



## Nationwide humanitarian appeal for Thailand, Myanmar

KUCHING: In response to the devastating earthquake that recently struck Myanmar and Thailand, claiming thousands of lives and displacing countless families, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia (CBCM) has launched a Nationwide Humanitarian Appeal calling on all Catholics in Malaysia to respond with prayer, compassion, and generosity.



In a heartfelt message released on Palm Sunday, Archbishop Simon Poh *pic*, President of CBCM, expressed sorrow over the destruction caused by the earth-

quake, especially in Myanmar, where many Catholic parishes and missions have been reduced to rubble.

"In the face of such suffering and devastation, we, the Church in Malaysia, are called to respond – not only with compassion and prayers but with concrete acts of solidarity and hope," Archbishop Simon wrote. "Let us unite our hearts with the people of Myanmar and Thailand during this painful time."

The humanitarian appeal will run from **April 26 to May 31**, with multiple avenues for the faithful to contribute:

**1. Special Second Collection:** To be held during the Masses on Divine Mercy Sunday (April 26–27) in all parishes nationwide.

### 2. Ongoing Donations:

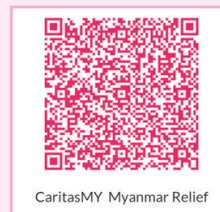
**Cash Donations:** May be handed in at any parish office and will be forwarded to Caritas Malaysia.

### Online Transfers:

Account Name: Caritas Malaysia  
(RHB Bank Act No: 20708200054188  
Ref: "CaritasMy Myanmar Relief"  
Email the transfer slips to: [info@caritas.org.my](mailto:info@caritas.org.my)

A QR Code for quick online giving is also available.

All funds will be managed by Caritas Malaysia,



the official charitable arm of the CBCM, and directed toward trusted local partners focusing on both immediate relief and long-term rebuilding in the most affected and vulnerable communities.

### A Call to Prayer and Unity

The Malaysian bishops are also urging all Catholics to accompany their giving with fervent prayer — for the victims and their families, for frontline relief workers, and especially for those suffering in silence.

"Let us, as Pilgrims of Hope, bring the light of Christ to those in darkness," Archbishop Simon said. "May our generous response be a living testimony of the mercy of our Heavenly Father and the unity of the Body of Christ."

# Embracing the Resurrection

## Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we gather to celebrate the glorious resurrection of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, this Easter, we are reminded of the boundless hope His victory over death offers each of us. This is not a distant or abstract hope but a living, transforming force that renews our spirits, heals our hearts, and calls us to live in the light of that resurrection every single day. This year, as we embrace the joy of Easter, we also step into the sacred journey of the Jubilee of Hope — a time set aside for deep renewal, reconciliation, and grace. It is an invitation to open our hearts to God's love and to the suffering of the world, even as we celebrate the resurrection that brings us eternal hope.

The message of Easter is one of profound hope — a hope that tells us that even in the darkest times, life will prevail. Yet, as we look around the world, it is easy to feel overwhelmed by the enormity of suffering that surrounds us. We see the pain of ongoing conflicts in Palestine, where families are torn apart and communities live in constant fear and violence. We mourn with those who have lost so much in the wake of the devastating earthquake in Myanmar, leaving countless lives shattered and grieving. We stand with the families affected by the gas explosion in Putra Heights, where destruction has left them seeking hope in the midst

of despair. These, alongside countless other wars, natural disasters, and heart-wrenching tragedies, serve as painful reminders of the suffering our brothers and sisters face each day. The weight of the world's pain can sometimes feel unbearable.

But even in the darkest places, we must never forget that at the heart of our suffering lies the unshakable hope of the resurrection. Just as Christ bore the weight of the world's sins on the cross and suffered in our place, He has also risen — conquering death and opening the doors to eternal life. His resurrection gives new meaning to our suffering, assuring us that no pain is without purpose and no darkness is too great for His light. This is the hope that sustains us as we pray for all those affected by conflict, disaster, and calamity.

We pray for the people of Palestine, that peace may replace violence, reconciliation heal divisions, and wounded hearts be restored. We pray for the survivors of the earthquake in Myanmar, that they may find strength and comfort in their grief, and rebuild their lives with the compassion and support of the global community. We pray for those suffering from the gas explosion in Putra Heights, that they may feel the tender mercy of God and the support of those around them. We pray for all those enduring the hardships of war, natural disasters, and human tragedy across the globe. May

the Lord draw near to them, offering peace, hope, and the comfort of His resurrection.

But let us not forget that we are not only called to pray for those who suffer, but to stand with them in solidarity and action. Reflecting on the resurrection of Christ, we are reminded that our faith is not passive. We are called to be bearers of hope in a world that desperately needs it. We are called to reach out to the least, the last, the lost, and the little. These are the forgotten ones, the overlooked, the abandoned. Yet, in the eyes of Christ, they are precious and loved, deserving of our care.

The Jubilee of Hope calls us to live as a family united in Christ's love, extending that love to those in need. We cannot turn our backs on the broken, the marginalised, or the forgotten. Christ Himself walked among the poor, healed the sick, comforted the grieving, and ultimately gave His life for all. He calls us to do the same.

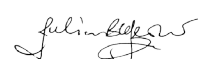
As we celebrate the resurrection, let us also reflect on our own journey of faith. To those who have drifted away from the Church or fallen distant from the community of believers, I offer a heartfelt invitation. The Jubilee of Hope is a time to return — to rediscover the boundless love and grace of God that is always waiting for you. No matter how far you may feel from Him, or how difficult the path to return may seem, know that Christ is always waiting with open arms, ready to

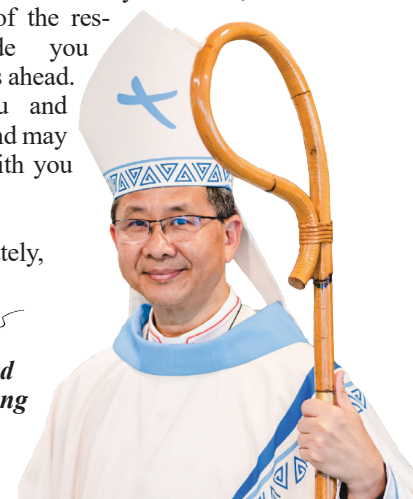
welcome you home. The Church is your family, and we long to walk with you, especially during this sacred season of renewal.

In this holy season of Easter, let us open our hearts to the message of the resurrection — the message of hope, life, and peace. Let that hope transform us, leading us to live as true disciples of Christ, bringing light into the darkness, comfort to the afflicted, and love to the least. As we pray for the world and the victims of suffering, let us also commit ourselves to being instruments of peace and agents of change. May the resurrection of our Lord remind us all that through Him, all things are possible.

Let the joy of Easter fill your hearts, and may the hope of the resurrection guide you through the days ahead. God bless you and your families, and may His peace be with you always.

Yours affectionately,

  
+ Most Reverend  
**Julian Leow Beng Kim, D.D.**  
Archbishop of  
Kuala Lumpur



# HERALD

The Catholic Weekly

ESTABLISHED 1994

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

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

**EDITOR**

Patricia Pereira  
editor1@herald.com.my

**ASSISTANT EDITOR**

Sandra Ann Inbaraj  
sandra@herald.com.my

**GRAPHIC DESIGNER**

Amanda Mah  
amanda@herald.com.my

**SOCIAL MEDIA**

Kevin Francis  
kevin@herald.com.my

**BAHASA MALAYSIA**

Melania Liza Magnus  
liza@herald.com.my

**MANDARIN**

Adelina Wong  
yin4482@gmail.com

**ADMIN ASSISTANT**

Rachael Sharma  
admin@herald.com.my

**ADVERTISEMENT/SUBSCRIPTION**  
advertisement@herald.com.my

**MEMORIAM**

memoriam@herald.com.my

**LETTERS**

letterseditor@herald.com.my

**Social Media**

www.heraldmalaysia.com



@heraldmalaysia



heraldmalaysia  
Herald Snapshot



@heraldsnapshot

**Disclaimer:**

The publication provides a platform for diverse perspectives, and the inclusion of these contributions is intended to encourage dialogue and reflection within the Catholic community. The views and opinions expressed in the articles contributed are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the editorial policy or official stance of HERALD The Catholic Weekly.

Become a voice in the HERALD community.

Capture and share the spirit and vibrancy of your parish or ministry life with our readers.

We're looking for concise articles between 400 to 500 words, accompanied by high-resolution photos (300 DPI) in JPG or PNG format.

Don't forget to include captions that bring your images to life.

Your contributions are essential in keeping our faith community connected and informed.

Send your articles to  
editor1@herald.com.my

It was just before 1.00pm on Thursday, April 10, when a ripple of surprise stirred the solemn hush inside St Peter's Basilica. "It's the Pope!" someone whispered. Within moments, the murmur became a wave of reverent excitement. Without fanfare or announcement, Pope Francis had quietly entered through the *Porta della Preghiera* — the Door of Prayer.

There was no grand procession, no prepared speech, no liturgical fanfare. Only the Pope — silent, frail, and unmistakably present. Wrapped in a plaid blanket against the chill, with oxygen tubes quietly attesting to his ongoing recovery, he made his way to the tomb of Pope Pius X, a pontiff he has long held in deep personal reverence.

This visit marked his second unannounced appearance in a week. Just days earlier, on Sunday, April 6, he had surprised the faithful by appearing at the Jubilee celebration dedicated to the sick and healthcare workers. He arrived in a wheelchair, his voice still weak, his presence still radiant. In a world dominated by virtual presence and digital interaction, Pope Francis chose instead to show up — in person, as he is.

In both instances, his silent gestures spoke volumes. He said no words, but offered waves, blessings, and smiles. A glance, a touch, a moment of closeness — each more eloquent than a homily. "He didn't need to speak," one onlooker said. "His silence said everything."

For those gathered — tourists, pilgrims, even art restorers working behind the veils of ongoing renovation — these were moments transformed by their simplicity. The Pope's presence turned an ordinary visit into something sacred. A hush fell over the Basilica. Children approached shyly. Pilgrims formed quiet lines, some in tears, simply to meet his gaze.

His appearance was not just a pastoral gesture — it was a message. In a time when

## A presence that speaks



Pope Francis arrives in a wheelchair at the end of a Mass in St Peter's Square at the Vatican, April 6, 2025, part of the Jubilee of the sick and the health workers. (Vatican Media via AP)

so much of life has retreated behind screens, the Pope reminded the world that there is no substitute for being there. To walk, to wait, to be exposed to the elements, to sweat, to reach out in person — this, he showed, is what it means to truly encounter the other.

And he, too, came as a pilgrim. A convalescent still bearing the marks of illness, he passed through the Holy Door — the same one he had thrown open on Christmas night — just as thousands of ordinary faithful do each day. Frail among the frail, he refused to let his condition separate him from his people. He chose to live "his" Jubilee among them.

Despite medical caution and the risk to his health, Pope Francis has not withdrawn. These unannounced appearances reflect his

deep conviction that love must be embodied. As he once said, "Love needs tangibility; love needs presence and encounter. It cannot be reduced to beautiful words or to images on a screen."

And so, even in weakness, he communicates strength. Even in silence, he speaks volumes. His presence — quiet, fragile, real — is an enduring homily in itself. As one pilgrim put it, through tears: "It wasn't just that he came. It was how he came. Present. Human. Near."

For those who were there, the memory of a Pope in plaid, blessing in silence, will linger far beyond that brief prayer. And for the wider Church, it remains a powerful lesson: that presence — real, embodied, vulnerable — is one of the deepest forms of love. **Agencies**

## Finishing unfinished business

Today's story is good news for early risers. You are familiar with the adage: "the early bird catches the worm." Well, Mary Magdala, in today's Gospel, was indeed rewarded with her early rising two thousand years ago: "It was very early on the first day of the week and still dark, when Mary of Magdala came to the tomb." Only in John's account is Mary pictured alone. She is accompanied by other women in the other Gospel accounts of the Resurrection. It would make more sense for a gaggle of women, for strength lies in numbers, to make their way to this place, to a cemetery, what more a place guarded by soldiers. But St John the Evangelist is content to state that Mary made this journey alone. Perhaps, it was too early for the others or they had stayed away due to fear for their own safety. Or perhaps, John wanted the spotlight on her.

But her presence begs a more pertinent question: Why was she there? Mary was there because of unfinished business. On Good Friday, we heard at the end of the long Passion reading, how our Lord was hurriedly prepared for burial, wrapped in a shroud filled with spices, "a mixture of myrrh and aloes." In the other Gospels, it was noted that it was done in such hurry because the Sabbath, which prohibited such rituals, was about to begin and there was no time to complete what needed to be done. Whatever may have been the circumstances, Mary was there because she had unfinished business. Firstly, to complete in a more thorough manner the dictates of Jewish burial customs and secondly, to bring some closure to her own profoundly deep sense

of loss.

Mary was there early in the morning, just as we are here this morning, because it is insufficient to close an episode of our lives after the death of a loved one with his or her funeral. Sometimes we believe that if the person who hurt us passes away, like a parent or spouse, their death will bring peace to our lives. However, in reality, it usually brings more sorrow and regret because it leaves us with a sense of things being left unfinished. Funerals can be beautifully consoling experiences, bringing solace to the grieving, camaraderie among the survivors, healing to scars opened by the barb of loss, but it can never truly bring a closure to the wounds we experience both emotionally and psychologically.

If funerals are the last thing we can do for the one we have lost, there is much unfinished business that needs attention and further resolution. Our commemoration of the Lord's life cannot end with Good Friday. It must find fulfilment and completion on Easter Sunday. And that is why Good Friday is leavened with the promise of Easter. Easter is when our Lord completes His work of redemption. On Easter, our Lord completes the unfinished business often left hanging in our lives.

Easter means the "making right" of things that have gone wrong: the forgiveness of sins; the reversal of death; the repair of broken relationships with God, each other and creation. This is not just an elusive ideal but a reality. Christ's resurrection has made this certain. This is the powerful message of Easter that continues to unravel its mysteries over the course of our lives.

## Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with Fr Michael Chua

### Easter Sunday (C)

Readings: Acts of the Apostles 10:34, 37-43;  
Colossians 3:1-4 or 1 Corinthians 5:6-8;  
Gospel: John 20:1-9 or Luke 24:1-12

This is what we look forward to, a new creation. A transformation. We will not merely be going back to normal, we will be going forward to something different, something new. It's an illusion to think that we're going to return to the way life was before. There is no going back. The past is an empty tomb. Our Lord is Risen, He is not there!

What unfinished business is waiting for us? Is it a conversation we've been afraid to have with someone? Is it a decision we've been putting off? Is it a relationship with someone that needs mending? Today's message is really that none of these questions need receive a silent answer nor lead us to a dead end. We are challenged, once again, to engage in the unfinished business before us, and live the Resurrection — through actions we can take, attitudes we can adopt, ready to allow the Lord to write the next chapter in our own gospel. And also, ready to discover how the risen Jesus is present NOW, in our time and place. As St Paul assures us, be "confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:6). Christ IS risen. He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!

Sabah Regional Pastoral Assembly 2025

# Uniting in faith and embracing diversity for a hopeful future

Peter Zeter

KOTA KINABALU: The Sabah Regional Pastoral Assembly (SRPA) will take place from May 11-13 at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart. Approximately 500 delegates from the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu, Diocese of Keningau, and Diocese of Sandakan will gather to unite as clergy, religious, and laity, celebrating their shared faith while embracing the richness of their diversity and uniqueness.

As a precursor to the Malaysia Pastoral Convention (MPC) 2026, the SRPA serves as a miniature version of the MPC, reflecting on the richness of diversity and uniqueness. It will focus on identifying challenges and opportunities for the 'Catholic Church of Sabah,' as it moves forward with hope, holiness, and mission, striving to be the salt and light of the world.

Coming together is a characteristic deeply ingrained in the diverse communities of Sabah. As a Church in Sabah, the three



dioceses have consistently celebrated this spirit of 'togetherness.' Over the years, various programmes have fostered unity, including the annual joint clergy retreat, Sabah Youth Day, Sabah Women's Convention, inter-diocesan catechetical programmes, joint initiatives on migrant

issues and joint vocation retreats or seminars, all of which have strengthened the spirit of oneness.

