

HERALD

The Catholic Weekly

This issue includes an 8-page Vocation supplement in conjunction with Good Shepherd Sunday.



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For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

1 Peter 2: 20-21



Celebrating the Feast of the Divine Mercy across Malaysia

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A community transformed by faith

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Vocation Spotlight: Deacons Anthony Robert & Philip Asirwalam

■ P12

Peace is a

KUALA LUMPUR: Pope Leo XIV has concluded a landmark Apostolic Journey across Algeria, Cameroon, Angola and Equatorial Guinea, leaving behind a message both pastoral and prophetic: peace cannot be assumed — it must be chosen, defended, and lived out in daily life.

The April 13–23 visit, his longest international journey to date, brought the Pope into close contact with communities marked by diversity, resilience, and, in some cases, deep social and political challenges. Across all four nations, a consistent thread emerged — the call to uphold human dignity, reject corruption, and foster unity through dialogue.

The journey began in Algiers, Algeria, where Pope Leo XIV set the tone as a “pilgrim of peace.” At the Maqam Echahid Martyrs’ Monument, he reflected on the cost of conflict and reminded the nation that the future must be built not on division, but reconciliation.

A defining moment of the Algeria leg came during his meeting with Muslim leaders and his visit to the Great Mosque. In a strong gesture of interreligious respect, he emphasised that authentic faith must lead to fraternity, urging believers to “respect one another, live in harmony and build a world of peace.” The encounter underscored the importance of dialogue in a region where mutual understanding is essential for social cohesion.

In Annaba, the Pope prayed at the site of ancient Hippo and celebrated Mass at the Basilica of St Augustine. There, he called Christians — a small minority in the country — to be “a humble and faithful sign” of Christ’s presence through quiet witness and



steadfast hope.

The tone sharpened during the second leg in Yaoundé, Cameroon, where Pope Leo XIV addressed civil authorities with unusual directness. He warned that peace cannot take root where corruption persists, urging leaders to act with integrity and place the common good above personal or political interests.

Yet some of the most powerful moments came away from official platforms. At the Ngul Zamba Orphanage, the Pope met children who have experienced abandonment and hardship. In a deeply personal encounter, he reminded them that “no one is ever forgotten,” offering not only words of comfort

but a visible sign of the Church’s closeness to the most vulnerable. The visit reflected a central theme of his pontificate — that faith must be expressed through concrete acts of love.

In Bamenda, a region affected by ongoing tensions, Pope Leo XIV delivered one of the strongest messages of the trip. At an interreligious meeting for peace, he condemned those who manipulate religion for political or economic gain and warned against systems that exploit both people and resources.

At the same time, he pointed to hope, praising the collaboration between Christian and Muslim communities as a model for the world. Peace, he said, is not merely negoti-

ated at high levels, but built daily through relationships grounded in respect and trust.

By the time of publication, the Pope would have completed visits to Angola and Equatorial Guinea, continuing his outreach to Church communities, leaders and those on the margins, reinforcing the same call to justice, reconciliation and solidarity.

Across the continent, one message has resounded with clarity: peace demands more than words. It requires courage, integrity and a commitment to see one another not as rivals, but as brothers and sisters.

In Africa, Pope Leo XIV has not only spoken about peace — he has challenged the world to live it. **HERALD Malaysia**

Asian bishops echo Pope’s call for peace

BANGKOK: The Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) has issued a strong pastoral appeal calling for peace, justice, and moral responsibility amid rising global tensions and violence.

In a statement titled “Blessed Are the Peacemakers” (Mt 5:9) issued on April 15, the bishops expressed solidarity with Pope Leo XIV and echoed his urgent call for an end to violence and a renewed commitment to peace grounded in human dignity.

Drawing from the Beatitudes, the FABC leaders stressed that peacemaking is not

merely an ideal but a moral obligation. They warned against the growing tendency to rely on power, force, and domination in resolving conflicts, noting that such approaches undermine international law and weaken global institutions.

“The Gospel calls us to a different path — the path of justice, dialogue, and peace rooted in human dignity,” the statement said. It also cautioned against the misuse of religion to justify war, describing such actions as a distortion of faith.

The bishops called on world leaders to take

concrete steps to de-escalate tensions. These include ending ongoing hostilities, returning to sincere negotiations, respecting international law and humanitarian norms, and pursuing diplomacy aimed at the common good rather than narrow national interests.

Reflecting on Asia’s own history of conflict and reconciliation, the FABC emphasised that lasting peace is achieved not through domination but through patient dialogue, mutual respect, and the pursuit of justice.

“As a Church called to be a sign and instrument of unity for the whole human race, we

cannot remain silent,” the statement read, underscoring the Church’s role in forming consciences and keeping alive the hope for peace.

The bishops also invited the faithful and all people of goodwill to commit to prayer and action, urging a shift from resolving conflicts through violence to approaches grounded in wisdom, trust, and dialogue.

The appeal was jointly signed by Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrao, President of the FABC; Cardinal Pablo Virgilio S. David, Vice President; and Cardinal Isao Kikuchi, Secretary General.

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From 'Just War' to 'No More War'

A century of papal witness

As voices once again invoke the idea of a “just war,” it is timely to revisit how the Popes over the past century have reflected on peace — not as an abstract ideal, but as a moral imperative shaped by the suffering of real people and nations. Their teaching has deepened in response to the changing face of conflict — from swords and battlefields to drones, missiles, and weapons of mass destruction. In such a world, the moral grounds for justifying war have grown increasingly fragile.

From Pope Benedict XV, who in 1917 described the First World War as a “useless slaughter,” to Pope Pius XII, who laboured to avert another global catastrophe, the papal voice has consistently urged restraint. Pope John XXIII, writing in *Pacem in Terris* (1963), warned that in the atomic age, it is “almost impossible to think that war could be used as an instrument of justice.” Pope Paul VI carried this plea to the world stage with his cry: “No more war!” Meanwhile, Pope John Paul II repeatedly appealed — often unsuccessfully — to prevent devastating conflicts.

Across successive pontificates, a clear moral trajectory emerges: an increasing awareness that the justifications once used to defend war are difficult to sustain in the modern age.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* remains the Church’s primary reference

point, allowing for legitimate self-defence only under strict conditions: the damage must be grave and certain; all peaceful means exhausted; there must be a serious prospect of success; and the use of force must not produce greater evils than those it seeks to eliminate. It also cautions that the destructive capacity of modern weapons weighs heavily in this judgment.

In today’s world, marked by escalating conflicts and unprecedented destructive capabilities, a pressing question emerges: how close has humanity come to the brink?

It is within this context that the voice of Pope Francis has sounded with renewed urgency. In *Fratelli tutti* (2020), he warned that wars are often justified under the guise of necessity, even as information is manipulated to sustain such claims. With the rise of nuclear and other advanced weapons, war now has an uncontrollable capacity to destroy innocent lives. Increasingly, the conclusion is inescapable: war is not a solution, but a tragic failure of humanity.

Continuing this trajectory, Pope Leo XIV has placed peace at the heart of his pontificate, calling on the world to resist the “madness of war.” In a world where power and wealth are often idolised — and even God invoked to justify violence — he reminds us that God is never on the side of those who kill the

innocent, but with those who suffer.

Speaking during a Prayer Vigil on April 11, he appealed to the “silent majority” — those who believe in peace, pray for it, and build it daily. He urged attention to the voices of children who have witnessed war’s horrors in Gaza, Iran, Ukraine, and beyond — a stark reminder of humanity’s failure.

Far from being an escape into spiritualism, his call to prayer is grounded in reality. Prayer, he said, is a “bulwark” against the illusion of omnipotence, reminding us of our limits. Those who recognise this do not threaten or take life. In contrast, those who idolise power sacrifice human dignity.

Yet the call does not end with prayer. Pope Leo XIV insists on the responsibility of each person to build peace through encounter, dialogue, and what he calls “good politics” — one that seeks ceasefires and lasting agreements.

Drawing from Christ in Gethsemane, he urges humanity to “put the sword back into its sheath.” It is a call to reject the deeper temptations that give rise to war: the idolatry of self and the illusion that violence can bring peace.

“Enough of the idolatry of self and money. Enough of the display of power. Enough of war,” he declared. “True strength is shown in serving life.” *Andrea Tornielli, Vatican News*

A heart restored by the Good Shepherd

Heart disease is becoming increasingly common today. We know that the heart has its own electrical system that regulates its rhythm. When there is a “heart block,” the signal is disrupted — the heart may beat too slowly or irregularly. To restore its function, medical intervention is needed: sometimes a stent to open blocked vessels, or more commonly, a pacemaker to regulate the heartbeat.

In short, intervention restores the function of the heart and strengthens life.

In the same way, our spiritual heart also needs healing and strengthening. Because of our weaknesses and struggles, we drift away from God. We lose the “nutrition” that comes from the sacraments, from prayer, and from God’s Word. Gradually, our spiritual heart weakens — perhaps not suddenly, but slowly — like a blockage forming within us.

Today’s readings invite us to reflect on the heart in the light of the Good Shepherd, as we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday.

In the first reading, St. Peter identifies the “heart problem” of the people. His remedy is clear: repentance. The Good Shepherd, our Risen Lord, desires to give us new life — but only if we allow Him to enter and work within our hearts, like a divine surgeon.

The image of the Good Shepherd is familiar: Jesus carrying the sheep on His shoulders. But this is not just a beautiful image — it is a reality. He enters our lives through Baptism, nourishes us through the Eucharist, speaks through His Word, guides us through the Church, and remains present in our daily journey.

Yet everything begins with one essential attitude: listening.

We are called to listen to His voice. Only by hearing Him can we know where He leads us. Perhaps the deepest problem of our spiritual

heart is not rebellion — but deafness. We no longer hear His voice clearly.

This is especially true when we reflect on vocation. Many are called, yet few respond — not because they are incapable, but because their hearts are too weak, too distracted, or too divided to recognise His call.

The world offers too many voices, too many choices. Like standing before a buffet with endless options, we become overwhelmed and lose the ability to choose what is truly good — what the Good Shepherd has prepared for us.

As Pope Leo reminds us in his message for Vocation Sunday: vocation is a gift discovered within. It is not something we choose first, but something God has already planted in our hearts. To recognise it, we need silence, prayer, and attentive listening.

God is already calling — we must learn to hear.

A strong heart allows us to hear more clearly and to respond with courage.

Let us then recognise the Good Shepherd who heals and strengthens our hearts:

• *He calls us by name (Jn 10:3)*

Each of us is known, loved, and valued. His leadership is personal, not controlling.

• *He leads, not drives (Jn 10:4)*

He walks before us and shows the way. He leads by example, not by force.

• *His sheep recognise His voice (Jn 10:4)*

This relationship is built over time — through trust, listening, and faithfulness.

• *He gives life in abundance (Jn 10:10)*

Not just survival, but fullness of life — now and eternally.

The Good Shepherd does not simply fix our hearts — He transforms them.

Through discipleship, our hearts are renewed. Following Christ is not just about having a purpose; it is about becoming a new

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with Fr Aloysius Tan

4th Sunday of Easter (A)

Readings: Acts of the Apostles 2:14, 36-41;

1 Peter 2: 20-25;

Gospel: John 10: 1-10

person. The disciple becomes “beautiful” because Christ Himself shapes the heart from within.

Vocation, then, is not just about doing something — it is about becoming someone, like the Shepherd.

In the end, to live a new life, we need a new and strengthened heart in Him.

The Good Shepherd is not just an image — it is the identity of Christ and the model for every disciple:

- to know deeply
- to serve humbly
- to lead by example
- to love sacrificially

As we pray for vocations, and for the perseverance of priests and religious in their “yes,” we are reminded again of what is essential. As the Pope emphasises, we must learn to:

- Pause
- Listen
- Pray

Without this, we cannot recognise God’s call within our hearts.

So today, let us ask for the grace of a renewed heart — a heart that knows:

- God calls from within
- Jesus the Good Shepherd leads the way
- Vocation is a journey of transformation
- Prayer and silence are essential
- We can trust God, even in our weakness
- Every vocation matters

May the Good Shepherd heal our hearts, strengthen them, and lead us into the fullness of life.



MJD reviews synodal implementation in the diocese

Y. K. Ng

JOHOR: The Malacca Johore Diocese Pastoral and Synodal Animating Team, known as MJD-PaSAT, met recently to review the next steps in the diocesan synodal journey and to strengthen the practical implementation of synodality in parish and diocesan life. The meeting was convened by Bishop Bernard Paul, who heads the team. PaSAT serves as the synodal implementation team of the diocese. The purpose of the team is to assist the bishop in animating and guiding the diocese towards a more synodal way of being Church.

Synodality is not a temporary programme but a way the Church is now called to live and move forward together. It is the Church's *modus vivendi et operandi*, a way of proceeding in which people are listened to, heard, and drawn into a shared mission. To be synodal is not only to include those already active in Church life, but also those on the fringes and outside the usual circles of participation. Therefore, the members reflected on the call for a conversion of relationships, a conversion of processes,

and a conversion of bonds, so that clergy, religious, and laity may work together in a more listening, participative, and mission-oriented way.

The role of PaSAT was also clarified by the bishop. The team is to help provide the structural framework and pastoral direction by which synodality may be implemented more clearly across the diocese. Among the priorities identified were formation on synodality in all languages, greater collaboration in parishes, assemblies that lead towards the diocesan Annual Pastoral Assembly, and the placing of prayer and discernment more intentionally into meetings and decision-making processes. In this implementation phase, the diocese is not merely applying directives, but receiving and discerning how the Final Document is to be lived concretely in its own local context.

A substantial part of the meeting focused on the Parish Pastoral Assembly. There is a need for clearer and more accessible questions that would help parishioners engage the topic of synodality meaningfully. Formations should be provided before the assemblies, and parish priests themselves

must understand synodality well if they are to help guide their parish communities in that direction. A formation kit is to be prepared and shared, including at clergy recollection and through other diocesan channels.

The bishop stressed that assistant parish priests should also be included in this process. Since they share in parish life and may later take up wider pastoral responsibilities, their inclusion in parish assemblies and synodal formation is seen as important. The implementation of synodality does not depend only on a few individuals but is to become part of the ordinary way parish leadership functions.

The first diocesan Annual Pastoral Assembly, scheduled for 24 to 26 November, was another major point of discussion. Because it will be the first event of its kind in the diocese, members reflected on how it should be shaped. There was a general sense that the assembly should not be too heavy, but should foster fellowship, participation, and a sense of shared ownership. One proposal was to place emphasis this year on the conversion of relationships,

while also allowing participants to share the fruits and struggles of implementing synodality in their own contexts.

The gathering of clergy, the MJD Pastoral Council, MJD ministries, and Social Mission is meaningful as a way forward in being a synodal diocese. It is also important that synodality, or being synodal, is practical, relatable, and can be understood by those working in varied pastoral and social settings. The Council of Pastoral Services, clergy, and the MJD Pastoral Council, including the Social Mission dimension of the diocese, are part of one connected process rather than isolated events. The hope is that synodality may gradually permeate all levels of diocesan life, especially in parish communities. Ideally, all understand what synodality is and practise it.

MJD-PaSAT is an effort by the Malacca Johore Diocese to move synodality from idea to practice. It is the diocese's commitment to form parishes, councils, ministries, and diocesan structures in a way that is more prayerful, more participative, more discerning, and more attentive to the mission of the Church today.



**KUALA LUMPUR
ARCHDIOCESE**

**Diary of Archbishop
Julian Leow**

May

- 1-3 Catechists Retreat – Singapore
- 9 Sacerdotal Ordination Rev Deacon Philip Asirwalam & Rev Deacon Anthony Robert – Cathedral of St John the Evangelist, KL
- 9 Confirmation – Church of the Divine Mercy
- 10 Tzu Chi Foundation 60th Anniversary & Buddha Day Ceremony
- 10 Papal Mass – 1st Anniversary of the Pontificate of Pope Leo XIV
- 12-13 Clergy Monthly Recollection
- 14 Meeting – Archdiocesan Finance



**MALACCA JOHORE
DIOCESE**

**Diary of Bishop
Bernard Paul**

May

- 3 Mass – Malacca Johore Catholic Campus Day 2 (MJCCD2) – MAJODI Centre
- 6 Meeting – South Johor Vicariate Clergy, Church of St Theresa, Masai
- 10 Masses in English and Tamil – Church of Divine Mercy, Skudai
- 12-13 Clergy Monthly Recollection – MAJODI Centre



Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #269



Welcome dear friends,

The *MPC Cross* journeys through St Peter's Melaka till May 2.

Preparations to implement the *pathways to synodality* are underway. *Training of Trainers* for parishes and vicariates to effect grassroot awareness and conversions to synodality; Pastoral and Synodality Animating Team or *PaSAT's pastoral blueprint*; and the *PPA kits* to prepare parish leadership for synodal parishes, are MJD's priorities for the year.

On Saturday, April 25, the diocese invited everyone from the young to the old, to the Mass to celebrate *World Day of Prayer for Vocations* at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Johor Bahru.

Local Takes. Some things change, some don't.

Malaysians will still continue to shop and buy amid the ongoing Iran war, but with different *spending patterns* as they opt for cheaper choices when prices go up, the local retail sector said.

The *happiest towns* in Malaysia for the year 2026 according to the *Happiness Report*: Simpang Renggam, Kluang and Mersing (all in Johor), Dabong in Kelantan, Lipis, Raub (in Pahang), Kuala Terengganu, Marang, Permaisuri (all in Terengganu) and Ranau in Sabah.

