

110th World Day of Migrants and Refugees



UNHCR photo

VATICAN: In his message for the 110th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, to be celebrated on September 29, Pope Francis focuses on the Church's itinerant nature and urges greater solidarity with migrants and refugees. The theme, *God walks with His people*, reflects the Catholic Church's synodal identity, emphasising that by walking alongside migrants, the Church rediscovers its role as a community that journeys together toward the Kingdom of Heaven.

Pope Francis compares this journey to the biblical narrative of the Exodus, where the Israelites escaped slavery and embarked on a perilous journey to freedom. Just as the Israelites endured challenges such as hunger, thirst, and despair, today's migrants face similar hardships. Many are forced to flee their homes due to oppression, insecurity, and discrimination, searching for safety and new beginnings. In the same way that God accompanied the Israelites, Pope Francis reminds us that He walks with today's migrants on their journeys, offering guidance and hope in the face of uncertainty.

Throughout his message, the Pope re-

iterates the Christian principle that every encounter with a migrant or refugee is an encounter with Christ. He emphasises that "the poor save us because they enable us to encounter the face of the Lord." This is a profound reminder that God is found among the marginalised, the displaced, and the suffering. For many migrants, God becomes their constant companion, providing comfort and direction in times of fear and hopelessness. Along their way, they often meet "good Samaritans" who offer vital assistance. In these encounters, Pope Francis highlights that God reveals Himself through acts of kindness, reminding us that we are called to be those who provide refuge, care, and support.

The synodal dimension of Pope Francis' message is central to his call for unity. Synodality, which has become a growing theme under his papacy, invites Catholics to walk in solidarity, not only with one another but with those who are most vulnerable, including migrants. This idea reflects the Church's role as the People of God, journeying through history toward Heaven. Pope Francis calls on Catholics to be more than just witnesses to the migrant journey; he challenges them to walk within these communities, to offer real companionship, and to recognise Jesus in the migrant seeking shelter, safety, and dignity.

Drawing from the words of Jesus in Matthew 25:35, "I was a stranger, and you

welcomed me," the Pope invites Catholics to be ready with practical charity, extending a hand to those in need. His message goes beyond offering symbolic support. He calls for genuine engagement with the migrant community — recognising their humanity, understanding their struggles, and providing concrete help where possible.

In the closing of his message, Pope Francis issues a call to prayer and unity. "Let us journey together with our migrant brothers and sisters," he writes, encouraging the Church to embrace its synodal nature fully. He emphasises that we must walk in solidarity and love, guided by the presence of God in every step we take. In a world marked by division and hostility, this call for a shared pilgrimage is not only a message of compassion but also a challenge to all people to act with kindness, empathy, and support for those on the margins.

The Pope's words remind us that the Church is at its best when it journeys with others, particularly those in need. As we walk together toward the Kingdom of Heaven, we are called to extend our hands and hearts to migrants and refugees, recognising that their journey is our journey, and their struggles are shared by all humanity. In doing so, we not only fulfil the mission of the Church but also encounter Christ in the most vulnerable among us.

To read the full message, go to: <https://bit.ly/3TF1p0z>

Prayer

God, Almighty Father,
we are your pilgrim Church
journeying towards the
Kingdom of heaven.

We live in our homeland,
but as if we were foreigners.

Every foreign place is our home,
yet every native land is foreign to us.

Though we live on earth,
our true citizenship is in heaven.

Do not let us become possessive
of the portion of the world
you have given us
as a temporary home.

Help us to keep walking,
together with our migrant
brothers and sisters,

towards the eternal dwelling
you have prepared for us.

Open our eyes and our hearts
so that every encounter
with those in need

becomes an encounter with Jesus,
your Son and our Lord.

Amen.

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INSIGHT

The shepherd's heart and the people's faith

The official green light for the devotion and spiritual experience that began in Medjugorje in June 1981, when six children reported seeing the Madonna, was made possible thanks to the abundant positive fruits observed in the parish, which over 1 million people visit every year from around the world. These fruits include pilgrimages, conversions, people returning to the Sacraments, and troubled marriages that begin a path of healing.

These are the elements that Pope Francis has always observed, even when he was a bishop in Argentina, affirming that popular piety which moves so many people toward shrines must be accompanied, corrected when necessary, but not stifled.

When judging alleged supernatural phenomena, attention must always be paid to the spiritual fruits. This perspective of the Successor of Peter corresponds to new norms published in May that have detached the Church's judgment from the most demanding recognition of a supernatural event. The latter may still continue, but it is no longer necessary to wait for them to cease to authorise liturgies, devotions, and pilgrimages, provided there are no deceptions or hidden interests, the messages are orthodox, and above all, many positive experiences are confirmed.

Thanks to Pope Francis' heart of a shepherd, the pronouncement on one of the most well-known and controversial Marian apparitions of the last century has taken place. It is a decision that does not come as a surprise.

Already in May, Cardinal Fernández, responding to a question about Medjugorje, had said: "With these regulations, we think it will be easier to move forward and reach a conclusion."

This is not an unprecedented approach, as attested by the words used by then-Cardinal Ratzinger in the book-length interview *The*

Andrea Tornielli, the Editorial Director of the Vatican Dicastery for Communication says Pope Francis' approval for Medjugorje was made possible thanks to the recognition of the positive fruits of the spiritual experience lived in that place, along with the pastoral approach of the Pope.

Ratzinger Report — "One of our criteria is to separate the aspect of true or presumed 'supernaturality' of the apparition from that of its spiritual fruits. The pilgrimages of ancient Christianity were directed toward places about which our modern critical spirit might sometimes be perplexed as to the 'scientific truth' of the tradition linked to them. This does not mean that these pilgrimages were not fruitful, beneficial, important for the life of the Christian people. The problem is not so much that of the hyper-critical modern outlook (which ends up, among other things, in a form of new credulity) but that of evaluating the vitality and orthodoxy of the religious life that develops around these places."

Pope Benedict XVI himself, in 2010, had set up a Commission led by Cardinal Ruini to study the phenomenon, and the outcome was favourable.

The Note released on September 19, entitled "The Queen of Peace," thus recognises the goodness of the fruits and presents an overall positive judgment of the numerous messages related to Medjugorje that have been disseminated over the years, correcting some problematic texts and some interpretations that may have been influenced by the subjective influence of the alleged visionaries.

Regarding the children who were protagonists of the phenomenon, who over the years were subject to controversies and even accusations, the document clarifies from the very first lines that the approval does not imply a judgment on their moral lives and that, in any case, spiritual gifts "do not imply a judgment about the moral

life of the alleged visionaries."

At the same time, the very fact that approval was granted signifies that no particularly critical or questionable aspects were detected, nor lies, fabrications, or mythomanias.

The Dicastery's Note highlights the two central cores of the Medjugorje message: that of conversion and return to God, and that of peace. When the phenomenon began and Mary appeared as the "Queen of Peace," no one could have imagined that those very lands would be the theatre of bloody clashes.

This reporter was deeply moved as he participated in a pilgrimage, from the testimonies of friends and fellow citizens of the visionaries: people who were in no way involved in the apparitions or messages, who, faced with the cruelties of the war fought in those lands even among neighbours, had found a way to forgive.

Thanks to their experience of faith linked to the apparitions of Medjugorje, they had reconciled even with those who had committed grave acts of violence against their relatives. This represents a much more "miraculous" aspect than many other phenomena discussed around sites of the alleged apparitions.

The authentic message of Medjugorje ultimately lies in those messages in which the Madonna humbles herself and invites everyone not to follow false prophets, nor seek out news about "secrets" and apocalyptic predictions.

One message from November 1982 bears this out: "Do not go in search of extraordinary things. Instead, take the Gospel, read it, and everything will be clear to you." **Vatican News**

Embracing our roles in Christ's body

Each and every one of us has got a certain role and purpose as a Church. No matter how small, medium or big the role and purpose is, it is necessary and needed. Some of us may feel as if what we are doing in church may seem insignificant or nothing to shout about, but what we often forget is that everything that we do as a Church has got a reason, a purpose. The Church is the Body of Christ and we could look at the Church in reference to the human body. The human body, as we know, has got different parts, and each part has got its own purpose and function. Hands are used for writing, lifting, holding and carrying. Feet are meant for walking. Our eyes are meant for seeing and our ears are meant for hearing. Each part cannot take over the function and role of the other, since each part has been designed specifically for a particular role and function.

The problem that some of us may be facing is when we allow pride, ego, and especially jealousy, to take control of us. When we allow jealousy to rear its ugly head, we become indifferent and blind to the importance and roles of others. We begin to think that whatever we do is the most important, or that we are the greatest, and that our role is indispensable. When others seem to be doing the same thing as we are doing, we begin to feel irritated, threatened and insecure, and we begin to

find ways and means to put down or even destroy others so that only our skills and abilities are accepted and recognised. We allow Christ's mission to be disrupted, when we allow competition to fester in the life of the Church.

In the first reading and in the Gospel, we can clearly see how jealousy can cloud our minds, our eyes and our hearts, causing us to lose track of who we are and what is our role and purpose. In the first reading, some of the elders appointed by Moses and who had received the spirit from him felt threatened by others who had not gone through the same selection and yet somehow had received the spirit. What they failed to realise is that God freely gives His spirit to anyone He chooses. Nobody can claim to have a monopoly or control over God, or His Spirit, or Truth. God gives Himself to all. The disciples of Christ in the Gospel also had the same problem. They felt threatened by another man who was able to cast out devils and saw him as a competitor. However, Jesus saw him differently and recognised the gift of the Spirit in this man. This led Jesus to make an important observation: "...no one who works a miracle in my name is likely to speak evil of me. Anyone who is not against us is for us."

So what does this all mean? It means that we must remember that we are all part of

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with Fr Andrew Kooi

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

Readings: Numbers 11:25-29;

James 5:1-6;

Gospel: Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

Christ's Body, and each and every one of us are necessary and important. We must not see each other as competitors. Instead, we must encourage the gifts, talents and contributions of others, since all of us have one common mission, that is to build God's Kingdom and not our own kingdom. After all, what and who are we trying to ultimately prove? Thus, if we have been jealous of others in the community, if we have been an obstacle to others, or if we have failed to give encouragement, then we must make effort to change, and not expect others to change to suit us. This is what Jesus was trying to tell us in the Gospel when He said: "if your hand, foot or eye should cause you to sin, cut it off." Let us stop all this nonsense and ridiculous waste of time and energy in blaming others and start taking responsibility for our actions and for the problems we have brought to our Church community. May we learn to focus more on doing God's will and giving Him the glory, instead of trying to gain glory and gratification for ourselves.





KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

October

2-27 Synod Assembly



PENANG DIOCESE

Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

October

- 1-2 Preparatory Meeting for Asian Mission Congress at 8.00pm – Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam
- 4-6 Diocesan Pastoral Assembly – Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu
- 10 Meeting – Dr Gabriel Dy-Liacco & Director for Ecclesial Relations and Safeguarding, Founder of Catholic Safeguarding Institute (CSI) at 11.00am, – Bishop's Office
- 11 Confirmation – Church of St Michael, Alor Setar at 7.30pm
- 12 Confirmation – Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam at 6.00pm
- 13 Confirmation – Taiping Catholic Church, Taiping at 9.00am
- 17 Asian Forum of IJ Sisters & Lay Collaborators – Cititel Hotel, Penang at 4.00pm



MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

October

- 6 Diocesan Launch of PROTEC Campaign Year 5 – Church of St Henry, Batu Pahat
- 8 70th Sacerdotal Anniversary of Archbishop Emeritus Dato Sri Peter Chung – Kuching
- 10 Meeting – MJDPN at Bishop's Office
- 12 Confirmation – Church of Divine Mercy, Skudai at 11.00am
- 12 Confirmation – Church of St Joseph, Plentong at 5.00pm
- 13 Parish Pastoral Assembly – Church of St Joseph, Plentong at 10.30am
- 15 Quarterly Meeting – Deliverance & Exorcism Office at MPI
- 19 Meeting – MJPT at Church of St Louis, Kluang at 9.00am
- 19 Chapel of St James, Merlimau-100th Centennial Celebration and Blessing of Newly Renovated Church and Confirmation



Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #190

F12
MJD NEWS
UPDATES

Greetings dear friends of MJD,

Eyes opening? Or eyes see no evil? Welfare homes of horror! It was reported that 402 children and teens at 20 welfare homes in Selangor and Negeri Sembilan, masquerading as religious education centres, were allegedly being physically and sexually abused. A former minister asks: Why *halal* certificates, what about *halal* wealth acquisition or *halal* work culture? A leader claimed that the recent sinkhole incident on Jalan Masjid India was due to “divine retribution”. The Transport Minister shared that 63 qualified engineers left Malaysia Airlines Engineering Services for SIA this year. IPSOS stated that 71 per cent of Malaysian respondents agreed that under-14 children should be banned from using social media (Indonesia 79 per cent); the survey also found 51 per cent agreed to ban smartphones use by under-14s. *May we have eyes that see!*

Moving Forward Times:

To the *Youth of Indonesia*, a minority amongst the majority Muslim nation, “I encourage you to sow seeds of love, confidently tread the path of dialogue, continue to show your goodness and kindness... and be builders of unity and peace.”

To the *Youth of PNG*: “Indifference — a fruit of hatred — is even uglier than hatred itself. You know that indifference is a very bad thing, because you leave others on the street, you are not interested in helping others. Indifference has the roots of selfishness. Take care of others and friendships amongst yourselves.”

To the *Youth of Singapore*: “A young person who doesn't take risks is an old person. Be courageous, to take risks, make mistakes — they are acceptable. Realise the mistake — that you stepped forward, you did something, you did not fear. He reminded them not to become slaves of technology, and when engaging with others in diverse society to RESPECT.”

To the *Youth of Timor Leste*: “To combat the temptations of ideological colonisation and western anti-Christian influences, he warned: Be careful of the crocodiles who want to change your culture and your history. Don't be deceived by the lure of comfort and life without commitment, nor by the appearance of happiness, in reality empty and illusory, that consumerism and materialism may promise. True freedom means choosing the good, not doing what you want. Respect and love it.”

A Thought For The Week: The Titanic

When the Titanic sank, it carried the millionaire, John Jacob Astor IV. The money in his bank account was enough to build 30 Titans. However, faced with mortal danger, he gave up his spot in a lifeboat to save two frightened children.

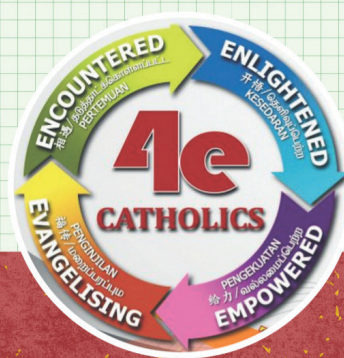
Another millionaire, Isidore Strauss, co-owner of Macy's, the largest American chain of department stores said; “I will never enter a lifeboat before other men”.

His wife, Ida Strauss, also refused to board the lifeboat, giving her spot to her new maid, Ellen Bird. She decided to spend her last moments with her husband.