The Catholic Church of Sabah began as a single prefecture of Kota Kinabalu, later elevated to the Diocese of Kota Kinabalu, and eventually split into three dioceses. It grew

from one common historical root, where the seeds of the Gospel were first planted by foreign missionaries. As these seeds took root and embraced local cultural elements, the Church has matured into its current form. Today, it stands as a vibrant manifestation of unity, with the people coming together to celebrate, listen, and walk together in the SRPA.

The assembly will focus on key challenges facing the Church, particularly issues related to family, the Church itself, social concerns, and ecology, while discussing the Church's responses to these challenges. During the SRPA, the three bishops will come together to listen to the voices of the people of God, discerning their insights and synthesising them into a unified vision for the Catholic Church of Sabah. This collective vision will be presented as a fruit of the assembly during the MPC in Johor next year. Central to the assembly — mirroring the MPC — are three core questions: As a Church, are we reaching out in mercy, communicating the fullness of life, and growing in holiness?

**KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE**

**Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow**

**April**

24 Meeting – FCMSM Exco  
29 Meeting – Archdiocesan Finance

**PENANG DIOCESE**

**Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis**

**April**

23 Easter – Jawi Prison at 2.00pm  
24 Meeting – Federation of Christian Mission Schools Malaysia, Google Meet at 2.00pm  
26 25th Anniversary of St Anne's Recycling Centre – Minor Basilica of St Anne, BM at 10.30am

**MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE**

**Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul**

**April**

26-27 Feast of Divine Mercy – Church of the Divine Mercy, Sungai Ara, Bayan Lepas, Penang  
29 Meeting – 2nd Caritas Malaysia Diocesan Directors & Ecclesiastical Assistants (CM DEA) via Zoom

**Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #219**

**Welcome dear friends and fellow Catholics,**

The long Raya break is over. The first Malaysian Catholic Youth Day (MCYD) in Kota Kinabalu ended on Sunday April 6, with participants from the nine Malaysian dioceses, and the neighbouring countries, Brunei, Timor Leste and Thailand. MJDYPN sent 56 reps.

It was there that the Salib Malaysia Pilgrimage was launched. The journey of the Cross in MJD began at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, JB on April 11, Friday, and will journey through the diocese from parish to parish according to the schedule, till MPC2026.

The Chrism Mass was held at the Church of St Theresa Masai on April 15.

Special collections for the Myanmar Earthquake Rebuilding, initiated by the Catholic Church of Malaysia, will take off on April 27, Divine Mercy Sunday, on a month-long campaign.

The diocese wishes Bishop Emeritus Paul Tan a blessed 85th Birthday.

**More Questions than Answers:** "Hands Off" protests, denouncing Trump policies and measures, are spreading to cities across the US? Malaysia to seek united ASEAN response to US reciprocal tariffs?

The MCMC probing influencer for stirring racial sentiments?

A migrant worker recruitment syndicate has become active again and may block efforts to reform the hiring of Bangladeshi and Nepali workers when Malaysia reopens the intake of foreign workers, according to a migrant rights

activist? The Putra Height gas explosion and the mystery contractor? A lorry driver was attacked by a panther when he stopped along Jalan Bukit Tangga-Seremban in Jelebu recently?

High-rise littering is making life unbearable for residents of a four-storey apartment in Melaka, leaving them frustrated as rubbish fills public spaces, with some seen even dangling from trees?

A doctor who was charged for transmission of offensive videos on COVID-19 vaccine was freed when the prosecution failed to establish the case beyond reasonable doubt?

**"Losing Sight" Times:** A columnist remarked "The Trump Tariffs are not about trade. It is about identity. It is about a nation that cannot admit its own economic model (war, debt, consumption, greed) is unsustainable." Likewise, religions, governments, corporations and organisations are capable of camouflaged evil, immoral acts and silent approvals. Partnerships, coalitions and alliances can remain silent and approving because of agreements. Here, one's religion, higher education, reformations, and revolutions do not deter one's complicity in deeds of death.

**A Thought for the Week: The Lonely Dreamer**  
A rose dreamed day and night about bees, but no bee ever landed on her petals. The flower, however, continued to dream. During the long nights, she imagined a heaven full of bees, which flew down to bestow fond kisses on her. By doing this, she was able to last until the next day, when she opened again to the light of the sun. One night,

the moon, who knew of the rose's loneliness, asked: "Aren't you tired of waiting?" The rose replied: "Possibly, but I have to keep trying!" The moon asked, "Why?" The rose answered: "Because if I don't remain open, I will simply fade away."

*The lesson from the rose:* The only way to resist, or not permit loneliness to crush beauty is to remain open.

**QnQ! Q asks? When did we get distorted?**  
"A tulip doesn't strive to impress anyone. It doesn't struggle to be different from a rose." It doesn't have to. It is different. And there's room in the garden for every flower. You didn't have to struggle to make your face different from anyone else's on earth. It just is. You are unique because you were created that way. Look at little children in kindergarten. They're all different without trying to be. As long as they're unselfconsciously being themselves, they can't help but shine. It's only later, when children are taught to compete, to strive to be better than others, that their natural light becomes distorted. *Marianne Williamson*

**The Holy Spirit @work:** The Holy Spirit transforms and renews us, creates harmony and unity, and gives us courage and joy for mission. *Pope Francis*

**Something To Tickle You:** Every tomorrow has two handles. We can take hold of it with the handle of anxiety or the handle of faith. *Henry Ward Beecher*

**Bishop Bernard Paul**

# Jubilee of health care workers

## Church of St Joseph



Participants practicing bandaging techniques.

KUALA LUMPUR: On April 5 and 6, the Church of St Joseph, hosted a series of events to promote health and safety within the community. These events aimed to equip participants with essential knowledge and practical skills to enhance their wellbeing.

On April 5, the newly commissioned Medical Team organised a *Safety at Home Awareness* event focusing on Basic First Aid and Fall Prevention. The event offered participants hands-on demonstrations of CPR, choking management, and bandaging techniques. Attendees practiced these skills under the guidance of trained professionals from the parish. Thirty participants attended the session.

On April 6, two awareness programmes took place. The Mental Health Awareness event, held from 11.00am to 1.00pm, was an enlightening session open to all

age groups, including youth. Delivered by an invited speaker from the Archdiocesan Mental Health Ministry, the talk covered key topics such as recognising mental health issues like anxiety, depression, and bipolar disorder, managing these conditions, and seeking professional help. Participants also gained clarity on the roles of counsellors, clinical psychologists, and psychiatrists. Around 35 attendees actively engaged in the discussion, asking questions and gaining valuable insights. This event contributed to reducing stigma and fostering a more positive outlook on mental health.

The second event was a Dental Health Awareness event, designed for kindergarten and primary school students. Hosted by an invited speaker from the Dental Faculty of UKM and the Ministry of Health, this



Fr Vincent Thomas commissioning the health care workers.

interactive session emphasised the importance of dental health and addressed common issues such as cavities, gum disease, and dental pain. Through engaging activities, video presentations, dancing, and games, children learned proper brushing techniques and the importance of regular dental check-ups. The session effectively imparted knowledge while rais-

ing awareness on the importance of dental care to 160 children who participated in the event.

During the 9.30am Sunday Mass, health care workers were officially commissioned, marking a significant milestone for our parish. Following this, parish priest Fr Frederick Joseph and Fr Vincent Thomas blessed the newly established medical room. **Lily Tresa**

## Church of Our Lady of Fatima

KUALA LUMPUR: The Church of Our Lady of Fatima honoured the resilience of the sick and the dedication of the compassionate professionals who care for them. The event coincided with the Jubilee celebration at the Vatican on the weekend of April 5-6.

This event marks the seventh jubilee celebration of the Jubilee Year. It aims to offer spiritual comfort to those facing health

challenges while honouring the tireless efforts of those who care for them.

Mass was offered for the sick, while the work of health care workers was acknowledged through a special blessing. Members of the medical profession, including doctors, nurses, caregivers, volunteers, and the newly formed Our Lady of Fatima Medical Emergency Response Team (OLF MERT), were given the opportunity to experience the parish's support in their journey of healing and compassionate service.

OLF MERT was established last month to assemble a group of volunteers on standby for medical emergencies during Mass and parish events. The parish community continues to pray for the sick and the "Persons of Hope" who assist them on their journey.

Fr Andrew Manickam OFM Cap commissioning the MERT members.



## Church of St Francis of Assisi



Two participants administering CPR on a manikin.

CHERAS: In conjunction with the Jubilee of the Sick and Health Care Workers, the Medical Emergency Response Team (MERT), the Ministry of Silver Liners, PMEIA, and Catholic Young Adults, from the Church of St Francis of Assisi organised a series of activities on April 5 and 6.

These initiatives included complimentary medical check-ups, training sessions on First Aid,

CPR, and AED, as well as a blood donation campaign — all designed to benefit the sick and healthcare workers alike.

The Jubilee event commenced with an opening ceremony led by parish priest, Fr Paul Cheong OFM Cap. Following this, a half-day training session was conducted by Amala Dass, a certified EMS trainer from Port Klang. Twenty-five participants from the parish

and the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur attended. This session offered an invaluable opportunity for attendees to acquire essential life-saving skills, such as First Aid, CPR, and the use of an AED (Automated External Defibrillator) during emergencies.

A complimentary health screening event, organised by MERT in partnership with the National Cancer Society and Vedo Wellness, was held for the parishioners. Approximately 75 individuals participated, benefiting from a range of medical services, including blood pressure and blood sugar screenings, Hepatitis B & C rapid tests, microcirculation analysis, and body composition assessments. In addition, participants received free consultations with healthcare professionals, ensuring that their health needs were comprehensively addressed.

The blood donation campaign was successfully coordinated with the National Blood Bank, resulting in 104 walk-in registrations. Of these, 71 individuals were deemed eligible for blood donation, contributing significantly to the vital cause of saving lives through the donation of blood. **Maria Santhana**

# OLL parishioners reflect on the last seven words of Jesus

KLANG: On April 1, the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes (OLL) hosted a spiritually enriching Lenten retreat led by assistant parish priest, Fr Gnana Selvam Berentis (Fr Selva), centred on the powerful *Last Seven Words of Jesus*.

As part of the season of Lent, the retreat offered the faithful a moment of deep reflection, drawing hearts closer to the suffering, love, and ultimate sacrifice of Christ on the Cross.

Fr Selva guided participants through a meditative journey on Jesus' final words before His death, words that not only convey the depth of His suffering but also reveal His divine mission and the fulfillment of messianic prophecy.

From the Cross, Jesus first offered forgiveness, praying, "Father, for-

give them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34), showing mercy even to His executioners.

He then spoke a word of salvation to the repentant thief: "Today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43), assuring him of eternal life.

In His word of relationship, Jesus entrusted His mother to the Apostle John, saying, "Woman, behold your son. Behold, your mother" (John 19:26-27), establishing a new spiritual family.

His cry of abandonment, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Mark 15:34), expressed the profound loneliness and burden He bore, echoing Psalm 22.

In a moment of physical agony, Jesus voiced a word of distress: "I thirst" (John 19:28), fulfilling

Scripture and reminding us of His true humanity.

Then came the word of triumph: "It is finished" (John 19:30), a victorious declaration that His mission of redemption was accomplished.

Finally, Jesus spoke a word of reunion, surrendering Himself to the Father: "Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit" (Luke 23:46), expressing ultimate trust and peace.

In addition to this spiritual reflection, Fr Selva also spoke on The Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:17-30), where Jesus instituted the Eucharist, giving the bread and wine new significance as His Body and Blood. During this sacred moment, Jesus foretold both His betrayal and Peter's denial, while establishing a new covenant between God and



Participants sharing in groups.

His people, a cornerstone of the Christian faith.

The retreat concluded with a time of Eucharistic silent adoration, offering participants a quiet moment of communion with Christ. Be-

yond personal spiritual renewal, the retreat also fostered a sense of community and fellowship, as participants shared reflections and deepened their bonds of faith. **Dato Seri Ann Marianthony**

# Penang clergy experience spiritual renewal at CER

PENANG: Fifty-four priests and deacons from the Diocese of Penang gathered at Stella Maris Retreat Centre recently, for a five-day Conversion Experience Retreat (CER), a testament to God's deep love for His chosen servants. Despite initial hesitation from some participants, by the end of the retreat, words like "life-changing," "amazing encounters with God," and "renewal, affirmation, and recommitment to their priesthood" were commonly expressed as they gave thanks for this transformative experience.

In late October 2024, the Bishop of Penang, Cardinal Sebastian Francis, invited the Archbishop of Singapore, Cardinal William Goh, to lead a Conversion Experience Retreat (CER) for his priests and deacons. This invitation came after hearing about the retreat from priests of the Diocese of Malacca Johore who had participated in their clergy CER at MAJODI Retreat Centre in 2017. Inspired by a desire for his priests and deacons to "experience a deeper encounter with our Lord Jesus together as one" in preparation for the Jubilee Year of Hope in 2025, Cardinal Francis made this humble request, guided by divine inspiration.

From the moment we arrived on the first day, it felt as though the Lord had been preparing this experience for some time. There was a warm sense of reunion as Cardinal William and Msgr Peter Zhang reminisced with various participants now based in Penang — former co-seminarians, formators, teachers, and students. A particularly cherished moment was a meeting with Cardinal William's former professor, Fr Francis Anthony, who had guided him over 40 years ago.

On Retreat Day 1, it was interesting to witness the familiar resistance from both priests and deacons — remarks like, "Praise and Worship is not for me," "The sessions are too long," "We've heard this before," and "Why am I here?" However, by the end of Day 2, hearts began to soften. A few hands were raised in praise and thanksgiving to



The clergy from Penang with the Conversion Experience Retreat team members.

the Lord, and participants became less self-conscious, focusing more on their communion with the Lord through songs, Scripture, and the Sacraments. Praise and thanks be to God for this transformation.

Without revealing too much, it is enough to say that God's abundant graces flowed freely throughout the retreat. As the sessions deepened, supported by the para-liturgies, hearts were consoled, tears were shed, spirits were lifted, and heartfelt hugs were exchanged. Conversations softened as past hurts, misunderstandings, anger, and unforgiveness were healed. Walls came down, and the floodgates of healing and reconciliation overflowed. One could almost imagine the Lord smiling and declaring, "It was very good."

By the end of Day 4, joy was overflowing as grateful hearts expressed unreserved thanksgiving, exchanging hugs and words of encouragement while prayers for healing and empowerment were lifted. Many experienced their first moments of rest in intimate communion with the Lord in the Spirit. Some received deep healing, others were moved to tears of joy, while many felt the peace of the Lord and were blessed with the gift of tongues. On Day 5, as they renewed their priestly promises and embraced their bishop, a beautiful sense of oneness and unity prevailed, reflecting the

words of 1 Peter 3:8: "Finally, all of you have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind."

The most beautiful praise to God came at the end of the retreat as priests and deacons shared inspired and courageous testimonies of the goodness of God experienced over the past five days. Here are just a few excerpts:

- "Liberating! The joy of letting God lead."
- "Healing of past hurts, anger, and guilt."
- "God touched and worked wonders!"
- "Physical healing of back, shoulders, and knees."
- "The best confession I've ever had. I now commit to being fully present as a confessor, a channel of God's healing grace for my parishioners."
- "Every priest must attend CER!"

Two soon-to-retire priests, including one who recently experienced prolonged illness, are now committed to discerning and continuing their service to the Church beyond retirement.

Cardinal Sebastian Francis shared his personal journey during the Conversion Experience Retreat, saying he gradually grew to enjoy the experience and ultimately felt "awe-struck." He expressed a profound revelation from the retreat, noting that "there

is forgiveness and healing for all, even for Pontius Pilate, if he desires it deeply enough." He also expressed his admiration for the retreat team who supported Cardinal William Goh through silent prayers, fasting, sacrifices, praise, worship, and Spirit-filled para-liturgies. "MARANATHA," he concluded.

Reflecting on the retreat, Cardinal William shared how moved he was by the humility of the priests and deacons who took part. "This retreat shows that even priests and deacons hunger for a deeper experience of God's love," he said. "They too have been wounded — through ministry or earlier life — and seek God's mercy, forgiveness, and healing."

He was especially inspired by their openness to be ministered to and renewed. "As ordained ministers, we are called not only to give but also to receive God's grace through one another," he added. Through worship, adoration, and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the clergy experienced a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit and renewal of their priestly gifts.

