

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

TERHAD

PP 8460/11/2012 (030939) ISSN: 1394-3294 | Vol: 31 No. 33 | September 22, 2024

[www.heraldmalaysia.com](http://www.heraldmalaysia.com)

For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

Jm 3:16-17



SSVP National Assembly

■ P4



Signed Mass at CDM Penang

■ P8



Building a house of mission

■ P12

# A day of FAITH and UNITY

Elvina Fernandez

**SINGAPORE:** The National Stadium erupted with cheers as Pope Francis arrived at 4.30pm., greeted by over 50,000 eager attendees who had gathered hours earlier to witness the Papal Mass, the highlight of his three-day visit to Singapore.

Attending the Papal Mass with such a vast congregation was an experience of a lifetime, etched forever in my memory. The month leading up to this momentous event was filled with reverence, including confession, increased prayer, reflection on the Word of God, abstinence, Mass, and Holy Hour.

As I entered the stadium, the sheer scale of the gathering struck me profoundly. People from all walks of life, diverse nationalities, and various ages had come together, united by their faith. The anticipation of the Mass, shared with a congregation of this magnitude, filled me with a mix of excitement, nervousness, and deep gratitude for what truly felt like a once-in-a-lifetime blessing.

Among the attendees were invited guests including 2,600 children ranging from kindergarteners to junior college students, 310 migrants, 1,000 elderly parishioners, 250 wheelchair users, and 3,000 Catholics from the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) countries. The sense of community was palpable, with everyone sharing smiles, discussing prayer, exchanging faith experiences, offering peace greetings, and praying together.

The arrival of Pope Francis was an overwhelming experience of faith. His readiness to greet and bless every child who approached him and hand them a rosary deeply touched me. It brought tears to my eyes to see him so close — about 30 rows of chairs from the altar on the stadium pitch.

As the Mass began, the sight of Pope Francis on the altar was awe-inspiring, evoking a profound sense of peace and unity. The readings, hymns, and prayers resonated deeply, weaving a spiritual connection throughout the service. The Mass was further elevated by the presence of 280 priests and 50 bishops and cardinals, enhancing the solemnity and grandeur of the occasion.



Historic Papal Mass at the National Stadium, Singapore

(Credit/Ministry of Digital Development and Information (MDDI))

A particularly proud moment for me was seeing Archbishop Julian Leow of Kuala Lumpur seated next to the Pope. As the current President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei, he was honoured with this prominent position. Cardinal Sebastian Francis of Penang was also given the special honour of reciting parts of the Eucharistic Prayer during the Mass.

The Pope's homily, delivered with compassion and wisdom, touched on themes of love and forgiveness, leaving a lasting impact on all present. Part of the homily that spoke out to me was, "The love that God shows us and that he invites us to share with others; respond generously to the needs of the poor; is marked by compassion for those in sorrow; is quick to offer hospitality; and is persevering in times of trial. It is always ready to forgive, to hope, even to the point of returning a blessing for a

curse."

The effort to organise the visit was monumental, involving two co-chairpersons, 28 main committee members, 17 subcommittees, and a 5,000-strong volunteer contingent. Many started the planning and organising work as early as February 2024. The dedication and hard work of these individuals ensured that the event was a resounding success.

Being part of such a large congregation was both humbling and uplifting. It reminded me of the strength and resilience of our faith community. The experience reinforced my belief in the power of collective prayer and the importance of coming together in worship.

It was more than just a religious event, it was a celebration of faith, unity, and hope. And also a reminder that despite our differences, we are all part of a larger, loving community. It has also inspired me even more to

live out the values of compassion and unity in my daily life.

Pope Francis' visit to Singapore was both a state and pastoral visit, highlighting his role as the head of Vatican City and the Holy See, which oversees nearly 1.4 billion Catholics worldwide. This visit has been eight years in the making, with invitations extended by former President Tony Tan in 2016 and President Halimah Yacob during her term. Originally planned for 2020 to coincide with the Church's bicentennial celebrations, the visit was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Holy Father's serves as a powerful call for us to rekindle our faith, deepen our love for God, and embrace a renewed zeal to share the reason for our hope with one another.

See also Pages 9, 10, 16, 17 and Back.



ESTABLISHED 1994

Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre  
5, Jalan Robertson, 50150, KL  
Tel / Whatsapp: 03-20268291

Jointly published by the  
Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur,  
Diocese of Malacca Johore,  
Diocese of Penang and  
Diocese of Keningau

**EDITOR**

Patricia Pereira  
editor1@herald.com.my

**ASSISTANT EDITOR**

Sandra Ann Inbaraj  
sandra@herald.com.my

**GRAPHIC DESIGNER  
Youth Section**

Amanda Mah  
amanda@herald.com.my

**SOCIAL MEDIA**

Kevin Francis  
kevin@herald.com.my

**BAHASA MALAYSIA**

Melania Liza Magnus  
liza@herald.com.my

**MANDARIN**

Adelina Wong  
yin4482@gmail.com

**TAMIL**

RK Samy  
rksamy3@hotmail.com

**ADVERTISEMENTS /  
SUBSCRIPTION**

advertisement@herald.com.my

**MEMORIAM**

memoriam@herald.com.my

**LETTERS**

letterseditor@herald.com.my

**Social Media**

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## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Pope Francis has recently completed an extensive journey across Southeast Asia and Oceania, marking one of the longest and most far-reaching papal trips in history. His 12-day visit to Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, and Singapore was the longest time he has ever spent away from the Vatican.

Every time I watched the 87-year-old pontiff land at each destination airport and partake in the activities, I was simply amazed at his energy, enthusiasm, the love, and aura he exuded. Equally astounding was the love and adoration from the multitudes of people who turned up to see the Pope.

Here is an octogenarian, despite health issues, brimming with life, who commands the attention of the world with a firm yet passionate spirit. In many ways, Pope Francis represents the amazing strength and power that define not just his papacy, but the enduring faith of the Catholic Church.

At a time when global leadership is often questioned, Pope Francis remains an example of moral authority and compassion. He is undoubtedly the most respected figure in the world today, commanding the attention and admiration of people from all walks of life, regardless of their faith or background. His message of peace, unity, and love resonates deeply, even in the face of the many crises the Church may face. Whether it's dealing with internal criticisms or external challenges, we Catholics can take solace in the fact that our faith is everlasting and full of hope.

During his Southeast Asia and Oceania visit, Pope Francis touched on several key issues that reflect the Church's commitment to the marginalised and forgotten. In Indonesia,

he spoke powerfully about interfaith harmony, urging for peaceful coexistence in a country known for its religious diversity. His message was clear: unity and dialogue should always triumph over division and discord. He reminded us that, as Catholics, we must always be agents of peace, working toward a society that reflects the inclusive love of Christ.

In Papua New Guinea, a country where environmental degradation has had severe impacts on indigenous communities, the Pope highlighted the urgency of protecting our planet. His continued emphasis on environmental stewardship, as outlined in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, shows that the Church is not silent in the face of global challenges like climate change. "We cannot remain indifferent while our brothers and sisters suffer the consequences of our neglect," he said. The Pope's words there were a call to arms for Catholics and non-Catholics alike to recognise the sacredness of creation and the responsibility we share in safeguarding it.

In Timor-Leste, Pope Francis acknowledged the country's struggles and reaffirmed the Church's role in fostering reconciliation and hope. He spoke about the importance of addressing poverty and inequality, issues that remain prevalent in many parts of the region. His call for justice for the marginalised, the poor, and the oppressed was a stark reminder that the Church's mission goes beyond spiritual nourishment; it is also deeply rooted in social action.

In Singapore, a modern city known for its economic prowess, Pope Francis shifted his focus to the moral and spiritual challenges of living in a materialistic society. He encouraged Catholics to embrace simplicity and to live

out their faith by serving the poor and the marginalised. "We must not forget the Gospel call to be poor in spirit," he reminded the congregation, "for it is in humility and service that we find true joy."

Throughout his journey, Pope Francis demonstrated that his message remains as fresh and relevant as ever. He continues to challenge the world to think beyond borders and divisions, to care for the poor, to protect the planet, and to seek peace in an increasingly fragmented world. His leadership has breathed new life into the Church, inspiring millions with his commitment to justice, mercy and love.

As we reflect on this papal journey, we are reminded of the timeless values that have always underpinned the Catholic Church. Our faith is not one that wilts under pressure or fades in the face of adversity. Instead, it stands firm, drawing strength from leaders like Pope Francis who embody Christ's love, compassion, and endurance.

No matter what crisis or criticism the Church may face, we Catholics can find assurance in our faith as a source of everlasting hope. Pope Francis has demonstrated that faith is not a relic of the past, but a dynamic force that continues to guide and inspire us. His papacy stands as a testament to the enduring mission of the Church in a world often marked by division and uncertainty. The Holy Father's example reminds us that no matter our age or circumstances, we are called to live out the Gospel with courage and compassion, reminding us that the Church remains vibrant and full of promise for the future.

Patricia Pereira

## To be or not to be a child of God

Each person's worldview can be simply divided into what they can see and understand as good and evil. Even the most complex of thinkers and the most intelligent among us will essentially reject what they think is not good and accept what they believe is good. We can say that we are caught up in our own thinking of what we truly believe is good. This I mean, regardless of being Catholic or not, we humans are generally making decisions constantly from the time we wake up until we go to sleep. As long as we are conscious, we are making decisions knowingly or unknowingly based on what we think is good and true.

When the disciples decided to follow Jesus, they recognised initially someone who is greater than them personally. Someone who could give them something more than what they have, even though they may have not even realised what exactly it is that they were seeking from Him. Someone who teaches things that they could not understand and does things that completely baffles them and yet they could identify in Him something totally good and pure in whatever He was saying and doing.

In the second reading today, we see this being spoken by James as if he's speaking about some sayings or proverbs, but when he writes "the wisdom that comes down from above is essentially something pure" and continues further with the description of it as making for "peace, kindly, considerate, full of compassion and shows itself by doing good, nor is there any trace of partiality or hypocrisy in it". He's essentially describing the person of Jesus, whom he had been walking with, especially as mentioned in today's Gospel reading from Galilee to Capernaum. James' exhortation about jealousy and ambition is precisely what

happened in that private journey, when Jesus asked them, what they were arguing about, even as He was teaching them privately about His own passion, death and resurrection. But they did not understand Jesus and more so did not understand the Father, who was sent by Jesus and hence they went back into their own understanding and own desires and ambitions which grew into the argument of who among them was the greatest.

How apt it is for us to realise this, for even as they were present physically with Jesus, they were not in 'true prayer' with Jesus and hence could not truly hear and could not really desire to understand what Jesus is saying and more importantly, who Jesus truly is and what He is actually doing for them; even as He is instructing them privately and what actually they must do, for them to be doing His work so that others who are like the child may see that Jesus sent them and more importantly the Father who sent Jesus. Why is this so important for us in the current godless climate of the world? For us Catholics, our essential identity is based on the 'Wisdom' that comes from above, since by embracing Wisdom's wisdom, we can lean not on our own understanding but on every word that comes from the mouth of God, from the mouth of Christ, from the mouth of the 12 apostles, from the mouth of the Church. In that way, we can understand what James is trying to say to us since just like the 12, most of us may have not really understood the event of Jesus being handed into the hands of men, being put to death and rise again after three days. If they who much later experienced that grief of loss and the joy of the resurrection could not fully understand what was truly happening, how much more we, who were not there

Reflecting on our  
Sunday Readings

with Fr Alexuchelvam Mariasoosai

**25th Sunday in  
Ordinary Time (B)**

Readings: *Wisdom 2:12, 17-20;*

*James 3:16 – 4:3;*

*Gospel: Mark 9:30-37*

physically but now baptised in Christ could really say we understand the joy of the resurrection, if we have not truly grieved over His death for us. How could we, if we have not spent time with Him to truly listen to Him and really desire what He desires for us and to know what He says and teaches us which is truly good for us and not what we think is good for us.

For we who were godless at one time or another, are always in danger of rejecting the virtuous man who in this instance is Christ Himself in our life since He comes to annoy us, opposes our way of life that is not His Way, reproaches us for breaching His teachings especially on loving one another as He has loved us, and accuses us, not in order to shame us but in order to draw us back to the one who sent Him, our Father. For to do so means, we must be like the child whom Christ embraces, ready to be loved by Christ and to be taught and sent out into the world, to witness to the one who sent Him. Are you then a child of God or a child of this world? Who could say that, when they see you, hear you and witness you in life, that you were sent by Christ and more so by the Father. Let us ask for that grace of humility that seeks not our own desires but only that of Christ, for our greater good and the good of the world through Christ our Lord.

# Malaysians celebrate Independence Day in Melbourne

MELBOURNE, Australia: Over 100 Malaysian Catholics came together for a special Mass to celebrate Malaysia's Independence Day at the Church of St John, Mitcham. Presiding at the Eucharistic celebration was Fr Collin Nunis (assistant parish priest of St Joseph's Melkite Church, Fairfield), with Fr. John Kelvin Pereira (St John's parish, Heidelberg) and Fr Alexander Chow (Administrator of St Luke's Blackburn South and St Timothy's Vermont) as concelebrants. Fr Robin Lomangkok, CSSR preached the homily.

The Mass was marked by a rich multicultural atmosphere. The readings and prayers of the faithful were in multiple languages, including English, Bahasa Malaysia, Mandarin, and Kadazandusun, reflecting the diverse linguistic heritage



of the Malaysian Catholic community. The choir of Our Lady of China Catholic Church, Box Hill North, provided the music for the liturgy, their rendition of the Lord's Prayer in Bahasa Malaysia leaving a lasting

impression on all present.

The gathering also featured video messages from Archbishop Julian Leow of Kuala Lumpur, who is the President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, Singapore,

and Brunei, and Cardinal Sebastian Francis of Penang. Both Archbishop Julian and Cardinal Francis offered their well-wishes and blessings, thanking the Malaysian Catholic community for remembering their roots, and for gathering as a community to pray for the nation.

This is the second event that saw Malaysian Catholics resident in Melbourne coming together since the visit of Archbishop Simon Poh in June. Inspired by this, Xavier Ng, a teacher and Fr Nunis (both formerly of the Church of St Jude, Rawang) took the initiative to organise a Mass to commemorate Malaysia's Independence Day.

True to the Malaysian spirit of unity in diversity, the event brought together individuals from all walks of life and reminded the community of their shared faith and heritage.



