



## Prayer for the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 (MPC2026)

Lord God,  
You call us to walk together  
as Your People,  
drawn into the life of communion  
of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Guide us as we prepare for  
the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026.

Teach us to listen deeply,  
to discern faithfully,  
and to trust where You are leading us.

We place before You the four areas we  
are discerning together.

Bless our families,  
that they may be places of love,  
faith, forgiveness, and hope.

Renew our Church,  
that we may grow in communion,  
participation, and joyful witness  
to the Gospel.

Open our hearts to the cry of creation,  
that we may care for the earth  
with reverence, responsibility,  
and gratitude.

Guide our life in society,  
that we may seek justice, promote  
peace, and stand in solidarity with the  
poor and the vulnerable.

As pastoral pathways emerge  
from our discernment,  
may they enrich and strengthen  
our local faith communities.

With Mary, Mother of the Church,  
who pondered Your Word and walked  
in faith, teach us to walk together  
in hope.

Keep us rooted in Christ,  
attentive to one another,  
and open to the work of  
Your Holy Spirit.

May this Convention help us live more  
faithfully as one Catholic Church of  
Malaysia, serving in this land we love.

Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.



## Easter Message from Cardinal Sebastian Francis

**“Peace be with you.”**  
These were the first words  
of the Risen Christ to all whom He  
met. They are not merely a greeting.  
They are a gift — the very heart of  
the Resurrection. After suffering,  
betrayal, and death, Christ does not  
return with vengeance or worldly  
triumph, but with peace. A peace  
that restores, heals, and gives new  
life.

But what does this peace truly mean for us  
today, in the complexity of 2026?

### The Illusion of Power

On January 1st of this year, Pope Leo XIV, in  
his message for the World Day of Prayer for  
Peace, offered a striking reflection: “Peace,  
not Power.” He did not simply say “Peace,  
not War.” Instead, he pointed us towards a  
deeper truth — that wars are often the result of  
power, or more precisely, the abuse of power.  
This abuse is expressed through superiority,  
dominance, conquest, manipulation, and the  
pursuit of control. These are the forces that  
continue to fracture our world.

We see this unfolding around us daily —  
in nations divided by ideology, in communi-  
ties strained by inequality, and even within  
the confines of our own families. The human  
desire to control, to “win” at all costs, or to  
dominate, often overshadows the divine call  
to understand, to reconcile, and to love. When  
power becomes the goal, peace becomes the  
casualty.

### The symbol of the donkey

As we move into the joy of Easter, I invite  
you to contemplate a radically different way  
of being — the way of Christ. The journey to  
Easter began with Jesus entering Jerusalem.  
He did not come as an earthly king. He did  
not ride a war horse, the Roman symbol of  
military conquest and imperial might. Instead,  
He chose a humble donkey (Matthew 21:5).