"This retreat is for everyone," Cardinal William concluded. "We all need God's grace, healing, and most of all, a personal encounter with His love." **Jerome, Catholic Spirituality Centre**

## Seminarians commit to safeguarding of minors and vulnerable persons

PENANG: College General, Regional Major Seminary, organised a seminar on the *Safeguarding of Minors and Vulnerable Persons* for seminarians on March 22. The seminar aimed to raise awareness on safeguarding issues.

Lawyer Christopher Kushi covered recent legislative developments on the protection of minors, including the Holy See's Universal Guidelines, child sexual abuse materials, sexual offences against children, stalking, cyberbullying, harmful online content, grooming, and anti-sexual harassment laws. Dr Mary Bharati, a psychiatrist, shared insights on the psychological effects of child abuse, addressing physical, emotional, sexual, and neglect-related abuse.

The Very Rev Fr Ryan Innas Muthu, rector, emphasised the importance of safeguarding awareness for seminarians as they prepare for roles of spiritual leadership and guidance within their parish communities. He stressed that seminarians must be able to recognise, prevent, and address risks effectively. Understanding the psychological effects of abuse equips them to offer empathetic support to survivors. Fr Ryan highlighted that seminarians must be proactive advocates for safety, as their vocation is rooted in care and compassion, especially for the most vulnerable.

Cardinal Sebastian Francis, President of



Seminarians with Fr Surain Durai Raj and the speakers.

College General Regional Major Seminary, Penang, together with Rector Fr Ryan and Fr Surain Durai Raj, Dean of Studies, have further strengthened the Safeguarding Standards adapted from the Diocese of Penang. They have introduced five additional standards to promote a culture of respect and safety. These include upholding a zero-tolerance policy for any form of abuse; advancing the principles of Catholic Social Teachings, which emphasise the inherent dignity of every child and vulnerable adult; implementing proactive measures to minimise opportunities for harm; maintaining boundaries in all digital interactions with children and vulnerable adults while refraining from using electronic devices in any manner that is disrespectful, discourteous; and to avoid

exploiting positions of trust, power, influence or authority.

Fr Surain shared that the seminar on Safeguarding offered the seminary community an opportunity to reflect on the responsibility that comes with being ministers of the Church. He reiterated the accountability required of priests and seminarians as they serve people from diverse backgrounds. Meanwhile, Gerard Abraham, a second-year Philosophy seminarian, highlighted the growing need for families and society to provide continuous care and attention to children, especially given the rising online dangers, such as interacting with strangers through social media. He emphasised the importance of addressing technological risks alongside traditional safeguarding

measures.

1st Year Philosophy seminarian Andy Anthony Masuil reflected on the session's valuable insights into the rights and laws designed to protect minors and vulnerable individuals. He emphasised that abuse cases in Malaysia must be taken seriously, as the trauma can persist for years and takes time to heal.

Initiation Year seminarian Marcus Leong noted that during their parish pastoral assignments, they may encounter cases of abuse. He stressed the importance of understanding the legal steps to address such issues and being vigilant for signs that may indicate a history of abuse.

1st Year Philosophy seminarian Vincent Yip shared that the seminar deepened his understanding of safeguarding and provided practical advice for personal protection, such as meeting in open spaces and exercising caution with text messages. He emphasised that these precautions protect not only minors and vulnerable adults but also oneself. He was also reassured to learn that dioceses have Professional Standards Offices for guidance and support.

All seminarians acknowledged and signed the Safeguarding Personal Declaration of Seminarians document, with the rector Very Rev Fr Ryan Innas Muthu, serving as the witness.

# A journey of healing and hope

Joanne Richard

PETALING JAYA: A group of single-again adults (separated, divorced, single parents or widowed) together with some of their children; gathered for the *Finding Me* retreat organised by Moving On Single Again (MOSA), with the ICPE Missionaries of Kuala Lumpur, from March 14 to 16. Many came carrying different burdens, searching for different things. Some were seeking answers about the Church's teachings, others hoped to support those on similar journeys, and many were simply looking to find themselves again. Yet, beneath all these reasons, one desire united them all — the desire to feel God's love, to heal, and to move forward with hope.

The retreat held at the Church of St Ignatius and led by Rachael D'Rozario, was rooted in the Ignatian psychospirituality guided through a book written by Margaret Silf called *Landmarks*. It was not just a series of sessions but a sacred space for restoration. Over the weekend, hearts opened, tears flowed, and souls were gently reminded that they were not alone, that God had been with them through every storm, and He was still walking beside them now.

The retreat began with icebreaker games, helping participants to set aside their initial hesitation, which then led into the first session on *The Desire for God*, inviting everyone to reflect on their longing for Him.



The retreatants with the facilitators.

Throughout the retreat, worship sessions became moments of deep encounter — where voices rose in praise, hands lifted in surrender, and hearts softened in God's presence. These times of worship were more than just songs; they were prayers, unspoken cries, and silent whispers of trust. In the melodies and words, many found comfort, and some even found the strength to let go of long-held pain.

The next morning began with a choice between Centering Prayer or Lectio Divina. Those who chose Centering Prayer practised the art of waiting on God, embracing the stillness that is often missing in their busy lives. Others engaged in Lectio Divina, allowing Scripture to speak deeply and personally into their hearts. In those quiet moments, God's voice seemed clearer, His presence nearer.

The next session, *River of Me*, was a turning point for many. Participants were invited

to draw their life's journey as a river — its twists, turns, calm waters, and turbulent rapids. As they looked at their drawings, memories surfaced — some joyful, some painful. But in that reflection, many began to see something they had overlooked before — that even in the roughest parts of the river, God had been their current, carrying them through.

Then came one of the most powerful sessions: *Emptying Our Water Jar*. Inspired by the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, this session was about surrender — laying down the burdens, fears, and wounds that had been weighing them down.

On the second day, some wept as they confronted hurts they had long suppressed. Others felt an unexplainable peace wash over them as they let go of resentment, shame, and self-doubt. It was in that sacred space of vul-

nerability that true healing began.

This final day was about receiving and embracing God's promises. Each participant was given a personalised Scripture passage — words divinely chosen for them. Many held their Scripture pieces close to their hearts, some with tears in their eyes, as they realised how perfectly God's message spoke to their situation. It was as if He had written those words just for them, reminding them that they were seen, known, and deeply loved.

The retreat concluded with a reflection on the new desires for their lives and the steps they could take to respond to it. It wasn't about having all the answers or knowing exactly what the future held — it was about trusting that they were not walking alone. They left, not as the same people who had arrived, but as individuals who had begun to heal, who had encountered love in its purest form, and who now had the strength to take the next step in their journey.

As participants said their goodbyes, there was a sense that this retreat was not an ending but a beginning. The healing, the growth, and the rediscovery of self would continue. They left with lighter hearts, renewed spirits, and the assurance that no matter what lies ahead, they are deeply cherished by a God who never stops pursuing them.

And as they returned to their daily lives, they carried with them a simple but profound truth: they are not alone. They never were, and they never will be.

## New parish hall for Raub Catholic community



Archbishop Julian Leow blessing the new parish hall.

RAUB, Pahang: Archbishop Julian Leow blessed the newly constructed parish hall at the Church of the Annunciation on March 29, following the celebration of the parish's feast day.

The ceremony was attended by Fr Clement Lim, the parish administrator, and members of the Raub Catholic community. Before proceeding with the blessing of the new hall, Archbishop Julian led a prayer in front of the assembly. Both priests then sprinkled holy water around the hall, which can accommodate over 120 people.

In his remarks, Archbishop Julian highlighted the significance of the new hall, noting it will serve as a vital space for the Raub Catholic community's pastoral formation, meetings, and fellowship events.

Fr Clement shared that the hall was recently completed at a cost of RM130,000, funded by a grant from the Federal Government. The new hall represents an important milestone in the parish's growth and commitment to serving the faith and fellowship of the Raub community. **Bernard Anthony**

## The after life – the art of dying well

PETALING JAYA: The process of life after death remains largely shrouded in uncertainty, mystery and, occasionally, disbelief among the faithful who, despite coming to the faith as adults proclaiming it as the eternal life they seek.

What then is the cause of this disconnect? Seems like there are two reasons here. The first being there is little clarity in this area unless one has been formed according to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* that provides the definitive Church teachings to the faithful. The second being the influence of non-Catholic assumptions that faith in Jesus Christ will suffice for salvation.

The Augustine Institute in the United States has produced a four-part video series on *Eternal Rest*, with the second installment titled *The Afterlife*. Building on this, the Grief Ministry of the Church of St Francis Xavier — whose mission includes supporting those in grief and providing psychosocial education to the bereaved — organised an event on March 20. The event began with a screening of the video, followed by a post-screening commentary from the parish priest, Fr Alvin Ng, SJ.

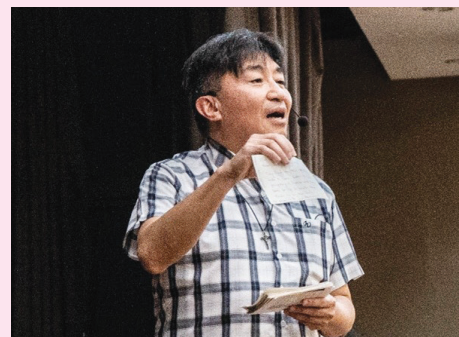
The topics covered in *The After Life* segment includes the particular judgement, an event at the entry to death where our friendship with God, or one lacking, becomes material to our journey of life.

Hell, which is the eternal separation from God, is brought into perspective. We are told that, when measures are not taken to avoid hell, with a life that is contrary to God, such a choice becomes ours alone.

While purgatory is often largely misunderstood, it is still good news — as one who died in the favour of God albeit with stains of sins, where the soul undergoes cleansing and purification to reunite with God thereafter.

Heaven is described as the entrance to a divine life of love with the Triune God where love is perfected and our hearts align with the Sacred Heart of Jesus

There is also the General Judgement at the



Fr Alvin Ng, SJ

end of time. While the Particular Judgement identifies with the individual, the General Judgement at the end of time will reveal how our lives affect others. Ultimately, it also discloses God's providence, His love and mercy for His created beings.

The second part of the evening continued when Fr Alvin unpacked and reaffirmed the authenticity of the video segment shown as conforming to the teachings of the Catholic Church. Fr Alvin started by pointing to a faith truism that God, in His goodness, will not direct us to eternal damnation. It is the choices we make that lead us down such a path. In response to a related question on why a good God would see fit to create hell, the blanket reply is that creation or the attributed state of hell is not the creation of God but of sinners. In this regard, he also pointed out that heaven and hell are not places as commonly

believed but states of being.

There was a query as to how the Church jubilee acts in penitence. Fr Alvin mentioned that the jubilee, as narrated from Old Testament times, is a reset of the wrongs committed. Such resets require that conditions must be fulfilled that include performing the sacrament of reconciliation and pilgrimage through the Holy Doors of designated churches. From Old Testament Scripture, we see that without a reset, the aggregate of sins can be overbearing and overwhelming, thus alluding to the mercy of God.

Something more profound that Fr Alvin shared is that at the point of passing from life to death, time as defined chronologically no longer surrounds the soul. Instead, we are governed by an attribute called *Kairos* that defers to moment and eternity but is outside the realm of time and space.

On a question concerning our preparedness for death, Fr Alvin reminded us of the parable of the ten virgins from the Gospel of Matthew, living each day as our last. Living to be more detached from this world and more attached to God helps us in our preparations.

The responses above were a small selection of a large sample of questions that were mostly addressed and responded. Feedback received from several participants indicated that they were better informed and formed from this event. **YC Hwang**



The participants listening intently to Fr Alvin Ng SJ.

# Offer hope to the forgotten

**Bernard Anthony**

RAUB, Pahang: The Catholic community of the Church of the Annunciation, established in 1952, celebrated its parish feast day on March 29, marking the Solemnity of the Annunciation with a Rosary and a Feast day Mass.

The evening celebration saw Archbishop Julian Leow preside over the Mass, with Fr Clement Lim as concelebrant. Archbishop Julian warmly welcomed everyone, expressing his joy in celebrating this significant feast with the local community and thanking Mary for her 'Yes' to God.

In his homily, delivered in English and briefly in Bahasa Malaysia, the Archbishop posed the question: "What is this Jubilee Year for? Why do we celebrate it?" He explained that the Jubilee Year is an invitation to embark on a journey — one that is not limited to just this year, but is a lifelong pilgrimage of faith. From the moment we are born until we pass from this life, we are all on a journey of faith. Pope Francis has given us this Jubilee Year to walk together as fellow pilgrims, reminding us that our permanent home is in heaven, while our time on earth is temporary. After death, we hope to ascend to heaven and not descend to hell.

The archbishop emphasised that the Jubilee Year of Hope is also an opportunity



During the Feast day Mass.

to remember the most marginalised in society. Drawing from *Spes Non Confundit*, the Bull of Indiction for the Ordinary Jubilee Year 2025, he highlighted Pope Francis' call to focus on those often forgotten by society — migrants, youth, the elderly, those with special needs, and the poor. Today, we are called to reach out to these groups and step out of our comfort zones to show them that they are loved and cared for. For the archbishop, this is the essence of the Jubilee Year — not just visiting Jubilee churches for enjoyment, but going to the forgotten and offering them hope. We must be pilgrims of hope to those in need.

The archbishop noted that large parishes have the means to celebrate the Jubilee, and it was heartening to see city parishes,

including some pilgrims from Kuala Lumpur, join in the celebration with smaller parishes like Raub. He encouraged all to be beacons of hope to these smaller communities. "Walk in this journey of faith, identify those who need a helping hand, and become a beacon of hope to them — not just this year, but as a part of our ongoing Christian mission. Be the salt and light to those who have lost or are about to lose hope in life. Let us be pilgrims of hope for all in need."

Fr Clement, who is also the parish priest of the Church of the Sacred Heart in Bentong, briefly translated the archbishop's homily into Mandarin for the congregation.

During the Prayer of the Faithful, the archbishop reflected on the example of Mary, who despite her circumstances, fol-

lowed God's will and became the Mother of Christ.

At the end of the Mass, Fr Clement expressed his gratitude to Archbishop Julian, acknowledging the challenges of the heavy traffic from Kuala Lumpur to Bentong. He thanked the archbishop for making the effort to join the Raub community and invited everyone to a dinner fellowship, where the archbishop was also asked to bless the new parish hall.

The archbishop praised Fr Clement for his leadership and the improvements made to the chapel and its facilities, recognising his pastoral duties and efforts in serving the Raub Catholic community.

Then, the parishioners surprised Fr Clement with a birthday cake at the entrance of the church. After the archbishop blessed the cake, the assembly sang "Happy Birthday" to Fr Clement, who expressed his thanks to the parishioners before cutting the cake. The cake was shared with everyone during the fellowship.

Though small in numbers, the vibrant faith and zeal of the Raub Catholic community made this feast day celebration memorable and joyous. The presence of the archbishop and the blessing of the new parish hall added to the significance of the occasion, creating a celebration filled with gratitude and renewed hope.



## Reaching out to needy families

COALFIELDS, Kuala Selangor: The Chapel of St Anthony in collaboration with a group from Kuala Lumpur, assisted ten impoverished families in the area.

The programme began with prayer and reflection in the chapel. A member of the KL group delivered the reflection, which emphasised that Christians are called to follow Jesus Christ's example by caring for the less fortunate and becoming "beacons of hope" for those in despair, particularly during the Lenten season. The reflection was also translated into Tamil.

Robert Savrimutu, the chapel's chairperson, welcomed the guests and expressed the chapel's commitment to working with the Kuala Lumpur group to bring joy and support to those in need. After the prayer session, everyone gathered for a tea fellowship at the chapel's foyer, where guests shared stories of their hardships. The gathering was an emotional moment, with many deeply moved by the stories of struggle.

The children participated in a colouring competition and a balloon game. These activities, along with small prizes, brought smiles and laughter, to all present.

In total, 405kgs of essential food items were distributed to the ten families. Additionally, bath towels, pillows, and educational books for children were provided.

After the closing prayer the group prayed a decade of the Rosary at the grotto.

