

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.

Make migration



a free choice

VATICAN: In his message for the 109th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Pope Francis recognised the migratory flows of our times as “the expression of a complex and varied phenomenon” that requires analysis of the different stages, including the departure, arrival, and the possibility of returning to one’s homeland.

The Church observes the World Day of Migrants and Refugees on the last Sunday of September, which this year falls on September 24. This year’s theme is *Free to choose whether to migrate or to stay*.

Pope Francis pointed out that the Holy Family’s flight into Egypt was not a free decision. This is the case with many migrants. He added that persecutions, wars, atmospheric phenomena and extreme poverty are some of the main causes of forced migrations today.

“Conflicts, natural disasters, or more simply, the impossibility of living a dig-

nified and prosperous life in one’s native land, is forcing millions of persons to leave,” he said.

“Eliminating these causes and thus putting an end to forced migration calls for shared commitment on the part of all, in accordance with the responsibilities of each,” he expressed. “This commitment begins with asking what we can do, but also what we need to stop doing. We need to make every effort to halt the arms race, economic colonialism, the plundering of other people’s resources, and the devastation of our common home.”

In order to make migration a truly free choice, “efforts must be made to ensure to everyone an equal share in the common good, respect for his or her fundamental rights, and access to an integral human development,” the Pope emphasised.

He encouraged countries and the international community to work together to ensure that all people “enjoy the right not to be forced to emigrate” and are able to live in peace within one’s own country.

“This right has yet to be codified, but it is one of fundamental importance, and its protection must be seen as a shared responsibility on the part of all states with

respect to a common good that transcends national borders,” Pope Francis added.

“Indeed, since the world’s resources are not unlimited, the development of the economically poorer countries depends on the capacity for sharing that we can manage to generate among all countries. Until this right is guaranteed — and here we are speaking of a long process — many people will still have to emigrate in order to seek a better life.”

Pope Francis reminded the faithful to not only see a migrant as a “brother or sister in difficulty but as Christ Himself, who knocks at our door” and to “show maximum respect for the dignity of each migrant” by building bridges and not walls.

“In whatever place we decide to build our future, in the country of our birth or elsewhere, the important thing is that there always be a community ready to welcome, protect, promote, and integrate everyone, without distinctions and without excluding anyone,” he said. — **By Francesca Pollio Fenton, CNA**

Photo source: Shutterstock/Chine Nouvelle

● See also page 2 and 9

PRAYER

*God, Father Almighty,
grant us the grace to work tirelessly
for justice, solidarity and peace,
so that all your children may enjoy
the freedom to choose whether
to migrate or to stay.*

*Grant us the courage to denounce
all the horrors of our world,
and to combat every injustice
that mars the beauty of your children
and the harmony of
our common home.*

*Sustain us by the power of your Spirit,
so that we can reflect
your tender love
to every migrant
whom you place in our path,
and to spread in hearts
and in every situation
the culture of encounter and of care.*

As it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honoured in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Phil. 1:20-21



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GUEST EDITORIAL

DEACON AARON ALAMMALAY



Freedom to choose

This year's World Day for Migrants and Refugees gives us a glimpse of freedom particularly in our freedom to choose, as the theme speaks *Free to choose whether to migrate or to stay*. As one of the growing countries in Southeast Asia, we have been receiving migrants and refugees that is not limited to the ASEAN region but from all across the globe. Sometimes it can be too much to handle on our plates that we have to turn the stranger away.

The issue of migrating, whether temporarily or permanently has always been an issue since the beginning of time. In the Christian faith, it goes back to Genesis in the story of Adam and Eve, a forced migration due to the penalty of sin. In today's time however, migration in its various forms either to seek a better life or to support our loved ones' back home who are unable to migrate with us due to whatever reason cannot just use the problem of sin as an excuse to migrate. We have read about climate change, heard about unjust policies, unequal rights and corrupt governments among the causes for migration, instability in such areas if we may put it as such.

Our involvement in the local diocesan ministry for migrants and refugees be it a ministry by itself or in collaboration with ministries involved in Social Action of the Church is not just to defend social action or social justice or to uphold the 'Human Life and Dignity.' We must also understand that as Church we are more than just being another NGO.

The heart of ministry is first and foremost about empowerment through our own encounter with Christ, welcoming Christ, feeding and taking care of Christ in the people we serve and liberating them that they too can empower others to encounter Christ in their lives and in the life of the Church. Our mission then is empowerment through an encounter with Christ.

Our involvement in this ministry is also not just about our contribution in kind or material goods, to give and not be present, to provide and not feed, to heal and not provide aftercare or accompaniment. This ministry is about lending a listening ear, building relationships through empowerment, collaborations with NGOs where we are unable to meet the needs of the migrants and refugees in our own locality, and to provide a safe place where migrants who choose to stay can call home, where they can be vulnerable and yet safe to share their lives through the life of the Church. Therefore, it is necessary to empower our neighbourhood migrants by wel-

coming them into our local BECs and church just as we took our first steps to integrate ourselves when we first moved into a new neighbourhood.

Unfortunately, this ministry can also be just a passing phase for a diocese or even a parish, and the downfall of such ministries is not just because there is no one to serve, but because of the negative experiences that members of this ministry encounter and the stigma of the migrants that members encounter through the ministry.

There is no perfect ministry. However, we must keep in our hearts, that the strength of any ministry is our prayer life. A ministry that has a very good prayer life, even if it is at the weakest point, will grow to be the most effective ministry for the church even if the members are few. Christ should be at the heart any ministry through the ministry's prayer life. Despite the challenges faced by the ministry, every labourer who signed up at the last minute still receives a just wage (Matt 20:14-14). The just wage is the little consolations we experience in this challenging ministry, not to give us some form of comfort, but to constantly remind us that Christ is our joy and that we can find Him in our service to our migrant neighbourhood.

The migrants in our country should be given a choice, just as we are given a choice as Church. No human being deserves to be forced into making a decision especially a critical decision to leave or remain in the country. However, it is also our responsibility and effort to help them decide. We never ever should answer for them; we may be their voice just as Christ Himself was our voice when we ourselves (or our ancestors) had to go through migration to seek a better life or even freedom. The decision is still their own to make. We can only encourage them. Still, after all the help we can give them, we should not expect everything to go smoothly or score points. We know through our discernment that we have given our best to them, and through our ministries for migrants and refugees, our aim is always to defend the human life and dignity through the actions from our own migrant himself, Christ our Lord. We empower the migrants and refugees through our own lives in the life of Christ and His Church.

Deacon Aaron Alammalay is Assistant Head to the Diocesan Ministry for Migrants and Refugees, Diocese of Malacca Johore.

God is beyond us. That is what the readings point to this weekend. The fact that God is a mystery and beyond our thinking is not something that should frustrate or disappoint us but, rather, it should be a source of our hope and the ground that we walk on as Christians.

When I was a seminarian, our class was sent to visit the home for the elderly. This was something that every second-year philosophy class did. While there, I always spent time with an elderly lady who was partially blind and bed ridden. Our conversation always started out pleasant but then it always turned to sadness because she would talk about her past and her sorrow over her many sins. Then she would go into this rhetoric of how God would reject her and punish her for her sins.

As she was a Catholic, I used to quote the exact passage from Isaiah found in the first reading, that there is still hope and it is not too late. I said something along the lines of how we cannot imagine that God thinks like us. God is generous and forgiving. God's ways are utterly different from human thinking. That seemed to make her feel better. However, I discovered that this would be the pattern of my visit with her over the next months. It would start out pleasant, but then she would start crying again. I did not visit her again after second year philosophy as we were sent to do pastoral year after that. Whenever I thought of her or told her story sometimes, I would say a simple prayer that she would now be in God's love and joy. I still wonder until today if she ever felt liberated from what weighed her down.

A scripture author writes that in many ways, it is comforting to think that God is not like us. One reason why we cling to

God is not like us



God is to be liberated from ourselves and be brought into God's marvellous light, living a life freed from the restrictions, frustrations and self-centredness that surrounds and penetrates us. While our love may always be tinged with self-interest and concern for ourselves, God's love is entirely generous and out-going, a limitless cascade of love, overflowing and penetrating us.

In the second reading, St Paul speaks of another dimension to living a Christian life. St Paul states that his life in Christ will only be completed by death. St Paul speaks often of the mystery of Christ's resurrection and how we, who share in Christ's death by our baptism, will also share in Christ's resurrection. If we are as convinced as St Paul, then it gives a new perspective to our life which is rooted in Christ. For us then, death is not the end but a rising to share in the glory of Christ's resurrection in ways that we cannot understand or fully comprehend now.

Jesus reaffirms the idea of how God's thinking is vastly different from ours in terms of what we think is fair and just. This

parable would surely make the leaders of Jesus' time angry as they may think that God operates on their own terms and thinking.

We can ask whether we still fall into the same trap within ourselves or in how we relate to one another. For example, is our understanding of God our own projection? Sometimes, I hear people talk about God as if they have God figured out. When they ask me what I think, I can only reply "I don't know."

It is true that we can get to know God. We believe that there is a God and Jesus Christ is His Son. However, it is also true that this objective understanding of God is filtered through our own human experiences. We understand God in relation to ourselves. This is why we say "God is love, forgiving and understanding." What we mean is that God is these things to us, or these are our experiences of the divine. They only describe who God is for us and not the totality of God. What we cannot do is reduce God to only the length, depth, and breath of our understanding.

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with Fr Dr Lawrence Ng

25th Sunday of Ordinary Time (A)

Readings: Isaiah 55:6-9;

Philippians 1:20-24, 27;

Gospel: Matthew 20:1-16

There are two points we can reflect on from the readings this weekend. First, we can reflect on whether we boxed ourselves in by our understanding of God. Is our image of God only according to our own thinking? If that is so, then we are trapping ourselves or putting ourselves on an island. We can only grow as big as the island we put ourselves in and what a small world that is.

Or instead of only depending on our own frame of thinking which can be our prison, we can consider that our understanding of God is limited. However, that is not a bad thing because while we seek understanding, we also realise that God is a mystery and is beyond us. To embrace God is to embrace the length, depth, and breath of God. German theologian Karl Rahner always uses the phrase that Christians who open themselves to the wide horizon of God transcend onto the mystery of God.

The first stifles us but the second opens us to the active dynamic presence of God who continues to engage us. It becomes for us an infinite wellspring of grace, hope, strength, liberation, and healing.



**ARCHDIOCESE OF
KOTA KINABALU**

CHYKK/WA/9/2023

Chancery Notice

Banns of Ordination

Seminarian Jerry Joseph Muhamat, will be called to the Order of Deacon (Transitional) by His Grace, Archbishop John Wong on:

Date : December 9, 2023

Time : 9.00 am

Venue : Sacred Heart Cathedral, KK

Seminarian Jerry Joseph Muhamat is from Good Shepherd Church, Mangatal. He completed his ecclesiastical studies in Philosophy (2017-2018) at College General Major Seminary, Penang and in Theology (2019-2023) at St Peter's College Major Seminary, Kuching, Sarawak.

Catholics are obliged to reveal any impediments or circumstances that would prevent Seminarian Jerry Joseph Muhamat from the Sacred Order and should contact the parish priest or Archbishop John Wong with such information in accordance with the norms of Canon Law 1043.

The publication of these banns fulfils the canonical requirement of Canon Law 1051 2°.

Rev Fr Wilfred Atin

Rev Fr Wilfred Atin

Chancellor

Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu

September 12, 2023



**KUALA LUMPUR
ARCHDIOCESE**

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

September & October

24/9 Mass – International Day of Sign Language, Church of the Visitation, Seremban

27/9-1/10 Church of St Michael, Ipoh



PENANG DIOCESE

Diary of Cardinal-Elect Sebastian Francis

September & October

18/9-7/10 Consistory of Cardinals and the Opening Mass of the Synod – Rome



**MALACCA JOHORE
DIOCESE**

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

September & October

26/9 Meeting – Caritas MJDOHD Exco, Church of the Immaculate Conception, JB

28/9 Deliverance & Healing Programme – MAJODI Centre

30/9 Confirmation (Eng) – Church of St Francis Xavier, Melaka

1/10 Confirmation (Tamil) – Church of St Francis Xavier, Melaka

1/10 CJC Protec Year 4 Launch – Church of St Francis Xavier, Melaka

1/10 Confirmation – Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Krubong, Melaka

Making Christ known to all

By Christopher Kushi

BUKIT MERTA JAM, Penang: The blessing of the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (FSIC) Convent took place September 7.

The sisters first came to the Diocese of Penang on Feb 16, 2017. Their mission is primarily in pastoral care to the Apostolate Bahasa Malaysia (ABM), Diocese of Penang.

They are now a common feature in the church for faith formation, preparing for Sacraments, pre-marriage course in Bahasa Malaysia, family visits, spiritual accompaniment, recollection, prayer and Taize. They leave a loving effect with their friendly disposition, guitar accompaniment songs and prayerful reverence.

Cardinal-elect Sebastian Francis reiterated that the ABM is important in pastoring to the Sabahans and Sarawakians — who have come to the diocese to work or study — the Orang Asli community and the Indonesian migrant groups. Support is always present for the Bahasa Malaysia-speaking parishioners to grow in faith and fraternity.



Cardinal-elect Sebastian Francis celebrating the Eucharist at the FSIC sisters' convent.

The FSIC is a home-grown diocesan congregation founded by Msgr August Wachter, originally from Austria, in the year 1936 and with the help of Mother Rose Charnley, the initial four novices — Cecilia Ho, Stephanie Malaim, Theresa Thien and Marie Thien made their first profession on June 20, 1941. Their mission is of living their consecrated, apostolic life in the spirit of prayer, simplicity and joyful service following the example of Mary Immaculate and St Francis of Assisi.

The congregation has grown to 112

professed sisters, five novices, three postulants and three aspirants. They have 33 communities in Sabah, four communities with one each in Kuala Lumpur, Terengganu, Malacca and Penang.

The Mass ended with fellowship. The sisters congratulated Cardinal-elect on his appointment to the Cardinalate and Fr Nelson Joseph on his 25th Sacerdotal Anniversary.

“Knowing Christ and making Him known” was the Sisters’ exhortation to all present.



Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #146

F12
NEWS
MJD
UPDATES

Greetings, dear friends and fellow Catholics:

I just ended with the annual conference and study on the local migrant and refugee phenomenon. Following that, there was an annual clergy retreat. The August 31 celebration was welcomed with a deeper sense of Malaysian-ness. The results of the Johor by-elections were viewed as a vote for the unity government, others said the green waves gained grounds. September remembers Malaysia Day, the feast of St Mother Teresa, Season of Creation, the World Day for the Poor and the Launching of Protec Year 4: *Reduce Fuel Consumption*.

Reconciling Times: Taking one another to court for libel and ‘fitnah’ are on rise among Malaysian politicians. Million Ringgit suits are being filed. Irresponsible statements! Lies, half-truths and 3Rs are uttered insensitively. Forgetting that words can kill or heal. It is said: a tongue six inches long can kill a man six feet tall. Political, community and religious leaders should be statesmen — bridge builders. Words are for teaching truth, encouraging excellence and affirming all that is good, true and beautiful. This country needs reconciling leadership. Reconciling leaders are men and women of their word. They reflect character not mere competence, faith that rejects violence, integrity that is not self serving, and listening deeply to the *rakyat*. Malaysia needs reconciling.