Lessons from the Titanic: They did not flaunt their wealth nor position. They did not try to buy a passage in the lifeboats. They gave up their place for another. They did not compromise their moral values. We see the brilliance of human civilisation and human nature.

Announcements For The Week:

1. On October 6, at the *Church of St Henry, Batu Pahat*, a Mass will be celebrated to *launch the diocese's PROTEC 5 at 9.00am*, with Fr Paul Wong and Fr Patrick Tyoh. After Mass, there will be an opening speech, distribution of PROTEC 5 posters for parishes followed by planting and blessing of trees; and a formation “Save the Trees - Every Bit Counts”, ending with lunch. All creation thank you for your commitment



ENCOUNTERED ENLIGHTENED EMPOWERED EVANGELISING

ENCOUNTERED

Unless God wished it, I could not have encountered Him. It is a grace. It is God who chooses to encounter me and meet me. It is a privilege. It is a choice on His part. I am chosen to meet Him and encounter Him.

ENLIGHTENED

If God chooses to encounter me – meet me – then He will give me light. I will begin to see things in a different light. I will understand and perceive reality in a different way. This is a process. It has to be nurtured.

EMPOWERED

When God gives me light, He empowers me – not only to see but to act; to act selflessly – that is to will for others and act for others in a way that empowers them, particularly the poor and marginalised.

EVANGELISING

And, so like Jesus – and I through Him and with Him and in Him – I become Good News. To evangelise means to become ‘Good News’ – particularly to those on the margins and peripheries of life.

ON BECOMING A SYNODAL DIOCESE

When God encounters me, enlightens me and empowers me to evangelise, I begin a journey outward from myself towards others; but, with others, in a journey together. Like the Israelites of old and the Church through the ages, I walk hand in hand with others along the way (participation) and I empower others along the way, particularly the poor and marginalised (mission). This is how we, together, become a synodal diocese.



SIFT
SCHOOL OF INFORMATION
FORMATION AND
TRANSFORMATION

and action. All parish representatives and creation justice ministries, see you there!

QnQ? Q ask: Do we begin with religion, and then, slowly descend into spirituality?

We are taught first, then we catch on and finally, we have caught it. Very often, it is a journey from knowledge to perception, to comprehension, and eventually, to wisdom — seeing as God sees. Definitely they differ.

Religion Versus Spirituality

Religion: worships God

Spirituality: encourages oneness with God.

Religion: God is outside of you

Spirituality: God is within you.

Religion: separates people who have different beliefs

Spirituality: unites people regardless of their beliefs.

Religion: teaches people to be afraid of hell

Spirituality: teaches people to create heaven on earth.

Religion: based on fear and restriction

Spirituality: based on love and freedom.

Religion: feels like a single drop in the ocean

Spirituality: feels like being the entire ocean in a single drop.

Religion: based on the experience of others

Spirituality: based on your personal experience.

See the Holy Spirit @ Work: Coming together is a beginning; staying together is progress; and working together is success. — Henry Ford

Something To Tickle You: “If you can't fly, then run, If you can't run, then walk, If you can't walk, then crawl, but whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward.” — Martin Luther King

Bernard Paul

Bishop Bernard Paul

Pilgrimage of faith and gratitude at Holy Cross Feast

Elvina Fernandez

MELAKA: The annual Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross at the Santa Cruz Chapel in Malim Hill, is a spiritual event that draws thousands of faithful each year. This year's celebration, held from September 11 to 15, featured a series of Masses and the veneration of the Holy Cross, a tradition that deeply resonates with the Catholic community.

The feast's highlight was the daily veneration of the Holy Cross, which saw pilgrims arriving from across the region, forming long queues to enter the chapel, light candles, and venerate the cross. A special Mass was celebrated on Sept 16 for pilgrims, with a focus on the elderly and physically challenged, giving them an opportunity to participate in the veneration.

As a first-time visitor, I was overwhelmed by the devotion of believers of all ages, walking up the hill to the chapel, which is situated next to a Chinese cemetery. Arriving four hours before the 7.00pm Mass, I saw the parking area quickly filling up, with buses and cars lining the road.

Many stalls were already open, selling items like crosses and rosaries. Like other pilgrims, I took the opportunity to get a cross for the altar of my new home, to be blessed by one of the priests at the chapel.

The ascent to the chapel is a re-



Bishop Bernard Paul during the Mass on September 14, 2024.

flective journey in itself. Walking up Malim Hill, I passed the stations of the cross, reflecting on Christ's suffering and sacrifice for our salvation. With each step, my heart grew heavier, filled with gratitude for God's love. Many pilgrims carried crosses provided by the chapel as they participated in the Stations of the Cross. I joined them, walking alongside my sister, tears welling in my eyes as I considered Christ's love for us.

Once we completed the 14th station, we entered the chapel. At 3.40pm, there was no queue, and we were able to proceed directly to light a candle with the help of hospitable volunteers. The moment came to touch and venerate the cross. As I bowed my head and placed my hands on it, tears flowed, overwhelmed by His love and care through the years. It was a deeply emotional experience,

reflecting on the times He made the impossible possible, offering grace when I thought I couldn't go on.

With both hands on the cross, I whispered, "Thank you, Lord," and fell to my knees in gratitude. Everything I am today is by His grace. In that moment, I also thanked Him for the blessing of being near Pope Francis during his visit to Singapore and for guiding me through that journey.

On Sept 14, the congregation gathered for Mass celebrated by Bishop Bernard Paul. Before the Mass, Fr Lionel Thomas led the congregation of more than 1,000 in the Eucharistic Adoration and reflection.

In his homily, Bishop Bernard Paul emphasised the significance of the cross in Christian life, calling it a bridge between heaven and earth. "When Jesus stretched out His arms



Pilgrims venerating the cross. (photo/Bernard Anthony)

on the cross, He connected us with God and each other," he said. He further elaborated on the sacrificial nature of love, drawing parallels between divine and human love. "God's love is a suffering love for His children. When we struggle to make life better for others, that is love."

The bishop also urged the faithful to seek solace in the cross during difficult times. "When suffering comes, don't turn to negative paths. Bring your pain to the cross. Ask not why,

but how to continue," he encouraged, offering a message of hope and healing. "Freedom, strength, and healing come when you bring your struggles to the cross."

The Feast of the Holy Cross at Santa Cruz Chapel is not just a celebration but a reminder of the enduring power of faith, hope, and unity. As for me, my first experience has marked the beginning of what I hope will be a yearly pilgrimage, returning each time with a heart full of gratitude to the foot of the cross.

MCCBCHST meets ministers over role of JAKIM officers

PUTRAJAYA: Representatives from the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Taoism (MCCBCHST) held a meeting with the Minister of Religious Affairs, YB Senator Dato' Setia Dr Haji Mohd Na'im, and YB Datuk Aaron Ago Dagang, Minister of National Unity, at the JAKIM Headquarters on September 18. The meeting aimed to address concerns regarding the role of JAKIM officers stationed in government departments and ministries.

During the discussion, Dr Mohd Na'im briefed the MCCBCHST delegates on the scope of responsibilities of these officers. Their roles, he explained, include managing various departmental needs such as human development, rehabilitation, safety, and prevention measures.

The MCCBCHST, however, reiterated their concern that the presence of JAKIM officers in government departments could

potentially influence policy development in alignment with Islamic principles, potentially impacting the rights of non-Muslims. The council emphasised that any such involvement in policy matters would fall outside the constitutional scope of Islam, and that any decision-making must adhere to the Constitution.

In response, Dr Mohd Na'im assured the delegates that JAKIM officers would not be involved in policy-making processes. It was agreed that further discussions on the placement of these officers could take place under the purview of the Religious and Mediation Bureau, which operates within the Harmony Committee.

The meeting was described as cordial and conducted in a harmonious atmosphere, with both parties expressing satisfaction with the productive dialogue. The MCCBCHST extended their gratitude to the ministers for facilitating the discussion.



Church of the Holy Name of Mary celebrates feast day

BUKIT MERTAJAM: The Church of the Holy Name of Mary, Permatang Tinggi, marked its feast with Masses held over five consecutive days, from September 11 to September 15. The Masses were celebrated at 8.15pm for the first four days, with Mass being celebrated at 5.00pm on the last day.

The Masses were unique as they were celebrated at three different venues within the church grounds simultaneously to cater for the English, Mandarin and Tamil-speaking parishioners.

The theme for each day centred on Mary.

The first four days saw a very encouraging daily turnout of about 500 people. The attendees were inspired and enriched by the sermons delivered by various priests who had been specially invited to celebrate the feast day of the church. This gave them a deeper understanding of Mary, the Mother of God, and her role and mission in the Catholic Church. Many were touched and encouraged by her humanity, her prayerful nature, her hope and trust in God, and her willingness to serve. She is also credited as being the first and model evangelist as she carried within her the presence of Christ and was instrumental in keeping the early



Fr Louis Loi burning the petitions and thanksgiving letters.

church faithful to her son, Our Lord Jesus Christ.

On the final day, the church was packed to full capacity with more than 1,200 people. The Mass was celebrated by Fr Louis Loi, and concelebrated by Fr Augustine Wong and the priests who had been invited to preside over the previous four days.

After communion, the faithful took part in a solemn candlelight procession around the church grounds led by parishioners carrying the statue of the Madonna. The Mass then concluded with the Benediction

of the Blessed Sacrament and was followed by the burning of petitions and thanksgiving letters written by parishioners to our Blessed Mother.

The feast day celebrations culminated in a scrumptious buffet dinner for all the attendees at St Mary's Hall.

The feast day of the parish of the Holy Name of Mary was a truly remarkable and inspiring event. Thanks to Frs Louis, Augustine, and the organising committee for their tremendous effort in making the feast day celebration a resounding success!



Canossians celebrate 250th anniversary of the birth of their foundress

KLUANG, Johor: The Church of St Louis hosted the 250th anniversary celebration of the birth of St Magdalen of Canossa on September 15, themed *Set Life on Fire*.

The main celebrant was Cardinal Sebastian Francis, joined by concelebrants Archbishop Julian Leow, parish priest Monsignor Peter Ng, and assistant parish priest Fr William Pillai. Also present on this auspicious day were guest priests Frs James Rajendran, Ryan Innas Muthu, Adrian Francis, along with Canossian associates from Malaysia and Singapore.

In his homily, the Cardinal emphasised the decades of humble work carried out behind the scenes for the least, the lost, the little, and the

lowly — pastoral care and healing known only to God, often hidden from the learned and the clever. This journey has seen its fair share of squabbles, debates, and disagreements. From the light of the stars to the fire of love, truth purifies and sanctifies. The early missionaries brought the message of the Joy of the Gospel, along with the charism of St Magdalen, to the shores of Malaya and Singapore. Today, the Sisters continue their mission in Jinjang, Kuala Lumpur; Sungai Siput, Perak; Melaka; and Kluang, Johor.

St Magdalen was canonised in 1988, following her founding of the Congregations of the Canossian Sisters and Canossian

Fathers in the early nineteenth century. She left behind a legacy of Sisters and priests in Italy, dedicated to serving the poor, opening charity schools for children, evangelising the Gospel, and caring for the sick. A century after her death in 1835, another Canossian saint, St Bakhita, was canonised during the Jubilee Year of 2000 and hailed as the “Saint of the Third Millennium” — our Universal Sister.

St Magdalen encouraged the Canossians to extend their mission to foreign lands. The first foundation was established in Hong Kong in 1860, followed by China, Macau, East Timor, India, Singapore, and Malaysia, where the mission has thrived for 119 years since 1905.

Today, the Canossians serve across Asia, Africa, the Americas, Europe, and Oceania, embodying St Magdalen’s belief that “Charity is a fire that ever spreads out.”

This celebration served to renew and strengthen our commitment to the ministries of evangelisation, education, outreach to the poor and those wounded in both spirit and body. Despite the many challenges and constraints in today’s world, we remain called to “Make Jesus known and loved.” As St Magdalen reminded her Canossian Sisters and Fathers, “Jesus is not loved because He is not known.” **Sr Esther Thomazios and Sr Margarete Sta Maria**

A day of ‘Harmony in Mantin’

Selva Manogary and
Marie Ashley Andrew

MANTIN, Negeri Sembilan: On September 14, the Church of St Aloysius hosted its inaugural ‘Harmony in Mantin’ event. The celebration, designed to promote faith and fellowship, embodied the spirit of *Merdeka* Day and *Hari Malaysia*, focusing on strengthening the bond between the church and the local community. The joyful atmosphere brought together people from diverse backgrounds, fostering a deeper sense of unity and connection.

The day commenced with a multilingual Mass celebrated by Fr Christopher Loh OCD, with parish priest Fr Christopher Soosaipillai concelebrating. During his homily, the parish priest reflected on the rich history of the church, spanning from baptisms to burials within the grounds of St Aloysius. He shared a poignant moment when a Sikh man confided that it was his first time walking through the church’s grounds, urging the congregation to embrace and share Jesus’ love with all. The singing of the national anthem in honour



The participants of the Lantern and Costume Competition.

of *Merdeka* and Malaysia Day set a tone of unity, underscoring the shared identity of all Malaysians present.

The highlight of the evening was undeniably the food. A delightful array of food trucks and home-cooked meals adorned the church grounds, offering a mix of local favourites and international dishes. The shared enjoyment of this diverse culinary spread fostered a lively, communal atmosphere. Families and friends bonded over the variety of flavours,

with the food trucks becoming the event’s focal point. The laughter and conversations that filled the air emphasised the spirit of togetherness.

Children brought a vibrant energy to the evening, dressed in traditional attire celebrating Malaysia’s rich cultural diversity. Their playful exploration of the festivities and their joyful presence added an extra layer of cheer to the event, with their innocence and creativity enhancing the overall experience.

The evening’s activities catered to all ages, featuring performances from local groups such as the Mantin Yoga Group and the Pinky Group from the Church of the Holy Family Kajang. The dynamic drumming and dance performances energised the crowd, showcasing the community’s diverse talents. Attendees cheered enthusiastically, reflecting the rich cultural tapestry of the gathering.

Interactive games, including the Lantern and Costume Competition, further elevated the festive mood. These activities encouraged creativity and friendly competition, with participants eagerly engaging and showcasing their inventive spirit.

As the event concluded, a lingering sense of unity and camaraderie prevailed. ‘Harmony in Mantin’ was not only a celebration of faith and food but also an opportunity to forge new friendships and strengthen community bonds. With the warmth and hospitality of the Church of St Aloysius at its core, this event has the potential to become a beloved tradition in Mantin, one that continues to foster unity, faith, and shared joy for years to come.

Malaysia Day celebration at Visitation parish

SEREMBAN: On September 15, the Parish Ministry of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (PMEIA) of the Church of the Visitation hosted a vibrant Malaysia Day event, celebrating the nation’s diversity and unity. The event brought together various faith communities, including Bahá’í, Hindu Sangam, Buddhist, Ikram, ABIM, Gurdwara, and Church of St Mark, alongside Catholic priests and parishioners from the Church of the Visitation. This harmonious gathering exemplified the spirit of inclusivity and mutual respect among different religious groups.