The event not only provided much-needed material assistance but also reinforced the message of hope, love, and community during this season of Lent. **Bernard Anthony**

## A day of unity and camaraderie at staff team-building event

BUTTERWORTH: A group of 20 staff members from various departments recently came together to strengthen their bonds and deepen their connections. The staff, representing the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Church of Sts Chastan and Imbert, St Joachim Home for Retired Priests, the Archives Office, and the Peninsular Malaysia Ecclesiastical Tribunal (Penang Office), participated in a team-building outing on March 4.

The event, held at the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, was centred around the theme *Running the Race Together as One Family*. Fr Dominic Santhiyagu led the outing, which was designed to foster unity and camaraderie among the diverse team members.

The event commenced with an uplifting opening prayer, setting the perfect spiritual tone for the day. This was followed by a captivating action worship song, choreographed with great devotion by Rose Maria and Joanne, filling the air with a sense of harmony. As the ice-breaking games unfolded, joy and laughter resonated throughout, preparing everyone for the exhilarating team-building activities curated by Rose and Jacinta. The pinnacle of these games was a special challenge crafted exclusively for Fr Dominic, where he had to identify his staff members solely by their voices.



The staff and clergy from the five offices.



Playing some team-building games.

es. Altogether, six engaging games captivated everyone, sparking immense joy and fortifying the bond between the staff and Fr Dominic.

Following the spirited activities, the team settled into a reflective session with Fr Dominic, where each staff member introduced themselves and shared heartfelt insights about their roles and the sources of their happiness within their respective departments. This moment of reflection and appreciation allowed everyone to develop a deeper understanding of each other's contributions. As the session drew to a close, Fr Dominic led a heartfelt prayer, marking a fulfilling end to the morning's activities. The team then adjourned to Sunway Carnival Mall, where a delightful lunch provided the perfect setting for casual conversations and deeper connections.

The day continued with a relaxing movie

outing, a perfect way to unwind and cherish the shared experiences of the day. As the credits rolled and it was time to bid farewell, everyone carried with them fond memories of a day brimming with joy, laughter, and a renewed sense of unity.

The event was met with glowing feedback as participants expressed their sincere gratitude and appreciation. Many found the ice-breaking games incredibly effective in fostering conversations and bridging gaps between colleagues. One staff member noted that, at first, interactions were limited to mere greetings, but the games helped them effortlessly engage in conversations with those around them. Thant, a Myanmar staff member, shared his admiration for the team spirit displayed during the activities.

Others highlighted the event as a truly enjoyable experience, from the delightful lunch to the seamless interactions that strengthened workplace relationships. The game sessions and the movie outing were particularly appreciated for their ability to create a vibrant, fun, and relaxing atmosphere. Many described the event as "outstanding," expressing enthusiasm for future team-building gatherings.

This unforgettable day was not just an event but a testament to the power of unity, fellowship, and shared joy. It left everyone with a renewed sense of belonging, deepened friendships, and an eagerness to continue working together as one family. **Jacinta Denis**

# A life-changing trip to Melaka

Bernard Anthony

MELAKA: On a recent spiritual pilgrimage, 41 pilgrims from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur embarked on a one-day journey to Melaka in celebration of the Jubilee Year.

The day began with participation in the Sunday Mass at the Church of St Theresa. Following the 11.15am Mass, parish priest, Fr Thomas Chong SJ, briefly met with the pilgrims. PPC committee member Theresa Kit then guided them to the fourth floor of the parish community centre, for the "Corridor of History" exhibition. This exhibition highlighted the rich 81-year history of the Church of St Theresa in Melaka, displaying photos and artefacts.

Afterwards, the pilgrims spent time in prayer and adoration in the Adoration Room before boarding their bus to the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception in Pokok Mangga. Upon arrival, they were welcomed by 30 parishioners, led by chapel chairperson Anthony Heng, for a community prayer session. The reflection focused on Lent and repentance, emphasising the importance of seeking forgiveness and offering forgiveness to others. This was followed by Mass offerings and fellowship.

The pilgrims' next stop was the Jubilee pilgrimage centre at the Church of St Mary in Ayer Salak, where they arrived at 4.00pm. Despite the rain, PPC chairperson Francis

Chua and several lay leaders welcomed the pilgrims. Francis gave a briefing on the history of Ayer Salak village, which has been home to Teochew people since 1848, and on the parish's humble beginnings in 1886. The larger church building was constructed in 1970, with wings added in 1991. Today, approximately 2,000 Catholics reside in Ayer Salak.

Parish lay leader Mary Ann provided further insights into the Jubilee Year, its logo, how to obtain the Jubilee Indulgence, and introduced the mascot, Luce and Friends. The pilgrims then prayed the Jubilee Prayer and sang the Jubilee Song.

The parish prepared spiritual exercises for visitors: the Path of Purification (cemetery), the Path of Repentance (field), and the Rosary Walk (palm oil estate). These exercises offer



The pilgrims during the Path of Repentance on the field.



The pilgrims at the Path of Purification in the cemetery.

pilgrims opportunities for prayer, meditation, and contemplation, fostering spiritual growth and a deeper connection with the Lord.

The pilgrims held a prayer session focused on hope, followed by a reflection on God's forgiveness, mercy, and the role Christians play in spreading hope, especially to those marginalised by society.

After the Rosary, the pilgrims journeyed along the Path of Repentance, walking the Way of the Cross, where 14 stations marked on large stones were set along the field. Pilgrims took turns carrying a large cross as they prayed and reflected on the Passion and Death of Christ. At the end of the walk, they gathered at the foot of the cross, where an

image of Christ on a white cloth served as a focal point for meditation and thanksgiving for the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. Here, the pilgrims repented of their sins and sought spiritual reconciliation.

Next, they proceeded along the Path of Purification (cemetery route), reflecting on the theme, *I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life*. This path of purification encouraged pilgrims to cleanse their souls through prayers, Scripture readings, and self-reflection. They were prompted to ask themselves, "Where am I going? Where am I heading? What am I living for?" This exercise helped pilgrims gain clarity on their life's direction, purpose, and the importance of following the teachings and will of Jesus Christ.

Back at the parish house, the pilgrims had the opportunity to offer Mass intentions and purchase Jubilee merchandise before gathering for a fellowship dinner in the meeting room. The pilgrims expressed their gratitude to the parish team for their warm hospitality and support during their transformative pilgrimage. The experience certainly deepened their faith, leaving them inspired to become true pilgrims of hope.



## A journey of perseverance and faith

PORT DICKSON: On April 1, the Church of Our Lady of Fatima with several parishes from Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya, organised a joint pilgrimage to the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Port Dickson. About 140 pilgrims, travelling by three buses and nine cars, took part in the event.

The Rosary prayer before Mass was conducted differently at the 123-year-old seaside church. Pilgrims were invited to leave the comfort of the church's cool interior and step into the blazing late morning sun. They followed a marked path, with each marker representing a decade of the Rosary and numbered discs indicating the Hail Marys.

The journey took pilgrims up a narrow trail for the first and second decades, around the back of the church, and into classrooms for the third and fourth decades. The final two decades were prayed along a narrow staircase leading to the side of the church, where the fifth decade was completed. The Hail Holy Queen and concluding prayers

were offered at the grotto of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, providing a fitting conclusion to the outdoor pilgrimage.

This unique outdoor trail, with its ups and downs, symbolised the personal spiritual journey of each pilgrim — a reminder that, despite challenges, one must persevere with faith and focus on God. This message was further emphasised by Fr Andrew Manickam, OFM Cap, in his homily. He encouraged the pilgrims not to remain in despair, referencing the biblical story of the man at the Pool of Bethesda, urging everyone to "get up, pick up your mat, and walk."

Fr Edwin Peter, the concelebrant at Mass, echoed this sentiment, urging the congregation to leave behind feelings of hopelessness in order to move forward in life.

The pilgrims left the Mass with a renewed sense of hope, inspired to move beyond the obstacles holding them back, and to walk in hope, just as the man at the Bethesda pool did.

## Reconciliation and renewal at PD centre



Pilgrims praying the Way of the Cross.

PORT DICKSON: On March 30, approximately 49 parishioners, including children from the Church of the Risen Christ (RCC) Jalan Ipoh, together with a few members from the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist, embarked on a pilgrimage of Hope. Their journey was aimed at seeking reconciliation and spiritual renewal at the Church of the Immaculate Conception PD (CICPD), one of the five designated pilgrimage centres in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.

The pilgrimage began at 7.45am from RCC, and the group arrived at CICPD in time for the start of the Tamil/English Mass at 10.30am. Throughout the bus journey, the pilgrims prayed the Rosary, setting the tone for a spiritually enriching experience. Upon arrival, they were warmly welcomed by the CICPD Jubilee team and participated in a community prayer session.

Fr Edwin Peter, the parish priest, was present to offer his support to the pilgrims. In his homily, Fr Edwin expressed his joy at the pilgrims' enthusiastic engagement in adoration and prayer. He emphasised the significance of repentance, especially before passing through the Holy Door, a symbolic act of grace during the Jubilee Year. "The Holy Door is not a magic door," he explained, "but a call for repentance, forgiveness, and spiritual renewal."

As part of their pilgrimage, the pilgrims

wrote petitions and placed them in the "Prayers of Hope" box. The petitions were then symbolically burned, representing the surrender of their prayers to God. Pilgrims were also invited to watch a video presentation explaining the significance of the Jubilee Year, the Jubilee logo, and how to obtain the Jubilee Indulgence or plenary indulgence.

A key highlight of the pilgrimage was the Rosary Walk, which took place both indoors and outdoors. During the walk, pilgrims reflected on their faith and deepened their connection with the Lord and Mother Mary. The Rosary Walk concluded with a short Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament by Fr Edwin.

Some pilgrims took the opportunity to purchase Jubilee-themed items. Holy water was also made available for the pilgrims.

In the afternoon, the pilgrims enjoyed a fellowship lunch before returning to Kuala Lumpur, expressing heartfelt gratitude to Fr Edwin and his Jubilee team for their warm hospitality and the well-organised Jubilee programme.

The pilgrimage was a deeply moving experience, providing participants with a time of spiritual renewal, faith, and unity — an unforgettable journey for all involved. **Dianne Kuseela Devi**



# King Charles and Queen Camilla visit Pope Francis

VATICAN: In a poignant moment, King Charles III and Queen Camilla met privately with Pope Francis on April 9, coinciding with the couple's 20th wedding anniversary and the fourth anniversary of the death of the King's father, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh.

The meeting took place at Casa Santa Marta, the Pope's residence within the Vatican, where he has been recovering for over two weeks following his release from Rome's Gemelli Hospital. Pope Francis, who had been hospitalised for bilateral pneumonia, has recently resumed a limited schedule of meetings.

In a statement issued by the Holy See Press Office, it was confirmed that the Pope met with Their Majesties in a private audience, during which he "expressed his best wishes to Their Majesties on the occasion of their wedding anniversary and reciprocated His Majesty's wishes for a speedy recovery of his health."

This mutual exchange of goodwill comes as King Charles continues his own recovery following treatment for cancer, which led to a brief hospitalisation at the end of March.

The audience had originally been announced by Buckingham Palace in early March, ahead of the royal couple's visit to Italy, part of celebrations marking the Jubilee Year. However, the visit was initially postponed due to the Pope's convalescence.



Britain's King Charles and Queen Camilla make a private visit to Pope Francis (Vatican Media)

A statement released on March 24 indicated that the meeting would not go ahead as planned, but noted the Royals' intention to visit the Pope once he had recovered.

That opportunity came on Wednesday, allowing King Charles and Queen Camilla to offer their well-wishes in person.

During their three-day official visit to Rome, the King and Queen also met with Italian President Sergio Mattarella and Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni. In a historic first, King Charles became the first British monarch to address the Italian Parliament, delivering remarks at the Chamber of Deputies in Montecitorio.

As Supreme Governor of the Church of

England and head of the British monarchy, King Charles has long expressed an interest in interfaith dialogue. In 2019, as Prince of Wales, he wrote a reflection in *L'Osservatore Romano* ahead of the canonisation of Cardinal John Henry Newman, describing the event as "a cause of celebration... for all who cherish the values by which he was inspired." He later attended the canonisation ceremony in the Vatican, where he greeted Pope Francis personally.

The audience continues the King's ongoing engagement with the Vatican and signals a continuation of his commitment to religious diplomacy and cultural exchange.

Vatican News

## News in Brief

### Indonesian Church empowers hamlet as eco-model

SLEMAN, Indonesia: Karangtanjung Hamlet has become a national model for community-led waste management, inspired by Catholic social teaching and *Laudato Si'*.

Recognised in 2020 as a "National Main Climate Village," the transformation was supported by the Archdiocese of Semarang's KKP KC, which helped implement family-based waste sorting and education.

Parish priest, Fr Benediktus Hanjar Krisnawan, and KKP KC chair Fr Adolfus Suratmo Atmomartoyo highlighted the importance of grassroots awareness and faith-based action. The hamlet's efforts led to a TPS3R (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) facility and ongoing training, including a composting workshop by Atma Jaya University.

Karangtanjung now serves as a model of ecological conversion and climate resilience rooted in Church teachings and community commitment. LiCAS News

### Religious bias in Pakistani school textbooks

LAHORE: A new report by the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) finds that Pakistani school textbooks marginalise religious minorities, showing a significant imbalance in representation. Among 389 religious images analysed from Grades 1 to 10, mosques appeared over 50 times, while churches, temples, and gurdwaras were depicted minimally — and some minority faiths were entirely absent.

Islamic content was also found in non-religious subjects, raising constitutional concerns over religious neutrality in education. The report cited instances of derogatory language toward Hindus and noted stalled implementation of minority faith textbooks approved in 2023, due to a lack of trained teachers and low minority student numbers.

Christian parent Romail Rajis said the curriculum makes minority children feel excluded, calling for equal respect and inclusion. Religious minorities make up less than four per cent of Pakistan's population. ucanews.com

### Thai bishops oppose Casino Bill, warn of moral consequence

BANGKOK: The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand (CBCT) has reaffirmed its strong opposition to the proposed Thailand Entertainment Complex Act, which would legalise casinos within large-scale entertainment hubs. Despite the Thai cabinet's decision to delay the bill, the CBCT remains vigilant, warning of serious moral and social consequences.

On April 9, CBCT President, Archbishop Francis Xavier Vira Arpondratana, and Secretary, Bishop Joseph Chusak Sirisut, submitted a formal statement to Parliament urging lawmakers to reject the bill. The legislation has sparked widespread concern from religious groups, educators, and civic organisations.

The Catholic Education Council of Thailand (CECT) and CBCT cite risks such as increased crime, youth addiction, debt, and human trafficking. "True development must align with moral values," Archbishop Arpondratana said, stressing the need to protect vulnerable communities. LiCAS News

## Tourists, pilgrims, religious learn CPR during Jubilee of the Sick

ROME: Just outside the walls of the Vatican, the Bee Gees' *Stayin' Alive* blared through speakers as health care workers tapped out chest compressions to the beat.

"Ah, ha, ha, ha, stayin' alive, stayin' alive," sang the 100 red-shirted volunteers near the entrance to the Vatican Museums, using the Bee Gees' disco anthem — with its tempo of 103 beats per minute — to guide tourists, pilgrims and even religious sisters through CPR basics.

The American Heart Association ran an open training event next to the Vatican to teach emergency resuscitation as part of programming for the Jubilee of the Sick and Health Care Workers April 5. Over two days, health care related events took place throughout Rome before concluding with a Mass in St Peter's Square April 6.

"Pilgrims that are passing by can learn, in just a few minutes, how to save a life," Marida Straccia, global training organiser with the AHA, told *Catholic News Service*.

More than 20,000 pilgrims were in Rome for the Jubilee of the Sick and Health Care Workers, including patients, health care workers and religious leaders from more than 90 countries.

Yet Straccia emphasised that CPR is not just for health care professionals. "It doesn't matter if you're a layperson, a priest," she said. "More than 80 per cent of cardiac arrests happen outside the hospital. Somebody could fall in front of you while you're walking in a store, in the Vatican, and knowing what to do,

even just how to call for help, it makes a difference in somebody's life."

Harim Lee, visiting from Los Angeles with her 14-year-old daughter, said the training was an unexpected but welcome part of their Jubilee pilgrimage. "I had no idea I'd be learning CPR," she said. "But it's wonderful, because most people think someone else will do it — but it's so important that everyone knows how."

