

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

Jm 1:17-18



Alor Setar parish hosts largest medical camp in northern district

■ P4



Legionaries encouraged to ignite the new evangelisation

■ P6



Youth gather for 'Truth In Love' rally

■ P16

PAPAL VISIT TO INDONESIA

A milestone for Christian-Muslim harmony



JAKARTA: Muslim leaders in Indonesia believe that Pope Francis' visit will be a significant milestone in building mutual trust between Muslims and Christians, enhancing harmony in the world's largest Muslim-majority country.

One such scholar is Budhy Munawar Rachman, who says he has personal reasons for admiring the leader of the world's estimated 1.2 billion Catholics. The Pope is scheduled to visit Indonesia from September 2-6 as part of his four-nation tour of Asia and the Pacific, which also includes Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, and Singapore.

"The Pope's messages are relevant to all humanity, including Muslims," Rachman told *UCA News*. He is particularly impressed with two papal documents: *Laudato Si'*, the 2015 encyclical on environmental stewardship, and *Fratelli Tutti*, the 2020 encyclical on humanism and human relations.

The 61-year-old director of the Center for Religion and Philosophy at the Jakarta-based Paramadina University said the two documents demand study for a deeper understanding of environmental crises and human relations.

"I am taking special classes to study these documents in depth, such as those initiated by the *Laudato Si'* Movement," said Rachman, a strong advocate of interfaith dialogue. He noted that *Laudato Si'* addresses not only the ecological crisis but also "a more fundamental issue — the social crisis — that must be a global concern today."



Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption and the Istiqlal Mosque in Jakarta, Indonesia (Photo/ AsiaNews.it)

Fratelli Tutti, he added, holds particular significance for Muslims, as it was released following Pope Francis' historic 2018 meeting with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Muhammad Ahmad Al-Tayyib.

The meeting resulted in the Document on *Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, also known as the Abu Dhabi Declaration, which emphasises "a culture of mutual respect" that enables different faiths to coexist peacefully.

"This is highly symbolic, reflecting an effort to initiate a joint movement to address challenges in religious life, similar to those faced in Indonesia," Rachman said.

He further noted, "The visit holds significant theological importance for Muslim-Catholic relations, as the Pope is visiting the largest Muslim-majority country in the world. This visit will encourage Muslims to pay greater attention to the issues the

Pope prioritises."

A key moment of the visit will be his meeting with religious leaders on Sept 5 at the Istiqlal Mosque — Southeast Asia's largest mosque — located across from Jakarta's Catholic cathedral.

Minister of Religious Affairs Yaquut Cholil Qoumas, who met Pope Francis at the Vatican in June 2022, stated that the papal visit will underscore the harmonious and peaceful interfaith relations in Indonesia.

In a recent statement, Qoumas, who extended the official invitation to the Pope, remarked, "Pope Francis' visit can inspire all parties by demonstrating that every religion teaches compassion." He praised the pontiff as a "symbol of friendship and interfaith dialogue."

Qoumas also acknowledged the rising intolerance in various regions of the country, which he noted challenges religious harmony. To address this, he has supported

policies to better protect minorities, an area that had previously been overlooked. One such policy includes granting permits for the construction of places of worship.

Syafiq A. Mughni from Muhammadiyah believes the papal visit is set to become a milestone for "building mutual trust" between Muslims and Catholics.

"We acknowledge that mutual suspicion exists among faith groups worldwide and within our own country," he said. Mughni emphasised that this distrust extends beyond religion to include political, economic, social, and cultural issues.

"We should view the Pope's visit as an opportunity to foster a common understanding and address these challenges together," he added. He suggested that religious communities need to bridge gaps, such as those between rich and poor countries and address global injustices.

The Grand Imam of Istiqlal Mosque, Nasaruddin Umar, mentioned that he has prepared a manuscript on humanity to present to the Pope, hoping to sign it together. He expressed admiration for Pope Francis, noting that "the issues the Pope champions are universal and comprehensive."

Umar explained that the mission of Istiqlal aligns with these values, focusing on humanity, spirituality, and civilisation.

Rachman added that the world now requires significant collaboration between religious leaders to address global conflicts. He noted that, similar to the Catholic Church's *Laudato Si'*, Indonesian Muslim scholars released a similar environmental document, *Al Mizan: A Covenant for the Earth*, in February.

He hopes the Pope's visit will elevate interfaith relations, fostering collaboration to tackle global social issues, with the Pope serving as a catalyst for this effort. — ucanews.com

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OPINION

Humanity's biggest footprint
is due to what we eat and buy!

Climate change is about you, me, and our everyday lives. Heat waves make a sweaty mess. Rain is upgraded to torrential storms. Climate change has upended our lives dramatically. The relentless cycle of destruction leaves us in constant fear.

But the real villain here is our undying romance with consumerism. We are stuck in a loop of 'Buy, Use, Throw' repeat. Every product we buy, and every decision we make, has a ripple effect on the planet.

Consumerism has undergone a significant transformation from the pre-industrial era, where purchasing goods was driven by necessity and durability. With the advent of mass production, advertising, and credit cards in the post-industrial era, consumption became quicker and more convenient, laying the foundation for today's habits dominated by online shopping, instant gratification, and convenience.

Consumerism is like a never-ending buffet where we keep filling our plates, not because we are hungry, but because of a mix of factors. Perception makes us believe that buying the latest gadget will make us cooler. Motivation whispers, "You deserve this!" Desires lure us with promises of pleasure and satisfaction, while emotions tug at our wallets — joy leads to celebratory splurges, boredom drives impulse buys, sadness seeks retail therapy, and excitement fuels our cart-filling frenzy. Societal pressures turn shopping into a competitive sport, where keeping up with the Joneses is a must. Together, these factors create the perfect recipe for consumer madness.

Advertising plays a critical role in this cycle, acting as a master storyteller that subtly

shapes our desires and habits. Bombarded by ads across various media, we often buy into trends not out of necessity but due to an internal compulsion fuelled by these messages. This relentless persuasion cultivates a culture where consumption is not just a means to an end but an end in itself.

You might think, "What does this have to do with me? I'm not a shopaholic." But let us look at a typical day. Imagine your morning coffee, trendy outfit, phone, and steak as tiny climate wreckers. That cup of coffee might have contributed to deforestation, your clothes came from pollution-spewing factories, your phone's production drained resources, and that burger is linked to deforestation and emissions. Whether it is choosing what to eat, how to commute, what products to buy, or how we dispose of waste, each choice has a ripple effect on our planet. These seemingly small, everyday decisions accumulate over time, creating a profound impact on the environment.

To truly make a difference, we must focus on reducing our consumption to conserve resources, save energy, and cut down on waste. Simple changes in consumption patterns could significantly reduce global greenhouse gas emissions.

Doing nothing is not an option. The cost of inaction is far greater than the cost of acting. If we fail to address climate change, we face catastrophic global impacts. The urgency of

the climate crisis is immense, and we are at a critical juncture where every decision we make will shape the future of our planet.

Climate change is not just a problem for governments and corporations; it is also a challenge for every individual. It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the scale of the problem and think, "What can one person do?" But change begins with us. Taking responsibility for our actions sets the foundation for broader societal shifts.

As we journey through September, a time dedicated to celebrating Creation, let us pause to reflect on our impact on this world — the carbon footprint we leave behind. Commit to understanding our consumption and identifying areas where we can reduce it.

This call to action aligns perfectly with the Protect Our Earth, Protect Our Children (PROTEC) campaign by the Episcopal Commission for Creation Justice of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, which reminds us that safeguarding our planet is inherently linked to protecting our children's future. Small changes, when multiplied by millions, can create a wave of transformation.

Together, we can nurture a healthier, more sustainable planet — starting with the choices we make today! — *By Mary Madaleine*

● *Mary Madaleine, author of 'Beyond the Cart', is a parishioner at the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist in Kuala Lumpur.*



God meets us at our hearts

My reflection revolves around the "heart." I do not mean it in the sense of cholesterol levels or exercise, but the deeper spiritual meaning of the heart. Today's readings point us to the idea that the encounter with the divine happens at the level of the heart. The heart speaks to the heart. When we speak of the heart, we mean the innermost part of our being, the core of our consciousness.

It is difficult to say what we mean by encountering God most profoundly in our hearts. When I spoke of this idea at a standard five catechism class, they asked me if I meant God is within our blood vessels. Despite this, we hear of this image often.

The Vatican II document *Church in the Modern World* describes our conscience as an "internal forum," an inner sanctuary where we can hear the voice of God. I have always liked that image. I like to imagine that there is a chapel within our hearts where God is always present and where the most important conversations of our lives take place.

St Thérèse of Lisieux, the Little Flower, had a beautiful way of expressing this. She said that she carried the heart of God within her wherever she went, and in turn, she always remained within God's heart. That is another image that is also a comforting thought. No matter where we go or what we face, we're always connected to God at the level of our hearts.

In the first reading, Moses instructs the people of Israel to observe God's commandments. At first glance, this



might seem like a call to follow rules and regulations strictly. But the deeper message here is that these commandments are not just about external compliance. It is about forming us to be people who respond at the heart's level.

The Old Testament shows us a people who are slowly learning that true observance of the law happens within. It's not just about doing what's right on the outside; it's about having a heart that is in harmony with God's will. This is clear when the prophet Hosea tells us, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6).

The Psalm continues this theme, reminding us that "whoever walks blamelessly and does justice; who thinks the truth in his heart and slanders not with his tongue" is the one who truly lives in the presence of God. This is challenging because it tells us to live without deceit or falsehood. It's about being

the same person on the inside as we are on the outside.

This brings us to the Gospel. The Pharisees, who are concerned with outward appearances, criticised Jesus' disciples for not washing their hands before eating. Of course, washing our hands is important, especially in Malaysia's humid climate. However, Jesus wasn't just talking about hygiene. He was pointing out that it's not what goes into a person that makes them unclean, but what comes out from within. Jesus was critical of mere external observances without considerations of what comes from within.

We can ask ourselves, are we as concerned with the cleanliness of our hearts as we are with the cleanliness of our hands? If we are, we may see more kindness, patience, and forgiveness. Jesus challenges us not to be people who honour God with our lips while

Reflecting on our
Sunday Readings

with Fr Dr Lawrence Ng

22nd Sunday in
Ordinary Time (B)

Readings: Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8;

James 1:17-18, 21-22, 27;

Gospel: Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

our hearts are far from Him. This is difficult but it makes a lot of good sense. What good is it to look holy on the outside if our hearts are full of resentment, jealousy, or pride?

St. James drives home the point for us in the second reading. He tells us that we should be "doers of the word and not hearers only." It's easy to listen to God's word, but much harder to live it out. Yet, this is what true religion is all about, that is, caring for those in need and keeping ourselves holy. If we take this seriously, then being a Christian isn't just a title. It's an action and a way of life. We aren't just followers of Christ. We are His hands, His feet, and most importantly, His heart in the world.

So, as we go about our week, let's take a moment to check in with the "internal forum" of our conscience. Let's ask ourselves: what's going on in the rooms of our hearts? Are they places where God would feel at home? And if not, what can we do to clean up a bit and make them more welcoming?

After all, God meets us at our hearts. Let's make sure we're ready to meet Him there too.



ARCHDIOCESE OF
KUALA LUMPUR
CHAN/CD/08/2024

Chancery Notice

New Appointment Archdiocesan Pastoral Institute

Archbishop Julian Leow has appointed Sr Margarete Sta Maria FDCC from the Canossian Daughters of Charity (FDCC) as Director of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Institute (API) effective September 1, 2024. She takes over from Dr Steven Selvaraju who was Acting Director since February 2024.

Sr Margarete Sta Maria FDCC had been the Provincial Superior of Indonesia Province 2018 to 2024 prior to joining the Archdiocesan Pastoral Institute.

We thank Dr Steven for stepping into the role of Acting Director in the interim period and we wish Sr Margarete Sta Maria FDCC God's blessings as she begins this new pastoral ministry.

Clarence Devadass

Rev Fr Dr Clarence Devadass
Chancellor
Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur
August 23, 2024



KUALA LUMPUR
ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

September

- 3-6 His Holiness Pope Francis' visit to Jakarta
- 8 Parish Pastoral Assembly – Church of Visitation, Seremban
- 11-13 His Holiness Pope Francis' visit to Singapore
- 14 Parish Pastoral Assembly – Church of the Immaculate Conception BVM



MALACCA JOHORE
DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

September

- 1-6 Clergy Annual Retreat – Cameron Highlands
- 13 Catholic Nurses Guild AGM, Mass – Melaka
- 15 Feast of Santa Cruz, Mass in English at 9.30am – Santa Cruz Chapel, Melaka

Planting trees in memory of the elderly

KUALA LUMPUR: To commemorate World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, a group of dedicated volunteers took part in a tree-planting initiative on August 10. This collaboration with the Jabatan Perhutanan Semenanjung Malaysia (JPSM), not only honoured the memories of their elders but also contributed to Malaysia's ambitious goal of planting 100 million trees.

The event took place at two venues: the Bukit Tinggi Forest Reserve and the Lentang Seed Centre. These locations, known for their rich biodiversity and vital role in the region's ecosystem, provided the perfect backdrop for a day of environmental stewardship and intergenerational solidarity.

A total of 102 volunteers joined hands for this noble cause, including 20 staff members from JPSM and 82 enthusiastic tree planters from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur. The diverse group of volunteers, united by a shared purpose, represented a beautiful blend of ages, backgrounds, and experiences. The presence of young and old alike underscored the importance of fostering a connection between generations while working towards a common goal.

The day began with a prayer by Fr Andrew Manickam OFM Cap, and later, Encik Hafni from JPSM and warm welcome by Encik Azman, Director of Bentong Forestry Department. Volunteers were briefed on the day's activities and the significance of the tree-planting effort. The volunteers then proceeded to plant trees in memory of their grandparents and elderly loved ones, symbolising the enduring impact of these individuals on their lives and the world around them.

The saplings and trees planted at the Bukit Tinggi Forest Reserve, will grow to form part of the rich forest canopy, providing habitats for countless species and helping to maintain the ecological balance. A total of 250 trees were planted along with approximately 240 sapling bags prepared.

As the day progressed, the volunteers took time to reflect on the significance of their actions. The event concluded with a luncheon, a sense of accomplishment and wonderful camaraderie among the volunteers.

This year's World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly was marked by an event that beautifully combined the values of family,



A volunteer and her child planting a tree sapling.

community, and environmental stewardship. The volunteers made a meaningful contribution to Malaysia's reforestation efforts while learning about tree improvement and effective plant production. — **By Mark Suresh, Elena Shim and Marilyn Theresa Menezes Simon**



Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #187

E12
MJD NEWS
UPDATES

Greetings dear friends of MJD

Mpox fear is rising. Pay rise for civil service expected. Inflation and spiralling price hikes may follow. Disgruntled voices against the PM are on the rise. The opposition claims to form the government, is here again. Clamouring to join the BRICS. Iskandar Malaysia sees investments in Johor. It is not a time to be complacent, nor celebrate. There's no guarantee of or of being cocksure about tomorrow. Remember the wheat and the darnel parable. Learn to live with uncertainty and unpredictably.

"Re-energising Times": Scott Hahn introduced Rick Warren to 14,000 people at the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia (2015). There, he challenged them with the wisdom of God's Word and the Catholic Tradition, and concluded with these words:

"In today's society, materialism is idolised, immorality is glamorised, truth is minimised, sin is normalised, divorce is rationalised, and abortion is legalised.

In TV and movies, crime is legitimised, drug use is minimised, comedy is vulgarised, sex is trivialised, the Bible is fictionalised, churches are satirised, God is marginalised, and Christians are demonised.

The elderly are dehumanised, the sick are euthanised, the poor are victimised, the mentally ill are ostracised, immigrants are stigmatised, and children are tranquilised.

In families around the world, our manners are uncivilised, speech is vulgarised, faith is secularised, and everything is commercialised.

"Unfortunately, Christians, you and I, are often disorganised and demoralised, our faith is compartmentalised, and our witness is compromised.

So what do we need? We need to revitalise our worship, minimise our differences,

mobilise our members, and evangelise the lost, and we need to re-energise our families." Amen, dear brother, AMEN!

A Thought For The Week: Socrates

An acquaintance came to Socrates and said: Have you heard what people are saying about your friend?

Then Socrates replied: Let me ask you three questions before you tell me about my friend?

The first question: Are you sure of the correctness of what you are going to tell me? The friend said: People are saying it. I don't know if it's true or wrong.

The second question: Is what you are going to tell me a good thing? The friend said: No, it is not good!

