye and bye
In the halls of heaven
to celebrate and rejoice.
Love is a bond
that death cannot part.
Gone from our arms
but we still hold you close
in our hearts.
Deeply missed by
wife Cindy Wong,
children
Fabian and Dominic,
siblings & all loved ones.*

Fondly remembered



Elizabeth Morris
(1947 – 2020)

Deeply missed and
forever remembered by
Children:
Sharmila & Julius
In law: Sharmini
Grandchildren:
Deborah, Patricia, Darren,
Siblings, Nephews
and Nieces.

25th Anniversary In Loving Memory of



Thomas Pereira
Departed: 30-10-1998

*Eternal rest grant unto him,
O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him.
May his soul rest in peace.
Dearly missed but lovingly remembered by:
Wife - Francina, Children, Daughter-in-law,
Grandchildren, Relatives and Friends.*

11th Anniversary In Loving Memory of



**Mathalaimuthu
s/o Arokiasamy**

**Departed:
30 Oct 2012**

*"Dad, your guiding
hand on my shoulder
will remain
with me forever."*

LOVING YOU DEARLY,

Wife : Victoria
Daughter : Helen Rita
Son : Eric Steven
Daughter-in-law : Nantyniy
Grandchildren : Rishwariya, Vasunddra

*Blessed be the God and Father
of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the Father of mercies and God
of all comfort, who comforts us
in all our affliction, so that we
may be able to comfort those
who are in any affliction,
with the comfort with which
we ourselves are
comforted by God.*

2 Corinthians 1:3-4



1st Anniversary In Loving Memory of

**Peter @ Marion
Varghese
Fernandez**
**07.09.1940 -
28.10.2022**

*One year has passed Appa, but it seems like
yesterday. Gone but not forgotten.
Your love and memories still live on in our hearts.
Rest in peace Appa.*

Deeply missed and cherished by
Amma, children, in-laws and loved ones.

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Beijing reminds us who's boss

VATICAN: There were suddenly two empty chairs in the Paul VI Hall, where the now 363 Synod fathers and mothers are gathered for the October 4-29 assembly on synodality. The previous occupants of those seats were none other than two bishops from Mainland China that Pope Francis called to take part in the month-long assembly. Their abrupt absence is a symbolic reminder that the Vatican's so-called Chinese question continues to hover over the Catholic Church.

Bishop Anthony Yao Shun of Jining in Inner Mongolia — the first bishop appointed under a 2018 agreement between Beijing and the Holy See — and Bishop Joseph Yang of Zhoucun in eastern China, left the synodal assembly for a one-way trip back to their Asian homeland after only two weeks in Rome.

Both bishops are leading members of the Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA), a Communist-controlled body working on the need for Catholics to assimilate Chinese President Xi Jinping's thinking. Bishop Yang has recently been involved in work to this end, while Bishop Yao has held a position on CPA's liturgical commission until only recently.

Their sudden return to China is reminiscent of the abrupt departure of two Chinese bishops during the 2018 Synod assembly on young people. Back then no explanation



Pope Francis waves at pilgrims from China at the general audience in St Peter's Square on September 7, 2016. (CNA photo/Daniel Ibanez)

was given. But this time, the Vatican actually took the lead in announcing the bishops' departures, justifying them by citing "pastoral requirements". This is part of a new communications strategy in which the Holy See is trying to show that it won't tolerate being dictated to by the Chinese authorities.

But faced with these two departures, it's hard for some not to suspect the Beijing government's behind-the-scenes intervention.

"As if there were no one else to manage the pastoral care in these dioceses," quipped a source who is extremely knowledgeable of Chinese Catholicism.

"In reality, it's a way of showing that the presence of Chinese bishops is a favour granted by the authorities, and at the same time, it's a reminder to the Vatican: Beijing is the boss and keeps its hand on the clergy," said the source.

The departure of the Chinese bishops

could be a strong signal that the Communist government has no intention of participating in any way in decisions on the future of the Church, especially since Catholics in China did not take part in the various preparatory phases of this Synod assembly. And it may also be a sign that the Chinese bishops, who will not have a say, are therefore, de facto, more observers than actors.