A Thought for the Week: The Suicide
A woman was getting ready to jump off a 44-storey building in New York City. She was very distinguished and well dressed. The police tried to get the woman off the ledge but failed. A pastor was called to assist. When the pastor neared the edge the woman

screamed, “Don’t come any closer or I’ll jump!”

The pastor stepped back and said, “I am sorry that you believe no one loves you.” It caught the attention of the woman and the police. Now the woman took a step towards the pastor and said, “My grandchildren love me. My children too. My whole family loves me! I have eight wonderful grandchildren and they love me.”

The pastor took a step towards the woman and said, “Well then, you must be very poor, maybe that is why you want to take your own life.” The woman who was a little overweight said, “Do I look like I go without any meals? We live in a very nice apartment. I’m not poor.”

The pastor took another step towards her and asked, “Then why do you want to kill yourself? I don’t understand.” The woman thought for a moment and then said, “You know, I don’t really remember.” The story ends with the pastor and the woman walking towards the elevator as she shows him pictures of her grandchildren.

Lesson from the ledge: The pastor helped her get her eyes off herself and see the many ways that God had blessed her with. She learned that thankful people are happy people.

Announcements for this Week

1. Malaysia celebrates her 58th Anniversary, keeping the theme *Determination of Unity Fulfills Hope*.
2. At the last Episcopal Conference of Migrants and Itinerants’ Conference, a reminder was given to all dioceses and parishes to set up Parish Migrant Ministries, with interested volunteers.
3. The Diocese is preparing for the Diocesan Pastoral Assembly, a follow up of the Parish Pastoral Assemblies, Language Pastoral Assemblies, and Vicariate Pastoral Assemblies, and the

first step to ready ourselves for the Malaysian Pastoral Convention 2026.

4. Deacon Aaron Alammalay, now serving at St Andrew Muar, will be ordained priest on November 20, 2023 at the Church of St Andrew, Muar at 8.00pm.

This Week’s Question and Query. The Q asks: What happens when we contemplate?

1. And this is why you cultivate contemplative practice. The more you intentionally turn inward, the more available the sacred becomes. When you sit in silence and turn your gaze toward the Holy Mystery you once called God, the Mystery follows you back out into the world. When you walk with a purposeful focus on breath and birdsong, your breathing and the twitter of the chickadee reveal themselves as a miracle.

2. So you sit down to meditate, not only because it helps you to find rest in the arms of the formless Beloved, but also because it increases your chances of being stunned by beauty when you get back up. Encounters with the sacred that radiate from the core of the ordinary embolden you to cultivate stillness and simple awareness. In the midst of a world that is begging you to distract yourself, this is no easy practice. Keep showing up. Thirst for wonder. — *Mirabai Starr/ Richard Rohr*

A blessed Malaysia Day to all of you. May the Lord raise up leaders who serve without fear or favour, and hear the cry of the poor and the earth. Pray for the nation, that she will be truly Malaysian. Be safe.

Bernard Paul

Bishop Bernard Paul

Understanding theology in the Asian context

KUCHING: It was a reunion of sorts with lots of reminiscing, bonding and camaraderie for the 70 alumni of St Peter's College, Kuching Major Seminary who came together for a four-day refresher course recently.

In the midst of all the fellowship, the clergy were also focused on the programme, which provided much enlightenment and understanding on the current theological concerns, especially on the Asian methodology of theologising and Synodality in the Asian context.

On hand to provide input during the September 4-7 programme was Fr Dr Clarence Devadass from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, and Dr Estela Padila, the Executive Secretary for the Office of Theological Concerns of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference (FABC).

Both speakers spoke about the need for having an Asian approach to doing theology, to complement the Western approach, which is predominant in most theological discourses.

Some of the topics presented included *Christian Theology and Asian Sensibilities*, *Journeying as Peoples of Asia*, *Overview of the FABC* and the *Final Report of the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality*.

As some participants put it: "This refresher course is encouraging us to take-off our shoes, and theologise with our bare-feet, grounded in this land of Asia".

Participants were also enlightened about the organisation of the FABC, and its role in supporting or being at the service of the



Clergy at the St Peter's College refresher course, Sept 4-7, 2023. (Today's Catholic photo/Shannon Wei)

different bishops' conferences from the 28 countries in the Asian region.

Throughout the sessions, the priests and bishops were divided into small groupings where they had the opportunity to share their vision for the Malaysian Church, share their own life experiences in the pastoral field, as well as give their views on the synodal way of being Church.

A session on Professional Standards Office (PSO), conducted by Archbishop Simon Poh, concluded the refresher course. The archbishop of Kuching, who spoke on the issue of sexual abuse of minors and the vulnerable, gave some insights as to why there are relatively low reports of abuses cases in Asia. The prelate also presented some guidelines on the standard procedures to follow when such cases do surface. He stressed that the Church must remain credible in her efforts to ensure a safe environment for all is always safeguarded.

The archbishop also spoke about caring for the mental health among the clergy, who go through the stresses of life in the minis-

try, adding that this is an issue that has been overlooked.

The time spent together, albeit a short period, allowed many to return home with fond memories of their seminary days and armed with a newfound knowledge on theologising the Asian way.

Comments from the clergy

"It was an eye opener to the Asian approaches of theologising to suit the Asian context. I feel blessed to have had the opportunity to listen to each other's concerns in the pastoral field and walk together as one Malaysian Church." — **Fr Sylvester Wong, Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu**

"I would say the refresher course was an eye opener to the many theological concerns involving Asian people. Besides that, this programme helped me to be aware of the approaches taken by FABC to form a synodal Church." — **Fr Raymond Raj, Diocese of Penang**

"I gained new knowledge from this refresher. It was certainly an enriching programme to connect myself with the marginalised and the less fortunate people of the Lord." — **Fr Henry Anak Jimbey, Archdiocese of Kuching**

"For me, it was a home coming experience. A time well spent listening and sharing." — **Fr Michel Dass, Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur**

"The experience of attending this course taught me two things, i.e. never ever be afraid of learning new things and that people are always more important than the goal." — **Fr Martinian Lee, Diocese of Malacca Johore**

"What I liked about this refresher course was the dialogue and group sharing. It was good to listen to the stories of our brother priests in their struggles and challenges in their pastoral ministry. Listening and sharing brings empowerment." — **Fr Terans Thadeus, Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu**

Consecration of St Ignatius of Loyola chapel in Stonyhurst school

PENANG: Cardinal-elect Sebastian Francis blessed and consecrated the Chapel of St Ignatius of Loyola on September 4 at the Stonyhurst International School.

Situated on the school's ground floor, the modern-looking chapel showcases a sleek design. The chapel bears the icons of its founder, St Ignatius, the Blessed Mother, and the Crucifix of the Risen Christ, along with an elegant marble altar. Keeping true to its modern and simplistic nature, the Stations of the Cross that adorn the two walls on either side are charming and quaint. The chapel seats approximately 40 people at a time.

During his initial address, the Cardinal-elect said that the school, which offers a wholesome Catholic-based education and its pastoral values, not only provides an academic qualification but prepares its students to be useful members of society in all aspects when they leave. To do this, he added, we need the guidance of the Holy Spirit as the school aims to keep its vision and mission centred on its



Cardinal-elect Sebastian Francis leading the prayer during the consecration.

Jesuit-based values.

The service began with the blessing of Holy Water and the cardinal-elect went around the chapel sprinkling the consecrated water. After a short reading, the cardinal-elect spoke about

the icons that were in the chapel. Speaking about St Ignatius, the prelate said that even though the saint died over 400 years ago, his teachings and values are still very much alive today in institutions like Stonyhurst. The

Blessed Mother, who was nurturing and gentle in nature, he said, can be a symbol of inspiration to those who nurture young minds. As for the Crucifix of the Risen Christ, the cardinal-elect said that we all share in the hope of the Risen Christ, provided we die to ourselves as He commanded.

Cardinal-elect Sebastian then proceeded to consecrate the altar.

Before ending the service with a concluding prayer, he encouraged the teachers to come to the chapel regularly and pray for their students.

Also in attendance were Fr Francis Lim SJ, a member of the Board of Governors of Stonyhurst, Msgr Jude Miranda, parish priest, and Fr Oliver Tham priest-in-residence of the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Fr Simon Labrooy, rector of College General Penang, Fr Edwin Peter and Paul Kang, candidate to the Permanent Diaconate. Michael Sng, the Chair of the Board of Governors of Stonyhurst and several staff members also attended the auspicious event. — **By Carmel Dominic**

Fundraiser for Sibü cathedral grotto

SIBU: On the Feast of the Nativity of Blessed Virgin Mary, September 8, about 1,700 parishioners gathered at the Sacred Heart Centenary Hall to commemorate the 38th anniversary of the dedication of Sacred Heart Cathedral and the 15th anniversary of the Episcopal Ordination of Bishop Joseph Hii with a thanksgiving dinner.

It was a night filled with singing and dance performances by parishioners and priests as they celebrated the two anniversaries and attempted to come to synodality to raise an estimated RM1.5 million to build a grotto of Mary Immaculate Conception at the cathedral.

Many parishioners contributed gener-



Toasting at the thanksgiving dinner.

ously while rector Fr Philip Hu, Fr Edward Raymond and Capuchin Friar Fr Raphael Samosir were seen joyfully performing on stage to help raise the necessary funds.

New belfry for Bidor church

BIDOR, Perak: A new belfry is currently under construction at the Chapel of St Joseph. The chapel, under the purview of the Church of St Mary in Tapah never had a belfry.

According to Fr James Pitchay, the chapel's administrator who is also the parish priest of St Mary's, the project will be completed soon. The cost of construction is RM20,000 and the bell was imported from

China at RM12,000.

Improvements to the chapel have been ongoing for the benefit of the parishioners.

Not long ago, a grotto dedicated to Our Mother Mary was constructed in the chapel's grounds, where parishioners and visitors could spend time praying the Rosary in the 'mini garden' where concrete seats were also made available. — **By Bernard Anthony**



The belfry being constructed at the Chapel of St Joseph.

Play something nice

KUALA LUMPUR: Parishioners of the Church of the Risen Christ were invited to participate in *Play Something Nice*. This was in conjunction with the #SaySomethingNice23 campaign and Hari Merdeka-Hari Malaysia month.

Organised by the BM Apostolate, it received support from various ministries and catechists.

The games began with the children and parishioners gathering for breakfast, followed by a session of stone painting.

Then, the games commenced, with children and parishioners spreading out to various stations. Everyone relished the activities, even though no prizes were offered. Parishioners also enjoyed other

games such as hopscotch, chess and carrom. It was heartwarming to witness some parents enjoying hopscotch, a game from their own childhood.

Individuals of all ages, both adults and kids, had a wonderful time.

The event concluded with lunch and cake. — *By Olyana Cabrynie*



The youth playing carrom.

We can do more for children with ‘hidden disabilities’

KUALA LUMPUR: A forum titled *Faith Formation for Children with Autism & ADHD: Challenges & Opportunities* was organised by the KL Archdiocesan Catechetical Ministry on September 2 via Zoom. About 67 people attended the forum graced by Archbishop Julian Leow.

In his opening address, the archbishop stated how the Church has already taken steps towards the inclusion of people with disabilities in some areas. For example, sign language interpreters and visually impaired readers in Braille are involved in the Sunday Mass readings in certain parishes. However, Archbishop Julian acknowledged that where “hidden disabilities”, like autism and ADHD, are concerned, more can be done. “Once baptised, we are all part of the Church,” said the prelate. He also stated, “No one can deny the sacrament to people with disabilities”.

Following that, Ignatius Lee, a child and family psychologist, delivered an hour-long keynote address highlighting key traits of autism and ADHD. He emphasised the importance of an individualised approach to catechesis and provided some insights on a more sensory-friendly environment. He also noted that community support and understanding are key in ensuring that a person with autism or ADHD feels safe when participating in Mass at the parish.

Next was a forum moderated by Desiree Kaur, founder of Project Haans and a mother to an eight-year-old autistic boy. The speakers included Christina Louis, a mother with an autistic son who has received his First Holy Communion. She shared the numerous challenges she faced in attending Mass with her child when he was a toddler. The negative reactions from some members of the

community caused her not to bring her son to church for many years, until she began preparing him for his First Holy Communion.

Constance Yuen, a Special Education Needs (SEN) catechist, also a speaker at this forum, played a pivotal role in supporting Christina in bringing her son back to church and to receive the sacrament of Holy Communion. Constance also shared her experience as a SEN catechist with the Church of the Holy Family in Kajang. She pointed out the many challenges SEN catechists face and provided ideas of how some of these challenges may be addressed.

The third speaker on the panel was Dr Steven Selvaraju, director of KL Archdiocesan Catechetical Centre. He quoted from the Church’s catechetical directories about faith formation for persons with disabilities. He noted that there has been a gradual but positive development

over the last 50 years in the way the Church understood and supported persons with disabilities in the area of catechesis. Dr Steven said, “The Church understands now that catechesis is not something we do for those with special needs but something we do with them.”

The forum opened up the conversation among the participants on how the Church can come together as a community to support children with special needs and their caregivers in areas such as participation at Mass and catechism and in receiving the sacraments. Participants posed several questions, to which the forum speakers responded with informative and useful answers.

The forum is an initiative of the Catechesis for Learners with Special Needs (CLSN) Ministry, a sub-ministry that was recently set up under the KL Archdiocesan Catechetical Ministry. The main role of CLSN

is to assist catechists who are supporting learners with special needs and their parents in their parishes. This includes organising formation for the catechists, making available relevant resources, providing opportunities for collaboration and networking, and responding to requests by parents for advice and help in preparing their children for the sacraments. CLSN aims to create more awareness among the members of the community on becoming more inclusive of persons with special needs, specifically in the areas of faith formation and their participation in Mass.

Those interested in knowing more about faith formation and sacramental preparation for children and teenagers with special needs may write to: catechetical@archkl.org

The video recording of the forum can be accessed on YouTube: <https://rb.gy/idq00>

Mental health is a universal right

KUALA LUMPUR: World Mental Health Day is observed on October 10 every year to educate, create awareness and advocate against the social stigma of mental illness. The Archdiocesan Mental Health Ministry (AMHM) celebrated that day on September 9 at the Church of St Francis Assisi.

More than 500 Catholics and others attended this event filled with talks, workshops and a forum.

Archbishop Julian Leow led the participants in prayer. In his speech, he spoke on the many facets of mental health, for both the vulnerable and even the well to do. Mental health gaps can arise from many areas like poverty, wealth, adversity, trauma, discrimination, toxicity, illness and age factors. It affects the everyday man on the street, prisoners, the elderly, LGBTQ, refugees, the homeless, caregivers, students, parents, teachers, “empty nesters” etc. There is no age limit, start or end date and mental stress can happen briefly, or can be prolonged, and can relapse at different stages of our life.