Alessia Cambela, a health care worker and volunteer with the AHA, said she was surprised to see religious sisters stopping by the bustling square to learn CPR.

"Religious nuns asked us to teach them how to perform CPR and I think it's great," she said. "It doesn't matter what you do in your life, but we can all learn

how to save a life."

One of them, Sr Maria José de Mesquita, a member of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Anne, said that it's important for pilgrims headed to the Holy Door of St Peter's Basilica to stop and learn CPR "because we don't know if at any time we will need to help someone."

And with Pope Francis missing out on several Jubilee events during his recovery from respiratory infections, the Jubilee of the Sick and Health Care Workers takes on a special meaning, she said.

"The Pope, having had the experience of this illness, it certainly brings him closer to those living through experiences of pain and distress in their lives," she said. Maria-Pia Negro Chin, CNS



Participants in the Jubilee of the Sick and Health Care Workers. (Vatican Media)



Fr. Dr. John Singarayar, SVD

# Women who witnessed the Resurrection first Leading the faith forward

In the soft haze of dawn, as the world held its breath between darkness and light, a woman walked alone toward a tomb. Her heart was heavy with grief, her eyes swollen from weeping, her mind clouded with the fog that follows profound loss. This woman — Mary Magdalene — carried spices to anoint a body, expecting to find death. Instead, she encountered the greatest mystery of faith: an empty tomb and a risen Lord.

“Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” (John 20:15)

The question rings across millennia. It was to her — not to Peter, not to John, not to any man — that Christ first revealed Himself in resurrection glory. It was her name — “Mary” — that was the first word spoken by the risen Lord. And it was her voice — a woman’s voice — that first proclaimed the Easter message: “I have seen the Lord” (John 20:18).

This profound truth often passes us by without the weight it deserves. In a patriarchal world, in a patriarchal time, God chose a woman as the primary witness to the central event of Christian faith. Mary Magdalene stands as the apostle to the Apostles, the first evangelist of resurrection reality. This was not incidental but intentional — a divine statement written into the very narrative of salvation.

## The Women at the Tomb: Carriers of Memory and Witness

Mary was not alone in her faithful vigil. The Gospels record various women who followed Jesus throughout His ministry, who stayed at the cross when male disciples fled, who watched where His body was laid, and who returned to properly care for Him, even in death. These women — Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, Salome, and others unnamed — form a constellation of faithful witness around the resurrection event.

Their presence disturbs the expected narrative. In ancient Jewish law, women were not considered reliable witnesses in legal proceedings. Their testimony carried little weight in public discourse. Yet the Gospel writers unflinchingly record that women were the first witnesses to the resurrection — a detail that would have undermined rather than strengthened their case in the ancient world. They included this detail, not despite its cultural liability, but because of its unassailable truth. The women were there. The women saw. The women testified.

What does this tell us about the God who orchestrates salvation history? Perhaps it reveals a divine preference for inverting human hierarchies, for elevating the marginalised, for speaking through those society has silenced. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone — and the witnesses that society rejected became the first heralds of resurrection.

## Faithful Presence: The Ministry of Waiting

There is something profoundly instructive about the women’s faithful presence at the tomb. When others abandoned hope, they remained. When others scattered in fear, they gathered in love. When others prioritised safety, they chose service.

Their vigil teaches us about the spiritual practice of faithful waiting — of being present when all seems lost, of tending to what appears dead, of honouring what others have abandoned. They did not know resurrection



was coming. They came to anoint a corpse, to perform the final acts of care. Yet in this humble act of presence, they positioned themselves to witness glory.

How often do we abandon our vigils too soon? How frequently do we walk away from situations that seem hopeless, from relationships that appear beyond repair, from dreams that look definitively dead? The women at the tomb remind us that sometimes the most profound spiritual act is simply to stay — to maintain our post when hope seems foolish, to keep showing up when results seem impossible.

Their faithful presence became the womb from which resurrection witness was born.

## Seeing and Being Sent: The Pattern of Discipleship

Mary Magdalene’s encounter follows a pattern that becomes the template for Christian discipleship: she sees the risen Lord, and she is immediately sent to tell others. Her commissioning is direct: “Go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God’” (John 20:17).

This “see and send” pattern reveals the essentially outward-moving, testimonial nature of Christian faith. Authentic encounters with the divine do not terminate in private spiritual experience but propel us outward as witnesses. Mary’s experience was not given for her private consolation alone, but to transform her into a messenger.

Here we find another inversion of expected power structures. The male disciples, who had walked with Jesus throughout His ministry, now receive the resurrection news from a woman. They must humble themselves to hear and believe her testimony. The traditional teaching hierarchy is temporarily but significantly reversed—the men must learn from the woman about the resurrection’s reality.

## Magdalene Misunderstood: Reclaiming Her Witness

For centuries, Mary Magdalene’s witness has been obscured by misinterpretation. She was conflated with the anonymous sinful woman who anointed Jesus’ feet, with Mary of Bethany, and with various other women in the Gospel narratives. From these mistaken connotations arose the persistent image of Mary Magdalene as a reformed prostitute — a characterisation with no biblical basis.

The Gospels identify her clearly: she was a woman from whom Jesus had cast out seven demons (Luke 8:2), who supported His ministry financially (Luke 8:3), who stood by

the cross (Matthew 27:56, Mark 15:40, John 19:25), who observed His burial (Matthew 27:61, Mark 15:47), and who discovered the empty tomb (Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:1, Luke 24:10, John 20:1). She was, in essence, a faithful disciple, a financial supporter, and, ultimately, the primary resurrection witness.

Why has her image been so persistently distorted? Perhaps because a faithful, financially independent woman who received direct revelation from the risen Christ and instructed male apostles challenges too many conventional hierarchies. It has often seemed easier to sexualise her, to emphasise her supposed sinfulness, than to wrestle with the implications of her apostolic role.

Reclaiming Mary Magdalene’s true witness means confronting our discomfort with women’s spiritual authority. It means acknowledging that gender hierarchy was not part of Christ’s resurrection design. It means recognising that the question is not whether women should lead and teach in matters of faith, but why we continue to resist what God established at the very foundation of the Church.

## Torch Bearers Through Time: Women’s Persistent Witness

Mary Magdalene stands at the head of a long line of women who have carried the torch of faith through history, often against tremendous resistance. From the wealthy women who supported the early Church, to the desert mothers who pioneered Christian monasticism, to the medieval mystics who deepened Christian spirituality, to the missionaries who carried the Gospel across cultural boundaries, women have been indispensable to Christianity’s survival and flourishing.

Yet their stories have often been marginalised, their contributions minimised, their authority questioned. The pattern established at the resurrection — where women’s testimony was initially dismissed as “idle tales” (Luke 24:11) — has repeated throughout Church history. Women’s spiritual insights, administrative leadership, theological contributions, and missionary work have frequently been treated as secondary to men’s more “authoritative” ministry.

Despite this resistance, women have persisted as torch bearers of faith. Like Mary running from the tomb with uncontrollable news, generations of women have refused to be silenced. They have taught when forbidden to teach, led when denied formal leadership, ministered when their ministry was unrecognised, and proclaimed when their proclama-

tion was dismissed. Their persistent witness has kept the flame of faith alive in countless contexts where formal structures failed.

## A Future Illuminated: Women’s Leadership Ahead

What might the Church look like if it fully embraced the resurrection pattern of women’s witness? What might Christian community become if it recognised that gender hierarchy was the first thing the risen Christ dismantled?

A Church illuminated by women’s full participation would not simply add women to existing structures but would be transformed by their distinctive gifts, perspectives, and experiences. It would embrace the full range of leadership styles, not privileging traditionally masculine approaches to power and authority. It would value relational wisdom alongside propositional knowledge, embodied faith alongside theoretical theology, collaborative strength alongside individual achievement.

This is not about advancing a political agenda but about recovering a resurrection reality. The first Easter established a pattern that we have spent two millennia partially obscuring: that in Christ, there is neither male nor female, that God speaks through all who are open to divine voice, that spiritual authority emerges from authentic encounter rather than social category.

## Personal Illumination: Walking with Mary

In my own spiritual journey, Mary Magdalene has become a companion and guide. Her story reminds me that authentic faith often begins in places of deep wounding and healing — she had, after all, been delivered from seven demons before becoming Christ’s disciple. Her witness challenges me to remain present even when hope seems lost, to keep vigil at modern tombs where death appears to have the final word. Her commissioning inspires me to move beyond private spiritual experience into public testimony.

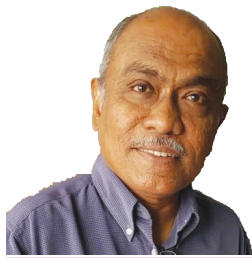
Most profoundly, Mary Magdalene’s encounter with the risen Christ offers a template for my own seeking. “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” These questions invite me into deeper self-awareness about my own spiritual longings and griefs. And the moment of recognition — when Jesus simply speaks her name, “Mary” — reminds me that divine encounter often comes not through spectacular displays but through the intimate knowing that can only exist between beings who truly see each other.

When I feel unseen in my own spiritual journey, when my voice seems dismissed or my perspective marginalised, I remember the woman in the garden who was seen, named, and sent. I remember that the resurrection narrative itself stands as God’s eternal validation of women’s spiritual witness. And I find courage to continue bearing the torch of faith, joining my light with the countless women who have illuminated the way before me and us, and for those who will carry the flame forward into futures I cannot yet imagine.

*Fr. Dr. John Singarayar, SVD, is a member of the Society of the Divine Word, India Mumbai Province, and holds a doctorate in Anthropology. He is the author of seven books and a regular contributor to academic conferences and scholarly publications in the fields of sociology, anthropology, tribal studies, spirituality, and mission studies.*

# The role of the sponsor in the RCIA

In the previous article, I stated that although the term ‘godparent’ and ‘sponsor’ are used interchangeably in some Church documents, in certain circumstances, a clear distinction is made between these two offices or ministries. Such is the case with the adult catechumenate, namely, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). The RCIA presents the offices of sponsor and godparent as two inter-related but specific ministries, each having its own responsibilities. In this article, the role of the sponsor in the RCIA will be examined.



## Echoing the Faith

DR STEVEN SELVARAJU

the motives of the interested person.

As in the words of the Church Father, Origin of Alexandria (c. 185 – c. 253): “Before they were allowed to join the community, they had to give sufficient evidence of their desire to live a vitreous life”. Only when the Christian was convinced that the unbeliever’s motives were sincere was the latter introduced to the Christian community. Once the unbeliever was accepted into the catechumenate, the

Christian would take on the role of sponsor to personally accompany the candidate during the catechumenal journey.

### Personal accompaniment

In present times, the sponsor formally begins his or her ministry at the celebration of the Rite of Acceptance. During the entire rite, the sponsor accompanies the candidate closely. Each time the presider calls the candidate forward, the sponsor responds by standing at the candidate’s side, a gesture signifying the sponsor’s closeness to the candidate. The sponsor also presents the candidate to the assembly and speaks on behalf of the candidate.

When the presider addresses the sponsors with the words: “Sponsors, you now present these candidates to us; are you and all who are gathered with us, ready to help these candidates find and follow Christ?”, together with the assembly, they respond: “We are” (RCIA, 53). It is also significant that the sponsor joins the presider in the signation of the candidates, that is, to mark the sign of the cross on the forehead of the candidate (RCIA, 55A), thereby demonstrating the important role that the sponsor is to play in the faith journey of the candidate.

After the Rite of Acceptance, among the responsibilities of the sponsor towards the

candidate (now known as ‘catechumen’) are to:

- serve as a source of basic information about the Catholic Faith. They are, however, not expected to catechise the candidate as this is the task of the RCIA catechists.
- listen to the candidate’s doubts and anxieties, as well as, to his or her hopes and aspirations.
- share his or her faith experiences in order to motivate the candidate.
- mediate with the RCIA team, if necessary, on behalf of the candidate.
- participate in the weekly RCIA sessions with the candidate since it is important for sponsors to continue learning about the Faith.
- accompany the candidate to liturgical celebrations, parish events and community gatherings.
- help the candidate integrate into the parish by introducing them to members of the community and to parish ministries and groups.
- pray for and with the candidate.

The sponsor is to journey with the catechumen up to the Rite of Election, after which, the godparent takes on the responsibility of accompanying the candidate (now known as ‘elect’) to the reception of the Sacraments of Initiation and beyond. Nevertheless, the sponsor can continue to be a close companion to the candidate throughout the rest of the catechumenal journey. Although not required, the sponsor can also become the godparent to the candidate. However, where possible, it is better to encourage other people in the community to take on the office of godparent, leaving the sponsor free to accompany another candidate in the next intake.

### Communal accompaniment

There is an aspect of sponsorship that

is often neglected in the RCIA process, that is, “communal accompaniment”. Basically, it means the entire parish community is also called to accompany the candidate since the task cannot be left to the sponsor alone. Baptised members must assist the sponsor in carrying out the responsibilities mentioned above. For example, community members can make the candidates feel at home in the parish or Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), share their faith experiences with them, volunteer to accompany the candidate to Mass and other liturgical celebrations, parish events and gatherings, invite them to their homes, pray for them and welcome them in other ways.

### Conclusion

Therefore, the role of sponsor in the RCIA has two dimensions, namely personal and communal sponsorship. Both are inter-related and equally important. Although personal sponsorship has its specific role and responsibilities, the sponsorship of the community is essential for the effective implementation of the RCIA in the parish. As stated, “... the people of God, as represented by the local Church, should understand and show by their concern that the initiation of adults is the responsibility of all the baptised” (RCIA, 9). May we do our part to sponsor the candidates of the RCIA.

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

The key ideas in the article are presented in an illustrated format below. The illustrations are by Dr Steven Selvaraju.

## THE ROLE OF THE SPONSOR IN THE RCIA

**Panel 1 (Top Left):** A woman (Susan) says, "Hi. I am Susan. I will be your sponsor during the RCIA journey." Another woman (Kim) replies, "Hi. I am Kim. Thank you for offering to accompany and guide me."

**Panel 2 (Top Middle):** A presider addresses the sponsors: "Sponsors, you now present these candidates to us; are you and all who are gathered with us, ready to help these candidates find and follow Christ?" The sponsors respond, "We are!"

**Panel 3 (Top Right):** A candidate expresses doubt: "I have done many wrong things in the past. I wonder if God will really love me." The sponsor responds: "God is always ready to forgive us if we are really sorry for our sins."

**Panel 4 (Bottom Left):** The sponsor introduces the candidate to another parish member: "Hi David. This is Kim, one of our RCIA catechumens." David replies, "Hi Kim!"

**Panel 5 (Bottom Middle):** A group of parish members is shown welcoming and accompanying the candidate, with text: "Members of the community must also play a role in welcoming and accompanying the candidate and helping him or her integrate into the parish."

**Panel 6 (Bottom Right):** A group of parish members is shown carrying out communal sponsorship, with text: "In this way, members of the parish carry out the ministry of communal sponsorship as directed by the Church: "...the people of God, as represented by the local Church, should understand and show by their concern that the initiation of adults is the responsibility of all the baptised" (RCIA, 9)."

**W**ould you spend 24 hours homeless? From March 10 to 12, ten individuals from various backgrounds took part in the 'Homeless for 24 Hours' event, organised by the Ministry of the Poor (MOP) under AOHD, as part of the 2025 Lenten Campaign. As 2025 marks the Jubilee Year with the theme 'Pilgrims of Hope,' this initiative aimed to bring hope to those experiencing homelessness. Participants embarked on a journey of solidarity to understand the daily struggles of street friends — exploring their challenges in finding shelter, food, income, and hygiene facilities. By walking a mile in their shoes, participants gained a deeper understanding of the realities faced by those living on the streets.

We kicked off the 'Homeless for 24 Hours' activity with an opening Mass at Cardijn House, celebrated by Fr Albet Arockiasamy, the ecclesiastical assistant to the Ministry of the Poor (MOP). The reading from the Gospel of Matthew was particularly fitting: 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me.' (Matt. 25:40). One of the participants, Nicholas Jeremiah, shared how deeply moved and inspired he was by Fr Albet's homily, especially when he said, 'Little acts of kindness will reward us in heaven.'

After the Mass, participants were briefed on the 24-hour challenge, which encouraged them to journey alongside the homeless and experience their daily struggles. Safety procedures were also outlined for the activity. The participants were then paired into teams of two and sent out onto the streets with no money, no phones—only their IDs, a cardboard, and a smart GPS

# Walk a mile in my shoes

tracker for safety.