The event was further enhanced by the presence of YB Teo Kok Seong and YB Nicole Tan, whose attendance underscored the importance of religious harmony and civic unity. Their participation highlighted the significance of the event and recognised the collective contributions of various faiths to national

unity.

The celebration featured a vibrant array of cultural performances that highlighted Malaysia’s rich and diverse heritage. Among the standout acts was the iconic Bamboo dance from East Malaysia, which energised both the guests of honour and participants. These performances celebrated the country’s multicultural fabric, allowing different communities to share their traditions and values. Traditional games also added a nostalgic touch, rekindling childhood memories for many attendees. Additionally, youths from various faiths collaborated on a skit that emphasised themes of interfaith understanding, cooperation, and friendship, reinforcing the spirit of harmony.

Three speeches were delivered on the day — one from YB Teo, another from Fr Xavier Andrew, the parish priest of the Church of



Visitation, and, lastly Madam Anne Sumitra, the PMEIA Leader of Visitation parish who personally illustrated the meaning of Malaysia Day by taking the excerpt of our Father of Independence, Tunku Abdul Rahman. The speakers inspired the audience by underscoring the importance of unity, tolerance, and, love in building a strong, peaceful society. Their words resonated deeply, reminding everyone of interfaith dialogue’s role in fostering a harmonious Malaysia.

A unique highlight of the day was the symbolic opening ceremony, where the guests of honour collaboratively assembled a jigsaw

puzzle of Malaysia’s states. This act represented the nation’s unity in diversity, serving as a powerful metaphor for people from different backgrounds coming together to work towards a common goal of peace and harmony.

The celebration concluded with a delightful afternoon high tea, offering participants and parishioners a chance to socialise, share experiences, and forge friendships across religious boundaries. This final gathering not only marked Malaysia’s independence but also reaffirmed the shared commitment to harmony, understanding, and collaboration among the nation’s diverse religious communities. **Manish Sherwin Mical**

Setapak kids attend preparation camp for First Holy Communion

Charmaine Amanda

KUALA LUMPUR: Forty-four children from the Church of the Good Shepherd (GSC), Setapak, took part in a two-day, one-night preparation camp from September 7 to 8 at the Church of St Francis of Assisi (SFA) in Cheras. The camp, organised in anticipation of their First Holy Communion in November, was facilitated by the Archdiocesan Catechetical Team and GSC catechists. This unity camp gathered students from the English-, Bahasa- and Tamil-language groups.

Sr Retta Savariannan, FdCC, kicked off the camp by posing the question, “Why be good?” This sparked a lively exchange of responses as the children eagerly tried to guess the right answer. Sr Retta then explained that we strive to be good because Jesus is good. This simple yet profound message resonated deeply with the children and remained a guiding theme throughout each session and prayer time.

Grace Novita Purnama and Jessica Retnasamy followed with engaging lessons on the Good Shepherd, Eucharistic Presence, the True Vine, and the Prodigal Son. The children were particularly attentive during their visit to the Portiuncula Chapel, dedicated to Our Lady of Angels, where they participated in the cenacle presentation and toured the chapel.

The first day concluded with sunset Mass, presided over by Fr Paul Cheong, OFM, Cap. The children were thrilled to receive a special welcome and blessing during the service, followed by a photo session with the SFA par-



ish priest. Later, they gathered at the Grotto of Our Lady of Fatima for an outdoor rosary, where they lit candles and wished Our Lady a Happy Birthday. Despite many being away from their parents for the first time, the children quickly bonded, spending the night in peace and joy.

On the second day, following the opening prayer, the children participated in a variety of activities, including learning the gestures of the Mass, creating chalice crafts, and completing sacrament of reconciliation cards. They also watched a video on how to receive Holy Communion. Parents later joined their children for a session with Sr Retta, who highlighted the critical role Catholic parents play in passing on the faith. She emphasised that parents must deeply know, believe, and expe-

rience their faith to help their children carry the light they received at baptism and fully experience God's grace.

Reflecting on the camp, Kharolrena, a catechist for the Bahasa group from GSC, said, “Walking hand in hand with the children through their First Holy Communion camp was an incredibly fun and heartwarming experience. It was wonderful to witness their excitement and spiritual growth as they encountered Jesus, the Good Shepherd. The imagery of Him as the Vine and us as His branches truly resonated with the kids. They also explored the sacred mysteries of the altar, the sanctuary lamp, and the sacrament of confession. As their teacher, I, too, gained valuable insights along the way. This camp was a beautiful journey of faith, strengthening our bond

with Christ and with each other.”

Keith Tan, a nine-year-old participant, shared his excitement, saying, “It was fun and good! I felt so happy and hope I can go again. I learned about the Joyful Mysteries, the Gospel, the Good Shepherd, and the candle that represents the Holy Spirit. I loved the songs we sang. It was a really great experience!”

The camp's success was the result of months of careful planning by the teachers, along with the steadfast support and encouragement of the parents. Their efforts ensured the children's safety, well-being, and spiritual growth, achieving the camp's objectives. It is hoped that this experience will help the children grow closer to Jesus and receive Him more worthily in the Holy Eucharist.

CDM retreat participants experience spiritual renewal

SHAH ALAM: A half-day retreat held at the Church of the Divine Mercy (CDM) brought profound spiritual renewal to the 100 participants who attended. Described by many as a “blissful” experience, the retreat offered a much-needed break from the demands of daily life and a chance for deep reflection, relaxation, and healing.

The retreat, which took place on September 7 at CDM's Faustina Hall, included Holy Mass, three formation sessions, and healing moments that left participants rejuvenated, both physically and spiritually.

The day began with the Eucharist, where participants experienced the healing power of the Mass. Parish priest Fr George Harrison, who led the retreat, reminded attendees of the importance of being open to receiving healing from the Lord. He

commenced the first session with a talk titled “I am on a Mission on this Earth.” In this talk, Fr George underscored the Christian mission to spread Christ's love in the world.

To illustrate this, Fr George vividly captured our imagination through a role play that reminded us of how God adorns us with love. We are clothed with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience — the very garments of Christ. This demonstration emphasised that God takes great care in dressing us, not merely in physical fabrics, but in the love and grace of the gospel. These garments serve both as our protection and as a mark of our identity as Christ's disciples. It calls us to reflect: Are we wearing the wrong “clothes” through actions or words that fail to reflect who we are in Christ? And are we truly shining His light



Fr George Harrison's role play on how God adorns us with love.

in our words, deeds, and interactions with the world?

The second session, led by Deacon Jonathan Rao, explored the fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Titled “Be Aglow with the Spirit,” his presentation focused on how living a Spirit-filled life can lead to peace, joy, and a reduction of fear and anxiety. Deacon Jonathan's insights helped participants see how the Holy Spirit can guide their spiritual growth.

In the third session, Fr Simon Lau presented “I Am the Handmaid of the Lord,” which emphasised the importance of humility, self-awareness, and obedience to God's will. Drawing from the life of Mother Mary, Fr Simon encouraged participants to surrender fully to God's plan, adopting the well-known spiritual principle: “Let go, let God.”

The retreat reached its pinnacle during an intimate moment of prayer, as the Charismatic Team invited participants to encounter the Holy Spirit. In a dimly lit hall filled with hymns, the Blessed Sacrament was brought forth, allowing for personal encounters with Jesus. Many were moved

to tears as Fr George encouraged them to trust in the Lord, despite their personal struggles. The session concluded with a rite of commission, where participants held candles and pledged their commitment to mission.

The day ended on a joyful note, with participants singing, clapping, and dancing to spiritually uplifting hymns. Maggie, one of the participants, expressed her gratitude: “I feel inspired by the sessions to embrace greater courage, to listen attentively, and to take bold steps into the unknown, guided by the Holy Spirit.” Another attendee, Joan, added, “This retreat reminded me that self-healing is a lifelong process, and it has taught me to view life differently, with God at the centre.”

We are excited to continue this transformative journey with the Holy Spirit through fortnightly prayer meetings, led by Harriet Thomas, the coordinator, and the Charismatic team, with the support of Fr George. We warmly invite you to join us for this Spirit-filled encounter with the Lord. Your presence will undoubtedly enrich our time together in prayer and reflection.

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• BUILDING OF MONUMENTS • SUPPLY OF CONDOLENCE WREATHS •

Gaining an understanding of *Fiducia Supplicans*

YC Hwang, Elise Monerasinghe, Rita Lai

PETALING JAYA: On August 29, the Firm Foundation Ministry of the Church of St Francis Xavier (SFX), in collaboration with the SFX Family Life and Youth Ministry, hosted Fr Dr Clarence Devadass for a talk titled *Understanding Fiducia Supplicans – on the Pastoral Meaning of Blessings*. The session aimed to address confusion and controversy surrounding the document issued by the Roman Curia on December 18, 2023.

Fr Clarence began by conducting an informal poll, asking attendees to submit a one-word reaction to *Fiducia Supplicans* via a QR code. The most common responses were “confused” and “curious,” reflecting the unease among the faithful about the implications of the document.

The document, *Fiducia Supplicans*, which translates to “Supplicating Trust” or “The Pastoral Meaning of Blessings,” is a concise text of 45 paragraphs. A major part of the document addresses blessings in

various contexts, including the Sacrament of Marriage, while only 11 paragraphs in Section III touch on blessings for couples in irregular situations, including same-sex unions.

During the session held at Loyola Hall, Fr Clarence walked participants through the contents of *Fiducia Supplicans*, offering a clear interpretation. He emphasised that the document reaffirms the Church’s teaching on the sanctity of marriage as an exclusive, stable, and indissoluble union between a man and a woman. He clarified that *Fiducia Supplicans* does not endorse same-sex marriage but instead discusses blessings in pastoral situations, stressing that liturgical blessings cannot be given to unions outside traditional marriage.

Fr Clarence further elaborated on the nature of blessings, explaining that they can be broadly divided into two categories: liturgical blessings, which follow formal rituals, and informal pastoral blessings, which are spontaneous and have no fixed text.

It is the latter form that *Fiducia Supplicans* focuses on, aiming to clarify how blessings can be extended in pastoral care without undermining Church doctrine.

One of the key points of confusion, Fr Clarence noted, stemmed from selective readings of the document by media outlets, which misrepresented the Church’s stance as a shift in doctrine. Additionally, some conservative clergy inadvertently contributed to the controversy by echoing these misinterpretations.

The talk clarified that while pastoral blessings may be given to anyone, they should not resemble or be mistaken for sacramental rites. Instead, such blessings serve as acts of faith, rooted in the Church’s pastoral mission to extend God’s grace to all without compromising the sanctity of the Sacrament of Marriage.

Fr Clarence concluded the session with a Q&A segment, where attendees expressed relief that the Church’s position had not changed as was initially feared. Many left the

FIDUCIA SUPPLICANS

On the pastoral meaning of blessings



talk with a deeper understanding of *Fiducia Supplicans* and a renewed appreciation for the Church’s pastoral role in offering blessings.

The talk encouraged Catholics to read *Fiducia Supplicans* in its entirety to better understand the nuanced position of the Church on blessings, including those for couples in irregular situations, and to reinforce the importance of God’s grace in their lives.

PORT DICKSON: The Church of Immaculate Conception, in collaboration with the Professional Standards Office (PSO) Committee of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, held a training session on safeguarding and child protection. The session, conducted in Bahasa Melayu, focused on ensuring the safety and well-being of children within the Archdiocese.

Eighteen participants, including parish ministry members and staff, attended the session, which aimed to equip attendees with the knowledge and tools needed to create a safer environment for children in Church settings.

The PSO training is designed to help individuals in various church roles grasp the significance of fostering a safe environment for children. It focuses on implementing protocols and best practices for volunteers across the archdiocese who work with children up to 18 years old.

The comprehensive programme featured expert insights from Amy Bala,



Sumathi Annamalai, and Mary William, who underscored the importance of safeguarding protocols and empowered attendees with crucial knowledge and skills.

The engaging question-and-answer session that concluded the event highlighted the participants’ eagerness to deepen their understanding and implement

effective measures within their respective roles.

In addition to the training, participants were reminded of the Talian Kasih hotline (15999), a vital resource for reporting concerns and seeking assistance related to child protection. This service underscores the commitment to ensuring that help is always available when needed.

Fr Gregory Chan, who dropped in to meet the participants during the training session, noted that the scope of safeguarding has expanded from “children” to “any vulnerable person.” The session concluded with a final blessing by Fr Gregory, which provided a fitting close to a day dedicated to enhancing child safety within the community. **Clare Ong**

Caritas Kindness Bazaar – a show of love!

PULAI, Johor: Caritas MJD (Malacca Johore Diocese) held their second bi-annual Kindness Bazaar or *Bazar Sumbangan Kasih* on September 7 at Pangsapuri Merak, Bandar Baru Kangkar. This was a collaboration with Pertubuhan Kebajikan Shechinah Johor Bahru, headed by James Issachar. Salt and Light Centre representative Geeva, was instrumental in getting its premises available as the homebase and venue for the environmental

talk during the bazaar.

After much hard work and pre-planning, the organising team was pleased to see the various teams of volunteers arrive early to set-up and layout the many goods on offer. Included in the spread of items for sale were women’s, men’s, and children’s clothing and accessories, toys and an assortment of trinkets. The themes of “take what you need” and “contribute your own pre-loved items” were very much in evi-

dence alongside the eco-friendly initiatives like “bring your own bag”.

Before the festivities began, Fr James Rajendran, assistant parish priest of the Church of Divine Mercy in Skudai opened the bazaar with a prayer followed by a briefing by the organising chairperson, Jessica Kee.

The atmosphere was festive with music, clowns and goodies for the younger set, along with the many smiling faces from the members of the volunteer team and the local community participants. Amongst the more than 40 volunteers, were representatives from the Church of Divine Mercy Skudai, POHD St Joseph, Plentong, POHD St Elizabeth, Kota Tinggi, the Creation Justice Commission (CJC) and even a few kind hearted helpers from previous bazaars.

Whilst the festivities were ongoing, Dr Maria Lee, the CJC Diocesan Team Lead, gave a presentation on plastic pollution. She taught that plastics do not decompose but rather disintegrate into microplastics which are now found in the air we breathe, the fish and marine products that we eat

and even in the water that we drink. She highlighted that the best way to combat plastic pollution is to use alternative products, and to refuse single use plastics but opt to Reduce, Reuse and Recycle. The participants were also shown how to identify the plastic resin number and recognise harmful ones which should not be used for food, due to their health impact. They also learnt that not all plastics are recyclable in Malaysia. This talk was attended by the younger set from the Church of Divine Mercy, Hosanna Anglican Church, the Salt and Light Centre along with other interested attendees from the community.

In closing, the youngest volunteer, Louis Jong, 12 years old, of the St Joseph Church, Plentong, said that he is always happy to help others, and that he was very pleased to see everyone working together for the greater good and showing such warm fellowship towards others. This young man has encapsulated the very essence of the Kindness Bazaar, showing that it’s not about the money!