## PENANG DIOCESE

### Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

#### September

- 28 Mass – Closing of the Forum for Penang Diocese New Evangelisation Alumni at 5.30pm in Domus, St Anne, BM



## MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

### Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

#### September

- 22 Feast of St Pio – St Pio's Friary and Spirituality Centre, Ulu Tiram  
28 Confirmation – Church of St Francis Xavier, Melaka



## Diocese of Penang

PKK/BDN/2024/09/190

## Notifications and Updates

**W**e know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8: 22-23).

### 1. A Call to Celebrate the PROTEC Campaign Year 5 and the Season of Creation 2024

The annual Season of Creation takes place from September 1 (World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation) to

October 4, the Feast Day of St. Francis of Assisi. The theme for this year is: *Use Less Paper and Wood*. In line with this, the Episcopal Commission for Creation Justice of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei earnestly calls on all the faithful in all dioceses to fully celebrate the PROTEC Campaign Year 5 and the Season of Creation 2024. To read the letter, go to: <https://bit.ly/3XKy2g0>

### 2. 110th World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2024

"God walks with His people", is the title chosen by Pope Francis for his Message for the upcoming World Day of Migrants

and Refugees (WDMR), which will be celebrated on Sunday, September 29. The Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development is promoting a communication campaign in preparation for the WDMR2024 in which it invites all people of goodwill to organise initiatives with migrants, refugees, vulnerable people. <https://bit.ly/3z7nloN>

*Sebastian Francis*

Cardinal Sebastian Francis



## Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #190



### Greetings dear friends of MJD.

Fading flags. Fading signboards. Fading streetlights. They are manageable. We can live with them. But fading road lines? They are dangerous. The cities and urban centres are well lit. No danger to drivers and riders. But many of our roads are hazardous. Badly lit. No visible lines. Bad roads. So we can expect more road accidents. Maybe it is a case of fading funds. But the nation is also contending with fading ideals, dreams and leaders. An opposition leader remarked "di negara ini sesiapa saja yang menganut Islam akan dinamakan Melayu tanpa mengambil kira suku kaumnya, termasuk jika individu terbabit berasal dari Arab, India, Cina dan sebagainya". No lawful institution responded. Belief in the system may fade. But hope does not fade.

### The Pontiff's Time:

**In Indonesia**, the key theme was on Islamic-Christian dialogue, amid concerns at increasing discrimination and harassment against religious minorities. His words: "We are all brothers, all pilgrims, all on our way to God, beyond what differentiates us."

**To Papua New Guinea**, which is regularly plagued by tribal violence, the January deadly riots in the wake of anti-government demonstrations against lower

wages and a nation hit by deforestation and repeated natural disasters, the Pope called for natural resources to be developed in a sustainable manner that "improves the wellbeing of all, excluding nobody, through ... includes international cooperation, mutual respect and agreements beneficial to all parties" and protection of the environment.

**In Timor Leste**, one of the world's poorest, which has also been hit by the global scourge of child abuse by Catholic priests, Francis called on the people to "not forget the many children and adolescents whose dignity has been violated and to do everything possible to prevent every kind of abuse and guarantee a healthy and peaceful childhood for all young people". **To Singapore**, to the government which has been prioritising building racial harmony since 1965, he may touch on criticisms by rights groups on curtailing freedom of speech, and not allowing protests without permits.

### A Thought For The Week: The Peacock

There was a peacock who often boasted about his beauty. Everyday he walked to the banks of a large lake, looks at his reflections and say: "Oh! What a beautiful bird I am!"

One day the peacock met a crane by

the lake. Sneeringly he said: "What a colourless bird you are! No beauty! No colour! Nothing like mine!"

The crane replied: Yes, I have no beautiful feathers. But my feathers make me fly across the lake. Can your feathers make you fly?

There was no reply from the peacock. **Lesson from the crane:** All of us are created beautiful in our unique ways. There are no duplicates nor imitations. Behold the God-image within. And you will soar, knowing that "you are the glory of God".

### Announcement for the Week

Session on **Safeguarding of Minors and Vulnerable Persons** (BM) will be held at the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Melaka on Sunday, September 29 from 11.30am to 4.30pm. Cost is RM10 per person.

### QnQ? Q ask: So many are in the rush. People are excited about the Pope in Singapore. Are you not going?

1. No, I am opting not to. Too many travels! Too many social events! Too many crowds. Too many protocols. Too many bouts of infections. This year of activities has drained me. All these going-ons can drain a person.
2. Another excuse is that I have met the pope twice, one-on-one, face-to-face.

Those memories stay with me. This time I choose to reflect from a distance. I want to be quiet. I want space. I don't want to be lost in the noise.

3. Thich Nhat Tanh's thoughts reminded me: "Solitude is not about being alone high up in the mountains, or in a hut deep in the forest. It's not about hiding ourselves away from civilisation. Real solitude comes from a stable heart that does not get carried away by the crowd or our sorrows about the past, our worries about the future or our excitement about the present. We do not lose ourselves; we do not lose our mindfulness. To take refuge in our mindful breathing, to come back to the present moment, is to take refuge in the beautiful, serene island within each of us."

**See The Holy Spirit @ Work:** Practice the pause. Pause before judging. Pause before assuming. Pause before accusing. Pause whenever you're about to react harshly and you will avoid doing and saying things that you will later regret. — Lori Denchene

**Something To Tickle You:** God is in the business of dissolving boundaries. — Richard Rohr

*Bishop Bernard Paul*

# Vincentians hold national assembly

Lucia Lai

TAIPING: On Merdeka Day, the Church of St Louis hosted 164 members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul (SSVP) from across Malaysia for a two-day assembly. Themed *Come to me, all you who are weary and over-burdened, and I will give you rest* (Matthew 11:28-30), the event was marked by reflection, leadership discussions, and community-building activities.

Cardinal Sebastian Francis of Penang, delivered the keynote address, while Martin Jalleh led various sessions focused on servant leadership and the role of Vincentians in today's world. Raj Narayanan, the newly elected national president, welcomed attendees and emphasised the need for Vincentians to remain loyal to their Catholic identity while adapting to the needs of the 21st century. He stressed the importance of empowering the poor and marginalised to become self-sustainable, underscoring the relevance of continuous formation and training in maintaining the group's Vincentian spirituality.

Cardinal Sebastian began with a quote from Pope John Paul II: "Let us remember the past with gratitude, live the present with enthusiasm, and look forward to the future with confidence."



In his speech, the cardinal highlighted four key points — celebration, listening, submission, and walking. He urged Vincentians to celebrate their past, listen to the needs of the present, submit to God's mission, and walk together with others in faith. He emphasised the importance of collaboration within the Church and with other organisations, provided that Vincentians remain rooted in their identity.

Martin's session on servant leadership encouraged members to reignite their passion and commitment to the SSVP mission. He highlighted the transformative process of being informed, formed, conformed, and eventually transformed into a leader capable of effecting positive change. He warned of the dangers of

conforming to worldly values, which could lead to the distortion of Vincentian principles.

The assembly also featured team-building activities to foster synergy and synodality within SSVP, emphasising collaboration, communication, and creativity. The day concluded with a sunset Mass celebrated by Cardinal Sebastian and concelebrated by Msgr Stephen Liew, parish priest of the Church of St Louis.

In the evening Martin focused on healing and prayer, during which Vincentians lifted their ministry to the Lord. A special meditation on the Rosary honoured the devotion of the group's founders to the Blessed Mother, seeking her intercession for the SSVP in Malaysia.

On the final day, Hugh Dason addressed the members on formation, introducing SSVP's resources and website. Martin concluded with a session on faith and fraternity, using the story of the paralytic man healed by Jesus (Mark 2:1-12) to illustrate the power of community and unity. The assembly ended with a commissioning ceremony led by Msgr Stephen, who challenged the society to adapt to new realities or risk becoming obsolete.

The assembly concluded with a visit to the Ozanam Retirement Village (ORV) project site, located on the grounds of the Church of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in Klian Pau. The cardinal urged the Vincentians to see the completion of the ORV as fulfilling God's will, saying, "Let His will be done on earth, in Taiping, as it is in Heaven."

He emphasised that this mission, entrusted to the newly elected team led by Raj and formerly by Aloysius Lai, continues the good work of SSVP Malaysia. "We must all be part of the winning Team *Turun Padang – Roh Kudus*," he added.

Following this, the cardinal, Msgr Stephen, Deacon Charles Lazaroo, and Deacon Rocky Loo toured the construction site to do the blessings.



Fr Robert Daniel kneeling as the congregation prays for him.

## Fr Robert Daniel celebrates 25 years of priesthood

IPOH: The Church of Our Lady of Lourdes celebrated the 25th sacerdotal anniversary of its parish priest, Fr Robert Daniel Francis, on September 8 with Mass.

A son of the parish, Fr Robert was ordained on the same day in 1999, alongside Msgr Jude Miranda and Fr Michael Dass.

In his homily, Fr Robert reflected on his journey, expressing the same nervousness and fear that he felt on his ordination day 25 years ago. He drew inspiration from the Gospel of Matthew 19:29, which reads:

"And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life." He acknowledged the faithful in attendance as living witnesses to this promise.

Following the post-communion prayer, Fr Robert knelt at the centre of the altar sanctuary as the congregation prayed over him.

To commemorate this special milestone, parishioners were given bookmarks as a token of remembrance.

The celebration continued at the parish hall, where Fr Robert greeted and mingled with the community. A sumptuous meal and a cake-cutting ceremony added to the festivities, marking the joyous occasion.

Heartfelt congratulations, Fr Robert, on your 25 years of dedicated ministry. We celebrate the incredible person you are and the extraordinary priest you've become. May your faith continue to inspire us and may your path be forever illuminated by the Lord's grace. **Pauline Sundram**

## Anointing the sick

ALOR SETAR: The Church of St Michael recently celebrated Mass for the Sick, Infirm and Elderly.

The parish came together for a special Mass tailored to provide comfort and anointing to those struggling with health issues. A total of 20 parishioners registered to receive the sacrament of Anointing.

The Mass was celebrated by parish priest, Fr Michael Cheah.

A dedicated committee of volunteers played a crucial role in the event, overseeing registration and arranging seating to ensure that the sick, infirm, and elderly were well cared for throughout the service.

After Mass, all parishioners were treated to a sumptuous lunch.



Fr Micheal Cheah anointing a parishioner.

## Double celebration at KKB parish

KUALA KUBU BHARU: The Church of St Paul the Apostle (SPA) had a double celebration on August 31. The first, marked the 67th Independence Day of Malaysia and the second, was the 31st Sacerdotal Anniversary of parish priest, Fr V. A. Michael.

Rosary began at 5.30pm followed by sunset Mass. Under the leadership of the KUBM leader, Leo Matang, for the very first time, uniformed government servants from the Police Force, Army and Fire Department were present at Mass. They are East Malaysians posted in Kuala Kubu Bharu. They took the initiative to animate the Mass. Different language groups participated. Some came in their traditional and colourful costumes. Both the Malaysian Flag and the State Flag of Selangor were processed in.

In his homily, Fr Michael spoke about how we listened to our superiors at work or listen to our parents and teachers. It is much more im-

portant to listen to the commands of God in our lives and the importance to follow His law and not some human traditions (Mark 7: 8-23). He said God gave Moses 10 commandments for the people to follow whilst Jesus gave two — "Love your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and to love your neighbour as you love yourself" (Mark 12 : 30-32). He challenged us to reflect in our lives to see if we have given great importance to listen to God.

As we celebrate Independence Day, Fr Michael told us to continuously remember and hold dear the *Rukun Negara* in our hearts. *Rukun Negara* is our guide to ensure that we Malaysians follow the law of the country. He made us to reflect our unity as Malaysians amidst its diversity. In spite of our different cultures, language and customs, we are still united as Malaysians and we care for one another.

After the Mass, the flags were raised and the National Anthem was sung with pride and love



Fr VA Michael with some East Malaysians parishioners.

for the country.

As the saying goes, "Food brings people together", and we had a potluck fellowship after Mass followed by cake cutting and presentation of a hand-made Sacerdotal Anniversary card prepared by the catechists and students. Parishioners had the chance to pen their well-wishes and gratitude in the card too.

Fr Michael thanked every one for coming and participating in the Mass and fellowship. **Justina Sharon**

## Birthday surprise for Fr Francis Andrew

SITIAWAN: On August 30, parishioners of the Church of St Francis De Sales (SFDS) came together to surprise their shepherd, Fr Francis Andrew, on his 71st birthday.

The event, organised by the Parish Council, was secretly planned to ensure Fr Francis remained unaware. The celebration, held at Ah Hing Restaurant, was attended by 270 parishioners, along with Fr Francis' family members.

Attendees, all dressed in the event's theme



colours of red or beige, eagerly awaited Fr Francis' arrival. He was brought to the restaurant under the pretence of a simple birthday treat, only to be greeted with a packed hall filled with joyful parishioners, including members of various ministries, BEC groups, and the migrant community.

The celebration began with an opening prayer by emcee Peter Francis, followed by a speech from PPC chairman Edwin Raj. Before dinner was served, Fr Francis was invited to cut his birthday cake, marking

the official start of the evening's festivities. The evening continued with several performances by parishioners, adding a lively and festive atmosphere to the occasion.

Fr Francis, visibly moved by the outpouring of love and appreciation, expressed his gratitude for the thoughtful gesture. After being ordained in 2006, Fr Francis served in several parishes before being appointed parish priest of SFDS in 2022. The celebration reflected the deep bond between Fr Francis and the SFDS community, a bond strengthened through his dedicated pastoral care.

**Dr Mary Thomas**

# PROTEC 5 campaign launched

Marilyn Menezes Simon

KUALA LUMPUR: The Cathedral of St John hosted the launch of the PROTEC 5 (Protect Our Earth, Protect Our Children) campaign, marking its fifth year with a compelling call to action on World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation. This year's theme, *Use Less Paper and Wood*, highlights the urgent need to reduce our environmental footprint.

The Eucharistic Celebration on September 1 was presided over by Archbishop Julian Leow and concelebrated by Bishop Joseph Hii, President of the Episcopal Commission for Creation Justice of Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei (ECCJ – MSB), alongside six priests.

Archbishop Julian's homily of-



During the Eucharistic Celebration to launch the PROTEC 5 campaign.

ferred a reminder of the disconnect between our protective instincts for our homes and the unchecked access to social media that our children experience. "We lock our doors to prevent strangers coming into our homes but allow our kids to let strangers into their lives via social media," he said.

The celebration commenced with Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament

and the Rosary, dedicated to prayers for all of Creation. During the entrance procession, delegates from the ECCJ – MSB carried banners representing their eleven dioceses, symbolising the unity and shared mission across the region.