Dr Gerard Louis, a pioneer in the education industry, gave the plenary talk. He focused on *Mental Health – A Universal Human Right*. It is a basic human right to be given the opportunity to develop a healthy mind and to be able to contribute to the well-being of people around us. Using the Ukraine War as an example, he said that six million innocent people had to flee their homes, jobs,

families, etc and how these people were deprived from this basic human right. This deprivation happens in all parts of the world and all kinds of situations. To be able to function fully as a human being, we all must have the freedom and right to care and use our mental capacity to the fullest.

An important point he gave was that a person must know that anyone’s mental health can deteriorate or fail, but they need not remain there. There are treatments, medications and therapies that can improve our mental wellbeing. These can be seen in the drop of the number of mental institutions and asylums compared with the 1950s, as people learn to treat, manage and cope with their mental challenges. Nowadays, with support, a mentally challenged person can turn into a mentally

healthy person and live an independent and dignified life. One will not even know of another’s mental state when sitting or walking with them on the streets.

The second half of the day was filled with workshops. Among them were:

- 1) *Understanding Palliative Care and Caregivers Mental Health* – Dr Richard Lim
- 2) *Emotional Support & Suicide Prevention* – Kenny Lim
- 3) *Understanding Narcissistic Personality Disorder* – Matilda Xavier
- 4) *How to rewire your anxious brain* – Chin Soon Lee and Ivy Yang
- 5) *How to deal with Depression in Youth* – Dr Madelene Ong
- 6) *Sexual Harassment & Mental Health* – Rita Wong



At one of the workshops.



Children using clay to express themselves.

There was also an exhibition booth showcasing Erik H Erikson, a German-American psychoanalyst’s theory on the development and learning stages of human beings. Understanding the different stages can help one to understand their own capabilities and limitations and also give the right care and support to people around them. Volunteers were on hand to explain and assist visitors.

Experiential booths showcased ways to have a healthy mind. Visitors were encouraged to experiment with clay, colours, drawings, play cards to bring out their inner thoughts and feelings. These activities relax our mind and releases dopamine, as we recall our joys in shapes, colours and creativity.

Music, yoga, meditation and doing a mental health check-up regularly is also good.

If necessary, do reach out for help from your doctor, nearest mental

health clinic, a trusted person or the Life Journey Wellness Centre (017-3586188 or email mentalhealth@archkl.org).

All of us can play a part in improving the mental health of our society. As Archbishop Julian said in his speech, our apostolic work must not be confined to comfort but we must reach out to one another. Visit someone or invite someone to your home, make a courtesy call or just give a stranger a smile. In a world where many think they have to stand out or fit in, it can become ugly, exhausting, disappointing and hurtful. That’s where a simple gesture of reaching out with a “Hello, how are you” and really listening to the answer can make a difference. Most importantly, the archbishop reminded us to “Pray for one another. Prayer is a powerful source of healing. Pray for them. Pray with them, as the more we give, the more we receive”. — *By Linda Louis*

We will reap what we sow

By Christopher Kushi

GEORGETOWN: Faith leaders gathered at the Penang Harmony Centre for an Interfaith and Ecology forum themed *Bringing Together Diverse Beliefs for a Greener Tomorrow* September 3. The forum was jointly organised by Penang Harmony Corporation (HARMONICO) and the Creation Justice Commission, the Diocese of Penang.

Sukhindarpal Singh, director of Harmonico welcomed everyone for an insightful understanding of Interfaith and Ecology and detailed Harmonico's vision, mission and programmes. Arokiadass Anthonyamy explained that the Creation Justice Commission of the Catholic Church is following the call of Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* in protecting our common global home, organising green workshops, eco exhibitions and community clean-up activities.

The faith panel included Kalpa Vrksa Das, International (Society for Krishna Consciousness), Sukhindarpal Singh (Malaysia Gurdwara Council), Kenneth Lee Tze (Federation Taoist Association Malaysia), Friar Cosmas Francis OFM (Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei), Loo Bong Seng (Malaysian Buddhist Association and Malaysian Buddhist Institute), Prof Zainal Alimuddin (Pertubuhan Ikram Malaysia Caw. Penang) and Renuka Radakrishnan (Penang Green Council).

Friar Cosmas gave the Catholic perspective when he related that the *Book of Genesis* gives



(From L-R): Panelist Magdalene Chiang, Kalpa Vrksa Das, Sukhindarpal Singh, Kenneth Lee, Friar Cosmas Francis, Loo Bong Seng, Prof Zainal Alimuddin and Renuka Radakrishnan.

an overview of God's creation, where all humanity has been charged with stewardship of the natural world.

Faith leaders then related that spiritual knowledge is imperative to being in harmony with nature. We must endeavour to close the gap in the inequalities between rich and poor, and to encourage moderation in daily living. Happiness should not be pursued as an end to itself but will always follow the blessings of work in faith and love. Efforts are also being made on the micro level to instil sustainable actions like the 3R's of Reduce, Reuse and Recycle, having recycling stations at religious festivals, instilling the habit of waste not, having eco-friendly religious materials and educating

sustainable living.

Moderator Magdalene Chiang summed up the forum's deliberation in that we are all one human race, we have one Mother Earth as our common home, and we are one in love with the environment.

However, the panellist also expressed concern that citizens are not taking the ecological crisis seriously. E-hailing food services cause more plastic waste and food waste! We all have a duty to protect the earth from the corruption of deforestation and over-development. We should not take Mother Earth for granted. We must harmonise our lives with the environment for if the earth suffers, we humankind are at fault. Statistics are frightening where accord-

ing to the UN 2023 SDG Summit, the global temperature has already risen 1.1°C above pre-industrial level, and by 2030 an estimated 700 million people will be at risk of displacement by drought alone. Friar Cosmas solemnly declared that our actions will result in the effect for 'we will reap what we sow'.

Pope Francis encyclical, *Laudato Si' Praise Be* — has the subtitle "on care for our common home". We all call our planet Mother Earth because of its nurturing nature and, like a mother, she embraces, sustains, and governs us. The encyclical relates to the cry of the earth together with the cry of the poor and downtrodden when facing the ecological sins of wasteful consumerism, the throwaway culture, irresponsible development, environmental degradation, pollution, loss of biodiversity, and global warming. Creation must come with Justice because climate change is an issue of justice where in times of natural disasters, famines, droughts, and floods, the poor are faced with even greater poverty as their sustenance and livelihood are affected.

The forum ended with the presentation of terrarium glass containers that mimic the earth's eco-system to the panellist and Paul Au, GM of Harmonico. All participants also received an eco-friendly food grade silicon collapsible coffee cup.

The forum ended with the movie *The Letter: A Message for our Earth* telling the story of a journey of leaders to Rome to discuss the encyclical letter *Laudato Si'* with Pope Francis.

Journeying through *Laudato Si'*

BUKIT PADANG, Sabah: A study day on *Laudato Si'* was held for parishioners of the Church of the Immaculate Conception.

It was conducted in three languages by Fr Russel Lawrine (BM), Sr Carmen Cordova (English) and Michael Wong (Chinese).

The 'See, Judge, Act' method was used to study the encyclical.

Chapter One (See): Pollution, climate change have harmed Mother Earth due to excessive development. Pope Francis high-

lights that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach — to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor (LS 49).

Chapters two to four (Judge): In the light of faith, the sin of pride (anthropocentrism) has disrupted the harmony between the Creator (God), humanity and creation (LS 66). Creation is the order of love and its creator is the heavenly Father who alone owns the world (LS 75-76). The Church seeks not only to remind everyone of the duty to care for nature

but, above all, to protect humankind from self-destruction (LS 79). Chapter three highlights that technology severed from ethics will not be able to limit its own power (LS 136). Chapter four stresses an urgent moral need for a renewed sense of intragenerational solidarity (LS 162).

Chapters five and six (Act): Interfaith dialogue is called forth for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor and building networks of respect and fraternity. The final chapter touches on ecological conversion

— a change of heart through examination of our lives and acknowledgement of the ways in which we have harmed God's creation through our actions and our failure to act (LS 218).

The participants were led to reflect and share in groups based on guided questions or in an interactive style throughout the input session.

The session closed with a prayer led by Fr Russel. The three facilitators were given potted plants as tokens of appreciation. — **By Catherine Wan, Catholic Sabah**



Sr Carmen Cordova conducting the session in English.

Environmental documentary sheds light on plight of our planet

KLANG: A screening of the impactful documentary *The Letter: A Message for Our Earth* was held on September 2. It was a joint effort by the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes (OLL) and the Church of Divine Mercy (CDM), Shah Alam in partnership with the *Laudato Si'* Movement.

Released in 2022, *The Letter* (pic) narrates the story of Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* encyclical. This film was brought to life through the efforts of the academy award-winning Off the Fence Productions and skillfully directed by Nicolas Brown, in collaboration with the *Laudato Si'* movement.



The screening attracted by more than 200 people who were captivated from start to finish, as the documentary shed light on the important issues concerning our planet and the responsibility we hold to protect it.

OLL parish priest, Fr Gregory Chan, gave the opening and closing remarks.

The team also honoured Madam Kanaga, a local farmer who exemplifies the principles of a *Laudato Si'* practitioner in her everyday life. Her unwavering dedication to sustainable farming methods served as a source of inspiration for everyone in attendance.

Following the screening, an engaging Q&A session was conducted by CDM's PPC chairperson, Dato' Dionysius Sharma, providing a platform for attendees to discuss their thoughts, concerns, and ideas. The session was an opportunity for fruitful dialogue and further exploration of the themes presented in the documentary.

As the evening concluded after a scrumptious chicken biryani meal, the attendees left with a renewed sense of purpose and determination to be agents of change in their communities. The impact of this event will undoubtedly resonate for years to come, inspiring individuals to take action and contribute towards a more sustainable and harmonious world. — **OLL *Laudato Si'* Ministry**

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REST IN PEACE

Family the cradle of synodality

PENANG: The Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (NBVM) began a 10-day celebration, leading up to the parish's 88th feast day, September 1.

The novena started with the crowd gathering at the church entrance for a flag-raising ceremony, accompanied by hymns and prayers before processing into the church.

This year, Fr Patrick Massang and three fellow priests from the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (Redemptorists), were the preachers. The four priests will accompany our parishioners on a two-month journey with the mission to rejuvenate our Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) and ministries.

Fr Patrick began his homily by congratulating the parish on the theme for the first day of the novena, *Family, Cradle of Synodality*. He reckoned the family starts with the one in the cradle, which is a symbol of protection and great love, nurturing with space and time as needed to grow. To make the idea of the family as a cradle of synodality clearer, he recited the famous nursery rhyme, *Rock-a-bye Baby*.

As the rhyme goes, the baby in the cradle is very much treasured and lavished with protection and nurturing. The blowing wind and breaking bough pose potential threats that require safeguarding. As with the family, it is important to be armed with the Gospel values to be protected against the breaking of the bonds of love during times of crisis.

Just as the baby in the cradle needs protection, nourishment, and nurturing to grow into a productive family member and a con-



Fr Patrick Massang CSsR blessing the young people with holy water on the 3rd day of NBVM feast.

tributor to nation-building, the family must provide emotional support and embrace the principles of the "3As" — Affirmation, Acceptance and Appreciation. It is in the family that one learns to resolve conflicts that arise and learns to forgive and be forgiven.

Coming from a family of 15 children, Fr Patrick shared how his parents took the Gospel values seriously in raising them, which ensured that none of the children were lost to the ways of the world. The family was an instrument of God's love, providence and consolation. Though poor, they did not go to bed hungry. Nothing was luxurious, and they learnt to be poor in spirit. Because the family

provided a sense of identity and belonging, all members were eager to return.

The family is the basic Church unit. When a family is dysfunctional and has lost its sense of love, forgiveness and care for one another, the members suffer as does the Church, the Body of Christ.

With the Synod on Synodality, the Church is on a mission to function as a family. Pope Francis put forward three prongs for action: Communion, Participation and Mission. In other words, the members of the Church must be in communion with each other, participate in all activities, and be missionary disciples.

Fr Patrick added that when people have a

sense of belonging in a parish, they will return; there will no longer be 'church-shopping' as we did through our screens during the pandemic. In moving towards being a synodal Church, we are aiming to be a family. This will have an impact on every dynamic in the Church, including how we worship, welcome and pray for each other, exchange the sign of peace, and participate in every event. This is very important so that the people want to return.

He shared that the Church has become his second family. To anyone who comes to the church, he must be welcoming. Regardless of their state of mind, when they come to meet the priest, it is a sacred moment for him, and the person must leave having encountered Christ — feeling happy, healed or blessed.

Similarly, he reminded everyone that every difficult encounter with a family member or parishioner is a sacred opportunity that God gives us to become an instrument of love, understanding, consolation, or reconciliation.

He summed up by reminding everyone that the mission, beginning now, is a call for us to think as a family. Just as the family is a cradle, a sacred space where the child is protected, nurtured and grows, the Church is the cradle to nourish BECs and ministries. We are called to be of one heart and one mind, to walk in faith. Whatever is past is past, and we ask for God's light and blessings to live as one Body of Christ.

After Mass, everyone adjourned for fellowship dinner. — nbvmcscs.org

Be life givers like our blessed Mother

KAMPUNG PANDAN: This year's feast of Our Lady of Good Health was celebrated at the Chapel of Our Lady of Good Health from September 2 to 10.

Parish Administrator, Msgr Stanislaus Soosamariam said that our Blessed Mother plays an important role in our pilgrimage of life. Mary assists, guides and leads us to her Son, Jesus Christ, through her own pilgrimage of life. Our Lady is described in her role in the many titles attributed to her.

Fr John Anandan OFM, Cap, Archbishop Julian Leow and Msgr Stanislaus were among the preachers for the celebration which had large crowds participating.

As the celebration of the chapel's patronal feast coincided with the Nativity of

the Blessed Virgin Mary on Sept 8, more than 1,200 faithful were present for the celebration.

The main presider, Archbishop Julian, said that Mary is a Mother who loves us and wants us to be healthy spiritually, mentally and physically. We come to seek Mary's intercessions to God to forgive us all our transgressions.

Touching on the significance of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the prelate elaborated on Jesus' lineage as proof that He was real.

He also urged the assembly to pray for good health for everyone, especially those who are sick. Mary sacrificed her life for her Son, Jesus Christ. The archbishop said

we too are to be life givers and bring life and light into the world, given that our words and actions bring about repentance and positive changes in the world.

As we celebrate Mary's birth, Archbishop Julian called on the assembly to remember our birth date, that God have given us life. No matter how colourful our sins are, God forgives us through the intercessions of the Blessed Virgin Mary and He saves us. Be a blessing, especially to those unwanted and make them welcome and part of our community.

Msgr Stanislaus translated and preached in Tamil.

Dinner was served to all on the chapel's grounds. — **By Bernard Anthony**

Mary needs us to say 'Yes,' as she did



Parishioners walking in procession.

LABU, Negeri Sembilan: Mother Mary does not require gifts from us as she'd received the greatest gift from God Himself: Jesus in her womb. However, Mary expects us to mirror her willingness to say, "Here I am," and bring Jesus into the world. In doing so, we become the gift to Mary and the world.

This was the crux of Carmelite Friar Nicholas Hoh, OCD's homily, during the Feast at the Chapel of Maria Bunda in Kampung Tekir on September 9.

A small crowd attended the event, representing various congregations, including the Chapel of Kebangkitan Jesus, Kampung Belihoi, Cahaya Kristus, Kampung Sebir, the Church of St Aloysius, the Church of St Theresa, the Church of the Good Shepherd and others from different parts of Kuala Lumpur.