The third question: is what you are going to tell me useful for me? The friend said: No, it is not useful at all.

Then Socrates told him: If what you are telling me is neither true, nor good, nor even useful to me, then why are you telling me this?

The lesson from Socrates: It is always bad to speak about the absent. It is cowardly to talk about a person, when we did not dare say anything while the person or persons were present.

Announcements For the Week:

1. September is dedicated as the **Season of Creation**, with the World Day of the Poor and the Migrant Sunday slotted in.

2. The Clergy will be away for their **Annual Retreat** during the month of September. Pray for them.

3. Coming next: The Novenas and the **Feast of the Santa Cruz Chapel Malim, the Padre Pio Centre, Ulu Tiram** and the **Catholic Nurses' National Conference** in Melaka.

QnQ? Q ask: We try and try to be the

best Catholic that we can, and yet we fail. Why?

1. Most of us approach religion, not God. We follow a manual, stick to our dos and don'ts, and subscribe to a 'switch on, switch off' God relationship.

2. Jesus undid that. He introduced Himself as a person and, at the same time, a process; as the Son of God but also "the Way" — the way of the cross; and as the goal and the means.

3. We find God when we undo religion as Jesus did. He finds God among the impure instead of among the pure. The simple found Him in the stable, among the poor, sinners and the tax collectors, and the suffering.

Meister Eckhart said: God is not found in the soul by adding anything, but by a process of subtraction...removing the blocks, handed down or acquired. "To die and thus to become" is the pattern of transformation in the entire physical and biological world. Why not humans? (Richard Rohr)

4. "Little by little, breath by breath, love dissolves the illusions and fears born of our estrangement and distance, from the infinite love that is our very life." (James Finley).

It is not about being perfect. It is about being connected.

See the Holy Spirit @ work: Were it not for the work of the Holy Spirit there would be no gospel, no faith, no church, no Christianity in the world at all." — *J.I.Packer*

Something to tickle you: Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase. — *Martin Luther King, Jr*

Bernard Paul

Bishop Bernard Paul

Alor Setar parish hosts largest medical camp in northern district

By Dr Edwin Jude Gnanasegaran

ALOR SETAR, Kedah: The Church of St Michael became the hub for the largest medical camp in the northern district on August 16. The event, organised by the Malaysian Medical Association Kedah in collaboration with the Society of St Vincent De Paul Conference of St Michael, brought together a range of healthcare providers and organisations to offer vital health services to the local community.

Supported by the National Cancer Society of Malaysia; Lembaga Penduduk dan Pembangunan Keluarga Negara (LPPKN) Alor Setar; Aurelius Hospital Alor Setar; A-Plus Optometrist; DR Hearing and Speech Centre; Blood Transfusion Department and Organ Donation Hospital Sultanah Bahiyah; Dental Department Kota Setar-Pendang; Yakult; Pharmaniaga, and the Pharmacy Division of Jabatan Kesihatan Negeri Kedah, the camp provided a comprehensive array of medical screenings and services.



Some of the participants at the health screening.

These included general health screenings, specialised tests for women's and men's health, cancer screenings, dental check-ups, hearing and vision assessments, and a nutrition talk by Yakult. The camp also facilitated blood donations, organ

donation pledges, and provided free HPV vaccinations.

The event attracted between 250 to 300 registered patients. Of these, approximately 30 successfully donated blood, 50 individuals pledged to become organ donors,

and 60 HPV vaccinations were administered.

In addition to these services, the camp offered breast examinations; HPV DNA tests; Pap smears; screenings for lung and colon cancer; diabetes, cholesterol, and blood pressure monitoring; BMI assessments; hepatitis B and C screenings; hearing and vision check-ups, and dental examinations. Subsidised mammogram vouchers were distributed through LPPKN. Dr Helena Chai, an ophthalmologist from Hospital Sultanah Bahiyah, conducted additional vision assessments.

The camp was officially inaugurated by Fr Michael Cheah, parish priest of Church of St Michael, who generously provided the church premises for the event. The collective efforts of the organising bodies and the active participation of the community contributed to the success of this significant health initiative, which not only delivered essential medical services but also fostered community engagement and support for public health.

Celebrating World Indigenous Day

NEGERI SEMILAN: Gereja Bunda Maria in Kg Tekir hosted a World Indigenous Day celebration (sambutan Orang Asli Sedunia) on August 18. The event drew approximately 300 parishioners from the area and Kuala Lumpur.

Archbishop Julian Leow was the main celebrant for the Mass. He was joined by Fr Christopher Soosaipillai, Fr Xavier Andrew, Fr Edwin Peter, Fr Albet Arokiasamy, and Fr Gerard Theraviam as concelebrants.

Fr Albet in his homily, reflected on his last visit to the chapel in the 1970s. He noted the changes over the years, particularly the increase in temperature, but was most moved by the steadfast faith of the community. "The children I once saw here are now parents themselves," he observed, "yet their commitment to their faith has not wavered, even amidst ongoing challenges, including land issues. Today, we are here not just to celebrate, but to strengthen and support one

another."

The Mass was followed by a cultural show that celebrated the rich heritage of the Orang Asli, the indigenous people of the area. Dressed in traditional attire, they performed dances highlighting their traditions, offering a living expression of their faith. The performances captivated the audience, serving as a reminder of the deep-rooted history and resilience of the Orang Asli community.

The celebration continued with a fellowship where the Orang Asli shared an array of traditional delicacies, each dish reflecting their heritage and connection to the land.

The evening was further enlivened by a series of lucky draws, featuring prizes such as rations and hampers, sponsored by neighbouring parishes. The excitement and camaraderie during the draws were palpable, underscoring the solidarity and support within the wider church community.



Orang Asli children performing a cultural dance.

This event was a true celebration of the enduring faith and unity of the community, where old memories were cherished, new ones were made, and the strength of standing together in faith was both felt and cel-

ebrated. The smiles, laughter, and shared experiences will remain in the hearts of all who attended, serving as a lasting reminder of the power of faith, community, and togetherness. — **By Sabrina Smith**

CST-101 programme inspires action in Catholic Social Teaching

KUALA LUMPUR: The Archdiocesan Office for Human Development (AOHD) and Caritas Malaysia recently collaborated to present the CST-101 programme, a seven-week initiative centred on Catholic social teaching. Held from June 20 to August 1, the programme brought together 224 participants from across Malaysia in an online setting every Thursday. This initiative accommodated participants from diverse backgrounds by offering the programme in both English and Bahasa, with all materials translated into Bahasa to ensure broader accessibility.

The CST-101 programme, an initiative of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic Relief Services, explored the seven themes of Catholic social teaching through videos and guided discussions. It aimed to inspire participants to put their faith into action, focusing on human dignity, inclusion, and community engagement.

The programme began with an opening address and prayer by Archbishop Julian

Leow. Each session started with an opening hymn and a video related to the week's topic, followed by a guest speaker's presentation. The first speaker, Yeo Kar Peng from the Tzu Chi Foundation, discussed the Life & Dignity of the Human Person. This was followed by breakout group discussions and concluded with a closing prayer.

The participants heard from a diverse array of speakers, who brought their unique perspectives and experiences to the table. These speakers have dedicated their lives to serving their communities, often in challenging circumstances.

Throughout the seven-week programme, a diverse lineup of speakers addressed various topics. Bro Anthony Rogers, FSC, discussed Rights and Responsibilities, while Fr Christopher Soosaipillai, Ecclesiastical Assistant to the Ministry for Migrants and Itinerants, covered Call to Family, Communion, and Participation. Fatima Emmanuel from Samaritan Hope Home spoke on Preferential Option for the Poor and Vulnerable, and Jubili Anilik

from Caritas Kota Kinabalu addressed The Dignity of Work and Rights of Workers. Rev Elisha Satvinder, Senior Pastor of New Covenant Community Church and Co-Founder of Dignity for Children Foundation, presented on Solidarity, and Magdalene Chiang, State Coordinator for the Penang Creation Justice Commission, shared insights on Care for God's Creation.

Participants were not only encouraged to learn the teachings but also to apply them in practice. Various outreach programmes aligned with different topics were launched at both the archdiocesan and diocesan levels, providing opportunities for participants to engage in hands-on service to the poor. These initiatives were crafted to help participants translate the principles they had learned into tangible, real-world impact.

The programme concluded with a closing address and prayer by Fr Fabian Dicom, National Office Director of Caritas Malaysia. His remarks offered a fitting end to the series, emphasising that while the formal sessions had concluded, the journey

of applying these teachings in their lives was just beginning.

The CST-101 programme has left a lasting impact on its participants, equipping them with both the knowledge and inspiration needed to effect meaningful change in their communities. The collaboration between AOHD and Caritas Malaysia has established a powerful platform for learning and personal growth. By uniting a diverse group of speakers and participants, the programme has cultivated a spirit of solidarity and inclusivity, demonstrating that faith extends beyond belief and into action.

As participants return to their communities, they carry with them a renewed sense of purpose and a deeper understanding of what it means to live out their faith. The CST-101 programme has not only enriched their understanding of Catholic social teaching but also highlighted the importance of coming together, sharing experiences, and translating faith into action to create a positive impact. — **By Adira Galusin, AOHD**

‘Go Mission Journey’ pilgrimage to celebrate Mission Month

KUALA LUMPUR: In celebration of Mission Month this October, the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur is organising the *Go Mission Journey*, a pilgrimage to five churches across the archdiocese. This journey, inspired by Pope Francis’ Mission Month theme, *Go and Invite Everyone to the Banquet* (Matthew 22:9), will run throughout the month.

The journey will commence on October 1 at the Church of St Theresa, Nilai and conclude on October 31 at the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Puchong on Oct 31.

The pilgrimage aims to bring together the faithful in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur to celebrate, listen, and journey in the Synodal Spirit of Communion, Participation, and Mission, reflecting the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20).

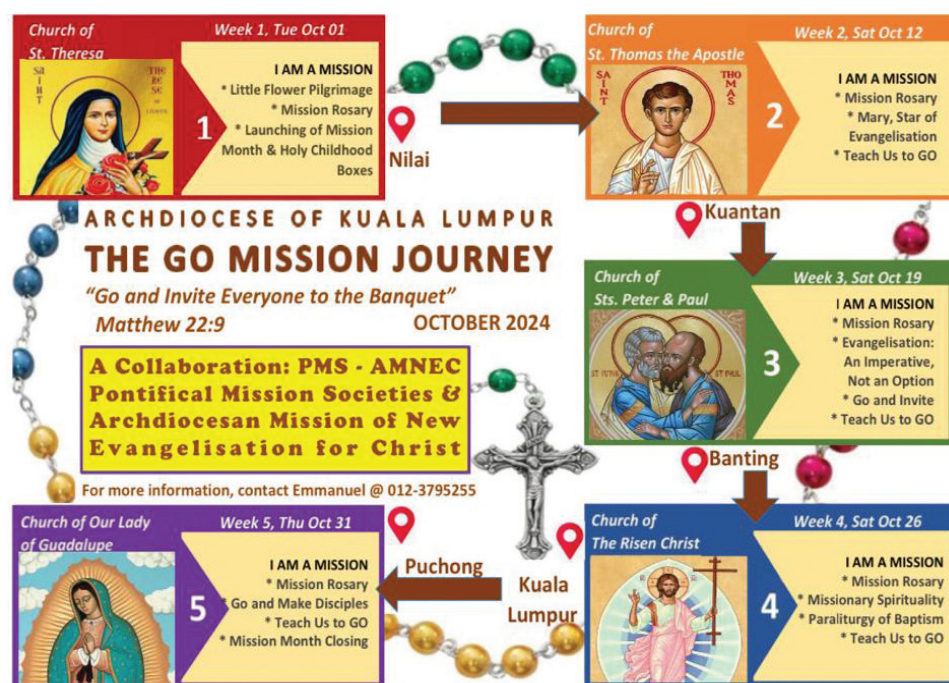
Organised by the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) Kuala Lumpur and the Archdiocesan Mission of New Evangelisation for Christ (AMNEC), the journey is set to inspire and engage

participants. PMS Director Fr Raymond Pereira expressed his hope that the journey, guided by the Holy Spirit, will plant and nurture the seeds of Mission in the hearts of the pilgrims and deepen their response to Jesus’ call to “GO.”

At each location, pilgrims will participate in the Eucharistic Celebration, pray the Mission Rosary, and attend talks on topics including *Mary: The Star of Evangelisation*; *Evangelisation: An Imperative, Not an Option*; *Missionary Spirituality* and *Teach Us to Go: Becoming a Disciple for Jesus*.

Fr Raymond emphasised that the pilgrimage theme, *I Am a Mission*, will encourage, empower, and equip participants to embrace their role as Missionary Disciples of Christ. “The journey is about fulfilling Jesus’ mandate: Go, Make, Baptise, and Teach,” he added.

Join us this October for an enriching journey of faith as we come together to celebrate, bond, and embark on this mission of discovery and purpose.



Feast day celebration at Mentakab parish

By Bernard Anthony

MENTAKAB, Pahang: The Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help celebrated its 61st parish feast from August 15 to 18 with a series of spiritually enriching events.

Parish priest Fr Terrance Thomas presided over the Masses on August 15, the Feast of the Assumption, and Aug 18, delivering homilies centred on the theme *Mary and Mission*. On August 16, Fr Clement Lim from Bentong preached on *Mary and Communion*, while on August 17, Fr Terrance led the morning Mass focused on *Mary and Participation*, during which he administered the Anointing of the Sick to many elderly and infirm parishioners. The Novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help was also prayed before each Mass.

The celebration reached its peak on the evening of Aug 17 with the Feast day Mass, celebrated by Fr George Packiasamy from Kuantan, who continued the theme of *Mary and Participation*.

In his homily, Fr George spoke about wisdom, the Bread of Life, and Mary. He



Parishioners joining in the procession in honour of Mother Mary.

emphasised that while knowledge can be gained through reading, true wisdom comes from above, building our faith and deepening our belief in Jesus Christ. He encouraged the faithful to seek divine wisdom, to set their eyes on things above rather

than worldly concerns, and to pray for a deeper understanding of Christ, especially in the Eucharist.

Fr George reminded the nearly 400 attendees that Jesus is the Bread of Life, inviting them to taste the goodness of the

Lord, even in life’s challenges. He reflected on Mary’s role, highlighting how she fully participated in the mission of the Lord through prayer and service. He urged the congregation to follow Mary’s example by participating in the life of the Church, setting aside anger and tension, and allowing the Holy Spirit to guide them closer to Jesus.

Fr George concluded with a prayer, asking for renewed enthusiasm to engage in the Church’s mission, inspired by the intercession of Mother Mary.

After the Mass, a procession in honour of Mother Mary took place despite a slight drizzle, with a beautifully decorated float of Our Lady leading the way as the Rosary was recited. The evening concluded with Benediction in the church, followed by a dinner in the adjacent kindergarten canteen.

A week prior to the feast, parishioners gathered for spring cleaning and preparations. Fr Terrance expressed his gratitude to the parish community and to those who sponsored the meal, praising their dedication to making the celebration a success.

Mary’s Assumption: A feast of joy and reflection

PETALING JAYA: August 15 is a cherished day for the Church, marking the solemn feast of the Assumption of Mary into heaven. The Church of the Assumption’s celebration was particularly special this year, imbued with vibrant festivity and deep spiritual significance.

Preparations for the occasion were in full swing, with every ministry contributing to the grand celebration. The church’s brick

wall was adorned with banners from the 27 BECs, and colourful lights signalled the approaching feast. Volunteers worked tirelessly to ensure that every detail was perfect.

The nine-day Novena leading up to the feast was particularly poignant. Each evening, the Rosary was recited along with the Assumption Novena and the Chaplet of the Assumption of Our Lady. These prayers served as a reminder of Mary’s role in sal-

vation history and her faithful acceptance of God’s will. The theme of the ‘Hail Mary,’ starting with the Angel Gabriel’s greeting and culminating in the final petition, was woven throughout the Novena. Each priest who preached during this period highlighted Mary’s obedience and faithfulness, enriching the spiritual experience for all.

The feast day itself was eagerly anticipated, culminating with Mass celebrated by Archbishop Julian Leow and parish priest, Fr Leonard Lexson concelebrating. The Church was filled, and the air was thick with devotion. Mary’s image was carried in a beautifully decorated procession float, lovingly prepared by the Altar Ladies Society and many others. Despite the rain that began shortly into the procession, the faithful’s enthusiasm remained undampened. The Altar Servers’ voices rose above the sound of the rain as they recited the Rosary.