— By Matthieu Lasserre, LCI, (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)

European Parliament honours Iranian women

STRASBOURG, France: The European Parliament awarded its annual Sakharov Prize to Iranian woman, Mahsa Amini (*pic*), who died in police custody last year, and the Iranian Women's Movement.

According to the European Parliament website, the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought is the highest tribute paid by the European Union to human rights work.

It gives recognition to individuals, groups and organisations that have made an outstanding contribution to protecting freedom of thought. Through the prize and its associated network, the EU assists laureates who are supported and empowered in their efforts to defend their causes. It was awarded for the first time in 1988 to Nelson Mandela and Anatoli Marchenko.



In a statement, the EU Parliament President, Roberta Metsola, said, "On September 16, we marked one year since the murder of Jina Mahsa Amini in Iran. The European Parliament proudly stands with the brave and defiant who continue to fight for equality, dignity and freedom in Iran."

"By choosing them as laureates," he noted, "this House remembers their struggle and continues to honour all those who have paid the ultimate price for liberty."

Mahsa Amini, 22, born in Iran's western province of Kurdistan, died in morality police custody in September last year after being arrested for allegedly flouting the Islamic Republic's mandatory dress code, for supposedly wearing a hijab headscarf in an improper fashion.

According to *Reuters*, while Amini's family said she had been killed by blows to her head and limbs, the authorities said she had died due to existing medical problems.

The Iranian woman's death sparked months of protests that spiralled into some of the worst political turmoil since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Under the banner "Woman, Life, Freedom", Iranian citizens have been protesting against laws obliging women to cover their hair and wear loose fitting clothing.

Iranian security forces have continued their crackdown on dissent and briefly detained Amini's father on the anniversary of her death, *Reuters* reports. — *Vatican News*

Church in India celebrates two recent Supreme Court verdicts

INDORE, India: Two Supreme Court cases in India whose verdicts came down within the same 24 hours are being lauded by the Indian Church.

On October 16, the Supreme Court of India rejected the plea of a mother of two children to abort her foetus in the 27th week — upholding the foetus' "right to live."

Under the abortion rules in India, called medical termination of pregnancy, abortion after 24 weeks requires medical proof of danger to the mother or to the foetus if the pregnancy is allowed to continue.

The following day, Oct 17, the Supreme Court said "no" to legalising gay marriage.

The split majority verdict (3-2) by the five-member bench headed by the chief

justice of India, Dhananjaya Yeshwant Chandrachud, rejected the plea for legalising gay marriage, which was strongly opposed by the federal government.

The legalisation of gay marriage, the judgment noted, "can only be done by the Legislature" and that "any attempt by the court to do so would amount to encroaching upon the field set for the Legislature," the *Indian Express* English daily reported.

Hailing the verdict, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, in a press statement pointed out that the judgment "reaffirms the institution of traditional marriage, rooted in the sacred teachings and values held by the Catholic Church and many other faiths."

While reiterating that "marriage, according to the Catholic Church, is a union exclusively between a man and a woman," the Indian bishops noted that "homosexual unions are fundamentally different from the divine plan for marriage ... At the same time, the Catholic Church emphasises the need to treat individuals with same-sex attractions with respect, compassion, and sensitivity, rejecting any unjust discrimination."

"The verdicts of the Supreme Court denying legal sanction for gay marriage and denial of abortion in advanced pregnancy uphold the dignity of family and pro-life values," the Syro-Malabar Church, which follows its own oriental rite and is based

in southern Kerala state, pointed out in a press statement Oct 18.

India's mainstream media appeared to favour a verdict that would legalise gay marriage. The *Times of India*, for example, the largest English daily in the world, ran an editorial Oct 18 with the headline: "Untying the knot: Do same-sex couples have the same constitutional rights as straight couples? Yes, should have been SC's [Supreme Court's] answer."

Many in pro-life and pro-family circles, however, praised both court decisions. Antonio Carvalho, a Catholic pro-life activist based in Belgaum, near Mumbai, said: "We are thrilled by these two verdicts." — By Anto Akkara, CNA