The celebration at the Chapel of Maria Bunda, which falls under the jurisdiction of the Church of St Theresa, Nilai, included the recitation of the Rosary, Mass, procession around the "kampung" with a statue of Mother Mary and the Blessed Sacrament, followed by Benediction. The evening concluded with a grand fellowship where everyone, including children, received goodie bags as tokens of thanksgiving. It was indeed a fruitful and joyous celebration uniting the local community with participants from various congregations. — **By Sabrina Smith**

Everyone is urged to be part of God's mission

TAPAH: The Church of St Mary celebrated her annual feast from September 7 - 10, with the theme, *Journeying Together: Communion, Participation and Mission — Salt of the Earth and Light of the World*. Parish priest, Fr James Pitchay, was the celebrant and preacher.

The feast culminated on Sept 9, when more than 500 faithful from far and near converged at the church for the evening

Novena, Mass, Procession and Benediction.

Fr James spoke about how Mary's mission was in fulfilling God's plan. He said we are the salt of the earth. Salt makes food tasty, but if it loses its taste, it becomes useless. We are the light of the world. A light must be shared with others who are in darkness.

As for *communion*, we need to come together as a community of God's people and

participate (*Participation*) in our *mission* to make Him known.

Mary was chosen because of her obedience. She is the great intercessor and the first disciple of Christ. Mary showed hope and comfort and is Mother of all — Christ and us.

Fr James added that Mary was a great intercessor at the Wedding at Cana. Mary intercedes for us.

Mary being the first disciple of Christ gives us hope and comfort, so that we can reach heaven.

Fr James invited the assembly to ask Mary to pray for us to have strength to carry our crosses and follow Christ and share Him to others.

The procession saw two floats, one with Fr James holding the Blessed Sacrament, the other one with the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The congregation prayed the Rosary during the 45 minutes procession along several roads in Tapah town while. Benediction followed after the procession returned to the church. — **By Bernard Anthony**



Fr James Pitchay with the Blessed Sacrament.

Nuncio to Thai bishops: 'Build bridges of understanding'

BANGKOK: The Apostolic Nuncio in Thailand urged Catholic bishops to actively engage in interfaith dialogue to foster understanding and cooperation among different religions.

In his address to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand's plenary session on September 12, Archbishop Peter Wells said, "We cannot afford to live in isolation or to see our differences as barriers."

The prelate said the Catholic Church must "recognise the value of open conversations," which he said "allow us to learn from one another, appreciate different religious traditions, and seek common ground for collaboration"

The Catholic Church remains a minority in Thailand with 388,468 members — a figure that represents about 0.58 per cent of the Thai population of 69 million.

Archbishop Wells said that as representatives of the Catholic Church, "it is cru-



Archbishop Peter Bryan Wells, papal nuncio to Thailand.

cial" for the bishops "to foster harmonious relationships with followers of other religions in order to build bridges of understanding and create a more peaceful and

inclusive society".

The prelate said interfaith dialogue should focus on finding shared goals like justice, compassion, and peace, to address social issues collaboratively.

He also encouraged the bishops to advocate for human rights, address social and economic inequalities, and challenge the status quo to effect positive change in Thailand.

"As leaders of the Catholic Church in Thailand, we bear a moral obligation to speak out against these injustices and work tirelessly towards a more just and equitable society," he said.

The nuncio said followers of Christ must be "willing to take risks" and "boldly stand up for what is right, even when it seems difficult or unpopular".

He implored the bishops "to use your influential voice and position to effect positive change" in the lives of the Thai people. —

LiCAS News

Free dental care for Rome's poor

VATICAN: In a commendable initiative aimed at providing dental care to the underprivileged in Rome, a memorandum of understanding was signed at the Vatican on September 7. The signatories included the Vatican's Dicastery for the Service of Charity, UniCamillus University, and the "Our Lady of Trust" clinic. This collaborative effort seeks to address the dental healthcare needs of Rome's less fortunate population.

Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, the papal almoner, emphasised the significance of this agreement in extending vital dental care to individuals facing financial hardship. The ar-

range enables individuals in need to seek assistance at the "Mother of Mercy" Outpatient Clinic. Following an initial evaluation, patients will receive the required dental treatment at the "Madonna della Fiducia" Clinic, located in Rome's Appio Latino neighbourhood.

This dental service initiative, commencing in September, complements the existing range of health services available at the Santa Marta Dispensary in the Vatican. These services encompass showers, food distribution, and medical care. The addition of dental care is a testament to the commitment to addressing the holistic healthcare needs of marginalised

individuals.

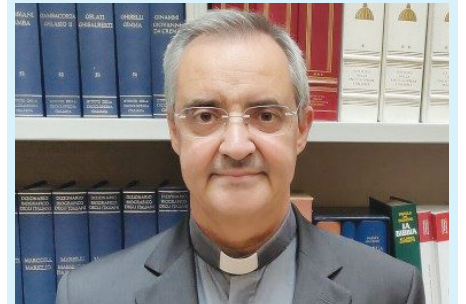
The "Mother of Mercy" facility is overseen by the Dicastery for the Service of Charity, established in 2015 under the guidance of Pope Francis. This initiative involves the dedicated efforts of 60 healthcare professionals and volunteers, enabling over 6,000 people to access free healthcare services annually. It reflects Pope Francis' call to action ahead of the upcoming World Day of the Poor on November 19.

Pope Francis has urged the faithful not to turn away from those in poverty, emphasising the importance of addressing the concrete needs of the less fortunate. This collaborative dental care initiative stands as a tangible expression of the Pope's message and underscores the commitment to extend compassionate care to those in need. — Agencies



Cardinal Krajewski with the signatories of the agreement. (Vatican Media)

New leadership at *La Civiltà Cattolica*



Fr. Nuno da Silva Gonçalves, SJ

VATICAN: Pope Francis has described *La Civiltà Cattolica*, the Italian Jesuit journal founded in 1850, as "one-of-a-kind" that has lived through "an extremely complex and eventful epoch in the life of the world."

In words he noted last June, the Pope describes how the journal aims to speak to everyone in "a world divided, wounded and in need of healing, peace and reconciliation."

With this mission and hope in mind came the announcement on September 14 of the new director, Fr Nuno da Silva Gonçalves, SJ, who will take over on October 1 from Fr Antonio Spadaro, SJ, who has headed the journal since 2011. Pope Francis has just appointed Fr Spadaro as a new undersecretary at the Dicastery for Culture and Education.

The new editor-in-chief of the journal, appointed by the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Fr Arturo Sosa Abascal, immediately sent a note to subscribers and readers saying they are at the centre of their daily work and form a community with whom the journal wishes to strengthen ties and deepen mutual knowledge. *La Civiltà Cattolica*, Fr Da Silva Gonçalves assures, wishes to offer everyone "a message of hope, engaging in a Christian reading of today's world and with an eye to the future."

La Civiltà Cattolica was originally published only in Italian. Fr Spadaro expanded the journal's outreach by launching its publication in other languages over the years that now number eight: Chinese, Korean, English, Spanish, French, Japanese, Russian, Portuguese. — By Alessandro De Carolis, Vatican News

New academic year begins for seminaries in China

SHANGAI: Seminaries in mainland China are currently celebrating the beginning of the new academic year in various ways.

On September 11, Bishop Joseph Shen Bin of Shanghai presided over the opening of the new school year at the diocesan seminary.

This year, the seminary, located in the Marian Shrine of Our Lady of Sheshan, welcomed a total of 16 new seminarians and will also offer courses for lay people.

In his address, Bishop Shen Bin encouraged the students and teachers of the seminary, which he called the "window of the diocese", to "work together to improve teaching and formation activities". He also expressed hope that the seminarians will experience three important changes — from aspiring students to scholars, from individuals to fellow human beings and from flocks to shepherds.

Bishop Joseph Li Shan of Beijing gave the opening address and called for "making the National Seminary the best and highest school of Catholicism in China". The new rector of the seminary, Bishop Joseph Guo Jincai of Chengde, emphasised that prayer, care for spiritual life and renewal of administration are the most important points to

promote vocations and make the seminary a welcoming home.

As a concrete gesture of welcome, the National Seminary offered three days of hospitality to the parents of the new seminarians who came from all over the country so that they could witness this important new beginning for their sons.

Meanwhile, Bishop Anthony Dang Mingyan of Xi'an, capital of Shaanxi Province, and rector of the Shaanxi Philosophical Theological Seminary, presided over the opening of the new academic year on Sept 7. In the words of St Paul, the bishop encouraged the seminarians: "For you should live a life worthy of the Lord and pleasing to Him in everything. You shall bear fruit in every kind of good work and grow in the knowledge of God. May He give you much strength in the power of His glory... (cf. Col 1:9-14)".

The bishop personally welcomed the 20 new students (11 seminarians and nine religious sisters) by calling them individually by name and naming them as role models to follow the patron saint of the seminary, St Therese of Lisieux, and the great Lazarist missionary, Fr Frédéric Vincent Lebbe. — Fides

Getting a new perspective on caring for migrants and itinerants

By June Vincent Marquez Cruz

PENANG: The 2023 Annual Conference for the Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerants (ECMI) took place at Stella Maris Retreat Centre September 4-6. The 36 attendees, from various countries and dioceses, including Brunei, Malaysia, and Singapore, enjoyed getting acquainted before the sessions began.

The conference officially commenced with Mass presided over by Bishop Bernard Paul, the president of ECMI. During his homily, he emphasised that God communicates with us daily, urging us to maintain our focus and remain receptive to His message, regardless of the form, shape, or size of the messenger. He stressed the importance of not being selective about the messenger.

On the second day, participants were divided into five groups, each consisting of members from different countries and dioceses. The initial activity involved group discussions, where individuals shared their distinct experiences, challenges, and takeaways from their involvement in the Migrant Ministry. The dedication and passion conveyed in their stories were on an entirely different level. As a first-time attendee of this conference, it opened my eyes to the challenges, sacrifices, and unwavering commitment of those serving in the ministry, regardless of the circumstances.

We had the opportunity to listen to a talk titled *Church Teaching on Migration* by Cheryl Lee, a former consultant of ECMI. She highlighted that human mobility is a constant aspect of human life, with migration being a significant sign of our times. Migration has been a part of human history from its inception, from Adam and Eve's expulsion from paradise to Abraham's journey from Ur to Haran to Canaan, Joseph of Egypt, Moses' exodus from Egypt, and Jesus' experience as a refugee who embraced human frailty. Migration continues to be a part of our Salvation History, which is ongoing.

Catholic Social Teachings emphasise the sanctity of every human being and prioritise human dignity over national interests, recognising that everyone possesses the freedom to choose to migrate or stay. Migrants are viewed as recipients of charity and individuals to



Som Sivann, Labour Attache of the Royal Embassy of the Kingdom of Cambodia during the panel session.

whom we minister. In serving them, we are already offering them the gift of faith in God, the greatest gift we can bestow.

In the afternoon session, the Director of Caritas Malaysia, Fr Fabian Dicom, delivered a talk on ways to attract labourers to the mission, entitled, *Harvest is plenty, labourers are few*. He mentioned that the Migrant Mission has abundant opportunities for harvest but lacks the necessary manpower. Rather than becoming discouraged, those engaged in the mission should pray for additional workers. The solution to the shortage of labourers lies in prayer, as prayer should serve as the central component of our mission. Ultimately, Christ is our mission, echoing the words of Jesus in Matthew 25:40, "Amen I say to you, whatever you did for one of the least brothers of Mine, you did for Me."

The final day began with a panel discussion on legal rights and advocacy. The panellists represented the different areas which need to work together — UN, NGO, Embassy and civil society. However, the ECMI exco was unable to invite a representative from the government.

The panellists were: Mathura Gopala Krishnan, a senior project assistant with the International Organisation for Migration, Som Sivann, Labour Attache of the Royal Embassy of the Kingdom of Cambodia, Audrey See Tho Wai Siong Senior Manager, Programme at (IJM) International Justice Mission and Sally Katherine Alexander from Persatuan Pembela Wanita Pulau Pinang.

These panellists spoke on:

1. Areas of assistance provided

by their organisation, as well how faith-based organisations might benefit from it and help raise awareness when reaching out to migrants.

2. Best practices and challenges faced by their organisation in assisting migrants — trafficking in person.

3. Identify areas of collaboration between faith-based organisation and their organisation in providing support services to migrants.

Bishop Bernard then shared insights about the Migrant Ministry. He stressed that everything should flow through prayer. As a gathering of believers, we should continually ask ourselves, "What is the Holy Spirit saying to us?" Our model is Jesus Christ. Each one of us should embody the five C's:

- Courage — belief in our calling,
- Creativity — thinking beyond conventional boundaries,
- Collaboration — inviting all potential contributors,
- Connection — remaining open to partnerships and establishing networks, and
- Contemplation — working with God and discerning His will.

Migration is not a new phenomenon; people have always sought better lives and moved. As a ministry, we should actively integrate others into the broader Church family and establish connections with other parish/diocese groups, NGOs, embassies, and governmental agencies. One of the most significant takeaways from the conference is that "we cannot build ministries with different mindsets". After absorbing the sessions and talks at the conference, I left Stella Maris with a new perspective.



The participants of the conference.

Sharings from participants

"I am simply amazed by the co-existence of Asian formed Migrant Ministries and the hearty volunteers moving strongly to continue the work of mercy in Welcoming, Protecting, Providing, and Integrating Migrants." — **Jennifer Nyanggau, Brunei**

"Blessed to acknowledge such community exists in supporting the rising number of documented migrants and non-documented refugees." — **Som Sivann, Cambodia**

"Insightful conference that created a possible platform in exchanging testimonies and community practices. I am proposing to have a consistent engagement in some form of regular meets through Zoom, Google Meet, Teams with aims to build up parish related missions." — **Mary Njo Juan Juan, Singapore**

"Cultivated moments of video clips shared that had moved my heart and provided the proper support of senior members to guide, educate and drive their mission boost audiences." — **Cornelius Bin Bujang and Caroline Ammani Punusamy, Malaysia**

"It is a blessed discovery to know that there are local hubs that support victimised migrants and refugees. Hoping for new voices to hear those in need of medical attention — cost to subsidise, those who seek shelter from those who were forced to leave their employment with pay debt." — **Anna Kim MyMyanmar**

"It was an eye-opener for the new genre. Being a migrant myself in Malaysia, I wish to give my 100 per cent support to the relevant NGOs and ECMI units." — **June Vincent Cruz, Philippines**

Migrant Sunday kit



Every year, the different dioceses take the lead in preparing the Migrant Sunday kit for the region. This year, the Diocese of Penang is responsible.

- The kit consists of:
1. Pope's message
 2. Bishop Bernard Paul's message
 3. Video
 4. Posters

Bishop Bernard in his message reminds us that only communities that welcome, protect, promote and integrate frees people to stay or leave.

He remind sus that when the migrants and refugees stand at our doorstep, BE FREE....see Christ, the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the prisoner.....hear them, hear their cry. BE FREEbecome communities which include all without distinction.

BE FREE, Walk together with all. They are your brothers and sisters.