Upon returning to the church, Archbishop Julian blessed bottles of Holy Water before heading to Dewan Volle. There, a set of beautifully arranged cakes marked the 65th anniversary of this celebration, with

Fr Leonard and Fr Biju Mathew joining in the festivities. The evening concluded with a meal and fellowship, celebrating not only the feast but also the strong sense of community.

As the nine days of celebration came to a close, the feedback from the faithful was overwhelmingly positive. Many expressed heartfelt gratitude for the hospitality and consideration shown, particularly towards the elderly. The choirs, including the Youth Choir making their debut, received high praise for their spirited performances.

This year’s Assumption celebration was a testament to the dedication and love of the parish community. Fr Leonard’s guidance helped transform the feast into a truly communal and familial event.

Yet, amidst the splendour of the celebration, the true essence of honouring Mary remains clear: to centre our lives on God’s will, just as Mary did. Her enduring message, “Do Whatever He Tells You,” serves as a reminder of how we can best honour her legacy — by faithfully following God’s guidance in our own lives. — **By Macline Fernandez**



The congregation during one of the Masses.

Legionaries encouraged to ignite the new evangelisation

By David Leong

CHERAS: In a strong and encouraging turnout, over 140 members of the Legion of Mary (LOM) from parishes across Kuala Lumpur and Selangor attended a one-day retreat at the Church of St Francis of Assisi. The retreat was organised by the Kuala Lumpur Legion of Mary Regia.

The primary focus of the retreat was on the Legion of Mary and the Catholic Church's clarion call for Catholics to evangelise. The retreat titled 'Mary, The Star of the New Evangelisation' was led by Martin Jalleh.

"It is not that evangelisation is an entirely new subject to the Legion of Mary. In fact, ever since the Legion began — it has been evangelising especially through its apostolic works worldwide," Martin said in his introduction.

The Legion of Mary is all about evangelisation," Martin said, echoing the words spoken nine years ago by Fr Paul Cheong OFM Cap, the Spiritual Director of the Legion of Mary in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, at a Legion retreat.

"We are often reminded that evangelisation is the Legion's deepest identity, that we exist to evangelise, and that evangelisation is truly at the heart of the Legion.



Yet, over the years, we sometimes find ourselves lacking in zeal and spiritual fervour."

Martin stressed the importance of reigniting this passion, stating, "The Legion of Mary must return to its original charism and spirit with renewed fervour, greater commitment, and deeper joy. This calls for a revitalised living of the spirituality inscribed in the Handbook, and above all, a renewed devotion to the Holy Spirit and the Blessed Virgin Mary."

In the first session, Martin spoke about Mary's personal encounter and journey of faith with God. He illustrated how her deep unity with the life of Christ, in alignment with the will of the Father, made her an evangeliser — the greatest evangeliser — and the true Star of Evangelisation.

Martin urged the legionaries to engage in a deep and ongoing personal encounter with God if they wish to become evangelisers like Mary. He

cited St John Paul II, who said that new evangelisation is not merely about passing on doctrine, but about a personal and profound encounter with the Saviour.

He then emphasised the role of the Holy Spirit as "the Protagonist of the Church's Mission" in Mary's life and soul, making her the ultimate example of missionary dedication. The Holy Spirit is indispensable to Catholics in their urgent call to evangelise.

Martin reminded the legionaries of St Paul VI's words: "Evangelisation will never be possible without the action of the Holy Spirit," and Pope Francis' statement: "The protagonist of the Christian proclamation is not the Church, it is not the Apostles, it is not Peter, Paul, Stephen, or Philip, but the Holy Spirit."

He also highlighted one of the most valuable aspects of Frank Duff's legacy, the founder of the Legion of Mary — his emphasis on devotion

to the Holy Spirit. "Membership in the Legion of Mary begins with our commitment to make the Legion's Promise to the Holy Spirit. Let us honour and continue this vital legacy of our founder," said Martin.

The deeper one meditates on the mystery of Mary, the more evident the absolute primacy of the Holy Spirit in her life becomes. Frank Duff aptly noted, "No Legion feature is more distinctive than the realisation of the union between the Holy Spirit and Mary."

Many participants found the final session on practical methods of person-to-person evangelisation — a hallmark of the Legion of Mary — to be highly useful, informative, and motivating.

The Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith describes so accurately this method: "Evangelisation is not only accomplished through public preaching of the Gospel nor solely through works of public relevance,

but also by means of personal witness which is always very effective in spreading the Gospel."

The Legionaries were visibly encouraged and moved as Martin shared the Catholic Church's heartfelt recognition, appreciation, and affirmation of the Legion of Mary, particularly as expressed by the popes.

"You have every reason to be proud of, and passionate about, being a Legionary! Through the power of the Holy Spirit and the ceaseless intercession and example of Our Blessed Mother, may you be anointed with a new missionary impetus and commit all of your energies to a new evangelisation," Martin concluded.

Many retreatants shared that they learned a great deal about Mary during the retreat — things they hadn't known despite being Legionaries for many years. The retreat offered them powerful, valuable, and inspiring lessons about Mary, the Star of the New Evangelisation.

The most fitting conclusion of the whole retreat was provided by one of the attendees: "Not only do we need new 'ardour, new methods and new expression' to respond to the call for a new evangelisation, the retreat made it obvious that we need a new perception of Mary — especially that of an evangeliser."

Empowering the elderly with valuable knowledge

KUALA LUMPUR: As we age, the importance of understanding crucial aspects of life, such as inheritance laws, becomes even more significant. For the elderly, this knowledge is not just about safeguarding their own legacy but also ensuring that their loved ones are protected and informed. The Golden Petals Ministry of the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, dedicated to serving senior parishioners aged 60 and above, recognises this need and strives to provide valuable educational opportunities for its members.

On August 11, the ministry organised a talk on inheritance laws in Malaysia, led by Emma S. Morgan, a practicing lawyer with over ten years of experience.

At the outset of her talk, Emma explained that the term "estate" in inheritance refers to both assets and liabilities at the time of death. This means that a beneficiary inherits not only assets like properties, monies, vehicles, and shares but also liabilities such as loans and

outstanding taxes. She also clarified that Employee Provident Fund savings and insurance benefits are not part of a Will if nominees have been declared.

Emma further explained that when a non-Muslim individual dies without a Will, the deceased is considered to have died "intestate," requiring the family to apply for Letters of Administration, with the distribution governed by the Distribution Act 1958. Conversely, when there is a Will, the Executor named in the Will must apply for a Grant of Probate.

The session also covered the conditions, essentials, and common issues related to drafting a testator's Will. Before opening the floor to questions, Emma shared insightful case studies.

The Golden Petals Ministry extends its heartfelt appreciation to Emma for her enlightening talk. The audience gained valuable knowledge, particularly during the interactive dialogue session that followed.



Support group for women with cancer

KUALA LUMPUR: On August 18, the Women Ministry of the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development (AOHD) launched its inaugural Support Group for Women with Cancer.

The session began with a beautiful video recorded message from Archbishop Julian Leow followed by a welcome speech by Dr Gary Liew, Director of AOHD and the Prayer to St Peregrine, patron saint for persons suffering from Cancer.

Women who attended the session comprised mostly of cancer survivors from various parishes in Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya, with a few currently undergoing treatment.

After an introduction by Susan Thomas, the Women Ministry Coordinator of AOHD, each of the ladies shared a short narration of their cancer journey and where they are now. It was amazing to hear how each of them addressed their emotional burdens, and how they

overcome them. Although many may have the same kind of cancer, the treatment and experience were different.

The support group is aimed to reach out to women with cancer, within and outside the church, providing a helpline formed by survivors or 'Wounded Healers' as Archbishop Julian had called them. They are here to help navigate other women who wish to seek help on managing their cancer journey, to be amongst their peers who understand what they are going through.

Most of the participants are active members of other support group like Pink Unity (National Cancer Society Malaysia), Exercise Support Group and Candy Girls (UMMC) and Sisters in Christ, a Catholic cancer support group formed in 2015. Many of them have experience managing helpdesk and counselling.

It was also highlighted that some women with cancer may not want

to share their illness with others within their own church and community. The support group will respect their privacy, thus plans to provide a safe helpdesk space in a neutral environment, for them to reach out for help. This shall include support for the caregivers and family members of the afflicted.

Moving forward, the support group seeks to welcome medical experts — doctors and nurses for medical advice, counsellors for peer support and a spiritual director for spiritual support and guidance. With their participation, the Support Group for Women with Cancer will be able to enhance the objectives of the group.

The session ended with a closing prayer followed by tea fellowship. Activities were planned for October 2024 onwards.

For more information, please contact Susan Thomas at 012-934 4133.



Emma S Morgan explaining the importance of understanding inheritance laws.

Spirit-filled discussions at CDM's parish pastoral assembly

By Rachael Philip

SHAH ALAM: After a three-year hiatus, the Church of the Divine Mercy, held its much-anticipated Parish Pastoral Assembly (PPA), marking the first time the assembly went entirely paperless, in line with the Ecology thrust introduced this year. The event saw over 160 parishioners from various ministries and BEC groups come together to engage in the assembly.

Archbishop Julian Leow inaugurated the assembly, emphasising its significance as a platform to explore the four thrusts identified during the

Archdiocesan Pastoral Assembly last October. These thrusts — Family, Church, Ecology, and Society — are the focal areas for the archdiocese from 2023 to 2026, stemming from earlier parish pastoral assemblies and the Synod process.

Archbishop Julian also highlighted the ongoing journey towards the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 (MPC2026), which will, for the first time, bring together all nine dioceses from Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah, and Sarawak.

Participants at the assembly were divided into smaller groups to

delve into each of the four thrusts. They were guided on using the “Conversations in the Spirit” method to discern, reflect, and analyse the thrusts, fostering attentive listening and openness to the Holy Spirit’s promptings.

The assembly culminated in a sharing session where groups presented the main points from their discussions. These insights were documented and shared with the ArchKL Pastoral Team, who will incorporate them into the preparations for the Malaysian Pastoral Convention in 2026.



The parishioners, in groups, during the *Conversations in the Spirit*.

Formation for new RCIA coordinators and facilitators

KUALA LUMPUR: A one-day formation programme for new RCIA coordinators and facilitators (catechists) was conducted by the KL Archdiocesan RCIA Ministry, a sub-ministry of the KL Archdiocesan Catechetical Ministry (KLACM) on August 17 at the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. About 80 people involved in the RCIA ministry participated in the programme.

According to Dr Steven Selvaraju, who serves as Director of the Archdiocesan Catechetical Centre, the programme is a new initiative by KLACM. He stated, “Each year, since 2019, we have been conducting formation programmes for new parish catechists who are teaching children and teenagers. This year, we decided to have a training session for those who have been recently appointed as RCIA coordinators or become involved as facilitators.”

The first session entitled, *Understanding the RCIA*, was presented by Dr Steven. He shared that the present day RCIA has its origins in the adult catechumenate that was carried out during the second to fifth centuries. The early Christians were particular about how people were initiated into the Church and they made sure that those seeking baptism were truly ‘converted’ to Jesus.

Around the sixth century, the catechumenate began to decline, largely due to the rise of infant baptism. However, elements of it persisted in various forms across Europe. European missionaries later introduced aspects of the ancient catechumenate when they evangelised in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Over time, calls for the adult catechumenate to be re-introduced into the Church began to grow.

At the Second Vatican Council, missionary bishops advocated strongly for the reintroduction of the catechumenate. The



Participants having a discussion.

Council decreed that the adult catechumenate “is to be restored and brought into use at the discretion of the local ordinary” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 64). Pope Paul VI approved the Order of Adult Initiation in 1972, officially naming it the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA).

The introduction of the RCIA sparked significant excitement and debate among catechetical, liturgical, and theological experts. Some viewed it as a ground breaking development, while others considered it one of the most crucial Church documents since the Second Vatican Council. The RCIA process emphasises that “The initiation of catechumens is a gradual process that takes place within the community of the faithful. By joining the catechumens in reflecting on the paschal mystery and renewing their own conversion, the faithful provide an example that will help the catechumens to obey the Holy Spirit more generously” (RCIA, 4).

Three key elements emerge from this understanding. Firstly, the RCIA is a spiritual journey that calls for faith and conversion on the part of the adult seeking initiation. Secondly, to support this

journey, the RCIA is structured into various stages and steps that signify the individual's progress in faith and conversion. Thirdly, the catechumen does not embark on this journey alone; the RCIA invites the entire Christian community to accompany and support them. In doing so, the community is also called to undergo its own conversion as it aids the catechumens in their journey toward Christ.

In recent years, however, some experts have expressed concern over how the RCIA is being implemented in many parishes. Instead of resembling a spiritual journey, the RCIA is often treated more as a formation programme, with a stronger focus on catechetical instruction rather than fostering an authentic experience of faith and conversion for those seeking initiation. Additionally, certain key elements of the RCIA are either inadequately implemented or entirely omitted, hindering the holistic development of individuals as disciples of Christ. Moreover, the responsibility for RCIA often falls on a small group within the parish, rather than involving the entire community. These issues need to be carefully addressed and improved to ensure the RCIA is properly and effectively carried out.

Role of the RCIA Team

In the second session titled *The Role of the RCIA Team*, Dr Steven Selvaraju highlighted three crucial points for team members.

Firstly, evangelisation is essential. True conversion cannot occur without it, and without conversion, later catechesis will be less effective. Therefore, the initial stage of the RCIA, the Period of Evangelisation and Pre-catechumenate, must be given significant attention.

Secondly, the RCIA team should recognise that the community plays a vital role in the RCIA process. Faith and conversion develop not just through catechesis but through active, frequent involvement in the community's life. The community acts as a living “curriculum,” where catechumens learn Catholic practices and values through the example set by its members.

Thirdly, the RCIA team can foster greater community involvement by focusing on building personal relationships. Relationships are crucial in the RCIA process, as studies reveal that many join due to existing connections with Catholics, such as a spouse, family member, or friend. Therefore, the team should facilitate these connections by integrating catechumens into parish ministries, groups, or BECs during the Period of Catechumenate. This approach allows catechumens to engage with the community on

a personal level, helping them form meaningful relationships and better integrate into the Church.

These relationships not only help the catechumen experience what it means to be Church but also play a key role in ensuring that he or she remains in the Church long after his or her baptism. During the presentation, Dr Steven highlighted some key statistics from the findings of his doctoral thesis — *The Role of the Parish Community in the RCIA* — which indicates the importance of facilitating one-to-one relationships between catechumens and individuals in the community.

The final session of the day, titled *The Role of the RCIA Coordinator and Facilitator*, was delivered in two parts by Stephanie Chia and Alan Lukose. Stephanie focused on God's pedagogical approach, exploring how catechists can draw from God's methods of teaching and guiding His people. She referenced several Biblical passages (Lk 24:13-35; Lk 19:1-10; Jn 4:5-30; Acts 9:1-9) to illustrate these principles. Alan, emphasised the importance for RCIA coordinators to build strong relationships with the parish priest and team members. He also highlighted the need for coordinators to develop and apply specific leadership skills to enhance their effectiveness in their roles. — *KL Archdiocesan RCIA Coordinating Team*



Stephanie Chia presenting on the “Pedagogy of God”.

First Mass brings hope and healing to displaced village

IMPHAL, India: On August 15, the Feast of the Assumption, a group of Catholics who had fled ethnic violence in northeastern India over a year ago were able to return to celebrate the Eucharist in their new settlement. This new community, built by the Archdiocese of Imphal, provides homes for those who lost everything. Fr Mark Aimeng, a priest from Manipur, described the celebration as “a spiritual balm amid so much suffering.”

Fr Aimeng, who has been a priest for 41 years, celebrated the first Mass in this new settlement of displaced people, assisted by Deacon Patrick Lal, marking a significant

moment of joy for the 180 attendees. They had been eagerly awaiting this moment. “It was a deeply moving experience for both me and the displaced families from Singtom in Chandel district,” he told *AsiaNews*. “Twenty families have settled in this village, which was built and blessed by the Archdiocese of Imphal with the help of generous benefactors. More families are expected to join in the coming months.”

These families had fled their village of Singngat on May 29, 2023, due to the ethnic clashes between the Meitei and Kuki. “They heard that a formidable group, the Arambai Tenggol, was

approaching and realised resistance was futile,” Fr Aimeng recounted. “After six days in exile, they learned their village had been burned. Out of 72 houses, 45 were destroyed, and other buildings, including the church, were severely damaged.”