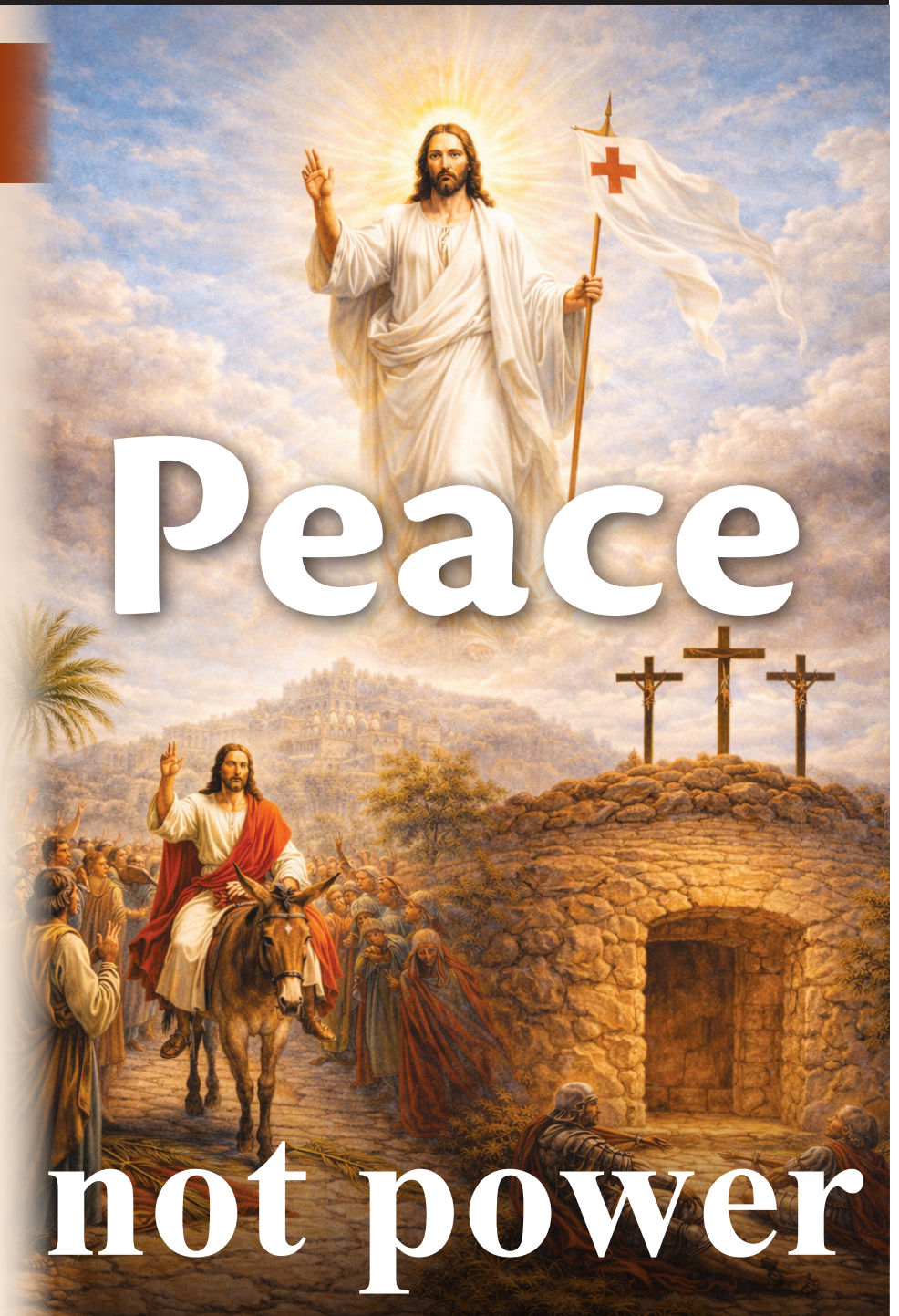
This image is deeply significant. The don-  
key is a symbol of peace, humility, and ser-  
vice. It reminds us that true strength is not  
found in force, but in love; not in domination,  
but in self-giving.

The donkey carried the Prince of Peace —  
not towards a throne of gold, but towards the  
Cross. And through the Cross, to the Resur-  
rection.

As the prophet Isaiah foretold: “The pun-  
ishment that brought us peace was upon Him,  
and by His wounds we are healed” (Isaiah  
53:5). The peace Christ offers is not superfi-  
cial. It is born of sacrifice. It is a peace that  
reconciles, heals wounds, and restores broken  
relationships.

### A peace the world cannot give

Throughout history, empires built on force  
and the sword have risen and inevitably fallen.  
Their power was temporary, their influence  
bound by time. Yet the image of Christ on the  
donkey endures. It continues to move across  
the world, crossing cultures and generations,  
touching hearts and transforming lives in a



way no army ever could.

The primary gift of the Risen Lord was —  
and remains — Peace. Not a fleeting emotion,  
but a deep inner stability that sustains us even  
in times of uncertainty and trial.

As Jesus assures us: “Peace I leave with  
you; My peace I give to you. I do not give to  
you as the world gives” (John 14:27).

This is the peace we are called to receive —  
and to share.

### A call to the faithful

This Easter, I invite each of you to welcome  
this gift anew. Let this peace dwell in your  
hearts. Let it shape your relationships within  
your families, and guide our communities and  
our nation.

To those newly baptised this Easter, we  
warmly welcome you into our Catholic fam-  
ily. Your presence is a sign of hope and renew-  
al — a living reminder that the Risen Christ  
continues to call, to heal, and to transform.

In a world driven by the pursuit of power,  
may we have the courage to choose peace. In  
moments of conflict, may we choose the hard  
work of understanding. In times of division,  
may we choose the path of unity.

Let us be bearers of peace — active wit-  
nesses to the Risen Lord in all that we do. As  
the Lord reminds us: “Blessed are the peace-

makers, for they will be called children of  
God” (Matthew 5:9).

### Your encounter with the risen Lord

The Gospels tell us the personal stories of  
encounter — of Mary Magdalene, Peter,  
John, Thomas, the two disciples on the road to  
Emmaus and Paul. Each met the Risen Lord  
in a unique and transformative way.

The Saints too, have shared their stories.

What about you? Where, when and how  
have YOU encountered the Risen Lord?

You cannot duplicate the stories of others.  
But when you read or listen to them, the Holy  
Spirit stirs within you your own irreplaceable  
encounter with the Risen Lord.

