

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

Pope Francis dies; *sede vacante* begins

VATICAN: On April 21 at 9.45am (3.45pm Malaysian time), Cardinal Kevin Farrell, Camerlengo of the Apostolic Chamber, announced the death of Pope Francis from the Casa Santa Marta with these words:

"Dearest brothers and sisters, with deep sorrow I must announce the death of our Holy Father Francis. At 7.35 this morning, the Bishop of Rome, Francis, returned to the house of the Father. His entire life was dedicated to the service of the Lord and of His Church. He taught us to live the values of the Gospel with fidelity, courage, and universal love, especially in favour of the poorest and most marginalised. With immense gratitude for his example as a true disciple of the Lord Jesus, we commend the soul of Pope Francis to the infinite merciful love of the One and Triune God."

The Pope was admitted to the Agostino Gemelli Polyclinic Hospital on Friday, February 14, 2025,

after suffering from a bout of bronchitis for several days.

Pope Francis' clinical situation gradually worsened, and his doctors diagnosed bilateral pneumonia on Tuesday, February 18.

After 38 days in hospital, the late Pope returned to his Vatican residence at the Casa Santa Marta to continue his recovery.

In 1957, in his early 20s, Jorge Mario Bergoglio underwent surgery in his native Argentina to remove a portion of his lung that had been affected by a severe respiratory infection.

As he aged, Pope Francis frequently suffered bouts of respiratory illnesses, even cancelling a planned visit to the United Arab Emirates in November 2023 due to influenza and lung inflammation.

In April 2024, the late Pope Francis approved an updated edition of the liturgical book for papal funeral rites, which will guide the funeral Mass which

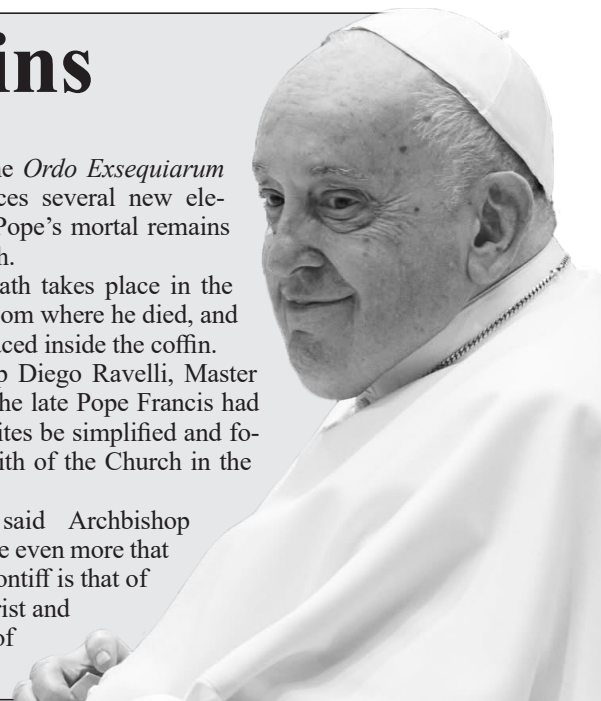
has yet to be announced.

The second edition of the *Ordo Exsequiarum Romani Pontificis* introduces several new elements, including how the Pope's mortal remains are to be handled after death.

The ascertainment of death takes place in the chapel, rather than in the room where he died, and his body is immediately placed inside the coffin.

According to Archbishop Diego Ravelli, Master of Apostolic Ceremonies, the late Pope Francis had requested that the funeral rites be simplified and focused on expressing the faith of the Church in the Risen Body of Christ.

"The renewed rite," said Archbishop Ravelli, "seeks to emphasise even more that the funeral of the Roman Pontiff is that of a pastor and disciple of Christ and not of a powerful person of this world." **Vatican News**



Christ is Risen!

VATICAN: On Easter Sunday (April 20), Pope Francis addressed a world in crisis with a message of peace and urgency. From St Peter's Basilica, the 88-year-old pontiff delivered his *Urbi et Orbi* blessing, calling for an end to war, hunger, and division.

Still recovering from pneumonia, he entrusted the reading of his address to Archbishop Diego Ravelli, but his presence and message were as forceful as ever: "Christ is risen — and hope must rise with Him".

As his words resonated throughout the square, he reflected on the Resurrection not as a distant, abstract belief, but as a force that "challenges, heals, and empowers," reminding the faithful that "hope does not disappoint." He declared that "love has triumphed over hatred, light over darkness, and truth over falsehood. Forgiveness has triumphed over revenge."

But even on this joyful day, the Pope's attention remained with the suffering. His message was not only a proclamation of Christian hope but a moral call to the world.

Pope Francis lamented the many wars and humanitarian disasters ravaging the planet. "Evil has not disappeared from history," he said, "but it no longer has the upper hand over those who accept the grace of this day."

He began with a passionate plea for peace in the Holy Land, condemning the ongoing violence in Gaza, where "the terrible conflict continues to cause death and destruction and to create a dramatic and deplorable humanitarian situation." He called

for "an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip," the release of hostages, and full access to humanitarian aid.

He extended his solidarity to Christians in Palestine and Israel, to all those suffering in Lebanon and Syria, and to the victims of war in Yemen, urging all parties to seek resolution "through constructive dialogue."

His voice also reached Ukraine, calling for efforts toward a "just and lasting peace," and to the South Caucasus, praying for reconciliation between Armenia and Azerbaijan. He appealed to leaders in the Western Balkans to abandon destabilising actions and seek harmony.

The Pope turned his focus to Africa, praying for peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, South Sudan, the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and the Great Lakes region. "In the face of the cruelty of conflicts that involve defenceless civilians and attack schools, hospitals and humanitarian workers, we cannot allow ourselves to forget that it is not targets that are struck, but persons, each possessed of a soul and human dignity."

He prayed for Christians across the continent unable to live their faith freely, reaffirming that "there can be no peace without freedom of religion, freedom of thought, freedom of expression, and respect for the views of others."

Speaking of Myanmar, Pope Francis expressed sorrow for the victims of recent violence and a devastating earthquake in Sagaing, and he welcomed the news of a potential ceasefire as "a sign of hope for the whole of Myanmar."

The Pope issued a stern warning against the global "logic of fear," which he said leads to isolation, division, and a dangerous race toward rearmament. "Let us not use our resources for weapons that sow death," he urged, "but for food, development, and care for one another." These, he said, are the real "weapons of peace."

He decried the "growing climate of anti-Semitism" across the world and renewed his commitment to interfaith solidarity, especially in the Middle East.

In this Jubilee Year, the Pope asked that Easter be an occasion for "the liberation of prisoners of war and political prisoners," and called for the international community to act in accordance with the "principle of humanity." He reminded listeners that "peace is impossible without true disarmament" and called for the dismantling of the "barriers that divide us — physical, political, economic, and spiritual."

This Easter carried special meaning, coinciding with the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea and celebrated jointly by Catholic and Orthodox Christians. After the blessing, Pope Francis toured the square in the popemobile — his first such public movement since hospitalisation — waving to pilgrims who responded with shouts of joy.

"Let us entrust ourselves to Him," Pope Francis concluded, "for He alone can make all things new." His Easter message, filled with both sorrow and hope, challenged the world not to be passive in the face of injustice, but to be empowered by the hope of the Resurrection — a hope, he insisted, that "does not delude, but empowers us." **Agencies**

Second Collection at all Masses (April 26-27) for the rebuilding of Myanmar.

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

In his April prayer intention, Pope Francis asked the world to reflect deeply on the future of artificial intelligence: "Let us pray that the rapid progress of artificial intelligence may not increase inequalities but help respect the dignity of and benefit everyone." His words arrive at a time of both marvel and mourning, as AI becomes increasingly present in our lives — sometimes in ways that reflect the best of human innovation, and tragically, sometimes in ways that reflect our worst impulses.

Just this month in Johor, a disturbing case made headlines: a 16-year-old boy was arrested for allegedly using AI to generate pornographic images of his schoolmates and alumni. Thousands of miles away in India, women are being blackmailed and extorted after their photos were doctored using similar technologies. These aren't isolated events — they're part of a rising tide. Sexual grooming, manipulation, and digital exploitation are increasing, even as most of us are just beginning to understand what AI can do.

It is hard to hold on to hope when confronted with such darkness. And yet, as Catholics, this is precisely what we are called to do.

This year marks the Jubilee Year of Hope — a time to rediscover the radical promise of the Gospel: that even in suffering, Christ is risen. The Resurrection was not the end of pain, but it was the end of despair. In this sacred season, we are reminded that hope is not passive optimism — it is a decision to believe in the power of light even while standing in the shadows.

And so we must ask: what does it mean to protect innocence in the age of AI? How do we become resurrection people in a world where even images of our children can be weaponised?

The danger is real — not just in schools, but in churches, homes, and within digital spaces that feel beyond reach. We want our children to grow



(Unsplash/John Lockwood)

up in trust, not in fear. But trust, today, must be rooted in vigilance and truth. Just as Christ warned his disciples to be "wise as serpents and innocent as doves," we too must learn how to engage with the world as it is, not as we wish it were.

The Church is beginning to act. In many parishes, child protection talks are being introduced, and safeguarding ministries are growing. These are important first steps, but they are not enough. We must educate ourselves and our communities — clergy, parents, educators, and children alike — about the emerging threats of AI misuse, and the ethical responsibilities that come with using these tools.

As people of faith, we must also do more than respond — we must anticipate. We need to build digital literacy into our catechesis and sacramental preparation. We need to teach not just the dangers, but the dignity of the human person, the sacredness of the body, and the inviolability of consent. These are not just secular values — they are deeply Catholic truths, rooted in our belief that every human is made in the image and likeness of God.

We must also model a better way. AI is not inherently evil — it can also be a force for tremendous good. But just as fire can warm a

home or burn it to the ground, technology must be stewarded with wisdom and reverence. As Pope Francis urges, we must ensure that progress does not come at the cost of the vulnerable.

The Resurrection calls us to new life. But that life is not free of wounds. Jesus rose with the marks of crucifixion still in His hands and side. In the same way, we must not hide the wounds in our communities, especially those inflicted on the young. We must name them, confront them, and work to heal them. Resurrection is not denial — it is transformation.

This Jubilee Year invites us to be people of hope — not naïve, but courageous. Hope is telling a young person that they are more than what has been done to them. It's equipping a parent with the tools to protect their family online. It's a priest or youth minister listening with humility, not judgment. It's a Church that stands not only in prayer, but in action.

In a world where innocence can be digitally stripped, let us become guardians of the sacred. Let us be the hands that protect, the voices that teach, and the hearts that hope. For Christ is risen — and with Him, the promise that even in the darkest tombs, new life can begin.

Patricia Pereira

Be generative, as your Father is generative

Lately, over the past years, one word keeps coming to mind. It's something I've been sharing in my talks and recollections. That word is generativity.

It comes from my experience in ministry. When I reflect on what is most needed in those who serve, especially in parishes, I've come to see that what we really need are people who are generative. Another word that comes close is life-giving.

Why do I say this? Everyone can serve in a ministry or be part of a BEC. But that service can become self-serving, divisive, or even create more damage for Jesus to undo than the good it was meant to bring. After all, the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

What makes a difference are people who bring something more into their service. They contribute to the good, the growth, and the flourishing of all they touch. They are people who create, if that makes sense, rather than just do things or criticise. Their presence brings light. You could say, they generate hope. They are life-givers rather than takers. They bring peace instead of conflict. They unite rather than divide.

They write new stories. They open new chapters. You do not get the same old fights, the same old complaints, the same old drama.

Can hateful people be generative people? Even if it is just hate generating more hate, conflict generating more conflict, bitterness feeding bitterness, from morning till night without end?

I suppose we can say that. But, let's look to the story of Jesus.

If anyone has reason to be angry or bitter,



Wikimedia Commons

Jesus does. Yet for all the hatred and rejection He faced, what we are given is a new story. Not a story of hate, anger, or disappointment. There is no "I told you so" or "look what you did."

God opens a new chapter with us. It is a story of peace. Sure, there is forgiveness, and Jesus, who taught us to forgive, surely forgave us. On the cross He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

In the first reading, we see the Apostles opening a new chapter too. Having received the Spirit of God, they begin writing a new

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with Fr Dr Lawrence Ng

Divine Mercy Sunday (C)

Readings: Acts of the Apostle 5:12-16;
Revelation 1:9-13, 17-19;
Gospel: John 20:19-31

story. A story of God at work through them.

This weekend, on the Second Sunday of Easter, many parishes, including mine, are celebrating Divine Mercy Sunday. At the heart of this devotion is the call to be merciful to others.

This devotion reflects a pattern we see in God. A pattern of being generative. Jesus calls us to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Luke 6:36 even gives a different perspective to that famous call to perfection. It says, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." That is the call, not just to be good, but to be life-giving.

The mission to baptise, to preach, to witness, they are all calls to be generative.

The Christian difference is this. Our ability to generate, to give life, does not come from ourselves. It comes from being rooted in Christ. In Easter, we celebrate that the Giver has become the Gift. God who gives life has now given Himself to us.

So it is no surprise that unless we are tapped into that life-giving power of God who creates, renews, and sustains, it is very hard to be merciful, forgiving, and generative.

Happy Divine Mercy Sunday. And if I may add a line, I would say, Let us be generative as our Heavenly Father is generative.

Risen Christ parish Lenten outreach project

PENANG: During the season of Lent, the parishioners of Risen Christ Catholic Church were inspired by the words of the Gospel of Matthew: “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me...” (Matthew 25:35). In the spirit of this message, they launched an outreach project on March 18, distributing meals to those in need — particularly the homeless and urban poor served by Lighthouse, a Catholic feeding centre that welcomes all, regardless of race, religion, or belief.



group. It was heartening to observe that about 40 parishioners from the BECs and the different language apostolates working with Caritas Risen Christ to make this event a success, no doubt with the tremendous support from the parish priest, Friar Esmond Chua, OFM *pic*.

Besides enjoying the food, the clients were also entertained with songs from the 60s and 70s which brought back memories for them.

Food for tea and lunch was prepared and cooked in the homes of parishioners before being sent to Lighthouse for this vulnerable

The parish looks forward to similar collaborative efforts to reach out to even more vulnerable groups in the near future. **Stephanie Cheong**



Parishioners serving the food they prepared for the clients of Lighthouse.

KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

April - May

29 Meeting – Archdiocesan Finance

30/4- Peninsular Malaysia Deacons & Wives Annual Gathering – MAJODI Centre

PENANG DIOCESE

Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

April - May

30/4- Peninsular Malaysia Deacons & Wives Annual Gathering – MAJODI Centre

3/5 Centennial Celebration - Church of St Philip, Segamat

MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

April - May

29 Meeting – 2nd Caritas Malaysia Diocesan Directors & Ecclesiastical Assistants (CM DEA) via Zoom

30/4- Peninsular Malaysia Deacons & Wives Annual Gathering – MAJODI Centre

1/5 Church of the Holy Family, Ulu Tiram, Fundraising Gala Dinner – Restaurant Pekin Johor Jaya

3/5 Mass in English – Church of St Joseph, Plentong at 5.00pm

Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #220

Welcome dear friends,

Wishing you a blessed Easter and may the peace of the Risen Lord be with you. The journey to the Church of St Theresa Masai is usually a 15-minute drive. But the heavy downpour and the flash floods on the Masai Lama Road and the Pasir Gudang Highway, the road cutoffs worsened the traffic flow.... I had to make U-turns, detours, squeeze into emergency lanes and crawl along.

When I was getting edgy, a hymn by the Weston Priory Monks, *Anything happens*, calmed me and I made it on time for the Chrism Mass. We want things to be linear and certain. We react to the uncertain, the unpredictable and chaos. We forget very quickly that *Anything happens*. It was a spirit-filled Chrism Mass.

Something’s Happening Near You:

- The pilgrim cross or the *Salib Malaysia* was assembled at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart Johor Bahru on April 11 and it leaves for St Louis Kluang on its second leg.
- The diocese is preparing for the Training of *Trainers Programme on Synodality*, the changes that are expected, the conversions needed, the spirituality required to sustain this new Pentecost. Ignorance is not bliss.
- The PSO MJD will be conducting a *Safeguarding of Minors Workshop* on July 5 (9.00am - 1.00pm) at Majodi Centre for *Tamil*-speaking parents, youth leaders and catechists.
- The Catholic Bishops Malaysia called for a nationwide appeal for *Myanmar-Thailand Earthquake Humanitarian Response*. In all churches, the second collection on Divine Mercy Sunday (April 26-27) and additional donations are welcome till May 31.

Easter Time: Love Poured Out, Not Love Stored Up.

1. In this beautiful hymn, Philippians 2:5-11, Paul recognises that *Jesus had only one “operational mode.”* Everything he did, he did by self-emptying. He emptied himself and descended into human form. And he emptied himself still further (“even unto death on the cross”) and fell through the bottom to return to the realms of dominion and glory. In whatever life circumstance, Jesus always responded with the same motion of self-emptying — or to put it another way, with the same motion of *descent: going lower*, taking the lower place, not the higher.

2. It is a path he himself walked to the very end. In the garden of Gethsemane, with his betrayers and accusers massing at the gates, he struggled and anguished but remained true to his course.

3. **Do not hoard, do not cling** — not even to life itself. Let it go, let it be — “Not my will but yours be done, O Lord. Into your hands I commend my spirit.”

4. Thus he came and thus he went, giving himself fully into life and death, *losing himself*, squandering himself, “gambling away every gift God bestows.” It was not love stored up but *love utterly poured out* that opened the gates to the Kingdom of Heaven. **Fr Richard Rohr**

A Thought for the Week: The Radio DJ.
A very poor woman with a small family called-in to a radio station asking for help from God. A non-believer man who was also listening to this radio programme decided to make fun of the woman. He got her address, called his secretary and ordered her to buy a large amount of foodstuffs and take them to the woman. However, he sent it with the following instruction: “When the

woman asks who sent the food, tell her that it’s from the devil.” When the secretary arrived at the woman’s house, the woman was so happy and grateful for the help that had been received. She started putting the food inside her small house. The secretary then asked her, “Don’t you want to know who sent the food?” The woman replied, “No, I don’t even care because when GOD orders, even the devil obeys!” *Lesson from the poor woman:* For the believer, God hears. The unbeliever mocks. But God uses all means and any means to accomplish His plans.

QnQ! Q asks? Does God abandon us as HE abandoned Jesus on the cross? From a Cistercian monk in Spain: “Sometimes God withdraws a particular blessing from someone so that the person can comprehend Him as something other than a being of whom one asks favours and makes requests. He knows how far He can test a soul, and never goes beyond that point. At such moments, we must never say: “God has abandoned me”. He will never do that, even though we may sometimes abandon Him. If the Lord sets us a great test, he always gives us sufficient grace to pass that test.”

The Holy Spirit @ work: “The resurrection of Christ changed the midnight of bereavement into a sunrise of reunion; it changed the midnight of disappointment into a sunrise of joy; it changed the midnight of fear to a sunrise of peace.” **Billy Graham**

Something To Tickle You: When a nation’s young men are conservative, its funeral bell is already rung. **Henry Ward Beecher**

Bishop Bernard Paul



Chrism Mass celebrations:

Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu

The Chrism Mass, traditionally celebrated during Holy Week, is a significant liturgical celebration that unites the Church in mission and ministry.

Central to the celebration is the blessing of the Sacred Chrism, the Oil of the Sick, and the Oil of Catechumens — sacred oils used throughout the year in sacraments such as Baptism, Confirmation, Anointing of the Sick, and ordinations.

Equally important is the Renewal of Priestly Promises, a solemn reaffirmation of the clergy's commitment to serve Christ and His Church.

The following is a round-up of the Chrism Mass celebrations held across Malaysia's arch/dioceses.

This year's Chrism Mass was celebrated on April 12 at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, presided over by Archbishop John Wong. In his homily, the archbishop reminded the faithful of their vital role in the mission that Jesus has entrusted to His Church.

He said, "Tonight, as we gather, it is good to ask ourselves: Why are we here? What is the purpose of this Mass? Perhaps it is to witness the blessing of the oils, to see the priests, or to bring oil on behalf of a friend. Whatever the reason, the Gospel of St Luke reminds us that Jesus used the words of the prophet Isaiah to reveal His ministry — a divine vision entrusted to Him. This same mission now calls each of us to be part of His Body, here and now."

The prelate then called on all the faithful



Archbishop John Wong stirring the Oil of Chrism.

to reflect on their shared commitment to live out the Gospel and to support one another, especially the clergy, in this journey of faith.

After the homily, the clergy renewed their

commitment to priestly service, and the archbishop blessed and consecrated the Oils brought to the altar by Frs Bradley Belly, Sylvester Wong and Jerry Joseph.

Diocese of Sandakan



Sandakan clergy renewing their vows.

On March 27, priests from the Diocese of Sandakan gathered at the Cathedral of St Mary for the Chrism Mass, which took place after a three-day priests' meeting.

Presiding over the celebration, Rt Rev Bishop Julius Dusin Gitom described the Chrism Mass as a deeply meaningful liturgy. "We have come together to praise and thank the Lord for the gifts of the priesthood and the Eucharist, which are closely connected," he said. "All baptised persons share in the ministry of Jesus — especially through teaching and prayer. But the priesthood is uniquely entrusted to those ordained to carry out Christ's ministry in a special way."

He emphasised that only priests could celebrate the Eucharist — the divine wisdom given to the Church to sustain and continue the ministry of Christ. "The

Eucharist sustains the life of the Church," the bishop noted.

Bishop Julius went on to explain the significance of the blessing of the sacred oils which would be distributed to the priests for their respective parishes.

He urged the faithful to continue supporting and praying for him and all parish priests in their ministry, asking them to be patient with their shepherds. "Pray that we may remain men of prayer, faithful, holy, and united with Christ, the Good Shepherd," he said.

To his brother priests, Bishop Julius offered words of encouragement, reminding them of their divine calling: "You have been chosen by Jesus to serve. You are important to God's plan. Serve the people with joy, remain close to God in prayer, be strong in the face of challenges, and never stop striving for holiness." Evelyn Jock

Diocese of Miri

The Chrism Mass for the Diocese of Miri was celebrated on April 9 at the Cathedral of St Joseph, ahead of Holy Week, to allow priests — some serving in remote parishes — to return in time for the Easter Triduum.

The celebration also welcomed five priests from the Vicariate of Brunei.

The Mass began with the launch of the *Perjalanan Salib Malaysia*. This *Salib* will journey through the diocese before reaching Majodi, Johor for the Malaysia Pastoral Convention in September 2026.

In his homily, Rt Rev Bishop Richard Ng reflected on the meaning of Chrism, derived from the Greek *Christos*, meaning "the anointed one." He highlighted the prophecy from

Isaiah — fulfilled by Jesus in Nazareth — and reminded the faithful that all baptised Christians are anointed, not for privilege, but for the responsibility of sharing in Christ's mission.

To the clergy, he urged a faithful living out of their priesthood: to be bearers of good news, forgivers, role models, and selfless servants. He also called on the faithful to pray for their priests and support them with encouragement rather than criticism.

After the homily, the priests renewed their vows, followed by the blessing of the Oil of the Sick and Catechumens, and the consecration of the Sacred Chrism. The blessed oils were then distributed to the priests to be used in their respective parishes throughout the year.



Bishop Richard Ng with the clergy from Miri and Brunei.

New outdoor stations of the cross at Batu Gajah parish

BATU GAJAH: Earlier this year, Fr Michael Dass, parish priest of the Church of St Joseph, initiated the construction of fourteen new outdoor Stations of the Cross around the parish grounds. Built mainly using stone and cement, the stations were completed in March.

On March 9, the Bishop of Penang, Cardinal Sebastian Francis, blessed each of the fourteen stations. The blessing was witnessed by Fr Michael, assistant priest Fr Konstend Gnanapragasam, and parishioners. After the Sunday Mass, the congregation also prayed the Way of the Cross at each of the newly completed stations.

Fr Michael shared that the total cost of constructing the outdoor Stations of the Cross was approximately RM18,000. He acknowledged and thanked Furdy Junior Fernandez, who served as both the architect



Cardinal Sebastian Francis incensing one of the Stations of the Cross.

and contractor for the project, and Francis Wong, who undertook the landscaping work.

The Way of the Cross, is a traditional Catholic devotion in which individuals or groups reflect on the Passion of Christ by

praying at each of the fourteen stations that depict key moments of His suffering and death.

Fr Michael expressed his hope that both parishioners and pilgrims would be able to experience a fresh, unique, and powerful

encounter with Christ's suffering by praying the Way of the Cross outdoors. He believes this setting offers a more immersive and personal connection with Jesus—often more impactful than within the confines of a church. The outdoor environment also encourages deeper reflection on both the physical and emotional aspects of Christ's journey, with nature providing a contemplative backdrop for prayer.

Since their completion, parishioners and visiting pilgrims have taken time to pray at the outdoor stations, especially on Fridays during Lent. Recently, a group of pilgrims from Kuala Lumpur visited and prayed the Way of the Cross. Taking turns to carry a large cross, they journeyed through the stations, experiencing a richer, more multi-sensory encounter of Christ's Passion that deepened their connection to His love and sacrifice. **Bernard Anthony**

A call to mission and renewal

Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur



Archbishop Julian Leow breathing on the Oil of Chrism.

The Chrism Mass was celebrated on April 8 at the Church of the Sacred Heart, with Archbishop Julian Leow presiding. The Mass brought together approximately 65 priests from across the archdiocese.

In his homily, Archbishop Julian delivered a reflection centred on the theme of family, inspired by the Gospel reading: “Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up.” “We all come from families — some whole, some broken, some joyful, others marked by pain,” he shared. “Even Jesus grew up in a family, and our own families shape us and teach us lessons that prepare us for our vocation. Today, we remember that our priests, too, come from families and are part of a greater spiritual family — you, the people of God — whose prayers and support we deeply need.”

The archbishop spoke about both the sacred responsibility and the human vulnerability of the priesthood. “We are called to serve — to bring liberty to captives, sight to the blind, and forgiveness in Jesus’ name. Yet we are

also weak men. We rely on your prayers, and the intercession of the saints, to stay faithful to the promises we made.”

Turning to the congregation, he added, “Your priests — my priests, our priests — stand before you tonight to renew the vows of their ordination. Please pray for us, that we may remain faithful servants, especially amid the distractions and challenges of today’s world.”

Quoting St John Mary Vianney, the patron saint of parish priests, Archbishop Julian reminded his brother priests of the depth of their vocation: “If we only knew who we are as priests...”, encouraging them to remember their identity as vessels of God’s mercy and grace.

As the Mass concluded, the archbishop expressed deep appreciation for the dedication of the clergy, particularly during difficult times. “We may have failed you at times,” he acknowledged, “but we ask for your continued prayers, as we strive — together — to be shepherds after the heart of Jesus.”

Diocese of Penang

His Eminence Cardinal Sebastian Francis presided over the Chrism Mass at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit on April 8. In his homily, he reflected on the meaning of the word “Chrism,” derived from the Greek *chrisma*, meaning “anointing.” He reminded the congregation that Chrism takes its name from Christ, “the Anointed One of the Lord,” and that the oils blessed during this liturgy are powerful symbols of mission, healing, and unity within the Christian community.

“This Mass reminds us that our identity is rooted in Christ,” the Cardinal said, referencing Jesus’ first homily in Nazareth from the Gospel of Luke. “He was anointed to bring good news to the poor, liberty to captives, and healing to the broken. These oils symbolise our shared call to mission and communion.”

The liturgy included the blessing of the three sacred oils: the Oil of Catechumens, the Oil of the Sick, and the Sacred Chrism — each serving a unique and vital role in

the sacramental life of the Church. Cardinal Sebastian highlighted that these oils are not only used in specific sacraments but also stand as continuous signs of God’s grace at every stage of life.

“They remind us that everyone — children, the sick, those preparing for baptism, and all the faithful — are embraced by God’s love,” he added.

Following the homily, the clergy present renewed their priestly promises, reaffirming their dedication to serve Christ and His Church.

Addressing the faithful, Cardinal Sebastian requested their prayers:

“Pray for your priests, that the Lord may pour out His gifts abundantly upon them and keep them faithful as ministers of Christ, the High Priest,” he said. “And pray also for me, that I may be faithful to the apostolic office entrusted to me and become, in your midst, a more perfect image of Christ — the Good Shepherd, the Teacher, and the Servant of all.”



Cardinal Sebastian Francis praying over the oils. (Photo/Boon Tiong)

He concluded by reminding the congregation that the Chrism Mass is a celebration of our baptismal calling — a visible sign

that we, the people of God, are anointed by the Holy Spirit to bring Christ to the world. **Nicholas Khor**

International community unites to stage musical on Jesus’ journey

KUALA LUMPUR: A musical drama on *The Life of Jesus* was held on the fourth Sunday of Lent, March 30, at the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist. Produced by members of the Parish International Community, the performance featured over 25 cast members from diverse countries, including Brazil, Netherlands, Cameroon, Nigeria, Kenya, Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, and Malaysia. The drama reenacted the life of Jesus, from His birth to His passion and resurrection.