While the Archdiocese of Imphal is working to provide homes, education, food, and other essentials, the path to healing will be long. “The presence of priests offers immense spiritual comfort,” Fr Aimeng concluded. “Since their arrival, I have had many opportunities to visit and provide this spiritual balm.” — **By Nirmala Carvalho, Asianews**



Fr Mark Aimeng celebrating Mass with the new community.

Life's 'final exam' will be on care for the poor

VATICAN: God will not judge people by how many university degrees they earned, but by how well they cared for the poor, Pope Francis told a group of priests and religious women.

“The Lord won’t ask us, ‘What did you study?’ ‘How many degrees do you have?’ ‘How many works did you accomplish?’ No, no. The Lord will say, ‘Come with me because I was hungry and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me to drink; I was persecuted and you protected me,’” the Pope said.

“That is the theme of the final exam on which we will be judged,” the Pope said Aug 12 as he met members of the general chapters of the Dominican Missionary Sisters of St Sixtus, the Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary and the Vocationist Fathers.

The pontiff joked that it was “effi-



Pope Francis meets at the Vatican August 12, 2024, with members of four religious orders holding their general chapter meetings in Rome. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

cient” of the Vatican to group all the general chapter members together in one audience since it is chapter “season” in Rome.

All four religious orders, he said, were founded to support and educate young people from poor families who would not otherwise receive the education they needed and the guidance necessary to discover their vocations.

The founders of the four orders

“saw in them a sign from God for their mission,” the Pope said. “In the same way, it will also be good for you, especially in these days of community discernment, to keep constantly before your eyes the face of the poor.”

“Jesus speaks to us in our neediest brothers and sisters,” Pope Francis said, “and in every gift given to them there is a reflection of God’s love.”

And while the art of spiritual discernment is a speciality of the Vocationist Fathers, the Pope told the religious that learning to make decisions by listening to God, to others and to one’s own heart is essential for all Christians.

Discernment, he said, involves “prayer, meditation, patient waiting, and then courage and sacrifice” to put into practice that which God, “without ever imposing his will on

us, suggests to our hearts.”

Having choices is a sign of the freedom God gives to each person, the Pope said.

“Our world is in such need of rediscovering the taste and beauty of making a decision, especially regarding definitive choices, which cause a decisive turning point in life, such as the vocational one,” he said. Young people need spiritual fathers and mothers to help them understand that “to be free is not to remain eternally at a crossroads, making little ‘escapes’ to the right and left, without ever really taking a road.”

“Being free means betting — betting! — on a path, with intelligence and prudence, certainly, but also with boldness and a spirit of renunciation, in order to grow and progress in the dynamic of giving and to be happy and loving according to God’s plan,” the Pope told them. — **By Cindy Wooden, CNS**

Nicaragua to tax Churches on offerings and donations

MANAGUA: Nicaragua’s parliament has approved new tax measures that will require Churches and religious organisations of all denominations to pay taxes on offerings received from the faithful.

The National Assembly of Nicaragua approved a tax reform on August 20 that does away with tax exemptions for religious institutions, requiring them to pay income tax on activities and assets even if exclusively intended for religious purposes.

According to independent Nicaraguan media, the amendment to Law 822 will require all Churches, regardless of denomination, to follow a tax regime similar to that of the private economic sector, where legitimate profit is the goal of activity.

Offerings, alms, and donations from the faithful will, therefore, be subject to income tax at rates ranging from 10 to 30 per cent.

It is noted that the elimination of tax exemptions will have a severe impact on the operational and financial

capabilities of religious communities, which are engaged in educational, social, and assistance efforts, with significant consequences particularly for the most vulnerable social groups.

The reform comes amid a difficult context for the Catholic Church and other religious and civil organisations.

Following the arrest and expulsion of priests, the Nicaraguan government recently revoked the legal status of another 1,500 non-governmental organisations, many of which were religious, transferring their assets to the State.

Regarding this decision, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed “deep concern,” stating in a communiqué that the Nicaraguan government’s initiative effectively “threatens freedom of religion and freedom of association,” and calling for the “guaranteeing and protection of fundamental freedoms” of individuals. — **By Giancarlo La Vella, Vatican News**

Interfaith dialogue in the Holy Land is in ‘crisis’

VATICAN: The ongoing conflict in Gaza has severely strained interreligious relations in the Holy Land, according to Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the patriarch of Jerusalem, *pic*. Speaking at the annual Meeting in Rimini on August 20, the cardinal expressed deep concern over the deteriorating state of dialogue between Christians, Jews, and Muslims, describing the situation as being in “crisis.”

In his remarks, Cardinal Pizzaballa highlighted the difficulties in facilitating public meetings between different religious communities, even at the institutional level. This breakdown in communication, he noted, is a significant setback, especially given the efforts made in recent years to foster interfaith understanding, such as the 2019 *Document on Human Fraternity* signed by Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmad el-Tayeb.

The cardinal emphasised the

urgent need for a renewed phase of interreligious dialogue once the war in Gaza comes to an end. He warned that rebuilding trust after such a prolonged period of distrust, hatred, and disdain will require immense effort. However, he also stressed that interreligious dialogue must move beyond the elites and reach the grassroots level, where communities can engage directly with one another.

Cardinal Pizzaballa urged religious leaders to listen to other faith communities and represent their own in a way that fosters understanding, rather than retreating into insular narratives. He echoed the words of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, who famously said, “no religion is an island,” underscoring the importance of recognising the interconnectedness of different faiths, especially in times of crisis.

Despite the Christian community’s small size in the Holy Land, Cardinal Pizzaballa called



on Christians to advocate for forgiveness in public discourse. He acknowledged that while forgiveness might seem impossible in the current climate, it remains the only path to overcoming the deep-seated impasse that plagues the region. — **By Justin McLellan, CNS**

Singapore prepares for papal visit

ROME: With Pope Francis's visit to Asia just around the corner, Singapore's Cardinal William Goh *pic*, has highlighted the significance of this trip, emphasising its potential to address pressing global issues like artificial intelligence and environmental care, while also showcasing the rich diversity and deep history of the Catholic Church in Asia.

In a recent interview with *Crux*, Cardinal William spoke about Pope Francis' long-standing commitment to key themes such as inclusiveness, fraternity, dialogue, and environmental stewardship. "From the beginning," the cardinal remarked, "Pope Francis has been a tireless champion of these causes. For many in Singapore, these themes reveal that the Pope is attuned to the lived realities of people, understanding their struggles and pains."

The visit to Singapore, scheduled for September 11-13, comes as part of a broader tour of Asia and Oceania that will also include Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and East Timor. Originally planned for 2021, the trip was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, making this the Pope's sixth visit to Asia since his election. Previous visits have taken him to South Korea, Sri Lanka and the Philippines, Myanmar and Bangladesh, Thailand and Japan, and most recently, Kazakhstan and Mongolia.

Cardinal William, who was appointed Archbishop of Singapore in 2013 and elevated



to the College of Cardinals in 2022, believes that the Pope's affinity for Asia stems from the continent's vast diversity. "Asia is a continent of pluralities — ethnicities, religions, cultures, political systems, and ideologies," the cardinal explained. "This diversity showcases Asia's richness, but it also brings about challenges like tensions and disagreements. The Pope's visit is valuable because it underscores themes of inclusiveness and dialogue, which are especially prophetic for Asia."

The prelate expressed his hope that the visit would inspire a renewed sense of unity and hope among Singaporeans, particularly in light of Pope Francis's call for a "missionary option" within the Church. This concept,

rooted in the Pope's Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, emphasises a missionary impulse capable of transforming the Church's outreach and engagement with the world.

The significance of the Pope's visit extends beyond the Catholic community in Singapore. According to Cardinal William, the visit is eagerly anticipated by people of various faiths across the nation. The overwhelming demand for tickets to the Papal Mass is a testament to this excitement, with many expressing a desire to hear Pope Francis' message. "Unfortunately, due to venue constraints, we cannot accommodate everyone who wishes to attend," the cardinal said, adding that the Mass will be livestreamed to ensure broader participation.

Cardinal William also noted that the Pope's visit holds importance at both the Apostolic and State levels. The visit, coming 38 years after Pope St John Paul II's visit in 1986, serves as a reminder that "God is close to us and indeed present and incarnate in our midst." Additionally, the visit is significant for Singapore's leaders, as the Pope's emphasis on the dignity of the human person, inclusiveness, interreligious dialogue, responsible management of artificial intelligence, and care for creation aligns closely with Singapore's own values and priorities.

Reflecting on the broader significance of Pope Francis' frequent visits to Asia, the car-

dinal pointed out that Asia is the birthplace of many of the world's oldest religions, making it a region of profound religious significance. The continent's rapid growth in Christianity, despite the presence of many other ancient religions, underscores its increasing importance to the global Church.

"The Gospel of Jesus Christ is truly universal in Asia," the cardinal said, "transcending ethnicities, cultures, nationalities, education levels, and political systems. In a world marked by deep-seated differences and polarisation, the Church in Asia bears witness to a Gospel that is for all nations."

Looking forward to Pope Francis' visit, Cardinal William expressed his hope that the Pope's message would inspire the Church in Singapore to become more vibrant, evangelising, and missionary. He also emphasised the need for unity within the Church, particularly in the face of the increasingly complex realities of Singaporean society, and expressed a deep desire for the visit to bring about a great sense of hope.

"As we prepare for this historic visit, I pray that Singapore will be filled with a profound, divine hope," Cardinal William concluded, "a hope that turns us all towards Christ, the source of all hope, and that inspires us to work together to bring about a new, better, and holier order in our society." — *Crux*

● See also back page

Papua New Guinean children to perform five-minute concert for Pope Francis

PORT MORESBY: Some 70 children from the Queen of Paradise (QOP) Project are scheduled to perform for Pope Francis during his upcoming visit to Papua New Guinea September 6 to 9.

Fr Miguel de la Calle of the QOP Orchestra said the children will play musical instruments and sing for the pontiff on Sept 8 in Vanimo.

"The children of the QOP Orchestra are very excited as Pope Francis is going to listen to them in person," the priest said in a report by *The National*, a local newspaper.

The priest said the children would be waiting for Pope Francis at the end of his 13-kilometre golf cart ride in Vanimo to bless the people.

Maestro Jesus Briceño, who will conduct the group, described the 5-minute concert as "pure gold," adding that they are preparing "two pieces of music" for the Pope.

Cardinal John Ribat, Archbishop of Port Moresby, described Pope Francis' visit to Papua New Guinea as a "blessing." He noted that the Pope comes not only as the leader of the Catholic Church but also as a head of state.

"I'd like to stress that the Pope comes as a person not in good health, he will be on a wheelchair. He will turn 88 this year," the prelate said. "At his age and with all the issues surrounding his health, he still decided to come." — *LiCAS News*



A screenshot from a YouTube video shows members of the working committee coordinating Pope Francis' upcoming visit to Papua New Guinea during a press conference on Aug 21, 2024. (Photo/ TVWAN / YouTube)

Tickets for Pope Francis' Mass in Belgium sells out in record time

VATICAN: Tickets for Pope Francis' Mass in King Baudouin Stadium in Brussels at the end of September sold out in record time on Aug 19.

After becoming available for free online, 32,000 tickets for the Sept 29 Mass were snatched up in just 90 minutes, surprising local organisers of the Pope's three-day trip to Belgium.

"This pleasantly surprised us; it's very positive to see such a high demand," the

spokesman for the Belgian bishops' conference, Tommy Scholtes, told French Catholic newspaper *La Croix*.

During the Mass, Pope Francis will beatify Carmelite Sr Ana de Jesús, a spiritual daughter of St Teresa of Ávila and a friend to St John of the Cross. Born Ana de Lobera y Torres, the religious helped expand the Discalced Carmelites to France and Belgium at the turn of the 17th century.

The Brussels soccer stadium is Belgium's

largest, with a seating capacity of almost 50,000 people. Besides hosting the matches of the national soccer team, it has also been the venue for concerts by world-class music artists, such as Madonna, U2, and the Rolling Stones.

Organisers explained that the approximately 18,000 remaining seats in the city-owned stadium are being reserved for groups from parishes, dioceses, and movements. After group registration closes, they may be able to release a few hundred more individual tickets for those who missed out on Aug 19.

Pope Francis will visit three cities in Belgium to mark the 600th anniversary of the Catholic universities of Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve from Sept 26-29. He will also make a brief stop in the small European country of Luxembourg on Sept 26.

In Belgium, a constitutional monarchy, the Pope will greet King Philippe and Queen Mathilde, and have time with Prime Minister Alexander De Croo. He will also have meetings with professors and students at the

country's two Catholic universities and with Catholic clergy and religious.

The Pope will also hold a private meeting with victims of sexual abuse during his visit.

Pope Francis' final morning in the Low Countries will be spent with local Catholics in King Baudouin Stadium for the celebration of Sunday Mass on Sept 29.

The trip comes at a time when the Belgian Church is going through a crisis. In December, the Belgian bishops apologised again after new testimonies reignited the scandal of children forcibly put up for adoption with the collaboration of the church.

A historically Catholic country, since the 1950s, Belgium has seen a significant decline in the number of its practicing Christians.

A 2023 study by the Catholic university KU Leuven estimates the number of Catholics in Belgium to be slightly higher, at 50 per cent of the population, but with just nine per cent attending Mass at least once a month. — **By Hannah Brockhaus, CNA**



The King Baudouin Stadium in Brussels.

Embracing newness

Women's

transformative role in the synodal journey



By Sr Monique Tarabeh

Reflecting on women's roles through the lens of the synodal journey, Pope Francis' decision to address his letters to the people of God as brothers and sisters marks a significant move towards greater inclusion, setting a tone of equity and harmony. By avoiding titles and using inclusive language, he emphasised unity and interconnectedness within the Church, resonating deeply with the spirit of the synod. His consistent highlighting of the indispensable role of religious women underscores the importance of embracing the theology of women, acknowledging the unique contributions women make to both the church and society, embodying compassion, love and teaching through their feminine essence.

In our lives as women religious, the growth path often requires letting go of attachments and embracing transformation. While it's natural to dwell on losses, our spiritual journey beckons us to focus on the opportunities for growth and renewal that lie ahead. Rooted in the divine feminine, which symbolises the birthing of new life and newness, women religious are called to cultivate a mindset of continual growth and evolution.

Despite the challenges of releasing what no longer serves us, many of us are experiencing a sense of completion in becoming smaller in number, aging, closing ministries and selling property. Yes, this process can be painful. In these moments, however, the wisdom of St Mary Euphrasia Pelletier comes to mind when she said: "If the congregation remains with eight sisters, do not worry, for you are engaged in a noble mission. This mission is not yours alone, but God's." As we feel that we are approaching the conclusion of certain chapters in our lives, letting go can feel like losing a part of our identity. Conversely, learning the art of growth in letting go offers a new perspective on our pain.

I attended a Mass at the Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows in Belleville, Illinois. The service was in Spanish, and I was pleased that I understood the homily. One key takeaway from the Gospel reading was the story of Jesus appearing to Thomas and the other disciples after the resurrection. Jesus showed them His wounds and said, "Peace be with you." Despite His wounds,

He did not let His pain speak for Him. As the priest said in Spanish, *Él está herido pero no dolido* (He is wounded but not hurt). The message resonated with me: We should let our peace speak through us, not the pain we hold from our wounds.

God has blessed us with the feminine aspect which embodies the essence of creation and renewal. Like mothers giving birth to new life, we as women religious are called to nurture and cultivate newness within ourselves and our communities. This divine gift serves as a reminder of our innate ability to adapt, evolve and flourish in the face of change. As we embrace

moments of completion and transition, we are gifted with the opportunity to release attachments and welcome the unknown with faith and courage. To move forward, we must leave something behind and open ourselves to the endless possibilities that lie ahead.

Women leaders often prioritise the values of compassion, love and teaching, reshaping traditional hierarchical structures and cultivating inclusive environments where every voice is heard and valued. Their contributions enrich the synodal journey, infusing it with a richness born from diverse perspectives and a commitment to collective discernment and action. In our leadership endeavours, whether formally in designated roles or as active members within our communities, we prioritise newness and growth by openly communicating our intentions, challenges and decisions.

This commitment to openness not only ensures clarity but also promotes an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect. When each person feels informed and included in the decision-making process, she is more likely to feel valued and empowered to contribute meaningfully to the collective mission. Through newness and growth-driven leadership, we strive to create an environment where dialogue invites everyone to the table, knowing that each person brings her own valuable wisdom. Dissent is respectfully heard, and unity is forged through shared understanding and common purpose.

This inclusive approach enriches decision-making processes with diverse perspectives and insights. Moreover, newness and growth in leadership encourage a culture of learning. We acknowledge

our fallibility and embrace vulnerability, understanding that newness is not about representing perfection but rather about authenticity.