If this has not yet happened, then wait, de-  
sire and pray. Speak to the Crucified Jesus.  
Tell Him how much you miss Him and desire  
to meet Him — as Mary Magdalene did, the  
Apostle to the Apostles — and be open to the  
surprises He will bring.

Alleluia Jesus is the Christ, the Risen Lord  
and He is waiting for you.

May the peace of the Risen Christ be with  
you always.

Happy Easter, and God bless you.

*Sebastian Francis*

Cardinal Sebastian Francis

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

# No shepherd should walk alone

Every vocation begins with a “yes.” A quiet, often trembling “yes” to God’s call — a call to serve, to shepherd, to lay down one’s life for others.

Yet, like all who follow Christ, priests are not spared from moments of crisis.

This month, the Holy Father invites us to pray for priests who are struggling — those weighed down by discouragement, loneliness, fatigue, doubt, or even the painful sense of failure. It is an invitation not only to pray, but to understand. Not only to understand, but to accompany.

For many of us, it is difficult to imagine that a priest — the one who preaches hope, celebrates the sacraments, and stands as a spiritual guide — could himself feel lost. We often see the collar before we see the person. We hear the homily, but not always the silent battles behind it.

And yet, priests are human.

They carry burdens we may never fully see: the expectations of a community, the weight of pastoral responsibility, the loneliness that can come from a life set apart, and the quiet sacrifices made daily in fidelity to their calling. There are moments when the fire that once burned brightly begins to flicker — when questions arise, when weariness sets in, when the path ahead feels uncertain.

In these moments, priests are not unlike Christ in His Passion.

On the Cross, Jesus — the Good Shepherd — experienced abandonment, suffering, and the crushing weight of what seemed like failure. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?” (Mt 27:46). It is a cry that echoes in the hearts of many who struggle, including those who have given their lives in service to God.

But the Cross is not the end of the story.

What appeared to be defeat became the very place of victory. What seemed like abandonment became the doorway to resurrection. The wounded Christ rose

— not despite His wounds, but with them transformed into signs of glory.

This is the hope we hold for our priests.

Moments of crisis are not signs that a vocation has failed. Rather, they can become moments of deep purification, of rediscovery, of grace. But no one should have to walk this path alone.

This is where the community comes in.

Too often, we expect our priests to be strong for us, without asking if they themselves have someone to lean on. We turn to them for guidance, but do we journey with them? We ask them to accompany us in our struggles, but do we accompany them in theirs?

To support a priest in crisis does not require grand gestures. It begins with something simple, yet powerful — understanding. A kind word. A listening ear. A prayer offered quietly and faithfully. A reminder that they are not alone, that they are seen not just as priests, but as fellow pilgrims.

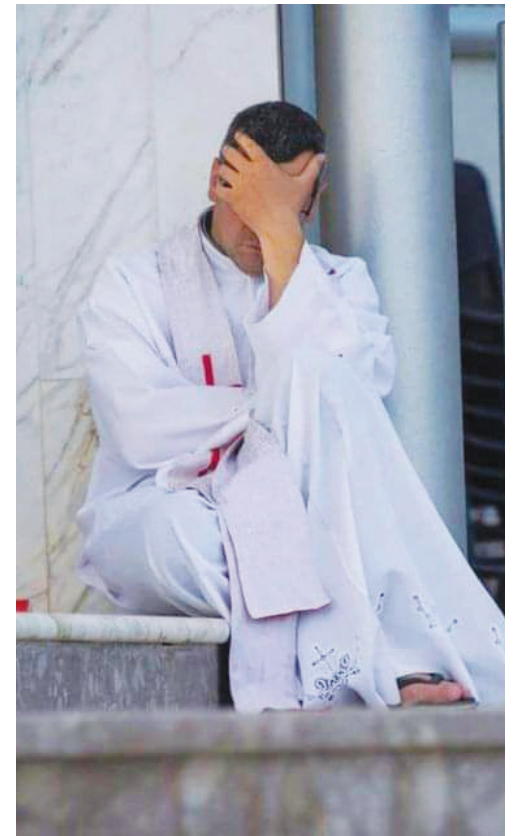
It also calls us to create a culture within our Church where vulnerability is not seen as weakness, but as a space where grace can enter. Where seeking help is not a sign of failure, but an act of courage.

As we celebrate Easter, we are reminded that resurrection is always possible.

The Risen Christ does not erase the wounds of the Cross — He transforms them. In the same way, the struggles our priests face can, through God’s grace and the support of the community, become sources of renewed strength, deeper compassion, and a more authentic witness.

Let us, then, take the Holy Father’s call seriously.

Let us pray — not in passing, but with intention — for priests in crisis. Let us walk with them, just as they have walked with us in our moments of need. And let us be a Church that does not abandon its shepherds when they falter, but stands beside them



with compassion and hope.