The youth are holding the government to honour the promises, pledges and agreements made with the *rakyat*: they protested at the Putra World Trade Centre before Azam Baki, and six others are taking the government to court over deforestation.

A *unity banquet* replaces a temple association's attempt at Hari Raya Open House in Penang.

Johor fears the *outflow of talents and*

skilled workers with the completion of the Johor Bahru-Singapore Rapid Transit System Link.

Reading the Signs: A Voice Unafraid.

Pope Leo XIV to Trump's Administration: "I have spent my life serving Faith, conscience and humanity, and what I have witnessed is not leadership — it is chaos, deception and the arrogance of power imposed upon the public."

Accused the Trump administration of "trying to bend reality until it submits and treating truth as expendable in political battles".

Pope Leo welcomed the two-week truce, demanding the release of hostages and humanitarian aid access, stating, "Violence can never lead to justice, stability and peace".

The Pope invited all men and women of goodwill across the world to join him in *prayer for peace* on Saturday, April 11, 2026. Continue praying for world peace.

A Thought for the Week: Disconnected or Connected.

When God created the fish, HE spoke to the sea, when God created trees, HE spoke to the earth, but when God created man, HE spoke to HIMSELF. Take a fish out of the water, it will die and when you take a tree off the earth, it will also die.

Similarly, when man is disconnected from God, he dies. God is our natural environment. *We were created to live in His presence. We must connect to Him because in Him is life.*

A lesson from the Creator: Stay connected. Remember Jn 15:9-10 "As the Father has loved Me, so I have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love".

QnQ? Q asks? Should the Church comment on the Iran War?

This is what Pope Leo XIV said to reporters during his flight to Algeria:

"I think that the people who read will be able to draw their own conclusions: I am not a politician, I have no intention of entering into a debate with him.

"Rather, let us always *seek peace and put an end to wars*. I am not afraid of the Trump administration. I speak about the Gospel. I am not a politician. I do not think the message of the Gospel should be abused in the way some people are doing.

"I will *continue to speak out loudly against war, to try to promote peace, multilateral dialogue between states* in order to seek the right solution to problems.

The message of the Church is the *message of the Gospel. Blessed are the peacemakers*; I do not see my role as that of a politician, I do not want to enter into a debate with him. *Too many people are suffering in the world.*" Catholic News Agency

The Spirit @ Work: "Easter is a season of profound transformation, a time when the old gives way to the new and the broken is made whole. It is a reminder that God's power is made perfect in weakness, and that His grace is sufficient for all our needs." *St Faustina Kowalska*

Something to tickle you: "Dawn and resurrection are synonymous. The reappearance of the light is the same as the survival of the soul." *Victor Hugo*

Bishop Bernard Paul

Celebrating the Feast of the

Skudai, Johor

JOHOR: The Church of Divine Mercy, Skudai, celebrated its parish feast on the Second Sunday of Easter with a multilingual Mass, strong participation from the faithful, and a festive gathering that brought together the parish's four-language community. About 600 people attended the celebration, which was the maximum the church could hold. Besides the church upstairs, the downstairs hall and classrooms were also filled with worshippers.

The Church of Divine Mercy is the only shophouse church in the Malacca Johore Diocese. The celebration also carried added meaning as the church had been consecrated by Bishop Bernard Paul on April 7, 2024, which also fell on the Feast of Divine Mercy.

In preparation for the feast, the parish held a nine-day novena beginning on Good Friday. The novena continued through Holy Saturday, Easter Sunday, and the weekdays of the Easter Octave. Priests from the South Johor District were invited to celebrate the novena Masses, each following themes drawn from the Diary of St Faustina.

Bishop Bernard Paul celebrated



A section of the faithful at the feast day Mass.

the feast day Mass. In his homily, he reflected on the Gospel scene of the disciples gathered behind closed doors, confused, afraid, broken-hearted, and without hope. He said many people today also know what it means to live in a closed room, unable to feel God's presence and unsure of the future. Into that situation, he said, Christ comes with peace. The peace of the Risen Lord takes away fear, assures the sinner of forgiveness, and becomes the sign that God is still present.

The bishop said that God calls His people to leave their closed rooms and closed hearts. Christ breathes His Spirit upon the

Church, reminding believers that although He cannot be seen, He is never absent. The Holy Spirit, he said, is not a spirit of fear, but of power, love and self-control. The Spirit within the believer is itself a sign that God remains near.

Bishop Bernard went on to say that the mission of Divine Mercy is clear. Christians are called to love as Christ loves, to forgive as He forgives, and to be merciful as He is merciful. In this way, mercy shown to others becomes a sign of God's presence in the world.

Drawing from the life of the early Church, he also reminded the congregation that a believing and hope-filled Church must be seen



Bishop Bernard Paul presiding over the celebration with clergy of the parish.

in concrete ways. He spoke of five basic marks of Christian life: welcoming, living the Word of God, worship, witness, and works of charity. A Christian community, he said, must be hospitable, rooted in the Word, faithful in worship, visible in witness, and active in love.

The bishop concluded with a simple but direct call to faith. Do believers truly trust that the Lord is here, that He has never been far away, and that He is only a whisper away? He encouraged the faithful to quiet down, let go of distractions, become silent, and listen. In silence, he said, they will hear Him.

The feast day Mass reflected

the life of the parish itself. The Church of Divine Mercy is a four-language community made up of Tamil-, Chinese-, English-, and Bahasa Malaysia-speaking faithful. Members of all four language groups took part in the choir and worked together in organising the celebration.

After Mass, the parish came together for fellowship and a shared meal, with food that reflected the diversity of the community, including Indian and Chinese dishes. The feast was thus not only a liturgical celebration, but also a visible expression of the unity, participation and shared faith of the parish community. **Michelle Natush**

Zero tolerance for abuse in any form

PENANG: A total of 303 Evangelising Catechists and Church members from across the Diocese of Penang — including Kedah, Perlis, Perak, Kelantan and Penang — recently participated in an online *Safeguarding of Minors Awareness* training session.

Conducted in English, Mandarin, Tamil and Bahasa Malaysia, the programme was organised by the Penang Diocesan Catechetical Commission (PDCC), with support from the Professional Standards Office and the Social Communications Office of the Diocese of Penang.

In a recorded pastoral address, Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang, emphasised that safeguarding is not merely a responsibility but a sacred duty — an expression of love and reverence for the children entrusted to the Church's care. He stressed the importance of protecting children from all forms of abuse and announced that participants would be invited to sign a *Declaration on Standards for Child Protection*. He also encouraged those struggling with harmful tendencies to seek help, assuring that assistance can be arranged. The Cardinal expressed heartfelt gratitude to evangelising catechists for their steadfast commitment to safeguarding children.

Deacon Clement Samuel, head of the PDCC, reminded participants that in today's highly sexualised culture, children face unprecedented risks. "The Church's

response is clear: zero tolerance for abuse of any kind," he said. He urged catechists to see every child through the eyes of Christ — with love, vigilance and a protective heart — and to uphold the highest standards of pastoral care so that parishes remain safe havens.

PDCC coordinator Jeanne J. Saw reported that 301 participants registered for the programme — 157 in English, 72 in Mandarin, 38 in Tamil and 34 in Bahasa Malaysia. She explained that catechists were encouraged to attend in order to understand current norms in safeguarding minors and vulnerable persons. Those unable to participate are required to attend similar programmes organised at parish or diocesan levels to remain compliant.

Joel Tan Kwong Weng, facilitator for the English session, highlighted presentations by Christopher Kushi on Malaysian Child Protection legislation, Dr Mary Bharathy on recognising and responding to child abuse, and Dato' Domnic Selvam on safeguarding minors and vulnerable persons. Participants expressed appreciation for the knowledge gained, particularly in recognising signs of abuse and understanding reporting procedures, including cases involving the Social Welfare Department.

The Mandarin session, facilitated by Justin Lee Kin Moon, featured Esther Tan, an Early Childhood Education and Early Intervention specialist, who pre-

sented modules on recognising and responding to child abuse and on post-safeguarding care. A legal presentation on Malaysian Child Protection legislation was also delivered, with Mandarin support provided to ensure clarity. Participants valued the insights, particularly on legal frameworks, the Seal of Confession, and methods of supporting children in their journey of care.

In the Tamil session, facilitated by P.R. Selvarajan and Bernadette Selva, Sumathi Annamalai conducted sessions on child protection awareness, policy, and the reporting and handling of suspicions and allegations. Participants were reminded that abuse includes emotional harm, and were introduced to support channels such as the Talian Kasih 15999 hotline.

The Bahasa Malaysia session, coordinated by Sandra Dato, featured Dato' Domnic Selvam and licensed counsellor Raymund Jagan, who addressed safeguarding frameworks, reporting obligations and the core components of effective child protection policies. Participants gained a deeper understanding of safeguarding principles and their practical application.

The programme concluded with participants encouraged to sign the Diocese of Penang's Standards of Pastoral Conduct, last affirmed in 2022. In light of developments in local legislation and the Universal Guidelines Framework, the revised standards have now been expanded from 10 to 15. **Christopher Kushi**

Pilgrimage to pray for vocations



MELAKA: A group of 37 Catholics from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur recently made a pilgrimage to the historic Chapel of the Holy Infant Jesus, located within the grounds of SK Convent Infant Jesus 1 along Jalan Parameswara.

The pilgrims were warmly welcomed by Sr Betty, IJS, and chapel caretaker, Rachel Samuel. Built in 1859, the chapel's distinctive architecture — blending Baroque and Gothic elements with high, vaulted ceilings — left many in awe as they entered the sacred space. For several, it was their first visit, marked by moments of quiet reflection, reverence, and a deep sense of spiritual connection.

The pilgrimage was centred on prayer, particularly for vocations to the religious life, with a special intention to encourage young women to consider this calling. The group also sought to deepen their appreciation of the chapel's history and the enduring mission of the Sisters of the Infant Jesus in Malaysia, offering a love gift in

support of their work.

A group prayer session was held, accompanied by a reflection on sacrifice, drawing inspiration from the lives of the Infant Jesus Sisters who have dedicated themselves in service to God and society over generations. Pilgrims were encouraged to embrace personal sacrifice and to pray consistently for vocations. Sr Betty and Rachel joined in the prayers, fostering a shared spirit of faith and communion.

Sr Betty also spoke about her own vocation and the mission of her congregation, expressing concern over the declining number of religious vocations. She emphasised the importance of daily prayer, especially the Rosary, and frequent reception of the Eucharist as vital in nurturing a culture of vocation.

The visit concluded on a joyful note, with the presentation of a Rosary as a token of appreciation to Sr Betty and Rachel, followed by a group photograph — marking a grace-filled and memorable pilgrimage for all. **Bernard Anthony**

Divine Mercy across Malaysia

Shah Alam, Selangor

SHAH ALAM: The Divine Mercy Feast Day celebrations at the Church of the Divine Mercy (CDM) were nothing short of electrifying — an inspiring, soul-stirring journey that drew hearts deeply into the mystery of Easter. Anchored in the theme *Missionary Disciples of the Divine Mercy*, the celebrations reminded the faithful that no one is beyond God’s boundless mercy and that all are called to share it with the world.

Rooted in the archdiocese’s Lenten theme, *In the One, we are one*, the community journeyed into Easter with a renewed awareness that encountering Divine Mercy also means being sent forth as missionary disciples — witnesses to Christ’s Resurrection in word, action, and service.

From Good Friday to the Feast Day Mass on Sunday, April 12, the parish marked a transformative “Decade of Grace” — a nine-day novena that affirmed Mercy as a lived experience.

The celebrations began with the raising of the CDM flag, accompanied by powerful preaching

that invited the faithful to recognise God’s hand in every aspect of life — from suffering and family relationships to responsibility, faith, and hope. These reflections underscored that missionary discipleship begins with interior conversion and trust in Divine Mercy.

Early reflections highlighted that suffering, when united with Christ, becomes a gift never borne alone. Families were reminded that marriage is a grace entrusted by God, to be nurtured through prayer and mercy, especially amid modern challenges. In living out mercy at home, parishioners were encouraged to become missionary disciples first within their own families.

Scriptural reflections echoed Christ’s words, “No one can come to Me unless drawn by the Father,” and God’s promise to replace “a heart of stone” with “a heart of flesh,” emphasising that Divine Mercy transforms hearts and renews lives for mission.

The theme deepened through the “Jonah Experience — Mercy for the Reluctant,” which ex-

plored humanity’s tendency to flee responsibility. Through vivid imagery, preachers reminded the faithful that God’s mercy exceeds our own, calling all to let go of prejudice, trust in His patience, and cooperate with His desire that “none should perish.”

Each day of the “Decade of Grace” was marked by daily Masses accompanied by hymns and Eucharistic Adoration, allowing congregations to encounter Jesus in a deeply personal way. Praise and worship songs filled the church, as many opened their hearts to the Holy Spirit, allowing past hurts and disappointments to be washed away — often amid tears freely shed in moments of healing and surrender.

Special Masses for the sick, elderly and children reflected the parish’s commitment to ensuring that every member encounters the Risen Christ. These moments embodied missionary discipleship — bringing Divine Mercy to the most vulnerable with gratitude and praise.

The mission extended beyond the sanctuary. After daily Masses, the church grounds came alive



Fr Mark Michael incensing the Divine Mercy portrait.

with fellowship, shared meals and joyful praise. Led by the Feast Day Committee, with the BECCOT team and BECs, Mercy was lived out in vibrant community life. The much-anticipated CDM Concert further united the faithful in song and missionary joy.

As the week unfolded, the focus turned to Christ’s Resurrection — a reminder that His death and rising bring mercy in our brokenness and forgiveness in our weakness. A procession around the church reinforced the call to trust and persevere, while the role of the Holy Spirit as Advocate was highlighted as the One who guides and empowers believers.

The celebrations culminated in the 3.30pm Feast Day Mass on April 12, where Archbishop Julian Leow delivered a stirring message: God’s greatest act of mercy is the gift of His Son on the Cross — and those who encounter this mercy are sent forth as mission-

ary disciples to share it with the world.

The parish extends heartfelt gratitude to visiting preachers — Frs Antony Parankimalil VC, Xavier Andrew, Paul Cheong OFM Cap, Nalerin Erone, Mark Michael, Johnson Vijay Kumar, Stephen Ng CDD and Simon Labrooy — whose reflections broke open the Word throughout the week. Their teachings helped the faithful not only understand what we believe, but how to live the Resurrection daily as missionary disciples of Divine Mercy.

Though the nine-day novena has concluded, the “ocean of mercy” remains ever open. The Church of Divine Mercy, Shah Alam, continues to be a welcoming community — forming and sending missionary disciples who live the Easter message through faith, compassion and service. **BECCOT, CDM Shah Alam**



Fr George Harrison and Archbishop Julian Leow sprinkling holy water on the congregation.

Kota Kinabalu, Sabah

KOTA KINABALU: The celebration of the Feast of Divine Mercy at the Church of Divine Mercy, Kota Kinabalu Industrial Park (KKIP), was not only marked by prayer and devotion, but also by a renewed call for the faithful to live out mercy in their daily lives.

A deep atmosphere of prayer and joyful faith filled the church as hundreds gathered in unity to honour the boundless love and mercy of God. For many, the celebration was more than a spiritual gathering — it was an invitation to translate faith into action, to surrender their burdens to God’s mercy, and to reaffirm their trust through the prayer, “Jesus, I trust in You.”

In preparation for the feast, the community observed the nine-day Divine Mercy Novena, entering more deeply into reflection and prayer. The celebration reached its spiritual climax with the solemn Eucharistic celebration, where the main celebrant, Fr Jeffrey Gumu, reminded the con-

gregation that Divine Mercy is not merely a devotion, but a call to live differently.

“Divine Mercy must not remain only in prayer, but be lived out daily — through our actions, words, and prayers,” he said, echoing the message entrusted to St Faustina Kowalska.

The celebration was further enriched with activities that fostered fellowship and unity. A procession of the Divine Mercy image symbolised Christ’s presence among His people, while the blessing of devotional images held deep personal significance for many participants. The event concluded with a potluck gathering, reflecting the warm, family-like spirit of the Church community.

The feast concluded with a renewed commitment among the faithful to become bearers of hope and witnesses of God’s love in their daily lives, carrying the spirit of mercy into their homes, workplaces, and communities.



A community transformed by faith

Fara Diba Rosle

PAHANG: This year marked a deeply significant and grace-filled moment as three Kampung Asli settlements gathered for the first time to celebrate the Paschal Triduum together. These remarkable and moving celebrations took place in the newly founded Orang Asli community of the Jakun tribe in Kampung Kundang, located about 12 kilometres from Muadzam Shah and some 230 kilometres from Kuantan city.

For generations, the identity of the Orang Asli has been closely tied to animistic beliefs, reflecting a profound connection to nature, where rivers, forests, and

mountains hold spiritual importance within their worldview. Given this rich cultural and spiritual heritage, many ask: what has prompted such a remarkable shift towards the Christian faith? The answer can only be found in the quiet yet powerful act of God's grace, gently touching hearts and guiding them towards the fullness of truth.

The Easter celebrations this year bore powerful witness to this grace. During the Easter Vigil, 81 adult Elect received the Sacraments of Christian Initiation – Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. The following day, on Easter Sunday, 41 children were baptised. Altogether, 122 mem-

bers of the Orang Asli community publicly professed their faith in Jesus Christ, embracing Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6)

This sacred moment was the fruit of nine months of faithful, committed preparation that began in July 2025. Accompanied by patience and care, this community journeyed step by step towards full communion with the Catholic Church. Many among them had previously belonged to Protestant communities, but through prayer, discernment, and formation, they have now embraced the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, and become part of the Parish family of St Thomas the



The Orang Asli community gathering in prayer.