Lucy Jacinta, one of the participants, expressed her initial scepticism: "I wasn't sure we could complete this mission without cash or phones, relying only on the tracking device provided by AOHD." However, she was glad to have survived the 24 hours without any of those comforts.

According to Nicholas, he formed friendships with several homeless individuals and learned about their life experiences. The program taught him to live like they do, and he viewed it as part of his penance for the year — experiencing homelessness and walking the streets all night without sleep. One of the most significant encounters Nicholas shared was with a Chinese uncle near a set of shop lots, a spot the uncle frequents to stay overnight. Although the uncle has a home, he chose to stay on the streets due to family issues and arguments, refusing to return. Nicholas expressed his hope and prayers that the uncle would eventually reconcile and return home, noting that family conflicts and imperfections are a normal part of life.

For Lucy and Patrick Moya, their evening began with the search for dinner. They decided to walk to Chow Kit to find food, where they met some of their homeless brothers and sisters, who kindly shared tips on where to get a meal. Lucy was deeply moved by the friendliness and caring nature of the homeless individuals. Afterward, she and her partner chose to walk back to a safer area in Kota Raya to spend the night on the streets with their homeless friends. They exchanged stories with the people they met, hearing accounts of lives lived on the streets — some had chosen homelessness, while others had been forced from their homes.

As the streets quieted down on a cool Monday night, the participants began to find different corners of the city to call 'home' for the night. Before midnight, the AOHD team made their rounds to check on the participants and were joined by a few shepherds, led by Fr Albet. To the surprise and delight of the participants and their street friends, the priests took the time to 'turun padang' and check in on how everyone was coping during the first few hours on the streets.

For Patrick, after walking around the city for about three hours, he discovered a place where some of the homeless had settled for the night. One of the most significant realisations Patrick had was how the number of homeless people seemed to be much lower than before. He wondered whether this was because many had found proper homes, had been moved along by building owners who splashed water on the five-foot way to deter them



(AOHD photo)

from sleeping there, or if it was due to the fasting month or action taken by authorities.

The next day, Patrick walked to the bridge on Jalan Sultan Sulaiman, where he found about 30-40 homeless individuals, mostly locals from out of town, particularly from Sabah. While some were resting and doing laundry, others were out searching for sources of income, selling anything they could — like aluminium cans — or doing odd jobs, such as moving. The homeless friends shared that they had often been harassed by DBKL, immigration officers, and the welfare department (JKM).

A major concern for those living under the bridge was the rising water levels during heavy rain, forcing them to move to higher ground until the waters subsided. Patrick mentioned that he was grateful the 'Homeless for 24 Hours' experience ended with Holy Hour, providing a much-needed time for reflection and gratitude.

Another participant, Maliana, observed that the homeless community consists of people of various ages and backgrounds, including young children, married couples, and the elderly. She came to realise the importance of understanding the daily struggles — both mental and physical—that homeless individuals face, and how we can help them. After spending 24 hours on the streets, Maliana gained a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by the homeless and expressed a wish for more people to reach out, offer support, and simply be there to talk and listen. She also discovered that some homeless individuals are remarkably caring, often sharing their food and resting places with others.

After 24 hours on the streets, the participants returned to Cardijn House to conclude the activity with Holy Hour, led by Fr Andrew Manickam, OFM, Cap. The session ended with personal reflections and sharing from all the participants.

For Nicholas, one of the most significant lessons from the 'Homeless for 24 Hours' experience was the importance of gratitude. He hopes that everyone becomes more thankful for what we have — our jobs, homes, and everything else — and remembers to thank God every day for the gift of waking up each morning. Nicholas was inspired to encourage others to support the homeless in any way they can to help ease their burdens.

Lucy's biggest takeaway was learning not to take anything for granted and to be grateful to the Lord for the roof over our heads.

For Maliana, the most profound lesson and realization was the importance of compassion, especially towards the least, the lost, the poor, and the abandoned. She reflected that we can never truly understand the struggles of others until we've walked a mile in their shoes, experiencing their loneliness, frustration, despair, hunger, and daily challenges. Maliana encouraged more people to participate in this activity in the future, as raising awareness is crucial. This experience has also shifted her perception of the homeless — she now sees them as ordinary human beings, deserving of love, opportunities, and care, just like anyone else. **AOHD**



Fr Albet Arockiasamy speaking to the homeless people.



The participants with the AOHD staff and Fr Albet Arockiasamy.

# 'Your headline lacks charity'

Of all people, who would have thought that I would receive a lesson on ethical journalism from "none other than" Anthony Cardinal Soter Fernandez?

As I write this, I am unsure whether to consider myself a "lucky journalist" for having benefited from a cardinal's tutelage on headline writing — or to hang my head in shame for sensationalising a story that earned me the late prelate's blunt reprimand.

Ensnared in my sacrosanct newsroom, I never expected anyone outside my professional circle to intrude into my editorial domain. But then my phone rang. On the line was Rome's first Malaysian Prince of the Church — the unassuming Cardinal Soter, whose legendary humility and fellow-feeling empathy were well known.

He wasted no time. "Your headline lacks charity. Be kind to the unfortunate!" he admonished.

Instantly, I knew what he was referring to.

The offending headline was my attention-grabbing, dramatic one-liner: "Bury the brain dead, says expert." Yes, you read it right — "brain dead" as in patients occupying critical care unit beds.

It was the lead story on page six of *theSun* daily that day, glaringly tagged to my byline.

In his exhortation, Cardinal Soter said: "I am not quarrelling with medical science or the experts. They may be right. But imagine the hundreds of people keeping vigil in hospitals for their loved ones right now. How would they react to your headline?"

"Always be kind to the sick and dying.

"As long as there is life, there is hope,"

he added, referring to the many critically ill patients confined to ICU beds.

Of course, I agreed with the prelate that modern intensive care medicine has its place, and many patients have been treated, recovered, and returned home hale and hearty.

## At the Lecture Hall

I recall that day, several years ago, when I sneaked into the auditorium of the Tun Tan Cheng Loke School of Nursing at Assunta Hospital. The country's doyen of anaesthesiology, Prof Emeritus Alex Delilkan, was slated to speak to nurses on *Ethical Considerations at the End of Life Care*. Delilkan, a medical icon and wicketkeeper of medical ethics (he was also a renowned cricketer), made history by establishing Malaysia's first intensive care unit at Universiti Hospital in Petaling Jaya in 1969.

I had heard him speak before and had always marvelled at his insightful takes on the many ethical dilemmas facing the medical field. Delilkan had a distinct and engaging way of speaking — what I have come to call "Delilkanese." His lectures were never without a discordant note or, at times, a jarring arcane — something that often unsettled the medical fraternity.

His sarcastic witticisms also stood out. Once, during a lecture at a teaching hospital, he remarked: "Modern hospitals want to go paperless. I just went to the gents and realised that the toilet is also paperless. No toilet paper lah!" The audience erupted in laughter. Just the lull that was needed to dilute his institutional-type of lectures.

## Delilkan Speaks

"In cases of brain death, medical technology

can temporarily maintain bodily functions like breathing and heart rate, though the brain itself is irreversibly damaged and no longer functioning," he explained to the nurses.

"Brain death occurs when the brain, including the brainstem, has completely and irreversibly stopped functioning. While machines like ventilators can maintain breathing and medications can help keep the heart beating for a short time, these interventions cannot restore brain function or reverse the damage caused by brain death. Legally, these individuals are deceased."

"The longest-known survivor declared brain-dead lived for nearly two decades after the loss of measurable brain activity and brainstem function. However, this is an exceptional case, not the norm," Delilkan added.

## The Bombshell!

Then came his trademark bombshell: "Brain-dead people must be buried!"

"If they are supported by artificial means for too long, then anyone entering the ICU will be welcomed by the stench of death!" he declared unapologetically.

At that moment, while the stunned nurses stared at the podium, the journalist in me went into overdrive, seizing on Delilkan's provocative punchline: "Bury the brain dead."

"What a scoop! I was the only journalist present — what a sensational headline this would make," I thought. The temptation was too great to resist.

In journalism, as every reporter knows, "dog bites man is no news", but "man bites dog" is. I subscribed to the latter principle and infused the "man bites dog" element into my headline.

To be fair, Delilkan was not at fault for what

he said. He was simply speaking in Delilkanese while presenting his scientific perspective. He had the right to do so.

And Cardinal Soter had his rights too, as a man of God. He was advocating for pastoral charity across all professions.

That said, all institutions have a responsibility to the public, and so do journalists.

My headline was the offending sore point. And so, I thump my chest and say: *Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa* (through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault).

*Joseph Masilamany was a pioneer reporter with the HERALD when Fr Lawrence Andrew SJ put the newspaper together under Cardinal Soter's watch. A no-nonsense Jesuit, Fr Lawrence would never have approved such tabloid-like headline at the expense of objective reporting. Neither would Cardinal Soter! On Tuesday, April 22, Cardinal Soter celebrates his 94th birthday in the halls of heaven. Happy birthday, Cardinal! Thank you for that valuable lesson on responsible journalism. For this, I shall rejoice and sing the Exultate. Alleluia!*

*The writer can be reached at josephmasilamany6505@hotmail.com or Whatsapp 6011-25160892*



## Joe's Jottings

JOSEPH MASILAMANY

**M**ahalo is a Hawaiian word that means "thank you" or "thanks". It is used to express gratitude or appreciation for something or someone. It's an important part of Hawaiian culture, reflecting the values of respect, kindness, and reciprocity.

In addition to being used as a simple thank you, *mahalo* can also carry a deeper, more spiritual connotation, expressing gratitude not only for material things but also for experiences, kindness, and the beauty of life.

It's a word that embodies the spirit of Aloha, which is centred on love, compassion, and mutual respect.

This year, I have been blessed to be able to observe Lent and celebrate Easter in Hawaii, thanks to my son-in-law being posted for six months to this island state located in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

Easter has evolved over the centuries for Catholics, both in its liturgical celebrations and in cultural expressions. The celebrations have grown from a simple, early Christian observance into the central feast of the liturgical year, celebrated with great joy and an ever-expanding array of liturgical and cultural traditions.

While the core message of Christ's resurrection remains unchanged, the way it is celebrated has adapted and grown to reflect the changing times and cultures throughout history.

Growing up in Malaysia, Easter was always an occasion for celebration albeit at a much smaller scale than Christmas, with much emphasis being placed on the Lenten season leading up to Good Friday. I remember Good Friday as a day of fasting, and the meals my mom prepared for us would consist of mostly bitter vegetables dishes, as a sign of



## From the Other Side

REGINA WILLIAM

# Celebrating Easter with Mahalo

repentance and reverence.

Easter was always a celebration of the Risen Lord with close family and relatives, without the bunnies and Easter eggs/chocolates that now defines Easter.

In Hawaii, Easter is marked by a beautiful blend of religious devotion and unique cultural influences. Hawaii, with its diverse population and rich traditions, celebrates Easter

with deep respect for its Catholic roots, while also incorporating local customs and a strong sense of community.

Similar to other parts of the Catholic world, the season of Lent in Hawaii begins with Ash Wednesday and lasts for 40 days, leading up to Easter. During Lent, Catholics participate in fasting, penance, and prayer. Many parishes hold Stations of the Cross on Fridays, and there is an emphasis on reflection and spiritual growth.

Some Hawaiian parishes offer Lenten retreats, where individuals can deepen their faith in preparation for the celebration of Easter. The core of Easter in Hawaii, like elsewhere, is the observance of Holy Week, leading up to Easter Sunday.

On Palm Sunday, Catholics in Hawaii attend Mass with palm fronds or ti leaves (a plant native to Hawaii) that are blessed by the priest. While traditional palm fronds are sometimes used, Ti leaves have become a local adaptation, reflecting the unique Hawaiian culture. In some areas, there are even small processions or gatherings to commemorate Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.

Holy Thursday is commemorated with Mass of the Lord's Supper, where the washing of the feet ceremony often takes place. This is a

poignant moment reflecting Christ's service to humanity. As is the practice in Malaysia and in many churches globally, there is also a Eucharistic Adoration throughout the evening.

Good Friday, a solemn day for all Catholics, is marked by the Good Friday service, which includes the reading of the Passion, veneration of the cross, and a moment of reflection on Christ's sacrifice. In some Hawaiian parishes, there are special processions, with a focus on the Passion of Christ and local traditions of prayer and reflection.

Easter Sunday in Hawaii begins with the Easter Vigil on Saturday night or early Sunday morning. This is the most important liturgy of the year, celebrating the resurrection of Jesus. The Mass includes the lighting of the Paschal candle, and the celebratory hymns and readings remind the faithful of the triumph of life over death.

On Easter Sunday, Catholics in Hawaii celebrate the Mass of the Resurrection. One of the distinctive features of Easter in Hawaii is the use of tropical flowers for decoration in churches and homes. These include vibrant plumeria, orchids, hibiscus, and bird of paradise. These flowers are often used to adorn altars, while locals also use flowers in their personal homes as symbols of new life and resurrection.

After the Easter Mass, many families gather for a festive meal where Hawaiian cuisine is served. Spam, *poke* (a raw fish salad), and *poi* (taro paste) are among the main dishes on the table, reflecting the fusion of local ingredients into the celebrations while *Hau pia* (a coconut milk dessert) and sweet rolls are often enjoyed as part of the Easter feast.

In some Hawaiian Catholic communities, Easter processions of the Blessed Sacrament or a communal gathering on church grounds

are held to celebrate the Risen Christ.

The concept of *Aloha* (love, compassion, and goodwill) is deeply embedded in Hawaiian culture and is evident during Easter celebrations. The sense of community and family is strong, and Easter Sunday often brings together extended families and friends for Mass and shared meals, emphasising fellowship and love in Christ.

Hawaii is known for its multicultural population, and this diversity is reflected in the way Easter is celebrated. While Catholic traditions remain central, the influence of Hawaiian culture and customs, along with other ethnic groups like Filipino, Portuguese, Japanese and even Western cultures, brings unique aspects to the Easter celebration.

While Easter egg hunts are not as widespread in Hawaii as in other parts of the United States, they are still a popular activity for Catholic families with children. Some parishes organise Easter egg hunts for children on Easter Sunday after Mass.

Easter for Catholics in Hawaii is a joyful and meaningful celebration, rooted in the Catholic liturgical tradition while also enriched by local customs and the spirit of Aloha. From the solemnity of Holy Week to the vibrant celebrations of Easter Sunday, Hawaiian Catholics observe the resurrection of Christ with reverence, community, and a deep sense of gratitude for new life. The fusion of Catholic faith and Hawaiian cultural elements makes Easter in Hawaii a unique and uplifting experience for the faithful.

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



Fr Ron Rolheiser

# The Chosen

I am sure many of you are familiar with the TV series about the life of Jesus called *The Chosen*. It was launched in 2019 and has been in theatres and on streaming platforms since and now has more than 200 million viewers. It has been translated into 50 languages and has 13 million social media followers, with about 30 per cent of its audience being non-Christian.

It was created and produced by Dallas Jenkins, an Evangelical Christian with wide ecumenical and interfaith sympathies. Jonathan Roumie, a devout Roman Catholic, plays the role of Jesus, and the Jesus he portrays in *The Chosen* comes through as somewhat different from, and more relatable to, than the Jesus we have generally seen in other movies and portrayals of Him. And this has had an interesting impact.

What's the impact? Joe Hoover, a Jesuit priest writing in a recent issue of *America* magazine, makes this comment: "I have been a baptised Christian for 53 years, attended a Catholic Christian grade school and for more than two decades have been a member of a religious order that bears the name of Jesus.... and *The Chosen* television series has done things for my understanding and engagement with the life of Christ and His disciples that nothing

else has. No sermon, no theological exhortation, no master's degree, no class on John or Mark or Luke, no spirituality workshop, no 30-day biblically based retreat has brought the Gospels home and made Christ and His people real and relatable to me in quite the way *The Chosen* has."

That speaks for me as well. *The Chosen* has had a similar effect on me. Like Joe Hoover, I was baptized as an infant, raised a Roman Catholic, am a member of a religious order, have degrees in theology, have been to every kind of spirituality workshop, and have studied the Gospels under the guidance of some world class scholars, and yet, this TV series has given a face to Jesus that I didn't quite receive in all that past learning and has helped me in my prayer and my relationship to Christ.