Sept 1 also marked the beginning of the Season of Creation, which will continue until Oct 4. This season's theme, *Hope and Act with*

*Creation*, is inspired by Romans 8:19-25, emphasising that despite the groans of creation due to our harmful actions, hope exists in waiting for a better future. Participants are encouraged to take practical steps toward sustainability, such as using tissue paper sparingly, opting for handkerchiefs, conserving water, using reusable containers, and avoiding plastic bags and cutlery.

Leading up to the launch, the ECCJ – MSB held their conference from August 29 to 31 at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Institute. The conference focused on resilience and biodiversity, addressing key issues and planning for the coming year.

In a related event, the KL Archdiocesan Creation Justice Ministry organised its third Mangrove Planting activity on Merdeka Day at the Kuala Selangor Nature Park. The event saw participation from ECCJ-MSB delegates and 85 volunteers, including a bishop, five priests, and a religious sister. Together, they planted 300 mangrove trees and prepared sapling bags, demonstrating a united commitment to environmental stewardship across different faiths.



Year 6 students practising zero-waste by bringing their own containers at an outing to FRIM.

## CDM goes zero waste

SHAH ALAM: The Church of the Divine Mercy (CDM) has made a significant leap towards environmental stewardship by inaugurating its Zero-Waste initiative to mark the beginning of the Season of Creation 2024. This pivotal milestone was celebrated with the release of the church's Zero-Waste Guidelines by parish priest Fr. George Harrison.

The launch coincided with the World Day of Prayer for Creation, during which members of the *Laudato Si'* Ministry received a special blessing at the 10.00am Mass. The ministry members pledged to continue their efforts in fostering an ecologically conscious church community.

Under the new zero-waste policy, CDM will eliminate the use of single-use packaging for all church events and meetings. Parishioners are encouraged to bring their own food containers and tumblers for events involving dining on church premises, including the popular Sunday Coffee Morning. For private events, reusable tableware and cutlery will be provided at the cafeteria, available for communal use upon prior booking.

This initiative responds to a pressing environmental issue highlighted by a recent WWF-Malaysia report, which reveals that Malaysians produce over 1 million

tonnes of plastic waste annually. A significant portion of this plastic waste ends up in the ocean and infiltrates our food chain as microplastics, which can carry harmful substances. Recycling alone is insufficient to address the plastic problem, as only nine per cent of plastics are recycled while the remainder contributes to landfill waste. Adopting a zero-waste lifestyle promotes mindful consumption and reduces waste, mitigating these environmental impacts.

To further support environmental stewardship, the *Laudato Si'* Ministry at CDM has organised a series of activities. On September 28, a retreat titled *Understanding Laudato Si' and Laudate Deum* will be led by Dato' Dr Dionysius Sharma. On October 5, catechism children will participate in preparing meals for the needy using surplus food at The Assembly Soup Kitchen (T.A.S.K.). For pet enthusiasts, a special Mass and pet blessing will take place on October 6 at 4.00pm.

The church hopes that these initiatives, coupled with ongoing education, will inspire individuals to respond to the Holy Father's call to address the "Cry of the Earth and Cry of the Poor." Embracing a zero-waste lifestyle is seen as a crucial first step in this collective effort.

Naomi Anne Dominic

## All are urged to be agents of change

SIBU: In a call to action amid the ongoing challenges of climate change and global warming, Pope Francis has urged all humanity to become "Agents of Change" and "Ambassadors of Hope". His message of optimism and resolve resonated at the diocesan launch of the fifth year of PROTEC 5, a pivotal initiative aimed at environmental stewardship.

During the Mass on Sept 7, Bishop Joseph Hii echoed Pope Francis' call for hope and action. Addressing an audience of over 300 participants, including students from Catholic High, SK Sacred Heart, and SK Hua Hin, Bishop Joseph declared, "Do not despair. There is Hope in Christ Jesus. Be the Agent of Change, Ambassador of Hope."

The Mass, held at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, was concelebrated with Rector Fr Philip Hu, assistant priest Franciscan Capuchin Friar Raphael Samosir, and Neocatechumenal Way priest Fr Edward Raymond. Bishop Joseph commended the students for their efforts, noting that even



The young people learning about enzymes.

small actions, such as pouring enzymes onto drains, contribute to their role as Ambassadors of Christ, spreading hope and positive change to those around them.

Representatives from 12 parishes within the Diocese of Sibu were present to receive the PROTEC 5 banner, symbolising their commitment to bringing the environmental message back to their communities.

The educational and nurturing session, which lasted two and a

half hours, was followed by the celebration of the Eucharist, reinforcing the spiritual dimension of the environmental commitment.

Bishop Joseph's message, combined with the ongoing efforts of PROTEC 5, underscores the church's dedication to fostering a culture of environmental consciousness and hope. As the Season of Creation continues, the Diocese of Sibu remains steadfast in its mission to inspire and enact positive change for the planet.

## Hope and act with Creation

PORT DICKSON: The Church of the Immaculate Conception is joining the global observance of the Season of Creation 2024 with some initiatives aimed at deepening our commitment to environmental stewardship.

The Season of Creation was launched on September 1 by the

Women's Ministry. During the launch, symbolic gifts of plants and seeds were offered, serving as a reminder of our shared responsibility to care for the earth. A pledge tree was also introduced, where parishioners could commit to personal acts of creation care. Leaf-shaped pledge cards, available in multiple

languages, were hung on the tree as tangible signs of our promise to protect and nurture God's creation. Some participants were also gifted small plants and seeds to nurture at home, further symbolising the growth of both faith and care for the environment.

The parish has also organised a range of community-centred activities to promote ecological responsibility and foster a deeper connection with nature.

Key events include a Recycling Challenge, a Nature Walk with Zumba, a Planting Session, and a Donation Drive for Reusable Items. Each of these efforts seeks to inspire hope and spur concrete action, demonstrating that even the smallest steps, when undertaken in faith, can repair the damage done to our planet and bring us closer to God.

Julie Amos



Parishioners hanging their pledge cards on the tree.

# Call for renewed commitment in parish life

Susai Anthony Muthu

KUALA LUMPUR: The Church of Our Lady of Fatima (OLF) Brickfields, held its Parish Pastoral Assembly (PPA) on Sunday, September 1, with Archbishop Julian Leow gracing the occasion with his presence. The event saw the participation of about 100 parishioners and was facilitated by the Archdiocesan BEC Animating Team led by Rita Krishnan, with assistance from Jacob Dass of the OLF Formation Ministry.

During the breakout sessions, parishioners engaged in discussions centred around the Archdiocese's four key focus areas: Family, Church, Ecology, and Society. Archbishop Julian actively participated, joining one of the groups for the 'Conversation in the Spirit' exercise. This exercise, as Rita explained, aimed to invite the Holy Spirit's enlightenment to better discern and reflect on the community's needs.

In his first PPA at OLF, Parish Administrator Fr Andrew Manickam, OFM, Cap, expressed gratitude for the



Parishioners participating in the Conversation in the Spirit.

active participation of attendees in shaping the parish's future and community life. He assured the assembly that all proposals would be carefully considered as the parish moves forward.

Archbishop Julian addressed the gathering with thanks for their presence and highlighted the concern over retaining youth after Confirmation. He stressed the need for a

shift in mindset to engage people in parish life from cradle to grave, noting that while older members are continually active, there is a pressing need to involve all age groups.

The archbishop emphasised that while children receive religious education, there is a lack of understanding of the Church's mission based on faith. He underscored the importance of support groups in fos-

tering meaningful relationships and asked, "Are we our brother or sister's keeper?" He posed a thought-provoking challenge: "If your mission were to ensure that everyone in your parish reaches heaven before you are admitted, would your lifestyle change?"

Archbishop Julian urged everyone to rethink their approach, take responsibility for the salvation of others and themselves, and be vigilant in helping the least, the lost, and the little. He concluded by acknowledging the challenging yet rewarding activities undertaken in the four focus areas and called for continued collective effort as individuals, families, BECs, the parish, and the wider Church. He reassured the gathering that they are not alone, as they journey with Jesus, the Blessed Mother, and the saints.

The PPA concluded with the prelate's blessing and a commitment to environmental stewardship. In line with the focus on Ecology, the Creation Justice Ministry, led by Fr Andrew, organised a 'plastic-free' and environmentally friendly round of refreshments.

## Empowering Orang Asli children to be missionaries

BIDOR: Some 55 Orang Asli, mostly children were present at their 15-year-old Gereja Ibunda Maria in Kg Chang, located about five kilometres from Bidor town for a prayer and reflection session, recently.

This was an outreach programme organ-

ised by the Chapel of St Joseph in Bidor in collaboration with a group of Catholics from Kuala Lumpur.

The event began with a prayer session conducted in Bahasa Malaysia, led by Orang Asli lay leader Junaida. Following

this, the Kuala Lumpur group shared a reflection on Mark 16:15, where Jesus commands to "go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation." The message inspired the Orang Asli present to embrace their role as missionaries, encouraging them to live out their Christian faith daily, pray regularly, and share the teachings of Jesus with their family and neighbours.

In all, eighty people were feted to a catered sumptuous lunch thereafter, where mingling and chatting with one another took place during the fellowship.

Participants were also engaged in various indoor games that brought much excitement and joy. The Orang Asli, including adults, actively participated in "balloon blowing" and "passing the ball" games, while children enjoyed a painting competition. Many walked away with attractive prizes such as plush toys and a mountain

bike, adding to the festive atmosphere.

In addition to the games and activities, each of the 20 families received a generous gift pack including a bath towel, pillow, biscuits, snacks, milk drink, toothpaste, toothbrush, layer cake, stationery set, shower gel, Milo, pudding, and holy water.

Alice Jabaimalar, a lay leader from the Chapel in Bidor hopes the KL group had good exposure with the Orang Asli. She emphasised the importance of reaching out to the poor and those on the fringes of society, encouraging Catholics to extend their support and love to those in need.

The event concluded with a Closing Prayer and a group photo, as the children bid farewell to their visitors. The Kuala Lumpur group also took the opportunity to visit five dilapidated non-Catholic homes in the village, where they briefly chatted with residents and distributed small hand gifts. **Bernard Anthony**



Orang Asli families receiving provisions from the organisers.

## St Mary's parish celebrates feastday

TAPAH, Perak: The Church of St Mary, founded in 1895, celebrated its parish feast with a triduum from September 5-7. Deacon Richard Wilson from the Church of St Joseph, Batu Gajah, was the preacher for the triduum, with parish priest Fr James Pitchay celebrating the Masses.

On Day 1, Deacon Richard preached on the theme of *Communion*, emphasising that we are called to be rooted in the unity of the Holy Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He urged the congregation to anchor their lives in God's love and to embody love in their hearts.

"Mary is a model of communion, participation, and mission," said Deacon Richard, highlighting her submission to God. The Mass also included the anointing of the sick.

The celebration culminated on Day 3, with an evening Mass attended by approximately 500 parishioners, some of whom travelled from afar to join the novena, Mass, procession, and benediction. Deacon

Richard spoke on *Mission*, explaining how blessings flow from the altar to the people of God, and from the Eucharist to the world. He encouraged the faithful to be "the salt of the earth and the light of the world."

Regarding Mary, Deacon Richard reminded the congregation that her mission extended beyond giving birth to Jesus — it continues with the disciples and the Church today. "When we are on a mission with God, we must set aside personal agendas and ambitions to align with His will," he said. "Let the Holy Spirit guide us as we follow Mary's example of fulfilling the mission of Christ."

He called for new ways of thinking, guided by the Holy Spirit, to foster communion, participation, and mission within the Church. He urged everyone to use their God-given talents to serve their brothers and sisters, bringing Christ into their lives and giving others the opportunity to encounter Him. He also emphasised the importance of justice, charity, and caring

for both nature and one another, following Mary's example.

The parish feast typically coincides with the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the patroness of this 129-year-old parish.

Fr James noted that many faithful attended to seek Mary's intercession and to offer thanks for answered prayers. He invited all to join the three-kilometre candlelight procession, a public witness of faith, through parts of Tapah town. The procession featured the Blessed Sacrament on one float and a statue of Mary on another, with the congregation praying the rosary throughout the 55-minute walk. Upon returning to the church, benediction was held.

Fr James expressed his gratitude to Deacon Richard for his insightful preaching and to all who contributed their time and efforts to make this year's feast a meaningful celebration. The festivities concluded with a communal dinner in the parish hall, where fellowship was enjoyed by all. **Bernard Anthony**



Deacon Richard Wilson with the Blessed Sacrament.

# Retreat deepens spiritual connection with Mother Mary

Karen-Ann Theseira

JOHOR BARU: September 8 was a day of special significance at the Church of the Immaculate Conception (CIC) as it marked both the birthday of the Blessed Mother Mary and the inaugural Marian Retreat.

The one-day retreat, held in St Mary's Hall, was a unique and deeply spiritual experience for the 59 participants. From the moment they arrived, the meticulous attention to detail was evident — from the specially created Chapel for adoration and devotion to the Blessed Virgin to the thoughtful provision of socks for added comfort.

Participants, dressed in white attire as requested, sensed an immediate atmosphere of reverence and commitment. Wristwatches and phones were set aside to enhance focus and immersion in the retreat's activities.

The aim of the retreat was to deepen participants' spiritual connection with Mary and to strengthen their faith.

The retreat featured a sequence of six



talks, each representing a stage in the life of the Blessed Virgin. The journey began with Chapter 1, which explored the early life of Mary, including the long-awaited gift of her birth to St Anne and St Joachim, and even her fondness for berries. Bernard, a participant, remarked on his surprise that the term "immaculate conception" refers to Mary rather than Jesus.

Chapter 2 delved into Mary's role in the divine plan, highlighting her position as a loving intercessor. Subsequent chapters ex-

plored Mary as Our Mother and Our Model. Philomena, another participant, shared her personal connection, noting that her reverence for Mary had deepened, leading her to desire more quiet time in prayer with the Blessed Virgin.

Chapters 5 and 6 focused on the Holy Rosary and the Peace Plan of Fatima. Joseph, a member of the Legion of Mary, emphasised the importance of nightly Rosary prayers, while Jo expressed an increased love for Mary following the retreat.

At the retreat's conclusion, participants were invited to share their reflections, which revealed profound devotion to the Blessed Virgin and a renewed commitment to practices such as the Rosary. The first Marian Class participants were presented with certificates, a Rosary, a Scapular, and a foldout card on Rosary prayers. Echoing the words of St Pope John Paul II, who said "the Rosary is my favourite prayer," the retreat sought to inspire participants to make it their own.

## Reflection, renewal, and revelry at lawyers' retreat

KOTA KINABALU, Sabah: Approximately 40 participants recently gathered for the Catholic Lawyers' Society of Kuala Lumpur's annual retreat. This year's event took place at Kokol Haven Resort, providing a serene escape from city life.