Apostle, Kuantan.

The Sacraments were administered by Fr George Packiasamy, parish priest of the Church of St Thomas the Apostle, as Kampung Kundang falls under his pastoral care. It was a moment of profound joy – not only for the newly baptised but also for the entire parish, as they witnessed the living work of the Holy Spirit.

This milestone would not have been achieved without the relentless efforts of the parish catechists and committed church members. Over recent months, they closely accompanied this community, teaching, guiding, and supporting them with patience and love. Through systematic catechesis, personal sharing, and ongoing support, they helped deepen the understanding of the faith and prepared the candidates to receive the sacraments meaningfully.

The celebration was truly enhanced by the Orang Asli communities from Kampung Batu 3, Rompin, and Kampung Bukit Serok. They participated not just

as spectators but also as sponsors and godparents, standing with the candidates and children in solidarity and faith. Their involvement represented a strengthening unity among the Orang Asli Catholics in Pahang, embracing the newly baptised into the broader Church family.

Despite the length of the liturgical celebrations, what stood out was the community's reverence and attentiveness. Seated humbly on the floor, they listened carefully, fully engaged with the rich signs, symbols, and rites that the celebrant explained. Their quiet devotion and openness reflected a genuine hunger for God and a deep respect for the sacred mysteries being celebrated.

The celebrations concluded with a joyful fellowship meal, generously provided by the parish of St Thomas on both Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday. It was a time of shared joy, laughter, and unity, a fitting expression of a new dawn of faith in Christ Jesus among the Orang Asli.



A weekend of rediscovery and renewal

KUALA LUMPUR: Marriage Encounter Sel/Wil held its first Marriage Encounter Weekend of the year, ME191, at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre from February 6 to 8. A total of 12 couples participated, taking time to rekindle the passion in their marriages, rediscover one another, and gain a renewed appreciation of the sacrament of Holy Matrimony.

Amid the demands of work and family life today, Marriage Encounter Weekends offer couples a much-needed opportunity to step away and focus entirely on one another. Beginning on Friday

evening, each session builds thoughtfully on the next, allowing couples to spend meaningful time reconnecting and rediscovering each other.

Throughout the weekend, the presenting couple and priest introduce practical tools and insights to help couples communicate more openly and engage more deeply in their relationship. Couples are encouraged to apply these tools to key areas of their marriage, enabling a deeper understanding of themselves and each other.

By the end of the weekend, many couples expressed a renewed ap-

preciation for their spouses and a deeper sense of connection. Several shared their gratitude for the experience and expressed a desire to encourage other couples to take part in the Marriage Encounter Weekend as well.

J & H, a couple from the Chapel of Kristus Aman in Kuala Lumpur, reflected, "The Marriage Encounter Weekend has opened many doors to true forgiveness, acceptance, meaningful conversations and reconciliation that once seemed impossible. Whatever attempts we made over the past decades led us back to the same place. Only through the ME tools, and the guidance of our presenters, have we been able to begin again with love, kindness and forgiveness."

Similarly, Anthony and Victoria, from the Church of St Anthony,

expressed their gratitude: "We are thankful for the Marriage Encounter Weekend, as it gave us the space to reconnect and strengthen our communication as a couple. The sessions helped us see our marriage from a fresh perspective, and we left feeling renewed in love and commitment. It was a meaningful and uplifting experience that we would encourage other couples to take part in."

For many couples, the tools learned during the weekend enabled them to enrich their relationship and explore their feelings more deeply. Benjamin and Elizabeth, from Jesus Caritas parish, shared, "The Marriage Encounter Weekend provided a welcoming space for us to open up honestly, supported by dialogue and the lived experiences of the

presenters. It helped us to better express, understand and respond to each other's inner feelings and needs. We are truly grateful and blessed to have attended this enriching weekend."

The Marriage Encounter movement remains an integral ministry, offering transformative experiences that strengthen and enrich marriages, while helping couples grow in faith and love within a supportive community. All married couples are encouraged to attend the Marriage Encounter Weekend, which helps make good marriages even better.

For details on upcoming ME Weekends, please contact James at 019-3562321 or Mandy at 012-3718756 or email us at www.mesehwil@archkl.org to register.



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Pakistanis pray for peace

RAWALPINDI: The Catholic Church in Pakistan held a nationwide day of prayer on April 11, in solidarity with high-level peace talks between the United States and Iran taking place in Islamabad.

The initiative followed an appeal by Pope Leo XIV in his *Urbi et Orbi* message, calling for global prayer to end conflicts.

In Rawalpindi, Archbishop Joseph Arshad led clergy, religious and laity in a prayer service at the Cathedral of St Joseph, urging leaders to recognise a shared humanity beyond political divisions. The faithful took part in a symbolic “procession of lights,” placing candles around a central dove as a sign of peace.

Across the country, similar initiatives unfolded. In the Diocese of Hyderabad, Bishop Samson

Shukardin presided over a Holy Hour at the Cathedral of St Francis Xavier, where prayers for world leaders were offered alongside the Prayer of Peace of St Francis of Assisi. Parishes continued these intentions into Divine Mercy Sunday, integrating petitions for reconciliation into their liturgies.

At the grassroots level, families and small communities also responded. In Lahore, the family of Mishal Maria, associated with the Focolare Movement, hosted a home-based Holy Hour, inviting neighbours of different backgrounds to join in prayer — a simple yet powerful witness to interfaith harmony.

Youth participation was strong. In Gujranwala, Fr Francis Gulzar led Eucharistic Adoration attended by hundreds of young people, who later

pledged to become ambassadors of peace in their communities. A similar gathering took place in Sialkot, where Fr. Ashraf Gill led prayers at St James Catholic Church, with support from the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP), highlighting the Church’s ongoing role in promoting social justice and advocacy.

In Karachi, CCJP diocesan coordinator Kashif Anthony organised a silent vigil for victims of war, with participants committing to foster religious harmony and continue daily Holy Hours during this period of tension.

Formation houses and religious communities also joined the effort. Fr Cecil Paul, OMI, led Eucharistic Adoration at the Oblate Juniorate, incorporating the peace intention

into the formation of future Church leaders. Meanwhile, the Daughters of St Paul in Lahore used media platforms to circulate prayer resources, extending the initiative beyond physical gatherings.

Women’s groups played their part as well. Sr Genevieve Ramlal of the Pakistan Catholic Women Organisation led efforts to establish “Peace Circles” in neighbourhoods — small support networks aimed at fostering unity and assisting families in distress.

Held at the close of the Easter Octave, the nationwide initiative reflected a united response by the Church in Pakistan — combining prayer, witness and action — as it stood in solidarity with efforts towards peace and reconciliation in the region. **RVA**



China’s ban on minors in church violates human rights

MILAN: Increasing state pressure on Catholic communities in China violates international human rights standards, according to a new report by Human Rights Watch.

Titled *China: Increasing Pressure on Catholics*, the report examines developments since the 2018 agreement between the Holy See and Beijing on the appointment of bishops, arguing that the deal has been used to tighten control over religious life.

Drawing on testimonies from clergy, lay Catholics and experts, the report highlights growing restrictions under President Xi Jinping’s policy of “sinicisation,” which seeks to align religious practice with state ideology.

A key concern is the pressure placed on “underground” Catholic communities that have refused to register with state-controlled bodies such as the Patriotic Association. According to the report, some communities have faced church demolitions, removal of crosses, and arrests, leaving members with little choice but to join the official Church.

The report also raises alarm over increasing restrictions on children’s participation in religious activities. Since the 2018 revision of religious regulations, authorities have tightened enforcement of bans on minors attending church services or receiving religious education.

Cases cited include the closure of a church in Henan province for allowing minors to participate in music activities, and directives discouraging parents from providing religious instruction at home. Experts warn such measures aim to weaken generational continuity within the Catholic community.

Human Rights Watch argues that these policies violate international legal frameworks, including Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on freedom of religion, as well as provisions related to children’s rights and education.

The report concludes that nearly a decade after the launch of the “sinicisation” campaign, religious freedom for Catholics in China has significantly deteriorated. It calls on Beijing to end restrictions on independent religious practice and urges the Holy See to reassess its agreement with China. **AsiaNews**

Church urges truth over misinformation

JALANDHAR: Catholic communicators in India have called for greater responsibility in countering hostility and misinformation in the media, emphasising truth, credibility and interreligious dialogue as essential to building peace.

Seventy-two media professionals from 12 regions gathered for the SIGNIS India assembly at Gianodaya Pastoral Centre from April 13–16 under the theme *Whispers of Hope: Communicating Peace, Growing Together, Building Futures*.

The meeting responded to the late Pope Francis’ World Communications Day message, reflecting on the challenges facing both Church and society while outlining priorities for the year ahead.

In a joint statement, delegates expressed “deep concern” over violence against marginalised communities, particularly repeated attacks on Christian minorities and the destruction of churches in parts of the country.

They also warned against the misuse of media platforms that



spread fake news, violent content and derogatory material, especially among young people.

While acknowledging the growing role of artificial intelligence, participants stressed the need for media literacy and guidance for digitally immersed youth. “This will enable them to transform confusion into clarity, and challenges into a vision for a purposeful future,” the statement said.

Reaffirming their mission, the communicators pledged to promote truth and credibility in reporting. They committed to countering hostility in the media with “a mes-

sage of hope grounded in social reality and personal integrity.”

Interreligious dialogue was highlighted as a cornerstone of peace-building, with delegates stressing the need for collaboration across communities to foster mutual respect and unity.

The assembly also recognised the vital role of women in promoting peace and bearing witness to the Gospel, calling for greater space to share stories of resilience and courage.

Participants further committed to responsible engagement with digital media and artificial intelligence,

including amplifying marginalised voices while exercising discernment and care.

Inspired by testimonies shared during the gathering, SIGNIS India resolved to deepen faith formation, strengthen lay involvement in dialogue, and develop digital safeguarding policies.

The four-day assembly concluded with a renewed commitment to ethical communication, positioning Catholic media professionals as advocates for peace, integrity and hope in an increasingly complex digital landscape. **Matters India**

Divine Mercy shrine launches ‘mobile confession’

MANILA: A shrine dedicated to the Divine Mercy in the Philippines is bringing the Sacrament of Reconciliation closer to the faithful through their mobile confes-

sion project.

The National Shrine of the Divine Mercy in the Diocese of Malolos has launched “Mobile Kumpisalan” on April 8 by making its first

stop at the Malolos Cathedral.

Fr Alvin Pila, the shrine rector, rode a white van bearing the image of the Divine Mercy and heard confessions through its window.

In an interview with *Radio Veritas Asia*, Fr Pila described this initiative as their active response to the Synodal call of the late Pope Francis.

“We hope to bring the Sacrament of Confession directly to the faithful who cannot go to Church because of hectic daily schedules, or are having doubts about receiving confession in their own parishes,” he said.

He also said this project will help promote devotion to the Divine Mercy.

The mobile confession remained at the Malolos Cathedral for almost three hours and heard the confessions of 15 individuals.

“They were grateful to receive confession even now that the Holy



The National Shrine of the Divine Mercy in the Diocese of Malolos launched the ‘Mobile Kumpisalan’ on April 8, 2026. (Photo: The National Shrine and Parish of the Divine Mercy Philippines)

Singapore warns: Trade chokepoints must remain open

SINGAPORE: Singapore has issued a stark warning that disruptions at key maritime chokepoints could trigger far-reaching global economic and humanitarian consequences, as tensions in the Strait of Hormuz refocus attention on the vulnerability of vital trade routes.

Speaking in Parliament recently, Singapore's Foreign Minister, Vivian Balakrishnan, stressed that freedom of navigation must be upheld as a fundamental right. "It is not a privilege," he said, cautioning that access to global shipping lanes should nei-

ther be restricted nor subject to tolls.

The concern extends beyond Hormuz to the Strait of Malacca — one of the world's busiest and most strategic waterways. Singapore's Coordinating Minister for National Security, K. Shanmugam, warned that no state should be allowed to control or selectively restrict passage through such routes, noting that the strait's narrow width makes it particularly vulnerable to disruption.

Nearly a third of the world's oil — about 29 per cent — passes through the Malacca and Singapore straits,

along with a significant share of global trade linking Asia with Europe and North America. Any prolonged blockage would disrupt supply chains, affecting industries from manufacturing to semiconductors and essential consumer goods.

For Singapore, the risks are immediate. The city-state relies entirely on these sea lanes for its energy needs, while its maritime sector supports over 170,000 jobs and contributes about seven per cent of gross domestic product.

The vulnerability of these choke-

points has long been recognised, particularly by China, which has sought to reduce its reliance on the Strait of Malacca through alternative pipelines and strategic port investments across Asia and beyond.

The issue underscores the fragility of an interconnected world. While the Vatican has not issued a direct statement on maritime chokepoints, Pope Leo XIV has repeatedly called for restraint amid rising global tensions, warning against actions that could escalate conflict and harm ordinary people.

Catholic social teaching likewise emphasises that global systems — including trade networks — must serve the common good. In this context, safeguarding open sea lanes is not only a strategic necessity but a moral responsibility, ensuring that essential goods and resources continue to reach those who depend on them.

As geopolitical tensions persist, Singapore's message is clear: keeping trade routes open is critical not just for economies, but for the stability and well-being of nations worldwide. **Agencies**

In the footsteps of St Augustine

ANNABA, Algeria: Pope Leo XIV celebrated Mass at the Basilica of St Augustine on April 14, marking a deeply personal moment during his apostolic journey as he retraced the footsteps of the great Church Father in North Africa.

Preaching at the basilica built near the site where St Augustine died nearly 1,600 years ago, the Pope urged the faithful to remain rooted in faith and witness through charity. "Here St Augustine loved his flock, seeking the truth and serving Christ with ardent faith," he said, calling Christians to be "heirs to this tradition."

Describing himself as a "son of Augustine," the Pope reflected on the saint's journey of conversion,

emphasising that Augustine is remembered not only for his wisdom, but for his transformation from a restless seeker into one of Christianity's greatest witnesses.

Quoting from *Confessions*, he pointed to the enduring relevance of Augustine's search for truth and his reliance on God's grace. He also recalled the role of St Monica, whose perseverance in prayer accompanied her son's conversion.

Before the Mass, the Pope visited the nearby ruins of Hippo Regius, where Augustine served as bishop until his death in 430. Despite the rain, he laid a wreath, planted an olive tree and paused in silent prayer at the ancient site, underscoring the spiritual significance of the visit.

The celebration marked a key moment in the second day of the Pope's visit to Algeria, part of his wider journey across four African nations.

Addressing the small Catholic community in Algeria — a country where Christians are a minority — Pope Leo XIV offered words of encouragement. "You remain a humble and faithful sign of Christ's love in this land," he said, likening their presence to "incense" that brings comfort and hope to others.

The Mass reflected the diversity of the local Church, with readings proclaimed in Arabic, English and French, highlighting its international character.

Throughout his ministry, Pope Leo XIV has frequently drawn on St Au-



Pope Leo XIV holds a painting after celebrating Mass at the Basilica of St Augustine in Annaba, Algeria, April 14, 2026. (OSV News photo/Simone Risoluti, Vatican Media)

gustine's writings, often pointing to them as a guide for prayer and spiritual life. During the trip, he again recommended *Confessions* as a starting point for those seeking to deepen their faith.

The visit to Annaba not only honoured the legacy of one of Christianity's greatest theologians, but also reaffirmed the enduring call to conversion, faith and witness in today's world. **OSV News**

Philippine bishop highlights loneliness among ageing priests

MANILA: A Filipino bishop has warned that loneliness and neglect remain pressing yet often overlooked challenges among ageing priests, even as many continue to serve faithfully in their later years.

Speaking during a retreat on April 7, Julito Buhisan Cortes, bishop of Dumaguete and chairman of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines' commission for retired, sick and elderly priests, stressed that care for senior clergy must remain a pastoral priority.

He noted that while retired priests may no longer be in the public eye, their mission endures. "Attention to our most lonely and isolated brothers cannot be considered less important," he said, echoing a reflection by Pope Leo XIV.

Bishop Cortes acknowledged the emotional toll of priestly life, including experiences of misunderstanding, isolation and the impact of crises that have shaken trust in the

Church. Yet he emphasised that a priest's vocation continues beyond active ministry, rooted in a lifelong commitment to serve.

This quiet perseverance is reflected in the life of Fr Cenon Viaña Garcia of Oriental Mindoro, who marked 50 years in the priesthood on April 10, coinciding with his 78th birthday.

A native of Lubang, Fr Garcia was ordained in 1976 and served across several parishes in Mindoro, including Victoria, Naujan, Puerto Galera and Calapan. Known for his steady leadership, he was the first diocesan priest appointed parish priest in Puerto Galera and helped nurture emerging communities that later grew into full parishes.

Rather than step back from ministry, he chose to deepen his spiritual life through the Focolare Movement in the early 1990s, strengthening his commitment to unity and renewal. **RVA**



Heralds of the Gospel ordain 26 priests after Vatican restrictions lifted



BRAZIL: The Heralds of the Gospel have ordained 26 new priests in what is being seen as a significant moment of renewal following the lifting of Vatican-imposed restrictions on the movement.

The ordination took place on April 12 at the Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary in Caieiras, in Greater São Paulo, and was conferred by Raymundo Damasceno Assis, Archbishop Emeritus of Aparecida, in the presence of bishops, clergy and a large gathering of the faithful.