The production was the brainchild of a parishioner, who shared her vision with a hesitant yet eager team. Though initially doubtful about its success, the team, supported by the parish priest, rallied behind the project despite challenges. The producer aimed to create a performance that felt both timeless and immediate. With a cast of both adults and children, the drama portrayed key moments in Jesus’ journey. Working with a small team from different national backgrounds, the focus was on the emotional depth of each role, whether it was the sorrow of the disciple John or the unwavering faith of Mary. The lighting and sound effects played a crucial role in highlighting the contrasts of darkness and light, while the music, led by the music director and choir conductor, with a choir of cat-

echism children and a soloist, added a deeply spiritual layer.

There were moments of doubt during preparations, especially with technical issues involving lighting and sound. However, despite setbacks, such as the synchronisation of slides faced by a mother and son team and the technical lead, the team remained calm and adaptable, learning the importance of collaboration across cultures.

This experience was not just about directing a performance but about connecting a sacred love story to a diverse audience. Ultimately, the production became more than a dramatic reenactment; it was a shared journey of faith, hope, community and collaboration. The dedication of the cast, the resonating music of the choir, and the powerful reactions of the audience reflected the profound impact of art and storytelling. Grateful for everyone’s contribution, the producer reflected on the deeper connection to Jesus’ sacrifice and resurrection that the production fostered among all involved. Indeed, the theme of the drama — to trust Jesus, for He is always with us until the end of time — was brought to life through this experience, extending beyond the performance and into our daily lives. Happy Easter everyone, those near and far! **SJC Parish International Community Team**



The international community staging a musical on the life Jesus.

Raising awareness on sexual grooming

Deacon Dr Leslie Petrus

JOHOR BAHRU: An informative Zoom session on the topic *Sexual Grooming: What Every Parent Needs to Know* was held on April 6 from 8.00pm to 9.30pm. The session featured expert speakers including Dr Christabel Esther Terence, a psychiatrist at Hospital Raja Perempuan Bainun Ipoh and a lecturer at UniKL; Fr Martinian Lee, parish priest of the Church of the Holy Family in Ulu Tiram; and Deacon Anthony Chua, PSO Bishop's Delegate for the Diocese of Malacca Johore and a practising lawyer.

Dr Christabel, the main speaker at the online session, provided a comprehensive overview of the topic of sexual grooming. Her presentation covered several critical areas, including:

- Defining sexual grooming
- The grooming process
- Identifying warning signs in adults involved in grooming
- Recognising warning signs in children who may be victims
- Strategies for protecting children and ensuring their safety

Grooming is a deliberate process used by perpetrators to gain a child's trust and isolate them for exploitation. This process can begin as early as childhood, with children aged 10-12 being the most targeted. Perpetrators are often known to the child and their family, including relatives, friends, and, increasingly, individuals met through social media. Online grooming often involves tricking or coercing the child into engaging in sexual activities via chat, videos, or photos. In physical settings, perpetrators may use persuasion through gifts, compliments, or excessive praise to gain the child's trust.

Dr Christabel devoted considerable time during the session to helping parents recognise red flags in adult behaviour and signs of distress in affected children. Adults involved in grooming often give excessive attention to the child, such as offering gifts, giving frequent praise, or engaging in physical affection, such as hugs, that may make the child feel uncomfortable. This type of behaviour may blur boundaries, particularly in family settings where hugging could be a sensitive issue.

Parents are urged to watch for changes in their child's behaviour, relationships, and



rouines. Key warning signs include shifts in how the child interacts with others, increased time spent online, and physical or emotional changes. Parents should also be attentive to signs such as a decline in academic performance, secretive behaviour, emotional withdrawal, or a reluctance to spend time with family. Being aware of these patterns is crucial for early detection and intervention.

Dr Christabel stressed the critical role parents and the church play in supporting children when indicators of grooming are clear. She emphasised that when a child discloses such sensitive information, parents must listen attentively, without judgment, and remain calm and patient. This, she noted, is one of the greatest challenges parents face in these situations.

Once a disclosure is made, Dr Christabel urged parents to take immediate action. The first step is to ensure the child's safety by keeping the perpetrator away. Parents should also seek help from a professional counsellor or a medical doctor (preferably female) if they are unsure how to proceed. If there is evidence of wrongdoing and the child is a minor, it is essential to file a police report, as required by law. Unfortunately, there are cases where families have chosen to hush up such incidents out of fear of shame or protecting family dignity.

In her closing remarks, Dr Christabel emphasised the importance of preventative education for parents of young children, starting as early as age three. Children should be taught about body ownership and personal boundaries, with the understanding that only parents (usually the mother) and medi-

cal professionals with appropriate authority (such as a doctor or nurse) should be allowed to touch them. She also stressed that children must be taught that no adult should ever ask them to keep a secret from their parents, especially if there is any threat of punishment for disclosure.

Dr Christabel advised parents to closely monitor their child's technology use, including their behaviour on electronic devices and online platforms. She also warned against sharing personal or family information online, particularly when it comes to pictures of children. Parents should be especially cautious if their child is talented or frequently in the public eye, as this can increase the risk of exploitation.

Deacon Anthony provided an important update on Malaysian laws governing sexual offences against minors during the session. He emphasised that anyone aware of a sexual offence involving a minor must take immediate action. If the minor informs their parents, or in the case of a parish, both the parents and the parish priest must report the incident to the police. Failure to do so carries legal consequences, he stressed.

Deacon Anthony also outlined the procedure for handling such cases within the parish. Whether the perpetrator is a layperson (such as a youth leader or catechist) or a clergy member, the victim's parents must notify the PSO Delegate — who is Deacon Anthony himself. He, along with two members from the PSO, will conduct an

investigation. If concrete evidence is found, the case will be referred to the bishop, who will make the final decision and subsequently report the matter to the police for further investigation. At that point, the PSO will cease its investigation.

Regarding the parties involved, Deacon Anthony explained that the alleged offender will be temporarily removed from their duties until proven guilty, while the victim will be provided with necessary protection. He also noted that the PSO has been actively conducting awareness sessions across various language groups within the diocese, particularly targeting those involved with children and youth, to ensure better understanding and prevention of such incidents.

To conclude the session, Fr Martinian shared his pastoral experience working with young teenagers who had been sexually involved. He discussed the deep guilt and shame these individuals often carry and how it significantly impacts their lives. Fr Martinian helps them by encouraging participation in spiritual camps, church youth activities, and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, offering a path toward healing and restoration. If the emotional pain is especially profound, he refers them to counselling services for further support.

Fr Martinian also cautioned parents of young children to closely monitor their children's phone usage and online chats. He warned that many perpetrators pretend to be the same age as their targets and establish online friendships. With parents often working, the risks of neglecting these behaviours can be costly.

The session concluded with a Q&A, where participants raised several sensitive questions. Dr Christabel's insights brought much-needed awareness to the issue of sexual grooming, especially with the growing influence of social media, where control is minimal. Many attendees were also informed about the Catholic Church's Personal Standard Office (PSO) in Malaysia, which handles sexual complaints within the Church.

Fr Martinian closed the conversation with a prayer and a blessing, leaving the participants with a sense of hope and support. It was truly a blessing, and we give thanks to God for such a valuable and enlightening discussion.



Seeds of hope planted during Lenten reflection

PUCHONG: At the commencement of the season of Lent, faithful of the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe and neighbouring parishes gathered for a special Lenten reflection led by Sr Margarete Sta Maria, a Canossian Sister and theology expert.

The event, held under the theme *Journeying in Living Hope Towards Easter*, drew 90 parishioners seeking spiritual renewal during the sacred 40-day period of fasting, prayer, and reflection.

Sr Margarete emphasised that Lent is a

time for Catholics to repent, reflect, and deepen their relationship with God through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. She encouraged participants to confront personal sins, failures, and obstacles in order to become more open to God's grace and better able to serve others.

"Think of our life like soil," she said during the reflection. "What does soil need to grow? Similarly, what obstacles block my heart from Jesus?"

Drawing on her role as director of API and her extensive theological background, Sr Margarete spoke passionately about the importance of silent prayer, discipline, and charitable acts as transformative Lenten practices. "Faith without action is nothing," she reminded the congregation, urging them to live out their faith through good works,

especially by praying for catechumens preparing for baptism.

She also addressed themes from the Heart of Synodality, calling for a united Church journeying together as a family of God. Highlighting the Witness of Hope, she spoke of the need to be beacons of light for others, offering strength and encouragement amid life's trials.

"Hope does not deny suffering," she said, "but it gives us the courage to believe in a future shaped by justice, peace, and love. Christ's suffering is not the end — it is the beginning of resurrection."

Parishioners were left with a renewed sense of purpose and spiritual direction, inspired to reflect more deeply and act more compassionately in preparation for the celebration of Easter. Jennifer L. Anugraham



The participants from the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Pilgrims walk in faith and stewardship at Camino eco-pilgrimage

Julie Amos

PORT DICKSON: The Church of the Immaculate Conception in collaboration with the Creation Justice Ministry, recently hosted a deeply enriching Camino eco-pilgrimage. The event brought together parishioners and nature lovers on a meaningful journey that highlighted the connection between spirituality and care for creation.

The word “Camino” means “the way” in Spanish, often associated with the famous Camino de Santiago pilgrimage. In our context, the Camino eco-pilgrimage symbolised not just a physical journey, but a spiritual and ecological one, an invitation to walk the way of stewardship, humility and hope. Each step taken was a prayer for healing of ourselves, our communities and the Earth. It reminded us that the path to holiness includes caring

for God's creation, and that every small action, done in love, can echo in eternity.

The eco-pilgrimage began with a beach clean-up and seashell collection, where participants not only helped restore the natural beauty of the coastline but also took time for quiet reflection. At the end of the activity, the collected seashells were crafted into keychains by the youth and distributed to participants as a symbolic memento of their commitment to protecting creation.

This was followed by a planting activity at the church grounds. Participants planted and watered small plants, which they later took home serving as a living reminder of their promise to nurture and protect the environment.

One of the highlights of the event was the eco Rosary Walk, held within the church compound. Along the route, two interactive



Participants planting some plants in the church grounds.



Some of the participants of the pilgrimage.

stations were set up: a “Share and Care” station, which encouraged the exchange of reusable items to reduce waste, and an eco Hope Wall, where participants posted prayers and messages for communities affected by environmental destruction.

The pilgrimage also featured a special presentation by Fr Andrew Manickam, OFM, Cap, titled *Stewards of Creation*, offering insights into the Christian call to care for the earth. This was followed by Mass celebrated by Fr Andrew, with parish priest, Fr Edwin Peter, concelebrating. A short video on sea plastic pollution and a potluck

fellowship further strengthened community bonds.

Adding a vibrant touch to the event, our youth and young children surprised everyone with a lively flash mob performance themed caring for creation. Their energy and creativity brought joy to the day and helped reinforce the message in a fun and memorable way.

We were also blessed by the presence of a youth group from the Seremban parish, whose enthusiasm and participation added to the spirit of unity and collaboration throughout the pilgrimage.



Pastoral care of the lay faithful on specific issues in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur

Dear People of God,

Greetings of peace and love of Jesus Christ. Over the past few years, the clergy has engaged in numerous discussions addressing challenging issues in the pastoral care of the lay faithful. Embracing a spirit of synodality, we have explored and discerned these matters within the presbyterium, the Council of Priests, and the College of Consultors. It is essential to recognise that collective decisions thrive on the unity of a group. When decisions are made collectively, they foster a stronger sense of commitment and responsibility among all involved. This shared accountability can lead to more effective implementation and better outcomes for the pastoral care of the People of God.

Therefore, the following decisions have been made for implementation in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur:

1. Mixed /Disparity of Worship Marriages and Holy Communion

Pope John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio* (1981) wrote, [t]he Eucharist is the very source of Christian marriage. The Eucharistic Sacrifice, in fact, represents Christ's covenant of love with the Church, sealed with His blood on the Cross. In this sacrifice of the New and Eternal Covenant, Christian spouses encounter the source from which their own marriage covenant flows, is interiorly structured and continuously renewed. As a representation

of Christ's sacrifice of love for the Church, the Eucharist is a fountain of charity. In the Eucharistic gift of charity, the Christian family finds the foundation and soul of its “communion” and its “mission”: by partaking in the Eucharistic bread, the different members of the Christian family become one body, which reveals and shares in the wider unity of the Church. Their sharing in the Body of Christ that is “given up” and in His Blood that is “shed” becomes a never-ending source of missionary and apostolic dynamism for the Christian family. (#57)

It has been the pastoral practice in this Archdiocese to celebrate mixed/disparity of worship marriages outside the context of the Holy Mass, unless express permission is sought from the archbishop. The primary purpose of this approach is to ensure that non-Catholic participants do not feel excluded from the celebration, thereby fostering unity.

While we understand that the reason for which the Church reserves the Eucharist outside Mass is, primarily, the administration of Viaticum to the dying, Holy Communion for the sick, and adoration of Christ present in the sacrament, there is also the possibility of Holy Communion outside Mass.

Therefore, after discussing the Rite of Marriage (without Mass) with the couple, at the request of the Catholic partner, the priest can give Communion to the Catholic partner and those Catholics in attendance.

2. Eulogy at Funeral Mass

The *General Introduction to the Order of Christian Funerals* states that “[a] brief homily based on the readings is always given after the Gospel reading at the funeral liturgy and may also be given after the readings at the vigil service; but there is never to be a eulogy. Attentive to the grief of those present, the homilist should dwell on God's compassionate love and on the paschal mystery of the Lord, as proclaimed in the Scripture readings. The homilist should also help the members of the assembly to understand that the mystery of God's love and the mystery of Jesus' victorious death and resurrection were present in the life and death of the deceased and that these mysteries are active in their own lives as well. Through the homily, members of the family and community should receive consolation and strength to face the death of one of their members with a hope nourished by the saving word of God” (#27).

However, we also recognise that eulogies can provide comfort and facilitate healing during the grieving process, helping individuals embark on a healthy journey of mourning. Therefore, once the funeral Mass has concluded, a family member or friend may deliver a eulogy for the deceased. It is recommended that the eulogy be kept to five minutes or less, with content that is reverent and appropriate in the sacred space of the Church.