The retreat, themed *Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you* (Isaiah 43:5), was led by Fr Dr Charles Chiew. It was a joint gathering with participants from the Catholic Doctors' Association of Malaysia (CDAM), alongside several lawyers from

Sabah, Sarawak, and Brunei.

The three-day retreat was a combination of serious talks and easy going activities to enable the participants to soak in the relaxed mood of the Retreat at a hilltop resort known for its jungle treks and camping sites besides enhancing their spiritual knowledge with talks about St Thomas More, the Patron St of Lawyers and his exemplary work. In addition to talks about healing thyself from one's professional career as lawyers/doctors there was also a session on a Catholic lawyer's role in upholding the faith when faced with questionable tasks/decisions

in their profession. Fr Charles emphasised that "Truth Corrects Lies and Distortion" when one's faith is under attack by other religions and many other aspects.

All the participants who had their respective groups were made to discuss these topics among their group members where many shared personal experiences in which they encountered crossroads where they had to make hard decisions in the course of their career where ethics and their faith was concerned and the lure of wealth and material satisfaction. The retreat master cleverly gave each one the

space to discuss all these heavy topics in cosy settings by allowing them to venture out of the designated venue to a more relaxed outdoor setting surrounded by nature and fresh air.

The retreat was also filled with carefree joyous moments of singing and bonding over food and drinks and even a late night karaoke session on Saturday night among the lawyers and doctors who honed their skills and talents taking turns to belt out popular tunes and even do comedy skits for a good laugh. All in all, it was an entertaining and vibrant night with all the participants in good spirits and they even got to try some local delicacies and learn some Sabah traditions.

The last day of the retreat concluded with Mass presided over by Fr Charles and a photo session overlooking the breathtaking landscape of Kokol Haven Resort.

Overall, the retreat was a fulfilling experience, leaving everyone refreshed and energised. Before boarding their flights back to Peninsular Malaysia, participants picked up gifts from the local markets in Sabah for their colleagues, staff, friends, and relatives.

Christina Rachel Param



## Be open to being moulded by the Potter

PETALING JAYA: The Servants of Yahweh Covenant Community recently held their annual Women's Retreat at the SOY Centre in SS2, bringing together 50 participants from across the Klang Valley, Taiping, Penang, Singapore, and even the USA.

The three-day retreat, themed *Clay in the Potter's Hand*, began on Friday with a warm welcome and an engaging programme designed to foster spiritual growth and community. The retreat kicked off with registration, a welcome speech, and Bible Enthronement. Participants were then led in Praise & Worship before being introduced to speakers Lou Sitaca and Joy Sanchez from the Ang Ligaya Covenanted Community in the Philippines.

An interactive game titled *Know Your Sister* and an energising action song set the tone for Day 1. The highlight was the orientation led by Lou, focusing on the theme *Clay in the Potter's Hand* and reflecting on Jeremiah 18:2, inviting the retreatants to listen and be shaped

by the Lord.

Day 2 commenced with a traditional Malaysian breakfast of *Nasi Lemak*, followed by Praise & Worship. Lou's first talk, *The Potter*, emphasised the Lord as our Creator and Potter, moulding us according to His will. Using Psalm 139:14 and Jeremiah 29:11, Lou explored the characteristics of the Potter and encouraged participants to respond with obedience and surrender.

The day included a creative group activity where participants used plasticine to mould representations of their transformation based on the talk. This was followed by the "Dress Sculpting Challenge" game and another energising action song.

Lou's second talk, *The Clay*, delved into how we, as clay, should embody humility, purity, and manageability, referencing Isaiah 64:8, Galatians 6:3, and Hebrews 12:1. Participants engaged in personal reflection and group prayer ministry, supporting each other's intentions. The day concluded with Mass at local



parishes in the Klang Valley.

Day 3 began with Praise & Worship and the final talk, *A Worthy Vessel*, highlighting the journey from raw clay to a finished work of beauty and usefulness. Lou's inspiring message emphasised living as the Potter's workmanship and engaging in Lifestyle Evangelisation, quoting Luke 12:1-12. The talk concluded with 2 Corinthians 4:7, focusing on God's surpassing power.

Joy shared her transformative journey, detailing how serving others in outreach programmes profoundly impacted her life. The retreat culminated in participants joyfully

sharing their own stories and testimonies, reflecting on the powerful impact of the retreat.

As the event drew to a close, gratitude was extended to speakers Lou and Joy for their contributions. The retreat ended on a high note with an energising action song and a heartfelt farewell, leaving participants with renewed faith and a deep sense of connection.

The retreat provided a meaningful and transformative experience for all attendees. As they departed, participants carried with them the joy and inspiration gained from their spiritual journey, eagerly anticipating their next gathering. Anne John

## OLL Family Day

KLANG: The Church of Our Lady of Lourdes held its Family Day recently. The theme for this year was, *Coming Together as One Family, One Church*.

The festivities began with Mass at 8.00am, celebrated by Fr Gnana Selvam. Families dressed in traditional costumes took part in a lively procession, reflecting the rich cultural diversity of the parish.

Parish Priest Fr Gregory Chan, and assistant parish priest Fr Selva, officially launched the event. The goal of Family Day was to strengthen bonds among the various BECs and parishioners. Organised by the Family Life Ministry with full support from the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC), Parish Coordination Committee (PCC), and BECCOT, the day was filled with engaging activities for all ages.

**Family life Ministry**



*Families at the Family Day.*

# Signed Mass begins at CDM Penang

**Sharon Chandra**

PENANG: Gestures and signs took on a whole new meaning at the first “signed-Mass” for the deaf held recently at the Church of Divine Mercy (CDM), Sg Ara.

For those accustomed to the full sensory experience of Mass — voices, homilies, choir music, projected prayers, and the aroma of incense — the richness of these elements is often taken for granted. However, the signed Mass provided a striking reminder of how essential and meaningful these gestures can be for those who experience Mass through sign language.

The celebration was a joyful one, uniting all of God’s people in praise. Paul Gan, a seasoned interpreter for the hearing impaired, played a key role in this inaugural event. Paul has been involved with the deaf community since 2001, starting with the REACH Ministry at the Church of St Francis Xavier in Petaling Jaya. He explained, “Previously, the deaf would attend the ‘normal’ Mass and try to follow the liturgy as best they could — imagine attending an English Mass without understanding English. With sign language interpretation, the deaf can now fully participate in Mass from start to end.”

This inaugural Interpreted Mass at CDM saw the participation of around five deaf who came from various areas in Penang, including from as far as Butterworth and Bukit Mertajam.



Parish priest, Fr Michael Raymond OFM Cap, welcomed the group by signing his greeting and used sign language throughout the Mass, working alongside Paul to ensure an interactive and inclusive celebration. Signed Masses will be celebrated every fourth Sunday morning of the month for the deaf.

One of the deaf expressed his gratefulness for having an interpreted Mass as he feels so much “at home” and to be able to participate fully throughout the Mass — especially being able to understand what is being preached during the homily!

Fr Michael summed it up thus, “for those on the fringes we want to make sure we

*Paul interpreting for the deaf at Mass.*

make space for them so that they feel part of church and part of the community. We need to create this sense of belonging.”

“This is only the beginning — as our deaf community here at CDM grows, we hope to be able to offer other interpreting services for the deaf to participate in formation programmes and also those who are interested in our faith and would like to join RCIA! We can collaborate with the Catholic Ministry for the Deaf based in KL for other programmes such as deaf retreats, deaf Mass and many more activities” expressed Paul about the inclusion of this group in future.



**CHURCH OF THE HOLY NAME OF MARY  
PERMATANG TINGGI, PENANG**

## “ENLARGE THE SPACE OF YOUR TENT” (ISAIAH 54:2)

**You are invited to the Mass of  
Dedication and Consecration of our  
New Church and Altar.**

It is with profound gratitude and great rejoicing that we, the Parish Priest and the parishioners would like to invite you to celebrate with us on this blessed occasion.

*Reception with lunch to follow.*



**MAIN CELEBRANT:**  
HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL  
DATO' SERI SEBASTIAN FRANCIS,  
BISHOP OF PENANG

**31.10.2024  
THURSDAY 9.30AM**



**SCAN TO OPEN  
GOOGLE MAPS**



## Elvina Fernandez

SINGAPORE: The Papal Mass on September 12, brought together a diverse group of Catholics, each with their unique stories of faith, gratitude, and resilience. From seasoned parishioners who have attended previous papal visits to those experiencing such a momentous event for the first time, the faithful gathered from across Asia to be part of this historic celebration. Through interviews, participants shared heartfelt reflections on the significance of the Mass, the blessings they've received, and their personal journeys that led them to this spiritual milestone. Here are their inspiring testimonies.

Michael Kong, 74, from the Church of the Holy Spirit, Singapore, attending with a group of elderly parishioners, said this is his second time attending the Papal Mass and he is blessed to be able to do it twice now. "I attended the Papal Mass in 1986 at the old National Singapore Stadium. I never knew I would have the opportunity again, and the feeling is unexplainable. I am blessed; that's all I can say," he said.

Jacqueline Joseph from Kuala Lumpur, who recently celebrated her 51st birthday, believes it was divine intervention that allowed her to attend this once-in-a-lifetime event. "My mother, Mary Sebastian, 76, and I were among the last 100 Malaysians to secure tickets for the Papal Mass, and we were moved to tears by the opportunity," she shared. A parishioner of Christ the Light, Jacqueline also revealed her battle with breast cancer, which was first diagnosed eight years ago and relapsed last year. "What my family and I endured was only possible through God's intervention and healing. This trip is truly a blessing and a birthday gift from my family," she added.

Ida Gao, 39, who designed the children's souvenirs for the Papal Mass, described it as a profound blessing to channel her passion into something of such historical significance. "I never imagined I would one day be part of something like this. It's truly a blessing to have this opportunity," shared the lawyer, adding



Pix credit/Ministry of Digital Development and Infrastructure

## Catholics from across Asia at Papal Mass



Michael Kong



Jacqueline Joseph and mum



Ida Gao



Jason



Celine Jacob



Akiko Holmes



Joseph Kang

that the opportunity came to her through her active role as a catechism teacher at an international school.

Eighteen-year-old polytechnic student Jason said he is blessed for being able to attend the Papal Mass, acknowledging that many others didn't have the opportunity. "But I'm here, and that means something. This experience has inspired and called me to attend Mass more regularly, as I've often found excuses to skip it," he admitted.

Celine Jacob, 57, from Kerala, who got the

opportunity through the balloting process says that God answered her prayers. "I have been a domestic worker in Singapore for 18 years now, and my journey like everyone else has challenges, especially being away from family. But this opportunity to see the Holy Father is indeed a great gift and blessing.

Mary Ny Eyen, 44, from Vietnam, attended the Papal Mass with a group of over one hundred Vietnamese Catholics. "I am deeply grateful to share this experience with fellow Catholics from my country, celebrating to-

gether as one family in faith," she said.

Akiko Holmes, 55, from Japan, described the event as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. "To be part of a Mass celebrated by the Holy Father, alongside Catholics from around the world, celebrating our faith, unity, and harmony, is truly special," she said.

Similarly, Joseph Kang, 42, from Myanmar, shared, "Today, I am a proud Catholic, and I can't wait to share this experience with everyone back home — my family, friends, and every Catholic I meet!"

## Hindu carpenter blessed to craft Pope's chair

During his visit to Singapore, Pope Francis used two handmade chairs for his inter-religious dialogue sessions, crafted by carpenter Govindharaj Muthiah, 44.

Govindharaj received the fortuitous call from the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Singapore around sometime in July through a recommendation to build the 100 percent handmade custom chair for the Pope and wanted it to be inspired by furniture from the 18th century.

"When I got the call, asking if I could make a chair, I asked for the dimensions or for the caller to send me the drawing, as that's how I make a custom chair."

To which the caller said that there are more specific details than just that. "I recall hearing from the other side of the call — it's for the Pope."

He pointed out that as a practicing Hindu, the opportunity is beyond religion, something larger than life, added by the fact that Jesus was also a carpenter, making him feel even more blessed to be chosen.

"Millions will want this opportunity, but I got the call; it's surreal, and it still hasn't sunk in and I told myself, I hope I don't faint when I see the Pope sitting on the chair later," he said.

He highlighted that for someone of such magnitude, the Pope's down-to-earth demeanour captivated him and inspired the thought put into crafting the chairs.

"I read about him and understood his simple character. Hence, I wanted to maintain that in these chairs."

The two months of crafting both the chairs with Burmese teakwood, he shared, were approached as a prayer of unity among various

faith believers and not as a project.

"We had people who did not know carpentry come in to the workshop to clean the space, sand down the wood material, and work on the fabric used," he said.

He shared that the chairs also have their sustainable value, echoing the Pope's Laudato Si calling, incorporating usable materials from religious places of worship that had just undergone renovation for leftover lumber he could repurpose.

"Recyclable materials were used as much as we could before sourcing out for what was needed to complete the historical chairs."

He added that he wanted to ensure that the chair will be comfortable and not too loud, with the fabric sourced from Belgium after a round of researching for the best needed.

The headboard of one chair was inspired by the distinctive frontage of the old Novena Church here, also known as the Church of St Alphonsus. The base of the other chair was inspired by the facade of the Basilica of San José de Flores, a Catholic church located in Pope Francis' birthplace of Buenos Aires, Argentina. This chair also has a B-shaped armrest — an homage to Pope Francis' family name, Bergoglio.

"I haven't digested this journey and the fact that I am here to see him in person today. I could hardly sleep last night."

He said the experience to craft the handmade chair using the old-school way of carpentry received divine intervention as it was a smooth journey. "Everything came at the right time."

"It is truly an honour to play a small role, coming together with brothers and sisters of

various faiths."

When asked if he would ever consider a request to make more miniature chairs for sale, he said, "I have not thought about it and will just like to enjoy the moment for now."

Govindharaj said he had requested to gift the Pope a miniature chair, made of materials left over from crafting the two chairs, and the request was accepted two days ago.

"I made a special box to place the miniature chair, and I am extremely overjoyed to know that the Pope will be bringing it back with him to Rome."

After witnessing Pope Francis sitting on the two chairs he made, Govindharaj said he felt the Pope looked comfortable. "It is a humbling experience to witness all of these and hopefully I can do more of his work."

Leaving his F&B career in 2018 to pursue the craft, Govindharaj started taking the hobby turn profession on a serious note a year later. When the pandemic hit, his craft felt the pinch, but it was all a blessing in disguise, he says. "I was classified under the essential worker category, so everything happened for a reason."

He added that in today's time when everything is available online, a craft like his is not the easy road taken and requires a niche.