The ceremony marked the culmination of years of philosophical, theological and spiritual formation for candidates drawn from across Latin America and Europe, including Brazil, Spain, Portugal, Argentina, Colombia and Peru. The international composition reflects the movement's global mission,

with priests often assigned beyond their home countries.

The Heralds of the Gospel, founded in 2001, have steadily expanded their pastoral and missionary outreach, with priests engaged in sacramental ministry, youth formation, retreats and family accompaniment. The movement is also known for its emphasis on liturgical solemnity, sacred music and evangelisation through culture.

The latest ordinations are particularly significant in light of restrictions imposed in 2019 by the Vatican's Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, which included a prohibition on priestly ordinations. While no detailed explanation has been publicly provided regarding the lifting of these measures, the resumption of ordinations signals a shift in the movement's standing.

A day earlier, on April 11, the same basilica hosted the ordination of 31 deacons belonging to the clerical branch associated with the Heralds, the Society of Apostolic Life Virgo Flos Carmeli. Together, the two ceremonies point to a renewed effort to strengthen clerical formation after several years of uncertainty.

Church observers note that the developments suggest a period of stabilisation and renewed confidence for the movement, which operates in numerous countries and collaborates with dioceses in pastoral and missionary initiatives.

For members of the Heralds, the ordinations represent not only personal milestones, but also a sign of continuity in their mission — reaffirming their commitment to evangelisation, formation and service to the wider Church. **Zenit**

Many priests suffer in silence

BANGKOK: A Jesuit leader has warned that growing priestly burnout is a “hidden crisis” in the Church, urging clergy to confront what he described as a “sacred weariness”, rather than ignore it.

Fr Miguel A. Garaizabal, SJ, regional superior of the Thailand Jesuit Region, delivered the reflection during a week-long annual retreat for clergy of the Archdiocese of Bangkok, framing exhaustion not as failure but as a spiritual condition that can lead to renewal.

Drawing from the post-Easter season and the realities of pastoral life, he said fatigue can become a place of encounter with Christ rather than a sign of weakness. “Our fatigue is precious in the eyes of Jesus, who embraces and sustains us,” he said, stressing that fruitful ministry depends not only on dedication but also on how priests rest and relate to God.

“Learning how to rest is difficult,” he added. “It requires trust and the humility to

recognise that we, too, are sheep in need of the Shepherd.”

His reflection comes as Pope Leo XIV has designated April 2026 as a month of prayer for priests facing vocational crises or deep loneliness, urging the faithful to accompany clergy spiritually and emotionally rather than view them merely as functionaries.

Fr Miguel noted that many of the deepest wounds among priests do not arise from major failures, but from the quiet accumulation of daily struggles — serving without affirmation, giving without being understood, and carrying unseen burdens.

“Many priests are surrounded by people all day, yet no one truly knows how they feel,” he said. “The heaviest loneliness is not being alone, but feeling that no one understands what we carry.”

He pointed to Christ’s own weariness, noting that Jesus did not hide His suffering but expressed it openly. Such honesty before God, he said, is the beginning of healing.

Reflections shared by Fr Natthapol Iamsetthee indicated that the message resonated deeply with participants, highlighting a reality often hidden beneath expectations placed on clergy.

He observed that burnout is not only the result of heavy workloads but also of deeper imbalances — including neglect of prayer, lack of self-understanding, absence of genuine friendships, and a tendency to prioritise ministry over one’s relationship with God. Over time, these can lead to discouragement, emptiness, and even doubts about one’s vocation.

“Many priests do not seek success or recognition,” Fr Natthapol said. “They simply long for someone who listens, understands, and loves them as they are.”

Fr Miguel also addressed priests in midlife, describing this stage not as a crisis but as an “awakening of the heart,” where deeper questions about vocation and meaning emerge. Such questions, he said, can be-



Our priests pour themselves out daily. But without renewal, even the strongest can feel like they are disappearing.

come moments of grace leading to renewal.

Rather than proposing more activity, he encouraged priests to return to the essentials — rediscovering God, rebuilding relationships, and restoring balance.

“Ultimately, a priest is not someone who never gets tired,” he said, “but someone who continues walking with God, trusting that his strength flows from God’s enduring faithfulness.” **LiCAS News**

Weekend Masses halted at 84 parishes

IOWA: In response to a shortage of priests and declining Mass attendance, the Archdiocese of Dubuque has announced that 84 parishes across northeastern Iowa will cease weekend Masses beginning this summer, as part of an ongoing reorganisation.

The restructuring process, which began in September 2024, has now entered its final phase. Under the new plan, the archdiocese will be reorganised into 24 “pastorates” — clusters of parishes that will share clergy, resources, and ministries. While some parishes will no longer hold regular weekend Masses, church buildings will remain open for other liturgical celebrations such as weddings, funerals, and weekday Masses.

The archdiocese, home to about 182,000 Catholics, currently has only one priest for every two parishes. With just 85 active priests — a number expected to decline further — the reorganisation aims to ensure sustainable pastoral care while preventing clergy burnout.

Archbishop Thomas Zinkula said the decision was shaped by “extensive data” gathered from parishes across the archdiocese. Statistics show that Mass attendance has dropped by 46 per cent over the past two decades, while Catholic marriages have declined by more than half and infant baptisms by 22 per cent.

“Like many dioceses across the country, we are facing sobering realities,” he said, adding that such changes reflect broader shifts rather than failure. “Change in the life of the Church has always called the faithful to deeper trust.”

Similar restructuring efforts have been undertaken in other dioceses in the United States, including St Louis, Detroit, and Seattle, as Church leaders respond to changing demographics and fewer clergy.

Among the affected communities is Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Cedar Rapids, founded in 1858 and the city’s first Catholic parish. Its pastor, Fr

Aaron Junge, acknowledged the pain felt by parishioners but also pointed to signs of hope.

“My people are still in a state of shock, as well as grief, but I have also seen a willingness to consider what new realities God may be inviting us to,” he said.

He expressed hope that parishioners would come together within the new pastorate to form a stronger, united community centred on the Eucharist and mission.

Archbishop Zinkula also acknowledged the emotional weight of the changes, noting that parish churches hold deep memories of faith across generations. However, he emphasised that the sacrifices of those who built these communities endure through the Church’s continuing mission.

He urged the faithful to remain united and to journey forward with courage and trust, expressing confidence that the reorganisation would ultimately bear fruit for the Church’s future. **EWTN**

Building mission-driven parishes for the future

COLORADO: The renewal of parish life remains central to the future of the Catholic Church in the United States, even as major initiatives such as the 2024 National Eucharistic Congress draw national attention.



The Congress, preceded by a two-month Eucharistic Pilgrimage covering more than 6,500 miles, was widely seen as a moment of spiritual renewal. However, Church leaders stress that lasting change depends on vibrant local parishes.

Tim Glemkowski, CEO of the Congress and Executive Director of Amazing Parish, said the Church continues to face challenges including fewer priests, declining Mass attendance, and shrinking communities.

“At Amazing Parish, we accompany leaders on the front lines,” he said, noting the organisation has worked with more than 1,100 pastors in parish renewal efforts.

Founded over a decade ago, Amazing Parish supports pastors and leadership teams in building mission-driven communities rooted in prayer, leadership, and discipleship. Its recent white paper, *Rebuild My Church: A Call for Renewal*, outlines key principles to reshape parish culture with a focus on evangelisation and intentional leadership.

Glemkowski described the present as a “missionary moment,” noting that many parish structures were shaped for a cultural context that no longer exists. Renewal, he said, is not about programmes but about leadership, culture, and spiritual depth.

He also emphasised the role of the laity, calling for a shift from assigning internal roles to empowering the faithful to live their baptismal mission in the wider world. In healthy parishes, lay people share responsibility for the Church’s mission, while pastors guide and form them, fostering genuine communion.

While digital tools can aid evangelisation, he noted that parishes must remain places of authentic, personal encounter.

Amazing Parish will host a leadership summit from August 3 to 5, 2026, in Houston, Texas, aimed at equipping leaders with practical tools and renewed vision. **Crux**

Barbed wire ‘Cross of Peace’ to symbolise Korean reconciliation

SEOUL: A striking symbol of reconciliation will accompany World Youth Day (WYD) 2027 in Seoul, as the Archdiocese of Seoul unveils plans for a “Cross of Peace” crafted from discarded barbed wire taken from the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) separating North and South Korea.

The five-metre-high cross, formed from materials once used to divide, seeks to transform a symbol of conflict into one of hope, prayer, and unity. It will be presented to young people from around the world during WYD 2027 and is expected to be blessed by the Pope.

According to the archdiocese, the initiative aims to encourage young people to turn signs of division into instruments of reconciliation — not only in society, but also in their personal lives.

The project was highlighted on April 12 during a special blessing ceremony led by Archbishop Peter Soon-taick Chung of Seoul, who also chairs the WYD Organising Committee. The event brought together young volunteers and members of the Together Walking Foundation, which initiated the project and previously organised a travelling exhibition featuring similar works.

At the heart of the initiative is the careful transformation of barbed wire into a cross through a hands-on, communal process. The work, carried out in the courtyard of Myeongdong Cathedral, is expected to continue until April 2027.



Archbishop Peter Chung Soon-taick of Seoul (left) and Bishop Paul Lee take part in a demonstration of hammering and straightening barbed wire for the ‘Barbed Wire Cross Project’ in the premises of Myeongdong Cathedral in Seoul on April 12, 2026. (Photo/Archdiocese of Seoul)

In his address, Archbishop Chung reflected on the painful symbolism of the barbed wire that lines the Korean border, a reminder of division and conflict on the peninsula. He drew parallels with the Christian understanding of the Cross, once an instrument of suffering that became a sign of love and redemption.

“Just as the cross became a symbol of peace and reconciliation through Christ, we pray that this cross may take root in our hearts as a sign of peace, love, and unity,” he said.

Each week, volunteers gather to shape and weave the wire into the structure, combining

manual work with moments of prayer and reflection. Participants are invited to consider both personal and societal wounds, while praying for healing and peace.

The initiative has drawn participation from parish communities, youth groups, and individuals from various sectors of society, reflecting its wider aim of fostering reconciliation and social unity.

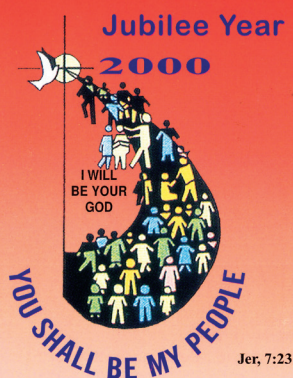
Organisers hope the “Cross of Peace” will stand as a powerful witness that, even from division and suffering, new life and harmony can emerge. **Agencies**



From vision to action

What began as a moment of reflection at PMPC II soon unfolded into a journey of renewal — as the Church moved from ideas on paper to concrete steps in mission and communion. In this 14th instalment tracing the stories, people and milestones of the Catholic Church in Malaysia, we see how vision gradually took shape in action, collaboration and a renewed way of being Church.

Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Convention II
30th August - 2nd September 1996
Majodi Centre, Plentong, Johor



Towards....
"A New Way of Being Church in Malaysia"

Richard Chia

At the close of the 1996 Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Convention II (PMPC II), there was a palpable sense that something significant had taken place — not just an event, but the beginning of a journey. The deliberations and decisions of the delegates were carefully compiled into a booklet, produced in English, Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese and Tamil, as both a record and a roadmap for the Church moving forward.

The English edition, with its distinctive pinkish-red cover, soon earned a name of its own — affectionately known as “The Red Book”, a symbol of both reflection and direction for the Church in Peninsular Malaysia.

Yet beyond the pages of the booklet, the voices of the participants revealed a deeper reality. There was enthusiasm, yes — but also a growing awareness that the Church needed to move from discussion to direction, from vision to implementation.

Among the observations offered was a clear and consistent call for a more systematic and strategic approach to pastoral planning. Auxiliary Bishop Bosco Penha of Mumbai, an invited guest, was struck by the strong presence of the laity. “The sheer number of lay faithful gathered here shows a strong lay participation in the life of the Church,” he noted, recognising both their determination and commitment. Yet he also pointed to what was needed next: a structured approach, supported by a dedicated secretariat, to ensure that the fruits of the convention would not remain ideas on paper, but become lived realities.

Closer to home, the late Fr Peter Bretaudeau,



Some of the members of the Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Team.

MEP, reflected candidly on the experience. While affirming the overall value of the convention, he noted certain gaps — particularly in the final stages of discussion. “I felt that the inputs on the last day were a bit out of point,” he observed, adding his hope that there would be meaningful follow-up. For him, the real task lay ahead: building consensus on priorities, ministries and structures at the diocesan level.

The voices of the laity added another important dimension. Participants from non-English-speaking communities expressed concern that language remained a barrier to full participation. Some noted that translations of talks were inadequate, limiting their ability to engage fully with the discussions. Others pointed out that many formation programmes seemed to cater primarily to clergy, religious and English-speaking groups. One Tamil-speaking participant expressed this with quiet urgency, lamenting that translations into Tamil, Chinese and Bahasa Malaysia appeared to be neglected.

There were also calls for broader inclusivity. A participant highlighted the limited representation of the indigenous Catholic community, reminding the Church that even minority voices must be heard if the vision of a truly participatory Church is to be realised.

Taken together, these reflections offered more than critique — they revealed a Church awakening to its own identity: participatory, diverse, and seeking greater coherence. The Red Book captured the vision, but the voices of the people pointed to the work that still lay ahead.

Formation of the Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Team (PMPT)

The echoes of PMPC II did not fade with the closing of the convention. Instead, they stirred a quiet but determined response. The call for clearer direction, stronger coordination and faithful implementation could not be ignored. The Church recognised that vision alone was not enough — it needed structure, continuity and leadership to bring that vision to life.

In response, the three bishops of Peninsular Malaysia took a decisive step. On December 1, 1996, the Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Team (PMPT) was formally established, with the bishops of the three dioceses serving as its chairpersons. It marked a significant shift — from consultation to coordination, from reflection to action.

The initial core team comprised 20 members — clergy, religious and lay faithful drawn from across the three dioceses. This composition itself reflected one of the key insights of PMPC II: that the Church must journey together, with shared responsibility among all its members.

Building on the work of the PMPC II Organising Team, the PMPT was entrusted with a clear and challenging mandate. It was to translate the Vision and Mission of the Church in Peninsular Malaysia into concrete strategies, programmes and pastoral initiatives. In many ways, it became the bridge between aspiration and implementation — ensuring that the spirit of the convention would take root in the lived reality of the Church.

At the same time, the PMPT was given another important responsibility: to guide the local Church in its preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. This added a sense of urgency and purpose, as the Church looked not only inward in renewal, but forward in hope.

As the work of the PMPT grew, so too did the need for a more structured support system. In 1998, the Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Secretariat (PMPS) was established to serve the team. More than an administrative body, the Secretariat became the nerve centre of coordination — linking the three dioceses, facilitating collaboration, and ensuring that communication flowed effectively across commissions and ministries.

Through the preparation of meeting minutes, reports and ongoing correspondence, the PMPS helped sustain the momentum that began with PMPC II. Together, the PMPT and PMPS embodied a Church learning to move not in isolation, but in communion — organised, intentional and united in mission.

Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Assembly (PMPA), January 1997

The momentum generated by PMPC II did not go unnoticed. Yet there was also a growing awareness that a ten-year gap between conventions was simply too long. If the vision of a renewed Church was to take root, it required more regular reflection, evaluation and direction.

In response, the Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Team (PMPT) proposed a new way forward — smaller, more focused gatherings known as the Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Assemblies (PMPA). These assemblies would serve as consultative and advisory platforms to the bishops, while fostering inter-diocesan collaboration and ensuring that the Church’s pastoral vision remained both alive and actionable.

The first PMPA was convened in January

1997 for three days at the Infant Jesus Convent in Cheras, Kuala Lumpur. It brought together 82 leaders — bishops, clergy, religious and lay faithful — reflecting the Church’s commitment to shared responsibility and participation.

The assembly became a moment of honest reflection. Participants revisited the proposals of PMPC I and II, explored the call to build Basic Ecclesial Communities, and discerned concrete directions for renewal. The focus moved beyond theory, emphasising formation and ministries of pastoral care as key priorities for the local Church.

Yet alongside hope came a sobering realisation — the journey forward had not begun as widely or as deeply as hoped.

Auxiliary Bishop Murphy Pakiam, then chairman of the PMPT Core Group, addressed this reality candidly: “The parishes should have already started on their pastoral plan, in the spirit of the Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Convention II (PMPC II) theme, *A New Way of Being Church*”, he said.

“But based on the feedback obtained from the participants at the PMPA held recently, we have discovered that not many parishes have moved forward. Some are still in the dark after the PMPC II,” he added.

“One way to come out of this darkness is to engage in collaborative ministry, especially at the district levels. A collaborative pastoral team made of clergy, religious and laity will study needs, plan and implement pastoral plans together. They will also be responsible for the church mission in the district. Thus, they will be able to help parishes that are lagging behind or need help. This proposal is one of the attempts to rectify the weaknesses in the mechanisms for implementing the vision of the Church in Peninsular Malaysia.”

His words were not merely an observation, but a call to action — urging the Church to move from intention to implementation through greater collaboration and shared responsibility.

The assembly also affirmed key guiding documents — *Towards a New Way of Being Church in Malaysia* and *The Strategic Pastoral Planning for the Church in Peninsular Malaysia (Study Document)* — first presented at PMPC II. These texts now took on renewed significance as the Church sought to translate vision into lived reality.