3. Permission for Female Altar Servers

In a Pastoral Letter dated November 29, 2019, permission was granted for parishes in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur to include girls as altar servers. While we acknowledge that some parishes may not have been logistically prepared to accommodate both boys and girls at that time, it is my hope that, after five years, all parishes have moved forward to welcome both boys and girls to serve as altar servers.

Let us remember Pope Francis' words from 2021: “Offering lay people of both sexes the possibility of accessing the ministry of acolyte and lector, by virtue of their participation in the baptismal priesthood, will increase the recognition, also through a liturgical act [institution], of the precious contribution that many lay people make, including women, to the life and mission of the Church.”

May our shared efforts and dedication continue to inspire and support one another as we work towards a hopeful, more compassionate future. Thank you for your unwavering commitment.

Yours faithfully in Christ,


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

April 8, 2025

NEWS IN BRIEF

Vatican updates Norms on Mass Intentions and Stipends

VATICAN: The Vatican's Dicastery for the Clergy has released a new decree updating norms on Mass intentions and stipends, approved by Pope Francis on Palm Sunday (April 13). The new rules took effect on Easter Sunday, April 20, 2025.



While maintaining Canon 945, the decree introduces revised norms for "collective intentions", allowing multiple offerings for one Mass only if all donors are explicitly informed and give free consent — consent cannot be presumed.

It strongly warns against treating Mass offerings as commercial transactions, reaffirming that doing so constitutes simony, a serious abuse.

The decree responds to modern pastoral challenges, especially priest shortages, while ensuring that Mass intentions retain their spiritual integrity. It urges bishops to educate clergy and laity on the new norms, keep proper records, and promote free Masses for the poor.

Priests may not replace promised Masses with general mentions during liturgies — doing so is considered "gravely illicit." Diocesan bishops may redirect surplus Mass intentions to support needy parishes or mission territories, fostering global solidarity. **LiCAS News**

Church leaders decry police assault on priests, tribal women

ODISHA, India: Three weeks after two Catholic priests and tribal women were assaulted by police in Juba village, Church leaders say no action has been taken against the perpetrators, raising serious concerns over religious freedom and state bias.

On March 22, police entered St Francis Xavier Church in Gajapati district without a warrant and violently beat Fr Joshi George, Fr. Dayanand Nayak, and several Kondh tribal women and girls preparing the church for Sunday service. A fact-finding report later described the police behaviour as a "targeted attack" on Christians.

"This is the first time in the state's history that police have assaulted Catholic priests and paraded them publicly," the report stated, describing a deep sense of fear, insecurity, and disbelief in the community.

The priests were accused of religious conversion and beaten with *lathis* (heavy sticks). Women were reportedly molested, and sacred church items were desecrated. Police also destroyed village homes, motorcycles, food supplies, and appliances.

Despite a formal complaint filed by the Berhampur Diocese on April 8, Church officials, including Bishop Sarat Chandra Nayak, report that no response or action has come from state authorities.

Fr. George said the silence from officials only confirms fears of targeted bias under the Hindu nationalist BJP government, which took power in the state in mid-2024.

The Church continues to call for justice, accountability, and protection of constitutional religious freedoms for Christians and tribal communities in India. **ucanews.com**

Parish training upholds dignity in Catholic funeral care

CENTRAL JAVA: A Catholic parish in Central Java recently hosted a special training to equip volunteers in caring for the deceased with dignity and reverence, in line with Church teachings.

Held at St Paul's Church, Kleco Parish, in collaboration with Brayat Minulyo Hospital, the "Catholic-standard Funeral Care Training" drew over 90 participants from 51 communities. Organised by the Pangruktilaya Ministry, the programme aimed to blend practical skills with spiritual formation for end-of-life ministry.

"Funeral care is a noble ministry," said Fr Aloysius Kriswinarto MSF, parish priest. "Volunteers help the deceased prepare to meet the Lord."

The training emphasised theological reflections, privacy, respect for grieving families, and included hands-on sessions. Volunteers were taught to pray during the rites and address the deceased gently, acknowledging the sacredness of the moment.

With new insights and skills, participants left with a deeper commitment to serve with compassion, honouring life even in death. **LiCAS News**

Keys to building resilient families, **Small acts, shared faith**

SINGAPORE: Faith and consistent family bonding are among the most important ingredients for building strong and resilient families.

This was the key finding of a three-year study presented at a symposium hosted by Catholic Family Life (CFL) in the Archdiocese of Singapore.

Singapore's Minister for Social and Family Development, Masagos Zulkifli, speaking as guest of honour, underscored the power of faith to restore and strengthen family life.

"There is something called *kintsugi* in Japanese art. Broken ceramic is glued back together with gold, and it becomes a work of art," he said. "What is this gold that puts it together? I think it is our faith."

The symposium gathered around 150 participants — ranging from faith leaders and educators to social workers and policy advocates — at the St Francis Xavier Major Seminary Building in Upper Bukit Timah.

Organised by CFL, the event marked the release of its study *Building Strong Families: A Study of Family Strength and Family Resources*, conducted from 2022 to 2024 with support from the National Council of Social Service.

Dr Kenneth Poon, CFL vice-chair and head of the study's research task force, said the findings provide timely insights as more Singaporeans live alone and young people spend less time with family.

"We are looking at more house-



Dr Kenneth Poon (centre), vice-chair of Catholic Family Life, moderates a panel at the Strong Families Symposium 2025, featuring (from left) Assoc Prof Razwana Begum, Malminderjit Singh, Nancy Ng, and Pauline Wong. (Catholic Family Life/Archdiocese of Singapore/Catholic News SG)

holds and individuals that might not be able to benefit as much from the protective influence of families," said Dr Poon, a veteran psychologist and researcher.

The study identified key contributors to family resilience: family commitment, marital satisfaction, conflict resolution, and — though to a lesser extent — family spirituality.

Dr Poon noted that spirituality was more evident in families where couples had been married for over two decades. While the study did not determine the exact cause, he suggested that shared faith practices, like family prayer, may become "internalised" over time.

Pauline Wong, Executive Director of the Archdiocesan Commission for Catholic Schools, said the findings affirm the Church's focus on the fam-

ily as the first educator. "What about family spirit? It's the family that's going to journey with each child for life," she said.

For Colin and Debra Tan, who have been married 25 years and serve in the Couple Empowerment Programme, the study reinforced their experience.

"When couples are empowered by knowledge of their faith and a sense of a shared vocation, they can provide a nurturing, faith-filled environment for their children," said Debra.

CFL board chair, Martha Suen, said the findings would guide the organisation's programming. "Building strong families doesn't always need grand gestures," she said. "Sometimes, it is in these small, repeated acts of togetherness that the deepest strength is forged." **LiCAS News**

Bombings show Myanmar junta's 'contempt for life, faith, and the laws of war'

MYANMAR: The Myanmar junta destroyed a Baptist church in Chin state on Apr 13, in the third attack on church buildings in five days and violating a ceasefire it declared to help relief works after last month's devastating earthquake.

The Myoma Baptist Church in Mindat town and several other buildings were severely damaged in the latest aerial bombing in the predominantly Christian Chin state, according to Church sources and rights groups.

The Palm Sunday bombing of the

church caused no civilian casualties, as churchgoers had already fled the area out of fear of possible attacks, Church sources said.

It was the third attack on a Christian structure in five days, after Christ the King Catholic Church in Falam township was hit with air strikes on April 8.

In another aerial attack, on April 9, also in Mindat town, six civilians, including an eight-month-old baby and a pastor, were killed. The attack also damaged the Assembly of God church and several homes in the area.



Salai Za Uk Ling (second from right), the executive director of Chin Human Rights Organisation, with fellow activists holding banners demanding action against the Myanmar military junta for war crimes in Chin state, in Manila, Philippines. (ucanews photo)

The junta's action violates the ceasefire it announced in the quake-stricken country from April 2 to 22 to allow the relief efforts. However, the junta accused ethnic groups and anti-coup resistance forces of launching offensives.

The mountainous and underdeveloped Chin state, where 85 per cent of its 478,000 people are Christians, has been at the forefront of resistance since 2021, when the junta took power through a coup deposing an elected government.

Chin state is controlled by a political alliance — the Chinland Council and the Chin Brotherhood Alliance. The junta offensive is seen as an attempt to regain control.

The air strikes are "a cruel and calculated attempt by a desperate regime to reassert control by terrorising an already devastated population," said a statement from the Chin Human Rights Organisation.

"Bombing villages, churches, and children in the middle of a humanitarian disaster shows the junta's utter contempt for life, faith, and the laws of war." **ucanews.com**

France sees record surge in youth-led baptisms this Easter

PARIS: In an unexpected development, France saw a record wave of adult baptisms this Easter, with over 17,800 catechumens — 10,384 adults and more than 7,400 adolescents — baptised during the Easter Vigil on April 19, according to the French Bishops' Conference.

For the first time, young adults (18–25) make up the largest group of adult converts, surpassing the 26–40 age group. Around 42 per cent are students or young professionals, indicating a generational shift and a deepening spiritual hunger among youth in secular France.

“This is not a passing wave,” said Archbishop Olivier de Germainy of Lyon, urging parishes to treat baptism not as an end but the beginning of discipleship. He emphasised the Church's role in welcoming and guiding new Christians.

Despite secularism's dominance in public discourse, the Church notes a spiritual counter-current, especially among the young. Urban parishes report booming attendance —

St Maurice in Lille had nearly 1,000 people on Ash Wednesday, many of them first-time young attendees.

Adolescent baptisms are also rising sharply, with a 33 per cent increase over last year. The Jubilee of Young People in Rome is seen as a key opportunity for these new believers to connect globally.

Adult baptisms in France have grown 160 per cent in a decade, from under 4,000 in 2015 to over 10,000 in 2025. Cécile Eon, national delegate for adult catechumenate, called it “impressive and sustained,” highlighting the pressure on diocesan teams to expand formation programmes.

The movement is diverse — some catechumens have Christian roots, others come from non-religious or alternative spiritual backgrounds like Buddhism or esotericism. A 2021 study found 17 per cent had prior spiritual experience outside Christianity.

Women make up 63 per cent of adult converts. After two years of rural growth, urban



The Catholic Church in France welcomed a record number of adults into the faith in 2025, with particularly strong growth in the numbers of young adults and teenagers, according to newly released statistics from the country's Conference of Bishops (CEF). (French Bishops' Conference)

parishes are now seeing the fastest expansion.

Globally, France's revival reflects wider trends. In the US, Christian identification is stabilising, with 62 per cent still identifying as Christian, according to Pew Research. While secularisation continues, grassroots, youth-driven, sacramental movements are reshaping

the spiritual landscape.

As Archbishop de Germainy noted, the varied paths to faith show the personal work of God in each journey. “If the Church is listening,” he said, “this Easter could mark a resurrection of hope where faith had long seemed dormant.” **Zenit**

Pope Francis reforms ‘school of nuncios’

VATICAN: In a chirograph signed in late March, Pope Francis decreed a change of status for the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy, the three-century-old institution that trains the diplomats of the Holy See. The decree, published April 15, transforms the school of nuncios into a new “Institute in Diplomatic Sciences,” thus conforming it to international academic standards and capable of awarding recognised second- and third-cycle degrees (master's and doctorate).

But the papal decree served as a reminder that the Holy See's diplomats have the mission to deploy internationally the line defined by the successor of St Peter.

In short, the diplomats are called to promote a synodal church. “In order to properly fulfill his functions, the diplomat (must not) limit himself to the acquisition of theoretical knowledge,” wrote Francis, after emphasising the importance of solid and ongoing formation.

“It is necessary to develop a working method and a way of life that allow him (...) to correctly interpret the objectives and difficulties that an increasingly synodal Church must

face,” he said.

It is not the first time Francis subtly reminded the diplomats of the Holy See of their duties. In 2019, the Pope sent a text to all his diplomats, recalling that “criticising the pope behind his back, having blogs or even joining groups that are hostile (to the pope), to the Curia and to the Church of Rome,” was “not compatible” with their status. The Pope also denounced nuncios who mistreat their collaborators and those who “seek luxury.”

Francis more broadly explained that his reform was made necessary by the evolution of the diplomatic mission. “Our time shows that this service is no longer limited to countries where the proclamation of salvation has rooted the Church's presence,” the Pope wrote, “but that it is also exercised in territories where it is a nascent community; or in international bodies.” The Holy See is today represented at the United Nations in New York (Archbishop Gabriele Giordano Caccia is the Holy See's permanent observer there), in Geneva (Archbishop Ettore Balestreto), in Vienna (Archbishop Richard Allen Gyhra),

and also in Nairobi (Archbishop Hubertus van Megen).

In these bodies, he wrote, “the See of Peter pays attention to the debates, evaluates their content, and, in light of the ethical and religious dimension that is proper to it, offers an interpretation of the major issues that concern today and the future of the human family,” in particular, at this moment, questions linked to gender and artificial intelligence.

The new institute for the training of nuncios should not leave its current premises, Piazza della Minerva, in Rome. It will, however, be more clearly placed under the control of the Secretariat of State of the Holy See, which already collaborated in selecting and training candidates.

However, “several dicasteries of the Roman Curia will be involved in the formation and the collegial bodies of the Academy,” clarified the current Secretary of State of the Holy See, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, in an interview with Vatican media published at the same time as the chirograph. **LCI** (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)



Pope Francis poses for a photo with the 35 students enrolled at the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy, the Vatican school for training diplomats, and with academy staff in this file photo from June 7, 2024. (CNS/Vatican Media)

Global Happiness Index 2025: Japan and South Korea struggle, India thrives

TOKYO: Only 13 per cent of Japanese are satisfied with their quality of life, and just 15 per cent believe they can improve it. In stark contrast, 74 per cent of Indians report being content with their lives, and 88 per cent say they are “very” or “fairly” happy.

These findings come from the 2025 edition of the Global Happiness Index, published by the French research firm Ipsos. The survey, conducted between December 2024 and January 2025, gathered responses from nearly 24,000 adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries.

The data highlights a growing divide between developing Asian nations and more industri-

alised countries. Since 2011, South Korea has seen a 21-point drop in happiness, with only 50 per cent of its citizens now reporting they are happy and just 24 per cent saying they enjoy a good quality of life.

In Japan, about 60 per cent say they are “fairly” or “very” happy — down 10 points from 14 years ago. Major sources of dissatisfaction include mental health struggles, economic pressures, and social expectations.

By contrast, Southeast Asian nations show significantly higher happiness levels: 79 per cent of Indonesians report being happy, followed by 78 per cent in Thailand, 76 per cent in Malaysia,

and 73 per cent in Singapore.