If you would like to find out more about how you can spread kindness in this way or on volunteering opportunities with Caritas MJD, please contact Albert at caritasmj@mjdioocese.my. **Brent Ah Kee**



'In the Psalms you will find the Lord Jesus'

SOUTHWARK: A new online prayer campaign has been launched by the Archdiocese of Southwark, encouraging people to make praying the Psalms a part of their daily lives.

Launching the campaign, Archbishop John Wilson said he is often greeted with questions about prayer and while the questions may vary slightly, at their heart people are searching for the purpose of prayer and guidance on how to make it a part of their life.

The Archbishop of Southwark said: "Questions about prayer, whether about the purpose of prayer, its power, beauty or even how to pray can be answered in the Psalms."

It is, Archbishop John said, by "praying the Psalms that the Church receives its strength" adding "it is in the Psalms that you will find the Lord Jesus."

The archbishop reminds us in his message that the Psalms have been prayed by the Saints, Apostles, as well as Our Lady and the Lord Jesus Himself. Archbishop John said "by praying the Psalms, we are imitat-



A screen capture of Archbishop John Wilson during the launch of the online prayer campaign on YouTube.

ing Christ" and it is through them that we are drawn ever "closer to him."

The beauty and power of the Psalms is that they can provide comfort through the many situations people face in life. Archbishop John explained that when he is suffering, he takes comfort in Psalm 31 and its call for God to be a "rock of refuge for

me." This is the very Psalm the Lord Jesus turned to when he said "into your hands I commend my spirit."

The online campaign has been launched by the Archdiocese of Southwark as part of its work to evangelise using new media, supporting Pope Francis' call for 2024 to be the Year of Prayer.

Earlier in the year, the Archdiocese which covers South London and Kent, ran a video initiative during Lent which released a prayer video a day across social media promoting much loved prayers within the Catholic Church. On Facebook alone, the videos had a combined reach of over 12 million people. Archbishop John Wilson also led 10,000 school children and young people in an online rosary.

Over the coming weeks and months, the Archdiocese of Southwark will be posting prayer videos across social media using the Psalms in the hope that it will encourage people to make praying the Psalms a regular part of their lives.

Archbishop John encouraged people who are searching about why or how to pray, or "the next time your child or grandchild is curious about prayer" to "turn to the Psalms". Because, he said, "by praying the Psalms, you too can discover the beauty and power of prayer" and "it is in the Psalms you will find the love and mercy of the Lord." **Patrick Kinsella, ICN**

Culinary programme launched to empower young women in India

INDIA: St Joseph's Institute of Skills has launched a three-month baking training programme aimed at empowering young women, particularly mothers aged 18 to 27, by providing practical skills and employment opportunities.

The initiative, developed in partnership with Vihaan Organisation, is designed to equip participants with the knowledge and tools necessary to start small-scale baking businesses from their homes, according to a report by Catholic Connect.

Many of the participants include women who have faced challenges such as unemployment, early school dropout, or the impacts of HIV/AIDS and sexual harassment.

"We are trying to empower women so they can learn a skill for their life. If not immediately, in the future they can start their own small businesses at home, making bakery items," said Fr Deepak Joseph, director of the institute.

"We don't want to leave behind those who are below 50 per cent, those who may not have the academic qualifications but have the potential to build a better future," the priest added.

St Joseph's Institute, established in 2020-21, has already trained more than 1,100 stu-

dents, with a focus on individuals from marginalised communities.

This latest initiative is set to enrol 25 women this year, with the potential for expansion to other locations in the future.

The baking programme, while providing practical skills, also offers participants a chance to utilise their free time in a productive way.

The institute hopes the programme will not only help young women support themselves but also give them the confidence to become entrepreneurs in their own right.

St Joseph's Institute of Skills, operating under the Archdiocesan Board of Education, was founded in 2020 at the St Joseph's Educational Institutions campus on Mysore Road, Bengaluru.

Established by Most Rev Dr Peter Machado, Archbishop of Bangalore, the institute serves as a post-COVID initiative aimed at providing vocational opportunities to semi-educated youths and school dropouts.

Focused on different areas of Bangalore and extending to the remotest parts of Karnataka, it helps individuals, often from disadvantaged backgrounds, to secure livelihoods and improve their economic circumstances. **LiCAS News**



Participants of St Joseph's Institute of Skills culinary programme. (LiCas News/Catholic Connect)



ACN photo

More than a million children to pray the Rosary for peace

UNITED KINGDOM: A Catholic charity is hoping to exceed last year's milestone of more than a million children joining a campaign to pray the Rosary for peace in the world's conflict zones.

Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) is holding its *One Million Children Praying the Rosary* initiative for the 19th year in the row on October 18.

Last year the target of a million children praying the Rosary for peace was reached for the first time — and the charity wants to see even more young people taking part in 2024.

ACN (UK) National Director Caroline Hull said that the charity is "hoping to surpass last year's record of 1,039,628 children praying the Rosary for peace around the world".

She added, "We would like to invite all our friends and benefactors here in the UK and beyond to encourage all the children they know to join this powerful initiative inspired by Our Lady of Fatima."

This year's motto — *Pray the Rosary and there will be peace* — places at the centre of the campaign the request made by Our Lady of Fatima in 1917.

Through this initiative, ACN is also participating in the "Symphony of Prayers"

campaign, which Pope Francis called for on the occasion of the 2024 Year of Prayer — and which also paves the way for the 2025 Jubilee Year.

In a statement, Cardinal Mauro Piacenza, ACN (International) President, and Fr Anton Lässer, ACN (International) Ecclesiastical Assistant, wrote that everyone should "apply strength and imagination, so that in as many places as possible prayer meetings can take place..."

"Go to children's groups, schools, prayer groups, radio and television, digital platforms, social media... and win over your own children and grandchildren for the prayer of the Rosary."

The *One Million Children Praying the Rosary* campaign has taken place every year on October 18 since first being organised in Caracas, Venezuela in 2005.

There is free material — including colouring pictures for children and more information about the campaign — available online for those looking to help encourage their parishes, schools, children's groups and families to join the initiative. For more details and to sign up to join the campaign, please visit: <https://acninternational.org/millionchildrenpraying> **ICN**

Pope urges Catholics to pick 'lesser evil'

VATICAN: Pope Francis has advised US Catholic voters to choose the “lesser evil” in the upcoming presidential election, noting that both major candidates hold views that go against the Church’s teachings on life. Speaking aboard a flight from Singapore, the Pope addressed concerns about voting for candidates who support abortion or restrictive immigration policies.

Without naming them directly, Pope Francis referred to Kamala Harris, who supports abortion rights, and Donald Trump, known for his tough stance on immigration, including deporting migrants. “Both are against life,” he said, emphasising that expelling migrants and legalising abortion are both grave sins in the eyes of the Church.

He reminded Catholics of the biblical mandate to care for “widows, orphans, and the stranger,” highlighting the sinfulness of neglecting migrants. On abortion, he reiterated the Church’s firm stance, calling it “assassination” and saying, “To have an abortion is to kill a human being.”

Despite these strong moral objections, the Pope encouraged Catholics to vote. He stressed the importance of participating in the democratic process and urged voters to act according to their conscience. “In political morality, generally, they say not



Republican presidential nominee former President Donald Trump and Democratic presidential nominee Vice President Kamala Harris greet each other as they debate for the first time during the presidential election campaign at the National Constitution Center on September 10, 2024, in Philadelphia. (CNA photo/Win McNamee)

voting is wrong; one must vote, and one must choose the lesser evil” in accordance with one’s conscience, he said.

The US bishops have similarly urged Catholics to weigh both abortion and care for migrants when voting. In their document *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, they identify abortion as a “pre-eminent priority” due to the millions

of lives it affects each year.

The Pope’s remarks came as the US presidential race intensifies, with Trump and Harris representing opposing views on key moral issues. While the Pope refrained from endorsing either candidate, his comments reflect the complex moral landscape US Catholics must navigate as they prepare to vote. **Agencies**

Basic Christian Communities — laboratories for synodality

AFRICA: The names given to the basic ecclesial structure of Christian communities vary from one place to another. Here we speak of Basic Christian Communities (BCC), there we speak of Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC), elsewhere we speak of Living Ecclesial Communities (LEEC), or Basic Living Ecclesial Communities (BLEEC), Basic Catholic Christian Communities (BCCC), Small Basic Christian Communities (SBCC), and so on.

Whatever they are called, they all express the same thing: to help Christians rediscover the founding importance of baptism, which confers the same filial dignity on all and calls all the baptised to the same holiness, whatever their responsibility.

The BECs came into being in the 1960s in Latin America and in the 1970s in Africa. They were inspired by the experience of the very first Christian communities, where proclamation, celebration and attitudes to life came together in a community witness.

At a time when pastoral life is resuming,

here and there, in our parishes and dioceses — after the holiday period — it is good to recall a few essential elements that make up the *raison d’être* of a BEC.

First of all, to organise as a BEC is to seek to recapture the spirit of the first Christians described in the Acts of the Apostles. This spirit was characterised by communal fidelity to the apostles’ teaching, communal listening to the Word, and communal breaking of the Eucharistic bread.

Secondly, in the African context, organising as a BEC means seeking to correspond more closely to the African mentality, which is naturally inclined towards community life. It is often said that where Descartes affirmed: ‘I think, therefore I am’, the African would say: ‘I am because we are’. The fundamental structures of the Black African family are characterised by the spirit of the family community, living together, fraternal mutual aid, and family and social solidarity.

These are vital spaces, outside which people are culturally and sociologically disorientated.

The BEC aims to create a family spirit. It is the image of the African family, which establishes itself, grows, establishes itself, and grows. In addition, the organisation of the Church into BECs is designed to promote baptism, the sacrament of Christian initiation, and the gateway to the Church. It is through baptism that we gain access to the other sacraments.

By organising the local Church into BECs, we aim to help Christians rediscover the founding importance of baptism, which confers the same filial dignity on all and calls all the baptised to the same holiness, whatever their responsibility in the Church. The BEC becomes a favourable place to create and develop a spirit of ecclesial communion and a spirit of common responsibility by virtue of baptism.

Finally, from a theological point of view, BECs enable the image of the church as a “Christian community” or “Family of God” to be expressed locally. This community is rooted in the mystery of the Holy Trinity since the God of Jesus Christ is a God in three persons and, therefore, a God in the ‘form’ of a “community” or “family.” The experiences of the BECs are laboratories for synodality.

There, in the BECs, the three dimensions of the synod’s theme on synodality — communion, participation, and mission — are lived out concretely. These experiences open up new paths for the whole Church. **Fr Jean Paul Sagadou, LCI** (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)

Notre Dame theologian wins prestigious Ratzinger Prize

SOUTH BEND, Indiana: A University of Notre Dame theologian with Irish roots is the latest recipient of a prestigious award named in honour of the late Pope Benedict XVI.

Cyril O’Regan, *pix* a systematic theologian who specialises in the thought of 19th- and 20th-century Catholics like St John Henry Newman, Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar, is a recipient of the 2024 Ratzinger Prize, the Joseph Ratzinger-Benedict XVI Vatican Foundation announced on September 18.

Born in Ireland in 1952, O’Regan is the first Irishman to win the coveted prize, which has been awarded to distinguished scholars mostly working in theology and philosophy since 2011.

Etsurō Sotoo, a Japanese sculptor whose work appears in places like the Sagrada Família Basilica in Barcelona, Spain, was also announced as an award winner.

O’Regan, who earned doctorates in both theology and philosophy from Yale University and has taught at Notre Dame since 1999, told the Register that he is “deeply honoured and immensely grateful to the Ratzinger Foundation to receive this award that has a truly venerable pedigree.”

The systematic theologian also admitted that he was “somewhat in a state of shock” to be awarded the prize. He cited both Notre Dame’s “congenial relationship” with the Vatican and the “high reputation” of the Indiana university’s theology department as possible factors in his selection. Notre Dame’s theology programme regularly ranks among the top in the world.

The foundation, however, cited O’Regan’s impressive theological contributions and teaching prowess in its statement announcing the 2024 award recipients.

Professor O’Regan “is much appreciated by students for his attentive teaching relationship,” a statement from the Ratzinger Foundation noted. “He has devoted several important articles to the figure and teaching of Joseph Ratzinger-Benedict XVI.”

O’Regan and Sotoo will be presented the Ratzinger Prize by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican’s secretary of state, at a Nov 22 ceremony in Rome. Prior to the award presentation, a Mass in memory of Pope Benedict XVI will be celebrated at the late Pope’s tomb in the crypt of St Peter’s Basilica, and the two award-winners will be received by Pope Francis.

The Holy Father approved the nominations of the prize winners, which are proposed to him by a Ratzinger Foundation committee. Among the committee members is Bishop Rudolf Voderholzer of Regensburg, Germany, and president of the Pope Benedict XVI Institute.

The Ratzinger Foundation was established in 2007 by former students of the German theologian with the aim of “the promotion of theology in the spirit of Joseph Ratzinger.” The nonprofit, which is affiliated with the Vatican, also funds deserving graduate students and holds international conferences on the life and legacy of Pope Benedict XVI. **Jonathan Liedl, Register**



A file photo of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) region. (ACI Africa/Meru Diocese)

Second synod session to open with penitential liturgy

Before the second session of the Synod on Synodality kicks off in Rome at the beginning of October, participants will gather in retreat to pray together and ask forgiveness for sins in a penitential prayer vigil led by Pope Francis.

In addition, four new forums will be conducted on two dates alongside the month-long assembly and will provide a public platform for reflection and debate on theological topics being discussed during the synod.

These and other changes to the second part of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops October 2–27 were highlighted by synod organisers on Sept 16.

Penitential vigil

The day before the synod begins, a prayer service in St Peter's Basilica on Oct 1 will mark the conclusion of a two-day retreat at the Vatican for synod members. At the public vigil, "some of the sins that cause the most pain and shame will be called by name, invoking God's mercy," synod



Members of the General Secretariat of the Synod pose for a photo after a news conference at the Vatican September 16, 2024. From left: Msgr Riccardo Battocchio and Jesuit Fr Giacomo Costa, both special secretaries for the synodal assembly; Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary-general of the synod; and Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, relator general of the synod. (CNS/Pablo Esparza)

secretary Cardinal Mario Grech said at a press conference Sept 16.

During the prayer service, three people

will speak about their experiences of being harmed by sexual abuse, war, and indifference toward migrants, and there will

be a "confession of various types of sins," Grech said. "It will not be about denouncing the sin of others but about recognising ourselves as part of those who, by action or at least omission, become the cause of the suffering suffered by the innocent and helpless."

The event has been organised by the synod secretariat in collaboration with the Diocese of Rome, the Union of Major Superiors, and the International Union of Major Superiors.

According to a press release, attendees will request forgiveness "in the name of all the baptised" for "sin against peace, sin against creation, against Indigenous populations, against migrants; sin of abuse; sin against women, family, youth; sin of using doctrine as stones to be hurled; sin against poverty; sin against synodality/lack of listening, communion, and participation of all."

The Synod on Synodality will then have its official start with an opening Mass in St Peter's Square on Oct 2.