Please go to: bit.ly/3RpiMCs



The synod's priorities are Communion, Participation, Mission

According to the media, the most important issues facing the Synod on Synodality are the possibility of married priests, women deacons and the blessing of gay couples. The first session of the synod will take place in Rome this October, with a second session in October 2024.

I personally hope the synod deals with these issues, but making these topics the principal focus of the synod would be a big mistake. They certainly are not central in the mind of Pope Francis, nor are they central to the *Instrumentum Laboris*, or working paper, that will guide the initial meetings of the synod.

For the *Instrumentum Laboris* and Pope Francis, the priority issues are **Communion, Participation and Mission**. If the synod does not foster greater communion, participation and mission, then it will be a failure. Francis' hope is that the fruit of the next assembly will be that the Spirit inspires the Church to walk together as the people of God in fidelity to the mission the Lord has entrusted to it.

Communion is central to who we are as Church. According to the *Instrumentum Laboris*, citing the Second Vatican Council, the Church is a sign and instrument of union with God and the unity of all humanity. People should see this union with God and this human unity in the life of the Church. The Church should be a preeminent way for people to attain this union. Fostering that communion is at the heart of what it means to be a synodal Church. If we forget that while we squabble over who can or cannot be a minister, then we miss the point.

Likewise, arguing over who can be a priest should not make us forget that we are all responsible for the Church's mission in service of the Gospel. If we all accept our responsibility for the mission of the Church, the clergy would be much less important to the life of the Church.

Our need for communion and our co-responsibility for the mission lead to questions about participation, governance and

Not who can be priests



A young man puts his head through a cutout frame to take a photo "hugging" Pope Francis at the Synod of Bishops' booth in a park in Lisbon, Portugal, during World Youth Day Aug 3, 2023. (CNS/Courtesy of the Synod Secretariat)

authority — where authority is service and decisions are made through discernment. Participation and discernment are not simply for the synod; they are the lifeblood of every local Church.

This is not to say the synod will ignore real problems in the world. The *Instrumentum Laboris* reports the particular situations experienced by the Church in different parts of the world. These include too many wars, the threat of climate change, as well as "exploitation, inequality and a throwaway culture, and the desire to resist the homogenising pressure of cultural colonialism that crushes minorities." Added to this is "persecution to the point of mar-

tyrdom," as well as self-inflicted wounds of sexual abuse and the abuse of power, conscience and money in the Church.

But these problems will not be solved by resolutions or documents, according to Francis, but through greater communion, co-responsibility in mission and increased participation in the life of the Church.

In other words, even if I got what I wanted out of the synod — married priests and women priests — but the Church became less a sign and instrument of union with God and the unity of all humanity, then the synod would not have achieved its goals. If I got what I wanted, and the Church remained clerical with a passive

laity, then the synod would have been a failure. If we continued as usual with just different people in charge, then we missed the revolution Francis is calling for.

Progressives are thinking too small. Through the synod, Francis is calling for a spiritual shake-up much greater than anyone can imagine. He is not looking for a few thousand new clergy to keep the Church going. He wants a mass movement that makes the Gospel alive in our time. On the other hand, conservative Catholics fear this movement will get out of control. They want the Spirit to be under the thumb of hierarchy.

According to the *Instrumentum Laboris*, this revolution has already begun in the preparations for the synod: "The first phase renewed our awareness that our identity and vocation is to become an increasingly synodal Church: walking together, that is, becoming synodal, is the way to truly become disciples and friends of that Master and Lord who said of Himself: 'I am the Way' (Jn 14:6)."

The spiritual conversations that have occurred in parishes and dioceses around the world have already fostered communion and helped people become more aware of their responsibility for the mission of the Church in service of the Gospel.

The synodal Church began growing at the grassroots and hopefully will bloom at the synod in Rome.

The hope is that the synod will "continue to animate the synodal process in the ordinary life of the Church, identifying which pathways the Spirit invites us to walk along more decisively as one People of God," according to the *Instrumentum Laboris*.

Francis is betting his papacy on the hope that these local ripples of synodality will combine into a tsunami that will transform the Church so that it is truly a sign and instrument of communion with God and the unity of all humanity. The Church will become God's instrument for the transformation of the world. — **By Fr Thomas Reese, SJ, NCR**

The Synod? "It must succeed, otherwise it will be a disaster"

How are the nuns doing, Mother Superior?

Your Holiness, we are concerned about the Synod.

Now what's going on? Do you want to send a sister to the Synod?

No, we are afraid you are going to change doctrine.

This astonishing dialogue, which Pope Francis recounted to journalists on his plane from Mongolia back to Rome, took place a few months ago between him and the prioress of a Carmelite monastery. In just a few words, the nun summed up the fears that sometimes loom large, in Rome and elsewhere, as we draw closer to the October 4 opening of the Synod of Bishops' next assembly.

The concerns are all the greater because some people in Rome are having trouble grasping the contours of this great reflection on the future of the Catholic Church. During the past many weeks,

Synod officials and the Pope have presented the synodal assembly as a spiritual process in which "the Holy Spirit will be the protagonist". At the

same time, they have insisted there be no political reading of

the process.

"It must succeed," said a Roman source supportive of Francis and the synodal process, making no secret of his concern.

"Otherwise, it will be a catastrophe."

"But how do you define the "success" of a Synod assembly that will not really be concluded until another year from now?"

"The criterion for success will be in the definition of what we are going to do with the second session, in a year's time," noted our observer. Like many others, he is clearly adopting a political angle. "In a war, the first attack is made to test the opponent.

"In October, we'll see who's strong and who's not. Then the war is won in the second battle," he said.

"If we want to demonstrate the Catholic Church's internal capacity to discuss issues on which its faithful sometimes disagree, that's fine," the observer added. "But it cannot be enough to ensure the success of the Synod."

— **By Loup Besmond de Senneville, LCI (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)**



Is opposition to the Synod rooted in a mistrust of the Holy Spirit?



Pope Francis has been the subject of what seems like unrelenting criticism for several years. At times, it is difficult to keep up with the sheer volume of critiques and attacks on the Holy Father coming from Catholic media outlets, Catholic journalists, columnists and writers; as well as, more surprisingly, cardinals, archbishops, bishops and priests. Some well-meaning critics try to be respectful of Pope Francis; other critics seem to have jettisoned even a modicum of respect for the successor to St Peter.

In the run-up to the Synod on Synodality's first month-long gathering in Rome, the critiques have only intensified. Few things seem to stir up Francis' opponents as much as this worldwide consultation of Catholics. (I am one of the six Americans invited by Pope Francis to participate in the synod as a voting member.)

Most recently, for example, Cardinal Raymond Burke, the former archbishop of St Louis, penned an appreciative forward to a new book attacking the synod, saying that the process will foster "confusion and error and division."

Perhaps one reason that there is so much public criticism is that, with a few exceptions, Francis is allowing these conversations to take place — and even commenting on his critics at times — rather than clamping down on the discussions.

But before we get into where such fierce opposition to the synod comes from, we need to look more closely at what it is.

What is a synod?

First, let's define a synod. It is a form of ecclesial gathering that has existed since the time of the early Church, but which fell into disuse; it was revived by St Paul VI shortly after the Second Vatican Council as a way of gathering together a variety of voices from



Pope Francis greets people during an audience with the faithful from the Diocese of Rome at the Vatican Sept 18, 2021. (Vatican Media)

across the Church. Later, the model was promoted by St John Paul II, who convened many synods during his pontificate.

For his part, Francis has emphasised the synod and "synodality" as a way of listening to voices from around the Church, especially

those who may not have been heard from before. One of Francis' innovations has been to give women and other laypeople the right to vote as full members of the synod. In this way, the Pope is filling a notable lacuna left by

Vatican II, which said in *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, that lay people, by virtue of their expertise, are sometimes "obliged" to offer their opinions on "things which concern the good of the Church" (No. 37). But in the decades since, they have been given few avenues in which to do so, at least at the universal level. The

synod is a step toward allowing them to fulfill that obligation.

"The synod," Pope Francis said on October 9, 2021, the day before its official opening, "offers us the opportunity to become a listening Church, to break out of our routine and

pause from our pastoral concerns in order to stop and listen."

As a result, the current Synod on Synodality (that is, a synod to help the Church hear the voice of the Spirit by involving and hearing from the people of

God) was preceded by listening sessions on the parish and diocesan levels around the world. The fruits of these conversations were sent to bishops' conferences, who summarised the proceedings. All these, in turn, were sent to the Vatican, where the worldwide responses were summarised into a working document (or *Instrumentum Laboris*).

Francis has emphasised the synod and "synodality" as a way of listening to voices from around the Church, especially those who may not have been heard from before.

The role of conscience

Let's focus on the second question, which I think may be at the heart of some of the opposition to Pope Francis: Do I believe that the Holy Spirit is alive in the individual conscience?

Many of the main flash points during Francis' papacy have included concerns around the role of conscience. Perhaps the first instance was his answer to a journalist's question about gay priests: "Who am I to judge?" The first part of his response is important: "If someone is gay and is searching for the Lord, who am I to judge?" If one believes in an informed conscience as the final arbiter of the moral life — what the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* calls our "most secret core and...sanctuary," one can see what the Pope means. If one does not, then what the Pope said can be very confusing — or result in a fearful response.

After the publication of *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis' meditation on love and the family, four cardinals sent him and the Dicastery (then-Congregation) for the Doctrine of the Faith, a *dubia* (a formal request for answers on theological questions), which took issue with several matters concerning conscience. This is not surprising. *Amoris Laetitia* highlighted the Church's traditional teachings on conscience, reminding pastors that they are called to "form consciences, not replace them," and inviting the Church to reverence people's consciences, for example, on the question of whether a divorced and remarried

person may receive Communion.

For many of Pope Francis' opponents, this seemed tantamount to "breaking the rules" or encouraging an "anything goes" approach to traditional Catholic morality. But from the perspective of reverencing God speaking through conscience, this instead marks an emphasis on a deep trust in the Holy Spirit. In a similar way, the synod asks us to believe that the Holy Spirit can act through the individual conscience as well as in the "joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties" of the people of God, as *Gaudium et Spes* put it.

'Counter currents'

As I mentioned, the synodal process has included inviting the faithful at the parish level, the diocesan level, the national level and then the continental level, to offer their opinions about the Church. The process calls to mind a line from every priest's ordination Mass, when the person in charge of the priests' training says to the ordaining bishop, "After inquiry among the Christian people, and upon the recommendation of those responsible, I find them to be worthy." That "inquiry" trusts that the people of God have something to say. Likewise, the synod is trusting that the Holy Spirit is at work in not just cardinals, archbishops and bishops, but in everyone who participated in these sessions — and all those who are gathering next month in Rome.

Nathalie Becquart, XMCJ, the undersecretary of the synod, told me that we had to be



cautious of the "counter currents" that resist the movement of the Holy Spirit and bring "fear, trouble and hopelessness." She said it was important to discern carefully, weighing what comes from God and what comes from "the enemy."

"The Spirit can speak through some of the critics to tell us something we have to integrate," she wrote in a recent email, "but the enemy can also use fears, resistance and critique as a means of diverting us from the right path to take in response to the Spirit's calls."

Do we believe in the Holy Spirit? Catholics profess this in the Nicene Creed during Sunday Mass. But do we trust in the Holy Spirit?

Basically, then, the synod trusts that the Holy Spirit is alive and active among not just cardinals, archbishops and bishops, and not just among Vatican officials, but among all the faithful. So where might this fear of the synod come from?

Fear and trust

I suspect a primary fear is that there will be a wholesale change to Church teaching. Now, I cannot speak for my fellow synod members, but I doubt that any member wishes to change the essentials of the faith. (I don't.) But anyone who knows any Church history also knows that Church teaching has developed dramatically on a variety of topics, including slavery, women's roles, ecumenical relations, the liturgy, limbo, capital punishment and so on. As Pope Francis said in a conversation with Portuguese Jesuits during World Youth Day, "doctrine also progresses, expands and consolidates with time and becomes firmer, but is always progressing."

But I often wonder if the deeper opposition is to something else.

After we dig into the political, the sociological, the ecclesiological, the theological, even the spiritual, we have to ask ourselves two questions: First, do we trust in the Holy Spirit? And second, do we believe that the Holy Spirit is active, both in this gathering of the faithful and in the individual consciences of the people participating in the synod? Throughout Church history, we have been invited to trust in the Holy Spirit during times of uncertainty—with Pentecost as the defining example, but elsewhere as well, as during ecumenical councils and papal conclaves.

We may also need to ask a third question: If we trust in the Holy Spirit, why would we be fearful of Francis' vision of the synod as a gathering where all voices are heard?

On an individual level — that of conscience — and on an ecclesial level? If we do, then we can approach the synod with open hearts and minds, free of what Sr Nathalie calls "fear, trouble and hopelessness."

I do not mean to equate the Pope (or the synod or anyone else) with the third person of the Trinity. But I do mean this: To condemn the synod outright is akin to saying that we do not trust that the Spirit is alive in the hearts of our fellow Catholics, that it is alive in the Church and that it may even have something new to teach us.

As for me, I trust in the Holy Spirit. — **Fr James Martin, SJ, America**

Small parish community embodies synodal journey

By Fr Martin Arlando

The recent parish feast day celebration at the Church of Our Lady of Good Health in Parit Buntar, Perak was a time of festivity, prayer, and thanksgiving for the parishioners. Community participation was at the fore as the event brought together people of all ages and backgrounds, providing an opportunity to strengthen bonds and celebrate in unity.

The feast day organising committee focused on the synodal journey and chose the theme, *Mary calls families to be salt of the earth and light of the world in the Church*. This theme was apt as the parish is currently in the transition period of moving from the focus on 'families' to 'Church'.

After being in this parish for about six months now, I have learnt a lot — from the kids to the senior citizens. I am more immersed in the Indian culture and tradition, the Synodal Church and the New Way of Being Church.

As soon as I arrived in this parish on March 1, 2023, I began visiting the BECs

with the hardworking Parish Animating Team. The purpose was to simply reflect with them and listen from the BEC members on their understanding of Church and participation. The questionnaires were completed earlier, but I felt their expression in person was very valuable and contributed greatly to the organising of the parish feast day celebrations.

We also met the various key ministries and went through the same process with the catechism children, youth and single adults.

During all the meetings I could sense their enthusiasm in wanting to grow as a family in the parish and the Church as a whole. To some groups I gave challenges for them to move forward in spirituality, participation and deeper understanding. By the end of the visits, the people's eyes were opened to the current needs and to come together as one community.

These efforts bore fruit during the preparation and the celebrations itself. The event brought people together, fostered a sense of belonging, and reinforced the bonds of

friendship and fellowship. Parishioners volunteered their time and effort to prepare for the celebration two months in advance. The celebration provided an opportunity for the young people to showcase their talents and learn about their heritage, while the elders were invited to share what the parish celebration was like in the olden days and how to grow from here. A video was prepared to capture and preserve all these precious moments and has safely

been archived for future generations.

The planning and coordination involved the priest, pastoral council, and leaders who met to discuss the event's structure, activities, and decisions related to liturgy and feast preparation. This planning process was guided by the principles of the synodal journey, where all members are encouraged to participate actively, whether little children, youth or the most senior person in the parish.