"There are good days and not so good days. I have times when I do not receive orders and also times when there are a lot of orders for handmade woodwork."

He added that the online purchasing trend has made it very competitive for crafters like him.

"So it is important to have a strong mind,



Govindharaj Muthiah with one of the chairs he crafted for the Pope. This chair was used by Pope Francis during the interreligious dialogue at Catholic Junior College, Singapore, on September 13.

keep up with time, upgrade skills, have good family and friends support, as well as turn to God when times are tough to remember your purpose."

Relating to young people who may be at a crossroads to choose their career or afraid to take the leap to follow their passion, he said one must have the drive, be persistent, and have the right attitude.

"You must put your heart to it, as when you do that, the work does itself, making everything fall into place, and the journey will feel more like a faith experience than a job."

Elvina Fernandez

# Unforgettable journey of missionary Pope to the ends of the Earth

Pope Francis concluded his historic 12-day Apostolic Journey across Asia and Oceania, his longest yet, which brought him to Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, and Singapore. There are several images destined to remain in the mind and heart.

The first is that of the “tunnel of fraternity” that the Pope blessed alongside the Grand Imam of Jakarta. At a time when tunnels are associated with images of war, terrorism, violence, and death, this underground walkway connecting Indonesia’s largest mosque to the Catholic cathedral is a sign and a seed of hope. The gestures of friendship and affection exchanged by the Bishop of Rome and the Grand Imam touched many in the world’s most-populous Muslim country.

The second image is that of Pope Francis boarding the Australian Air Force C-130 to travel to Vanimo, in the northwest of Papua New Guinea, to visit three Argentine missionaries and their people, bringing with him a ton of aid and gifts.

The Pope, who as a young man had dreamed

of becoming a missionary to Japan, had long wanted to make this visit to the most remote periphery of the world, where he was embraced by men and women in their colourful traditional attire. Being a missionary means, first of all, sharing the lives, the many problems, and the hopes of these people living in precarious conditions, immersed in exuberant nature. It means witnessing to the face of a God who is tenderness and compassion.

The third image is that of President José Manuel Ramos-Horta, who, at the conclusion of the official speeches at the presidential palace in Dili, Timor-Leste, bent down to help the Pope adjust his feet on the wheelchair pedals. In the most Catholic country in the world, faith is a strongly defining element, and the role of the Church was decisive in the process that led to independence from Indonesia.

The fourth image is the moving embrace of the Pope with the children with disabilities who are cared for by the sisters of the Irmãs Alma school. He exchanged gestures, looks, and few words that were deeply evangelical,

to remind us that these children, who rely on others for everything, by allowing themselves to be cared for, teach us to allow ourselves to be cared for by God. The question of why children suffer is a blade that cuts deep, a sore that does not heal. Pope Francis’ response was closeness and a fatherly embrace.

The fifth image is that of the people of Timor-Leste, who waited for hours under the scorching sun for the Pope on the Taci Tolu plain. More than 600,000 people were present, practically one out of every two Timorese. Pope Francis was moved by this reception and warmth in a country that, after hard-won independence from Indonesia, is slowly building its future. Sixty-five percent of the population is under 30 years old, and the roads travelled by the popemobile were overflowing with young men and women with their very small children. This experience was a sign of hope for the Church, hope for the world.

The sixth image is that of Singapore’s skyline, the island-state with its towering, ultra-

modern skyscrapers. This is a developed and wealthy country. It’s impossible not to think of the contrast with the dusty streets of Dili, which the Pope had left just a few hours earlier. Even here, where wealth is evident on every corner, where life is organized and transportation is incredibly fast, Pope Francis embraced everyone and pointed to the path of love, harmony, and fraternity.

Finally, the last image is that of the Pope himself. Some had doubted whether he could withstand the strain of such a long journey, in countries with tropical climates.

On the contrary, it was an upward journey. Instead of tiring day by day, covering kilometers, transfers, and flights, he gained energy. He met the young people of various countries, abandoning his written texts and exchanging in dialogue with his interlocutors, refreshing his spirit and body. He became young among the young, despite his approaching 88th birthday, which he will celebrate on the eve of the 2025 Jubilee. **Andrea Tornielli, Vatican News**



## Pope's visit to Indonesia September 3-5, 2024



(Vatican Media)



Grand Imam Nasaruddin Umar kisses Pope Francis on the top of his head after the signing of the Istiqlal Joint Declaration, September 5, 2024. (CNA/Daniel Ibáñez)



Pope Francis' meeting with those who benefit from the work of charitable organisations in Indonesia. (Vatican Media)



## Pope's visit to Papua New Guinea September 6-9, 2024



Pope Francis getting ready to board a flight of the Royal Australian Air Force from Port Moresby to the remote town of Vanimo, Papua New Guinea. (Credit/VAMP Pool)



Pope Francis exchanges a smile with children and a Missionary of Charity in Port Moresby (Vatican Media)



Two children, one of them holding a statue of Blessed Peter To Rot, await the visit of Pope Francis at the Caritas Technical Secondary School in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, September 7, 2024. (CNA/Daniel Ibáñez)



## Pope's visit to Timor Leste – September 9-11, 2024



Missionaries of Charity attending the meeting of Pope Francis with bishops, priests, deacons, consecrated persons, seminarians, and catechists at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, Dili, East Timor, September 10, 2024. (CNA/Courtney Mares)



Pope Francis' visit to the Irmãs Alma school in Dili, September 10, 2024. (Vatican Media)



(Vatican Media)

# The Bishop as “catechist par excellence”

In the previous article, I examined the role of the bishops in the ministry of catechesis from the First Vatican Council to the early 20th century. In this article, I will discuss their contribution from the Second Vatican Council to the publication of the General Catechetical Directory in 1971.

### Second Vatican Council (1962 – 1965)

The Second Vatican Council was the twenty first ecumenical council in the history of the Church. St. Paul VI often referred to the Council as “the great Catechism of modern times”. At the Council, the responsibility of the bishops for catechesis was again emphasised. In the document, *Christus Domini*, n. 14, the tasks of the bishop are stated as follows:

1. Bishops should ensure that catechetical instruction be given with diligent care to children, adolescents and adults.
2. Bishops should see to it that this instruction is based on Sacred Scripture, tradition, the liturgy, magisterium, and life of the Church.
3. Bishops should take care that catechists be properly trained for their task.
4. Bishops should also strive to renew or at least adapt in a better way the instruction of adult catechumens.

At the Council, a number of bishops also spoke about the “unfinished work” of the First Vatican Council and called for the preparation of a universal catechism. The majority of bishops, however, decided against a single catechism and suggested that a catechetical directory be produced instead. The directory would serve as a guidebook for the implementation of catechesis in the local churches. As a result, the ‘General Catechetical Directory’ was published in 1971.

### General Catechetical Directory (1971)

In itself, the General Catechetical Directory (GDC) is a unique document since it

was the first of its kind to be produced for use in the entire Church. It was published in accordance with the Second Vatican Council document on the Decree on the Bishop’s Pastoral Office, known in Latin as *Christus Dominus* (n. 44). Here, the Council, besides calling for the revision of the Canon Law and the preparation of a directory for the pastoral care of special groups of the faithful, also requested the compilation of:

“...a directory for the catechetical instruction of the Christian people in which the fundamental principles of this instruction and its organisation will be dealt with and the preparation of books relating to it.

Interestingly, there are a number of observations that can be made in the preparation of the GDC.

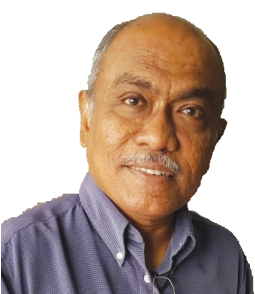
Firstly, that the directive for the preparation the catechetical directory is placed in the document for the bishops highlights again the essential relationship between the bishop and the ministry of catechesis.

Secondly, the directory itself was primarily intended for the bishops, as well as, for Bishop Conferences, and generally, for all those who, under the leadership of the bishops, have responsibilities in the catechetical field.

Thirdly, while the initial draft of the GDC was prepared by a team of catechetical experts, the views and observations of bishops from different parts of the world were sought, especially at the second stage of the preparation of the document.

### Catechesi Tradendae (1979)

In 1977, the International Synod of Bishops was held in Rome with catechesis as its focus. It was the first major gathering



Echoing the Faith  
DR STEVEN SELVARAJU

of bishops from the entire world to discuss the theme of catechesis. Soon after the synod, St John Paul II promulgated one of the most important documents on catechesis, *Catechesi Tradendae* (CT). In addressing the bishops, the pope states:

“Dear beloved Brothers, you have here a special mission within your Churches; you are beyond all others the ones primarily responsible for catechesis, the catechists par excellence. Together, with the Pope, in the spirit of episcopal collegiality, you too have charge of catechesis throughout the Church” (CT, 63).

### The bishop is primarily responsible for catechesis

According to the pope, the bishop is the person most responsible for catechesis. He is “the catechist par excellence”. The pope goes on to say that although the ministry of the bishop grows more complex and overwhelming daily, whereby, “A thousand duties call you: from the training of new priests to being actively present within the lay communities, from the living, worthy celebration of the sacraments and acts of worship to concern for human advancement and the defence of human rights...”

“... but let the concern to foster active and effective catechesis yield to no other care whatever in any way” (CT, 63).

The concern of the bishop for catechesis should lead him to personally transmit the doctrine of life to the faithful. He should take on the chief management of catechesis in the diocese. In addition, he has to bring about and maintain a “real passion” for catechesis and put in place the necessary

personnel, means, equipment, and financial resources. To emphasise this point, the pope states:

“You can be sure that if catechesis is done well in your local Churches, everything else will be easier to do” (CT, 63).

### The bishop shares the responsibility with the pope

Bishops, says the pope, share responsibility for catechesis for the whole Church with the Roman Pontiff. Together with the pope, they participate in the task of teaching and safeguarding the faith. He reminds the bishops:

“... although your zeal must sometimes impose upon you the thankless task of denouncing deviations and correcting errors, it will much more often win for you the joy and consolation of seeing your Churches flourishing because catechesis is given in them as the Lord wishes” (CT, 63).

### Conclusion


It has to be observed that from the Second Vatican Council onwards, the role of the bishop in catechesis has an added dimension. That is, his responsibility is not only confined to his diocese. It extends to the whole Church in a spirit of collegiality with other bishops under the leadership of the Holy Father. In the next article, I will conclude the discussion on the role of the bishop in catechesis in relation to the principle of collegiality.

The key ideas of the article are presented in a simple illustrated format as below. The images are taken from public domain.

● Dr Steven Selvaraju, STD, STL, holds a Doctorate in Theology with Specialisation in Catechetics and Youth Ministry from Pontifical Salesian University, Rome. He serves as Director of the Archdiocesan Catechetical Centre, Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.


## THE BISHOP AS “CATECHIST PAR EXCELLENCE”

The Second Vatican Council, which St. Paul VI referred to as “the great Catechism of modern times” also emphasised the important role of the bishop in catechesis.




In the document, *Christus domini*, n. 14, the Council states bishops should ensure that:

- Catechetical instruction is given to children, teenagers and adults.
- The instruction is based on Scripture, Tradition, liturgy, the Magisterium and life of the Church.
- Catechists are to be properly trained.
- A proper way of catechising adult catechumens should be

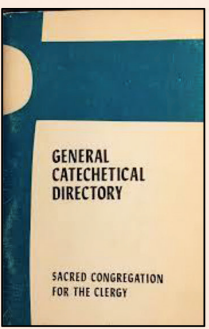


At the Council, a number of bishops called for the preparation of a universal catechism. The majority of bishops, however, decided against it and suggested that a catechetical directory be produced instead. As a result, the General Catechetical Directory was published in 1971.



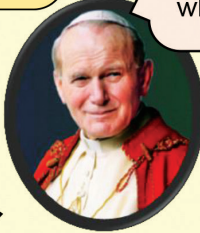
The Directory was a unique document in that:

- The directive for its preparation is placed in the document for the bishops (*Christus domini*, 14).
- It was intended mainly for the bishops and Bishop Conferences.
- Bishops from different parts of the world were invited to give their views and observances before its publication.



In 1977, the International Synod of Bishops on the theme of Catechesis was held in Rome. In 1979, the encyclical, *Catechesi tradendae*, was promulgated by St. John Paul II. In addressing the bishops, the pope stated...

Dear beloved Brothers, you have here a special mission within your Churches; you are beyond all others the ones primarily responsible for catechesis, the catechists par excellence. Together, with the Pope, in the spirit of episcopal collegiality, you too have charge of catechesis throughout the Church (CT, 63).



... let the concern to foster active and effective catechesis yield to no other care in whatever in any way.

You can be sure that if catechesis is done well in your local Churches, everything else will be easier to do.

Carmel Dominic

It may be unthinkable for most of us to go into full time missionary work. The mere thought of giving up a stable income and the comforts of home is not a sacrifice we are willing to make. Nonetheless, there are many who have purposely and purposefully decided to make full time missionary work their life-style. These are the everyday lay people who have chosen to heed the calling of a life spent in sacrifice, servanthood and utter dependence on God for absolutely everything.

Having said that, the rest of us are also missionaries. As Pope Francis has reminded us time and time again, since the establishment of the Synod, that we are all missionaries by virtue of the Sacrament of Baptism and Confirmation. This means we reflect the love of Christ to the people around us in the little things that we do in everyday life. But a lay missionary does so much more than that. Yes, the ultimate goal is the same — to win souls for Jesus, but their approach is far more in-depth.

Lay missionary work in a nutshell, is more about the active involvement of the lay faithful in the Church's mission to evangelise, utilising their unique positions in society to spread the Gospel and embody Christian values in everyday life. This mission is supported by the Church through formation, encouragement, and a call for collaborative efforts among all members of the Church. (CCC 898 to 907).

This writer had the opportunity to speak with two full time lay missionaries — Lavinia and Alicia Antoine. Now, if their names seem familiar to you, it's because they are the daughters to Jude and Veronica Antoine, the pioneering duo who paved the way for full time lay missionaries in Malaysia. While Jude and Veronica have dedicated their lives to serving God for the last 30 years, it was not the life they wished for their daughters; and what's more, the sisters did not desire that for themselves either.

Lavinia, 29, was keen on having a career as a practicing clinical psychologist. She had interned with the Malaysian Psychological Association and was working for them for about half a year after her graduation. She was fully intending on opening her own private practice for counselling.

Alicia on the other hand, 28, graduated with a degree in Communications. She was

working with a marketing agency and was responsible for the public relations of its clients. She too

# Building a house of mission



worked for about half a year after graduation. Her dream was to work in advertising for a fashion magazine.