Optimism about the future also differs greatly across Asia. In India, 79 per cent expect their quality of life to improve. Similar optimism is seen in Indonesia (76 per cent), Thailand (70 per cent), Malaysia (59 per cent), and Singapore (46 per cent). Meanwhile, South Korea and Japan sit at the bottom, with only 38 per cent and 15 per cent, respectively, expressing hope for improvement.

While mental well-being is a growing factor in happiness in the West, in Asia, emotional and relational factors — such as family, love, and a sense of control over life — play a more central

role. In India, for instance, strong family ties and feeling loved are key contributors to happiness.

Nevertheless, economic hardship remains the leading cause of unhappiness in all 30 countries. Though wealth alone doesn't guarantee happiness, lack of financial security clearly fuels dissatisfaction.

Across most surveyed nations, feeling loved, having children, and finding purpose in life are consistent drivers of happiness. The survey also notes that older people tend to be happier than younger generations — a pattern especially pronounced in economically developed nations. **AsiaNews**



Fr Dr John Singarayar, SVD

Hope in the endless ocean of divine mercy

Divine Mercy flows like an endless ocean, offering boundless compassion and forgiveness regardless of our sins or shortcomings. It whispers a profound truth: no matter how far we stray, God's love remains constant, always ready to welcome us home.

I remember a time when guilt and shame weighed heavily on my heart. I had wounded someone dear to me with careless words, and the regret felt unbearable. In that moment of darkness, I believed myself unworthy of God's love. Then, during a quiet afternoon of prayer in a small church, I felt His presence wash over me like a gentle wave. It was as if He whispered directly to my soul, "I love you, and I forgive you. Come back to Me." Tears streamed down my face as I realised that God's mercy transcended my failings. This moment transformed everything, giving me courage to seek reconciliation and begin anew.

This encounter with mercy filled me with a hope that permeates every aspect of my life. I discovered that my past mistakes do not define me. With God's mercy, I can always start again. There is a profound freedom in this understanding, a lightness that comes from knowing I do not carry my burdens alone. This hope extends beyond earthly existence, offering the promise of eternal salvation that sustains me through life's trials and gives purpose to my days.

In daily challenges — whether facing tight deadlines at work or navigating tension with loved ones — I draw strength from knowing God walks beside me, offering His mercy and guidance. This awareness helps me persevere when paths grow difficult and inspires greater patience and understanding toward others. I have found that approaching people with mercy softens my heart and creates space for healing connections.

The Sacrament of Confession provides a tangible experience of this mercy. Each time I kneel in the confessional, sharing my shortcomings and receiving absolution, I emerge renewed and hopeful.

Similarly, receiving the Eucharist strengthens my bond with God's love, filling me with grace that carries me through each day.

Understanding Divine Mercy has transformed my relationships fundamentally. When I catch myself judging others harshly, I pause and remember God's patience with me. This reflection reminds me that everyone deserves mercy and that by extending it to others, I become a beacon of hope in their lives.

In moments of despair, when everything seems bleak, the Divine Mercy becomes my lifeline. The simple words of the Chaplet — "For the sake of His sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world" — anchor me in the truth of God's love. The image of the Divine Mercy, with rays of red and white light flowing from Jesus' heart, brings peace when I gaze upon it. It is as if Christ Himself reassures me, "Trust in Me, and I will take care of you." I keep a small version on my desk, and in moments of doubt, a glance steadies my spirit.

Jesus' resurrection forms the cornerstone of this hope, demonstrating that death is not the end and that God's mercy triumphs



over sin and darkness. The Divine Mercy extends this promise, assuring us that through grace, we too can rise to new life. This is not a distant concept but a living hope that shapes how I greet each new day.

St Faustina Kowalska wrote, "Mankind will not have peace until it turns with trust to My mercy."

These words resonate deeply in our wounded world. Amid division, suffering, and uncertainty, the Divine Mercy calls us to trust in God's love, seek forgiveness, and extend mercy to others. By embracing this message, we discover hope within chaos and work toward building a more compassionate society.

When I witness suffering around me, I feel called to become a small light of mercy where I stand.

Each Divine Mercy Sunday, I join special devotions to renew my trust in God's mercy. The day fills me with gratitude as I celebrate alongside others. The shared

prayers and faith lift my spirit, connecting me to something greater than myself.

Ultimately, Divine Mercy provides profound hope by reminding me of God's unconditional love, giving me strength to face each day with courage. I carry this hope in my heart and strive to share it through my actions. As I continue my spiritual journey, I pray to remain open to God's mercy and to become an instrument of His hope. "Jesus, I trust in You," becomes my compass and guiding truth.

Divine Mercy is not merely a theological concept but a lived experience permeating every aspect of life. It transforms despair into hope, sin into redemption, and death into life. This mercy serves as my anchor and guide, lifting me when I fall and pointing toward a future filled with promise. In God's eyes, I am precious, and His mercy remains my greatest treasure — offering hope not just for me, but for all who seek it.

The image of the Divine Mercy

In 1931, our Lord appeared to St Faustina in a vision. She saw Jesus clothed in a white garment with His right hand raised in blessing. His left hand was touching His garment in the area of the Heart, from where two large rays came forth, one red and the other pale. She gazed intently at the Lord in silence, her soul filled with awe, but also with great joy. Jesus said to her:

Paint an image according to the pattern you see, with the signature: Jesus, I trust in You. I promise that the soul that venerates this image will not perish. I also promise victory over [its] enemies already here on earth, especially at the hour of death. I Myself will defend it as My own glory (Diary, 47, 48). I am offering people a vessel with which they are to keep coming for graces to the fountain of mercy. That vessel is this image with the signature: Jesus, I trust in You (327). I desire that this image be venerated, first in your chapel, and [then] throughout the world (47).

At the request of her spiritual director, St. Faustina asked the Lord about the meaning of the rays in the image. She heard these words in reply:

The two rays denote Blood and Water. The pale ray stands for the Water which makes souls righteous. The red ray stands for the Blood which is the life of souls. These two rays issued forth from the depths of My tender mercy when My agonised Heart was opened by a lance on the Cross. Happy is the one who will dwell in their shelter, for the just hand of God shall not lay hold of him (299). By means of this image I shall grant many graces to souls. It is to be a reminder of the demands of My mercy, because even the strongest faith is of no avail without works (742).

These words indicate that the Image represents the graces of Divine Mercy poured out upon the world, especially through Baptism and the Eucharist.

Many different versions of this image have been painted, but our Lord made it clear that the painting itself is not what is important. When St Faustina first saw the original image that was being painted under her direction, she wept in disappointment and complained to Jesus: "Who will paint You as beautiful as You are?" (313).

In answer, she heard these words: "Not in the beauty of the colour, nor of the brush lies the greatness of this image, but in My grace" (313).

So, no matter which version of the image we prefer, we can be assured that it is a vehicle of God's grace if it is revered with trust in His mercy.

<https://www.thedivinemercy.org/message/devotions/image>

It's a disheartening ritual, one I've personally come to dread. Time and again, I find myself needing to remind audiences, participants in workshops, or during conferences and seminars that individuals living with dementia are, fundamentally, human. They are not the "living dead," nor are they mere vessels or victims of a disease. They are people deserving of the same basic human rights we all expect: respect, dignity, and compassion. I guess the fact that we need such reminders speaks volumes about the pervasive misconceptions and profoundly deep-seated stigma surrounding dementia. It's a stark indictment of our society that often prioritises cognitive function over inherent personhood. Why must we continually reassert something so intrinsically obvious?

I am not denying the fact that dementia can be painful and challenging for everyone, but focusing merely on cognitive decline does not negate a person's emotions, experiences, or inherent worth. People living with dementia continue to feel, to love, to experience joy and sorrow. They retain their unique personalities, histories, and desires. It is up to us, as a community, to uphold that, as dementia does not exist in a vacuum.

I want to tell you about Mary (not her real name), a woman with dementia who attends our daycare centre with her husband. One day, she arrived in soiled pajamas, her demeanour cheerful and oblivious. It was evident she was unaware of her clothing and its inappropriateness for the public. Instead of drawing attention to her situation, we greeted her with warmth and invited her inside. Once she was comfortable, we gently offered a 'ladies' trip' together — a common, casual gesture.

The unnecessary burden of proving one's personhood

She happily accepted, and we were able to discreetly clean and change her, safeguarding her dignity and self-respect. This is something we all can do as a society.

Think about it. What would diminish Mary's personhood and her social self?

Our social self depends on being recognised by other people. How others behave towards us, and talk about us, confirms us in our role as their parent, child, friend, etc. Their behaviour also expresses the value that we have for them in that role.

If we make a big deal out of this matter by pointing out that Mary wore the wrong attire and that she had soiled herself, what do you think the outcome would have been?

Highlighting Mary's inappropriate attire and soiled state, then rushing her to the restroom for immediate cleanup, would likely have caused significant distress. How would any of us feel if someone were to publicly announce that we had forgotten



Dancing with Dementia

DR CECILIA CHAN



to zip up our pants? Such public exposure would be akin to announcing someone's unzipped pants to everyone present — deeply embarrassing and humiliating.

Later that day, Mary was sitting in the corridor, seemingly fixated on the clouds. I sat beside her and asked her what was she staring at. She commented that the sun was melting the clouds and smiled at me, asking me what I saw. I told her that the clouds looked like a garden of roses. "No," she said. "It is God's hands reaching out to us," as she extended her arms out. I was too dumbfounded to say anything. We held hands and stared at the clouds together, savouring the divine's love for us.

I would have missed this precious moment if I had seen Mary purely as a

person who forgot to change her clothes and soiled her clothes because she has dementia. You see, it is really up to us. There is no I without a you, no me without us. We have to realise that we are at each other's mercy towards the end. So, it makes sense that we should have a more compassionate, unequivocal commitment to everyone and honour each individual out of common humanity, if not out of love. Connection with each other is the deeper understanding that we are all somehow joined by our humanity.

Like Rumi reminds us, "... after all, we are just walking each other home."

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Welcoming all God's children: dispelling misconceptions about Autism

"Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (Romans 15:7).

The Church is a home for all of God's children. Yet, for many autistic individuals and their families, attending Mass or participating in community events can be a challenge — often not due to a lack of faith, but because of misunderstandings that create unintentional barriers to inclusion.

As a Church, we are called to be the Body of Christ — diverse, united, and whole. Acceptance does not mean asking autistic individuals to mask who they are. Instead, it means embracing their presence, making space for different expressions of faith, and honouring the unique ways they experience the divine.

Since 2007, 2 April has been celebrated as World Autism Awareness Day, sanctioned by the United Nations. Over the years, this has evolved into month-long events aimed at raising awareness, leading to greater acceptance, advocacy, and action towards a more inclusive world for all. While awareness has grown, it remains essential to continue educating our communities about our neurodivergent friends. As this month holds great significance for the autism community, this article will highlight some common misconceptions about autism.

Autism is neither a label nor a behavioural issue. It is a neurological condition that affects an individual's ability to engage in social communication and interaction. Autistic individuals may also display repetitive actions such as hand-flapping, spinning, or repeating lines from films or shows. Parents of autistic children

often face the assumption that they are merely labelling their child, but this is far from the truth. Diagnosis serves the purpose of ensuring that the child receives the appropriate support they need.

One common misconception is that challenging behaviours stem from disobedience or poor parenting, when in fact, these behaviours often arise from sensory overload, anxiety, or difficulties with transitions. Sensory processing refers to how the brain interprets input from the senses — sight, sound, touch, taste, smell, and movement. Autistic individuals may be over- or under-stimulated. It's important to understand that some are averse to certain sensory stimuli, while others are sensory seekers who crave such input.

Another common misconception is that autistic people do not desire connection with others. In truth, many do seek meaningful relationships, but may express themselves differently — through gestures, limited eye contact, or unique communication styles. Although the diagnostic criteria include challenges in social communication and interaction, this does not mean they lack the desire to connect. They do — but perhaps not in a way we traditionally recognise.

Autism does not "go away" over time. Early intervention and various therapies aim to equip autistic individuals with tools to cope and self-regulate. Autism is a lifelong condition; there is no cure. Therefore, even as adolescents and adults, many continue to face challenges. Therapy is often long-term, evolving as the individual grows and their needs change. Like anyone else, an autistic person matures with unique and varying needs

throughout different life stages.

The belief that all autistic individuals are savants is another harmful misconception. All autistics are different. As the saying goes: if you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism. Only a small percentage of autistic people are savants, and savantism is not exclusive to autism. This stereotype is perpetuated by the media and television shows that over represent savant characters. Whether or not an autistic individual has savant abilities, they still face a range of challenges.

Another misconception is that autistic individuals who can speak struggle less than those who are non-speaking. This is untrue. Their challenges are different, not less. Many are forced to mask their autistic traits — either consciously or unconsciously — in order to align with societal norms. This masking can be extremely draining and may negatively impact mental health over time. Many struggle with mental health issues because others fail to understand that their capacity to socialise is sometimes limited. Importantly, "limited" does not mean "non-existent."

This April, let us take a meaningful step forward. How can you make a difference in your parish and beyond? Consider the distinction between integration and inclusion. While integration often involves allowing individuals who are different to join in — with the expectation that they will adapt to the "norm" — inclusion means making reasonable accommodations within systems and spaces to remove barriers and promote genuine participation.

Let us reconsider the notion that participation in Church must look a certain way. A child flapping their hands during the Gloria or an adult quietly humming during the homily is not being disruptive — they are worshipping in a way that feels safe and authentic to them.

Let us become a community where no one feels they must change who they are in order to belong. Just as Jesus welcomed the little children, the outcast, and the misunderstood, so too must we open our hearts and doors to our autistic brothers and sisters.

John 13:34–35 carries a profoundly heartfelt message:

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another."

Desiree's advocacy for all abilities began in 2017 after her son Haans was diagnosed with autism. Frustrated by the lack of accessible information, she took the initiative to educate herself, earning a Master's in Special Education. A former PR practitioner, she went on to establish Project Haans, a website supporting Malaysia's special needs community. She also co-hosts the Kita Family podcast with four other mothers of neurodivergent children.



Inclusion Matters

Desiree Kaur

Forum explores inculturation of faith and Catholic practices



The panellists.

Carmel Dominic

PENANG: The Penang Diocesan New Evangelisation Commission (PDNEC) hosted an interactive forum titled *Inculturation of the Faith* on March 30 at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit. The forum aimed to address long-standing questions and debates among Catholics regarding certain practices observed by the Church.