Participants and methodology

Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, the relator general for the Synod on Synodality, said Sept 16 that there have been "no great changes" to the 368 voting members and 96 non-voting participants in the second session of the assembly.

To date, only 25 changes have been recorded, mostly replacements for people who are no longer able to attend, he explained, including several for health reasons.

Archbishop Julian Leow, President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei will be replacing Cardinal William Goh of Singapore. He will be joined by Fr Dr Clarence Devadass and Anna Teresa Amandus from Malaysia, who are voting members for the synod. Professor Christina Kheng, a Singaporean layperson

will be at the synod as an Expert and Facilitator.

The number of fraternal delegates, representatives of non-Catholic Christian faiths, has increased from 12 to 16 at the request of Pope Francis. The new additions are representatives of the Patriarchate of Alexandria and all of Africa, the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch, the Lutheran World Federation, and the World Mennonite Conference.

The overall format for the nearly month-long meeting remains very similar to the prior year's gathering — including daily prayer, theological reflections, and "conversation in the Spirit" in small working groups divided by language.

But organisers noted that there will be fewer plenaries (when members have the opportunity to address the entire assembly)



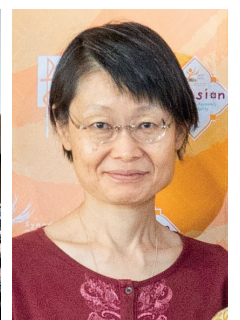
Archbishop Julian Leow



Fr Dr Clarence Devadass



Anna Teresa Amandus



Professor Christina Kheng

in 2024, and instead, representatives of each of the working groups will meet among themselves to share what emerged during conversations.

There will also be "more pauses for prayer and reflection," according to Sheila Pires, who is on the synod's communication team.

One of these pauses will be another retreat day on Oct 21, according to Fr

Giacomo Costa, SJ, a synod special secretary. He explained that this retreat will allow members to spiritually prepare for the presentation of the draft of the synod's final document, which they will be called to provide feedback for before voting on the document's final content.

There will also be voting during the synod to determine what topics will be concretely discussed, he said.

Organisers insist that hot-button topics discussed during the first session will not be on the program in October, which will focus on "how the synodal Church is on mission."

This year, however, the theological and pastoral underpinnings of the synodal discussions will be open to the public to learn about during four forums on Oct 9 and Oct 16 in Rome.

The forums will be on *The People of God*, *Subject of the Mission*, *The Role and Authority of the Bishop in a Synodal Church*, *The Mutual Relationship Between the Local Church and the Universal Church*, and *The Exercise of Primacy in the Synod of Bishops*.

In each forum, four or five theologians, canonists, and bishops will introduce "the principle questions, focusing on the different perspective from which these issues can be viewed," said Fr Riccardo

Theological-pastoral forums

Battocchio, a special secretary of the synod.

Afterwards, the floor will be open for questions and responses from those present.

According to a press release, the forums are intended for all participants in the Assembly (members, special guests, fraternal delegates, experts). Journalists accredited to the Holy See Press Office are also invited and members of the public may attend according to available space. Registration will be required for anyone who wants to participate, with details on how to register to be released at a later date.

These four forums, Battocchio said, "intend to offer a further contribution of reflections ... to those who will participate in the second session ... but also to other people interested in the themes of the synod."

They will tackle, he continued, themes connected to several sections in the *Instrumentum Laboris*.

The forums' speakers have not yet been published.

The October assembly of the Synod on Synodality will mark the end of the discernment phase of the Church's synodal process, which Pope Francis opened in 2021.

The third phase of the synod — after "the consultation of the people of God" and "the discernment of the pastors" — will be "implementation," according to organisers.

The *Instrumentum Laboris* for the final part of the Synod on Synodality, published July 9, focused on how to implement certain of the synod's aims while laying aside some of the more hot-button topics

from the October 2023 gathering, such as women deacons, priestly celibacy, and LGBTQ outreach.

These more controversial subjects and others have been delegated to the competency of 15 study groups formed starting late last year.

The 2024 guiding document instead offered concrete proposals for instituting a listening and accompaniment ministry, greater lay involvement in parish economics and finances, and more powerful parish councils.

"Without tangible changes, the vision of a synodal Church will not be credible," the *Instrumentum Laboris*, or "working tool," said.

The 15 study groups will continue to meet through June 2025 but will provide an update on their progress at the beginning of the second session in October.

Hannah Brockhaus, CNA



Is dementia a real enemy?

I was at a dinner recently, and someone casually asked me about my profession and when I explained, he simply shrugged and said, “Why should I bother? Why should anyone bother?” That statement hit me hard. Why indeed should we be bothered about people living with dementia? Similarly, I was with a bunch of young engineers who giggled when they found out about my work, it’s like being with a group of hopeless lunatics, according

to them. This crystallises how we stigmatise dementia because words matter. How we talk about someone affects who that person is, how others perceive them, and how they perceive themselves. Our words represent our beliefs, morals, prejudices, and principles which can shape one’s perceptions of those living with dementia.

Is every life precious or only those we think are fit to be qualified as a human being? What if they are different than us? What if they are old, repetitive, forgetful, slow, silent, seemingly from a different world?

Shame is the word that surfaces again and again when it comes to dementia. Most of my friends living with dementia locked themselves in the house because of shame. A friend of mine, a retired matron was hiding the fact that her husband has dementia. She refused to inform anyone about it because it was a secret, a shameful secret. She



Dancing with Dementia

DR CECILIA CHAN

is not alone, nearly everyone that contacted me has shared some elements of shame. It comes in many guises, and many forms, felt by the individual living with dementia as well as their family members. So, we hide it so that it will not be seen by strangers as well as friends because we are trying to protect ourselves from the judging world.

Today we live in a society with stereotypes; where sadly judging has become a norm, one that not many realise how detrimental it can be to the community. No wonder dementia is the MOST feared condition in the world now.

I have lost count of how many times I’ve seen people being impatient staring at computer screens or at their handphones rather than attending to an anxious and confused person in an unfamiliar environment. How often do we talk over them during procedures as if they do not exist? How often do we assume that it is okay not to seek their permission before touching them, and then get puzzled when they express their displeasure, we even label it as BPSD (Behavioural and Psychological Symptoms in Dementia). Would it be okay for people to touch us without our permission? Why is it that we fail to recognise that despite all their losses they are still human beings? If someone is forgetful or slow — does that mean they are less than a human, that their lives are less valuable?

Someone dear to me has a wife living with dementia. Their children had long migrated overseas. She is the love of his life and still is after 60 long years. He is afraid of their future and he shared with me his wish to kill his wife before she becomes a living dead, a zombie. I could not stop my tears from flowing. I felt that slap on my face. How desperate must one be to want to kill someone you love because their future is so bleak to spare them the misery? What does that say about our culture? Dementia, like old age, does not exist in a vacuum. We as a society make a huge difference.

Often people who are living with dementia are missing people, forgotten and denied by a society that values independence, productivity, and youthfulness, and shuns away from vulnerability. Yet, we as humans are a species evolved to be social. We have an innate, biologically driven ability to develop and form interpersonal connections. The COVID-19 period of on and off lockdowns, restrictions, and social isolation has made it abundantly clear that we are not meant to be alone. Nothing has highlighted the importance of social connections more than the COVID-19 pandemic has. Yet, those living with dementia continue to live in isolation.

We also cannot deny that we, as human beings, have a longing to be seen, understood, and accepted for who we are. We all



need people who would lovingly confront us when needed but also try to talk to us first, to understand where we come from and support us. Perhaps when we encounter someone living with dementia, it threatens our selfhood. Could it be that it triggers us to think of our future disgrace? It could be us in the future. We could be wearing diapers, forgetting how to use a spoon, begging for our mummies. So, we turn away, not me, not us, but THEM, the disgraced them.

Being a human being is so complex, it is beyond just cognitive ability. Maybe it is time for us to start by looking directly at our fear, to look at it squarely in the eyes, that is our own eyes. What makes us human?

I quote Mahatma Gandhi’s compassionate plea, “Let us be the change we want to see”.

Dr Cecilia Chan is a Gerontologist and Dementia Advocate and Activist. She can be contacted via WhatsApp (013-4384388).

Nostalgia — a powerful tool in relationships and therapy

Every time I watch the musical *Cats*, especially when Grizabella sings *Memory* as she ascends to the “Heaviside Layer” to be reborn as a new cat, my heart races as my thoughts wander back to the old times when life was energetic, adventurous and glamorous.

Being a cat who fell on hard times after a glamorous past, she finds herself ostracised by her Jellicle peers. Sung at the show’s climax, her lyrics (based on TS Eliot’s poems) strike a chord as she sings about her life and as a plea for acceptance by the other cats.

*Memory, all alone in the moonlight
I can dream of the old days
Life was beautiful then
I remember the time I knew
what happiness was
Let the memory live again*

Of course, my life is not as desperate as an old cat, but at times, I do wish there is a “Heaviside Layer” that I can walk in and come back as a younger version of myself, renewed to relive the adventures of life all over again. As we navigate the complexities of modern life, a simple memory can transport us back to a time when everything seemed simpler, warmer and more humanly connected. But what if these memories could do more than just comfort us — what if they could heal us?

Nostalgia is more than a simple yearning for past experiences; it is an emotion that encompasses fond memories, important milestones and relationships that shape a person’s life. For the elderly, nostalgia often revolves around their childhood, growing up, family life and career accomplishments. And in “madeleine” moments described by French novelist Marcel Proust, related sounds, sights and smells can evoke vivid recollections of joyful moments, bittersweet experiences and even cherished relationships with loved ones.

Nostalgia – its origin

We may be surprised that the word ‘nostalgia’ has its origins in describing severe home sickness. It comes from the Greek words *nóstos*, meaning “return or homecoming”, and *álgos*, meaning “pain or suffering”. The term was coined in the late 17th century to describe the anxieties suffered by Swiss soldiers who

were longing for their homeland. It was mostly linked to neurotic depression until 1979, when sociologists began to explore its benefits and define it in a more positive way.

The elderly can pass down valuable life lessons, traditions and family stories to the younger generation. For example, reminiscing about cultural experiences, historical events or childhood memories can create a sense of unity and shared identity. This reinforces inter-generational bonding and promotes overall wellbeing.

Therapeutic benefits

A therapeutic technique known as reminiscence therapy helps the elderly to recall and share past experiences. This involves discussing personal history, viewing of old photographs and engaging with familiar objects to evoke positive emotions. A systematic review observed that one-hour group reminiscence sessions about hometown could significantly improve the quality of life and life satisfaction among the elderly (<https://rb.gy/saqnyy>).

Engaging in creative activities, such as journaling, storytelling, playing childhood games (such as five stones or *Batu Seremban* in Malay) or creating memory albums are some of the therapeutic ways for the elderly to channel their nostalgia. These activities allow them to organise their thoughts, process emotions and preserve memories in a way that is both meaningful and fulfilling.

However, precautions must be taken when engaging in nostalgia. The effect of nostalgia on well-being depends on the natural context in which it is elicited. A study has observed subjects reporting more nostalgic experiences on days when they felt lonely (*Frontiers | The*

Negative Interactive Effects of Nostalgia and Loneliness on Affect in Daily Life (frontiersin.org).

Negative effects of nostalgia

As the Italian poet Dante Alighieri used to say, “There is no greater sorrow than to recall a happy time when miserable”. This shows that nostalgia may reinforce a sense of regret by promoting the feeling of a bleak future, where “the good old days” are gone forever. If we over-rely on nostalgic memories, it can lead to a sense of longing that prevents us from fully engaging with our present lives.

And sometimes, nostalgia can lead to bitterness, anger and vengefulness. People may look back and say “I should be the one who married this guy or girl” or “I should have succeeded in business if he or she hadn’t cheated me”. Or maybe “I have the right to hurt him back for bullying and insulting me”.

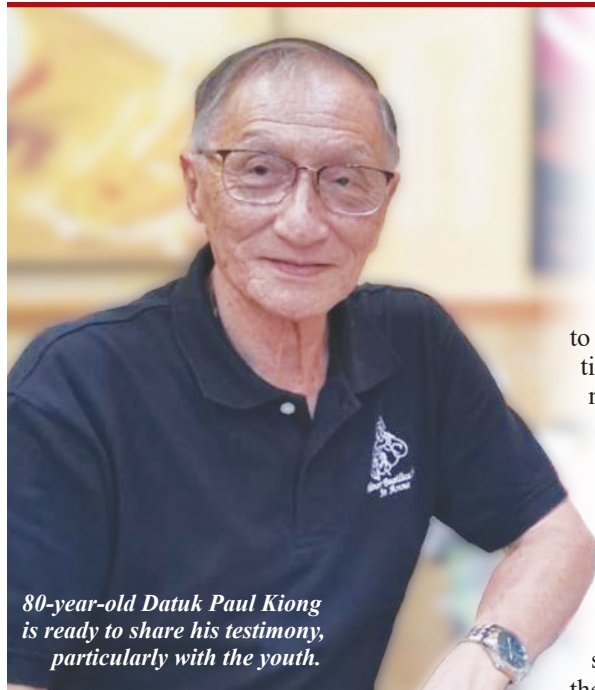
Living for today

Reality tells us that we only live once, and we must make the best of life without regret, whatever the outcome. It is important for us to get a grip on reality in our nostalgic reflections. We must learn to acknowledge the past without becoming trapped.

The next time you find yourself reminiscing, don’t just savour the memory — share it. Tell others your stories. Whether with family members, friends or even in a therapeutic setting. Let those memories become a bridge that connects life, strengthens hope and brings healing. Let us head to the nearest *kopitiam* to chit-chat about the good old days over a hearty set of *kaya* toast and coffee... as long as we remember to get a grip on reality.

Emeritus Professor Ng Kwan Hoong





80-year-old Datuk Paul Kiong is ready to share his testimony, particularly with the youth.

Bob Ho

A true patriot, Datuk Paul Kiong placed his full trust in God, risking his life in a covert mission to prevent communist terrorists (CTs) from turning Malaysia into a godless nation.

As a Special Branch officer, Paul spent six years in the jungle, living a double life — posing as a comrade to the CTs while remaining a patriot willing to die for his country. He prayed for spiritual strength, courage, and wisdom as he carried his Cross in the pursuit of peace and harmony.

By God's grace, Paul not only captured 43 communist terrorists but also won their hearts and minds, living out the command to "love your enemies, do good to those who hate you" (Luke 6:27). Through his efforts, he convinced them to abandon their cause and work toward peace, for their own good and the good of the nation.

"Although I earned their trust, there was no guarantee they would not flip. There was no room for error, no second chance. Failure meant death," said Paul.

Though, highly trained in jungle warfare, Paul made a conscious effort to avoid taking lives, guided by the commandment "Thou shall not kill" and Jesus' teaching to "love your enemies" (Matthew 5:43-45). Reflecting on his mission, Paul said, "I was there

to save lives, not destroy God's creation. I prayed that there would be no unnecessary deaths or injuries. What good is a dead CT? I can't win him over or persuade him to convince his comrades to abandon their cause."