In many ways, the first PMPA marked an important turning point. It was not simply about reviewing the past, but about recognising the challenges ahead — and responding with clarity, collaboration and renewed commitment.



The first Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Assembly was held in January 1997 at the IJ Convent in Cheras.

We've all been there: trapped on a bad date, inventing creative excuses just to escape before the food arrives. I've had my share of those moments, counting the seconds until I could bolt for the door. When I finally made my exit, nobody batted an eyelid. After all, the freedom to leave a place where you feel uncomfortable is a basic human right.

Yet, when a friend of mine tried to escape a similar discomfort, the world reacted differently. He felt imprisoned; he had no friends nearby and no meaningful way to fill his days. Like me, he wanted out. The difference? He couldn't leave. He is living with dementia. His very basic desire to leave the uncomfortable space made him an escaper or eloper, and at times, he was locked up in his room and, sometimes, even restrained.

The myth of "acceptable" care

What do we make of a world where people are forced into "activities" that feel foreign to their life's work? Why would we expect a businessman who has never been to a kitchen all his life to be interested in making cookies all of a sudden? How many of us would stay calm while a stranger assisted us in our most personal acts — standing naked, being touched in intimate areas, being told when to sleep, what to eat, and when to eat?

While this is unthinkable to us, we expect it to be "acceptable" for them, simply because of a diagnosis. We expect a retired professor to suddenly be content colouring



Dancing with Dementia

Dr Cecilia Chan

What makes us human?

in pages with pencils just because he has dementia. When he resists, we label it "challenging behaviour" and "resisting care".

A lifelong physician friend of ours was recently assessed by a much younger doctor using the Mini Mental State Exam. He felt humiliated, insulted, and deeply hurt by what he experienced as a clinical interrogation. Can we blame him? Wouldn't you feel the same in his shoes? How does a diagnosis reduce a respected doctor to "just an uncle"? The same man who appeared "agitated" during the assessment was calm, warm, and friendly with us. We treated him with respect, calling him "Doctor." Beyond medicine, he has many talents: he became our Tai Chi instructor, and he is an amazing tenor. We sang a duet of his favourite song, *Blue Spanish Eyes*, and everyone was moved by his deep, powerful voice. He even hugged me at the end, despite my poor singing. If dementia causes agitation and aggression, why wasn't he that way with us? It seems obvious: people respond to how they are treated.

The traditional paradigm of care is often reduced to "management" — a clinical cocktail of control, containment, and pharmacology. We treat behaviours instead of the person behind them, desperate to force them back into our own comfort zone.

Recently, at our pop-up café run by

people living with dementia (the *Forgotten Mutiara Café*), June (not her real name) was interviewed by a reporter from *The Star*. The reporter wanted to know what makes this place so special and her experience contributing to the pop-up café. Her reply both touched and shattered me. She said, "Here, I am being treated like a human being. Outside, people treat me like an idiot, like I am stupid. Here, I don't worry about repeating myself or saying something wrong. Here, I can finally breathe. Here I can relax and be myself."

It is devastating that "being treated like a human" has become a luxury. Once labelled with dementia, a person is often demoted to a lower class of citizen. We fear this diagnosis not just because of the cognitive changes, but because we know the label has the power to destroy our social standing.

A week after the *Forgotten Mutiara Café* event, I had a Zoom meeting with someone who considers herself an expert in aged care. She wanted to know more about our *Forgotten Mutiara Café*. She was shocked to learn that at the *Forgotten Mutiara Café*, we don't hand-pick "well-behaved" clients. To her, dementia is a condition to be managed with locks and restraints — a storm of aggression that must be controlled.

To my team and me, there is no such thing as an "aggressive" client; there are only people with fundamental needs that have been ignored or disrespected. It broke my heart to hear a professional speak of human

beings as problems to be contained. When we treat people like prisoners, they lose their voices; when we welcome them into our community, they find their dignity. No wonder the world fears this condition — not because of the condition itself, but because of the way we choose to forget the person

The choice before us

The truth is, very few people with dementia can manage entirely on their own — but to be brutally honest, none of us can. We are a species defined by our interdependence. We are all parts of families, couples, and social circles.

Dementia forces a choice upon us. When we meet someone who perceives the world differently — someone who cannot contribute to the "productivity" of a material society — we must decide: *do we accept their personhood, or do we discard it?*

If we choose to see them, we must admit that our current definition of "human" is dangerously narrow. It is a view that privileges the "choosing consumer" while framing 80 million human beings as a "burden" on the economy.

We have to ask ourselves: by 2040, will we still be managing 80 million "burdens," or will we finally broaden our hearts to understand what it truly means to be human?

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

In every parish in Malaysia, there are moms and dads quietly carrying the weight of separation and divorce. They sit in our pews, stand at the back after Mass, or drift away altogether — not because they have lost faith, but because they are unsure whether the Church still has a place for them. Their suffering is rarely visible, rarely discussed, and often unintentionally overlooked.

Psychological research leaves little doubt that parental separation places children at higher risk of emotional and behavioural difficulties. In my experience of doing sessions with school counsellors, teachers and students in Malaysia, the primary risk-factor for child problems in schools are broken family systems — families with high conflict and emotional turmoil and/or where the needs of children are set aside or even neglected.

Across the United States and Australia, approximately four-in-10 marriages end in divorce, meaning, millions of Christian parents are raising children across divided households. In Asia, large scale international research shows that family instability is increasing as societies urbanise and experience economic pressure. While official statistics report figures averaging around 15,000 divorces a year for non-Muslims in Malaysia for the last four years, separation (without legal divorce) numbers are believed to be very much higher. In regional reports, including those from the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), "broken families" and the "marginalisation of the divorced" are frequently cited as top concerns.

The quiet cost to children

Large international studies demonstrate that children experiencing parental divorce have a 1.5 to 2 times higher risk of depression, anxiety, academic struggle, and behavioural problems compared with peers from intact families. In Malaysia, government statistics show 1-in-6 children as experiencing mental health issues in 2024.

Yet research shows that not all is lost if we can navigate towards protective

Broken families and the Heart of Christ

factors. What makes the greatest difference in the lives of children is the presence of emotionally available parents, low inter parental conflict, and ongoing support from trusted communities. This is precisely where the Church can make a difference and bring healing.

The hidden wound of dads

The woundedness of moms is often acknowledged and discussed. But among divorced parents, the suffering of dads is least discussed. International research describes many fathers after divorce as feeling silenced, marginalised, and invisible — often experiencing profound grief, shame, and isolation while trying to remain present to their children. Depression and even suicidal ideation can set in. In many cases, fathers are singled out and blamed for the divorce, and in some cases, alienated from their children.

Long term studies show that when fathers lose contact or emotional connection with their children after divorce, the consequences can echo into adulthood, weakening father-child relationships decades later. Conversely, children whose fathers remain meaningfully involved — through encouragement, presence, and affection — show better mental health outcomes even years after divorce.

Yet fathers often have the smallest support networks. Many do not readily reach out. Some feel they no longer "fit" in parish life. When the Church does not intentionally draw near, their suffering deepens in silence.

What the Church herself teaches

The Catholic Church has never abandoned those wounded by marital breakdown. Pope Francis, in *Amoris Laetitia*, urged the Church to "accompany, discern, and integrate weakness," reminding us that the divorced are not excommunicated, but remain beloved members of Christ's Body.



Hope, Healing & the Human Heart

Dr Brendan J Gomez

The call is not to lower the Church's teaching on marriage, but to raise the Church's practice of mercy.

Across the world, many dioceses have begun to take this seriously. Long established Catholic ministries such as *Beginning Experience* — now present in dioceses in the United States, Australia, and parts of Asia — offer structured, faith centred healing retreats for the divorced and separated, grounded in Scripture, Eucharist, and peer support. These programmes reflect a simple but powerful conviction: healing happens when broken hearts are allowed to grieve in the presence of Christ and a supportive community of believers.

What can Malaysian parishes do — practically?

Concrete steps can be taken in every parish:

1. Make the Invisible Visible

Priests can preach compassionately and emphatically on family brokenness, and clearly state that separated and divorced Catholics remain fully part of the Church. Visibility alone restores dignity.

2. Create Parish Based Support Groups

A parish need not begin with complex programmes. A monthly, confidential small group — facilitated by trained lay leaders or Catholic counsellors — can offer prayer, Scripture reflection, and shared stories. Evidence shows that peer supported environments significantly reduce isolation and psychological distress among divorced parents.

3. Develop Dad Focused Outreach

Fathers' groups can meet over simple shared activities — coffee after Mass, a Scripture reflection followed by fellowship, or service projects with their children. Research confirms that

supportive environments strengthen fathers' sense of identity and improve parenting involvement after divorce.

4. Integrate professional and pastoral care

Parishes can collaborate with Catholic psychologists and counsellors to offer talks on helping children cope with separation, managing co-parenting conflict, and rebuilding hope. Research confirms that culturally sensitive parenting interventions improve family resilience.

5. Form priests and lay leaders

Ongoing formation in trauma informed pastoral care equips clergy and parish leaders to respond with wisdom, compassion, empathy, and confidence — ensuring that no broken parent is turned away simply because the Church feels unprepared.

Why this matters for the whole Church

Supporting broken dads and moms is not a "special ministry." It is ordinary Gospel work. When the Church walks with wounded parents, children find stability, fathers rediscover hope, mothers regain strength, and parishes become places of mercy rather than quiet exile.

Today, many "doors of hearts" are locked not by rebellion, but by grief. I dream of a day when every parish in Malaysia dares to knock at these doors gently and say with conviction: You still belong. We will walk with you. In doing so, the Church does not weaken her witness to marriage but rather strengthens her witness to Christ — who never turns away from the broken, but makes His home among them.

Dr Brendan is a psychologist, associate professor, and fellow traveller of life that believes each one of us matters, and each one of us can make a difference - especially when our journey is filled with storms, and our ability to cross waves is by the power of Jesus Christ.

A family's faithful YES

Christina Lazaroo

For years, **Deacon Anthony Robert Peter** lived his life around two simple terms: work and family.

Growing up in Rawang, Kuala Lumpur, Deacon Anthony was raised in a Catholic family of seven siblings. Faith was part of daily life, and his parish, St Jude, Rawang, naturally became his second home. Although church activities and service formed the rhythm of his upbringing, priesthood was never something he actively considered while growing up. In fact, one of his sisters eventually joined religious life and is now serving in the Little Sisters of the Poor as Sr Philomena.

Before seminary, Deacon Anthony worked as a manager in HSBC Bank. His steady role allowed him to provide for his parents, who celebrated 50 faithful years of marriage before passing away in recent years — his father in 2020 and mother in 2024.

The idea of priesthood did not come early in

life. Sr Philomena was among the first to encourage him to consider this vocation. Later, during a CHOICE weekend, a priest's sharing left a deeper impression on him, especially as he found himself identifying with that sharing.

Even then, he did not rush into a decision. He discerned for two years before entering the seminary.

When he first shared his desire to enter the seminary with his family, the news did not come as a complete surprise. The main concern was practical: who would care for their ageing parents? Eventually, a younger brother stepped forward willingly and offered to take on that responsibility, what he reflects now as part of God's plan. With his family's support, Deacon Anthony left his banking career and entered formation to discern whether this calling was truly his.

Seminary formation, however, brought its own challenges.

Coming from a professional background where he managed people and responsibilities, Deacon Anthony had to adjust to a life where he was now being formed, corrected, and guided. The transition was not easy. He describes moments of self-doubt, particularly during the more demanding aspects of his formation.

There were times he questioned whether he was truly suited for the priesthood.

"I did ask myself if I was really fit for this," he says,

then, clarity did not arrive instantly. It took seven days of prayer and discernment before he understood it as a sign, confirming his path.

From the beginning, he knew the cost of priesthood would be high.

"The time spent with family, with friends, your own time is no longer yours," he says.

"You have to make yourself available all the time, ready to be of service."

Even during seminary years, the challenge was real. Yet, he found small anchors of joy: hiking in the hills with his brothers or sometimes alone, and spending hours glued to a book. These simple habits helped him slowly accept that what felt like limitations could also become deeply fulfilling.

Like every other vocation, there are moments of exhaustion and times when the needs of ministry feel heavy. His time as a deacon sharpened this lesson. Deacon Philip explains that the diaconate is first an office of service, and he has learned what that truly demands.

"When you make yourself available, even when you are tired, the tiredness slowly disappears," he reflects. "It becomes fulfilling."

More difficult still are the moments when

recalling moments during his formation.

"Sometimes going back seemed easier."

What sustained him during these moments was the spiritual foundation of seminary life. Reading about the lives of the saints, especially his patron, St Padre Pio, helped him reframe his struggles. Rather than seeing doubt as failure and unworthiness, he began to see it as part of a larger process of formation. He also recalls a quote he once came across on a fridge magnet in the seminary: "God doesn't call the qualified; He qualifies the called." It stayed with him, especially in moments when he questioned his own ability.

He chose Revelation 21:5 as his ordination theme: "Behold, I make all things new." For Deacon Anthony, it reflects his own renewal of mind, body, and strength.

Serving as a deacon has given him a clearer, more realistic view of priestly ministry. He once thought priestly life would be simpler, mostly limited to Sundays. In reality, it means being available whenever needed, for people from all walks of life. "When people look at a priest, they should see the *alter Christus*, or another Christ. This calls for a willingness to bring God's love to all, even when we feel unworthy. God makes us worthy for the work."

Looking ahead, Deacon Anthony hopes to be a priest who is steady and approachable, focused on nurturing the faith of others

rather than drawing attention to himself. One of the moments he looks forward to most is celebrating baptisms, welcoming new life into the Church.

When asked what he would say to someone discerning a vocation, his response is simple: bring the question honestly before God. Clarity, he says, does not always come immediately, but through time, openness, and perseverance.

"I myself was fearful to answer this call. Am I really worthy? Am I holy enough? And I think young people feel this too. The world and our faith teach us different

values. If we cling to the world, we will be fearful. So, cling to God and He will reveal His plan for your life," he says.

Though his parents will not be physically present at his ordination, Deacon Anthony knows that they are with him spiritually. He recalls the day his father sent him to the seminary, reminding him to remain faithful to his vocation. His mother's words were equally clear: once you put your hand to the plough, there is no turning back.

"Their words have been guiding me to stay firm to my vocation."

When asked what he thinks they would say if they were here, Deacon Anthony pauses, visibly moved. He imagines their joy, their blessings, and the warm congratulations they would have offered. A priceless hug shared in rejoicing that two of their children responded to God's call.

As Deacon Anthony prepares for his ordination this May, he carries forward both that formation at home and the lessons learned along the way. His journey, shaped by responsibility, family, and perseverance, now continues in service to the Church.



A life no longer his own

To become a priest is not simply to choose a vocation. It is to surrender ownership of one's life — time, personal plans, even rest.

And yet, as **Deacon Philip Asirwalam** prepares for his priestly ordination this May, it is precisely this surrender that he embraces.

Raised in a close-knit family in Pandan Dalam, Kuala Lumpur, the third of four siblings followed a steady, familiar path. After completing his secondary education, he earned himself an Advanced Diploma in Accounting and qualified as an ACCA affiliate at Tunku Abdul Rahman College. He then spent five years working — three with a shipping company and two in the accounts department of his alma mater, Sekolah Menengah Stella Maris.

But beneath it all, there was a persistent stirring.

"There was always an inclination," he reflects, recalling how watching priests celebrate Mass first drew his attention to the priesthood. Still, inclination was not enough. He entered the seminary in 2017 without complete certainty, but with a desire to discern his calling.

During a time of prayer at Sacred Heart Chapel in College General, he encountered a Eucharistic miracle, which he now recognises as a decisive moment. Yet even

he encounters human suffering he cannot fully resolve.

"It is hard when we are not fully able to help someone," he admits. "As human beings, we are limited. It is only our Saviour, Jesus, who can help us. So, we place our trust in Him."

That paradox of a life given up, yet deeply fulfilling, has come to shape not only how he understands priesthood, but also the kind of priest he hopes to become.

As he looks ahead to his

ordination, what excites him most is not the role or title, but a mission: to bring hope, especially to a generation that often finds itself caught between belief and doubt.

"Young people today are asking, 'Why do we need to go to church?'" he observes. "The older generation went through so much, yet they remain faithful. But for those who have not experienced that, there are questions."

It is a gap he feels called to step into, not to dismiss these questions, but to walk patiently with them.

"They love the Church and its teachings," he says of young people, "but when it interrupts their way of life, that is where

the struggle comes."

For him, the answer is not to turn away from that struggle, but to remain present within it, to listen, to accompany, and to trust that faith can take root even in the midst of uncertainty. In many ways, this desire reflects the words of Pope St John Paul II, which have become a steady anchor in his own life: "Be not afraid."

"In whatever situation or struggle I go through, I fall back to His word," Deacon Philip shares. "Then I know who is behind me and before me."

Those who know Deacon Philip often describe him as a good listener, someone who creates space for others to be heard. It is a quality he hopes to carry into his priesthood, even as the weight of responsibility grows.

"They say I'm always smiling now," he says with a light laugh. "Maybe that's because I have not yet received the full burden of a parish priest. But I hope I can remain the same."

As he prepares to take this final step on May 9, his outlook remains simple. He says he wishes to adopt the same spirit often attributed to Pope St John XXIII: "Lord, it is your Church, I am going to bed."

A posture of surrender and trust.