Active participation

The synodal journey underlines the importance of active participation by all members of the parish community. The participation of parishioners was welcomed in all aspects of the feast day preparations including decoration, cooking, and preparation of the Liturgy. This active involvement fostered a sense of togetherness and

belonging within the community. This is where I witnessed the spirit of *gotong-royong*, especially during the preparation of meals, where all came together to cook, chat and help one another. Even though some were tired after the long day of preparation and procession, they went back home to immediately change and come back with their utensils to prepare the food for the chef to cook. It was such a joy to see them preparing the meal with LOVE. One special thing I witnessed was the generosity of the parishioners in donating some of the things needed to be used for cooking whereas the kindergarten and primary school kids also contributed by giving the savings from their daily school pocket money. No one was left out.

Listening to the voices of the people

The synodal journey encourages Church leaders to listen to the voices of the people, especially those who are marginalised or vulnerable. This is where the various BECs contributed to the poor — Christians and non-Christians alike. We also listened to their feedback on how to make this parish and us, a Jesus for all. Their voices were precious and taken into account, ensuring that everyone feels valued and heard.

Encouraging dialogue and collaborative decision-making

The synodal journey emphasises the spirit of collaboration, dialogue, and consensus-building. This was done within the various parish groups. One of it was the selection of the theme for the parish feast day, where all the BEC liturgical representatives were asked to propose the daily themes for the Masses they were animating and also the main theme. All of us brainstormed to make the theme OUR theme and not just to showcase it. At the end all were in agreement as the theme reflected what we are going through and living, and the sub themes helped us to enhance our spiritual growth. The members shared their ideas, listened to others, and worked together to create a vibrant celebration.

Peace, joy and gratitude

Our parish feast day celebration included entertainment such as cultural performances, live music, and children's games. These events had a unifying theme promoting peace, joy, and gratitude. There was a booth about Mother Mary where everyone had a chance to learn about the various apparitions of Our Lady that took place around the world. There were activities for the children.

The youth and single adults organised a praise and worship session and also did a flash mob which I promised to join, and I did.

Our celebration this year provided the members with an opportunity to come together in prayer, reflecting on their faith and devotion to Our Lady of Good Health. The preparation and celebration itself exemplified the Synodal journey's principles, emphasising a shared sense of collaboration, togetherness and active participation. The celebration represented the spirit of the Church as a community, reflecting the values of listening, dialogue, and reflection. Volunteers, cultural performers, feast preparers, procession leaders, and Mass attendees all played an essential role in making the celebration a joyous and memorable one.

All in all, our parish feast day embodied the spirit of community, participation, togetherness, enhanced team spirit, and fostered goodwill. These aspects of the synodal journey were evident throughout our preparations where the values of prayer, active participation, listening to the voice of the people, dialogue, and decision-making were all emphasised. All of these reinforced the sense of community and belonging that is at the heart of the synodal journey.



Why were so many of Jesus' first followers fishermen?

Ever wondered why many of Jesus' first followers were fishermen?

Something was happening when Jesus was growing up in the early First Century.

Judea and Galilee had fallen under the control of the Roman Empire, either directly through a local client king or ruler, or through a Roman governor.

These rulers ensured that the economy of the region served the needs of the empire foremost. Their model was an early prototype of the economic globalisation we are familiar with today.

Under Roman rule, local agriculture and fisheries — two key sectors of the economy — grew commercialised to boost the food supply of the empire while reaping profits for local elites.

This was part of the Roman 'globalisation' of the Mediterranean region.

By the time Jesus arrived on the scene, many of the farmers and fishermen were no longer independent. Many farmers had lost their family land — which the Jews considered as belonging to God. Their land had been placed as collateral for loans to pay heavy taxes.

The confiscated plots of land were then combined into large estates. Now the farmers had become casual workers or day labourers working for landlords or other tenant farmers.

The new owners of the land produced cash crops like grain and wine for export to Rome and regional markets. Many of the grain shipments were made through the new port that King Herod constructed in Caesarea — an architectural marvel.

Under the local rulers, even the fisheries sector was turned into an industry, again to supply the region. Fish was salted and pickled and fish products were shipped to markets in the empire. Today, we see the ruins of fish processing plants around the Sea of Galilee in places like Magdala.

But the fishermen were now struggling as



SUNDAY OBSERVER

Anil Netto

even the Sea of Galilee was commercialised to secure profits for the elite class. Many fishermen now had to combine their resources as collectives to secure fishing rights and even to afford a boat.

These independent fishermen were reduced to struggling to earn a living, as the middlemen and concessionaires reaped handsome profits. They had to work long hours to make ends meet.

Meanwhile, the local elite and the aristocrats were content to indulge in the trappings of Greco-Roman civilisation in the cities of Sepphoris and Caesarea.

These elites — many of them Sadducee



families — owned much of the land and some were also in the Sanhedrin court.

They lived off the profits from estates producing cash crops. They also had great say over the Temple treasury in Jerusalem, which functioned like a central bank. Many of these elites cooperated with the Roman imperial overlords, especially in putting down any rebellions.

So, both the farmers and the fishermen were losing their economic independence and gradually becoming casual workers. Or they turned to other jobs like construction work, stone masonry or carpentry to work on Herod's string of mega-construction projects.

This process eroded the farmers' and fishermen's self-sufficiency in food supply, as many sank into poverty and even destitution. Some even had to wait at town squares for casual day jobs for a day's wages — "Kais pagi, makan pagi, kais malam, makan malam," (a hand-to-mouth subsistence existence), as they say in Malaysia.

All this took a toll on their health in a land that was once described as one of "milk and honey". Little wonder then that Jesus had so many people to heal.

Many of these dispossessed farming and fishing families turned to John the Baptist. John spoke of God's justice and an impending catastrophe if people did not repent. He warned of an impending divine clean-up to sort out this mess.

By then it was clear that a rebellion from the restless people against Roman rule would cause tremendous suffering, devastation and bloodshed.

When John was executed, many of his followers gravitated to Jesus, whose message had a different emphasis.

Jesus told them that God was inviting us to collaborate in building up his kingdom. He was inviting us to change the course of history by wiping out injustice, promoting inclusiveness and ending greed. His way was not the way of the world.

Today, the global and local economies face challenges that are not much different from Jesus' time. Greed still rules. The Commons — the sea, the forests, the hills and the land, which rightfully belongs to the public — is still being coveted by the elite.

How often have we seen public assets and resources — whether farmland, fishing waters, forests and hills — being destroyed, to profit a small elite group of political and business interests. Such wanton destruction is taking a terrible toll on our ecosystems.

Let's pray for the courage and the vision to see the world anew. Let's regard Creation as a gift from God that should be treasured and not destroyed due to unbridled Greed.

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



WORD MADE FRESH

Nicholas Lye

Safety first (before Salvation)

questions about my faith and background, and even asked inquisitive questions with regards to what he was studying. All this revealed to me his intellect and capacity to thrive, provided he was given a safe and affirming environment to do so, something we do not seem to value or provide for others, yet goes such a long way in helping someone to be more of their best selves.

Psychological studies reveal that there is a part of our brain known as the amygdala, whose function is to constantly look out for danger as a mode of survival. When this part of the brain is activated, particularly when the person is in an environment that does not feel safe, it tends to operate from a fight, flight or freeze mode, resulting in what appears as social anxiety, laziness, or other kinds of rebellious or unhealthy behaviour. At this point, the pre-frontal cortex that is in charge of all the reasoning functions is not at its optimum level, resulting in individuals not being able to make sound and rational decisions. However, once a person feels safe, and the amygdala no longer needs to be hyper vigilant, it allows the pre-frontal cortex to function optimally, and can result in someone becoming more open, more responsive, make better decisions, and even thrive from his or her own innate strengths and gifts.

This very much applies to how we journey with people whether in life or in the faith. No amount of reasoning, reprimand, or reiteration of biblical teachings and truths can fully

make sense to anyone who does not feel safe and loved. It is often after we have showed acceptance, patience, and gentleness to someone, and offered a safe and encouraging environment to the person, would the person become more open and perceptible to words and actions of love, wisdom and even gentle correction.

We see this in the way Jesus walked with the two disciples who were on their way to Emmaus. Instead of reprimanding them for losing their faith so easily and walking away from Jerusalem, Jesus provided a safe space for them to speak their hearts and minds about their disappointments and frustrations. Even as He tried explaining the Scriptures to them, He did not impose the teachings on them, but gave them their own space and time to process these truths on their own. It was not till much later, when the safe and loving accompaniment of Jesus finally opened their hearts to encounter His love and presence in the breaking of the bread, were their eyes, hearts and minds finally opened to the truth that set them free, and led them to making the decision to return to Jerusalem and spread the Good News.

How can we better provide safety and love to others in order for them to thrive and be more of their best selves? It might first be to provide safety to ourselves, especially when we find ourselves overreacting to people or circumstances from a fight, flight or freeze mode. When we can turn back to Christ and

experience safety, love and acceptance from Him, and no longer see others or situations as a sign of danger, can we better process His truths and respond to others in a more loving and life-giving way.

"I shall not call you servants anymore, because servants do not know what their master is about. Instead I have called you friends, since I have made known to you everything I learned from my Father." (John 15:15)

God never intended to use fear or force to get us to do what He wants. Instead, He treats us as friends, providing a safe space for us to be as we are, while gently making known to us everything He has learned from His Father, so that in our own time and space, through safety, love and encouragement, we might eventually accept these truths on our own, and gradually learn to live out of the truths of God, but also the truth of who He created us to be.

The better we are able to provide safety and love to ourselves and others, the better we are able to optimise our gifts, strengths and capacities to flourish and thrive as friends of God.

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

'What is my purpose?' asked Tiny Dragon. Big Panda paused, then said, 'To sit on that stone and be with your friend.'

('Big Panda and Tiny Dragon' by James Norbury)

I was recently invited to coach a pre-teen who was experiencing social anxiety. He would not say much on our first day of meeting. But when I offered suggested responses to my questions, he could at least say "yes" or "no" to those suggestions. As I continued to reiterate how important he is to me, and offered him encouragement and safety to be himself, he was finally able to articulate feelings of disappointment about himself. Through the use of pictures from the book *Big Panda and Tiny Dragon*, I was then able to point out his strengths that helped him overcome his challenges, and remind him of the people supporting him in his journey. After just two sessions, he was not only opening up more to me; his mother also noticed how he was beginning to respond better to strangers.

Another opportunity came for me to accompany a teenager to study, as he felt encouraged and safe when I was with him. In school or at home, he would often be scolded and labelled as 'lazy,' but when I was around, he showed great interest in my life by asking



Fr Ron Rolheiser

Hypocrisy's two faces

The subtlety of hypocrisy! How easy it is not to see our own inconsistencies, even as we so clearly see the faults of others. Are we wilfully blind, or is it that we just don't see? Is this a moral problem or a visual one? Consider these examples:

In his travels, the eighteenth-century explorer, Captain James Cook, once spent several years in the Polynesian Islands. He learned the native language and was befriended by the people. One day, they took him to witness a human sacrifice. The tribe still practised a certain animism and would sometimes offer a person as a sacrifice to their gods. Cook, a sophisticated English gentleman, was understandably appalled. He wrote in his diary that he expressed his indignation to the chief, telling him: This is awful! You're a primitive people. In England we would hang you for that!

The irony in Cook's reaction shouldn't be missed — and it isn't missed by anthropologists. When we kill someone in God's name, it doesn't matter whether we call it human sacrifice or capital punishment. Either way, we are sacrificing a human life and justifying it in God's name.

A second example comes to us from the writings of Bill Plotkin who once spent time studying various initiation rites which pre-modern tribes used to initiate young boys and young girls at the age

of puberty. As we know, puberty can be a dangerous time for a young person. Puberty hits a young person with a certain violence which heats up both the body and the psyche. However, it must be kept in mind that this powerful unsettling force had been designed by God and nature with a definite purpose, namely, to drive you out of your home, to push you towards finding a home for yourself, and to end your childhood so as to enter adulthood. Understandably, powerful energies are needed to accomplish that.

But these energies can be hard to contain and hard to initiate in the direction of adulthood. Indeed, almost all pre-modern cultures had initiation rites to help direct that process. Today most cultures (not least our own) have precious little in terms of explicit initiation rites. What Plotkin found in his study of pre-modern initiation rites is that all of them were very demanding, physically, and emotionally, on the youth undergoing them that sometimes a youth undergoing them died during the process.

Looking at this, Plotkin comments that our modern sensitivities are offended by this seemingly primitive cruelty. We easily become morally indignant and see these practices as backward and cruel. However, he goes on to point out, these tribes actually lose very few young people in the passage from puberty to adult-

hood — while we, sophisticated modern cultures, lose thousands of young people every year who are trying to self-initiate through drugs, alcohol, sex, cars, gangs, and at-risk behaviour.

Aye, as Jesus once said, it's easy to see the splinter in someone else's eye even as we are unaware of the beam in our own eye.

Now I say all this more in sympathy than in judgment because hypocrisy isn't all of a kind. There is a hypocrisy where the blindness is more wilful, and there is a hypocrisy where the blindness is more innocent. Thomas Aquinas once distinguished between two kinds of ignorance. For Aquinas, there is culpable ignorance and there is invincible ignorance, that is, sometimes we don't see because we don't want to see, and sometimes we don't see simply because we can't see.

In culpable ignorance we do know better. We refuse to look at something because we don't want to see the truth. Our inability to see is predicated on rationalization and fear, a wilful refusal to look lest we see what we don't want to see, some inconvenient truth. In culpable ignorance, we don't see the parallel between human sacrifice and capital punishment because we already intuitively sense the connection and we don't want to see it, and so refuse to look.

In invincible ignorance we don't know

any better. Our shortcomings have to do with the limits of our humanity, our background, and our experience. We aren't afraid to look at reality. We look, but we simply don't see. Like Captain Cook, in all sincerity, we simply don't see the parallel between human sacrifice and capital punishment, and, unlike Bill Plotkin, we can easily judge pre-modern initiation rites as cruel and appalling, even as thousands of our own young people die cruel senseless deaths in trying to find the passage of life from puberty to adulthood.

All of us, liberal or conservative, have blind spots in terms of how we see and assess various social justice issues, be that climate change, poverty, abortion, immigration, refugees, racism, women's equality, or gender issues. Standing before these complex issues, are we willing to look them square in the face, or are we unwilling to really look at them because we already intuit what we might see? Is our blindness, our hypocrisy, culpable or invincible?

● **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

Life is good, life is hard: Christianity's saving paradox

He said to expect the cross — not once in a while, not in certain seasons of our life, but daily. But the trick is to notice the graces as much as you notice the needs.

At Benedictine College in Kansas, I have contact with religious and lay people, married and single. Twice recently I had to share a lesson I had to learn the hard way: If life is going wrong, you can't necessarily expect it to get better; but if you stop and look, you will realise that life is beautiful even when it's at its worst.

First, a consecrated religious shared with me how hurtful the cross of religious life can be. I said: "That sounds like married life!"

It turns out that religious obedience to a sinner-superior can be as hard as mutual submission to a sinner-spouse.