In *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*, Richard Rohr quotes Thomas Merton's insightful observation:

In the way we've structured our lives, we often spend our entire existence climbing the ladder of supposed success, only to reach the top and realise it's leaning against the wrong wall. At the summit, we find that what we thought we wanted isn't truly fulfilling. To return to a state of inherent abundance, we must release all false agendas, unreal goals, and passing self-images. It's all about letting go.

Letting go is often the first step toward meaningful collaboration. Collaboration doesn't always come easily; in fact, it's often quite challenging. According to an old African proverb, it's faster to work alone, and there's truth in that. Collaboration, on the other hand, demands excellent communication, mutual interests, thorough planning and strong relationships.

Unlike top-down approaches, collaboration emphasises shared goals, collective wisdom, and mutual empowerment. We leverage collaboration to build consensus, harness collective creativity, and address complex challenges facing our communities. At the heart of collaboration lies the recognition of each individual's inherent worth and dignity.

Despite our reality of diminishment and the challenges of growing in letting go, a collaborative attitude fosters a profound sense of ownership and belonging, empowering individuals to contribute their talents and skills for the common good. By keeping the mission at the heart of our efforts, we are committed to living the fullness of life.

As I participated in the Leadership Collaborative, or CLDP, I found Sr Linda Buck's explanation of the Johari window insightful. This model offers a useful framework for understanding and enhancing interpersonal collaboration and relationships within our religious communities. It consists of four quadrants:

- **Open:** In our roles, we strive to expand this quadrant by sharing our thoughts, feelings and intentions openly with our constituents. By doing so, we reduce the size of the hidden quadrant, where aspects of ourselves are known to us but not to others. Through transparency, we in-

vite others to see and understand us more fully, fostering trust and authenticity within our community.

- **Hidden:** This quadrant includes aspects of ourselves that are known to us but not to others. Through self-disclosure and openness, we aim to shrink this area, promoting deeper connections and mutual understanding.

- **Blind:** Aspects of ourselves that others see but we may not recognise live here. By actively seeking feedback and listening to others with humility, we minimise this quadrant, gaining insights that spur personal and collective growth.

- **Unknown:** This quadrant encompasses aspects of ourselves that neither we nor others are aware of. It represents untapped potential and undiscovered strengths. Embracing curiosity and self-exploration helps us uncover and integrate these unknown facets, enriching our leadership and community engagement.

The synodal journey and our roles as women religious who embrace the divine feminine call us to embrace the trans-

formative power of newness and growth. Pope Francis' inclusive approach sets a precedent for a more equitable and harmonious Church, where every voice, especially those of women religious, is valued and heard. By letting go of old attachments

and welcoming change, we can cultivate a mindset of continual evolution, embodying the divine feminine's essence of creation and renewal. Through collaboration and open communication, we enrich our communities, fostering a culture of trust, mutual respect, and shared purpose. As we move forward, let us remain steadfast in our commitment to nurturing new life and possibilities, ensuring that our collective mission reflects the fullness of life and the boundless potential within us all. — NCR

● **Monique Tarabeh is a member of the congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd. Born in Damascus, Syria, Monique currently resides in St. Louis. She holds a Master of Arts in graphic design and communication, which led her to serve as communications director for her congregation. She was also appointed as president of Multi-media International in Rome.**

“As we embrace moments of completion and transition, we are gifted with the opportunity to release attachments and welcome the unknown with faith and courage. To move forward, we must leave something behind and open ourselves to the endless possibilities that lie ahead.”

“Women leaders often prioritise the values of compassion, love and teaching, reshaping traditional hierarchical structures and cultivating inclusive environments where every voice is heard and valued.”

Hearing the cry of the earth: A call to radical response

Pope's prayer intention for September

This September, Pope Francis calls us to turn our attention to a plea that resounds not just from distant lands but from our very doorstep: the cry of the Earth. As we reflect on this prayer intention, it's more than just a call to spiritual reflection — it's a summons to action, to a transformation in how we live in harmony with creation, especially here in Malaysia.

A Scriptural Mandate for Stewardship

The Bible reminds us that creation is a divine gift. In Genesis, we are entrusted with the earth, not to dominate it but to steward it. Psalm 24:1 tells us, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." This scripture lays the foundation for our role as caretakers, not owners, of creation.

St Paul describes how "the whole creation has been groaning" (Romans 8:22), a groan that today manifests in the environ-



PRAYER PRISM

Fr Fabian Dicom

mental crises we witness. From the alarming frequency of floods to the devastating haze that chokes our cities, the signs of this groaning are all around us.

Reflections from *Laudato Si'* and *Laudate Deum*

Pope Francis, in *Laudato Si'* and *Laudate Deum*, calls for an "ecological conversion" — a fundamental change in how we view and interact with the environment. He speaks against the "throwaway culture" that prioritises profit over people and the



planet, urging us to adopt sustainable practices.

This call to care for creation is not just

an environmental issue but a spiritual and moral one. Our love for God cannot be separated from our care for His creation.

The Malaysian situation: Apathy amid crisis

Environmental degradation in Malaysia presents a multifaceted challenge, marked by issues such as rampant deforestation, pollution from industrial activities, and the increasingly visible impacts of climate change. Despite the urgency of these problems, the response from both the government and the public has often been inadequate. This can be attributed to several factors, including economic priorities, corruption, inconsistent enforcement of environmental regulations, and a general lack of public awareness.

The Malaysian government has introduced various policies aimed at sustainable development and conservation, yet these efforts frequently fall short of what is necessary. Meenakshi Raman, President of Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) and a leading environmentalist, has been a staunch critic of these shortcomings. She argues that while policies may exist on paper, they often lack the necessary rigor and enforcement to be truly effective.

For example, one of the critical issues Meenakshi has highlighted is the ongoing deforestation driven by palm oil plantations and logging. Despite regulations, illegal logging continues, contributing to the loss of biodiversity and worsening the effects of climate change. In both East and West Malaysia, vast tracts of rainforest have been cleared, not only destroying habitats but also displacing indigenous communities who rely on these forests for their livelihoods.

Meenakshi has also been vocal about the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on marginalised communities in Malaysia. These communities, often residing in rural or low-lying areas, are most vulnerable to the adverse effects of environmental crises such as floods, landslides, and pollution. For instance, the frequent and severe flash floods in Malaysia, worsened by poor urban planning and climate change, disproportionately affect lower-income communities. These floods cause significant damage to homes, disrupt livelihoods, and lead to long-term socio-economic consequences, particularly for those who lack the resources to rebuild their lives.



Volunteers participating in the tree-planting initiative at Bukit Tinggi Forest Reserve.

The intersection of environmental degradation with social justice is a central theme in Meenakshi's advocacy. She argues that the environmental crisis in Malaysia is not just about conservation but also about protecting the rights and livelihoods of the most vulnerable. This perspective aligns with the broader global call for ecological justice, as articulated in Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*, which emphasises the need to care for both the environment and the poor. There is an undeniable nexus between the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.

Magdalene Chiang, the Penang State Coordinator for the Commission for Creation Justice – Diocese of Penang, echoes these concerns. "I cry every day, asking God why it is so difficult to penetrate society and enlighten them that our current lifestyle is unsustainable," she laments. She emphasises that our exploitation of natural resources for selfish gain has led to severe consequences, including global warming, flash floods, and food scarcity, which hit the poor hardest.

The Church's Response in Malaysia

The Catholic Church in Malaysia has been actively engaged in various environmental initiatives and projects, especially in response to the climate crisis.

Ecological Diocese Pledge

In July 2023, all nine bishops of Malaysia signed the Ecological Diocese Pledge, committing their dioceses to ecological sustainability. This pledge is part of a broader commitment to live out deep ecological

spirituality and advance ecological justice across the nation. The pledge includes protocols for creating ecological dioceses and parishes, focusing on reducing carbon footprints and building community resilience. This initiative aligns with the universal Catholic Church's efforts to respond to the environmental crisis as emphasised in Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'*.

PROTEC Campaign

We are now coming into the fifth year of the Protect Our Earth, Protect Our Children (PROTEC) Campaign with the theme: *Use Less Paper and Wood*. This theme runs for one year from September 1, 2024 to August 31, 2025. PROTEC Year 5 will be launched on Sept 1 with Mass at the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist, Kuala Lumpur. This launch will coincide with the 2024 Season of Creation (Sept 1 to Oct 4) with the theme: *To hope and act with creation*.

The Episcopal Commission for Creation Justice (ECCJ) has been leading the way with its PROTEC campaign since 2020. The Year 5 theme continues the call to action for all Catholics in Malaysia to adopt more sustainable practices. This campaign includes various activities aimed at promoting environmental consciousness among the faithful, highlighting the urgent need for lifestyle changes to mitigate the effects of climate change.

Local Environmental Activities

On the ground, various parishes and dioceses have been organising grassroots environmental activities. The Diocese of Malacca Johore,

for instance, has engaged in tangible efforts like mangrove replanting projects, which are crucial for combating coastal erosion and supporting biodiversity. These initiatives are integral to the Church's mission in Malaysia to care for creation. However, these initiatives need to be more widespread and consistent. We must prioritise environmental education within our communities, advocate for stronger environmental policies, and lead by example in adopting sustainable practices within our institutions.

The Role of Leadership

In this movement, the leadership of the Church is pivotal. Bishop Joseph Hii, President of the Episcopal Commission for Creation Justice, has been a strong advocate for environmental care, urging the faithful to see creation care as integral to their faith. He emphasises that caring for the environment is not just a task for activists but a responsibility for every Christian. Bishop Joseph's advocacy and example serve as a powerful reminder of the Church's responsibility to lead by example in caring for creation.

A Call to Action: Beyond Apathy

As we reflect on the Pope's prayer intention this month, let us not be content with just words. The cry of the Earth is a cry for justice — a plea for a radical change in how we live and relate to creation. The situation is dire, and our response must be rooted in prayer, education, advocacy, and tangible actions.

We are called to be stewards of creation, to protect and care for the world entrusted to us. Let us commit to making the necessary changes, advocating for those who are most vulnerable, and ensuring that our actions reflect our faith. The future of our planet, and the lives of countless people, depend on it.

In the words of Magdalene Chiang, "We need to change. We must examine our consciences and ask ourselves if we are doing the right thing. Let us pray and have hope, continuing to take action to care for God's creation. I believe that one day, God will awaken us from our ignorance, leading to a breakthrough for a better world to come."

May our prayers this month be the seeds of a new, just, and sustainable world.

Former students pay tribute to dedicated La Sallian educator

By Adrian David

PETALING JAYA: After six decades as a dedicated teacher and as the oldest living La Salle brother in Malaysia, Ambrose Loke's contributions and spirit were recently feted in a grand reception at the La Salle Hall off Jalan Gasing here.

Through the years, Bro Ambrose had touched the hearts and souls of students at his principal school, Melaka's St Francis Institution (SFI), and 28 other La Salle schools in peninsular Malaysia as well as six associated schools in Sabah and Sarawak.

Bro Ambrose was elated when former students and teachers of La Salle schools in the country came together to celebrate his 80th birthday on August 8.

"I am very grateful to the Lord Almighty to have blessed me with longevity and the strength to share my 80 years of living with fellow Lasallians, family and friends.

"To me, this is the greatest gift of life from God: to be able to share such camaraderie with all of you,



Eric Chan and Vivienne Cheong (left) present Choe Sim Chye and Brother Ambrose Loke with a commemorative SFI giant crest and a SFI 'Green and White' school magazine compilation, respectively. (photo/Adrian David)

without whom our lives will be less colourful, said Bro Ambrose, who resides at the adjoining La Salle Provincialate residence overlooking SMK La Salle in PJ.

Reflecting on his decades in the education field, Bro Ambrose said he had simply done what other teachers had set out to do: to serve

society across all races and religions.

And like many other dedicated educators, he is happy to witness the strides his former students have made in life. It gives me pride and joy to be among the teachers who have nurtured the lot, imparting knowledge to our young charges,

he said.

During the celebration, Bro Ambrose exchanged pleasantries via video call with his close Japanese friend, professor Mishima Moritake from the Immaculate Heart College in Kagoshima prefecture, Kyushu island.

Moritake was instrumental in fostering student-exchange and homestay programmes between our two countries. We last met in Melaka in 2019 before the pandemic, and I am looking forward to rekindling our friendship by welcoming him and his entourage to Malaysia for many more years, Ambrose added.

Meanwhile, Malaysian Federation of Lasallian Alumni Associations secretary and Franciscan Club of Kuala Lumpur treasurer James Sia paid tribute to the former SFI director for the part he had played leading to countless success stories among his students.

Sia said Lasallian brothers like Bro Ambrose were special as they were pious, disciplined, and capable of imparting sound knowledge. It is for this reason that the dedica-

tion, sacrifices and services of the La Salle brothers live on 170 years after their arrival in Malaysia, he said.

Bro Ambrose's younger sibling, La Salle Malaysia director Bro Andrew Loke, hoped that the Christian brothers' legacy would inspire the young to pursue teaching at missionary schools to educate Malaysians of all races and creeds.

It is our wish for youths to better understand the pedagogy and best practices put forth by my fellow brothers, said Bro Andrew.

At the event, former SFI art teacher Choe Sim Chye, 90, was also honoured and presented with an enlarged replica of the school's colourful crest, which he had helped design in 1958 beyond his teaching hours.

The crest has received accolades for being one the most attractive in the world.

Having served as SFI's school magazine editor from 1991 to 2019, Choe was also presented with a compilation of magazines he had edited.

The book keeper of Manila

How one man's passion for reading sparked a community of learning

In a world where education remains a privilege for many, a 72-year-old man has taken it upon himself to make knowledge accessible to all.

Hernando Guanlao, affectionately known as Mang Nanie, has spent the last two decades dedicating his life to sharing his love for books through the Reading Club 2000 — a public library that has transformed not only his neighborhood but also the lives of countless individuals seeking knowledge and growth.

Mang Nanie's journey began with a lifelong love for reading, a passion that only grew stronger as he aged.

As he approached his 50th year, facing personal and financial

challenges, he decided to honour his parents, who had valued education deeply, by sharing his personal collection of books with his community.

What started as a modest display of fewer than 50 books outside his home with a sign "Reading is free" has blossomed into a vast collection that fills every corner of his house.

From the garage to the living room, shelves overflow with encyclopedias, religious texts, novels, and textbooks spanning a wide range of subjects, from engineering to nursing.

To Mang Nanie, books are not just objects to be stored; they are living entities that fulfil their purpose only when read. "Books

need to live," he says. "They are only alive if they are being read."

This belief lies at the heart of his mission. There are no fees, no membership requirements, and no strict rules at the Reading Club 2000.

Anyone is welcome to borrow a book, return it, or even keep it — because for Mang Nanie, the true value of a book lies in how it enriches lives.

The sight of thousands of books stacked in crates and lined on shelves in his home immediately captures the attention of passers-by.

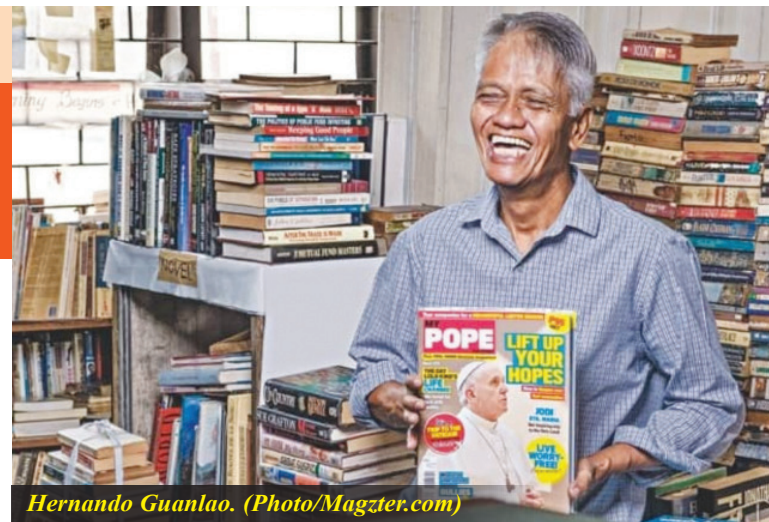
This isn't just a library; it's a living, breathing organism that grows alongside the community it serves.

The library's philosophy is simple yet profound: books should be accessible to all, especially to those who lack the financial means to buy them.

By sharing his love for books, he has given people the chance to learn, to grow, and to dream of a brighter future.

While the Reading Club 2000 has evolved into a community-driven initiative, it remains deeply personal for Mang Nanie. The library reflects his values and his unshakable belief in the transformative power of education.