For in giving up a life that is his own, Deacon Philip Asirwalam is preparing to receive something greater: a life poured out for others, especially for those still searching, still questioning, and still hoping to find their way home. **Christina Lazaroo**



In an age marked by conflict, uncertainty, and profound human suffering, the call to “count our blessings” can seem almost out of place – like lighting a candle in the midst of a storm. Images of war, particularly in the Middle East, confront us daily with realities that resist easy explanation. And yet, within the Catholic tradition, gratitude is not reserved for moments of comfort. It becomes most powerful precisely in times of trial.

An attitude of gratitude is not a denial of suffering. It is a discipline of the soul – a way of seeing that recognises life as a gift, even when that gift is wounded. Scripture exhorts believers to “give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thessalonians 5:18), not because all circumstances are good, but because God remains faithful within them. Gratitude, then, is not sentimentality; it is an act of trust, an orientation of the soul – a quiet refusal to let darkness define the whole of reality.

This posture becomes especially significant when we confront the mystery of suffering. The Catholic faith does not offer simplistic explanations for pain. It does not claim that suffering is inherently good, nor that God directly wills it in every instance. Instead, it points to the Cross – the central paradox of Christianity – where the brutality of the crucifixion and apparent defeat become the source of redemption.

In the Passion of Christ, suffering is neither glorified nor ignored; it is transformed. The Cross reveals that even what appears senseless can be taken up into a greater purpose. As St Paul writes, “we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope” (Romans 5:3–4). This is not a glorification of pain, but a recognition of its potential when united with love.

Within this framework, even the presence of evil takes on a paradoxical role. Catholic teaching affirms that Satan is real, yet not an equal rival to God. He is a fallen creature – limited and ultimately subject to divine providence. Scripture describes him as “the



Thinking Aloud

Susai Anthony Muthu

Counting blessings in a broken world

accuser” (Revelation 12:10) and “the father of lies” (John 8:44), seeking to distort truth and draw humanity away from God. Yet even his actions are permitted only within the bounds of divine providence and can be transformed by God into occasions for greater good.

The story of Job remains a powerful testament to this mystery. Subjected to immense suffering, Job is not given a tidy explanation. Instead, he encounters God more deeply. Likewise, Christ’s temptation in the desert shows that confrontation with evil, while real, is never beyond the reach of grace. What is intended for harm can, in God’s hands, become a path toward deeper faith.

These theological truths take on urgent relevance when we consider ongoing conflicts, particularly in the Middle East – a region that holds profound significance in salvation history. From the call of Abraham to the prophetic vision that “they shall beat their swords into ploughshares” (Isaiah 2:4), Scripture reveals both divine promise and human fracture. This land, sacred to Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike, reflects the broader human condition: created for unity, yet marked by division.

The Catholic Church approaches such conflicts not through political partisanship, but through enduring moral principles rooted in the dignity of every human person. It calls consistently for peace, the protection of innocent life, and genuine dialogue among peoples. While acknowledging the right of legitimate defence, the Church insists on strict moral limits: proportionality, the safeguarding of non-combatants, and the pursuit of peace as the ultimate goal.

This vision has been articulated clearly in modern Church teaching. The Second Vatican Council’s declaration *Nostra Aetate* (*In Our Time*), promulgated by Pope Paul VI in

1965, marked a turning point in the Church’s relationship with other religions. It emphasised the shared spiritual heritage of Jews, Christians, and Muslims, all of whom look to Abraham as a father in faith, and called for mutual understanding, respect, and collaboration in the pursuit of peace.

More recently, the call for peace has been reaffirmed with urgency. In his Palm Sunday homily, Pope Leo XIV declared: “Brothers and sisters, this is our God: Jesus, King of Peace, who rejects war, whom no one can use to justify war. He does not listen to the prayers of those who wage war but rejects them.” Such words echo the consistent teaching of the Church: that violence, especially against the innocent, can never be justified as a path to justice.

And yet, the question remains: how do we hold onto hope without ignoring reality?

Here, a striking parallel emerges in what has been called the “Stockdale Paradox,” named after US Navy Admiral James Stockdale, who endured years as a prisoner of war in Vietnam. He observed that survival required holding two seemingly contradictory truths in tension: an unwavering faith in eventual deliverance, and a clear-eyed acceptance of the harsh realities of the present.

This insight resonates deeply with Christian faith. The Gospel does not bypass the Cross; it passes through it. Christians are called neither to naive optimism nor to despair, but to a hope that is both realistic and unshakable. The Resurrection does not erase the wounds of Christ – it transfigures them.

To live in this way is to resist the urge to explain away suffering and, instead, allow it to be caught up in a larger story. Meaning is not always found in the immediate experience of pain, but in what that pain can become when united with love. Acts of compassion, forgiveness, and courage – often born in the

darkest circumstances – bear witness to a reality that transcends suffering.

Gratitude plays a crucial role in this transformation. It anchors the soul, training the eyes to recognize grace even amid loss. It allows us to perceive signs of God’s presence: in the resilience of communities, in the sacrifice of those who serve others, and in the quiet dignity of those who endure suffering with faith.

This does not eliminate grief. The Christian life holds together both lament and thanksgiving. The Psalms themselves are filled with cries of anguish alongside declarations of trust. To be faithful is not to suppress sorrow, but to bring it before God – honestly and without pretence – trusting that it will not have the final word.

Ultimately, the Christian vision does not offer a complete explanation for suffering. Instead, it offers something more profound: a presence within it. “I am with you always” (Matthew 28:20) is not a solution to every question, but it is a promise that transforms suffering from isolation into communion.

Thus, to count one’s blessings in a broken world is not to deny its brokenness, but to affirm that it is not the final reality. It is to live within the tension – grateful yet grieving, hopeful yet honest – trusting that somehow, even the most senseless moments can be gathered into a greater story of redemption.

To live this out is not easy. It requires discipline, faith, and often the support of a community. Yet it offers a path forward that neither denies reality nor surrenders to it. In counting our blessings, we learn to see. In suffering, we learn to trust. And in the midst of a broken world, we learn to hope.

Susai describes himself as neither an accomplished nor a regular writer, but someone who occasionally puts his thoughts to paper, thinking aloud as it were.

Across Malaysia, a familiar season of discernment is unfolding in many homes.

The IGCSE results were released in January, and more recently, the SPM results were announced on March 31. In many households, the chatter at the dinner table has shifted from exam stress to the big questions: What’s next? Which college? Which course?

Our home in Subang Jaya is no different.

At seventeen, our “princess” — the perpetual baby girl of our hearts — is preparing to fly the coop. Soon, she will be packing her bags for a campus in another state, leaving the familiar comforts of the Klang Valley.

For the first time, she will truly be “testing the waters” of the life skills she’s been practising under our roof: cooking simple meals, managing her own laundry, and the most challenging of all, stretching a monthly allowance until the final day of the month.

By God’s grace, we began this onboarding early. Over the past year, we visited various campuses and had many heart-to-heart talks about her future. Her direction eventually became clear: a Foundation in Business, leading towards a degree in Business Finance.

At one point, she floated an idea that truly touched us: the possibility of one day joining the family practice. As parents who have dedicated our lives to the financial planning industry, that thought naturally warms our hearts. However, we believe that education should never be a cage; it should be a launchpad. Whether her journey leads her back to the family firm or to a completely different calling, we know it will be an adventure guided by the Holy Spirit.

For many years, our home has quietly

When children leave the nest

served as a training ground. Not just for Maths or the English language, but for the everyday disciplines of independence. We viewed the teen years as an internship for adulthood: running errands, managing chores, and, crucially, understanding the value of a Ringgit in an era where money has become increasingly invisible.

As parents, we had honest conversations about the boring stuff like household bills, groceries, and the reality of cash flow. Not to weigh her down with adult worries, but to help her realise that money does not simply appear in an e-wallet by magic. These conversations were our first steps in teaching stewardship.

We practised this stewardship through the management of allowances. There were months when the budget was managed like a pro, and others where it mysteriously evaporated before the month ended due to impulsive online shopping.

As my grocery shopping partner, she learnt buying within a budget, mastering the art of comparing prices and making difficult trade-offs before reaching the checkout counter. She learned that she couldn’t have everything; she had to choose.

Now, as the departure date looms, it hits me: I’m losing my grocery shopping buddy. I am selective about my inner circle, and my daughter is right at the centre of it. She recently reminded me that I’m losing more

than just a shopping companion; I’m losing my late-night chat partner and my “human Waze.” (I have a poor sense of direction)

For a moment, I felt a bit lost. But the feeling passed. We both know this exit strategy is necessary for growth. As parents, we aren’t the owners of our children; we are merely stewards entrusted with their care for a season.

College life introduces a whole new financial ecosystem. Between Grab rides, food delivery, and the social makan sessions so central to Malaysian campus life, expenses add up quickly. In our current economy, a student’s monthly living costs can easily range between RM1,500 and RM3,000, depending on the city. This is where financial maturity is forged.

Jesus had asked: “Which of you wishing to construct a tower does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if there is enough for its completion?” (Luke 14:28). Budgeting is exactly that — sitting down to “count the cost” before we commit.

College offers a new kind of freedom, but today’s Gen Z faces temptations we never had. With “Buy Now, Pay Later” (BNPL) schemes and the ease of digital payments, spending has become effortless and dangerous.

Without the virtue of prudence, it’s easy to graduate with a degree in one hand and a mountain of bad habits in the other.



Faith and Finance

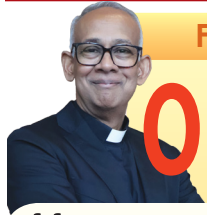
Hazel Ong-Archibald

We must pass on more than just a bank transfer; we must pass on values. As St Paul warns, “The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil” (1 Timothy 6:10). Money is a tool, not a master. If our daughter does eventually join our practice, we hope these “ground-level” experiences form her credibility. A good financial planner isn’t someone who just quotes textbooks; it’s someone who understands the pinch of a tight budget.

Beyond the Ringgits and sen, there is a deeper prayer in my heart. I pray that being away from the “home parish” won’t lead her to drift. I pray she finds a solid group of Catholic friends on campus — a “BEC away from home” — to keep her grounded. Degrees open doors, but character, discipline, and faith are what keep you standing once you walk through them.

We spend years teaching our children how to fly. And then one day, with a quiet prayer and a bit of a lump in our throats, we have to let go and trust them to spread their wings. As the Book of Proverbs reminds us: “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6). The rest, we leave in the hands of our Blessed Trinity.

Hazel is a Licensed Financial Planner with over two decades of experience in investment, insurance, and estate planning. Since year 2000, she has been guiding individuals and families towards financial stability. Hazel is passionate about integrating Catholic values into personal finance, helping others achieve their financial goals while living a life of generosity and trust in God’s providence.



Fr Dr Clarence Devadass

Old men dream dreams, young men see visions

“Old men will dream dreams; young men will see visions.” These words, drawn from the prophet Joel 2:28 and echoed again by Peter the Apostle in the book of Acts of the Apostles 2:17, speak powerfully to every generation of the Church. They remind us that the life of God’s people moves between memory and imagination, between what has been and what might yet be. Dreams often carry the sweetness of memory: stories of faithfulness, sacrifice, and triumph. Visions, however, look forward. They call us to see what God may yet be doing in a world that is constantly changing.

The Church today needs vision.

This is not because our past has been empty. On the contrary, the history of the Church is filled with moments of courage and faith: missionaries who crossed oceans, pastors who shepherded communities through hardship, and believers who built congregations from nothing more than conviction and prayer. These stories form the dreams of the Church. They are the memories that inspire us and give us a sense of identity.

Yet dreams alone are not enough.

In many ways, the glorious and triumphant chapters of the Church’s past are now being challenged on many fronts. We are living in a rapidly changing world. Technology reshapes communication, social structures shift, and cultural values evolve at a pace that previous generations could scarcely imagine. In such a landscape, institutions that once seemed immovable are now being questioned.

The Church is no exception.

Among many young minds today, a pressing question is quietly growing: Is the Church still relevant? This question is not always asked out of hostility. Often it arises from honest observation. Young people see a world very different from the one their parents and grandparents inhabited. They engage with authority differently. They are less inclined to accept traditions simply because they have existed for a long time. They are more likely to ask why things are done a certain way, and whether they still serve a meaningful purpose.

This can be unsettling for institutions that have grown accustomed to stability.

What worked before may not work today. Methods that once filled halls and energised congregations may now feel distant to a new generation. Structures that once seemed natural may now appear rigid. If the Church responds defensively to such questions, it risks alienating precisely the generation whose vision it needs most.

This does not mean abandoning the foundations of faith. The Gospel itself does not change. But the ways in which the Church lives, speaks, and serves within society must continually be re-examined. The early Church itself adapted creatively to new contexts, from Jerusalem to Antioch to Rome, while holding firmly to its core message.

The challenge before us is not simply about survival. It is about faithfulness.

The upcoming Malaysia Pastoral Convention in September 2026 and the ecclesial assemblies at various levels in the Church, provide a timely opportunity for such reflection. Gatherings like this must be more than administrative meetings or ceremonial events. They can become sacred spaces where leaders pause, listen, and discern what the Holy Spirit is saying. They offer the Church a chance not merely to recall its dreams but to seek new visions.

What might the future of the Church in Malaysia look like?

Will it be a Church that speaks meaningfully to a generation shaped by digital culture? Will it be a Church that engages thoughtfully with a diverse and plural society? Will it be a Church that nurtures authentic community in a world increasingly marked by isolation?

These are not easy questions. Yet they are necessary ones.

There is a particular danger when churches appear healthy on the surface. Full churches on Sunday mornings can create the comforting impression that everything is well. Attendance figures may reassure us that the church is strong. Leaders may look around and feel satisfied that the institution is thriving.

But such satisfaction can easily slip into complacency.

History repeatedly reminds us that complacency is the silent downfall of institutions. Organisations rarely collapse because of a single crisis. More often, they slowly decline because they stop asking difficult questions. They assume that tomorrow will look like yesterday. They grow comfortable with familiar routines and forget to examine whether those routines still serve their purpose.

The Church is not immune to this danger.

If we are not careful, we may find ourselves patting one another on the back and saying, “We are doing fine,” even while deeper shifts are taking place beneath the surface. Generational disengagement may quietly grow. Cultural distance may widen. And by the time the signs become unmistakable, the gap may already be difficult to bridge.

Vision requires honesty.

It asks us to look at the present without illusion. It calls us to acknowledge where we may have grown comfortable, where we may have relied too heavily on past success, and where we may have stopped listening to the voices around us, especially the younger ones.

Vision also requires humility.

Young people do not reject authority simply for the sake of rebellion. Often, they are searching for authenticity. They want leaders who listen as well as speak, who demonstrate integrity rather than merely claim it. They want communities where questions are welcomed rather than feared.

If the Church learns to engage these longings with openness, it may discover that the next generation is not abandoning faith but seeking a deeper and more credible expression of it.

Vision requires courage.

Real change is never comfortable. It demands more than eloquent speeches or carefully crafted statements. Change is not lip-service. It involves the willingness to face suffering, misunderstanding, and sacrifice. It means letting go of certain habits, structures,

or assumptions that have long felt secure.

Change will also certainly leave some people unhappy. Every transformation disrupts familiar patterns and unsettles established expectations. Some will feel that cherished traditions are being threatened. Others may fear that the Church is moving too quickly or perhaps not quickly enough. Such tensions are unavoidable whenever a community seeks renewal.

Yet the possibility of discomfort cannot be allowed to paralyse the Church. Leadership sometimes requires the courage to move forward even when consensus is incomplete, trusting that faithfulness to the mission of God ultimately matters more than preserving universal comfort.

Such courage is costly.

Yet throughout history, renewal in the Church has always required precisely this willingness. Every great movement of spiritual renewal in the Church began when believers dared to ask whether God might be calling them into something new.

Perhaps that is the invitation before us today.

As the Church in Malaysia prepares for the Pastoral Convention and the upcoming ecclesial assemblies in the local, national, continental, and universal levels, the question is not whether we have dreams. We do. Our past is rich with them. The deeper question is whether we are ready to see visions that look beyond nostalgia; visions that take seriously the realities of the present; and visions that dare to imagine!

“Imagination is a sacred gift that allows us to create, love, hope, and draw closer to God in all that we do... imagining a Church and a world where every heart is filled with God’s love and mercy, abounding in kindness, respect for life, justice and peace for all people, now and forever!” (Archbishop Ronald Hicks).

Fr Clarence serves as the parish priest of the Church of St Anthony and is also the Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.



Fr Ron Rolheiser

Our problems with faith today – A diagnosis and a prescription

In 2007, Charles Taylor wrote a book entitled, *A Secular Age* which gave us a clear and comprehensive analysis of the secular age we live in and the implications of that for our faith. More than a thousand years before that an unknown author in the fourteenth century wrote a book, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, (in a way that doesn’t initially leap out at you) that answers the fundamental question Taylor left us with.

I had read both Taylor’s book and *The Cloud of Unknowing* without making a connection between the two. That connection was pointed out to me by a doctoral student whose thesis I am directing. Her thesis? She is interfacing Taylor’s analysis of secularity with the fundamental insight of the unknown author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Here’s her thesis in a capsule:

One of the ways Taylor defines our secular age is this: “The shift to secularity consists of a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and unproblematic to one in which it is understood to be one option among others – and frequently not the one that is easiest to embrace.” Taylor suggests that two things are conspiring to produce this.

First, we now are what he calls “buffered persons”, that is, we have moved from “a self who is vulnerable to many religious fears and superstitions to a self that is buffered from all

the ‘spirits’ within the enchanted world.” I’m old enough to have been brought up in that enchanted world where spirits, demons, and supernatural powers lived under every rock, where you sprinkled holy water around the house during a lightning storm.