In both religious life and married life, you are struck with a painful paradox at the very heart of your vocation: You have given your all to a perfect God, through formal vows, but that perfection is available to you only through a deeply flawed, even hurtful, human vessel. That makes life a series of disappointments that are worse than disappointing: They seem to strike at the core of your being.

You find yourself saying: "God, I gave everything to You so that I could live only in Your grace, relying on You alone to buoy me through life, and instead of Yourself, I ended up with a leaky lifeboat that is constantly taking on water and is by now all but sunk. How is this okay?"

Students face the same problem.

At Benedictine College I also meet a lot of lay people, students and professors, from secular backgrounds who crawled into the Catholic faith like thirsty desert travellers who have found an oasis. The problem is, some of them now worry that maybe it's just a mirage.

They think that maybe they found a fuzzy, fake church, not the real, strong Church that Aquinas and Chesterton described. Or maybe it's all just a kind of Live Action Role

Playing game of people pretending to be something they aren't, like a worldwide Renaissance Festival with pews.

They wanted faith to secure them, but now they struggle with the Church instead. They had great hope, but now strongly fear that they have misplaced their trust. They longed for love, but now feel more unloving than ever.

My advice is always the same: "I'm sorry. The Christian life doesn't get better. But please notice that it is already amazing."

To understand why life in Christ is like this, you have to understand what Jesus is doing. I like how the poet Milton summed up Satan's attitude in *Paradise Lost*: "It's better to rule in hell than to serve in heaven." That attitude made Satan reject God — and drove him to earth to convince us to join him.

Now we echo his attitude in our lives, saying: "I don't trust God and His Church. I know I'd be better off doing things my way." To win us back, God has to do two difficult, contradictory things simultaneously: He has to win our trust and break our pride.

So that's what He does. To show us we can trust Him, He promises bliss, starting now, saying: "Come to Me all you who labour and are burdened ... and you will find rest for your souls."

To break our pride, He tells us to expect heartache and sorrow, starting now, from whatever is not Him — including our homes and our homeland. He warned that His followers will be sold out by our families, and that our nations will set us against each other. He said to expect the cross — not once in a while, not in certain seasons of our life, but daily.

Jesus said following Him means building on rock, and that following Him means facing constant storms.

Look for it and you find this message on every page of the Gospels.

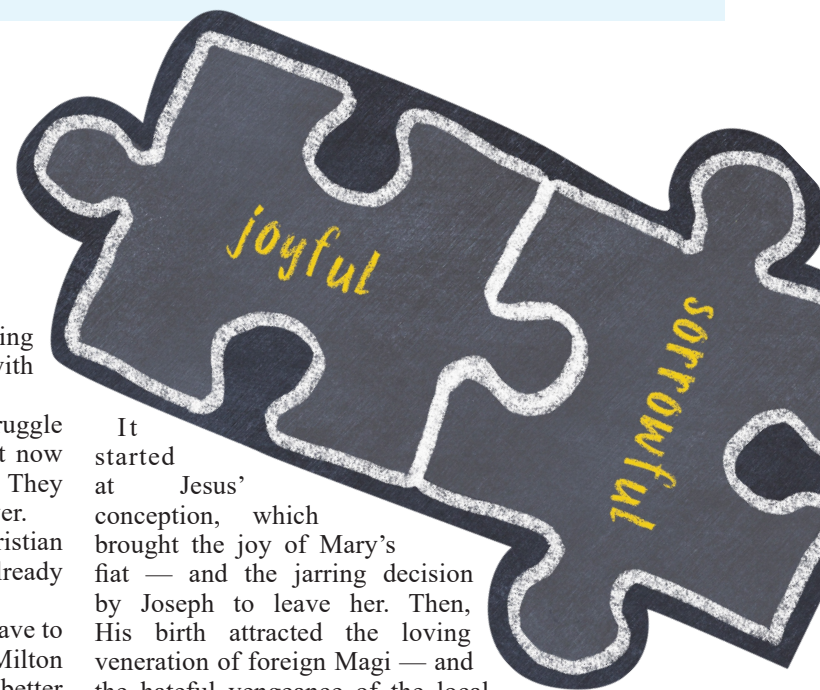
It started at Jesus' conception, which brought the joy of Mary's fiat — and the jarring decision by Joseph to leave her. Then, His birth attracted the loving veneration of foreign Magi — and the hateful vengeance of the local magistrate. And so, it went from there — constant joys and constant sorrows. The Father's voice at the Jordan River brought Satan's voice in the desert. Followers revered His miracles but rejected His message. Crowds cried "Hosanna!" one day and "Crucify Him!" another.

It was the same way for His followers: They got Pentecost followed by persecutions; we get great graces, and great needs.

The trick is to notice the graces as much as you notice the needs. God is good: Open your fridge, and you'll see more than the "daily bread" you asked for. God is beautiful: Open your front door, and you'll see beauty unrivalled by any art museum. God is truth: Look in a NASA telescope or an electron microscope, and you'll see a perfect order, everywhere. And all of it means "God is Love."

And yes, He gives you the cross, too, each day without fail, like the sun rising.

So, while the "bad news" of Christ is really bad — your life will be hard — the Good News is way better: Your Trinitarian life will be beautiful, fulfilling your most fundamental needs, starting now and lasting forever. — **By Tom Hoopes, Aleteia**



Little Catholics' Corner

WORKERS IN THE VINEYARD

D V O M O N E Y Q K J F E Q L
R Y H Q P G Y Y V V D B S K P
E U G V H E H E A V E N U I H
C S S Z Q N M J N R U N N N O
E A V I N E Y A R D R S F G U
I M I D T R I Z V E B M A D R
V W R S X O U F N P D T I O V
E O S P M U Q W M E E B R M C
D R D G B S O K R R T Q E R A
E K R Y P D M I T H V L U S W
H E Y V N P H E G E B Q E A A
O R C A V S Y I C M W G P K L
N S L H N Q R G U B A R W J K
U H G S Z L W R U W H I F E G
G B Z Y G D G T X R E V Q B N

MONEY
LANDOWNER
WAGES
HOUR
HEAVEN
HIRED
EQUAL
GRUMBLE
UNFAIR
WORKERS
KINGDOM
RIGHT
VINEYARD
GENEROUS
RECEIVED

Today is World Day of Migrants & Refugees. Let us say a prayer for our friends who had to leave their homeland to look for a better life. Draw a picture in the box below to show your understanding of Migrants & Refugees.



Hello children of God,

Today in the Gospel, Jesus tells a story of several men who were hired to work at a vineyard. The owner of the vineyard went out at different times to find men to work. At the end of the day, he gave each man a whole day's wages, even though some had only worked for a little while! Jesus tells us that the Kingdom of Heaven is like this too: some people spend their whole lives working for God, and some people only turn to Him at

the last minute.

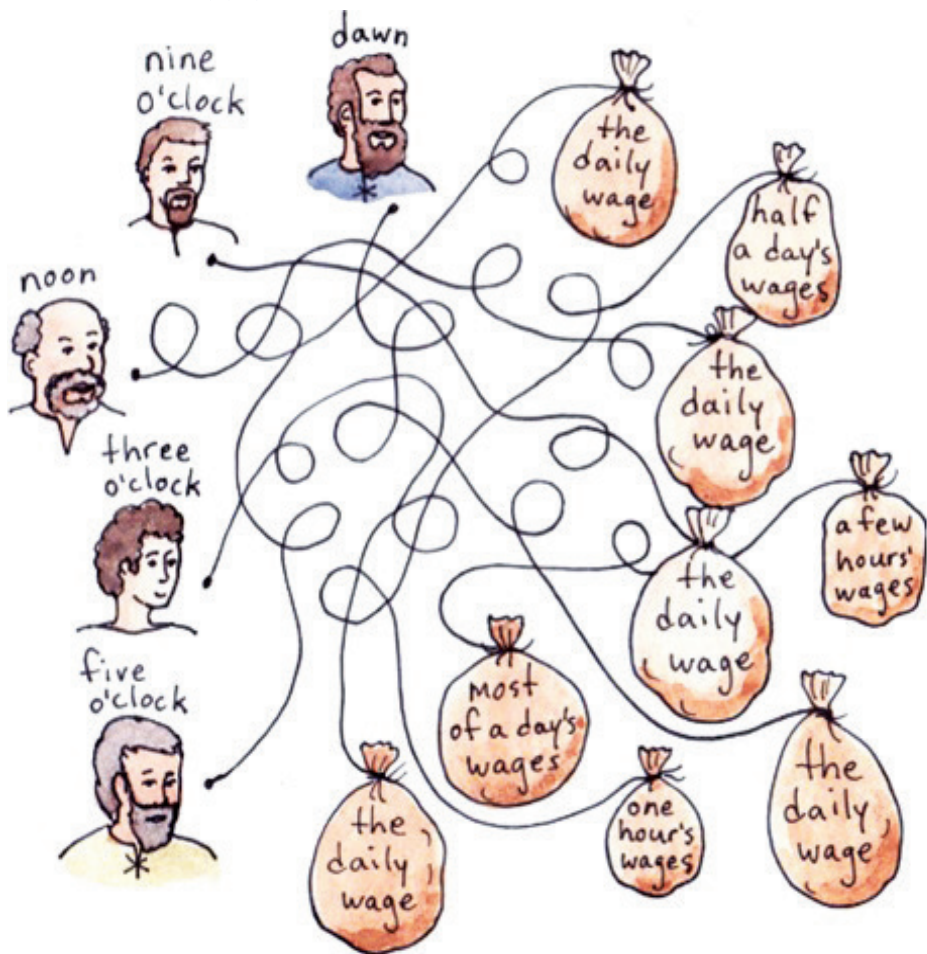
God opens Heaven to all the people who choose to love Him.

At first this doesn't seem fair. After all, some people give their whole lives to God and some give hardly any! But here is why it is fair: the only reason that any of us turns to God is because He gave us that grace. Some people have to live their whole lives without God's grace until the very end, but some of us have been given grace all our lives.

Love Aunty Gwen

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus tells the parable of a man with a vineyard who went out to hire men at different times of the day. At the end of the day, how much did each man get paid?

Follow the wiggly lines to see!



Colour this



YOUTH

SEPTEMBER 24, 2023

Stella Maris schools reignite spirit of Rukun Negara

KUALA LUMPUR: Stella Maris International School, Damansara (SMIS), has established *Rukun Negara* clubs. Students can join and take an active role in promoting the principles of *Rukun Negara*, which is all about preserving peace and harmony among the various races in the country.

The school saw the need to bring *Rukun Negara* to the fore, given the challenging times over racial and religious tolerance in the world today. This needed a tangible reminder to all — a Unity Bell was installed at the school's foyer — a symbolic call to take up a rightful challenge to promote peace and harmony and respect for all.

The bell was engraved with the five tenets of *Rukun Negara* as mementos of the launch of the *Rukun Negara* Club.

Minister of Youth and Sports, Yang Berhormat Hannah Yeoh, rang the Unity Bell (*pic right*) to signify the launch of the two *Rukun Negara* clubs, one for the primary and another for the secondary students. She said “This is a very noble

thing that you are doing because the Ministry of National Unity is emphasising a lot on the *Rukun Negara*. In the climate that we have today, especially in Malaysia, with the rise of very extreme views and speeches on social media it is very important that our young people are grounded on these five pillars that they will continuously learn and practise through the *Rukun Negara*.

“I don't think I need to tell you how important it is that in this school you have chosen to watch *Rukun Negara* — it tells you the significance and importance of making sure that the kids are not just memorising these five pillars but also making sure it's something that resonates within the heart.”

The Chairman of the School's Board of Governors, Dr Tarcisus Chin, in his welcome speech explained that the Unity Bell aptly serves as a conscious call to every student to embrace and appreciate the significance of the *Rukun Negara*



while working together for a common good. “The *Rukun Negara* is especially dear to us at Stella Maris. This national philosophy prescribes a noble calling for creating harmony and unity among the various races. It also aligns with our Mission Statement of being truly Malaysian in orientation, caring for all God's creation while preserving the dignity and potential of all persons through a holistic education for the young under our charge,” he said.

For a start, the *Rukun Negara* Clubs promoted four of the 17 SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) of the United Nations – SDG No.3 (Ensuring Good Health and Well-being), SDG No.12 (Responsible Consumption), SDG No.13 (Taking Climate Actions) and SDG No.16 (Promoting Peace and Justice).

Some of the initiatives included helping our children understand the need to promote good health and well-being by working with the National Kidney Foundation and the National Cancer Society of Malaysia to create awareness. The clubs have also implemented ways to reduce wastage and exercising responsible use of resources.

Moreover, the children are

YB Hannah Yeoh, Minister of Youth & Sports with student prize-winners of an Art Competition in conjunction with the Launch of *Rukun Negara* Clubs.

taught the importance to care for Mother Nature, and explaining to them how their small actions of planting within their vicinity could go a long way in conserving the Earth and contribute to the increase of oxygen level entirely in the longer run. With the principles of the *Rukun Negara* in mind, our children are trained to be responsible and loyal citizens in the course of promoting peace and harmony.

As part of the launch ceremony, the guests were later feted to a prize-giving Art Competition and Exhibition themed *Malaysia — My Heritage, My Home* by the students, along with a choir presentation of Stella Maris's specially composed *My Jalur Gemilang* and a programme of student activities rendered for the occasion.

Also present at the event was Chairman of the Council of Directors of Yayasan Tan Sri Dominic Vendargon, Brig Gen (Rtd) Dato' Richard Robless; members of the School's Board of Governors, President of Stella Maris International School, Margaret Soo, Principals and other distinguished guests.



First Prize (Secondary) to Jillian Lau



Qianni's Art-Penang pre-war heritage houses, our Malaysian Pride



SERVERS CELEBRATE THEIR RITE OF RENEWAL AND COMMITMENT

PENANG: The altar servers of the Church of the Immaculate Conception successfully celebrated the Rite of Investiture and the Rite of Renewal and Commitment of the Altar Servers recently.

Parish priest, Msgr Jude Miranda, pointed out in his homily that in serving God as an altar server, you must have these three characteristics: be passionate, committed, and skilful. Being an altar server is not just a position of honour or power; to be known or to be famous but rather, it is “serving with love and sacrifice”. He concluded his homily addressing the altar servers present at the Mass.

“I congratulate you for saying ‘yes’ to inviting Jesus into your life in a special way. And I urge you to continue to cultivate a love for the Eucharist, a love for the Mass. Make



it a central part of your life, it will be a compass that will lead you to God and help you to always have the strength to lead a

good life. Help others to discover the beauty of the Mass and God's love.”

After the homily, Msgr Jude led the servers in a rite of commissioning and blessing. They pledged to show reverence in their duties, develop their Christian life through prayer and service, grow in devotion to Jesus in the Eucharist, and strive to be good examples to their peers and assist the other servers at Mass.

Priest in residence, Fr Oliver Tham, sprinkled and blessed the altar servers with holy water, after which he gave each of them a cross which will be worn during serving as a reminder of Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross and who is present to us in God's Word and in the Eucharist.

— By Nicholas Khor

I AM MISSION

By Clementine Vikneswari

MELAKA: The “I Am Mission” vocation talk was recently held at the Church of St Peter. It echoed Pope Francis’ message for vocations in the 2023 World Day of Prayer.