While they had their own ambitions, their hearts never strayed from Jesus. They were active in their home parish — Church of St Joseph in Sentul and served in various ministries. They also started their own ministry focusing on young people and ran programmes for youths throughout Malaysia.

Having been raised in a home that ran entirely on God's generous and sufficient providence, the sisters wanted to honour and show gratitude to God's faithfulness to their family. So, they decided to take a year off from their normal lives and go on mission trips. They had fully intended on returning to their normal lives once the year was over, but God clearly had other plans for them.

In that year, they went on mission to various countries and had their fair share of challenges while spreading the Gospel. When asked how they overcame language and cultural barriers, Lavinia had this to say.

"Once you meet and fall in love with Jesus, the most natural thing to do is to tell others of His amazing love. So, we used whatever resources that was available to us to convey that message. Sometimes, we had translators and other times, we use Google translate."

The sisters explained that while they did preach on street corners, God also directed them to specific people that needed to hear the Good News. They shared some of the encounters that they experienced while on mission. A good encounter would end with the sisters praying with the person and guiding them into having a personal relationship with Jesus in the days that follow. The sisters also had some unpleasant encounters.

"I was handing out pamphlets on the streets in Japan one day, and saw a man who was cuddling a baby. I like babies, and so, I approached him and complimented him on the baby. I also took the opportunity to speak to him about Jesus. It was this point that I realised that he wasn't carrying a baby but a doll! He promptly tore up the pamphlet, screamed at me and ran off," Alicia shared.

"A lady in the UK literally screamed at me to get away from her and threatened 'to choke the daylight out of me and suck my soul'. And all I said to her was hello. I think she could sense what my intention was. She walked away angrily mumbling threats," Lavinia recalled.

It was also at this time, that the sisters felt God calling them to be full time missionaries. Understandably, they resisted the call as they

had plans for their lives. But God patiently and continuously pursued them through Scripture and by sending people to affirm their calling over a period of time. Once they were convicted of their calling, they spoke to their parents about it. In a surprising turn of events, both their parents became their biggest and most vocal naysayers.

As a father, Jude wanted to be sure that his girls would be able to withstand the magnitude of what their calling entailed. He also wanted to make sure that this was a decision that they made with a clear conscience. The sisters recounted how their father tested them by being critical and negative. As it turned out, it was a necessary lesson for them, as it built their trust and dependence on the Holy Spirit for their lives work. He was convicted that this was God's call on their life when they stood resolute despite his many curveballs. Their mother, vehemently disagreed with their decision because she knew first hand what sacrifices and challenges full time missionary life presented. She wanted her daughters to have an easier life than she did. But when the Holy Spirit convicted her heart, she didn't question it anymore and gave her blessings.

Soon after, the sisters resigned from their jobs and received the blessings from Archbishop Julian Leow and officially became full time missionaries in July 2019. Then, it was just a period of waiting. At this point, the Holy Spirit had already revealed to them in their personal prayer time what their mission was — to start a Catholic lay missionary organisation that raised up a generation of young people to be evangelist.

"We prayed together and God spoke to us through Scripture, specifically through the book of Ezra and Nehemiah which is primarily about rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. And what God was asking us to do was to rebuild and equip the Catholic church with young people who would be able to step out on full time missions. He also told us that He would open the World's door for us through the book of Jeremiah and even told us that this organisation would function as an *Oikos* evangelisation (household evangelisation). This was also how God would provide missionaries for the organisation."

The organisation is now known as Kasih House of Missions (KHOM) and is based in Slovakia. The sisters train a small group of young people

to rise up to their full potential of God's call in their life to step out in faith to evangelise. And as God promised, He provided missionaries from all over the world for KHOM through CROSSROAD School of Discipleship. The sisters started this school during the waiting period which was at the height of COVID-19. Since this was an online school, people from all over the world were able to participate and some of them eventually joined the sisters in KHOM as missionaries. Crossroad is now one of the many programmes that KHOM now leads. God was and still is faithful by not only providing for them at every stage but also dealing with every obstacle and giving them direction.

As a team, KHOM runs seminars, conferences, formations, retreats and evangelises throughout the world and is sustained entirely on God's mercy, grace and providence. It is clear that the plans that God had for the Antoine sisters was and is far more fulfilling than what they had originally planned for themselves.

"It has been six years now. We love this life. Everyday is a good day and everyday is a new adventure. No two days alike. This lifestyle is not a bed of roses but the ultimate joy for us is to see how God moves and to be able to witness the tangible hand of God every day. We feel so blessed that God has chosen us to live this life," the Antoine sisters said with big smiles.



# Kisses of fraternity : Iconic image during Francis' journey to this region

Pope Francis' journey to this region has been significant in more ways than one.

He arrived in Southeast Asia to see a region whose challenges mirror many of the same problems plaguing the rest of the world: climate change, religious extremism, human trafficking, drug trafficking — and even a genocide and uprising in Myanmar.

On September 5, the bishop of Rome and Indonesia's grand imam signed a joint declaration with leaders of other faiths, which focused on the first two of these threats. This was probably the highlight of his visit.

The "Joint Declaration of Istiqlal 2024" aims, as its subtitle suggests, to further the cause of "fostering religious harmony for the sake of humanity".

The two-page declaration focuses on "dehumanisation and climate change".

It decries the global phenomenon of dehumanisation marked by widespread violence and conflict. In this, "religion is often instrumentalised".

The declaration also states that "the human exploitation of creation, our common home, has contributed to climate change".

It calls on the various faiths to "defeat the culture of violence and indifference afflicting our world". In its place should be "a culture of respect, dignity, compassion, reconciliation



**Sunday Observer**

ANIL NETTO

and fraternal solidarity".

In all this, inter-religious dialogue can play a huge role in resolving conflict at various levels and overcoming threats to the world.

Across the Straits of Malacca and South China Sea, many Christians in Malaysia looked on with interest at Francis' visit to Indonesia.

In Malaysia, Christians are a minority at nine per cent (Catholics almost five per cent) compared to 10 per cent (Catholics three per cent) in Indonesia. Somewhat similar, a

small minority.

Yet, it was heartening to see the ease with which Muslim in Indonesia accepted Francis' visit with grace and even warmly welcomed him to their land, the largest Muslim nation in the world.

The most enduring image was that of Francis and Indonesia's Grand Imam Nasaruddin Umar exchanging kisses. This was a powerful reminder of the bond of fraternity that is much needed between the world's two largest faiths.

The image was widely shared across the region and who knows how far those ripples will reach.

Many in Malaysia hope that the goodwill generated from the encounter between leaders of these two major faiths in Indonesia will spill over to the rest of the region.

Referring to the Istiqlal Mosque in Jakarta, the largest in the region, Francis noted it was designed by the architect Friedrich Silaban, a Christian. The mosque is linked by an underground "tunnel of friendship" to the Cathedral of St Mary of the Assumption. This allows these two places of worship to be "connected" to each other.

Francis used the tunnel as a metaphor to drive home a couple of points.

On the surface, the mosque and the cathedral are well defined and frequented by their respective faithful. But underground, the same people can meet and encounter each other's religious perspectives.

"This image reminds us of the important fact that the visible aspects of religions — the rites, practices and so on — are a heritage that must be protected and respected," he said.

"However, we could say that what lies 'underneath', what runs underground, like the 'tunnel of friendship', is the one root common to all religious sensitivities: the quest for an encounter with the divine, the thirst for the infinite that the Almighty has placed in our hearts, the search for a greater joy and a life stronger than any type of death, which animates the journey of our lives and impels us to step out of ourselves to encounter God."

Profound words.

The bishop of Rome also stressed the importance of preserving the bonds between the different faiths, like a tunnel creating a bond between two places.

But this does not mean discarding or overlooking our differences. "Sometimes we

think that a meeting between religions is a matter of seeking common ground between different religious doctrines and beliefs no matter the cost."

But such an approach, he warned, may end up dividing us, because the doctrines and dogmas of each religious experience are different.

"What really brings us closer is creating a connection in the midst of diversity, cultivating bonds of friendship, care and reciprocity. These relationships link us to others, allowing us to commit ourselves to seek the truth together, learning from the religious tradition of others, and coming together to meet our human and spiritual needs."

More than that, these bonds allow us to work together and move forward together in pursuit of the same goals. And what are these goals? The "defence of human dignity, the fight against poverty and the promotion of peace".

Yes, the challenges facing our region are legion — like the demons that possessed the man from the tombs in the region of the Gerasenes.

But by building bridges of fraternity and understanding between our faiths, we can form bonds that connect us and allow us to confront these problems together — and ultimately cast them away.

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

This is hardly the headline you might have expected to see in this column but it provides the starting point for contemplation as we're in the Season of Creation: a global ecumenical celebration of prayer and action to protect our common home. Have you wondered: what is the end game of *Caring for God's Creation, for Laudato Si'*?

The name *Laudato Si'* provides some clues: it "Praise be to you my Lord", which is the opening line of the beautiful canticle of Saint Francis of Assisi, sets the tone.

To begin with, we must consider the universal for all Christians which is to be union with Christ: to follow Christ and to make Christ and His Gospel — His Good News — present in the world. Hence, this is the first premise and should be our primary concern: the state of our own souls. That we remain right with God — first.

And for us Catholic Christians, this clearly resounds in our profession of faith in the (Apostle's) Creed: "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth" setting the stage for the order of priorities in our life. Firstly, we worship God, precisely because the world was created for God's glory.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (paragraph 319) reminds us that God created the world to show forth and communicate his glory. That His creatures should share in His truth, goodness and beauty — this is the glory for which God created them. Our hymn "All Creatures of Our God and King", reminds us that indeed all creatures recognise the might and godhead of our Creator.

Caring for ecology is also caring for the state of our souls, said Pope Francis. As good Jesuit priest once preached in his homily, that it is to the peril of our souls if we associate the environmental destruction as the end of the world. As Jesus Himself aptly reminded us in Mark 8:36 and as St Ignatius himself warned St Francis Xavier, we can paraphrase: "What profits mankind if he saves the environment

## What profits mankind if he saves the environment but loses his soul?

but loses his soul?". Survival on earth and salvation of our souls are not mutually exclusive.

Thus, caring for God's creation is a call to worship the Creator (and only) then to sanctify his creatures.

The central message of *Laudato Si'*, is the call to recognise the importance integral ecology. The call to care for the God's creation not merely for the sake of saving the environment alone — its trees, the rivers, the animals and wildlife, but because we recognise how its destruction adversely impacts and hurts human life particularly the poor, and the vulnerable.

"When creation suffers, it hurts most the poorest of people. Poor people generally must depend so much more on the water, on the climate because that's how they make their living. They are very vulnerable to climate change," said Dr Carolyn Woo, the former President and CEO of Catholic Relief Services, points out in the Catholic Social Teaching 101 video series.

She cited for instance farmers who experience two to three degrees increase in temperature, cannot grow the same thing in the same area. "So, the care for creation translates directly into the care for our brothers and sisters," Dr Woo points out.

Hence, our care for creation must extend to the care of the human person — their dignity, rights and needs particularly the poor and the marginalised. In Malaysia, the indigenous peoples (Orang Asli and Orang Asal) and local communities (IPLCs) who live within the



**In the Beginning**

MARY TERRA

fringes of forests, riverine and coastal areas are the guardians of the forests, and depend on these landscapes to support and supplement their livelihood to provide for their B40 families. Environmental degradation including deforestation, river and coastal pollution, unsustainable development, as well as degazettement and land use issues continue to plague these communities. Similarly, those with little to no access to clean potable water and clean sanitation.

Another group of communities that are often overlooked in the discussion on climate change is those displaced due to floods. Displacement due to floods is a real and present danger in Malaysia. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) revealed that there were 354,000 climate-related internal displacements between 2016 and 2021. In 2021, floods triggered around 129,000 internal displacements in Malaysia compared with 24,000 in 2020. In 2022, IDMC recorded 156,000 people displaced due to floods, landslides, and storms: signs of a changing climate.

In the CST 101 video series, Cardinal Peter Turkson, President, Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace highlighted: "Caring for creation, it calls for a certain kind of unity of reciprocal relationship between man and his environment. We receive the earth as a garden. It would be very unfair if we pass on the earth as a wilderness".

The life of St Francis of Assisi whose feastday

marks the end of the Season of Creation, offers us a timely inspiration for an orderly love. While to most of modern day society, St Francis is known for his love for animals and creation, he loved Triune God first. then he loved the poor and the nature. He recognized God who created the earth, the skies, the seas, the trees, the animals, and finally, men and women in his image and likeness.

The watershed moment in Francis' life was his chance encounter with a leper. Francis, who hailed from an aristocrat family was accustomed to the finer things in life: loving beauty and hating deformity. He encountered the leper while riding his horse through the countryside and although initially he repelled by the sight and smell of the leper, he got down off his horse and offered him the kiss of peace. As the leper returned his embrace, Francis found himself surprisingly overjoyed. It was in the leper, that he experienced an authentic encounter with Jesus. It was soon after this that Francis would hear Christ asking him to rebuild his Church from the cross of San Damiano.

Let us pray and ask God for the grace to move away from disordered affections but to love like St Francis of Assisi did: loving God first, our neighbour including our loved ones and the poor and marginalised and then, all other created things.

*(In the Beginning offers ruminations from Mary Terra, a not-so-young Catholic striving for holiness with a desire to grow in grace and leave behind a legacy of love for God, for others and all his other creatures. and hopefully leave this earth with a significantly reduced ecological footprint)*



Fr Ron Rolheiser

# Our real legacy —the energy we leave behind

Several years ago, at a time when the national news was much fixated on a high-profile case of sexual harassment, I asked three women colleagues: “what constitutes sexual harassment? What’s the line here that may not be crossed? What’s innocent behaviour and what’s harassment?” They answered to this effect. It’s not so much a question of a clear line, a certain remark or behaviour that goes too far. Rather, we know what is innocent and what is not. We can read the energy beneath the behaviour. We know when it’s harassment and when it’s not.

I have no doubt that in most instances this is true. All of us have very perceptive inner radar screens. We naturally feel and read the energy in a room – tension, ease, jealousy, affirmation, innocence, aggression. You see this already in very young children, even babies, who can sense ease or tension in a room.

It is interesting that the great Carmelite mystic John of the Cross, draws on this notion when he writes on discernment in spiritual direction. How, he asks, do you discern if a person is in a genuine dark night of the soul (a healthy thing) or whether he is sad and down because of an emotional depression or because of bad moral behaviour? John elaborates a

number of criteria for discerning this, but ultimately they all come down to reading the energy that the person is radiating. Are they bringing oxygen into the room or are they sucking the oxygen out of the room? Are they depressing you as you listen to them? If yes, then their issue is not spiritual nor healthy. People who are in an authentic dark night of the soul, irrespective of their personal interior struggle, bring positive energy into a room and leave you inspired rather than depressed.