Second, for Taylor, we now live inside what he calls an “immanent worldview”, where our secularised world gives us the idea that there is no other world than this one and we don’t need anything beyond this world to achieve full flourishing, meaning, and happiness.

Taylor, a devout Christian, concludes by saying that this new situation doesn’t constitute a crisis of faith, but rather, a *crisis of imagination*. The old imaginaries within which we imagined our faith don’t serve us anymore. We need a new imagination within which to picture our faith.

And from where can we draw this new imagination?

According to my doctoral student, the new imagination we need within which to re-picture our faith can be drawn from the fundamental counsel given us in *The Cloud of Unknowing*. But this isn’t immediately evident.

On the surface, what this unknown fourteenth century writer advocates is a simple prayer practice, not unlike what many today call “centering prayer”, where you go to prayer without any agenda, request, or words.

You just sit in silence, without expectation, simply trusting that God will give you what you really need.

However, for the author of *The Cloud* this is not just a simple prayer practice, it’s a basic stance before life itself. It’s a stance of radical honesty, of radical sincerity, where you stand naked in soul before yourself, life, and God. What’s being said here?

In short, because of our buffered persons and our immanent consciousness, we are almost never fully naked in soul, almost never fully sincere (*sine cere – without wax*), never fully ourselves. It is rare for us to get beneath all the distractions, ideologies, cultural obsessions, traumas, daydreams, and groupthink that seemingly forever colour our consciousness.

What *The Cloud* advocates is that we, as our habitual stance before reality, try to strip away everything that’s not true in us in an attempt to stand outside of all of our distractions and defences, naked in soul, helpless to think or imagine, just asking life and God to give us what we cannot even imagine is best for us.

Taylor suggests that we need a new imagination within which again to picture our faith.

The Cloud suggests that the new imagination we need will not be the result of intellectually thinking ourselves into a new way of imagining our faith. Rather, that new imagination will be

given us when we stand before God, naked in spirit, devoid of our own imagination, and helpless to help ourselves. Then, paradoxically, when we can no longer help ourselves, we can be helped from what is beyond our buffered selves and the virtual immanent prison within which we live. Life and God can now flow into us, and flow into us in an untainted way, precisely because we are standing naked, helpless and unknowing, before the mystery of ourselves, life, and God.

John of the Cross words this invitation this way: *Learn to understand more by not understanding than by understanding*.

What this means is that, paradoxically, faith starts at precisely that place where we are tempted to think it stops, namely, at that place where we find ourselves naked and helpless to imagine faith and God.

What’s our real struggle for faith today? Charles Taylor gives us a *diagnosis*. What are we to do inside this struggle? *The Cloud of Unknowing* gives us a *prescription*.

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

LITTLE CATHOLIC'S CORNER

Dear children,

In this Sunday's Gospel reading, Jesus tells us a story about a shepherd and His sheep.

A good shepherd enters through the gate, not by climbing in another way.

The sheep know the voice of their shepherd, and they follow him because they trust him.

Jesus says that He is the Good Shepherd.

This means that Jesus knows each one of us personally, just like a shepherd knows every sheep.

He knows our names, our hearts, and what we need. When Jesus calls us, He invites us to listen to His voice and follow Him on the right path.

Jesus also says, "I am the gate."

The gate is the way to safety.

Children, when we follow Jesus, we are protected and guided. He leads us to a life full of love, peace, and joy. Jesus came so that we may have life, and have it in abundance.

Sometimes, there are "strangers" in our lives — voices or choices that lead us away from what is good. Like wise sheep, we should not follow those voices.

Instead, we listen to Jesus through prayer, the Bible, and the teachings of the Church.

Dear children, Jesus the Good Shepherd always cares for us. He never leaves us alone.

Let us learn to listen to His voice every day and follow Him with love and faith.

Love
Aunty Eliz

Fill in the blanks below using the words provided in the word bank.

Very I tell you, I am the for the

All who have come before me are and, but the sheep have not to them.

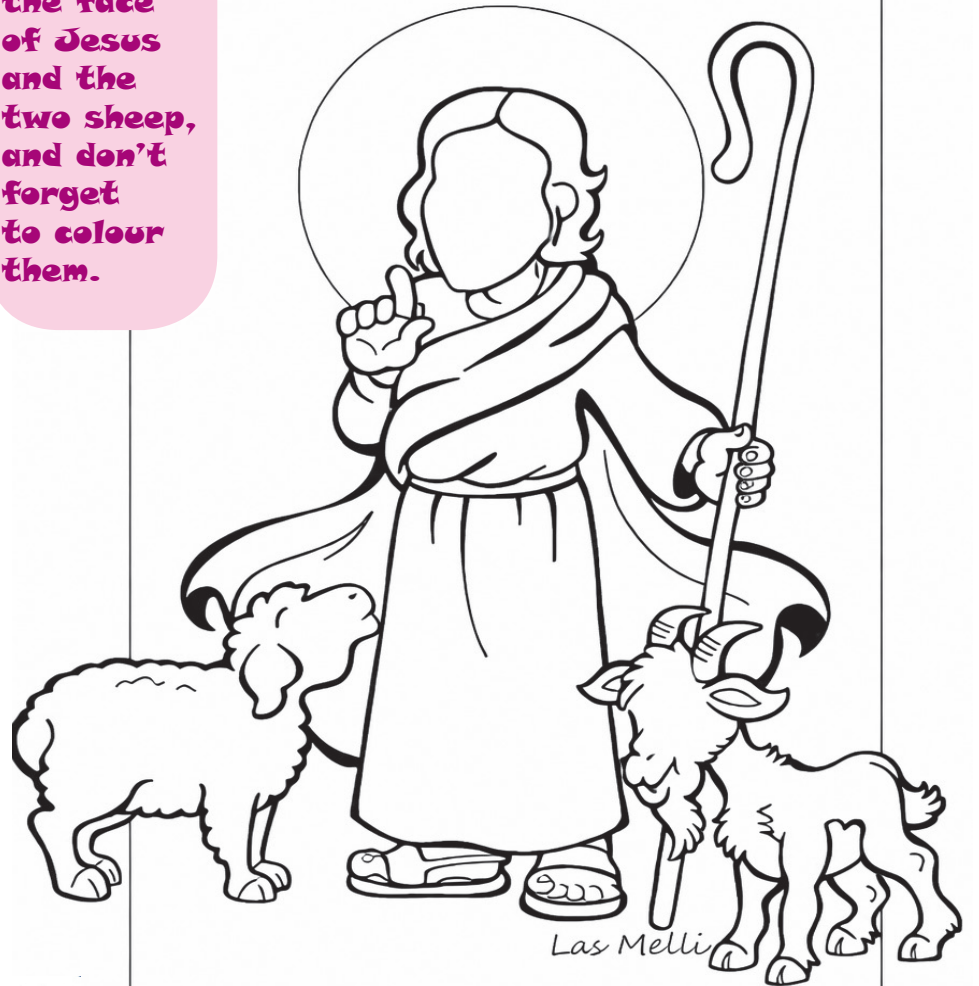
I am the gate; whoever through me will be

(John 10:7-9)

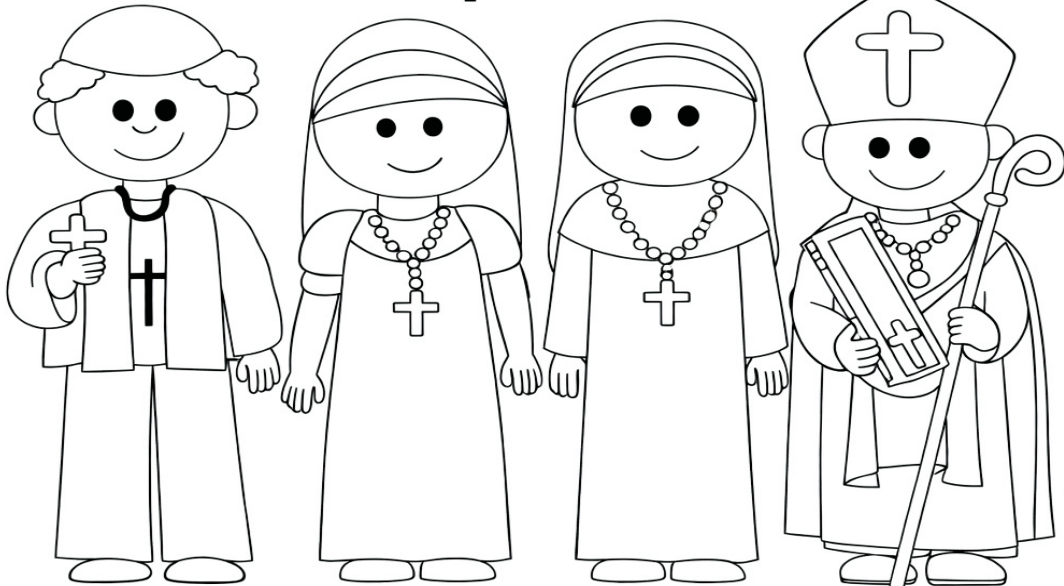
listened robbers
truly saved
sheep gate
enters thieves



Complete the face of Jesus and the two sheep, and don't forget to colour them.



World Day of Prayer for Vocations 26 April 2026



We Pray for Vocations!

Dear Jesus,

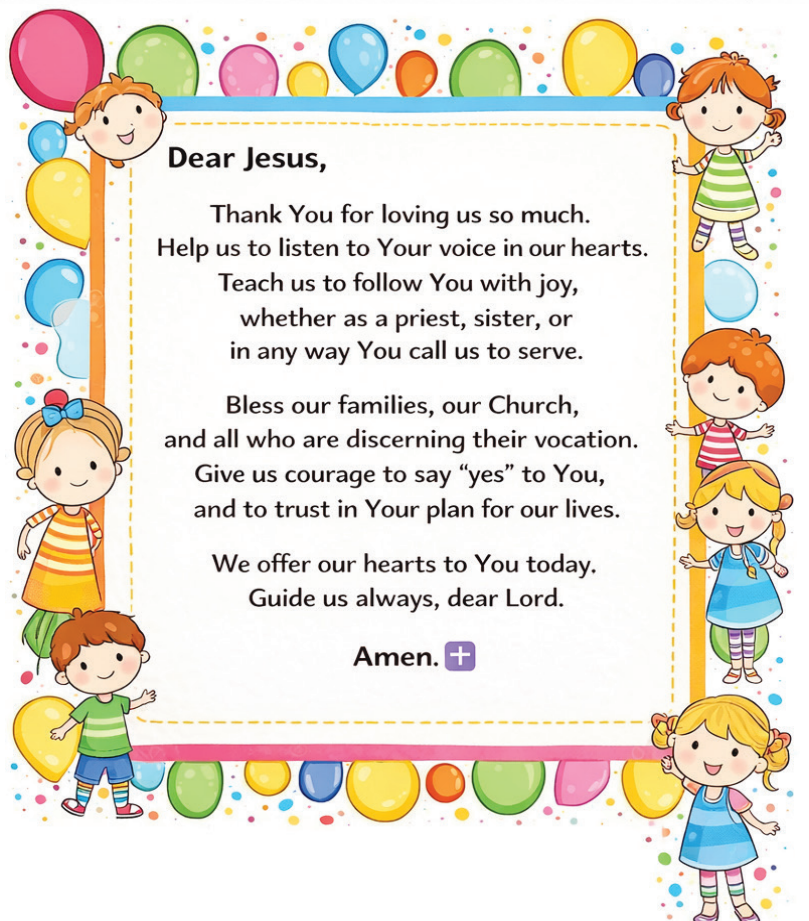
Thank You for loving us so much. Help us to listen to Your voice in our hearts.

Teach us to follow You with joy, whether as a priest, sister, or in any way You call us to serve.

Bless our families, our Church, and all who are discerning their vocation. Give us courage to say "yes" to You, and to trust in Your plan for our lives.

We offer our hearts to You today. Guide us always, dear Lord.

Amen. +



YOUTH

YOUTH LEAD MADRID EASTER CONCERT FOR PEACE

SPAIN: While Easter is a season of joy for Christians worldwide, ongoing conflicts have cast a more sombre tone over this year's celebrations.

Yet even amid global tensions, signs of hope emerged. As Pope Leo XIV joined thousands in St Peter's Basilica in prayer for peace on April 11, an estimated 85,000 people gathered at Plaza de Cibeles for a vibrant celebration centred on the Resurrection — a reminder that Christ's victory over death brings light in dark times.

Feast of the Resurrection

The fourth annual "Feast of the Resurrection," organised by the Catholic Association of Propagandists, blended contemporary music and culture to celebrate the risen Christ. Founded in 1908 by Jesuit Fr Ángel Ayala, the association promotes Christian humanism in public life.

The concert featured a mix of local and international performers, including DJ Pulpo, Liz Mitchell of Boney M., the Gipsy Kings, and Hakuna Group Music, known for engaging youth through contemporary worship.

Amid the festive music and dancing, participants remained mindful of those suffering in war-torn regions. Hopes for peace persisted, even as international negotiations faltered in the days following the event.

'Shared joy' rooted in the Resurrection

Cardinal José Cobo read a message from Pope Leo XIV, who praised the initiative, saying it was "good and necessary that Easter also find a language of music, of encounter, and of shared joy."



Pope Leo XIV appears on a large screen as people attend the fourth annual "Feast of the Resurrection" concert in Madrid, April 11, 2026. (OSV News photo/Asociación Católica de Propagandistas)

"Faith in the Risen One gives meaning to human joy; it purifies it, elevates it, and brings it to fullness," the Pope wrote, urging the faithful to move beyond fleeting emotion and allow the Resurrection to renew their lives.

He also called for "young people who are not ashamed of the Gospel," stressing that evangelisation flows not from strategies but from hearts transformed by Christ.

A great harmony of faith

Expressing his desire for a world united in Easter joy, the pope said he hoped Christian life itself would become "a concert — a

great harmony of faith, unity, communion and charity — proclaiming that Christ lives."

Looking ahead to his planned visit to Spain in June, he hinted at a stop at Plaza de Cibeles, encouraging young people to seek Christ sincerely and "not settle for the minimum."

Prayer for peace

Cardinal Cobo noted the concert took place at a time when "all of Christendom, also led by Pope Leo, prays for peace."

"Peace must be prayed for, asked for — and it requires our commitment," he said, adding that war begins when people cease to recognise one another as brothers and

sisters.

He then led the crowd in a moment of silent prayer, inviting them to unite with the Holy Father and all those suffering from war, violence, and injustice.

An easy 'yes' for Gipsy Kings

For the famed Gipsy Kings — the France-based group behind global hits like Bamboleo and Volare — the invitation to perform at a concert celebrating Christ's Resurrection was an easy "yes."

Speaking at a press conference on April 10, founding member André Reyes said that, as Catholics, "the Word of God is truly important and we carry it in our hearts."

His cousin, Mario Reyes, echoed the sentiment, describing it as an honour to take part in the event. "We are believers," he said, adding that their faith shapes their lives. "Thanks to God, we live a clean life. We don't drink alcohol or do anything bad because God has saved us and purified us."

Despite performing for world leaders and dignitaries over the years, Mario said his most cherished memory remains meeting Pope John Paul II.

"I still have the photos — it was a unique experience," he recalled. "He spoke many languages, and he told me, 'Que Dieu te bénisse' ('May God bless you') in French. It was incredible."

Looking ahead to the concert, Mario said the group's hope was simple: "to transmit the love of God to the people," especially in a time marked by global uncertainty and conflict.

"It is important that we all pray," he said. "In the world today, we must all pray for peace." OSV News

KUALA LUMPUR: Stella Maris International School (SMIS), Medan Damansara, marked its 11th Annual Cross-Country Race on April 11, with Archbishop Julian Leow present as Guest of Honour to flag off the event.

The archbishop led the start of four waves of runners, comprising both primary and secondary students, in a spirited display of enthusiasm and unity.

The race was held in support of the National Kidney Foundation of Malaysia (NKFM), following a charity drive organised in the preceding months to raise funds for those suffering from kidney disease. It also served to highlight the importance of healthy living, as kidney failure is often linked to poor dietary habits and lack of exercise.

The generosity of students, parents, teachers, staff and well-wishers culminated in a cheque presentation of RM8,500 to NKFM.

Chairman of the School's Board of Governors, Dr Tarcisus Chin, expressed his appreciation to the SMIS community for their continued support. "It is encouraging to witness how our school community comes together each year to support those in need. This contribution reflects our shared commitment to compassion and service," he said.

He also noted that over the past decade, the school has raised approximately RM120,000 for NKFM. "Through this initiative, we hope to instil in our students a spirit of generosity and concern for the less fortunate," he added.

In addition to fundraising, the school has placed strong emphasis on raising awareness about kidney health and



RUNNING WITH PURPOSE SMIS Raises RM8,500 for Kidney Foundation

the challenges faced by renal patients. Each year, a Kidney Awareness Day is observed in conjunction with World Kidney Day, with students and staff wearing red as a sign of solidarity.

Educational activities such as video presentations and quizzes are also organised to deepen students' understand-

ing of healthy living and the importance of supporting those affected by kidney disease.

The initiative reflects Stella Maris' broader commitment to holistic education — nurturing not only academic excellence, but also values of compassion, responsibility and service to the wider community.

Knights of the altar: Formed to serve



Gerard Chong

SANDAKAN: Often working quietly behind the scenes, altar servers play a vital role during Holy Week, assisting in the sacred liturgies at the very heart of the Church's celebrations. Their service calls not only for dedication and discipline, but also for careful preparation — both spiritual and practical.