Fr Adrian Francis, head of vocations for the Diocese of Malacca Johore, together with the St Peter’s Youth (SPY), Melaka, organised the talk.

This vocation talk was attended by 33 participants, consisting of both boys and girls. When asked why girls were allowed to join the talk, Fr Adrian replied that girls could play a role in guiding the boys

when they are discerning their vocation call to the diocesan priesthood. Girls too could benefit from understanding the characteristics of being called to answer the vocation that God calls them to.

The talk began with an ice-breaking game, followed by Praise & Worship by SPY before Fr Adrian took over by showing the video clip titled *Fishers of Men* by USCCB Secretariat for vocations and priestly formation as the basis of his talk. Drawing inspiration from the video, which featured a young man’s call to the priestly vocation after witnessing a priest anointing the victim of an accident,

Fr Adrian also shared his experience,



CALLED TO EMBRACE THE JOY OF VOCATION

when he realised that his call to the priesthood took precedence over all the fears and anxieties he had. He also listed out a few guidelines as to how to discern if they were being called to the priesthood or any other vocation. He outlined what the young men could expect when they chose to join the priesthood, as well as the trials and temptations that would follow, regardless of the vocation the young people are called to. He also gave them advice on how to overcome these trials by having a

constant prayer life.

He said that there has been a decline in the number of young men joining the priesthood and he hoped that through this talk, the participants would be able to help by praying for more vocations.

Fr Adrian ended the talk with a Q&A session before celebrating the 1.00pm Mass with the participants and parishioners who were gathered there. The talk ended at 2.00pm with fellowship. — *By Wilson Savage*



Freedom in Christ Jesus



PENANG: Genesis Youth of Mercy is a vibrant Catholic youth community from the Church of Divine Mercy. These youth, who love God’s Word, usually gather for sharing and fun activities once or twice a month.

Recently, they had a gathering, *Gaming with God*, where they used the concept of playing station games to relay an important message at the end. The station games included the “Obstacle Course”, symbolising obstacles that hinder us from listening to God, and the “Cup Tower” which shows the importance of community in building one another through faith in Christ. “Flip It”, a game of flipping a bedsheet with only your feet while standing on it, gave rise to the term “turning over a new leaf,” meaning to be free in Christ by turning away from our sinful ways and to live God’s call to us as Christians by His abundant grace and lastly, the “Ribbon Twirl” that represents the confusion we experience living

in a world that goes against God’s Will.

The final message was from Galatians 5:1, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” The youth advisor presented the last session, asking, as youth today, what we could be slaves to? We could be a slave to our emotions, friends, self-image, studies, future, and certainly addictive behaviours like social media, gaming and anything that becomes the centre of our lives, when it should be Jesus in the middle of it all.

However, God loves us too much to keep us tied to our attachments in life. Through Jesus, sin should no longer control us. The power of the Holy Spirit gives us the ability to resist temptations. Instead of choosing the path of sin, we are free to choose life.

“God turns our mess into a message, your freedom is His message.”



WHAT I LEARNT AT THE TOB CAMP

These are three sharings from students from the Church of St Francis of Assisi who attended the Theology of the Body (TOB) camp recently.

“After attending the TOB camp, I finally found my real purpose of living. It was unexpected at first because I thought that we live to achieve what we want in life like money, house and cars. But throughout this course, I realised that all this is just a demand for material goods, which is far away from God’s purpose for living. To love is the purpose of living. How simple is that? I always thought that simple life is just simply living life out. But the answer is LOVE.”



“A few months back, I went through an emotional breakdown. I was attending one of my lectures in college and I stumbled upon a topic reminding me about retirement. I was wondering why I was crying. I realised that I was lost and that my whole purpose of living would be pointless if I couldn’t bring anything to heaven but only my spirit. So then I prayed and asked God to give me an answer.”

“The TOB camp is the answer that God gave me. With the loving guidance and encouragement from Teacher Sarah, I was able to find the answers that I was looking for in the past. And that’s when I finally got my sense of gratitude back. I’ve always liked to be at church because it brings me peace, gratitude, love and harmony.”

Thank you so much to Teacher Sarah for being dedicated to all the students and organising such a camp for us, where I found my true purpose of living. Thanks for the hard work.

“Special shoutout to the facilitators who have taught us throughout the camp. They’re really passionate and giving. Thank you so much for clarifying our understanding in detail. Appreciate it a lot

“United we stand, divided we fall.” — *Maxwell Ng Yi Ken*

I have some cherishable memories of this TOB camp. I have learnt how the perspective of things in this world are very different from how it is in the Church. The world tends to tarnish the beautiful things God has made. This camp also taught me about true and pure love, just like that of God’s. We all have a share in His love and shouldn’t define ourselves the way the world does, but instead, as how God does, because He loves us and knows us. At the last session of the camp, I remember us discussing living a good life, and this was said:

“God is calling you back to be happy”

“Our lives here on earth might not be so good, but, true happiness lies in God and doing His Will. ‘The One that can satisfy the human heart is the One who made it.’” — *Gabriella Ann Benedict*



When I heard about this camp, I wasn’t really interested in going for some reason. Maybe it’s because I didn’t like spending time around people and prefer being by myself. But on that day, my mum told me that I would have a great time there. Well, I really learnt a lot from this camp and really enjoyed my time with my friends and meeting new people, even though I was just meeting them in this camp.



“During this camp, we learnt about LOVE. It is really not something I was interested in but learning about it taught me a lot about loving myself, the people around me, and also about learning to love God and get closer to Him.”

“God made love so beautiful. It is just this generation that has made it look toxic. In 1 Corinthians 13:4-5 Love is patient, love is

kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs.

“We should all believe in this — that God’s love is so strong. We won’t realise it until the time comes. Be grateful for the people we have in our life. One day we will realise how lucky we are to have them.” — *Abigail Ruth Francis*

Pope offers prayers for victims of Libya, Morocco tragedies



A man looks at the rubble of homes in the village of Talat N'Yaaqoub south of Marrakech in Morocco on Sept 11, 2023. (CNA photo)

VATICAN: Catastrophic flooding in Libya resulted in what officials estimated was up to 10,000 deaths in the wake of multiple dam failures amid torrential downpours.

Swathes of the Mediterranean city were obliterated by a torrent of water unleashed by a powerful storm that swept down a usually dry riverbed on the night of September 10, bursting dams above the city. Multistorey buildings collapsed with sleeping families inside.

The Vatican, meanwhile, said in a telegram that Pope Francis was “deeply saddened” by the national tragedy, offering prayers to the country as it worked to address the disaster and rescue those still affected by it.

On Sept 12, the Vatican sent a telegram to Archbishop Savio Hon Tai-Fai, the apostolic nuncio to Libya, in which the Holy See said Pope Francis was “deeply saddened to learn of the immense loss of life and destruction caused by the flooding in the eastern part of Libya.”

The Pope “sends the assurance of his prayers for the souls of the deceased and all who mourn,” said the telegram, signed by Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin.

“His Holiness also expresses heartfelt spiritual closeness to the injured, to those who fear for their missing loved ones, and to the emergency personnel providing rescue and relief assistance,” the document said.

“Upon all affected by this tragedy, Pope Francis willingly invokes the divine blessings of consolation, strength, and perseverance.”

Earlier on Sept 10, Pope Francis expressed solidarity with the people of Morocco in the wake of the country’s devastating earthquake and offered his prayers for material help in response to the tragedy and the charity group pledging to help distribute it.

The country was hit by a 6.8-magnitude quake overnight on Sept 8, with the death toll rapidly climbing to upward of 3,000 fatalities and thousands injured, amid major building collapses there.

The Pope offered “prayerful communion in the face of this natural disaster.” In the Pope’s customary address after his regular Sunday recitation of the Angelus, the Holy Father reiterated his “proximity to the dear people of Morocco” in the wake of the disaster.

“I pray for the injured, for those who have lost their lives — so many! — and for their relatives,” Francis said.

“I thank the rescue workers and those who are working to alleviate the suffering of the people,” he continued, praying for “concrete help on the part of everyone” to “support the population at this tragic time” and urging Catholics to “be close to the people of Morocco.” — **By Daniel Payne, CNA**



People look at the damage caused by flash floods in Derna, eastern Libya, on Sept 11, 2023. (CNA photo)

MEMORIAM

26th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of
Jonna Lopez d/o Elario Koek



26 September 1909 – 3 July 1997

*"For even the Son of Man
did not come to be served, but to serve,
and to give His life as a ransom for many."
Mark 10:45 (NIV)*

*Remembering her great love, compassion,
dedication and service to others affirmed in
fervent prayer and faith in Christ Jesus.*

Forever in the hearts of:
Daughter: Theresa Lopez,
Grandchildren: Christabel, Sabrina,
William Cheah and our families.

9TH ANNIVERSARY
IN EVER LOVING MEMORY OF



LOURDS MARY
ANTHONY
(MRS. C. ANTHONY)
Departed:
24-09-2014

Mum,
You showed us
the right path in life.
You taught us to be
honest, sincere
and caring.
You loved us
all your life.
You solved
our problems.
Most of all you were
faithful and loyal to us.
In this world, we're
struggling to follow
your footsteps but
We are still trying...
We love you.
Your family.

4th Year
Anniversary
In Ever Loving
Memory of
Irene Lopez



Returned to
the Lord on
26th September
2019

*"I am the Resurrection and the Life.
He who believes in Me,
even if he dies, shall live;
and whosoever lives and believes in Me,
shall never die."*
Forever loved, cherished and missed by
Children, grandson, family and friends.

23rd Anniversary
In Loving Memory of



Gregory Kumar
Kandasamy

3rd September 1941 –
22nd September 2000

*It's been 23 years,
And yet the hurt still feels the same.
A Big piece of our hearts lives in Heaven now.
And we are reminded everyday;
How lucky we were to have you for as long as we did.
Always on our minds, Forever in our hearts.*

Deeply missed and always loved by:
Wife: Charlotte
Children: Caroline & Jason
Son-in-law: Alison Anthony
Daughter-in-law: Marianne Chia
Grand Daughters: Melanie, Maegan & Annamarie

5th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of the late



ROBERT YONG TAI HUA

22nd May 1936 to 23rd September 2018

*"The Lord is my Shepherd;
there is nothing I shall want"
(Psalm 23)*

Deeply missed and fondly remembered by:
Wife: Monica Hiew Nyok Moi

Children & their spouses:

Patricia Yong & Bernard Thio
Angila Yong

Beleena Yong & Raymond Goh
Catherine Yong & Benzamin Kolenus
Peter Yong

Grandchildren & their spouses:

Alexandre Thio & Divij Mathur
Thomas Thio
Gabriel Goh,
Michael Goh & Stella Oh
Nichole Goh

Leonard Benzamin & Maurice Benzamin

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40 Days Memorial
In Loving Memory



Christine Tan Meow Lan
9th January 1952 to
11th August 2023

Psalm 23:6
*"Surely goodness and mercy
shall follow me all the days of
my life, and I shall dwell in the
house of the LORD forever".*
Lovingly remembered and
deeply cherished by
beloved husband, daughters,
son in-laws, grandchildren
and loved ones.

Towards an ecological culture

PARIS: The fight against climate change seems to be stagnating on a global scale. The recent G20 summit in India showed how difficult it is for emerging countries to consider changing their growth model.

Another deadline that encourages pessimism is the upcoming COP29. It will be held next December in Dubai, the heart of a region whose economic model depends on hydro-carbon production. Despite the increasingly obvious effects of rising global temperatures, most political leaders and multinational corporations seem to be going about their business without changing their priorities.

Isn't this inertia also ours? Are we, the inhabitants and citizens of Western countries, really doing enough to change our lifestyles? Yet, the stakes have clearly been set.

At the same time, we put forward countless reasons for not boldly committing ourselves to a rapid transformation. The task seems too vast; the direction to follow, too vague; the costs, too daunting; the solutions, too contradictory. Political ecology, which has become a vast free-for-all, unfortunately does not pro-



(Pixabay/stuarthampton)

vide direction.

Among those who want to speed things up, there are two opposing views. Some call for a radical change of society and an end to capitalism, which they see as a system that

exploits resources and people, and is leading to the destruction of the planet. Others, those who are confident in technological innovation, advocate for adaptation and pragmatism.

In both cases, a change of mentality is required, where we need to make ecology a common culture. It's a matter of urgency. —

By Jean-Christophe Ploquin, LCI (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)

Korean Catholics to send aid to Morocco's quake victims

SEOUL: The South Korean Church mourned the victims of a devastating earthquake in Morocco and will send aid to assist in relief and rehabilitation, says a top Church leader.

Archbishop Peter Chung Soon-taek of Seoul has sent a letter to the Diocese of Rabat in Morocco to express "deep sorrow and condolences" for the loss of more than 2,000 lives and thousands of homes in the earthquake, Catholic Peace Broadcasting Corporation of Korea (CPBC) reported on September 11.

"I offer words of comfort to all who have lost their homes, including their precious families, and I hope that there will be a speedy healing for those suffering from injuries," Chung said.

"All members of the Archdiocese of Seoul also pray [along with the hearts] of the people of Morocco and [shall] provide any practical help they can," the prelate added.

Seoul archdiocese-based Catholic charity groups, Babo Nanum and One Body, One Spirit Movement, will raise funds and send them to Morocco through Caritas Internationalis, Chung asserted.

He said the archdiocese will raise more funds through a fundraising campaign to send to Morocco.

The 6.8-magnitude earthquake hit the High Atlas Mountain range, about 72 kilometres

(44.7 miles) southwest of Morocco's historic city of Marrakesh on Sept 8.

The earthquake has been reported as one of the deadliest in Morocco's history since 1960, when a quake killed more than 12,000 people.

King Mohammed VI of Morocco on Sept 10 thanked Spain, Qatar, the United Kingdom, and the United Arab Emirates for sending aid, CNN reported, citing Morocco's state-run broadcaster *Al Aoula*.

"Moroccan authorities responded, at this particular stage, to the offers of support made by friendly countries... which suggested mobilising a group of search and rescue teams," King Mohammed said.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), more than 300,000 people have been affected in Marrakesh and surrounding areas.

International aid has poured into Morocco in the form of funds and emergency support personnel following the disaster.

France mobilised aid from local government funds to help with humanitarian operations in quake-affected regions. Spain has sent a search and rescue team consisting of 56 soldiers and four dogs.

Turkey, which was devastated by a deadly earthquake earlier this year resulting in close to 60,000 deaths and more than 120,000 injured, said it was ready to send 265 personnel

and 1,000 tents to Morocco.

The United Kingdom has deployed 60 search and rescue specialists, including four search dogs, rescue equipment, and a medical assessment team.

Neighbouring Algeria, which had severed all diplomatic ties with Morocco in 2021

and closed its airspace to all planes registered in Morocco, said that it would reopen its airspace for humanitarian aid and medical flights going to and from the Arab nation.

World leaders have sent their condolences and assured assistance to Morocco. — ucanews.com



People carry the remains of a victim of the deadly 6.8-magnitude earthquake near Amizmiz in central Morocco on September 10.

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- It is believed that the remains of the Apostle St James the Great lie in Santiago de Compostela.

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Zaragoza | Pamplona |
Logrono | Burgos |
El Camino | Ponferrada |
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