The event sought to provide clarity on various topics, including religious dynamics in Malaysia, the blending of Christianity with local cultures, the Chinese inculturated Mass, ancestral veneration, the *Ponggal* festival, and issues surrounding unilateral faith conversions. These topics have often sparked discussions not only within the Catholic community but also with brethren in the Episcopal and Evangelical churches.

An estimated 150 people attended the forum, which featured five panellists: Deacon Lazarus Jonathan, administrator at the Minor Basilica of St Anne in Bukit Mertajam; Fr Desmond Jansen, assistant director of the Penang Diocese Vocations for Youth; Fr Arulnathan Joseph, parish priest of the Church of St Anthony in Nibong Tebal; Fr Michael Cheah, parish priest of the Church of St Michael in Alor Star; and Christopher Kushi, a lawyer and legal advisor at the Minor Basilica of St Anne.

The forum began with the panellists addressing questions submitted by participants in advance via a Google form, which was made available alongside the event registration form.

Chinese New Year

Among the many questions raised, several attendees sought clarification on the practice of ancestral worship during the Chinese New Year (CNY) Mass. Fr Michael Cheah addressed this by explaining that in ancient Chinese civilisation, over 5,000 years ago, people would carve the names of their deceased loved ones onto stone tablets as a way to remember them — similar to how we keep photographs of our departed rela-



Boiling of the rice during the Ponggal celebration.

tives today. During the CNY Mass, when the priest burns incense and bows at the stone tablets, it is a gesture of veneration and respect, aimed at blessing the deceased.

“Imagine that, instead of stone tablets, there are photographs of our deceased loved ones. As with many Asian cultures, we bow as a sign of respect. The incense is used to bless them, much like how Indians use frankincense (*samburani*) to bless their homes or the deceased when visiting cemeteries. We are not worshipping them — that would be the wrong term. It is ancestral veneration,” said Fr Michael.

Ponggal

Another question raised was whether it would be appropriate to use a Hindu devotional song, originally written for a Hindu deity, by changing the lyrics to honour Mother Mary. Fr Arulnathan responded that this would be inappropriate, as the music was created for a different purpose.

“It’s natural for our minds to revert to the original lyrics, which would prevent us from fully entering into God’s presence with genuine praise,” he explained.

Fr Arulnathan also addressed the practice of celebrating the *Ponggal* festival in church.

“The Hindus celebrate different types of *Ponggal*, but the Catholic Church only ob-

serves the harvest *Ponggal*. We celebrate this as a form of thanksgiving to God for His providence. It’s similar to how we celebrate *Gawai* with our brothers and sisters from East Malaysia. There is no worship of any deity involved, just a heartfelt expression of gratitude to the King of Kings.”

According to Fr Arulnathan, the bottom line is that cultural practices are allowed as long as they do not involve worshipping, praising, glorifying, or venerating any god or deity other than God. For example, Hindus worship the Sun god, as the sun is believed to ensure their harvest. Consequently, they perform the *Ponggal* ceremony either when the sun rises or before it sets. However, when Catholics celebrate *Ponggal* in church, they do not worship the sun but instead give thanks to the God who created the sun and provided the harvest.

The same principle applies to converts to the Catholic faith. While they are encouraged to spend time with their non-Catholic family members during festivities, family gatherings, and funerals, they are not permitted to participate in any ceremonial rituals or prayers during these events. Similarly, any cultural practices aimed at warding off the “evil eye” (*buang sial*) are not allowed, as Catholics firmly believe that the name and blood of Jesus Christ are the only protection needed from evil.

Catholics are also prohibited from engaging in practices such as breaking coconuts during Thaipusam or other Hindu festivals, using sacramental items from other religions to bless family members, or following superstitions, as these diminish God’s greatness and dishonour Him.

Inculturation and the Church

Fr Desmond Jansen said that Catholic inculturation is the respectful and dynamic process by which the Catholic Church expresses and lives out its faith within different cultural contexts, allowing the Gospel to take root in local traditions, values, and customs without compromising essential Church teachings. In Malaysian context, we celebrate multilingual Sunday Masses with the use of local music and instruments for the celebration of Ponggal, Chinese New Year and Gawai-Kaamatan.

Deacon Lazarus Jonathan noted that the good attendance and questions raised shows that inculturation is generally viewed as a necessary and positive process, especially within the Catholic Church, for adapting Christian faith and practice to diverse cultural contexts. It is seen as a way to ensure the Gospel message is relevant, accessible and meaningful to people of all cultures while safeguarding its core tenets. However, there are also debates and concerns about the specifics and potential pitfalls of inculturation, particularly regarding the balance between adaptation and maintaining the integrity of Christian doctrine.

In a personal letter dated July 9, 2023, Pope Francis extended his heartfelt congratulations to Bishop Sebastian Francis on his elevation to the rank of cardinal. The letter, read aloud by Christopher Kushi, highlighted the Pope’s reflections on the deep connection between faith and culture.

Addressing the newly appointed cardinal, Pope Francis wrote, “Dear Brother... The call to universality impels us to implant the faith in every culture, each with its own values and distinctive characteristics (inculturation of the faith).”

The pontiff further stressed that a faith unable to adapt and take root within diverse cultural contexts risks losing its authenticity. “A faith incapable of inculturation is not a genuine faith,” he stated, “for it succumbs to the temptation of ‘uniformity,’ typical of a rigid way of thinking.”

Pope Francis also underscored the dual mission of the Church: “Alongside the inculturation of faith, there is the evangelisation of cultures. These two aspects — inculturation of faith and evangelisation of cultures — are inseparable.”



Veneration of ancestors during Mass celebrating Chinese New Year.



Participants at the forum listening to the presenters.

This season of Good Friday and Easter, or Resurrection Sunday, celebrations allow us, as the disciples of Jesus Christ, to commemorate and to bring to our remembrance once again the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We do not fully know and experience the depths and the unbounded love of God in the voluntary sacrifice of Jesus who is the Christ, the holy and righteous God-man who is without sin and who, at one-moment in time at His crucifixion, became sin for us, to redeem by His blood we who are sinful human beings.

What kind of love is this? The God who is love (1 John 4:8,16), the loving Triune Godhead who loves outside of Himself His creation (spiritual and our material world) and especially, we who bear His image and likeness.

What is this love? The Christian author C.S. Lewis speaks of the four loves – *Agápē* (unconditional “God” love; an inspite of love), *Philia* (friendship love; a love among companion friends), *Eros* (romantic love; sexual love between a man and a woman), and *Storgē* (empathy bond; like a love between a parent and a child) - in his book *The Four Loves* (1960) and helps us to explore the nature of love from a Christian and Western philosophical perspective.

Hence, God’s love is an inspite-of-love for us who were once so far away from Him because of sin in us and it was only because of Christ’s death on the cross and His resurrection has brought us near to God, into fellowship with Him once again (Ephesians 2:13).

On loving God

This is God’s love for us, concretely manifested in the loving sacrifice of His Son, the second Person of our trinitarian God, who voluntarily took on flesh, dwelt amongst us and yet did not sin, and gave His life willingly on the cross (Philippians 2: 6-8) to redeem us so that we might now live in God through the daily companionship of the Holy Spirit who is our advocate teaching us all things, reminding us of everything that Jesus has said to us and guiding us into all truth (John 14: 26; 16: 7-15).

How then do we respond in our own frail humanity to God’s gracious and abundant love for us, His erring creatures?

We are reminded that Peter the Apostle was once asked three times by our Lord Christ, “Do you love me?” (John 21: 15-17). Twice Jesus used the *agápē* love word but Peter’s response in the first two occasions was “You know that I *philéo* love you”. So, the third time our Lord used the *philéo* love word of Peter instead of his *agápē* love word.

Just as it was for Peter, our Lord accepts our love for Him at this moment in time. I do believe that Peter surely grew in his love for the Lord and in time his *philéo* love became an *agápē* love only because it was the Spirit of



Growing in Christ

TAN KONG BENG

God in him who graciously gave him God’s *agápē* love. So too, our love for God will surely grow in time.

Perhaps it would be instructive for us to turn to the Lord’s advice on how we are to love God. “If you love Me obey My commandments.” (John 14:15, NLT). Here is one directive He gives to us that in loving Him we begin by obeying His commandments.

We can know his commandments by attending to the whole counsel of God’s Word, the Holy Scriptures, that He has given to us. Following the Monastic Fathers in *lectio divina* (divine reading), we spend time in God’s Word with reading-studying, meditating-reflecting, praying and contemplating the Word of God. As we spend time with God’s Word may the Holy Spirit enlighten us and empower us to obey Him daily in order that we may live lives of obedience to His Word, and grow in our love, in God and for God.

The second advice Jesus gives to us is to remain in His love. We can do this by becoming His friends. As his friends He tells us that we are to do all that He commands (John 15:9, 14). Friendship with Jesus is obeying His commands and thus remain in His love.

What is His command? It is that we love one another (John 15: 17).

However, if truly we have not been able to do this consistently in our daily lives, may the Lord forgive us for not wholeheartedly obeying Him in loving one another. Jesus calls us to love one another so that “Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are My disciples.” (John 13:35, NLT). Thus, loving one another not only shows to others that we are His disciples but it also bears witness that we belong to Christ.

Finally, let us recall that a Pharisee once asked Jesus about the greatest commandment. Jesus’ reply to him was that “You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’. The entire law and the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:34-40, NLT).

May the Lord help us to love Him more deeply each day with our whole being and may we love our neighbour as ourselves by the Holy Spirit’s help. Loving God must be seen in loving our neighbour as we love ourselves. And who is my neighbour? (cf. The parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke’s Gospel 10:29-37).

After many years in Christian service, Tan Kong Beng is seeking a new season of vocation and life lived in God’s ways. He worships and serves in Subang Jaya Gospel Centre

UNESCO, I go again



GETTING SIDETRACKED
Agnes Ong

*Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time.*

**Henry Wadsworth
Longfellow in A Psalm of Life**

I spend much of my adult life travelling, and in my travels, I search for and visit UNESCO World Heritage sites. Thus far, my journeys have primarily centred in Southeast Asia, due to its proximity and affordability, as well as Europe, driven by my interest in history and art.

A friend once asked me why I spend my hard-earned money travelling, as all that I learn and discover on my journeys will one day end with me. While that is true for me, as I have yet to find a way to sustainably and profitably fund my travel experiences, I am struck by what South Korean actor and singer Lee Min Ho recently told *The New York Times*. Lee said, “Visiting historical sites allows me to imagine the lives of those who once lived there, even though they are no longer present. I become immersed in the era, picturing what those people were thinking, how they laughed, cried, and moved in their daily lives.”

Recently, I have been to both Spain and China and have been able to explore additional UNESCO World Heritage locations.

In March, a chance encounter with hostel manager Hector in Arzua, while completing my Camino de Santiago Walk in Spain led me to Cáceres. Hector’s enthusiasm for Cáceres was so infectious that I soon found myself booking a bus ticket to the town without conducting my usual research about the place.

Cáceres, an embattled land

The Old Town of Cáceres was the site of strategic battles between the Moors and Christians during the 12th and 13th centuries. Previously, I wrote about my travels through the cities in Spain that were under Moorish rule for approximately 800 years before the Christian kings rose to power.

The numerous buildings and fortifications in the Old Town of Cáceres reflect the various eras of its rulers: the Romans, who established their presence in 25 BC and ruled for 400 years; the Visigoths, who governed during the 5th and 6th centuries AD; the Moors, who began their rule in the 9th century; and the Christian Kingdoms, which took control in 1229.

Echoes of valour for king and glory resound against these walls and in the hilly cobbled paths. One story about the *Fratres of Cáceres*, a military order made up of monks and soldiers, has them fighting valiantly against the invasion of the Almohads in 1171. The *Fratres* held out against the Almohads for six months until finally, trapped in the Tower of Bujaco, the last bastion, the invaders surged into the tower, overpowered the *Fratres*, and sliced their throats.

Legend has it that Cáceres fell into the hands of Alfonso IX because the daughter of an Almohad ruler fell in love with a Christian soldier and showed him a secret entrance to the Tower of Pozos, and the city, which the Moorish soldiers had been using. The girl’s father was understandably furious and locked her in an underground chamber in the Alcazaba (Moorish citadel). Some more fantastical stories said he turned her into a chicken that roams the city streets on Saint John’s night (one might also consider avoiding having chicken for dinner on the eve of St John the Baptist’s feast day).

Walking through Cáceres’s cobbled streets, it is almost surreal to imagine that these are the same paths many leather-soled (now rubber) lives have walked on their daily errands for over 2,000 years and will continue to do so.



The main altar of the Co-Cathedral of Santa Maria in Cáceres.

UNESCO World Heritage in Malaysia

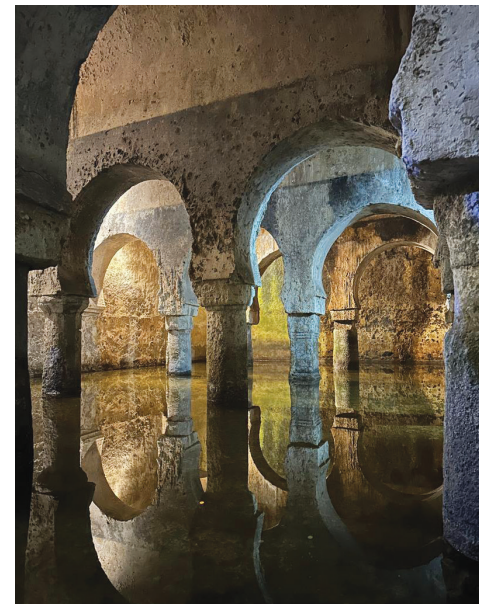
Phil Rosenthal, host of *Somebody Feed Phil*, told the BBC: “Travel is a mind-expanding thing we can do in life. You come back changed. You come back with a new perspective. (Travel) gives that perspective on life so that you can appreciate what you have at home as well.”

Coming home to Malaysia, I feel that we are fortunate to list five UNESCO World Heritage sites although I hope to see more locations in our country listed in the future, given the rich natural and cultural heritage of our land (that’s my patriotic plug for this month!).

In Peninsular Malaysia, our UNESCO World Heritage locations include the historic cities of Melaka and Georgetown, which are part of the Straits of Melaka, and the Lenggong Valley in Perak, known for its evidence of early human migration from Africa.

In Borneo, two national parks — Kinabalu Park and Gunung Mulu National Park — along with the archaeological significance of the Niah Caves complex, complete our list of World Heritage sites.

It is no secret to my family and friends that I am a big fan of UNESCO World Heritage sites. Without sounding boastful,



The cistern at the Casa De La Veletas built during the reign of the Almohads.