Over the years, the community has rallied around him — people donate books, volunteer their time, and even bring snacks for



Hernando Guanlao. (Photo/Magzter.com)

the children who visit.

It's this spirit of generosity and collaboration that has kept the library thriving.

Every day, you'll find Mang Nanie happily sorting through new donations, welcoming visitors, and sharing his love for reading.

His unwavering dedication has inspired people far beyond his immediate community — reaching educators, students, and book lovers across Manila and beyond.

Many visit the library just to meet the man behind it, eager to contribute to a project that has such a meaningful impact.

For students, teachers, and social workers, the Reading Club 2000 is more than just a library — it's a lifeline.

The abundance of resources available opens doors to academic success and personal growth that many could only have dreamed of before.

As Mang Nanie continues his mission, the impact of the Reading Club 2000 grows ever stronger.

What began as a simple act of

sharing his personal collection has evolved into a movement that challenges the notion that education and knowledge should be limited by financial barriers.

Through his library, Mang Nanie has leveled the playing field, proving that one person's passion can ignite change and inspire a community.

His story is a powerful testament to the difference one individual can make when driven by a genuine desire to help others. Mang Nanie's work is not just about providing books; it's about cultivating a culture of learning, generosity, and community.

His legacy is not just in the thousands of books that have passed through his hands but in the countless lives that have been transformed by his kindness.

In a world where access to education is often unequal, Mang Nanie's dedication is a beacon of hope.

By sharing his love for books, he has given people the chance to learn, to grow, and to dream of a brighter future. — **By Leahna Villajos, Radio Veritas Asia**





REMINISCING CHURCH

Richard Chia

Praying or saying prayers

Have you noticed how we Catholics automatically stand when the celebrant says, "Let us pray"? This action comes naturally, ingrained in us through years, even decades, of faithfully attending Mass each week and on Holy Days of Obligation.

From a young age, we're taught the various postures for prayer — how to stand, kneel, clasp our hands, and what to say, when we pray. Catechists continue to impart these traditions to both children and adults, and rightly so.

Today, countless examples of ready-made prayers are available for download, ready to be copy-pasted and adapted for any specific intention or event. These complement the many set prayers we recite during the Novena, Rosary, and various devotions dedicated to the Saints and Mother Mary.

Despite all the sources of prayer, I notice that many Catholics are not comfortable praying spontaneously. When called upon to say grace before meals, do an opening or closing prayer, they quickly decline, or hesitate. Of course I am generalising here, as I also know of many who will quickly jump in to say prayers effortlessly.

Accusations that Catholics don't know how to pray or can't quote scripture have been hurled at the laity since time immemorial. The truth of these claims often depends on our upbringing, involvement in the Church, and how we live out our faith each day.

For those who attended catechism from a young age, our first exposure to prayer will certainly be the Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary, Glory Be, and making the Sign of the Cross. Catechists teach these as foundational to

prayer. Alongside these prayers, we learn to clasp our hands, perhaps close our eyes, tilt our heads downward, and recite these prayers by heart. For those who struggle, repetition is encouraged until they can do so confidently.

As we grow, we learn to recite the five decades of the Rosary and the Apostles' Creed. For those who pray regularly, incorporating the four Mysteries of the Rosary into daily prayer, along with the Memorare, the Magnificat, and the Prayer for the Sick during the Novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help, becomes a vital part of our spiritual life.

For prayer before meals, there is that universal Bless Us O Lord.... prayer. For the devout, our late Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI encouraged the lay faithful to pray the Divine Office Liturgy of the Hours daily. The Catholic Church is never short of prayers — for every occasion, every event and every day of our life.

So how is it that with all these wealth of prayers available, many Catholics are still incapable of praying spontaneously when called upon to do so? The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) teaches that "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" (CCC #2558). St Therese of Lisieux's autobiography manuscripts says "Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God".

The CCC also tells us there are six forms of prayer. A *prayer of blessing* is our human response to God's gift, because God blesses us, and in return we bless the One who is the source of every blessing. A *prayer of*

adoration is not only done during Holy Hour in Church, or on Holy Thursday, but can be done privately in respectful silence in the presence of God.

The *prayer of petition* is one we pray often. Asking God to hear our prayers and to grant us our petitions. Prayer of intercessions are usually prayers we pray for others — our family, friends, society, people we know, etc. *Prayer of thanksgiving* and *prayer of praise* are some of the common prayers Catholics pray often, especially at group gatherings, novenas and formal prayer sessions.

Reciting prayers are the hallmark of many Catholics schooled in the way of Catholic prayers. But, are we really praying? What exactly is prayer?

Without delving in deep theological definitions of prayer, my answer is simply "Prayer is like falling in love and communicating with God". As an analogy, when a couple first fall in love, there is tendency for them to want to be together, to meet, talk and be with each other. Today, this could be via whatsapp video, chat or messaging. The need to be constantly in touch, hearing the other's voice and words, and exchanging sweet nothings. That is early stages of love.

As this love deepens, it transforms into a commitment, and the decision to be together for life. The topic of conversation changes. Less lovey-dovey communication. More serious conversation about future,



Tawatchai Khid-arn

adjustments required and what needs to be done.

Decades later, this love matures and there is less communication. Love is no longer expressed in words, but in presence. Being together, doing things together and sharing experiences together becomes the norm. At this stage, words become less, not that there is nothing to say, but because they already know each other intimately, and know each other's feelings and thoughts.

Prayer is like falling in love with God. For those new to prayer, there is a tendency to talk more. We spend most of our time saying prayers, reciting prayers, reading from prayer books. As we mature in our prayer life, saying or reciting prayers become secondary, replaced by spending time in prayer with God. Being in His presence, in silent contemplation becomes our expression of love.

Whichever way we pray, remember that prayer is personal time with God. It is our intimate moment with Him, face-to-face in direct communication with the Almighty. He does not need our words to know our innermost thoughts and feelings. All He wants from you is YOU.

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



FROM THE OTHER SIDE

Regina William

Deuteronomy 31:8 - The LORD himself will lead you and be with you. He will not fail you or abandon you, so do not lose courage or be afraid.

August 25 marked the 30th anniversary. As my husband was called home to the Lord at the age of 37, two months after he was diagnosed with fourth stage lung cancer.

Life took a dramatic turn when my husband passed away. In the midst of grief and loss, I was left with the responsibility of raising our three young daughters aged seven, four and two on my own.

It's common for the grief process to take years and most often gets less intense over time, but the sense of loss can last for decades. Certain events, mementos or memories can bring back strong emotions.

If you had asked me then, the path that my life would take, I wouldn't have been able to answer you. I was a homemaker with a housing mortgage hanging over our heads and having to figure out how to put food on the table for my three children.

The journey over the past 30 years has been marked by both immense challenges and rewards and those who know me, can attest that it is a testament to the strength that emerges from love and faith.

The early days after my husband's passing were shrouded in a heavy fog of sorrow and uncertainty and the weight of managing daily responsibilities and providing for my children seemed overwhelming.

Yet, even in the darkest moments, I found a wellspring of courage within myself. It was not just my love for my daughters that fuelled my perseverance, but also the unwavering support of my faith, family and community.

My Catholic faith became my anchor in those early years. Attending Mass, engaging in prayer, and finding solace in the sacraments provided a sense of continuity and hope. I leaned heavily on the belief that my husband was at peace and that God was guiding our family through this challenging time. The spiritual nourishment through my faith helped me stay focused on raising my daughters with love and purpose.

The role of my family in our lives was immeasurable. From practical help like child care to the emotional support offered became a vital part of our healing process.

Raising Strong, Independent and Compassionate Daughters

Raising three daughters as a single mother required both resilience and adaptability. Each stage of their growth brought its own set of challenges and joys. I aimed to instil in them the values of kindness, perseverance, and faith. I wanted them to know that

despite our circumstances, they were deeply loved and valued.

I also made sure to create a sense of normalcy and stability in our home. We celebrated milestones, established traditions, and supported each other through ups and downs. The bond we shared grew stronger as we navigated life's challenges together.

As my daughters are older and have begun to forge their own paths, I look back on our journey with a profound sense of gratitude. The experience of raising them alone, though filled with trials, was also filled with moments of joy, pride, and deep connection. We learned to cherish each other's company and to support one another unconditionally.

The journey of raising three daughters after the loss of my husband is not just a story of endurance, but of love's transformative power. It was a journey marked by faith, family, community, and the unwavering strength that comes from the heart.

Looking back, I am grateful for the lessons learned and the love that continues to sustain us. I've come to realise that while their father's absence has been a profound challenge, it has also been the backdrop to countless moments of strength, love, and growth. In their laughter and resilience, I see a testament to the enduring bond we forged together — a bond that transcends loss and celebrates the triumph of family.

Drawing from my own personal experience as a single mother has enabled

me to provide valuable insights and support to others in similar situations.

I have learnt that it is okay to experience a range of emotions and that healing doesn't follow a set timeline. My own journey through grief has provided me with the hope and reassurance that it is possible to find joy and meaning again in my life.

Our faith teaches that God is present in both our joys and our sorrows. Losing a husband is a significant trial, and for us as Catholics, faith can be a source of comfort and strength. The belief in eternal life and the hope of being reunited with loved ones can provide solace.

The grace received through prayer, sacraments, and the support of the family and the Church community helps us to navigate the pain of loss and the responsibility of raising children alone.

Through the trials and triumphs of raising three young children for 30 years after their father's passing, our faith has been the unwavering compass guiding us, showing that even in our deepest sorrow, God's love and grace provide strength, hope, and a path forward.

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



Fr Ron Rolheiser

Celibacy — what's to be said

Some years ago, an op-ed piece appeared in the *New York Times* by Frank Bruni, entitled *The Wages of Celibacy*. The column, while provocative, was fair. Mostly he asked a lot of hard, necessary questions. Looking at the various sexual scandals that have plagued the Roman Catholic priesthood in the past years, Bruni suggested that it was time to re-examine celibacy with an honest and courageous eye and ask whether its downside outweighs its potential benefits. Bruni, himself, didn't weigh-in definitively on the question; he only pointed out that celibacy, as a vowed lifestyle, runs more risks than are normally admitted. Near the end of his column, he wrote: "Celibate culture runs the risk of stunting [sexual] development and turning sexual impulses into furtive, tortured gestures. It downplays a fundamental and maybe irresistible human connection. Is it any wonder that some priests try to make that connection nonetheless, in surreptitious, imprudent and occasionally destructive ways?"

That's not an irreverent question. It's a necessary one. We need the courage to face the question: is celibacy, in fact, abnormal to the human condition? Does it run the risk of stunting sexual development?

Thomas Merton was once asked by a journalist what celibacy was like. I sus-

pect his answer will come as a surprise to pious ears because he virtually endorses Bruni's position. His response: "Celibacy is hell! You live in a loneliness that God himself condemned when he said: 'It is not good to be alone!'" However, that being admitted, Merton immediately went on to say that just because celibacy is not the normal human condition doesn't mean it cannot be wonderfully generative and fruitful, and that perhaps its unique fruitfulness is tied to how extraordinary and abnormal it is.

What Merton is saying, in essence, is that celibacy is abnormal and dooms you to live in a state not willed by the Creator; but, despite and perhaps because of that abnormality, it can be particularly generative, both for the one living it and for those around him or her.

I know this to be true, as do countless others, because I have been deeply nurtured, as a Christian and as a human being, by the lives of vowed celibates, by numerous priests, sisters, and brothers whose lives have touched my own and whose "abnormality" served precisely to make them wonderfully fruitful.

Moreover, this particular abnormality can have its own attraction. I once served as a spiritual director to a young man who was discerning whether to join our order, the Missionary Oblates of Mary

Immaculate or to propose marriage to a young woman. It was an agonising decision for him; he wanted both. And his discernment, while perhaps somewhat overly romantic in terms of his fantasy of both options, was at the same time uncommonly mature. Here (in words to this effect) is how he described his dilemma:

I grew up in a rural area and was the oldest in my family. When I was fifteen years old, one evening just before supper, my dad, still a young man, had a heart attack. There were no ambulances to call. We bundled him up in the car and my mother sat in the back seat with him and held him, while I, a scared teenager, drove the car on route to the hospital some 15 miles away. My dad died before we reached the hospital. As tragic as this was, there was an element of beauty in it. My dad died in my mother's arms. That tragic beauty branded my soul. In my mind, in my fantasy, that's how I want to die — in the arms of my wife. Given the grip of that fantasy, my major hesitation about entering the Oblates and moving towards priesthood is celibacy. If I become a priest, I won't die in human arms. I'll die as celibates do — held in faith but not held in human arms.

But one day in trying to discern all of this, I saw another picture: Jesus didn't die in the arms of a spouse; he

died lonely and alone. I've always had a thing about the loneliness of celibates and have always been drawn to people like Soren Kierkegaard, Mother Teresa, Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, and Daniel Berrigan, who didn't die in the arms of a spouse. There's a real beauty in their way of dying too!

Bruni is right in warning that celibacy is abnormal and fraught with dangers. It does run the risk of stunting sexual development and especially of downplaying a biblically mandated fundamental human connection, namely, the fundamental anthropological dogma contained in the story of God creating our first parents and his pronouncement that it is not good (and dangerous) to be alone!

Celibacy does consign one to live in a loneliness that God himself condemned, but it is also the loneliness within which Jesus gave himself over to us in a death that is perhaps the most generative expression of love in human history.

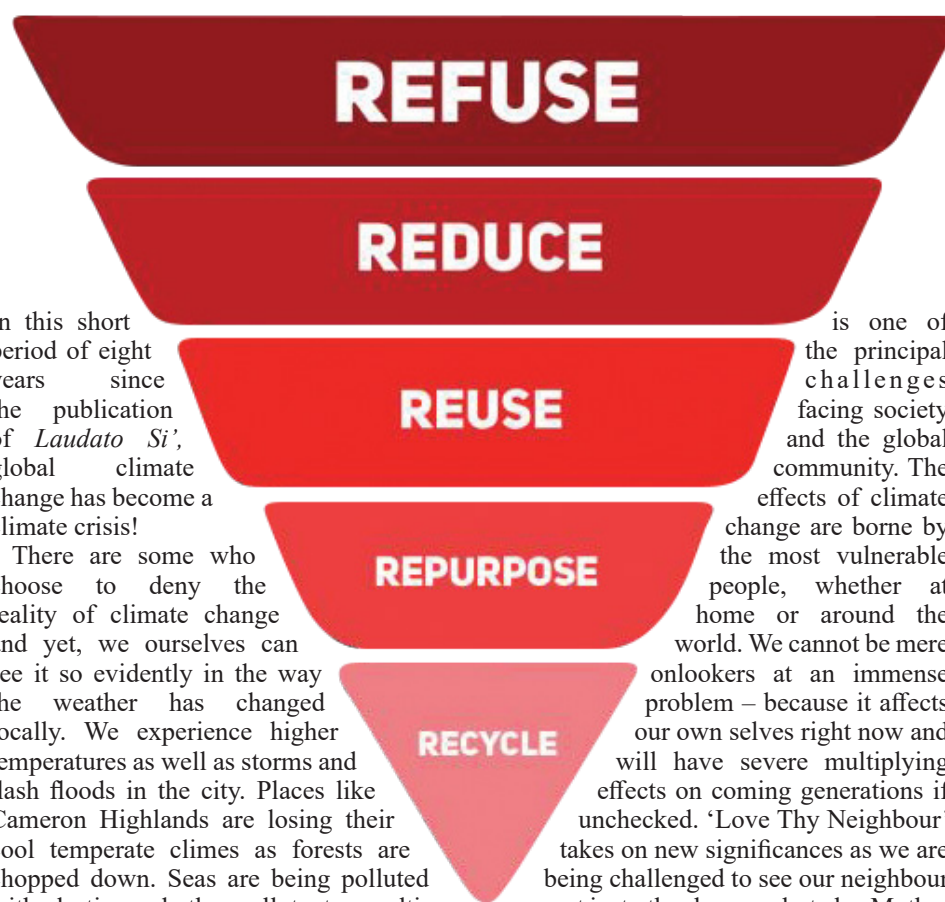
● **Oblate Fr Ron Rolheiser**, theologian, teacher, and award-winning author, is President of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, TX. He writes a weekly column that is carried in over 90 newspapers around the world. He can be contacted through his website www.ronrolheiser.com



As I was contemplating

Fr Gerard Steve Theraviam

Saving Mother Earth ... and ourselves!



In this short period of eight years since the publication of *Laudato Si'*, global climate change has become a climate crisis!