My purpose in sharing is not for us to become more critical and start judging others by trying to consciously read the energy they are radiating. (We are already unconsciously doing that.) What I want to highlight rather, as a challenge, is for each of us to more consciously examine ourselves vis-à-vis what energy we are bringing into a room and leaving behind.

Each of us needs to courageously ask: what energy do I bring into a room? What energy do I bring to the family table? To a community gathering? To those with whom I discuss politics and religion? To my colleagues and fellow workers? To the social circles within which I move? And more deeply, as a parent or as an elder, what energy am I habitually bringing to my children and to the young? As some-

one teaching or doing ministry, what energy am I radiating as I try to lead others?

That’s a critical question. What energy am I habitually bringing into a room and leaving behind? Frustration? Anger? Chaos? Jealousy? Paranoia? Bitterness? Depression? Instability? Or am I bringing and leaving behind some stability, some sanity, some joy of heart, some energy that blesses rather than curses others? Ultimately, what am I leaving behind?

When Jesus is giving his farewell speech in John’s Gospel, he tells us that it is better for us that he is going away because otherwise we will not be able to receive his spirit; and that his spirit, his final gift to us, is the gift of peace. Two things should be noted here: first, that the disciples couldn’t fully receive what Jesus was giving them until he had gone away; and second, that ultimately his real gift to them, his real legacy, was the peace he left behind with them.

What may seem strange at first glance is that his followers could only fully inhale his energy after he had gone away and left them his spirit. That is also true for each of us. It is only after we leave a room that the energy we left behind is most clear. Thus, it is after we die that the energy we have left behind will constitute

our real legacy. If we live in anger and bitterness, in jealousy and unwillingness to affirm others, and if our lives sow chaos and instability, that will be what we ultimately leave behind and will always be part of our legacy. Conversely, if we are trustworthy and live unselfishly, morally, at peace with others, bringing sanity and affirmation into a room, then, like Jesus, we will leave behind a gift of peace. That will be our legacy, the oxygen we leave on the planet after we are gone.

And this is not a question of who can best light up a room with humour and banter, good as these can be. It is rather a question of who has enough personal integrity so as to bring trust and stability into a room?

Given all this, it’s good to ask oneself: when I enter a room am I bringing some oxygen into that room or am I sucking some oxygen out of that room?

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

## SOCIAL JUSTICE



### Making a Difference

Tony Magliano

## Everything and everyone is connected

About 1,600 years ago, the brilliant Doctor of the Church St Ambrose admonished those of wealth who clung to their sense of entitlement: “You are not making a gift of what is yours to the poor man, but you are giving him back what is his. You have been appropriating things that are meant to be for the common use of everyone. The earth belongs to everyone, not to the rich.”

With these prophetic words, St Ambrose eloquently highlighted and linked together the Catholic social teaching principles known today as the “preferential concern for the poor and vulnerable,” the “common good,” and the “care for creation.”

And in our day, Pope Francis has voiced similar concerns; especially in his encyclical letter *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home* – a must read. In his own prophetic way, the Holy Father warns: “When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities – to offer just a few examples – it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected.”

Yes, everything is connected! We have no time to waste in recognising, healing, and strengthening these connections. We are linked together in a common bond. And it is crucial to become aware that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Thus, we need to shore up every single link of the Creator’s good and wonderful creation.



(Unsplash photo)

And there’s no better time to begin than now, during this “Season of Creation” which runs from September 1 to October 4 – the feast of St Francis of Assisi patron saint of ecology.

More than ever before, much of our planet, and many of our people, are greatly suffering. Here are just two of the many tragic examples: 2023 was the world’s hottest year on record (see: <https://www.noaa.gov/news/2023-was-worlds-warmest-year-on-record-by-far> and <https://www.ucsusa.org/climate>), and global hunger is at a historic level with 42 million people in 45 countries languishing on the brink of starvation (see: <https://bit.ly/4e4Az9W>).

A popular phrase from Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si’* captures this dreadful reality quite well: “We must hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (see: <https://bit.ly/3z1iZoo>).

Don’t miss the inspiring film featuring Pope Francis called *The Letter: A message for our Earth* (see: <https://www.theletterfilm.org/watch/>). Consider making it a parish event.

<https://bit.ly/3z1iZoo>).

One of the social justice, peace, pro-life bumper stickers on my car reads: “Make Everyday Earth Day.” Yes, indeed, not just one day, and even not just during the “Season of Creation,” but furthermore may we remember that each day of life beckons us to cherish, protect, pray for, and celebrate our awesome God’s awesome creation!

The inspiring Catholic social justice and peace activist, and “Servant of God” Dorothy Day, said, “Like Dostoevsky, I began to believe that the world would be saved by beauty.” Looking upon the sun, the moon, and the stars, Day said to her atheist live-in partner, “How can there be no God when there are all these beautiful things?” With further reflection she concluded, “It was this beautiful, natural world that slowly led me back to God.”

Like Dorothy Day, may each of us allow God’s beautiful creation to lead us to a far deeper appreciation of our awesome Creator and his awesome creation!

Like Dorothy Day, may each of us allow God’s beautiful creation to lead us to a far deeper appreciation of our awesome Creator and his awesome creation!

*Tony Magliano is an internationally syndicated Catholic social justice and peace columnist. He is available to speak at diocesan or parish gatherings. Tony can be reached at [tmag6@comcast.net](mailto:tmag6@comcast.net).*

# Little Catholics's Corner

Dear children,

If I were to ask you, "Who is the greatest person who ever lived?" What would your answer be? Would you name a famous athlete? A movie star? A world leader?

You might be surprised to know that even Jesus' disciples had an argument themselves about which

of them was the greatest.

Jesus overheard them, and when they got to the place where they were going, Jesus said to them, "If anyone wants to be first," he said, "he must be the very last, and be the servant of everyone else."

The disciples were hoping to hear Jesus say that they were going to

have a position of great importance in His kingdom.

Instead, Jesus called a little child over to Him and took him in His arms. "Anyone who welcomes one of these little children also welcomes Me; and whoever welcomes Me, also welcomes the one who sent Me."

Who is the greatest person who

ever lived? I think we would all agree that Jesus Christ was the greatest person who ever lived. Why? Because, although He was God, He gave up all of His divine privileges and became a servant.

Until we meet again next week, be good, okay?

Love  
Aunty Eliz

Complete the paragraph by filling in the blanks with the correct words from the word bank at side of the story.

last  
Anyone  
child

placed  
welcomes  
servant

arms  
Twelve  
welcome

child  
welcomes  
first

Sitting down, Jesus called the \_\_\_\_\_ and said, "\_\_\_\_\_ who wants to be \_\_\_\_\_ must be the very \_\_\_\_\_, and the \_\_\_\_\_ of all." He took a little \_\_\_\_\_ whom he \_\_\_\_\_ among them. Taking the \_\_\_\_\_ in His \_\_\_\_\_, He said to them, "Whoever \_\_\_\_\_ one of these little children in my name \_\_\_\_\_ me; and whoever \_\_\_\_\_ me does not \_\_\_\_\_ Me but the one who sent Me."  
(Mark 9: 35-37)



Let's Colour



To read the message in Psalms 1:1-2, decipher the hidden code.



is the one



who does not \_\_\_\_\_ in step with the \_\_\_\_\_

or \_\_\_\_\_ in the way that \_\_\_\_\_ take

or sit in the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_

but whose \_\_\_\_\_ is in the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Lord,

and who \_\_\_\_\_ on his law \_\_\_\_\_



(Psalm 1: 2)

\_\_\_\_\_ walk \_\_\_\_\_ wicked \_\_\_\_\_ stand \_\_\_\_\_ delight  
\_\_\_\_\_ blessed \_\_\_\_\_ mockers \_\_\_\_\_ company \_\_\_\_\_ law  
\_\_\_\_\_ sinners \_\_\_\_\_ day and night \_\_\_\_\_ meditates



# Pope calls Singaporean youth to unity during interreligious dialogue

Deborah Castellano Lubov

SINGAPORE: Pope Francis took part in an interreligious dialogue with young people, urging them to commit themselves to unity and hope among the youth of various faiths in Singapore.

Some 600 participants from more than 50 schools and interfaith and religious organisations attended the event.

This marked Pope Francis' final event before his departure from Asia to Rome after his four-nation 45th Apostolic Journey abroad, which also brought him to Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and Timor-Leste.

## The pledge of the young people

During the event, the young people committed themselves to the "Pledge of the Future Generation to work for Unity and Hope."

After the Pope's speech and before a moment of silent prayer, the young people recited, "We, the future generation, pledge to be a beacon of unity and hope by promoting cooperation and friendships that nurture the harmonious co-existence between people of diverse beliefs."

The Holy Father was greeted with testimonies of a young Hindu, Sikh, and Catholic, to whom he encouraged their personal faith journey, but appealed for them to walk together and toward the common good.

## Dictatorships take away dialogue

In a spontaneous exchange with the young people, the Holy Father invited them to leave their comfort zones, and have the courage to move



Pope Francis with young people at interreligious dialogue event in Singapore's Catholic Junior College. (Vatican Media)

forward and offer constructive criticism.

"If you dialogue as young people, then you will be able to do so as citizens and as members of a community."

Throughout history, the Holy Father pointed out, "the first thing a dictatorship does is take away dialogue."

## Do not be afraid

In his remarks, the Pope told them to take risks and to engage the world. "Do not be afraid," he said, noting that fear is a dictatorial attitude that "can paralyse you."

He acknowledged that young people, like everyone else, will inevitably make mistakes.

"It is normal to make mistakes," but what matters more, he suggested, is recognising it, and starting over.

Turning to technology, and other forms of social media, which came up during the testimonies, the Holy Father called these tools useful, but warned against becoming enslaved by them.

Pope Francis with young people at interreligious dialogue event in Singapore's Catho-

lic Junior College.

## All children of God

The Holy Father went on to invite those gathered to join him in praying together for one another.

"May God bless all of us, and when time passes and you are not young people, but older, and become grandparents," he urged. "Pass this on."

## God for all

"God is God for all, and if God is God for all," he said, "then we are all sons and daughters of God."

"We are all sons and daughters of God."

"All religions are paths to reach God," said Pope Francis. "They are — to make a comparison — like different languages, different dialects, to get there. But God is God for everyone."

The Holy Father thanked the young people for engaging in interreligious dialogue, for respecting one another, and reassured them of his prayers. **Vatican News**



# Freedom means choosing to respect others,

## Pope to Timorese youth

TIMOR LESTE: "I have two words of advice for you: make a mess and respect your elders!"

Pope Francis offered those words of advice on Wednesday as he met with the young people of Timor-Leste in the capital, Dili.

The encounter was held at the Congress Centre and was the final public event of the Holy Father's Apostolic Journey to Timor-Leste.

In his address, the Pope noted that young people make up a clear majority of the population of 1.4 million, of whom over 95% are Catholic, praising their enthusiasm in living the faith.

Pope Francis said he would never forget the smiles he found on the faces of the Timorese people.

He also invited Timorese youth to recall

the sacrifices their forefathers made in laying the foundations of the nation, and took the opportunity to urge them to respect their elders.

A society, he noted, has two treasures: young people and the elderly.

"The children and the elderly," said the Pope. "A society that has so many children like you must take care of them. And one that has so many elderly, who are the memory, must respect and care for them."

Pope Francis spoke briefly about the three values of "freedom, commitment, and fraternity."

He recalled a saying in the Tetum language of Timor-Leste — "ukun rasik-an" which means "everyone is able to govern themselves."

The Pope said young people should recall



the true meaning and purpose of freedom.

"To be free does not mean doing what we want," he said, noting that freedom means respecting others and caring for our common home.

He also recalled the value of "fraternity" and the importance of reconciliation.

"You, in this smiling country, have a won-

derful history of heroism, faith, martyrdom, and above all, faith and reconciliation," he said.

Pope Francis concluded his meeting with young Timorese by urging them to recall the example that Jesus gave in forgiveness and reconciliation. **By Devin Watkins, Vatican News**

# INDONESIAN YOUTH URGE POPE TO SPREAD MESSAGE OF GLOBAL PEACE

Deborah Castellano Lubov and Linda Bordini

In an interview with *Vatican News* on September 4 in Jakarta, Maria Paz Jurado, Director of Scholas Occurrentes' International Projects, conveyed a heartfelt plea for Pope Francis to share a message of peace with the world. This appeal was made during the Pope's visit to Indonesia, part of his longest Apostolic Journey to date across Asia and Oceania.

Jurado's remarks came as Pope Francis concluded a series of significant meetings, including with local authorities, clergy, and his Jesuit peers. His final event of the day was a gathering with Scholas Occurrentes, a Vatican Foundation founded by the Pope, which focuses on engaging youth through education, art, and sports.

At the Grha Pemuda Youth House in Jakarta, the Pope was welcomed by around 200 young Indonesians from diverse islands, schools, and religions. The venue featured a prominent polyhedron sculpture, symbolising the themes of unity and diversity central to the gathering.

Jurado highlighted how Indonesia's core values resonate deeply with the Pope's message of peace and unity. "Indonesia embodies



Pope Francis' encounter with young people of Scholas Occurrentes in Jakarta (Vatican Media)

the principles Pope Francis advocates, particularly the concept of 'Unity in Diversity,' or 'Bhinneka Tunggal Ika,'" she said. "His presence here in the world's largest Muslim democracy is a powerful message of peace and dialogue for the entire globe."

Expressing excitement about the Pope's visit, Jurado emphasized the significance of hearing directly from young people about their hopes and concerns for the future. "We are thrilled that His Holiness is here to listen to the youth's aspirations and dreams for Indonesia and the world," she remarked.

The Pope's visit, noted Jurado, has energized the nation and highlighted the extensive work done with over 2,500 young people, including those in prison, through various social organisations. The polyhedron sculpture, designed in the shape of a heart, represents the heart of Indonesia and its commitment to diversity.

Jurado concluded with a heartfelt request: "From the heart of Indonesia, we ask Pope Francis to convey a message of peace to the world, reinforcing the values of unity and respect that we hold dear." **Vatican News**

## CHOOSE HARMONY, NOT DIVISION

PAPUA NEW GUINEA: Setting aside his prepared speech, Pope Francis engaged in a back-and-forth dialogue with the estimated 10,000 young people gathered at the Sir John Guise Stadium in Port Moresby.

### Young people's problems

Following a colourful welcome dance by a group of young people dressed in traditional attire, Bishop John Bosco Aoram of the Diocese of Kimbe greeted the Pope.