I am pleased to say that I have visited four of the five UNESCO World Heritage sites in Malaysia.

All our UNESCO sites truly live up to their World Heritage status. Each one holds a piece of our shared soul, echoing stories of humanity, resilience, beauty, and belonging. These aren’t just landmarks; they are places that move you, connect you to something greater, and remind you of the wonder and worth of the world we share.

Perhaps, with the school holidays coming up at the end of May, families may want to consider visiting these sites too and be awed by our own World Heritage.

As for me, I plan to visit the Lenggong Valley to see the “Perak Man” before the end of the year to complete my Malaysian UNESCO World Heritage sites list before setting out again into the world in search of other UNESCO sites.

Agnes Ong is a self-professed curious traveller and lifelong learner with a lamentable tendency to get into sidetracked experiences. She aspires to explore as many historical UNESCO sites as possible, funds permitting. Agnes has a travel-slash-work-slash-dump everything IG at @agnes_gets_sidetracked.



Fr Ron Rolheiser

The Resurrection: the ultimate meta-narrative

Several years ago, while presenting at a conference at our school, a young priest from Quebec, Pierre Olivier Tremblay, shared a story (in words to this effect).

I spent some years working with young people and what I noticed with many of them was this. They were young and bursting with energy, with dreams, with hopes, an energy that was wonderful to be around. However, while so full of energy, few of them radiated much hope. They lacked hope because they lacked a meta-narrative. They had only their own stories and when things were going well, their energy and spirits were high, but when things went wrong (a breakup in a relationship, the death of a loved one, a serious illness), they had nothing to cling to because they didn't understand their lives within the context of a bigger story, a meta-narrative. They understood themselves solely within their own individual stories – and that is never a basis for hope.

What is a meta-narrative, a bigger story, within which we need to understand our own story? And how is that the basis for hope?

Here's an example: Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was both a world-class scientist and a Christian mystic. His intent as a scientist and as a man of faith was to articulate a theological synthesis which would bring

together in one harmonious vision, both the divine intent within cosmic evolution and the divine intent in God becoming incarnate in Jesus Christ.

And he articulated such a vision, one within which a Christian could bring together in one harmonious vision, the scientific theories regarding the origins of the universe, the unfolding of evolution through 15 million years, the purpose and role of Christ in history, and how cosmic and faith history would eventually culminate (just as is described in the hymn in the Epistle to the Ephesians) in the fullness of time, where, through Christ, God would bring all things into one in Him. And on that day, goodness would forever triumph over evil, love would triumph over division, peace over chaos, empathy over selfishness, gentleness over cruelty, and forgiveness over vengeance.

As he was expounding this vision at a conference, a colleague challenged him with this question. You believe that good will ultimately triumph over evil; well, what happens if we blow up the world with an atomic bomb, what happens to your vision of things then? Teilhard's answer: if we blow up the world with an atomic bomb, that would be a two-million-year setback; but goodness will triumph over evil, not because I wish it, but because God promised it and,

in the Resurrection, God showed that He has the power to deliver on that promise.

He's right. Except for the Resurrection, we have no guarantees about anything. Lies, injustice, and violence may triumph in the end. Chaos, cruelty, and death may well be the last word. That's certainly how it looked the day Jesus died.

However, the resurrection of Jesus is God's last word on this. In the resurrection, God assures us that, no matter how things look, no matter how much evil seems to have the upper hand, no matter how powerless innocence, goodness, and gentleness may look sometimes, no matter how many times our world crucifies Christ, no matter how many times we might blow up the world with an atomic bomb, no matter how hopeless it all looks, the ending of our story has been written, and it is a happy ending, an ecstatic one.

The resurrection of Jesus assures us that, as Julian of Norwich affirms, "in the end all, shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of being shall be well".

The Resurrection, God raising up the crucified Jesus in a way that was real, cosmic and corporeal, and not just a shift in the consciousness of his followers, is the basis not just for our hope but for our Christian faith as such. As St Paul says, if there were no Resurrection, we are the most deluded

of all people. But, if Jesus was resurrected, everything we believe in and everything we hope for, not least that in the end goodness, love, community, gentleness, and joy would forever triumph over all that opposes them, is assured. The resurrection of Jesus, and that alone, is the basis for all hope, both for ourselves and for the cosmos itself.

The Resurrection is the ultimate meta-narrative. This is the bigger story within which we need to set our own individual stories. When Pierre Olivier Tremblay (now a bishop in Quebec) remarked that the young people he was working with radiated beautiful energy but radiated very little hope because they lacked a meta-narrative within to set their own stories, the meta-narrative he was referring to was precisely the narrative of Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

Young or old, our own individual stories are not enough. We need to understand ourselves (and the cosmos itself) within the meta-narrative of the Resurrection.

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

SOCIAL JUSTICE



Making a Difference
Tony Magliano

'The Gospel of Life' – needed now more than ever!

This year marks the 30th anniversary of one of the most powerfully prophetic social justice and peace encyclicals ever written: *Evangelium Vitae* (*The Gospel of Life*).

Trying to awaken the conscience of the world to reject the "culture of death" which creates "structures of sin," Pope St John Paul II wrote in *Evangelium Vitae*, "How can we fail to consider the violence against life done to millions of human beings, especially children, who are forced into poverty, malnutrition and hunger, because of an unjust distribution of resources between peoples and between social classes?"

"And what of the violence inherent not only in wars, as such, but in the scandalous arms trade, which spawns the many armed conflicts which stain our world with blood?"

"What of the spreading of death caused by reckless tampering with the world's ecological balance, by the criminal spread of drugs, or by the promotion of certain kinds of sexual activity which, besides being morally unacceptable, also involve grave risks to life?"

Pope St John Paul continued, "We shall concentrate particular attention on another category of attacks, affecting life in its earliest and in its final stages ... Abortion and euthanasia are thus crimes which no human law can claim to legitimise. There is no obligation in conscience to obey such laws; instead, there is a grave and clear obligation to oppose them by conscientious objection."

Then Pope St John Paul tackled the death penalty. He said due to improvements in

the penal system, the need to execute a dangerous criminal in order to defend society was not necessary. "Such cases are very rare, if not practically non-existent," he wrote. And his teaching here paved the way for Pope Francis to completely condemn the death penalty.

Many Catholics, as well as many other Christians, hold inconsistent opinions regarding the protection of life.

Some condemn abortion, but fail to oppose the mass murder of war – which mostly kills innocent people – including countless babies. Others work for an end to the violence of war and war-preparation, but ignore the violence done to unborn babies by abortion. And still others who work to protect the environment, irrationally promote the murder of unborn children through abortion as a distorted means to control population.

But all life issues are morally and logically linked. It's what the Catholic Church refers to as the "consistent ethic of life."

Pope St John Paul beautifully explains: "Where life is involved, the service of charity must be profoundly consistent. It cannot tolerate bias and discrimination, for human life is sacred and inviolable at every stage and in every situation; it is an indivisible good. We need then to 'show care' for all life and for the life of everyone. ...

"As disciples of Jesus, we are called to become neighbours to everyone (see Lk 10:29-37), and to show special favour to those who are poorest, most alone and most in need. In helping the hungry, the



Pope John Paul II, who later became St John Paul II, blesses a baby during an annual baptism liturgy in the Vatican's Sistine Chapel Jan 13, 2002. (OSV News photo from Catholic Press Photo)

thirsty, the foreigner, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned – as well as the child in the womb and the old person who is suffering or near death – we have the opportunity to serve Jesus."

Quoting St John Chrysostom, Pope St John Paul wrote, "Do you wish to honour the body of Christ? Do not neglect it when you find it naked. Do not do it homage here in the church with silk fabrics only to neglect it outside where it suffers cold and nakedness."

"What is urgently called for is a general mobilization of consciences and a united ethical effort to activate a great campaign in support of life. ... The purpose of the Gospel, in fact, is to transform humanity from within

and to make it new!"

The Catholic Church and the world need the powerful, prophetic wisdom of *Evangelium Vitae* (*The Gospel of Life*) now more than ever (https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html).

Do yourself, and everyone you touch, a wonderful favour: Read it. Take it to heart. And live it!

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

Little Catholics' corner

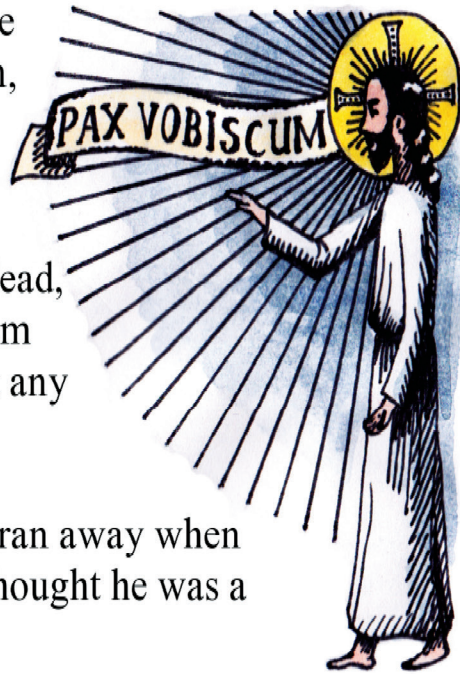
True or False: When Jesus Came to the Apostles

1. When Jesus first came to the Apostles after His resurrection, He said "Peace be with you" twice. True or False?

2. When Jesus rose from the dead, you couldn't see the marks from the nails in His hands and feet any more. True or False?

3. The Apostles panicked and ran away when they saw Jesus because they thought he was a ghost. True or False?

4. Jesus breathed on the Apostles and told them that they now had the power to forgive people's sins. True or False?



Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen Me, you believe; blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."
(John 20:29)




5. The Apostle Thomas was not with the others when Jesus first came to them after He rose from the dead. True or False?

6. Thomas believed that they had seen Jesus, so he wasn't surprised when Jesus came again a week later. True or False?

7. Jesus told Thomas to put his fingers in the nail-holes in His hands and put his hand in Jesus' side where the spear had gone in. True or False?

Can you solve "the St Faustina" secret code?
Fill in the letters from the clues provided to read what St Faustina said to Jesus.



E = ☆
S = ⚡
O = ⬆
U = ♥



J ☆ S ♥ S



I T R ♥ ⚡ T

I N Y ⬆ U

1.true 2.false 3.false 4.true 5.true 6.false 7.true

Dear children,

In today's Gospel, we hear about the first time that Jesus came to the Apostles after He rose from the dead.

He breathed on them and told them that they had the power to forgive sins. Jesus had

just given us the Sacrament of Confession - now a priest could take God's place to hear our sins and tell us that we are forgiven.

Today, the second Sunday of Easter, is also the feast of the Divine Mercy. Mercy means being treated well even though we don't deserve it. God is

so merciful that He wants to forgive ALL our sins, no matter how bad. All we have to do is be sorry and go to Confession.

God's Divine Mercy is so great that even the worst sinner in the world can be saved from Hell if he asks for it.

But even our little sins hurt

Jesus, so we need to ask God for mercy too.

Don't ever imagine that God can't forgive you when you are sorry - remember, Jesus died on the cross so that you would be able to go to Heaven!

Aunty Eliz



Called, formed and sent The MiDYA mission



MIRI: One hundred and five young people recently gathered for one month for the Miri Diocesan Youth Apostolate (MiDYA). They came with hearts full of hope and curiosity seeking answers to questions like “Who am I?” and “What is my calling?”

Guiding them through this journey were two warm and spirited coordinators, Kak Feli and Kak Nia. Their ever encouraging presence and sincere smiles made this four week-journey not only bearable, but deeply meaningful.

The first week focused on **Human Formation**. Led by dedicated facilitators, the youth were invited to explore values that lie at the core of being human — love, empathy, responsibility. It wasn't just about learning from others, but also learning to understand ourselves and how we relate to those around us.

Week two was all about **Pastoral Formation**. This was led by Haggai Malaysia, who brought in inspiring speakers from outside. Their talks went beyond just words, they stirred something within us, reminding us of the importance of serving, leading, and being active in the parishes and communities.

Then came week three — **Community Life Formation**. The youth stepped out of their comfort zones and into homes through the foster family programme. Living with host families taught them humility, gratitude, and service. They experienced the beauty of giving and receiving love from com-

plete strangers, who soon became like family.

In the final week, they entered into **Spiritual Formation**. Talks on vocation encouraged deep reflection. Visits to the Carmelite Convent opened their eyes to the quiet yet powerful lives of those who have answered God's call. Some cried, some sat in silence, perhaps for the first time truly hearing the still, small voice of God within.

And then came a night they will never forget — Solidarity Night. Planned and carried out by the participants themselves, it was a beautiful celebration of everything they had experienced. That night was filled with laughter, music, tears, and a sense of unity that words can't fully describe. It was not just a farewell, it was a promise to carry this experi-

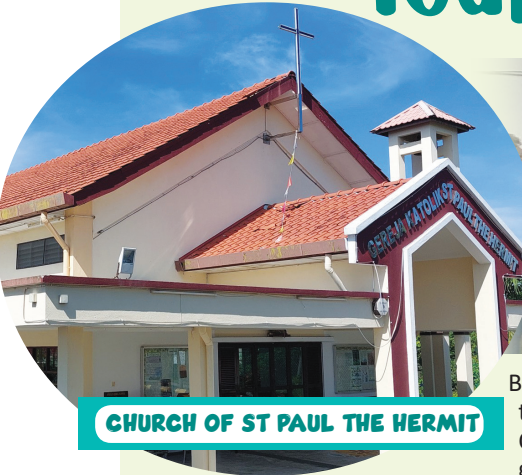
ence forward in their lives.

MiDYA #6 brought together 105 participants alongside priests, sisters, and guest speakers, all of whom played a part in shaping the young people's journey. This was not just another youth programme; it was a life-changing chapter. There were sweet moments, like sugar, and bittersweet ones like lime but each of them had a role in shaping them.

As the youth stepped out of MiDYA, one thing was sure, they were no longer the same as when they first arrived.



Youth organise pilgrimage across chapels



CHURCH OF ST PAUL THE HERMIT



BESTARI JAYA: After an 11-year hiatus, the youth ministry, from the Church of St Paul the Hermit, organised a pilgrimage. Led by Cyril Nevin, the group prayed the Way of the Cross (WotC) at 10 chapels within the parish's jurisdiction, spread across Kuala Selangor.

This spiritual yet adventurous WotC pilgrimage, held under the theme *Walking With Christ*, drew around 65 youth and 80 parishioners, some of whom were members of the chapels being visited.