There are some who choose to deny the reality of climate change and yet, we ourselves can see it so evidently in the way the weather has changed locally. We experience higher temperatures as well as storms and flash floods in the city. Places like Cameron Highlands are losing their cool temperate climates as forests are chopped down. Seas are being polluted with plastics and other pollutants, resulting in there being less fish and thus causing higher prices, affecting us all, but especially the poor! We see many animals becoming extinct as their habitats are lost. Global warming is a scary reality with some island nations being at the risk of disappearing while the ice in the Arctic and Antarctica melts, causing rising sea levels.

We are reminded that our care for one another and our care for the earth are intimately bound together. Climate change

is one of the principal challenges facing society and the global community. The effects of climate change are borne by the most vulnerable people, whether at home or around the world. We cannot be mere onlookers at an immense problem — because it affects our own selves right now and will have severe multiplying effects on coming generations if unchecked. 'Love Thy Neighbour' takes on new significances as we are being challenged to see our neighbour as not just other humans but also Mother Earth itself! Our well-being is interwoven with the well-being of the Earth.

Some effects of the climate crisis are already irreversible so we may be tempted to give in to despair and give up. Yet, if we all make concerted efforts we can indeed turn the tide, hard as it is. We simply must do so, not just for the coming generations, but for ourselves too! We do so with Hope, doing our very best together! We cannot shy away from the stark reality that we are

facing but to "accompany this pilgrimage of reconciliation with the world that is our home and help to make it more beautiful."

Our efforts at parish level to inculcate the '5R's — Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Repurpose and Recycle — must continue. Many parishes are engaged in re-cycling efforts and reducing the use of paper and plastics. Going paperless has meant that our church bulletins are now online. We ask that minimum plastics are used at our coffee mornings and invite people to bring their own containers and even cutlery. Rather than use disposable plates and cutlery that add to the landfills, we are encouraged to wash our cups and plates!

We must also engage and pressurise our political and civic leaders to address the crisis and not accelerate economic progress without recognising ecological and human factors that must be prioritised. We need to see where political parties stand on ecological issues and ensure that our economic policies do not put profit above people and our ecology. We need to stand up against polluters and demand that they pay stiff penalties to deter them, and this must be led by the authorities. We need also to join community and NGO ecological efforts.

Louis Armstrong's song *What a Wonderful World* resounds in my head as I close this article. *Laudato Deum* (Praise God!) indeed for the gift of this world that we are called to care for. May we take our responsibilities to be co-creators and stewards seriously indeed!

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

The Season of Creation is upon us! Each year from September 1 to October 4, Christians unite for this worldwide ecumenical celebration of prayer and action to protect our common home. This special season honours God as Creator and invites us to see Creation as the divine ongoing act and God invites us to be collaborators in creation. We are called to care for all of Creation — we are ourselves creatures, and yet God has made us share in his role as Creator and called us to be stewards of all that is the work of his hands.

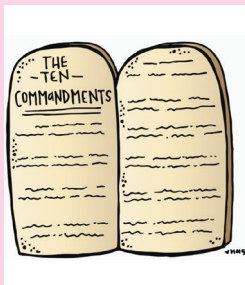
Pope Francis promulgated his Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum* addressed to all good people of good will on the climate crisis just last year in 2023. This came hot on the heels of his earlier lengthier encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*, published just eight years prior. Why two papal documents on the same topic coming so soon after each other? *Laudato Si'* was a gentle and pastoral invitation to concerns about the care of our common home. However, he tones of *Laudate Deum* is stronger and grimmer! Sadly, we have largely failed to rise to the challenges he outlined in the *Laudato Si'*. Hence, the Pope addresses not just Catholics but all people as this is a global problem affecting us all! "I have realised that our responses have not been adequate, while the world in which we live is collapsing and may be nearing the breaking point," says the pope. "The reality is that we have not taken adequate steps to 'save' Mother Earth. Climate change impacts us all and we feel its effects in the areas of health care, sources of employment, access to resources, housing, forced migrations, etc."

Little Catholics' Corner

Moses Tells the Israelites to follow God's Laws

How much do you know about God's commandments for the Israelites? See if you know which of these are true and which are false:

1. Moses only taught some of the people of Israel that they had to obey the commandments that God gave them. True or false?
2. The people had to obey God's laws if they wanted to live in the land that He was giving them. True or false?
3. Moses said that they were not allowed to add to God's law, nor take away from it. True or False?
4. If the people obeyed God's commandments then all the other nations would see that they were wise. True or False.
5. The laws that God gave the people of Israel were unfair. True or False.
6. God gave His people laws because He cared for them and wanted what was best for them. True or False?
7. We should obey God's commandments because they tell us how to live well. True or False?



1 false 2 true 3 true 4 true 5 false 6 true 7 true

Complete the sentences by filling in the blanks with the correct words from the wordbank at the bottom of the picture.



Do not merely _____ to the

and so _____ yourselves.

Do _____ it _____.

James 1: 22



Dear children,

People today are very concerned about having clean hands. Many people carry packages of wipes or hand sanitizer.

The Bible tells about some Pharisees who came to Jesus.

They liked to be bossy about the rules. They complained that Jesus' disciples were eating without washing their hands!

They asked Jesus. "Why don't they follow our tradition of washing their hands before they eat?"

Jesus responded, "You bunch of phonies! Isaiah must have been talking about you when he said, 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.'"

Then Jesus called the people to gather around and told them, "It's



not what goes into your body that makes you unclean, it is the bad words that come out of your mouth. Out of your hearts come evil thoughts, greed, cheating, and envy. This is what makes you unclean."

Children, are we more worried about having clean hands or bodies than having a clean heart?

We work hard to keep our hands clean, but do we guard our hearts against evil thoughts?

What kinds of books do we read?

What kinds of TV shows and movies do we watch? What kind of language comes out of our mouth? Clean hands or a clean heart, which is more important?

Love
Auntie Eliz

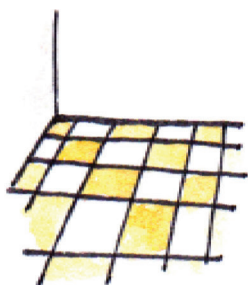
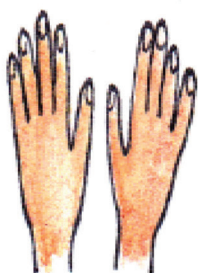


Mark 7:1-8,
14-15, 21-23

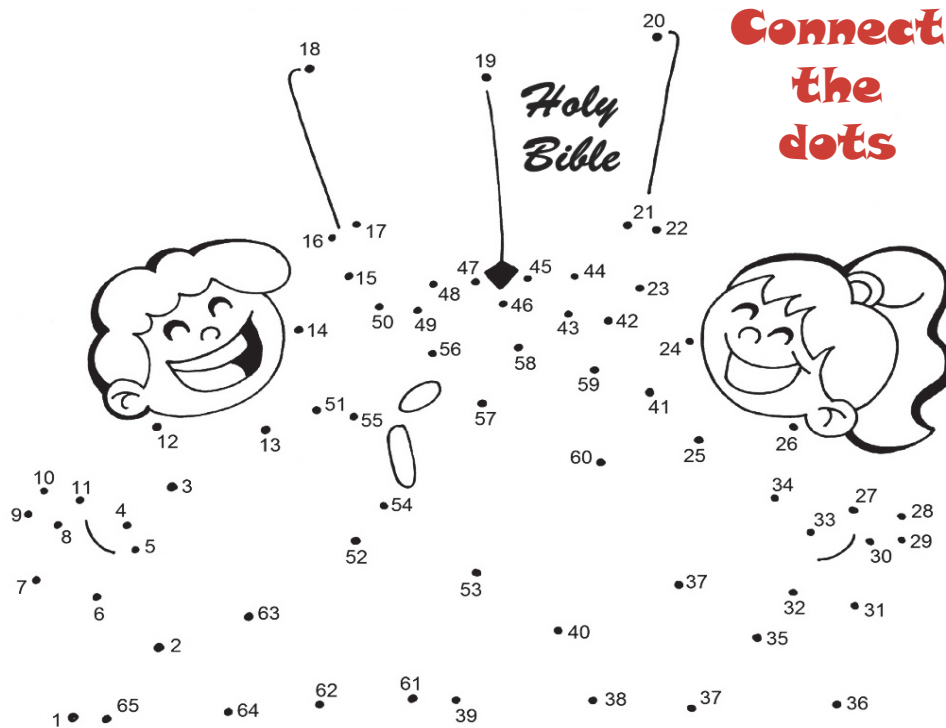
The Jews knew that it was important to keep their bodies and their dishes clean. But Jesus told them that something else was more important. What was it?

Match the letters from the top pictures with the things they clean at the bottom of the page to find out what is the most important thing to keep clean!

Your _____ !



Connect
the
dots



YOUTH

September 1, 2024

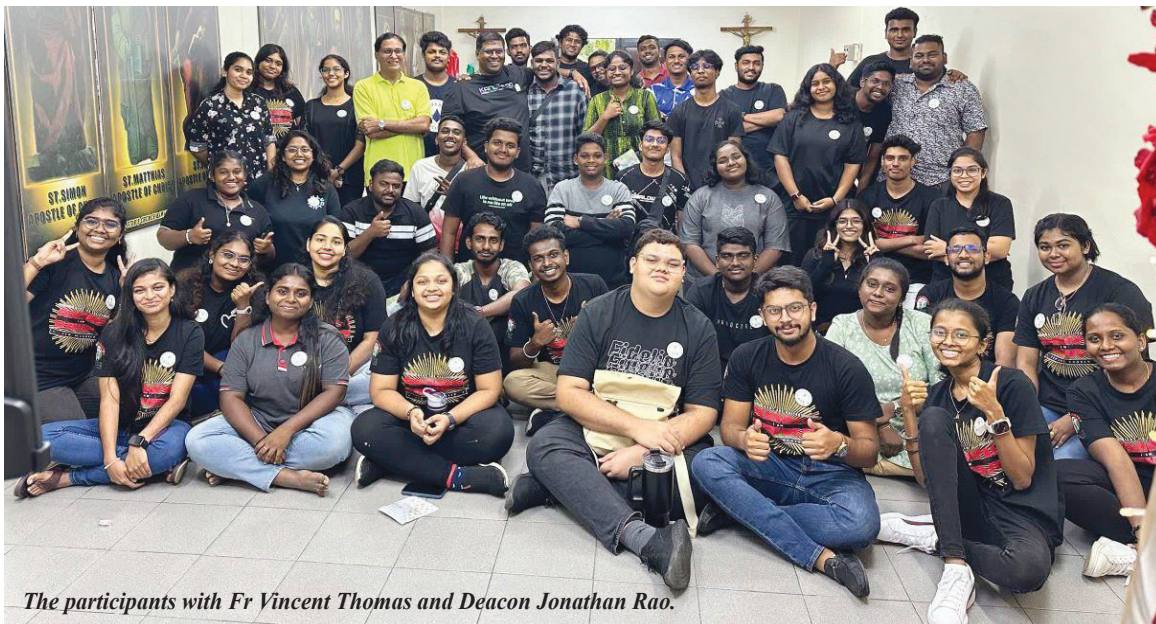
Youth gather for 'Truth In Love' rally

By Mercy Almeida Stellus

RAWANG: A vibrant energy filled the Church of St Jude, Rawang, on August 10, as 40 youths gathered for the *Truth in Love* youth rally. Organised by the parish Youth Committee led by Jason Nair, the event was aiming at bringing young Catholics together to foster a sense of community and shared faith.

Fr Vincent Thomas, ever supportive of the youth, expressed his delight at the initiative. He encouraged the committee to host more of such formations and rallies, recognising their value in strengthening the faith journey of young people.

The day unfolded with the stage set for a dynamic programme that integrated spiritual growth, interac-



The participants with Fr Vincent Thomas and Deacon Jonathan Rao.

tive activities, and meaningful discussions.

Kevin Pathinathan and his wife Priscilla, seasoned formators, led a session titled *The Family and Social Media*, which resonated deeply with the participants. As one participant shared, "The talk offered

valuable insights on navigating the complexities of social media within the context of family life."

The programme balanced introspective moments with lively praise and worship sessions, allowing the youth to connect with their faith on a deeper level. Interactive

games further strengthened the sense of camaraderie and provided a platform for building new friendships.

Group discussions emerged as another key highlight. Facilitated by the committee members, these discussions offered a safe space

for young people to share their thoughts, anxieties, and joys on various topics relevant to their lives. The discussions fostered a sense of understanding and provided opportunities for participants to learn from each other's experiences.

The *Truth in Love* youth rally proved to be a resounding success. By addressing contemporary issues, fostering a sense of belonging, and promoting spiritual growth, the event empowered the participants to embrace their faith. The rally concluded with a renewed sense of purpose and a commitment to living out their faith in their daily lives.

The success of this event underscores the crucial role of youth ministries in nurturing a vibrant Catholic community. As Fr Thomas aptly highlighted, programmes such as this one provides a vital platform for young people to connect, grow, and become active participants in the life of the Church.

Catholic youth group in Nepal releases short film on Indigenous culture and faith

TIPLING, Nepal: A Catholic youth group in Nepal has released a short documentary film highlighting the cultural traditions of the Tamang community in Tipling, marking the 30th International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples.

Produced by members of the FA MULAN SIGNIS group in the International Movement of Catholic Students (IMCS), the film, titled "The Convergence of Indigenous Tamang Tradition and

Catholic Faith in Tipling," offers a rare glimpse into how the Tamang people integrate their Indigenous customs with Catholic beliefs.

The documentary captures various Indigenous practices unique to the Tamang community, such as traditional hair-cutting rituals and salt inaugurations. These practices serve as a testament to their strong cultural identity, which has been preserved despite the community's embrace of Catholicism.

The film explores how these ancient customs are harmoniously woven into the community's Catholic faith.

"As Indigenous people, we are very much connected with nature and the ethos, cosmology, and philosophy. I think this is one of the reasons that the Tipling people are interested in Christianity and accept it," Bishop Paul Simick, Apostolic Vicar of Nepal and the Titular Bishop of Maturba, said in the film.



The documentary also features interviews with Indigenous community members, from youth to elders, and faith leaders.

Their perspectives provide a deeper understanding of how the Catholic Tamang community in Tipling merges their Indigenous practices with their faith, offering a unique narrative of cultural and religious convergence.

The release of the documentary coincided with the 30th International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, which is celebrated globally every August 9.

This year's theme focused on *Protecting the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Voluntary Isolation and*

Initial Contact.

Established by the United Nations in 1994, the day commemorates the cultural heritage and contributions of Indigenous communities worldwide and seeks to raise awareness about the ongoing challenges they face.

#SIGNISFAMULAN is a project of SIGNIS, or the World Catholic Association for Communication, an organisation recognised by the Vatican as an International Association of the Faithful with the mission to "help transform cultures in the light of the Gospel by promoting human dignity, justice, and reconciliation." — *LiCAS news*



Members of FA MULAN SIGNIS group. (Photo/SIGNIS Asia/FA MULAN Project)

PETALING JAYA: Ninety-three confirmands from both the English-speaking and Mandarin-speaking groups at the Church of St Ignatius received the Sacrament of Confirmation on August 17.

Archbishop Julian Leow was joined in co-celebrating the Mass by parish priest Fr Lawrence Ng CDD and assistant priests, Fr Martin Then CDD, and Fr Thomas Koo CDD.

Archbishop Julian began his homily with the saying, "You are what you eat," addressing the confirmands. He continued, "Our health and well-being largely depend on what we consume. We must be disciplined not to abuse our bodies."

The prelate further emphasised the importance of spiritual nourishment, reminding the congregation to continually "consume" the body of Christ, who resides within each of us. Quoting Jesus, he said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35), highlighting that communion with Him is essential for our spiritual well-being.

The archbishop went on to remark that we



are continually reminded to "consume" the body of Christ, and that He resides in each one of us. Referencing John 6:35 where Jesus says "I am the bread of life", Archbishop Julian emphasised that spiritual nourishment comes from communion with Him.

In his closing speech, Fr Lawrence urged the confirmands to "Rejoice always, pray without

ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thess 5:16-18). He explained that we rejoice because Christ dwells among us, and His love sustains us, making constant prayer vital to keeping our faith alive.

Fr Lawrence also expressed gratitude to Archbishop Julian for confirming the can-

didates and thanked the catechists for their tireless efforts in preparing the students. He acknowledged the godparents, sponsors, and parents for their loving support in nurturing the confirmands.

The congregation fittingly concluded the ceremony by singing the beautiful and stirring hymn "Give Thanks" in four languages.