Before going into the jungle Paul went to the Church of Our Mother of Perpetual Help in Ipoh to "ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened". (Matthew 7:7). Paul said: "I talked to God about my fears and pleaded with Mother Mary to intercede with Jesus to watch over me."

The national hero carried his Rosary everywhere but for the suicide mission he had to leave it behind, trusting Mother Mary would not abandon her son. Paul returned to the church after every successful mission to thank God and Mother Mary, praying one decade of the Rosary and the *Memorare*. Praying gave him calm, peace and relief, for "anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thy intercession, was left unaided".

Paul, then 34, was based in Perak where CTs were actively recruiting the youth to carry out attacks in the urban areas and jungles during the second insurgency. They assassinated Perak Chief Police Officer Tan Sri Khoo Chong Kong and many Special Branch officers. Perak was deemed a critical state in combating the second insurgency. The youth were being indoctrinated and brainwashed with subversive propaganda. "I could not allow them to destroy our peace and harmony, and turned us into a nation without religion," said Paul, who was trained in psychological warfare.

In the jungle, Paul honed his ability to behave, speak, and think like a CT to avoid suspicion and death. "We ate, bathed, fought, and slept together," he recalled. As

a courier, transporter, and food supplier, he had access to towns. During these trips, he discreetly extracted valuable information he was meant to deliver and disrupted food supplies to weaken enemy morale. With extreme caution, Paul even attended Mass incognito and offered thanksgiving.

When firefights seemed imminent, he prayed silently. Miraculously, thanks to God, the tide often shifted, and lives were spared, with zero casualties on both sides. However, a few unavoidable shootings occurred, involving hard-core communist terrorists. "With bullets flying and bombs exploding everywhere, my combat training kicked in instantly. Lives were lost, but I wasn't wounded," Paul said.

Paul is grateful that God blessed him with his late wife, Veronica Low, who stood firmly by his side, trusting that God was with him. "Veronica never asked

about my work, and I couldn't tell her. All I could do was give her a number to call if anything went wrong," he said.

Now 80, the retired Superintendent is ready to share his testimony, particularly with the youth. His advice: "Talk to God from the heart, pray the Rosary, and always give thanks."

For his sacrifices, Paul received three gallantry medals, including the country's highest honour, the *Seri Pahlawan Gagah Perkasa* (Grand Knight of Valour). "I didn't get these medals because I was brave. I was scared to die. God turned my fear into courage," quipped the Church of St Ignatius, Petaling Jaya parishioner. "I'm just holding them for my fallen comrades."

The communist insurgency, which started in 1948, officially ended on December 2, 1989, with the signing of a peace accord in Thailand.



A young Paul Kiong at a makeshift field office in the jungles of Perak.

Consecrated virgin offers her vocation to serve war-stricken communities

ODESA, Ukraine: A consecrated virgin in Ukraine shared her deep gratitude for her vocation, which allows her to "give all, day and night" to those impoverished by Russia's decade-long war against her nation.

"For me, it is a great privilege," said Olena Punda, speaking to *OSV News* on September 5 in the historic port city of Odesa, located along the Black Sea.

Punda, originally from Khmelnytskyi in western Ukraine, made her vows as a consecrated virgin of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Odesa-Simferopol in 2021. Before that, she was a member of a religious congregation.

While serving in her previous order — whose mission focused on "working with the poor" — Punda felt a deeper calling to an even more personal relationship with God, especially through prayer.

"I felt I needed more space and time for personal prayer," Punda explained.

She began discerning her vocation as a consecrated virgin, a life in which a never-married, celibate woman vows, under her diocesan bishop, to dedicate herself to Christ "with spousal love ... in virginity." This vocation allows women to remain in their "ordinary context of life" within their diocesan community, as outlined in the 2018 Vatican instruction *Ecclesiae Sponsae Imago*.

The vocation, which dates back to the Church's early centuries, was renewed by St Paul VI following the Second Vatican Council.

In 1970, the pope introduced a new liturgical rite for the consecration of women living "in saeculo" (in the world), along with a form for perpetually professed nuns in religious communities.

Living alone, Punda begins her day at 5.00am with prayer at home, where, with episcopal permission, she keeps a tabernacle. Afterward, she heads to the Roman Catholic Cathedral of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Odesa, where daily Mass is followed by morning prayer with the cathedral's priests, and then a shared group breakfast.

"We share the Eucharist and the table," Punda said.

The workday is long, with Punda supporting the diocese administratively and assisting Bishop Stanislav Shyrokoradiuk of Odesa-Simferopol. Russia's war on Ukraine has amplified both humanitarian and spiritual challenges for the diocese.

"When the war started, our lives changed, and our ministry expanded," Punda said.

In addition to handling chancery correspondence, Punda coordinates various charity projects and initiatives, while also providing hands-on aid to those affected by

the war, particularly in the Mykolaiv and Kherson regions.

"Sometimes it's dangerous to go to these places because of Russia's relentless attacks on civilian targets," she admitted. "But there are people there where no one else can reach them. They need basic things, such as food, hygiene supplies, and cleaning products."

The need is just as critical in Odesa and other cities, where many internally displaced people have no means to survive.

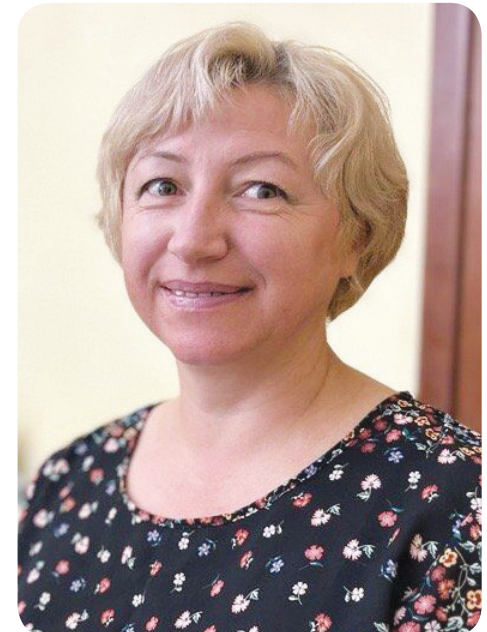
"So many come to our church just to receive whatever we can give," Punda said.

Her vocation as a consecrated virgin uniquely equips her to assist the Church in its mission, she said.

"It's important in a special way because you can give all of yourself, day and night, when the need arises," Punda said. "A wife or husband with children has many responsibilities and may not have that same opportunity to serve."

For Punda, her vocation is ultimately a grace.

"It is God who can use me all the time, wherever he wants and to whomever he wants," she said. **Gina Christian, OSV**



Olena Punda, a consecrated virgin for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Odesa-Simferopol, Ukraine, told *OSV News* her vocation enables her to "give all, day and night," to those impoverished by Russia's war on Ukraine. (*OSV News photo/Gina Christian*)

Finding reality in a social media world

It is strange how sometimes we can feel absolutely invisible to the rest of the world that seems to be going on just fine, and at other times we become so self-conscious we feel all eyes are fixed on us scrutinising and judging our every move. We have become a society obsessed with what people think and I believe this has become more factual because of social media. We may have created a generation with higher IQ but lower self-esteem.

I myself have a love-hate relationship with social media. I love binge watching mom hack videos of women who have their act together with home organisation routines, beauty regimes, hour glass figures, creative and organised kids play time, stunningly beautiful tidy homes. May I add doing all this while looking perfectly dolled up, and I find myself hating the sentiment I am often left with, feeling inadequate, messy, overweight, and wishing I had more love, more clothes, more children, more money and just more. It is hilarious I know but I also know I am not the only one.

Everything on social media is just so perfect and flawless, this often makes us feel we are not. Our wits want to believe that everyone else is smooth sailing through life while we face our daily struggles. Remember, people don't post their cellulite, undone dishes and relationship brawls (of course some do, but that's a story for another time). So it's easy to wonder "Why me? Why does my life suck?"

Not very long ago I received a phone



A Blessed Life

TIANNE PEREIRA

call from someone very dear to me, she said "Tianne, I am getting a divorce." I almost fell off my seat! This was someone who in my head had the perfect marriage. Their love story was a fairy-tale. In fact from social media I knew they had the most romantic and unforgettable concert experience not very long ago. My mind was still blurry when she went on to say "he cheated.... (long pause)...with a guy." What?? No! What? You're joking! No....

To cut the long story short this guy whom we all knew or thought we knew so well, had a whole other secret life. The life portrayed was a far cry from reality. The thing is while on the outside they looked so happy together, they were struggling with this battle internally — but no one knew and no one would have ever guessed. But here's where social media can have a positive impact — when my friend posted something to hint the situation she was in, she received messages from women she never even knew (friends of friends of friends), women who were in the exact situation but were too ashamed to talk about it and did not know what to do about it. As

someone who had not experienced what they had, I was utterly useless in this situation because I could only share a foreign point of view. But when my friend shares with someone of common experience it means they have similar feelings, worries, and in turn can help each other feel less alone, isolated or judged while working together to empower, support and lift each other. I must add here, my dear friend is a real rock star! Her faith in God has been nothing less than admirable. Through all the disappointment, heart ache and hurt, she still walks around with a huge smile on her face, because she knows Jesus loves her and He has her back.

So, am I saying social media is bad? Not at all... well, yes and no.

We all know there is a wealth of information we can obtain online, even with regards to our faith life. Then there is the part that allows us to stay connected, build relationships with people all around the world. We also know many people who make enough money on these platforms to retire early and others who find the love of their life online. However, it is when we start comparing ourselves to others and start doing things to keep up and when we feel pressured to stay with trends or maintain an online presence that we should hear all the alarm bells in our head go off.

I work with youngsters and almost all of these children use social media by the age of 12. A majority of them are obsessed with the number of interactions and followers they have, and it feels like they place their worth based on these numbers. How sad is this? Like me, they too scroll through their feeds

constantly exposed to unrealistic beauty standards, flawless filtered selfies and carefully curated profiles. The difference is I know my identity (and yet I can still feel insecure). But with innocent kids this affects their mental health, their sense of identity and their self-confidence. I cannot stress enough the critical role parents play in shaping their child's online experience and building their self-worth.

I remember attending the World Communications Day celebration organised by the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, and in his speech, Archbishop Julian Leow said the difference between artificial intelligence and human intelligence is the heart. And I guess it's the same with social media. If you're not using it to touch someone's heart or if others are not touching yours, then we're probably not using it right.

A post popped up on my feed not too long ago that read "Social media needs to shut down for a year so everyone can get back to reality." In some ways I couldn't agree more. We may need a break. We need to renew our association with people, build on our physical relationships, re-evaluate where we place our worth, and start living life - the real life.

I write this article to remind those who need to hear it, don't forget the true meaning of life. There are many aspects of social media, the good the bad and everything in between, but I wanted to pen my thoughts on the realness of it. Make sure you are happy in life, not just on social media. Your life, your REAL life, is what matters.

Tianne Ramona Pereira identifies first as a Catholic daughter, sister, wife and mother. From years in the media industry, she eventually started and continues to run her own businesses while teaching part-time. She has been actively serving in church for as far back as she can remember and is involved in various charities.



BE OUR GUEST

Each time I fell, God lifted me up

Bob Ho



It was only after I embraced Christ four years ago that I began to notice the way God had woven His presence into all 61 years of my life, even when I didn't recognise Him. The memories came flooding back, each moment of near-miss or quiet strength taking on new meaning. The deeper I reflected, the stronger my faith grew. It became clear — the Father had always been there, watching, lifting me with a gentle hand I once ignored.

The truth is, without God, I would have drowned when I fell into a deep, overflowing drain as a toddler, into the sea as a boy, and into a fast-flowing river as an adult. Without His protection, I wouldn't have survived four road accidents, avoided being crushed by a huge tree, or escaped an ambush that could have taken my life.

I now realise that I've been receiving countless blessings from God, yet I chose to remain silent, keeping His glory to myself. However, after experiencing two falls in the same week last June, I felt compelled to share my testimony at a fellowship.

On June 22, after attending a talk about death, I fell flat on a road in Kuala Lumpur, luckily only sustaining only minor injuries. Six days later, I fell again, this time in the bathroom, hitting my head on the wall. It

was my third fall this year.

For someone my age, with diabetic complications and hypertension, a single fall can be life-changing or even life-threatening. Yet, I thank God for softening the impact, turning each fall into what I call a "happy fall." These incidents have served as wake-up calls, reminding me to be more mindful of my ageing body. The knock on the head, in particular, felt like a nudge to testify to God's grace continually at work in my life.

My 'happiest' fall happened in June 2019. It was life-changing, leaving me blind in one eye. Fearing total blindness, I prayed the Hail Mary, though at the time, I didn't fully understand its significance. Yet, through God's love and mercy, I was healed. More than that, God opened my heart to accept Christ, and on September 5, 2020, I was baptised at the Church of St. Ignatius, Petaling Jaya. I thank God for finding me, a sheep lost for 61 years.

God also blessed me with two remarkable gifts — the gift of writing and the gift of journalism. In 1981, I missed my first day as a cadet reporter at *The Star*, but the editorial manager gave me another start date. On my third day, I failed the medical test and was asked to leave; it was then that I discovered I

had diabetes. That night, I cried, uncertain of what lay ahead. I appealed and was advised to continue working while awaiting a review. Despite feeling defeated, God lifted me up. Three months later, by His grace, I received my confirmation letter, securing my place in the newsroom.

In 1987, during *Ops Lalang*, more than 100 people were detained under the Internal Security Act, and two days later, *The Star* and two other newspapers were shut down for six months. Just the day before, I had bought a house, making it difficult to secure a loan. But by God's grace, I managed to get it, as the bank manager was confident the newspaper would regain its printing and publishing licenses.

After securing the loan, I was anxious about making payments, as we were only receiving one-third of our salary. Yet, God made a way. A technical glitch delayed the release of the loan, and the seller generously allowed me to stay rent-free. Once again, only God can turn the impossible into possible.

I thank God for granting me the strength and courage to use His gift of journalism to serve those in need, and for protecting me from the many occupational hazards along the way. In 1984, God saved me from the

jaws of death as I unknowingly walked into an ambush set by an armed gang angered by my reports. Eventually, justice caught up with them.

In another instance, a notorious housing swindler threatened to kill me if I didn't stop writing about his fraudulent schemes. He, too, was eventually caught, found guilty in court, and jailed. Through it all, I am grateful to God for His unwavering protection.

I also thank God for sending me the Holy Spirit when I was under investigations over my reports, taken to court for defamation and suspended from work.

Now that I am a Catholic, I am deeply moved whenever I feel God's touch in my life. During the pandemic, I desperately needed healing — body, mind, and spirit — but was too proud to ask. Yet, God knew my need and led me to two churches, where, unexpectedly, I received spiritual healing from the parish priests. Truly, God is with us always (Matthew 28:20).

In my twilight years, I still write occasionally, but never without first praying to the Holy Spirit for guidance, asking for help in ensuring that my words bring glory to God.



Fr Ron Rolheiser

Being rich, but in a hurry

Several years ago, I went with another priest to visit a mutual friend. Our friend, a successful businessman, was living on the top floor of a very expensive apartment overlooking the river valley in the city of Edmonton. At one point during our visit, he took us out on his balcony to show us the view. It was spectacular. You could see for miles, the entire river valley and much of the city.