Held on April 6, after the Sunday morning Mass, all participants gathered to pray the First Station at the Church of St Paul the Hermit. Earlier, Cyril and his youth leaders had briefed the group on the pilgrimage route. A Google Maps link was shared via WhatsApp to help them navigate from one chapel to the next, while lead cars guided the convoy to ensure a smooth and coordinated journey to each destination.

More than 25 cars took part in the ten-hour spiritual pilgrimage, which concluded at the Church of St Paul the Hermit. The programme wrapped up at 8.30pm after the prayer at the 14th Station, followed by reflections shared by three participants

and a closing address delivered by Cyril and his team.

The Way of the Cross is a traditional devotion that honours the Passion and Crucifixion of Jesus, recalling the events of His journey from the Garden of Olives to Calvary. Journeying from chapel to chapel and praying the Stations together as a community — especially with the youth, not only deepened our awareness of Christ's immense love for us but also renewed our hope. Through this spiritual exercise, we were reminded to embrace the Cross of Christ and to accept the small crosses in our own lives with joy and faith.

At each chapel, participants took turns leading the prayers. Through this devotion, the youth were reminded of God's deep love for humanity and were encouraged to strengthen their faith.

Chapel committee members welcomed the pilgrims at every stop, greeting them with joy and love. For the fellowship, the youth group sponsored around 200 packets of vegetarian meals, which were shared and enjoyed during a lunch break at the Coalfields chapel.

At every chapel, a representative from the chapel briefed on the history of their chapel, allowing participants to better understand and appreciate the rich heritage of each place of worship.

The participants journeyed through Tennamaram, Minyak Estate, Nigel Gardener, Coalfields, Bukit Chera, Bukit Panjang, Assam Jawa, Kuala Selangor, and Taman Seri Kilat, be-

fore returning to Bestari Jaya. For some of the youth, it was their first time visiting certain chapels, especially those tucked deep within palm oil estates. This pilgrimage offered them a unique opportunity to discover and appreciate the history and significance of each chapel. Notably, one of the chapels stood in the ruins of the first church in Bestari Jaya, while another had been under renovation for the past five years, awaiting the resolution of certain issues.

By the end of the journey, parishioners expressed their gratitude to the youth for their initiative, dedication, and teamwork in organising the pilgrimage, made possible with the blessing of parish priest, Fr James Gabriel.

Many expressed hope that such a programme would become an annual tradition — not only to promote awareness of the chapels but also to foster a deeper sense of community through prayer and pilgrimage. There is also a growing desire for more chapels to hold monthly Masses and devotional prayers, encouraging greater spiritual use of these sacred spaces. **Bernard Anthony**



CHAPEL OF ST ANTHONY, TENNAMARAM, BESTARI JAYA



CHAPEL OF ST PAUL THE HERMIT, TENNAMARAM



CHAPEL OF ST ANTHONY, MINYAK ESTATE



CHAPEL OF ST JOSEPH, NIGEL GARDENER



CHAPEL OF THE OUR LADY OF GOOD HEALTH, BUKIT PANJANG



CHAPEL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, BUKIT CHERAKAH



CHAPEL OF ST ANTHONY, COALFIELDS

MELAKA: The youth of the Church of St Mary, with a few young adults from Melaka, gathered for a unique celebration — the Seder Passover meal, followed by the washing of one another's feet. The evening was organised and led by Bro Gabriel Puvan, who is currently on his four-month pastoral attachment in the parish.

The initiative, spearheaded by the parish youth group under Bro Gabriel's guidance, was supported by young adults who assisted in the planning and preparation. Their goal was to offer an experience that would deepen the participants' understanding of the roots of the Last Supper, the Holy Mass, and the events of Holy Week.

The Seder Passover Meal, rich in symbolism and tradition, introduced the youths to elements such as *matzah* (unleavened bread), *maror* (bitter herbs), and *haroseth* (a sweet mixture of apples, nuts, honey, cinnamon, and wine). Each item served as a tangible reminder of the Exodus story, the Jewish heritage, and the profound spiritual journey of God's people — all of which find fulfilment in the Christian celebration of the Eucharist.

Throughout the two-hour event, Bro Gabri-



The youths having a Seder Passover meal with Br Gabriel Puvan.

rel guided the group through the steps of the Seder, explaining the meaning behind each symbol and connecting it to the Christian faith. His reflections made the experience not just educational, but spiritually enriching.

Following the meal, the group moved to the church where they participated in the washing

of one another's feet. In silence and reverence, they bent to wash each other's feet, symbolising love, humility, and a willingness to serve. "It was truly a great experience, especially with Bro Gabriel explaining each step along the way," shared one participant. "The washing of our feet was especially eye-opening,

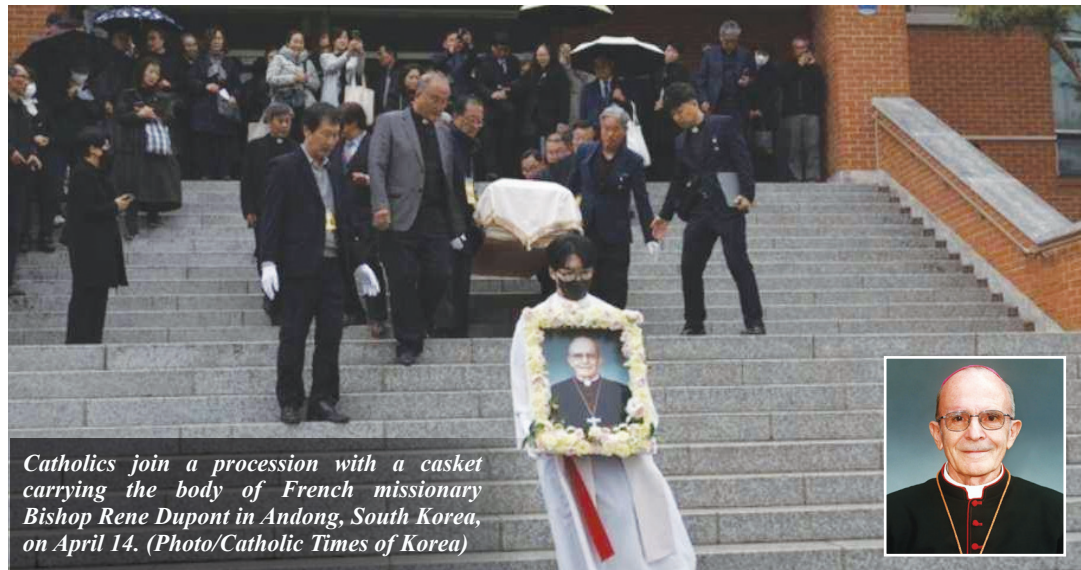


Washing of the feet.

reminding me of Jesus' humility and love." **Maddy Melkis**

"I learned a lot experiencing the process of a Seder meal where I now truly understand why Jesus abstained from the fourth cup of the Passover meal at the Last Supper." **Eugene Wong**

Korea's French missionary bishop remembered for love, service



Catholics join a procession with a casket carrying the body of French missionary Bishop Rene Dupont in Andong, South Korea, on April 14. (Photo/Catholic Times of Korea)

KOREA: Hundreds, including Catholics and people of other faiths, flocked to pay their last tributes to French missionary bishop René Dupont, who served the Korean Church for more than seven decades.

The funeral rites of Dupont, former bishop of Andong Diocese in South Korea, were held at the Mokseong-dong Cathedral in Andong on April 14.

Dupont, a member of the French religious order Paris Foreign Missions Society (MEP), died on April 10 at the age of 95.

Bishop John Chrysostom Kwon Hyeok-ju of Andong led the requiem Mass with other bishops and Korean Cardinal Lazarus Yoo Heung-sik, the prefect of the Vatican's Dicastery for the Clergy.

Cardinal Yoo recalled the missionary bishop's "warm and cheerful laughter" and thanked him for "devoting his life to the service of South Korea."

The prelate hoped Dupont would be "beatified and canonised soon."

Dupont arrived in South Korea almost a year after the Korean War concluded in 1953 and served for more than 70 years. He was the first bishop of Andong Diocese.

Archbishop Giovanni Gasparri, the papal nuncio to South Korea, read a condolence message from Pope Francis.

Former Minister of Employment and Labour, Kim Moon-soo, Representative Andrea Lee Joon-seok of the Reform Party, Governor Lee Chul-woo of Gyeongbuk Province, and Mayor Kwon Ki-chang of Andong City, among others, attended the event.

Leaders and members from the Buddhist and Confucian circles also attended the funeral Mass.

As hundreds flocked to pay tributes to the deceased bishop, the cathedral became overcrowded, forcing many to join the funeral service from outside the church.

After the funeral Mass, a voice message from Dupont, recorded on April 10, 2024, exactly one year before his death, was played for the gathering. The crowd smiled and shed tears hearing his voice.

A short biography of Dupont was read out during the service and followed by condolence messages from selected members.

Bishop Mathias Ri Iong-hoon, president of the Korean Catholic Bishops' Conference (CBCK), said Dupont devoted his life to the poor farmers and "was a living witness to the turbulent history of Korea."

Dupont is remembered for his efforts to help thousands displaced by the Korean War in his mission area in Daejeon.

When Dupont was the bishop, most Catholics and other people in Andong Diocese were farmers, so he formed the "Catholic Peasant Movement" to promote unity and collaboration among them.

He retired as the bishop of Andong in 1990 and lived in a parish in the suburbs of Seoul, leading spiritual retreats and giving lectures. In November 2004, he returned to a village in the Andong diocese, where he stayed until his death.

French priest Christophe Bérard, director MEP in Korea, called Dupont a "brother who shone even brighter by sharing God's love."

In 2019, South Korea, which does not permit dual nationality, made an exception to Dupont by granting him Korean citizenship while allowing him to retain French citizenship. ucanews.com

MEMORIAM

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40TH DAY MEMORIAL IN LOVING MEMORY OF



ANDREW ERICKSON PEREIRA
(SURESH)

22 MAY 1960 - 16 MARCH 2025

Forever in our hearts and always remembered with love by his beloved mother (Lucy Pereira), siblings (Prasana, Prem, Ramesh, Asha), in-laws, nephews and nieces.

Rest in peace our dear Suresh.

19th Anniversary In Loving Memory of



Rev Fr Philip So
Returned to the Lord:
29-04-2006

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.



9th Anniversary In Loving Memory of Regis Fernandez Returned to the Lord on 2nd May 2016

"Your love is always in our hearts
Your kindness is fondly remembered
Your faith has shown us grace and mercy
Even though you are now
in God's kingdom,
The memory of you is
always beautifully near."

Dearly missed
and fondly remembered by
husband, children, grandchildren,
family and friends.

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REST IN PEACE

A shared resurrection and a common hope

VATICAN: This year's Easter celebration marked a rare and powerful moment in Christian history — as East and West came together to proclaim the Resurrection of Christ on the same day. For the first time in years, Orthodox and Catholic Christians celebrated Easter jointly, a symbol of unity that coincides with the 1700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325 AD).

In his Easter reflection, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, head of the Greek Orthodox Church, emphasised that this anniversary is not a return to the past but a renewal of the "spirit of Nicaea" — a call to conciliar unity, fidelity to doctrine, and shared Christian mission.

"This celebration is not a return to the past," Bartholomew wrote, "but a reawakening of the spirit of Nicaea, a spirit that calls us to communion, clarity of faith, and shared responsibility."

The Council of Nicaea defined core Christian beliefs, including the Nicene Creed, and introduced a synodal model of Church governance — a model echoed in Pope Francis's current vision of synodality.

Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem reflected on what this unity means for

Christians in the Middle East.

"We are committed to the journey of establishing a common date for Easter every year," he said. "So that we may always keep this great feast together."

He outlined four essential elements shared

- by Christians this year:
 - A common Easter date, seen as vital to Christian witness;
 - A shared faith in the Nicene Creed;
 - A commitment to Eucharistic unity, "the journey to the common Chalice";
 - A united voice for peace, especially in the Holy Land, Syria, Lebanon, and Gaza.

"If one member suffers, all suffer," Theophilos quoted St Paul. "If one is honoured, all rejoice."

He highlighted recent joint projects among Christian communities, including the restoration of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and plans to restore the Grotto of the Nativity in Bethlehem, calling these efforts tangible signs of increasing trust and collaboration.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) also released a powerful Easter message, calling the shared celebration a "profound sign of reconciliation" and urging churches



Worshippers gather in front of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. For the first time in years, Christians across the world celebrated Easter on the same date. (Photo/Vatican Media)

worldwide to make this unity more than a rare occasion.

"Could it not always be so?" wrote Rev Jerry Pillay and Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm. "A common feast of Easter — at the heart of our shared faith — would be a powerful sign of our reconciliation and unity."

They called on the faithful to witness boldly in a world often filled with despair and division, not just to proclaim the Resurrection, but to live it daily in word and deed.

As churches of East and West lifted the same alleluia on Easter morning, voices

across Christendom acknowledged this rare unity as a sacred opportunity. The confluence of the Empty Tomb and the Creed of Nicaea is more than a coincidence — it is a call. A call to return to what unites, to speak with one voice, and to walk together in the hope that does not disappoint.

"May the light that shines from the Holy and Life-giving Tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ enlighten our hearts and minds," Patriarch Theophilos prayed, "and strengthen us in our God-given mission."

Vatican News

US vice president meets Pope Francis, Vatican officials



US vice-president JD Vance meeting Pope Francis at the Casa Santa Marta.

VATICAN: On Easter Sunday, Pope Francis held a brief private meeting with US vice-president J.D. Vance at the Casa Santa Marta.

According to the Holy See Press Office, the meeting lasted only a few minutes and provided the opportunity to exchange Easter greetings in a warm and cordial tone. During the brief encounter, the Pope presented Vance with several gifts, including a Vatican tie, a red rosary for the vice president, white rosaries for his children, and a separate white rosary for his wife. The family also received a set of three large chocolate Easter eggs.

The visit followed a formal meeting the day prior between Vice President Vance and Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican Secretary of State, along with Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, Secretary for Relations with

States and International Organisations. In that meeting, the parties discussed the international landscape, focusing on the defence of religious freedom and freedom of conscience, as well as humanitarian concerns including migration, the plight of refugees, and the treatment of prisoners in war-torn regions.

Both sides affirmed their shared commitment to promoting human dignity and continuing positive collaboration between the US government and the Catholic Church in America.

As part of his visit to Rome, Vice President Vance attended the Celebration of the Lord's Passion on Good Friday evening at St Peter's Basilica with his wife and three children.

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