This year, Holy Week brought a spirit of excitement and deep devotion among altar servers at the Cathedral of St Mary, as they undertook thorough preparations for the Triduum celebrations through a specially organised camp held from April 3 to 5, beginning with the Stations of the Cross at 7.30am followed by registration and a practical session for the Good Friday Service.

After the service, the parish priest and spiritual advisor, Fr David Garaman, delivered his opening remarks, expressing gratitude to all servers for their dedication. He encouraged younger members to learn from

the seniors and urged the seniors to guide the juniors in understanding altar service more deeply. The session concluded with a blessing, followed by dinner, fellowship, and the first formation session.

A particularly inspiring aspect of the camp was the presence of dedicated senior altar servers who came forward to serve wholeheartedly, regardless of where they were needed. With humility and generosity, they guided and mentored the younger servers, patiently training them and helping them grow in both skill and understanding. Even amidst the busy preparations for the Triduum, including decorating St Mary's Cathedral and ensuring everything was in place, their commitment never wavered. Their quiet service reflected not only their love for the ministry, but also their deep respect and affection for their priest and bishop, becoming a powerful witness of servant leadership in action.

Throughout the camp, participants were formed through a series of meaningful inputs and activities that deepened their un-

derstanding of Holy Week and the sacred liturgy presented by seniors, Gerard Chong, Marshal. Roy and Stephen. The boys were reminded that Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday and culminates in the Easter Vigil, with the Triduum understood as "three days, one celebration" centred on Love, Sacrifice, and Resurrection. Sessions also introduced the proper use and care of liturgical objects, including sacred vessels and vestments, while emphasising discipline, posture, and attentiveness in serving at the altar. These moments of learning were complemented by prayer, Praise and Worship, and opportunities for fellowship, helping to foster unity among both senior and junior servers.

Recreational activities such as volleyball were also organised to promote teamwork, alongside time for bonding and rest.

A comprehensive briefing was later conducted to outline the sequence of events for the upcoming Easter Vigil Mass, including role assignments. This was followed by a practical session in the Cathedral, where participants rehearsed their roles — from

the entrance procession to the altar service. Preparations for the Easter Vigil were then carried out, including setting up the Paschal fire, preparing the sanctuary, and conducting a final walkthrough.

The day concluded with the Easter Vigil Mass at the cathedral, where participants served with dedication and reverence, marking the culmination of their training.

What stood out most was the spirit of unity and pride shared between the seniors and the new servers. Working side by side, they served with one heart and one purpose, supporting and learning from one another. It was evident that every gesture and action at the altar was carried out with care, intention, and reverence — reflecting not only their training, but a deep understanding of the sacredness of their role.

The camp concluded on Easter Sunday, with altar servers returning home enriched with knowledge, strengthened in faith, and filled with meaningful memories — fostering unity, discipline, and a renewed commitment to their ministry.

CHOICE SPARKS LAUGHTER AND COMMUNITY SPIRIT AT RUMAH HOPE PJ

KUALA LUMPUR: Laughter filled the halls, paint refreshed worn walls, and the aroma of freshly served meals created a warm atmosphere as the CEKL109 Make a Difference (M.A.D) Project brought a day of joy, fun and love to Rumah Hope Children's Home on March 7.

The initiative followed weeks of careful planning and coordination, with Choicees ensuring that every detail — from activities to meals — ran smoothly.

On the day, participants were split into teams: one group focused on entertaining the children through lively games, another repainted the home's aged white walls, while a third handled food and refreshments to ensure everyone was well taken care of.

Children engaged enthusiastically in games such as pass the message, blindfold shape challenge, and ping pong ball on spoon race, filling the home with energy and excitement. Choicees joined in the play, immersing themselves to connect with the children and share in their joy. The freshly painted walls also stand as a visible reminder of the day's activity, while traces of paint on volunteers' clothes serve as a playful memento of their efforts.

The project reflected the spirit of



Choicees doing activities with the children.

CHOICE's motto, "to know, love, and serve you," with volunteers fully committed — whether assisting with logistics, working under the sun to repaint, or simply offering encouragement to the children.

Sherylyn Sze-To said, "Seeing the children's smiles and happiness made everything worth it. Thank you for bringing so much warmth, kindness, and positive energy to them." Jared Nathaniel Pinto added, "Moments like this remind me how beautiful it is when people come together for oth-

ers. I truly believe God was present in the little moments we shared with the children and in the way everyone stepped in to help."

The CEKL109 MAD Project illustrated that service brings joy not only to those who receive it but also to those who give, forging bonds, spreading positivity, and leaving lasting impressions. For the children, it was a day of fun and engagement; for the volunteers, it was a reminder that even small acts of kindness can brighten lives — both literally and figuratively.

As the day concluded, the brightened walls and echoes of laughter reflected the spirit of giving and shared purpose. During this season of reflection, the project stands as a testament to Christ's love and light, showing that acts of care illuminate the lives of others and bring hope to the community.

Myia S. Nair

WYD Seoul 2027 Liturgical Hymns Contest

The WYD Seoul 2027 Local Organizing Committee (LOC) is launching a global call for new hymn compositions. We are seeking hymns that will inspire hearts not only during the main events of WYD Seoul 2027 but also within general liturgical settings of the Church.

We warmly invite talented young composers from around the world who share a passion for Catholic liturgical music to join us. Come and be part of this great festival where young people gather to share love, faith, and hope through the power of music.

Submission Guidelines

- **Liturgical Standard:** Must be suitable for Catholic liturgical use.
- **Artistic Quality:** Should be artistically excellent while remaining easy for youth worldwide to sing.
- **Language:** Must be usable in both Korean and English.
- **Composition:** Can be monophonic or polyphonic; no restrictions on length or instrumentation.
- **Human Creativity:** Submissions created using generative AI will not be accepted or considered.

Required Documents

1. Sheet Music
2. Soundtrack (Audio File)
3. Consent Form (Downloadable from the official website)

How to Submit

- Email: music2@wydseoul.org
- Deadline: June 30, 2026 (Tuesday)



A vocation that lives on

Christina Lazaroo

In a longhouse at Rh Mungkin, Sarawak, a mother once watched her only son take a step towards a calling that would ask everything of him.

That step now lives on in ways no one could have imagined.

Seminarian Fernandez Anak Sawing @ Andin, 33, did not live to see the day of his priestly ordination. The only son in his family and a brother to three sisters, he lost his life in a sudden drowning on April 7 while bathing in a river near Kg Purak Ogis Supuan, Sabah, where he was undergoing his Initiation Year at the seminary. His body was later found 20 kilometres downstream after a powerful surge of water swept him away.

Bishop of Sibiu, Bishop Joseph Hii gathered the seminarians in Kota Kinabalu and urged them to reflect on how they could carry forward Fernandez's dream.

"Make seminarian Fernandez's dream come true," he said.

He gently challenged them to persevere in their formation and remain faithful to their calling until priestly ordination, reminding them that while Fernandez had answered God's call, his desire to serve could continue through those who remain.

Bishop Joseph accompanied the body of seminarian Fernandez Anak Sawing home to Sibiu, together with his mother.

On April 10, nearly 500 mourners gathered at Sacred Heart Cathedral to bid him farewell. Despite the heavy downpour described by many as "the cry of heaven", the cathedral was filled with prayer, grief, and hope.

The funeral Mass was celebrated by Bishop Joseph with seven priests concelebrating: Msgr Michael Lee, Fr Joseph Sebastian, Fr Edward Raymond, Fr David Ho, Fr David Lau, and Fr George Omutto MHM. Their presence reflected a Church united not only in sorrow, but



also in faith.

During the homily, Bishop Joseph reflected on the words of the Psalm: "The stone that was rejected has become the cornerstone." He reminded the congregation that even in sorrow, the promise of the Resurrection remains. Just as Christ's death was not in vain, God the Father raised Him so that all who enter the tomb with Him may also rise.

This reality is not easy to accept. It does not remove the sorrow felt by a mother who has lost her only son, or by a community grieving a life taken too soon. But it invites a deeper question.

When does a vocation truly begin?

Is it at ordination, the moment the Church formally recognises it? Or does it begin much earlier, in the decision of saying "yes" to God?

Fernandez had already made that decision. Though his journey did not reach the altar in the way many had expected, his vocation has not been lost. It has been entrusted to the very community that now mourns him, in the seminarians who, like Fernandez, responded to their call, in the faithful who gathered in prayer, and in the strength of his family.

A vocation is never lived alone. It is part of the life of the Church, a calling that does not end with death, but is carried forward by others willing to respond.

"Even though Fernandez has returned to the Lord, his spirit lives on through the seminarians he has inspired," the bishop said.

Fernandez Anak Sawing's life, though brief, continues to bear fruit. His witness becomes a source of encouragement to persevere, and a reminder that a "yes" given to God is never in vain.

Even in loss, the Church holds on to the hope that what is offered to God is not taken away, but transformed.

Rest in the arms of the Good Shepherd you longed to serve, Fernandez.

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

Always remembered by
Chris Loh and family and
all those who loved him.

In Loving Memory of
Our Beloved Solomon Rayan Money
1/12/1934 to 28/04/2020



Today we remember and honour the life of our beloved father, grandfather & great-grandfather, whose love, wisdom, and guidance continue to shape our lives even though he is no longer with us. He was a pillar of strength in our family, a man of deep kindness, humility, and unwavering faith.

Solomon lived a life that reflected compassion, patience, and generosity. He always welcomed others with warmth and shared his wisdom through quiet words and meaningful actions. The memories we hold of him, his stories, his laughter, and his unwavering support remain treasures that we carry in our hearts every day and his utmost dedication and contribution to MBSA, Bukit Mertajam.

Though time has passed since his departure, the love he gave us and the lessons he taught continue to guide our paths. His legacy lives on through his family, who will forever cherish the values and faith he instilled in us.

*We find comfort in knowing that he is now resting peacefully in the presence of the Lord.
"I am the resurrection and the life," says the Lord.
"The one who believes in me will live, even though they die." — John 11:25*

Today, we remember him with love, gratitude, and deep respect. Though he is gone from our sight, he will never be gone from our hearts.

Forever loved, forever remembered by
Anthonia Arulsamy, Pamela & Family, Sheila & Family
and all loved ones.

In Loving memorial of
(RTD) Major Eugene
Clifford Cross



Entered eternal rest on
3rd March 2026

*"Forever in our hearts,
remembered with love and
gratitude for a life well lived"*

A memorial Mass will be
celebrated on Saturday,
2nd May 2026 at 6pm at the
Church of Our Lady of
Fatima, Brickfields,
Kuala Lumpur.

A Hundred Years of You

Today, you would have turned one hundred years,
A century measured not in time, but tears.

No cake, no candles to set aglow,
Just quiet thoughts of all we used to know.
The days move on as though not stirred,
Yet linger still the echo of your words.

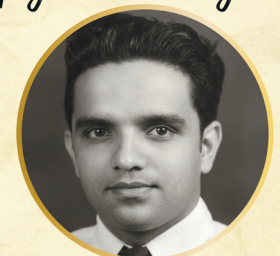
In simple things, your presence is felt —
Even in the quiet moments when the rain pelts.
We see you in the strength you left behind,
In the echoes that shaped our hearts and minds.

Not gone with time, nor lost within the past,
But in the quiet love you gave, forever cast.
One hundred years—yet still it feels too few
To hold the depth of all we owe you.

If we could gift this day without frills or fuss,
We'd wrap it in the person you made of us.
So here you live, where time cannot depart,
A steady voice, a place within our hearts.

Today, one hundred—still, it feels unreal...
And your loss is one that time can never heal.

Happy Birthday Dad



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Pope: *Evangelii Gaudium* must be relaunched

VATICAN: In a letter dated April 12 to the members of the College of Cardinals, Pope Leo XIV reflected on the first consistory of his pontificate held January 7-8, highlighting the importance of the cardinals' exchanges, which he described as "a resource of lasting value" for the Church.

He also reaffirmed that the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* remains "a significant point of reference," urging renewed missionary boldness across the life of the Church. The Holy Father further confirmed that he will convene another consistory with cardinals from around the world on June 26-27.

"I greatly appreciate the work carried out in the groups, which facilitated free, concrete, and spiritually fruitful exchanges as well as the notable quality of the interventions made during the plenary," Pope Leo wrote in the letter, which was made public on April 14.

At that January meeting, the cardinals chose two of four topics proposed by the Pope to guide their work. Setting aside the liturgical question — specifically the rite used before the Second Vatican Council — and the issue of relations between the Holy See and episcopal conferences, they opted to focus on "the mission of the Church in the world today" and on "synod and synodality as an instrument and style of collaboration."

The Pope also placed special emphasis on

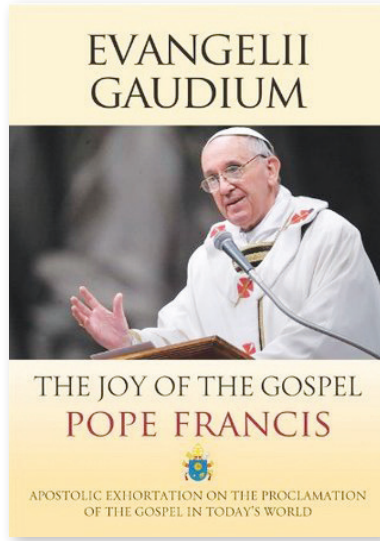
Evangelii Gaudium, Pope Francis' first apostolic exhortation, published Nov 24, 2013, and centred on proclaiming the *kerygma* — the Gospel with Christ at the centre.

Referring to the cardinals' contributions, Pope Leo said: "This exhortation continues to be a significant point of reference. In addition to introducing new content, it refocuses everything on the *kerygma* as the heart of our Christian and ecclesial identity."

He added that it was recognised as "a 'breath of fresh air,' capable of initiating processes of pastoral and missionary conversion — rather than producing immediate structural reforms — and thus profoundly guiding the Church's journey."

The Pope said this perspective challenges the Church at every level.

"On a personal level, it calls every baptised person to renew their encounter with Christ, moving from a faith merely received to a faith truly lived and experienced," he wrote. "This journey affects the very quality of spiritual life, expressed in the primacy of prayer, in the witness that precedes words,



and in the coherence between faith and life."

At the community level, he said, the Church must move "from a pastoral approach of maintenance to one of mission."

"This requires communities to be living agents of the proclamation — welcoming communities that use accessible language, attentive to the quality of relationships, and capable of offering places for listening, accompaniment, and healing," he wrote.

At the diocesan level, Pope Leo stressed the duty of bishops and priests to foster missionary zeal.

"The responsibility of pastors to resolutely support missionary boldness emerges clearly, ensuring that such boldness is not weighed down or stifled by organisational excesses but is guided by a discernment that helps us to recognise what is essential," he said.

The Pope also underlined a Christ-centred understanding of mission, one that spreads "through attraction rather than conquest."

"It is an integral mission, holding in ba-

lance explicit proclamation, witness, commitment, and dialogue, and yielding neither to the temptation of proselytism nor to a merely institutional mentality of preservation or expansion," he wrote. "Even when the Church finds herself in a minority, she is called to live with confident courage, as a small flock bringing hope to all, mindful that the aim of mission is not its own survival but the communication of the love with which God loves the world."

Among the proposals that emerged from the January consistory, the Pope said several deserve further reflection. These include "the need to relaunch *Evangelii Gaudium* through an honest assessment of what has actually been embraced over the years and what, by contrast, remains unfamiliar or unimplemented," with particular attention to "the necessary reforms of the processes of Christian initiation."

He also pointed to "the importance of valuing apostolic and pastoral visits as authentic opportunities for kerygmatic proclamation and for a growth in the quality of relationships" and called for a reassessment of Church communications — including at the level of the Holy See — "from a more explicitly missionary perspective."

The letter concludes with the formal announcement of the next consistory, to be held June 26-27, with further details to come later to help cardinals prepare. Victoria Cardiel, EWTN



KOMAS presents racism report to Speaker

KUALA LUMPUR: Pusat KOMAS presented its Malaysia Racism Report 2025 to Dewan Rakyat Speaker YB Tan Sri Dato' (Dr) Johari Abdul and a delegation appointed by him during a meeting on April 13.

The report documents incidents of racial and religious discrimination during the fourth term of the 15th Parliament in 2025. Based on Hansard records, the findings were assessed against the non-discrimination principles enshrined in the Federal Constitution, as well as international human rights standards.

The meeting aimed to explore more effective approaches to curb racist speech while safeguarding freedom of speech and expression during parliamentary debates.

Pusat KOMAS was led by its director, Jerald Joseph, who presented the organisation's findings and recommendations. With over two decades of advocacy against racism, the organisation proposed the introduction of a Code of Ethics to promote non-discriminatory speech in Parliament.

Such measures, already implemented in countries and institutions including the United Kingdom, South Africa, the European Union and the United Nations, are intended to guide Members of Parliament in identifying discriminatory remarks and to assist presiding officers in making rulings on contentious statements.

The report was subsequently handed over to YB Syahredzan Johan, chairperson of the All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on Racial and Religious Harmony (APPGM-RRH), as instructed by the Speaker, for further study and action.

Pusat KOMAS expressed appreciation to the Speaker and APPGM-RRH for their openness in receiving the report and its recommendations. The organisation voiced confidence that the relevant parties would act on the concerns raised, to ensure Parliament remains a democratic institution where discussions on policy and reform are constructive and free from racial and religious politicking.

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