Twin celebration at Stella Maris International School

KUALA LUMPUR: Stella Maris International School in Damansara has increasingly embraced its Catholic ethos with greater visibility. Since last year, daily Masses have been integrated into the school timetable, with the school's chaplain, Fr Alvin Ho SJ, engaging students in interactive homilies through questions and answers. The Catholic Student Societies (CSS) of both the primary and secondary levels have also become a vibrant presence, showcasing their Christian activities and playing an evangelical role within the school community.

This year, the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary on August 15 marked a significant celebration for the school, which also commemorated the anniversary of its inauguration in 2017. The event was meticulously stage-managed by the Catholic students, with choreography by the chaplain and Catholic teachers in close collaboration.

Due to the large turnout, including students, teachers, staff, Board members, Council members, and well-wishers, the solemnity



Bible Knowledge Class of Year 11 unveiling their "Last Supper" painting for the School to commemorate the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Mass was celebrated at the school's sports centre. The Mass was animated by both primary and secondary students, who did the readings, intercessory prayers, offertory, and altar serving. The choir, accompanied by a student violinist and pianist, performed an age-old Latin hymn, the *Magnificat Anima Mea Dominum*, popular for Marian feasts.

Fr Alvin, who celebrated the Mass, delivered a homily that highlighted Mary as the first and faithful disciple of Christ. He explained Mary's Assumption by referencing the teachings of early Church doctors and shared ar-

chaeological evidence of Mary's empty tomb. Fr Alvin concluded his homily with a prayer, asking the Lord to help the students recognise that, like Mary, they are "amazingly blessed in the ordinariness of life."

At the end of the Mass, Year 11 Bible Knowledge students unveiled a table-sized "replica" of Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper, which they had painted themselves as a surprise gift to the school. The students explained that their painting acknowledged the profound connection between Mary's immaculate nature and her participation in Jesus' redemptive

sacrifice. They emphasised that from the Last Supper to the Resurrection, like the Incarnation, heaven and earth are reconciled.

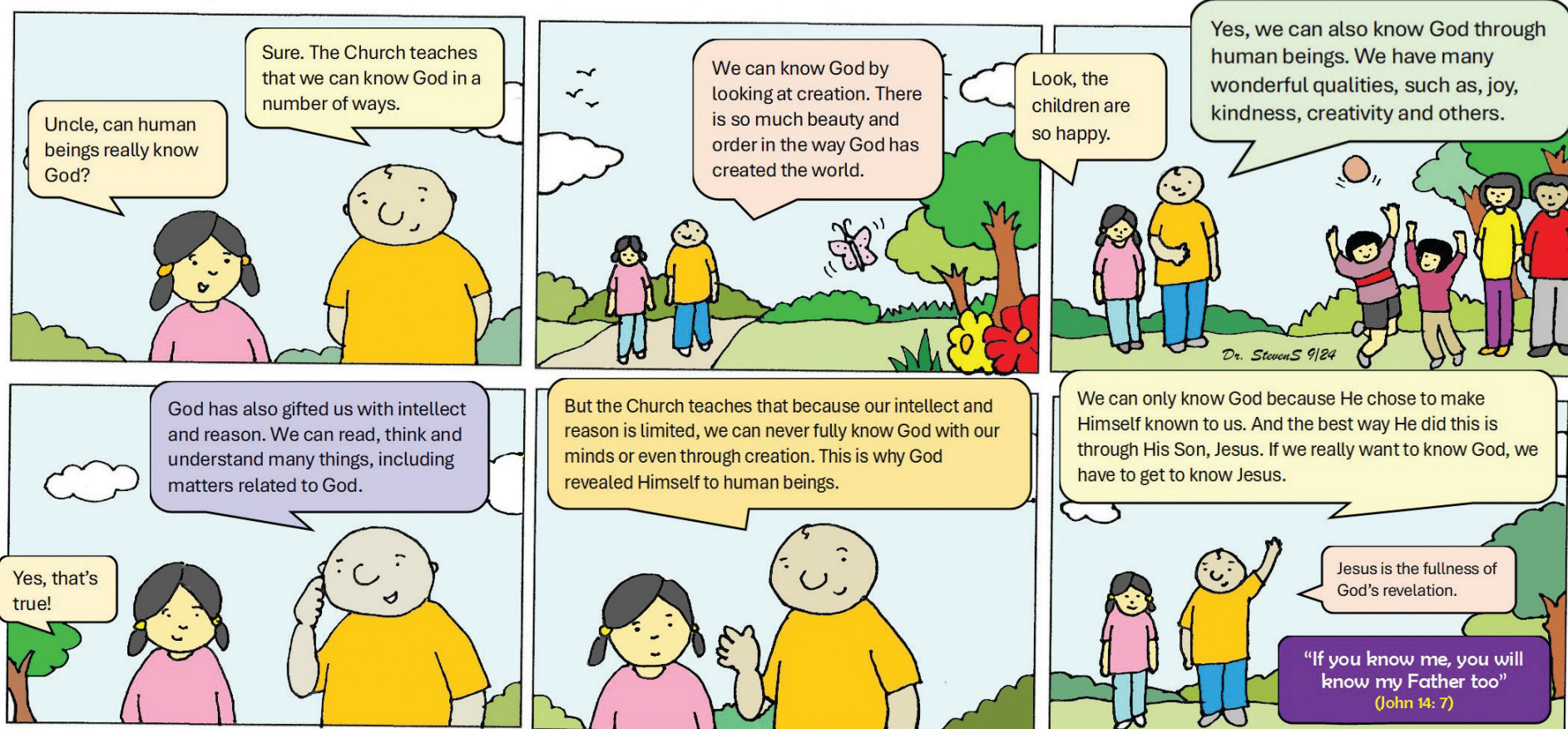
In celebration of the day, all students, teachers, and staff were treated to a Kit-Kat chocolate bar, much to their delight. Maintenance workers and cleaners were also appreciated with a packed lunch, sponsored by a generous well-wisher.

The celebration was attended by the principals of both the primary and secondary schools, the school's Campus Director, the Chairman of the Council of Yayasan Tan Sri Dominic Vendargon (YTDV), Dato' Richard Robless, along with council members and the school's board of governors.

As the patroness of Stella Maris, meaning "Star of the Sea" in Latin, Mary is revered as the guiding star that illuminates inner darkness and leads souls to Christ. Each year, Stella Maris International School acknowledges the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary as its own Feast Day, wishing every student, teacher, and staff member a blessed celebration.

THE SIMPLE LIFE...

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



We conclude this comic strip series with this issue. Our sincere thanks to Dr. Steven Selvaraju for generously sharing his talents with us.

Dr.steven/simplelife

Our Lady of Akita visionary, dies at 93

Sr Agnes Sasagawa, a Japanese nun whose purported visions of the Virgin Mary under the title of Our Lady of Akita included stark warnings for humanity and instructions to pray the rosary and repent of sin, died August 15 at age 93.

The order to which Sasagawa belonged, the Institute of the Handmaids of the Holy Eucharist, announced that Sasagawa, who had been “undergoing medical treatment for some time,” died on the feast of the Assumption of Mary. She famously received a purported series of messages from Mary and witnessed other supernatural phenomena beginning 50 years ago.

The local bishop, John Shojiro Ito of Niigata, who founded Sasagawa’s order and died in 1993, gave the faithful in his diocese permission to venerate Our Lady of Akita in April 1984 after eight years of investigation, finding that her messages contain “nothing contrary to Catholic doctrine or morals.”

Katsuko Sasagawa, born in 1930 to a Buddhist family, was baptised after the witness of a Christian nurse who gave her water from Lourdes to drink. She joined religious life and took the name Agnes.

Sasagawa’s unusual spiritual experiences began in 1973 while she was still very new to the religious community.

On June 12, 1973, Sasagawa saw brilliant rays coming from the tabernacle at the convent. The vision happened again on each of the following two days. Then, on June 28, a painful cross-shaped wound, which bled profusely, appeared on Sasagawa’s hand.

On July 6, Sasagawa heard a voice coming from a wooden statue of Mary that was in the convent, which had been carved from a single block of wood a decade prior. The voice told her that issues she was having at the time with her hearing would be healed (which came to pass in 1974) and also that she should “pray in reparation for the sins of men.” The voice also taught her a prayer of consecration to Jesus’ heart.

Soon after, the statue of Mary developed a wound similar to Sasagawa’s, but on the opposite hand. Sasagawa’s wound eventually vanished.

On Aug 3, 1973, Mary spoke to Sasagawa again, speaking of an “important” message that Sasagawa should convey to her superior.

Sasagawa’s second message from Mary came on Oct 13, 1973, the anniversary of Mary’s appearance at Fatima.

In January 1975, almost two years later, the statue of Mary began to weep — continuing to do so on 101 occasions over the next seven years. A Japanese television station reportedly captured the weeping — known as “lacrimations” — on film.

In an April 22, 1984, letter, Bishop Ito recog-



Sr Agnes Katsuko Sasagawa. (Photo/immaculate.one)

nised “the supernatural character of a series of mysterious events concerning the statue of the Holy Mother Mary.”

“Consequently, I authorise, throughout the entire diocese, the veneration of the Holy Mother of Akita, while awaiting that the Holy See publishes definitive judgment on this matter,” the bishop wrote.

“And I ask that it be remembered that even if the Holy See later publishes a favourable judgment with regard to the events of Akita, it is a question only of a private divine revelation. Christians are bound to believe only [the] content of public divine revelation (closed after the death of the last Apostle), which contains all that is necessary for salvation. Nevertheless, the Church, until now, has equally made much of private divine revelations as they fortify the faith.”

A shrine housing the statue and dedicated to Mary under the title of “Redemptorist Mater” (Mother of the Redeemer) was completed in Akita in 2002 and since 2017 has attracted some 7,000 pilgrims a year.

The Vatican, which earlier this year issued new norms mandating that the Vatican’s top doctrinal office “must always be consulted and give final approval” to alleged Marian apparitions, has not officially ruled on Our Lady of Akita. In 1988, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the future Pope Benedict XVI, as prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith let stand Ito’s judgment that the apparitions and the messages were acceptable for the faithful. — **By Jonah McKeown, CNA**

MEMORIAM

**2nd Anniversary
In Loving Memory of**



**Martha Manamuny
August 6, 1951 –
September 1, 2022**

*“Blessed are the pure
in heart, for they
shall see God.”*

Forever in our
hearts.

**9th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of**



Kathryn Ching Noy Tiang
Departed: 30th August 2015

**9 years pass,
Pain still last, Memories last forever.**

Lovingly remembered by:

Husband: Kenneth Aw,
Son: Alwyn Aw, Daughter: Louisa Aw,
Daughter-in-law: Jennifer Ng, Son-in-Law: Shaun Tay
Grandniece: Angeline Chin,
Relatives and Friends.

வின்கை வாழ்வின்
மூன்றாம் ஆண்டு



அம்மா திருமதி
அந்தோனியம்மாள்
(16.11.1934 - 20.8.2021)

‘என் ஆயன் ஆண்டவர்,
எனக்கென்ன குறைவு’
சங் 23:11

நினைவில் வாழும்
குடும்பத்தினர்
(கோல்பீல்ஸ்)

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

**Saramah Chacko
Skaria @ Jolly**

Born:
10th July 1957
Departed:
6th Sept 2023



Always in our thoughts, hearts and prayers.

Although you may have left this world,
your presence and love still live in our hearts.

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race,
I have kept the faith”

Dearly missed by beloved family and loved ones.

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*Peace I leave
with you; my
peace I give to
you. Not as the
world gives do
I give to you.
Let not your
hearts be
troubled,
neither let them
be afraid.*

John 14:27

**2nd Anniversary
In Loving Memory of**



Philip Anthony a/I Joseph
Born: 30.9.1960
Departed: 6.9.2022

*“I am the resurrection and
the life. Anyone who believes
in me will live even though
they die” (Jn 11:25)*

Deeply missed by
Family and friends.

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REST IN PEACE

Papal visit theme song *One Church, One People* released

SINGAPORE: The Catholic community in Singapore has introduced a new theme song for the upcoming Papal Visit, according to *Catholic News*, the official publication of the Archdiocese of Singapore.

Titled *One Church, One People*, the song was composed by Ethan Hsu, a founding member of the local band *Mystic Font* and a parishioner of the Church of St Mary of the Angels.

The song narrates salvation history from Genesis to the New Testament with Jesus as the "Second Adam," and concludes with a depiction of the Holy Trinity.

"It reminds us that we are one Church, made holy in the Lord and led by the Holy Spirit, galvanised as one people of God to become light for the world," said Hsu.

Hsu, experienced in creating music for church retreats, turned to prayer to align the composition with the spiritual and communal values of the Catholic faith.

Mystic Font, established in 2020, consists of four members. The band has sup-

ported charitable causes such as ABLE, a service agency for the physically disabled, and the Archdiocesan Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (ACMI), which supports migrant workers in Singapore.

The song is designed to reflect liturgical principles and encourage unity within the Church. The creation of "One Church, One People" faced challenges, including lyric adjustments to maintain theological and aesthetic standards.

However, Hsu views the process as a reflection of unity and hope. "It was testimony that we found unity and hope in this project, even within our own little work group," he said.

"How we dealt with conflict enabled outcomes to be positive and life-giving," he added.

The theme song was launched on August 13 and is available on the Archdiocese's YouTube channel <https://bit.ly/3Zd6pxh> — *LiCAS News*



ST PETER'S CHURCH
A PARISH OF THE ROMAN
CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF
MALACCA JOHORE

FEAST OF THE EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS @ SANTA CRUZ CHAPEL, MALACCA

{ FROM 12TH SEPT – 15TH SEPT 2024 }

Thursday, 12.09.2024

- 7.00 pm i) Eucharistic Adoration with Stations of the Cross
- ii) Holy Mass in English
- iii) Veneration of the Holy Cross (ends at 10.00 pm)

Friday, 13.09.2024

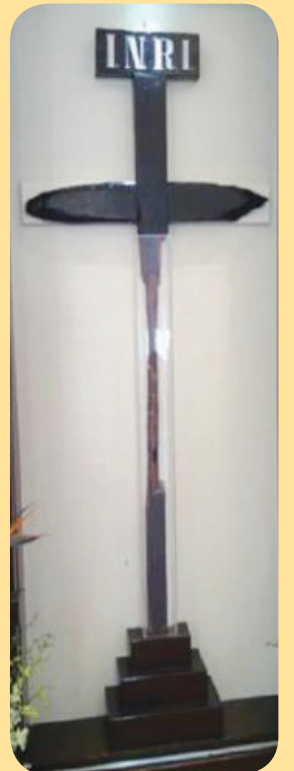
- 8.00 am to 6.00 pm: Veneration of the Holy Cross
- 7.00 pm i) Eucharistic Adoration with Chaplet of Divine Mercy
- ii) Holy Mass in Tamil
- iii) Veneration of the Holy Cross (ends at 10.00 pm)

Saturday, 14.09.2024

- 8.00 am i) Holy Mass in Mandarin
- ii) Veneration of the Holy Cross (stops at 5.00 pm)
- 7.00 pm i) Eucharistic Adoration with Rosary
- ii) Holy Mass in English
- iii) Veneration of the Holy Cross (ends at 10.00 pm)

Sunday, 15.09.2024

- 7.00 am i) Holy Mass in Mandarin
- 9.00 am i) Holy Mass in English
- ii) Veneration of the Holy Cross (ends at 12.00noon)



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2024 Solemn Eucharistic Celebration of the Triduum & Feast of

St. Pio of Pietrelcina

A MAN OF PRAYER

Presided by His Excellency,
Bishop Bernard Paul D.D.
Bishop of Malacca Johore



THE TRIDUUM will be at the Church of the Holy Family, Ulu Tiram, Johor.

Thursday | 19 September | 8PM | Theme: Prayer is Forgiveness

Friday | 20 September | 8PM | Theme: Prayer is Relationship

Saturday | 21 September | 6PM | Theme: Prayer is saying "Yes"

THE FEAST DAY will be at St. Pio's Spirituality Centre, Ulu Tiram, Johor.

Sunday | 22 September | 10.30AM | Theme: Prayer is Becoming a Child

3pm | Divine Mercy Devotion & Prayer for healing

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Contributions are most welcomed to help defray the cost of the celebration of the feast of St. Pio. Thank you for your generosity. For directions to the Center, please use Waze come first to Sanctuary Memorial Park, Ulu Tiram, followed by St Pio's Friary & Spirituality Centre. See you there!

For more information please contact: 012-2900547, 016-8508002