He highlighted the major challenges facing Papua New Guinean youth, such as living out Christian values within their families and society, limited opportunities for growth and development, and frustrations arising from unmet expectations of society, government, and even the Church.

### "Face the future with smiles of hope"

Pope Francis, for his part, expressed his joy at spending time in Papua New Guinea, a land of oceans, mountains, and tropical forests.

He noted that Papua is a young country filled with young people and is called to "to face the future with smiles of hope."

"Thank you for your joy, and for how you have shared the beauty of Papua, where the ocean meets the sky, where dreams are born, and challenges arise," the Pope said. **By Renato Martinez, Vatican News**



Young people performing in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. (Vatican Media)

## CONFIRMATION STUDENTS EXPERIENCE TRANSFORMATIVE GROWTH

MASAI, Johor: The Church of St Theresa celebrated the Sacrament of Confirmation last month. Bishop Bernard Paul presided over the Mass with parish priest Fr Cyril Mannayagam concelebrating. A total of 55 candidates received the sacrament, comprising 21 students and 34 adults.

In preparation for this sacrament, the parish provided special formation for the students, complementing the Malaysian Catechetical series. This year, the parish catechetical team, in collaboration with Caritas Parish Office for Human Development (POHD) led by Caroline, and Deacon Dr Leslie Petrus, organised a series of activities and formation sessions addressing current issues. The students engaged eagerly in these sessions, which were greatly enriched by the unity of the three language groups within the parish. This unity was a testament to our goal of working together as one Church.

Some of the activities were as follows:

### Street Feeding - May 29

Our community service began with a street feeding initiative where we connected with the less fortunate, offering them food and companionship. This humbling experience underscored the significance of small acts of kindness and generosity.

### Visiting Friends In Need (FINS) - June 15

We visited Friends In Need (FINS), an organisation supporting those in challenging situations. We interacted with beneficiaries, providing moral and material support, which reinforced our understanding of empathy and solidarity.

### Visiting Kampung Orang Asli - June 28

A highlight of our service was the visit to Kampung Orang Asli. We engaged the children with games, taught them hygiene practices, and stressed the importance of education. The joy and gratitude of the children and their families made this experience particularly rewarding.

### Marriage and Choosing a Partner

Deacon Petrus led a session on marriage and selecting a life partner, emphasizing mutual respect, love, and shared values as the foundation of a strong relationship.

### Catholic Sexuality, Pre-Marital Sex, and Sexual Health

Andrew Chew addressed Catholic teachings on sexuality, pre-marital sex, and sexual health with clarity, offering a comprehensive understanding of these important issues.

### Understanding Homosexuality and Gender Issues

Deacon Petrus's talk on homosexuality and gender issues was pivotal in fostering an inclusive and compassionate perspective, encouraging sensitivity and respect for human dignity.

### Effects of Pornography

Deacon Petrus discussed the negative impacts of pornography on individuals and relationships, advocating for purity and wholesome living.

### Recollection/Retreat

The retreat offered a six-hour reflection on faith and life decisions, guided by Deacon Petrus and Dr Milton Frank. The session focused on decision-making with the Holy Spirit's guidance, highlighting the importance of spiritual discernment.

### Call to Priesthood, Religious Life, or Lay Missionary Work

Fr Cyril delivered an inspiring talk on vocations, sharing stories and insights into the priesthood, religious life, and lay missionary work, encouraging us to consider dedicating our lives to service.

The 2024 Confirmation Class experienced a transformative year of growth, learning, and service. The activities and talks were crucial in our spiritual and personal development, and the lessons learned will guide us in our continued journey of faith and service. **Nathaniel Cassian Xavier**



Session by Deacon Dr Leslie Petrus on Catholic Marriage and choosing a partner.



Cooking for the Street Feeding.



Confirmation students with Bishop Bernard Paul.

# A tribute to Fr Jean-Claude



September 1, 2024, a Sunday that will be long remembered. We have lost a brilliant priest with a heart of gold and a true servant's spirit.

As cool as Jean-Claude Van Damme may be, he doesn't even come close to who Fr Jean-Claude Lourdes was. He was a man of endless knowledge and wisdom, with a peculiar charm unfamiliar to most, yet brilliant in every way. He had a genuine passion for both Star Wars and, most importantly, for imparting his knowledge to others. In the words of Yoda, "Pass on what you have learned."

I first got to know him in 2003 when he was appointed parish priest of the Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help (OLPH) Mentakab, succeeding Fr Christopher Soosaipillai. He would come, celebrate Mass, deliver an impactful sermon, and then be gone, leaving us to wonder if he was a magician priest.

It didn't take long to see the kind of person Fr JC was; a genuine soul with a remarkable depth of character. While he might have seemed like a "hard nut to crack" to some, this was only because his thoughts and perceptions were so advanced, always operating on a level beyond the ordinary.

He brought about several changes to the parish, one of the most notable being the introduction of altar girls, even before it was officially announced by the Archdiocese.

During his time at OLPH, Fr JC ensured that the feast day and Easter celebrations were always grand, with generous hospitality extended to the pilgrims. He was never one to settle for less; he always aimed to make a lasting impact.

He was dedicated to encouraging and empowering young leaders. For example, during Lent, he suggested the youth take charge of a Holy Week project, and we decided to build the Tomb of Jesus. Fr JC not only supported the idea wholeheartedly but also ensured we had everything we needed, demonstrating his openness to and support for the aspirations of young people.

He established a recording studio at OLPH and produced a Christmas album titled *Joy to the World*, featuring the children's choirs as the main singers. This involvement thrilled the children, making them feel truly valued and part of something significant. The recording sessions were a joy, and watching our parish priest with bulky headphones, acting as both conductor and producer, was a delightful experience. Fr. JC's eagerness to experiment and try new things showcased his unique

personality and genuine care for making the children feel important.

During his seven-year term in Mentakab, Fr JC faced both challenges and good times. At the height of the *HERALD* 'Allah' case, he was once interrogated by the police and asked, "How many children do you have?" and Fr JC responded, "300" referring to the parishioners under his care and that response threw the authorities off. He shared this story with us during a homily, evoking an image of Jesus being questioned by Pilate. Despite such challenges, he remained steadfast. Whenever the police conducted regular checks during Mass, Fr JC wasn't afraid to speak his mind. He never shied away from standing up for what was right, even when it came with significant risks.

Fr JC was one of the most egalitarian and compassionate people many of us knew. He was an advocate of the poor and the forgotten. He always stressed the importance of treating everyone equally with respect and never looking down on others, condemning the idea of politics and status within the Church. This sometimes upset people, much like how Jesus' truthfulness challenged the Pharisees and Scribes. His commitment to fairness and humility was unwavering.

His childlike nature had a profound impact on those around him, often bringing out the best in even the most hardened individuals. When Fr JC took the time to counsel someone with a tough exterior, his warmth and genuine concern would often melt their defences. He had a unique ability to connect on a deep level, using his wit and keen observation to gently break through barriers. By the end of their conversation, even the most guarded person would often feel a sense of renewal and openness.

I could go on and on about all the things Fr JC has done for his parishes, but prefer to cherish those elaborate details in my heart. I write this in hopes of rekindling the memories you've shared with this remarkable priest. This tribute serves to remind our community of the incredible gift we've received from God through Fr JC. When I went to meet Fr Jean-Claude, I found Christ.

It's a call for all of us to represent Christ in every encounter, embodying more of Him and less of ourselves. Like Fr Jean-Claude, till the very end, he was a faithful servant of God.

Let us keep the faith strong and treasure every moment spent with this amazing priest, who was truly 'Called to Faithfulness'. **Jennifer Peter**

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### 40th Days of Memorial



**MR ALBERT S/O JACOB PEREIRA**

8th June 1950 - 5th August 2024

We'll always remember  
That caring heart, That warm embrace, You always gave us.  
You being there for us, Through good and bad times,  
No matter what. We'll always remember You *Appa* because  
They'll never be another one to replace you in our hearts,  
And the love we will always Have for you.

Dearly missed and fondly cherished by beloved

Wife : Mdm Gathirin Theresa  
Children, Son & Daughter in Laws,  
Grandchildren, Siblings, Brother  
& Sister In Laws, Relatives and Friends.

### 25th Anniversary In Loving Memory of



**Anthony Marshall Joe Lopez**

Born on 20 March 1911

Returned to the Lord on 26 September 1999

*For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels,  
nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come,  
nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all  
creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God  
in Christ Jesus our Lord.  
Romans 8:38-39*

Forever in the memory of family, relatives and friends.

### In Loving Memory of Clarence Abraham



*May you be in the  
company of Angels  
and Saints in  
Heaven.*

*Eternal Rest  
grant unto him  
O Lord and let  
perpetual light  
shine upon him.*

*May his soul  
rest in peace.*

It's fifteen years since our loved one left us,  
yet loving memories linger on in our hearts.

### 3rd Anniversary In Loving Memory of Mdm Theresa Heng Eng

Departed on  
12th September 2021



*She was a woman like no other,  
She gave me life, nurtured me, taught me,  
fought for me, There is nothing like a mother's love,  
We miss you so much mom,  
Gone but never forgotten,  
We love you.*

Fondly remembered and missed by  
family and friends.

*Because of the tender mercy  
of our God,  
whereby the sunrise  
shall visit us from on high  
to give light to those who sit in  
darkness and in the  
shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into  
the way of peace."*

Luke 1:78-79

### 24th Anniversary In Loving Memory

**Gregory Kumar  
Kandasamy**

3rd September 1941 -  
22nd September 2000

*There's a special kind of feeling  
When we think about you,  
There's a special kind of caring  
That is meant for you alone,  
There's a special place  
within our hearts  
That only you can own.  
You will forever be our always*

Always on our minds, Forever in our hearts.  
Deeply missed and forever loved by:

Wife: Charlotte  
Children: Caroline & Jason  
Son-in-law: Alison Anthony  
Daughter-in-law: Marianne Chia  
Grand Daughters: Melanie, Maegan & Annamarie

## NOTICE

Effective  
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For enquiries, please contact:

**HERALD The Catholic Weekly**

5, Jalan Robertson, 50150 Kuala Lumpur

Tel/WhatsApp: 03-2026 8291 | E-mail: [advertisement@herald.com.my](mailto:advertisement@herald.com.my)

Website: [www.heraldmalaysia.com](http://www.heraldmalaysia.com)

## Holy Father discusses prayer and vocation with Jesuits

SINGAPORE: Pope Francis, on the fourth and final leg of his 45th Apostolic Journey abroad, held a heartfelt and intimate dialogue with Jesuits from Singapore and Malaysia at the St Francis Xavier Retreat Centre, September 11.

The meeting took place on Wednesday afternoon, just hours after the Pope's arrival in Singapore. This session with his Jesuit brothers was a notable highlight of the day, dedicated otherwise to rest for the Pope. The gathering brought together 25 Jesuits of varying ages, including a newly ordained member, some older Jesuits, and a few who were unwell.

Fr Antonio Spadaro, Undersecretary of the Dicastery for Culture and Education, who accompanied the Pope, described the atmosphere as deeply fraternal and warm. "The meeting lasted an hour, as usual, and it was evident that the Pope did not want to leave this very intimate and family-like setting," he said. The Pope's demeanor was notably relaxed and cheerful, as captured in the photos from the event.

During the meeting, Pope Francis opened the floor to questions, addressing a range of topics with the Jesuits. The discussion began with the challenges facing the Church today and the specific issues



Pope Francis with his Jesuit confreres in Singapore. (Facebook/Francis Lim SJ)

in the region. The Pope emphasised the importance of faith engaging with contemporary human challenges, particularly in Asia, which he highlighted as a pivotal continent for the Church.

One key theme was the role of prayer in meeting societal challenges, reflecting the spirit of Fr Pedro Arrupe, the former Superior General of the Jesuits. The Pope underscored the significance of prayer in confronting the complexities of modern life and expressed his deep connection to Fr Arrupe, whose beatification cause is underway.

The Pope also touched on pastoral mat-

ters, notably the importance of vocations. He acknowledged the concerns of young people considering religious life and emphasized the need for high-quality formation to address the challenges of today's world. "The Pope encouraged maintaining high expectations for vocations and stressed the need for thorough and relevant formation," Fr Spadaro noted.

In addition to discussing Fr Arrupe, Pope Francis also spoke about Matteo Ricci, the revered Jesuit missionary to China. Ricci's legacy was highlighted as a significant point of reference for Jesuits in the region.

## Orchid hybrid named in honour of Pope

SINGAPORE: On the morning of September 12, Pope Francis received a ceremonial welcome at the Singapore Parliament House and met with President Tharman Shanmugaratnam. He also had an audience with Prime Minister and Minister for Finance Lawrence Wong.

During this event, a new orchid hybrid was unveiled for the first time and named in Pope Francis' honour. The naming ceremony was officiated by President Tharman Shanmugaratnam.

The orchid, named *Denbrobium His Holiness Pope Francis* is an elegant and attractive hybrid, producing semi-arching inflorescences ranging from 40 to 60 cm in length. Each inflorescence features 10 to 20 flowers, each approximately eight cm wide, exuding a serene and pure beauty. Elvina Fernandez



CEO of Singapore's National Parks Board, Hwang Yu-Ning, presents the *Denbrobium His Holiness Pope Francis* to our Holy Father, with Singapore President Tharman Shanmugaratnam looking on. (Photo credit/Ministry of Digital Development and Infrastructure)

## Pope urges Singapore's clergy to be united and close to people



SINGAPORE: On the final day of Pope Francis' Apostolic Journey to Singapore, the Holy Father met with the bishop, priests, and religious men and women serving in the country.

The roughly 20-minute encounter was held privately at the St Francis Xavier Retreat Centre.

According to the Holy See Press Office, the Pope mentioned some characteristic traits of priests, who should be "among the people, united with God, brothers among themselves, and united with the bishop."

Speaking to women religious, Pope Francis encouraged them to remember their identity. "Do not forget to express the motherhood of the Church," he said.

Finally, just before giving the group his Apostolic Blessing and taking a group photo, he urged everyone to "keep smiling."



Archbishop Julian Leow, President of the Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei was also present at the meeting. Vatican News

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No. 10 (1st Floor) Jalan 17/54, Seksyen 17, 46400 Petaling Jaya, Selangor

Email: tours@topaztravels.com

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20 YEARS

Published by The Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur on behalf of the Bishops of Peninsular Malaysia, HERALD, APC, 5 Jalan Robertson, 50150 Kuala Lumpur and printed by Vivar Printing Sdn. Bhd., Lot 25, Rawang Integrated Ind. Park, Mukim Rawang, Jalan Batu Arang, 48000 Rawang, Selangor.