We were in awe and told him so. Thanking us for the compliments, he shared that, sadly, he seldom came out on the balcony to drink in the view. Here are some of his words: “You know, I should give this place to some poor family who could enjoy it. I could live in a basement apartment since I never have time to enjoy this. I can’t remember when I last came out here to watch a sunset or a sunrise. I’m always too busy, too pressured, too preoccupied. This place is wasted on me. About the only time I come out here is when I have visitors and want to show them the view.”

Jesus once said something that might be paraphrased this way: What does it profit you if you gain the whole world and are forever too much in a hurry and too pressured to enjoy it.

When Jesus talks about gaining the whole world and suffering the loss of your own soul, he isn’t first of all referring to having a bad moral life, dying in sin, and going to hell. That’s the more radical warning in his message. We can lose our soul in other ways, even while we are good, dedicated, moral people. The man whose story I just shared is indeed a very good, dedicated, moral, and kind man. But he is, by his own humble admission, struggling to be a soulful person, to be more inside the richness of his own life because when you live under constant pressure and are perennially forced to hurry, it isn’t easy to get up in the morning and say: “This is the day that the Lord has made, let us be glad and rejoice in it.” We are more likely to say: “Lord, just get me through this day!”

As well, when Jesus tells us that it’s difficult for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, he isn’t just referring to material riches, money, and affluence, though these are contained in the warning. The problem can also be a rich agenda, a job or a passion that so consumes us that we rarely take the time (or even think of taking the time) to enjoy the beauty of a sunset or the fact that we are healthy and have the privilege of having a rich agenda.

Full disclosure, this is one of my struggles. During all my years in ministry, I have always been blessed with a rich agenda, important work, work that I love. But, when I’m honest, I need to admit that during these years I have been too hurried and over pressured to watch many sunsets (unless, like my friend, I was pointing out their beauty to a visitor).

I have tried to break out of this by conscripting myself to regular times of quiet prayer, regular walks, retreats, and several weeks of vacation each year. That has helped, no doubt, but I’m still too much of an addict, pressured and hurried almost all the time, longing for space for quiet, for prayer, for sunsets, for a hike in a park, for a glass of wine or scotch, for a contemplative cigar. And I recognise an irony here: I’m hurrying and tiring myself out in order to carve out some time to relax!

I’m no Thomas Merton, but I take consolation in the fact that he, a monk in a monastery, was often too busy and pressured to find solitude. In search of that, he spent the last few years of his life in hermitage, away from the main monastery except for Eucharist and the Office of the Church each day. Then, when he found solitude, he was surprised at how differ-

ent it was from the way he had imagined it. Here’s how he describes it in his diary:

Today I am in solitude because at this moment “it is enough to be, in an ordinary human mode, with one’s hunger and sleep, one’s cold and warmth, rising and going to bed. Putting on blankets and taking them off, making coffee and then drinking it. Defrosting the refrigerator, reading, meditating, working, praying. I live as my ancestors lived on this earth, until eventually I die. Amen. There is no need to make an assertion about my life, especially so about it as mine ... I must learn to live so as to forget programme and artifice.”

And to check out the sunset from my balcony!

When we are rich, busy, pressured, and preoccupied, it’s hard to taste one’s own coffee.

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

The ladder, a guide to spiritual elevation

At first glance, the ladder seems like a simple everyday object stored away in our closets or garden sheds, but it encapsulates a deeper pursuit. We use it when something appears beyond our reach: two side rails connected by rungs, allowing us to ascend or descend. The ladder symbolises the *axis mundi* — the mythical axis of the world, connecting heaven and earth. In this way, it shares its meaning with the rainbow, the tree, or the bridge. The ladder represents verticality, ascension, spiritual elevation, and mystical fulfilment. It also serves as a symbol of reconciliation between God and humanity.

The most well-known ladder is Jacob’s Ladder, described in the Book of Genesis (Gen 28:10-19). While sleeping outdoors, Jacob dreams of a ladder (or staircase, depending on the translation) “resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.” The fact that they ascend before descending symbolises the action humans must take. Upon waking, Jacob exclaims, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.” In the Gospel of John (Jn 1:51), Jesus recalls this episode to Nathaniel, saying, “You will see heaven open.”

But this symbol isn’t exclusive to the Judeo-Christian tradition. In Islam, the Book of Muhammad’s Ladder — part of a set of traditional accounts — recounts the Prophet’s ascension (Miraj) to God, accompanied by the angel Gabriel during a night journey (Isra). A ladder to the heavens is also found in Shintoism and Buddhism; it allows Buddha to descend from Mount Meru, the realm of the gods, via a ladder made of two nagas, serpent deities. In Ancient Egypt, Ra’s ladder connected two worlds and allowed the gods to be seen. The ladder

was considered a symbol of good fortune, and people would carry small ladder-shaped amulets for protection.

However, the ladder goes beyond being a mere channel between worlds. Its rungs provide valuable guidance for one’s spiritual evolution — a progressive, structured ascent leading to the heavenly realm. When complete, the ladder ensures a person’s safe ascent toward union with God without fear of stumbling.

The number of rungs on a ladder is highly symbolic. A ladder with seven rungs — often a significant number in the Bible — represents completeness and the fulfilment of a cycle. This is the number chosen by Flemish mystic John of Ruysbroeck (1293-1381) for his “ladder of spiritual love”: Will, voluntary poverty, purity of heart and body, humility, nobility, and introspection should lead to the union of the soul with the divine essence, the ultimate stage of contemplative life.

The image of the ladder is frequently used in monastic literature. In *The Ladder of Monks*, Guigo II the Carthusian (1114-1193), prior of the Grande Chartreuse monastery, systematised the practice of *lectio divina* in four steps to move from receiving the Word to divine contemplation and action: “Seek by reading (lectio), and you will find by meditating (meditatio); Knock by praying (oratio), and you will enter by contemplating (contemplatio).”

No one embodied the celestial ladder symbol better than St John Climacus. A hermit and then abbot of the Sinai Monastery in the 7th century, John Climacus (whose name derives from the Greek *klimaks*, meaning “ladder”) developed a detailed guide to the inner life in his work *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. “May this ladder teach you the spiritual sequence of virtues,” he

wrote, outlining 30 rungs that correspond to various aspects of contemplative life, from renunciation to charity, the ultimate stage of spiritual elevation. Always dynamic, the ladder represents not only an external ascent but also a simultaneous inward descent to the deepest part of oneself — the heart — allowing one to “move from the shell to the almond.”

Whether a ladder has four, seven, or 30 rungs, the real task is not just climbing it but also knowing how to descend and return to the world, applying the lessons learned, and inspiring others. As art historian Christian Heck notes in his book *The Celestial Ladder in Medieval Art* (Flammarion, 1999), “This allegory is also a reinterpretation of the Neoplatonic theme of the return to the place of origin, but through the specifically Christian understanding shaped by the theology of the Incarnation. It’s a paradoxical image that invites elevation through humility. The celestial ladder doesn’t separate the ascent — through contemplation — from the descent — through compassion.” Ultimately, it encourages serving others with humility, which is the hallmark of true wisdom, connecting heaven and earth in a continuous movement.

But be careful of missteps! According to persistent superstitions from the 17th century onward, “walking under a ladder” is bad luck. The horizontal movement, as opposed to vertical, promises dire consequences depending on the culture — ranging from hanging to never being able to marry or even falling into the devil’s hands! More subtly, this could symbolise the passerby’s refusal of spiritual elevation — a thought to ponder during our next household task. Of course, as long as the ladder is securely held! **Stéphane Bataillon, LCI** ([https:// international-la-croix.com/](https://international-la-croix.com/))



Little Catholics's Corner

Dear children,
On October 2 we celebrate the feast of Guardian Angels. Did you know that God has an angel specially looking after you?
God gave you a guardian angel to help guard you against temptation and danger.

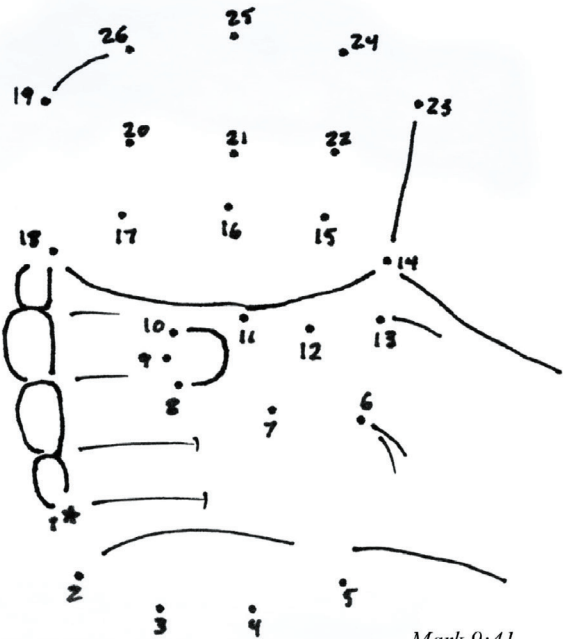
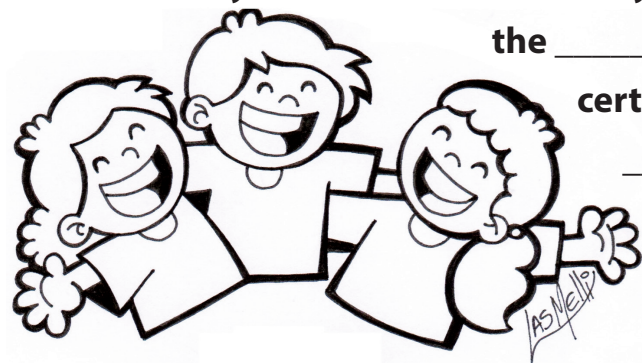
Angels are pure spirits. Even though we draw them like people with wings, they don't have bodies, so they don't take up space. They can see and understand much more than we can, and they know God much better than we do, too. They are very powerful and can help us very much.

We should try to talk to our Guardian Angel every day. Thank your angel for looking after you, and ask him to keep protecting you from evil.
Here is a good prayer you can say every day:
Angel of God, my guardian dear,
to whom God's love commits me here. Ever this day be at my side to light and guard, rule and guide. From sinful state O keep me free, and at death's hour my helper be. Amen.

Love
Aunty Eliz

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

“Teacher,” said John, “we saw _____ driving out _____ in your _____ and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.” “Do not stop him,” Jesus said. “For no one who does a _____ in my name can in the next _____ say anything _____ about me, for whoever is not _____ us is for us. Truly I _____ you, anyone who gives you a _____ of water in my _____ because you belong to the _____ will _____ certainly not lose their _____.



Mark 9:41

What is it?
Connect the dots to find out!
Jesus says in today's Gospel reading that anyone who gives one to someone for His sake will receive their just reward.




- demons
moment
someone
name
bad
miracle
reward
tell
against
cup
Messiah
name



Let's Colour



OCTOBER 2




HOLY GUARDIAN ANGELS
















Write the answer using the symbol given to read God's Word.


(Mathew 6:1)


- not to practice


in front of others

If you do,

Be careful
- to be seen by them.

from your Father in heaven.

you will have no reward

your righteousness



More than 3000 participate at SYD-6



By Liza Magnus

KENINGAU: “Sabah Youth Day was celebrated at this cathedral 20 years ago, but the vibe was different. Two decades ago, there weren’t many participants. Today, thanks to God, not only have the number of participants doubled, but the infrastructure and facilities here have developed in pace with the growth of faith,” said Bishop Cornelius Piong during the opening Mass of the sixth Sabah Youth Day (SYD-6) at Dataran Keuskupan Keningau, September 17.

On September 16-20, over 3,200 young Catholics from the three arch/dioceses in Sabah attended SYD-6 with the theme *Mary arose and went with haste* (Luke 1:39). Bishop Cornelius, who has a great devotion to Mother Mary, asked the participants, “Why did Mary get up and go?”. The prelate stated that Mary was able to get up and go because the Holy Spirit was with her. She was a little surprised when the angel Gabriel appeared to her to proclaim the Good News, but Mary was given strength by the Holy Spirit to take on her role as the Mother of God, and with the Holy Spirit’s grace, she “got up and

went” to see her elderly cousin, Elizabeth, who was pregnant.

Bishop Cornelius also stated three notable examples that Mary is always quick to intercede to the needs of all Catholics, namely:

1. Mary travelled immediately to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who was pregnant in her old age; this significant event indicates that, just as Mary understood Elizabeth’s need for assistance, Mary was also aware of our needs, especially youngsters.
2. Our Lady is sensitive to the family’s needs. This was obvious at the wedding in Cana. She noticed the wine

had run out and urged Jesus to help. Running out of wine symbolises the loss of joy. Families today are constantly losing joy, so pray to Mother Mary for peace, joy, and love to strengthen families.

3. According to Acts of the Apostles 1:14, Mary was a member of the early Christian group. They gathered together and waited for the Holy Spirit to descend upon them. It shows that Mother Mary is present in every community. Pray to Mother Mary for help when our youth group or BEC is having difficulties.

During SYD-6, the youth stayed with their adoptive families. Besides catechesis and Masses, the SYD-6 participants actively took part in other activities such as SYD-6 Way of the Cross, Friendship & Accompaniment, Mission Walk, Missionary in Action, and the Magnificat



New study finds REGULAR PORN USAGE LINKED TO HIGHER LONELINESS, DEPRESSION

A new study has found that daily pornography consumption among young adults leads to statistically significant negative mental health outcomes, including higher rates of reported depression.

The Institute for Family Studies/YouGov survey of 2,000 adults under the age of 40 determined that “pornography has become a daily part of life for many young adults.” About 10% of young adults aged 18–39 report watching pornography online “at least once a day.”

Men “are about twice as likely as women to report being daily users of online pornography,” the study found, while “liberal young adults” were roughly twice as likely as conservatives to report watching online pornography at least once daily.

Daily porn usage was similar for married and unmarried respondents and was roughly consistent across income and education levels, the survey found.

And “frequent use of online pornography is linked to an increased occurrence of negative mental health outcomes among young adults,” the study found, with roughly one-third of daily pornography users reporting feeling “down, depressed, or hopeless” most or all of the time, compared with just 19% of those who rarely or never watch porn.

An even higher number of daily porn users — 36 per cent — report feeling lonely “all or most of the time,” compared with 20 per cent of those who consume porn rarely or never.

These findings remain even after controlling for factors like sex, marital status, and income. Overall, daily porn consumption “doubles the risk of being depressed and increases the risk of feeling lonely by a similar amount,” the research said.

The new findings echo earlier studies that showed a similar link between heavy porn usage and negative mental health outcomes.

The researchers noted that daily porn use also “may displace activities that contribute to healthy social relationships, leaving users feeling more lonely and depressed.”

‘You’re thirsty, but you’re drinking salt water’

Father Sean Kilcawley is the director of the Freedom From Pornography apostolate in the Diocese of Lincoln, Nebraska. He said he has observed in his ministry that frequent pornography, as well as frequent masturbation, “does lead to a kind of depression.”