In essence, this is what *The Chosen* has done for me. It has presented a Jesus whom I actually want to be with. Shouldn't we always want to be with Jesus? Yes, but the Jesus who is often presented to us is not someone, if we are honest with ourselves, we would want to spend a lot of one-on-one time with, with whom we could be at ease and comfortable with without affectations.

For instance, the Jesus who has often been presented to us in movies is generally

lacking in human warmth, is distant, stern, other-worldly, over pious, and whose very gaze makes you feel guilty because your sin caused His crucifixion. That Jesus is also humourless, doesn't ever seem to bring God's smile to the world, and never brings any lightness into a room. He is not a Jesus with whom you are at ease.

Unfortunately, that is often the Jesus who has been presented to us in our preaching, catechesis, catechism classes, theological classes, and in popular spirituality. The Jesus we meet there, for all the truth and revelation He brings into the world, is generally still too divine and overly pious for us to be at ease with humanly. He is a Jesus we admire, perhaps even adore, and whom we trust enough to commit our lives to (no small thing). But He is also a Jesus with whom we are not much at ease, whom we wouldn't pick to sit next to at table, with whom we wouldn't pick to go on vacation, and who is so distant and distinct from us that it is easier for us to have Him as an admired teacher than as an intimate friend, let alone as a lover to whom we want to bare our soul.

This is not a plea to humanise Jesus (as is sometimes in fashion today) by making Him just a nice man who preaches love but doesn't, at the same time, radiate God's

non-negotiable truth. This is not what *The Chosen* does. Far from it.

*The Chosen* presents us with a Jesus whose divinity you never doubt, even as He appears as warm and attractive, with a humanity that puts you at ease in His presence; indeed, it lures you into His presence. Watching *The Chosen*, one never doubts for an instant that Jesus is specially and inextricably linked to His Father and that He brings us God's truth and revelation without compromise. But this Jesus also brings God's smile, God's warmth, and God's blessing upon our lives which too often suffer from a lack of these.

The great mystic Julian of Norwich once described God in this way: God sits in heaven, completely relaxed, His face looking like a marvellous symphony.

Among other things, *The Chosen* shows us this relaxed face of God which, to our own detriment, we too seldom see.

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

## There is no greater love than to give one's life

In the sacred Scriptures, the verse, "There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13), calls us to reflect deeply on the true meaning of love and unconditional self-giving in our daily lives. This love is revealed through concrete gestures that, although they may seem insignificant at times, gives life a sense of fulfilment.

Jesus, with His community of friends, offers us specific lessons on how He loved and gave of Himself each day to create spaces and experiences that rescued his followers from the meaninglessness and oppression they lived in. His expressions of affection, welcome, appreciation, and healing restored life and dignity to those who approached Him, longing for change. Many times, His self-giving led Him to forgo His own well-being. To those He called friends, He gave His life with gratitude and dedication, even amid the difficulties of His time.

When the Christian mission calls us to share life in places of conflict and instability, we live each day with intensity but also with uncertainty. One never knows when it will be necessary to leave our place of mission, flee to protect one's life, face imprisonment, or even death. This has been our reality in Nicaragua for many years, not knowing when persecution and exile will reach us. In these circumstances, we are called to build our community of friends in the way of Jesus.

As followers of Jesus, we feel challenged to reveal the face of the merciful God, to transcend suffering, and to not let the discourse of hatred rob us of inner peace or plunge us into despair.

In the face of this reality, giving one's life means finding deep meaning in every event. Personal accompaniment, attentive and empathetic listening to the cries, dreams and hopes of so many people

are part of this daily self-giving. These encounters become whispered psalms, encouraging one another and keeping alive the hope of change, even when it seems distant.

Giving one's life is not just about thinking of physical death but about finding reasons to remain alongside those who need companionship, listening, solidarity, empathy, closeness, affection and support. Through reciprocal gestures, we sustain one another, forming an extended family — a community of friends strengthened by the challenges of the journey, where secrecy becomes a means of protection.

To give one's life daily in mission is to discover that we can walk together, sharing sorrows, struggles, joys and hopes. In communities of faith and life, we find people living with the certainty that the God of life does not abandon us and provides the means and strength among the people to continue raising our voices. We dare to denounce injustices and the culture of oppression and death while remembering that in the strength of the community and unity as a people, we can find hopeful paths forward.

From a spiritual perspective, we learn to pray, reflect and contemplate God's presence in the stories of life. Every person who opens their heart to express their suffering and the pain of family separation due to exile, imprisonment, death or forced illegal migration faces dangers, cruelty and inhumanity at borders controlled by organised crime and government corruption.

Living one day at a time becomes a motto for survival. Learning to savour moments that expand the heart and enrich life is the lifeblood that sustains us on the arduous and barren path when we feel like prisoners in our own communities and country. We repeat to ourselves: "Live one day at a

time" as an act of resistance when the lack of freedom to express ourselves and share becomes part of daily life, and we can only turn it into prayer, even as our souls cry out to transform it into action.

Each encounter with friends and companions in mission becomes a space for analysing reality and a form of catharsis to avoid emotional turmoil. How can we continue to speak of resurrection and hope when dictators believe they own everything? We find answers in those who, despite having the chance to leave, remain to serve in schools, hospitals, markets, churches and other places. We grieve for those forced to work under threats and for those who, out of fanaticism, support the regime with hardened hearts and blinded eyes.

To give one's life in a country under totalitarian dictatorship means learning to live in active resistance, creatively defying imposed measures. We learn to respond with prudence to the control and pressure of the so-called "order" agents. Over time, we understand that living under a different kind of prophecy means not responding with evil to the evil received, but remaining steadfast with wisdom and strength.

Silence as a sacrifice is another form of self-giving. It pains us when our organisations are dissolved, and our spaces and belongings are arbitrarily seized. We must endure insults in silence, aware of the violence that dispossession entails. Choosing to stay amid conflict is a sign of love — helping to bind and heal wounds, build bridges, and fight for a better country.

Amid control and surveillance, giving one's life means resisting and fostering change through education and Gospel reflection. Surviving with dignity is also a form of self-giving. This self-giving is expressed by being present in these places as signs of God's love, accompanying those

who suffer, promoting peace, reconciliation and human dignity. It is a testimony of faith and courage, often at personal risk. Self-giving also means maintaining integrity in the face of corruption and refusing to succumb to dark forces; it is a commitment to life and faithful discipleship of Jesus.

Sharing life with friends in difficult mission times is a way of loving that makes our lives increasingly fruitful. It means living with a deep commitment to service, love and justice.

As followers of Jesus, we feel challenged to reveal the face of the merciful God, to transcend suffering, and to not let the discourse of hatred rob us of inner peace or plunge us into despair. In light of this, we ask ourselves: How can we bear witness to love and self-giving in the face of those who promote unjust structures?

We bear witness to love and self-giving when we choose to love amid persecution, when we challenge unjust structures and create spaces of humanity and healing. We do so by learning to forgive, reconcile and serve even in the midst of suffering. In the midst of persecution and uncertainty, choosing to give our lives for others is an act of love that cannot be silenced. As the Jesuit martyr Luis Espinal so powerfully expressed: "Lord Jesus Christ, we are afraid to spend our lives. But you have given us life to be spent; it cannot be hoarded in sterile selfishness. ... Life is given simply, without publicity, like the spring's water, like the mother nursing her child, like the humble sweat of the sower." **Global Sisters Report (NCR)**

*The author is a vowed religious woman, missionary and nurse. She lives in a community and accompanies groups of women and young people in their human and spiritual development. She uses a pseudonym to protect her identity.*

# Little Catholics' corner

Find the words on the list that are hidden in the puzzle

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



**TOMB**  
**MAGDALENA**  
**JESUS**  
**ANGELS**

**STONE**  
**JOHN**  
**EASTER**  
**PETER**

Dear children,

Jesus is Risen!  
Alleluia!

Today we celebrate the greatest feast day in the year!

Jesus has come back to life! Alleluia! Jesus died on the cross on Good Friday to take away our sins.

But He didn't just die - He came back to life again so that we could come back to life one day too.

The Apostles were afraid when Jesus was killed. They were very sad and tried to comfort each other.

Imagine their surprise when Mary Magdalene came rushing in and told them that the body of Jesus was gone from the tomb!

Peter and John ran to see. When they saw the empty tomb, they knew what had happened. Jesus had come back to life!

Blessed Easter children! Love, Aunty Eliz



*Easter Sunday*  
*April 20, 2025*



John 20:1-18

What are we celebrating on Easter?  
Unscramble the letters to fill in the blanks!

*Alleluia!*



Can you help Peter and John to find the tomb of Jesus?



# The Good Good Father Camp Experience

**BUTTERWORTH:** In early March, 28 teenagers, ages 13 to 15, gathered at the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (NBVM) for the Good Good Father camp.

Organised by the NBVM/SCIC English Catechetical Ministry, the camp explored Genesis 1–3, revealing a powerful truth: we are all created in God's image, deeply loved, and called to live in communion with Him and others. Through engaging sessions, fun activities, and heartfelt encounters, these young participants rediscovered their identity as God's beloved children.

The camp kicked off with an energetic praise and worship, setting the tone for the weekend. In the first session, based on Genesis 1–2, the teens reflected on how

Holy Name of Jesus that they be healed from past wounds and released from bondage of sin. Many experienced a deep sense of the Father's love and a renewed desire to return to Him.

"During the healing session, I felt an overwhelming sense of peace," said Anastasia, 15. "It was unlike anything I've experienced. This wasn't just a camp, it was a renewal. It helped strengthen my faith and draw me closer to God and my bigger family, the Church. After the camp, I feel a sense of renewal, like a breath of fresh air, and I am inspired to live my faith with greater passion and commitment."



Teens and parents take turns to wash each other's feet.

washed the feet of a child whose parents couldn't be there, the gratitude in her eyes was indescribable."

As the camp drew to a close, the teens reflected on all they had learned. Nicholas, 14, summed it up: "This camp strengthened my faith, my friendships, and my understanding of God. I also discovered talents I never knew I had and how to use them meaningfully. The friendships and lessons will stay with me for a long time."

Beyond the planned activities, what made this camp truly special was the spirit of love and service. Parents and catechists served meals and cleaned up together, fostering a sense of family that extended beyond blood ties.

The Good Good Father Camp beautifully echoed the message of Genesis — created in love, called to love, and lifted by mercy. As these young souls continue their journey of faith, may they never forget their worth, their purpose, and the Father who calls them His own. **NBVM/SCIC English Catechetical Team**



One of the speakers praying over the teens during the healing session.



Teens working together to untangle the web during one of the station games.

each of them is made in God's image, fully known and loved from the moment of conception. This foundation led to a deeper discussion on being rooted in their identity as sons and daughters of God and using their gifts for His glory.

In a subsequent session, the teens received a powerful reminder: every person is a gift. Through activities, they learned to appreciate that each person is a needed and valued member of society. After that, it was time for action. The station games had everyone laughing, strategising, and working together, proving that faith and fun go hand in hand.

The highlight of the evening? Talent Night! From singing to skits, Bible verse recitations to comedy, the young teens took the stage with confidence and joy. Parents watched with pride as their children shone. "My favourite part was Talent Night," shared Yvaine, 13. "Our group clicked quickly, and we put up a skit that had everyone laughing."

#### An outpouring of grace

The second day took on a more reflective tone, shifting focus to Genesis 3 and the reality of sin, brokenness, and God's unending mercy. Guest speakers John and Daria, along with their son Jonathan, led a powerful session for the teens on experiencing God's love. Then, as worship music filled the room, the Ministering and Healing Session began. The participants were prayed over in the

One of the most moving moments came during the washing of the feet. In an act of love and humility, participants washed their parents' feet, and parents, in turn, washed theirs. For those whose parents couldn't attend, other parents and catechists stepped in, ensuring no one was left out. During this session, parents and children also exchanged letters they had written to each other earlier in the camp. Later, laying on their hands, they prayed over each other. Tears streamed down faces as families embraced, the love of Christ tangible in the room.

"At first, it felt awkward," admitted Annelia, a parent. "But as we washed and kissed each other's feet, something shifted. It was a moment of pure love. And when we



KUALA LUMPUR: As the Lenten season called the faithful into deeper prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, the catechetical students of the Church of St Joseph answered that call — not merely in word, but in deed. On April 6, over 100 students, Forms 1 to 5, took part in a Lenten Outreach Programme that placed their faith into action and hearts into service.

The Lenten outreach was designed not just as an act of charity, but as a spiritual journey — one that would open the eyes of the young to the realities of the world and challenge them to live the Gospel in a tangible way.

Form 1 students, numbering more than 20, visited Berniece Homes where they spent time with elderly residents, shared meals, and brought joy through simple conversations and heartfelt songs. It was more than a visit — it was a reminder that the elderly are not forgotten, and that joy multiplies when shared.

Meanwhile, 39 students from Form 2 and 3 journeyed to PJ Senior Care, another home for the elderly. The students listened with compassion to stories of yesteryears and offered companionship that brought smiles and tears of gratitude. Through these encounters, they witnessed the sacred dignity of life in all its seasons.



## HEARTS IN ACTION

Form 4 and 5 students — over 40 in number — rolled up their sleeves for a clean-up campaign at Positive Community Life in Batu Arang. Amidst brooms, mops, and laughter, these teens discovered that service often looks like hard work and sweaty brows, yet the reward is a soul lit with purpose.

These experiences did more than fill a few hours on a Sunday — they planted seeds of

empathy, humility, and justice. For many students, it was their first exposure to the lives of the marginalised. The day became a catechism lesson of its own, teaching that love is not just preached from the pulpit, but lived in the streets, the homes, and in the quiet presence of listening hearts.

Such encounters bring faith to life. In the faces of the elderly, in the smiles exchanged,

and in the labour of love, the students met Christ. They learned that to follow Jesus means to serve without expecting in return, to love those who may never repay, and to go where the need is greatest.

This initiative would not have been possible without the unwavering support of parents and catechists. Parents not only gave their consent, but generously contributed food, supplies, transport, and most importantly, prayers. Their openness and encouragement remind us that the domestic church — the family — is where seeds of service are first sown. **Mary Jane Buniel**



The catechism students were divided into age groups to three places (Berniece Homes, PJ Senior Care and Positive Community Life).

## THE GAZA SUNBIRDS: CYCLING THROUGH ADVERSITY

GAZA: Alaa al Dali is a professional cyclist with the talent and determination to compete at the international level. His dream was to represent Palestine at the Asian Games in Jakarta. But his journey, like that of many in his homeland, was interrupted by violence.

Alaa was born and raised in the Gaza Strip, a place often marked by conflict and hardship. In May 2018, while Israel celebrated the 70th anniversary of its founding, Palestinians observed Yawm al-Nakba, the Day of Catastrophe — commemorating the 1948 exodus of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians.

During that same period, the international spotlight briefly turned to the region as the Giro d'Italia cycling race began in Israel. Meanwhile, weekly demonstrations by Palestinians in Gaza — known as the “Great March of Return” — were met with force. By the time of the final protest, over 200 Palestinians had lost their lives, including many children.

Alaa continued to train on Gaza’s rough

roads, holding onto hope. But his dream was cut short when he was struck in the leg by an Israeli sniper. The bullet, designed to inflict maximum damage, shattered his leg. With medical facilities overwhelmed and borders sealed, two weeks passed before doctors were forced to amputate to save his life.

His dream of Jakarta was lost — but not his spirit.

### The Sunbirds

With extraordinary resilience, Alaa transformed personal tragedy into a new mission. Together with fellow cyclist Karim Ali and 18 others, he founded a para-cycling team: the Sunbirds. The name refers to a small bird native to the region — featured in the Palestinian national emblem — that soars high without legs to carry it. The symbolism is powerful: a message that even without limbs, one can still fly.

The Sunbirds quickly gained international attention. Their training and public rides



The Gaza Sunbirds (Roberto Cetera)

across Gaza’s dusty roads drew media coverage, including from Italian journalist Flavia Cappellini — now a correspondent for Sky News — who even joined them on her bike. Their story inspired solidarity and support from around the world.

With donated funds, the Sunbirds became a force for good beyond sport. Carina Low, who manages their communications, speaks about the impact:

“Though not a humanitarian organization, the Sunbirds have distributed 120,000 kg of food, 15,000 hot meals, \$33,000 in aid for disabled residents, 250 shelters for displaced families, 22 bicycles, infant care supplies, toys for children, and installed public toilets and water supplies.”

### The mission continues despite the war

The events of October 7 and the conflict that followed brought new suffering to Gaza, but the team’s commitment has remained steadfast. As international aid dwindles and prices skyrocket, the Sunbirds continue their mission—providing for the most vulnerable: the

disabled, the poor, and children.

In February 2024, Alaa was able to leave Gaza and now resides in Brussels, Belgium. From there, he coordinates the Sunbirds’ operations and continues to train and compete in para-cycling events.

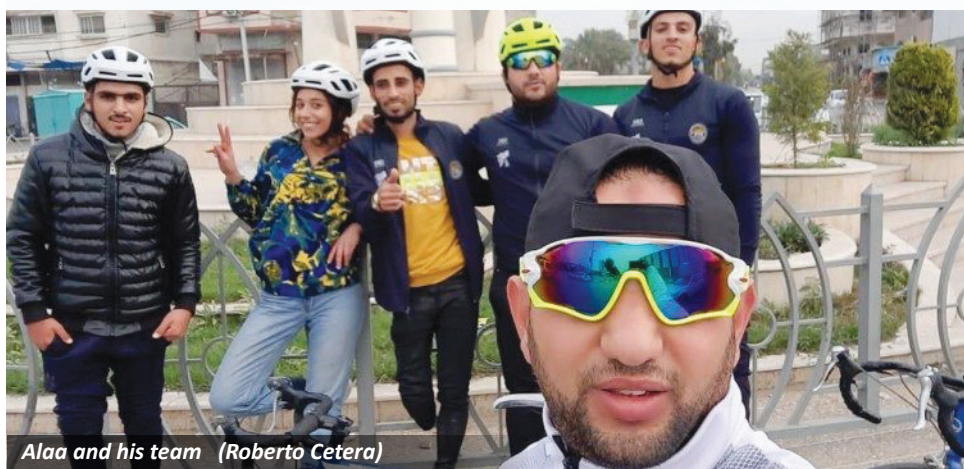
“Escaping the bombs on one leg was impossible. Training was out of the question,” he says. “I had to leave my wife and family behind. The war is terrifying. But helping Palestinians in Gaza is bigger than me. There are no words to describe what’s happening. Death and destruction are constant. People have no shelter. No safety. It is endless.”

Despite the risks, the Sunbirds remain active on the ground, supported by young amputees who continue the mission in Gaza.

“We will keep doing what we’ve been doing for the past 18 months,” says Karim Ali.

“Seeing Alaa compete again this year in international para-cycling events — alongside teammate Asfour — will be deeply symbolic,” Carina Low adds, “Every pedal stroke is a sign of hope for those still suffering in Gaza.”

**Roberto Cetera, Vatican News**



Alaa and his team (Roberto Cetera)

# Salesian champion of washermen community dies



**KALLAKURICHI:** A Salesian priest, who championed the cause of the poor, especially the washermen community, died of a heart attack on April 8. He was 54.

Fr Arul Valan was preparing to receive the Tamil Nadu government officials from Chennai to distribute lands to more than 90 Thurambar families near Kallakruchi when he complained of acute chest pain. He was rushed to the government Hospital in Sankarapuram.

His funeral took place on April 9, at Dominic Savio, Tirupattur.

Fr Valan was born on May 31, 1970, and made his first profession as a member of the Chennai province of the Salesian congregation on June 11, 1988. He was ordained a priest on September 2, 2000.

He began the Thurambar Liberation Movement in 2003 and strived to restore human dignity and rights to the most oppressed Puthirai Vannar (Thurambar) community of Tamil Nadu.

For more than two decades, Fr Valan had worked for the rights of the most marginalised Dalit community. Puthirai Vannars are the last and the least in the caste-based hierarchical Tamil society.

Fr Benjamin Chinnappan, founder of the Dalit Solidarity Network, mourning the death, recalled working with Father Valan for the advancement of the Thurambar communities.

Thurumbar wash the clothes of the Dalits. Because they clean the clothes of the untouchable Dalits, they were previously viewed as unseemly.

Fr Valan was the co-founder of the Thurambar Liberation Movement Tamil Nadu along with Sister Alphonsa.

The movement helped Thumbar to find dignity as humans. It became their voices.

They conducted door-to-door visits to religious houses to educate the children of these washermen. Though Fr Valan was a heart patient, he traveled day and night,

visiting the people, sleeping in their places and telling them about their human dignity and rights, Fr Chinnappan recalled.

Fr Devasagayaraj M. Zackarias, former executive secretary of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, Office for Scheduled Castes and Backward Classes, said Fr Valan's death is "a tremendous loss not only for the washermen people but for all the people who work for the development of the marginalised."

The movement emerged as a response to the atrocities and untouchability perpetrated on the Puthirai Vannar community, which spread through Tiruvannamalai and Villupuram districts, Fr Zackarias explained.

In 2003, caste-bonded labour rescued three Puthirai Vannar families from Kuruvimalai village in Tiruvannamalai district. The Catholic parish in Sathiamangalam village, Villupuram district, actively discriminated against the Puthirai Vannar families.

These incidents snowballed into the formation of many sangams (associations), which later emerged as the Thurambar Liberation Movement.

A Sangam consists of 15 to 20 villages. They hold monthly meetings to solve their problems. Trainings are held for the members — women and children in particular. Children receive education scholarships. It is active in Villupuram, Cuddalore, Tiruvannamalai, Vellore, and Kancheepuram in Tamil Nadu.

Fr Valan, said Fr Zackarias, was a powerful fighter who created a dawn in the life of the Thurumbar, who are politically, economically, and socially marginalised in society. His passing away is a shock for all of us.

"We cannot summarise his activities and struggle movements in a few lines. He never hesitates to invite leftists to the protests in the Villupuram district, which support the Washermen community in

## MEMORIAM

For enquiries, please contact:  
Email: [memoriam@herald.com.my](mailto:memoriam@herald.com.my)  
Tel: 03-2026 8291


**THE MIRACLE PRAYER**

Dear Heart of Jesus, in the past, I have asked for many favours.

This time, I ask you this very special favour (mention favour). Take it dear Heart of Jesus, and place it within your own broken heart where your Father sees it. Then in his merciful eyes it will become your favour, not mine. Amen.

Say this prayer for 3 days, promise publication and favour will be granted, no matter how impossible. Never know to fail.

**25th Anniversary In Loving Memory of**



**S. Innasimuthu**  
Departed : 26/04/2000

**GONE NOT FORGOTTEN**

A remarkable man who is forever in our Hearts.

Memorial Mass will be offered at Church of St Anthony Kuala Lumpur Saturday, 26th April 2025 at 6.45am

Dearly missed and cherished by all loved ones

**6th Anniversary In Loving Memory of**



**Edwin Lawrence**  
Departed: 25th April 2019

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

Sixth Year Anniversary Mass will be offered on 25th April 2025 (Friday) at 6.45am at the Church of the Visitation, Seremban.

Deeply missed and forever cherished by:  
Wife: Margaret  
Children: Anne, Agnes, Agatha, Anastasia and Andrew and loved ones.

**2nd Anniversary In Loving Memory of**







**Kevin Ng Kah Wing**  
Departed: 25 April 2023

**"I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead yet shall he live."**

**John 11:25**

**SEBASTY EMMANUEL & AGNES CHOW**

27 Jan 2011 Returned to the Lord 18 Apr 2023

*Remember Me*  
To the living, I am gone,  
To the sorrowful, I will never return,  
To the angry, I was cheated,  
But to the happy, I am at peace,  
And to the faithful, I have never left.

*I cannot speak, but I can listen.  
I cannot be seen, but I can be heard.  
So as you stand upon a shore gazing at a beautiful sea,  
As you look upon a flower and admire its simplicity,  
Remember me.*

*Remember me in your heart:  
Your thoughts, and your memories,  
Of the times we loved,  
The times we cried,  
The times we fought, the times we laughed.  
For if you always think of me, I will never be gone.*

*Margaret Mead*

Blessed are those who mourn, they shall be comforted. *Matthew 5:4*

**NOTICE**

**The cost for placing a memoriam is RM150 per column.**

For enquiries, please contact us:

Tel/WhatsApp: 03-2026 8291

Email: [memoriam@herald.com.my](mailto:memoriam@herald.com.my)

*This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life.*

Psalm 119:50


**In Loving Memory of**



**Clarice De Souza**  
was called home to the Lord at the age of 96 on 3rd April 2025

She will be missed by her children, in-laws, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

**29th Anniversary**



**Bernard James Pereira**  
4.9.1923 – 16.4.1996

\* *"The righteous shall inherit the land & dwell upon it forever."* Ps 37:29


Dearly loved & treasured by Wife, Florence Loone & children.

Tamil Nadu. I have engaged in ideological discussions with him over the course of several days," he added.

Savarirajan Arockiam, a member of the Communist Party of India in Villupuram, said Fr Valan's memory will live for generations among the oppressed people living in the slum.

Before taking the Thurumber ministry in 2004, Fr Valan was an assistant parish priest in Saint Anthony's Church, Veeralur, and Sacred Heart Church, Polur, of the Vellore diocese, Tamil Nadu. **Robancy A Helen, Matters India**

**BE FORMED AND INFORMED**

**SUBSCRIBE TO** 

We provide news, commentaries and teachings on the Catholic Church. Get the physical copy of **HERALD** delivered to your doorstep. You can also subscribe for your loved ones.

Subscription Rates:

COUNTRY	YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION
Malaysia	RM220
Singapore	RM1,400

For enquiries, please contact:  
**HERALD The Catholic Weekly**  
5, Jalan Robertson, 50150 Kuala Lumpur  
Tel/WhatsApp: 03-2026 8291 | E-mail: [advertisement@herald.com.my](mailto:advertisement@herald.com.my)  
Website: [www.heraldmalaysia.com](http://www.heraldmalaysia.com)

# Christ has died, Christ is Risen!

This joyful Easter proclamation lies at the very heart of our Christian faith.

Known as the *Kerygma* in Greek — the core message of the Gospel — it is a declaration we make at every Mass. After the consecration, when the priest proclaims “The Mystery of Faith,” we respond: “We proclaim your Death, O Lord, and profess your Resurrection until you come again.”

This is the Paschal Mystery: the suffering, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ — God’s plan to save humanity.

## The Easter Triduum and the Paschal Mystery

We have just celebrated the Easter Triduum, the sacred “three days” from Holy Thursday to Easter Sunday. On Holy Thursday, Jesus shared the Last Supper with His disciples, instituting the Eucharist. On Good Friday, He was crucified, becoming the true Passover Lamb who freed us from the slavery of sin. On Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday, we rejoiced in His resurrection from the dead.

Through His death and resurrection, Jesus reveals the depth of God’s love and opens the way to eternal life. This is not something we could have discovered on our own — it has been revealed to us

through Christ. And by believing in Him, we find true life.

## A Personal Encounter with Death and Hope

Last month, while I was at Mount Hosanna in Sri Aman, I received news that my father had passed away in Sabah, where he had run a survey business. I flew there to celebrate his funeral Mass, followed by his cremation. At the crematorium, I was allowed to gather his cremated remains — bone fragments later placed in an urn. I brought him home to Kuching for a Requiem Mass and interment at the Church of St Peter’s columbarium.

In those sacred moments, as I prayed beside his coffin, carried his urn, and reflected on his life, I came face-to-face with death in a deeply personal way. I realised that the very hands that once carried me as a newborn were now entrusted to me in turn. It was a moment filled with sorrow — but also gratitude, reverence, and profound faith.

## The Promise of Eternal Life

In times of loss, the words of Jesus come alive with power and comfort. “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in Me, even though they die, will

live.” (John 11:25)

At every funeral Mass, as we place a coffin before the altar, we are reminded of Christ’s promise of eternal life to those who have received Him in Holy Communion: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever.” (John 6:51)

At every Mass, Christ nourishes us with His Body and Blood — the spiritual food that strengthens us for life’s journey and prepares us for eternal life.

## Easter: the Victory of Life over Death

As human beings, we all journey through life, death, and burial. But for us as Christians, this journey is illuminated by the Paschal Mystery. Because Jesus died and rose again, we know that death is not the end. Through our Baptism, we are united with Christ in His death and, as Scripture promises, we shall also be united with Him in His resurrection: “If we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him.” (Romans 6:8)

The resurrection of Jesus gives us hope in our grief, strength in our trials, and meaning in our suffering. Even in our darkest moments, we cling to the promise: “Today you will be with Me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43)

## A Message of Faith and Joy

This Easter, let us renew our faith in the risen Lord. Let us rejoice that sin and death have been conquered. And let us live as people of the Resurrection — sharing the light of Christ with a world so in need of hope.

May the joy of Easter fill our hearts, and may we one day hear those beautiful words from our Lord:

“Well done, good and faithful servant... enter into the joy of your Master.” (Matthew 25:23)

Blessed Easter to you and your loved ones. Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Together with Cardinal, archbishops, bishops, priests, deacons and religious, I wish all our Catholic faithful a Blessed Easter filled with the Hope of Jubilee Year 2025.

+ Simon Poh

Most Rev Dato  
Dr Simon Poh  
President  
Catholic Bishops’  
Conference of  
Malaysia



## Catholic Church urges Congress to support global humanitarian aid



Catholic Relief Services workers help to distribute humanitarian aid materials to Gazan civilians in March 2024. (NCR Photo courtesy of Catholic Relief Services / Catholic Relief Services)

WASHINGTON: The US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) are urging lawmakers to approve significant international humanitarian assistance in an upcoming federal appropriations bill. They emphasised a Catholic, pro-life vision for foreign aid rooted in human dignity, solidarity, and subsidiarity.

Bill O’Keefe, CRS Executive Vice President, testified before a House subcommittee, stressing that foreign aid is a moral duty, not only for the Church but also for governments. “Church teaching has long asserted that governments must actively pursue the common good — not just for our own citizens but for all members of the global family,” he said.

CRS, the largest recipient of federal aid among nongovernmental organisations, has served tens of millions globally. However,

funding freezes under President Trump led to the cancellation of 74 CRS programmes. Without restored funding, the organisation faces severe staff cuts and program losses.

The USCCB and CRS are calling for over \$10 billion (RM44 billion) for global health, nearly \$5 billion (RM22 billion) for disaster assistance, and several billion more for development, refugee support, and economic aid.

O’Keefe urged Congress to uphold Catholic values in foreign aid by investing in lifesaving programs, building partnerships beyond governments, and supporting local communities with deep knowledge of local needs.

“The Catholic Church has a moral responsibility to respond to our neighbours in need,” he said. “But this work cannot be left to the Church alone.” CNA

## 2025 PILGRIMAGES

### 13D FRANCISCAN SHRINE

**Highlights:**

- Basilica of St Antonio, Padova
- Duomo St Maria del Fiore, Florence
- Leaning Tower of Pisa, Pisa
- Basilica of St Francis of Assisi, Assisi
- Shrine of Padre Pio, San Giovanni
- Papal Audience
- St Peter’s Basilica, Rome

**RM 14,300 p/p**

**02 NOV**  
Friar Cosmas Francis, OFM

### 11D OUR LADY OF KNOCK

**Highlights:**

- Dublin Castle
- Our Lady of Knock Shrine
- Our Lady of Walsingham
- Canterbury Cathedral

**RM 16,900 p/p**

**18 JUN**  
Fr V A Michael

### 10D RUSSIA - ST PETERSBURG + MOSCOW

**Highlights:**

- Town of Peterhof
- Church of the Saviour on Spilled Blood
- Pushkin + Pavlovsk
- Peter and Paul’s fortress
- Sapsan High Speed Train
- Sergiev Possad
- Red Square
- Zaryadye Park
- Old Arbat Street

**RM 14,500 p/p**

**28 AUG**  
Fr Mark Michael

(237364 - TIKKKP8377)  
No. 10 (1st Floor) Jalan 17/54, Seksyen 17, 46400 Petaling Jaya, Selangor  
Email: tours@topaztravels.com  
Tel: +603-7931 4055

For more info:

+6 019 - 6688471 (Adeline)

www.topaztravels.com