“Some of the neuroscience research out there would validate that,” he said. “When we talk about living a life of chastity in the Church and purity in the Church, it really comes down to our mental health and our physical health.”

health.” Regarding individuals who suffer from mental health ailments due to pornography consumption, Kilcawley said that such people “aren’t always aware that one is causing the other.”

“For instance, people often say the reason they look at porn is because of loneliness. But then at the same time their reason for loneliness is that they’re looking at pornography,” he said.

“When I’m talking to young people I might use the analogy that it’s like you’re thirsty and you’re drinking salt water,” he said.

Kilcawley said that, as with many addictions, the first step for many people struggling with porn usage is to simply acknowledge they have a problem.

“I might start with just asking them, do you believe you have a problem? Do you want help? Is it bad

enough that you’re willing to do whatever it takes to get help?” he said.

“Breaking free, from a Christian perspective, is when we have a conversion,” he continued. “And we come to realise that Our Lord can meet all of our needs, and that whatever porn and masturbation is doing for us, Our Lord is the one who is capable of giving us that sense of affirmation and longing, that feeling of being hurt and [yet] being understood.”

“Whatever it is, Our Lord can give it to us,” he said. “And that path to conversion needs accompaniment. We need others to walk with us.”

Those who have finally acknowledged the depth of their problem, Kilcawley said, can pursue help including 12-step addiction programs and individual counsellors. Group therapy, he noted, can offer an antidote to loneliness as well as help with addiction and dependency.

The priest stressed the importance of “raising the bottom,” a concept promoted by Alcoholics Anonymous as a means to help more people beat their addictions before they reach a ruinous place.

“When AA started, it was full of people who were in-the-gutter drunks,” he pointed out. “They’d lost jobs, families, horrible things that happened to them, and then they went to the meetings. In the earlier years it was just those kinds of people.”

“And then over time people started talking about how you can get off the train earlier, you don’t have to ride all the way down,” he said. “People started getting help sooner.”

“I think we can do the same thing with those who are addicted to pornography,” he argued. “Before it affects their marriage and their family, and before it escalates to something worse.” **By Daniel Payne, CNA**



Be filled with the Holy Spirit

Confirmations in Diocese of Penang



“In Him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation, and had believed in Him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of His glory.” (Ephesians 1:13-14)

Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Penang

Church of St Joseph, Batu Gajah

Catholic leaders mourn killing of Honduran environmental activist

TOCOA, Honduras: Catholic leaders throughout the Americas are expressing grief and outrage at the killing of Juan Antonio López, a Honduran environmental activist and local Catholic leader, in Tocoa, in northeastern Honduras, on September 14.



López, described by friends as his local bishop's right-hand man, was shot dead by several men as he left church on Saturday night. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights said López had recently received threats from a gang member, a Honduran businessperson and a mining company representative.

A member of the Municipal Committee for the Defence of Common and Public Goods in Tocoa, López had advocated against the harmful impacts of an open-pit iron oxide mine. His group had protested that the mine was polluting the Guapinol and San Pedro rivers, which communities in the area rely on for their daily water supply.

In a message addressed to López after his death, Bishop Jenry Ruiz of the Diocese of Trujillo wrote, "You told me that you were not an environmentalist because for you, the social, ecological and political commitment were not an ideological question, but a question of your being of Christ and of the Church."

The bishop noted the activist's understanding of Pope Francis' environmental teaching and "tenderness and truth" in responding to his detractors. Ruiz wrote too that López knew of the risks. "You knew very well that the extractivist and mining system is a system that kills and destroys the whole world, along with the corruption of the false politicians and the narco-governments."

In a video posted by several Honduran news outlets, Fr Carlos Orellana, a Catholic priest in Tocoa, called the killing of López "a death foretold" and accused Tocoa Mayor Adán Fúnez and his "minions" of

being responsible for the hit that killed López.

Fúnez told Honduran outlet HRN that he was praying that the truth would be revealed, that his family was in fear due to the accusations and that he had been attacked with stones.

The Honduran Jesuits released a statement also holding the government responsible for López's death, pointing to officials' failure to keep mine owners in check and investigate threats against López's group and punish those responsible for them.

"We demand that the investigation to determine the truth of the facts be carried out with the effective accompaniment of an international commission that guarantees impartiality, diligence and independence to determine the material and intellectual responsibilities in the murder of our comrade and brother Juan Antonio López," the order wrote.

Outside Honduras, Catholic organisations, including Caritas Canada and the Jesuit European Social Centre, expressed grief at López's death.

The Latin American bishops' conference, known by the acronym CELAM, wrote to López's colleagues and family, emphasising López's service as a leader of ecclesial base communities, a pastoral worker, diocesan coordinator and member of the Ecclesial Network of Mesoamerican Ecology (REMAM).

"We emphatically repudiate and condemn all forms of violence, and regrettably the assassination of Juan is a reflection of a small portion of society that is intolerant, unjust and who want to impose their will through force," the conference wrote.

As he came to the conclusion of his letter to López, Ruiz, his bishop, wrote, "Dear Juan López, may your blood make the seeds of Kingdom bloom and we have fruits of justice, where a new Honduras is possible." Aleja Hertzler-McCain, NCR

MEMORIAM

For enquiries, please contact:
Email: memoriam@herald.com.my
Tel: 03-2026 8291



1st Anniversary IN LOVING MEMORY OF **Daryl Tony Edwards**

Returned to the Lord
27th September 2023

Your absence creates a void no time can fill.
Yet the warmth of your memory
continues to comfort us.

*Dearly missed and forever cherished by
mum, brother, sister, brother-in-law,
nieces and relatives.*

**Eternal rest grant unto him O Lord
and let your perpetual light shine on him.
May his soul rest in peace. Amen**



19th Anniversary In Loving Memory of **A. J. STELLUS**

*...Nineteen years and
countless tears...*

*We can hardly believe how
so much time has passed;*

*From the day the angels
escorted you with
trumpets blast.*

*They say time heals
memory's painful reels,*

*But there's always a void in
our fellowship and
celebratory meals.*

*Acha, you will be missed..
forever and always.*

*Your loving children,
grandchildren &
great grandchildren.*

**Departed:
30th September 2005**

In Ever Loving Memory of 28th Anniversary 16th Anniversary



N. E. AROKIASAMY
**Departed:
05-10-1996**

Deeply missed and fondly remembered by:
Sons, Daughter, Son-in-law, Daughter-in-law,
Grandchildren, Relatives and Friends.



ANNAMARY
**Departed:
30-09-2008**

6th Anniversary 1st Anniversary In Loving Memory of the late



**ROBERT YONG
TAI HUA**

22nd May 1936 -
23rd Sep 2018



**MONICA HIEW
NYOK MOOI**

3rd Aug 1939 -
3rd Oct 2023

**"The Lord is my Shepherd;
there is nothing I shall want" [Psalm 23]**

Deeply missed and fondly remembered by:

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



10TH ANNIVERSARY IN EVER LOVING MEMORY OF

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

Mum,

*The world changes from year to year,
our lives from day to day, but the love and
memory of you, shall never pass away.*

Your family.

NOTICE

**Effective
September 8, 2024,
the cost for placing
a memoriam is
RM150 per column
as our paper
transitions to full
colour.**

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In loving memory



**Born:
02.06.1935**



**Called Home:
21.09.2022**

AROKIAMARY SAVRIMUTHU

*Mom, it has been recently you left us, yet
your loving memories linger on in our hearts.*

Cherished and remembered by your love.



40th Day Memorial of our Beloved Amma

*You lived your life for
us. We shall cherish
your love and memory.
You will always be in
our thoughts, hearts,
and prayers."*

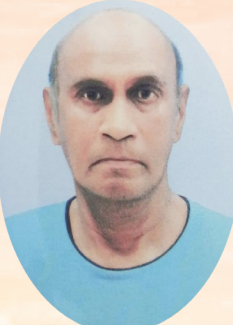
JAPAMALAMARIA D/O PITCHAMUTHU
23 August 1949 – 23 August 2024

Memorial Mass will be held on Saturday, 5th October 2024.

Rosary at 10.30 am followed by Mass at 11.00 am
Residence: AG 8750, Taman Rakyat, Kuala Ina,
73000 Tampin, N. Sembilan

Deeply missed and fondly cherished by family and loved ones.

10th Anniversary In Loving Memory of a Beloved Husband, Father & Grandfather



FELIX THESEIRA

**From the Lord:
8th Feb 1948
To the Lord:
4th Oct 2014**

*A DECADE has gone but
your love, sweet memories,
increase thoughts and your
presence will forever be
missed. You will be
remembered and cherished
forever in our hearts
whenever a tear is shed.*

A memorial Mass will be
celebrated on 4th October
at 8.00pm at the
Church of St Francis of
Assisi, Cheras.

Deeply missed, loved,
cherished and
remembered by loving
wife, sons, grandchildren
and daughter-in-law.

Easter belongs to Christ, not our calendars

VATICAN: As all Christians prepare to celebrate Easter together in 2025, Pope Francis recalls that the preeminent Christian celebration belongs to Christ and not to our earthly calendars or plans.

"Easter does not take place by our own initiative or by one calendar or another. Easter occurred because God 'so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life,'" the Pope said.

"Let us not close ourselves within our own ideas, plans, calendars, or 'our' Easter. Easter belongs to Christ!" he said during an audience at the Vatican on September 19.

The Pope was speaking to a delegation of members of the Pasqua Together 2025 initiative. The ecumenical initiative, found-

ed in 2022, calls on Orthodox and mainline Christian churches to celebrate Easter on a common date.

The year 2025 will mark both the Holy Year for the Catholic Church and celebrations of the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, which gave birth to the Nicene Creed, affirmed the full divinity of Christ and set a formula for determining the date of Easter, that is, the first Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox.

However, the Julian calendar, which is what Christians used in the fourth century and many Orthodox churches still use, was out of sync with the actual solar year, so March 21—generally assumed to be the date of the northern hemisphere's spring equinox—gradually "drifted" away from



Pope Francis prays with the "Pasqua Together 2025" group. (Vatican Media)

the actual equinox.

In 1582, Pope Gregory XIII, relying on the work of astronomers, reformed the calendar, dropping 10 days and making the equinox fall on March 21 again. Today Catholics and most Christians in the West follow the Gregorian calendar.

The Julian and Gregorian calendars align for the celebration of Easter in the Catholic Jubilee Year of 2025, meaning that all Christians will celebrate the

Lord's Resurrection on the same day.

The "Pasqua Together 2025" initiative seeks to use the coincidence as an opportunity to invite the churches to find ways of reconciliation to overcome the division.

In his speech to the delegation, the Pope praised the initiative and encouraged them to "avoid letting the important occasion of 2025 pass by in vain."

"On more than one occasion, I

have been asked to seek a solution to this issue, so that the common celebration of the day of the Resurrection may no longer be an exception, but rather become the norm," he said.

"I therefore encourage those who are committed to this journey to persevere and to make every effort in the search for a shared agreement, avoiding anything that may instead lead to further divisions among our brothers and sisters," he said. **Agencies**

Jakarta archdiocese ends 33-year wait for new church



The clergy during the inauguration of Calvary Catholic Church in Lubang Buaya on September 14, 2024. (UCA News Photo)

JAKARTA: Cardinal Ignatius Suharyo Hardjoatmodjo of Jakarta inaugurated Calvary Catholic Church in Lubang Buaya in East Jakarta City on September 14 during a Mass attended by 25 priests and thousands of worshippers.

The parish had been struggling to obtain a building permit since 1991. It even purchased an additional piece of land to fulfil the government norm of providing 40 per cent of the total land area as open space.

However, objections were raised by Muslim groups. In 2009, Muslim figures in Lubang Buaya signed a letter objecting to the construction of the church.

The parish then formed a special team to approach Muslim religious figures. In 2021, the parish obtained a permit from Jakarta Governor Anies Rasyid Baswedan.

Cardinal Suharyo hoped that the congregation would interpret the long wait for the church from a faith perspective and not as "wasted

time."

He said the congregation can take advantage of the new church to grow in faith.

The cardinal recalled the theme of Pope Francis' recent visit — Faith, Fraternity, and Compassion — and said it was an important thing to always remember.

Parish priest Fr Johan Ferdinand Wijshijer said the church's inauguration "was the culmination of the 33-year-old dream of the congregation."

"This is a joy that is difficult to express in words," the priest said.

"Indeed, there are radical groups. But because we received support from religious figures, they did not dare to interfere," Wijshijer said.

East Jakarta Administration Mayor Muhammad Anwar, who was present at the inauguration, said the church will be beneficial to Lubang Buaya residents.

According to a government rule in the Muslim-majority nation, writ-

ten consent from local residents, including Muslims, is needed to get a construction permit for a place of worship.

The 2006 joint regulation of the ministries of home and religious affairs requires religious communities to obtain 90 signatures from their own community and 60 signatures from other local residents to get the permit.

The rule was widely criticised by rights groups for making it difficult for minority religious groups to establish places of worship. Muslim groups often oppose the construction of churches.

In November last year, St Theresa Catholic Church in Cikarang in Bekasi Regency received permission after 18 years.

In January, St Benedict Church in Padalarang subdistrict under Bandung diocese started construction after a 15-year delay as its license was withheld because of resistance from local Muslims. **ucanews.com**

Tokyo Archbishop warns against marginalising elderly as birthrate declines

TOKYO: In a homily delivered September 15, Tarcisio Isao Kikuchi, SVD called for solidarity between generations, emphasising the invaluable role that elderly people continue to play in society.

Citing Pope Francis' message for World Grandparents Day, the archbishop warned against societal trends that view the elderly as a burden on younger generations.

He stressed the need to counter the erroneous belief that older generations "rob young people of their future."

"Even when their activities become less productive and may be seen as a waste," Archbishop Kikuchi said, quoting Pope Francis, "God never abandons His children, even when they grow old and their strength declines, even when their hair turns gray and their role in society becomes less important."

The Church originally designated the fourth Sunday of July as the World Day of Prayer for Grandparents and the Elderly.

However, the Church in Japan sought and received permission from the Holy See to move the observance to September, aligning it with the national holiday, Respect for the Aged Day.

This year, the World Day of Prayer for Grandparents and the Elderly was celebrated in Japan on September 156.

Japan's aging crisis is among the



An elderly man stands in a shoe shop in Tokyo. (ANSA)

most severe in the world, with nearly 30 per cent of its population over the age of 65.

A shrinking birthrate, combined with extended life expectancy, has created a demographic imbalance that has disrupted traditional family structures.

Japan's fertility rate, which measures the average number of children a woman is expected to have in her lifetime, dropped to 1.2 last year, according to the latest statistics.

In 2023, the country recorded 727,277 births — a 5.6 per cent decrease from the previous year, marking the lowest number since records began in 1899, the ministry reported.

Additionally, the data revealed a 6 per cent decline in marriages, with 474,717 couples tying the knot last year. Authorities cite this drop in marriages as a significant factor contributing to the falling birth rate. **LiCAS News**