For in the mystery of the Cross and the light of the Resurrection, no darkness is beyond redemption — and no vocation is beyond the reach of God’s healing love.

As we celebrate the joy of Easter, may the Risen Christ renew our priests with His peace, strengthen them in their calling, and fill our Church with hope that no cross is ever carried in vain.

Alleluia, He is risen!

• See also pg 15, ‘When the shepherd is wounded’.


Patricia Pereira

**Easter Sunday (A)**


Readings: Acts of the Apostles 10:34, 37-43 | Colossians 3: 1-4 | Gospel: John 20:1-9

Reflecting on our  
**Sunday Readings**  
with Dr Steven Selvaraju

## DOES THE EASTER EXPERIENCE TRANSFORM YOU?




This Sunday, the Church celebrates Easter Sunday of the Resurrection of the Lord. Catholics all over the world will participate in Masses and hold special events to rejoice in the victory of the Risen Christ over death and sin. However, for many, Easter Sunday may only remain another holy day or a major event in the Church’s calendar. They may not be fully aware of its real significance.



It is true that even the disciples of Jesus, who had been close to him, could not themselves, in the beginning, fully understand his resurrection.

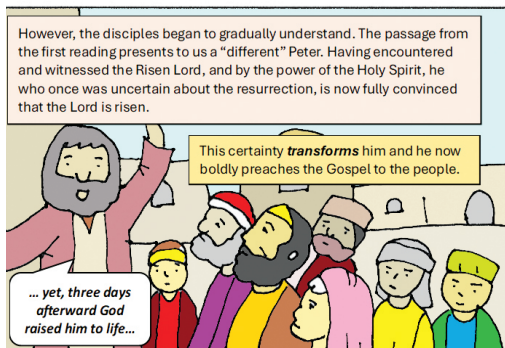
In the Gospel passage, upon seeing the empty tomb, Mary panics, and runs to seek help from Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, to find the body of the Lord.

They have taken the Lord out of the tomb. Help!



Running to the tomb, the other disciple reached it first. He bent down, looked in and saw the linen cloths but did not go in. When Simon Peter reached the tomb a little while later, he entered and saw the cloths that had covered Jesus’ body and head. But nothing is said about what he felt. Then, the other disciple entered, saw and believed.

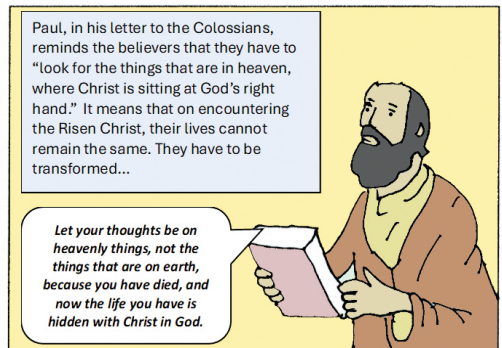
According to John’s gospel, “Till this moment, they had failed to understand the teaching of scripture, that he must rise from the dead”.



However, the disciples began to gradually understand. The passage from the first reading presents to us a “different” Peter. Having encountered and witnessed the Risen Lord, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, he who once was uncertain about the resurrection, is now fully convinced that the Lord is risen.

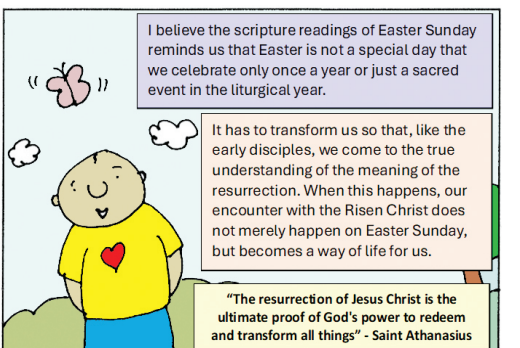
This certainty transforms him and he now boldly preaches the Gospel to the people.

...yet, three days afterward God raised him to life...



Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, reminds the believers that they have to “look for the things that are in heaven, where Christ is sitting at God’s right hand.” It means that on encountering the Risen Christ, their lives cannot remain the same. They have to be transformed...

Let your thoughts be on heavenly things, not the things that are on earth, because you have died, and now the life you have is hidden with Christ in God.



I believe the scripture readings of Easter Sunday reminds us that Easter is not a special day that we celebrate only once a year or just a sacred event in the liturgical year.

It has to transform us so that, like the early disciples, we come to the true understanding of the meaning of the resurrection. When this happens, our encounter with the Risen Christ does not merely happen on Easter Sunday, but becomes a way of life for us.

“The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the ultimate proof of God’s power to redeem and transform all things” - Saint Athanasius

# A Raya of dialogue and friendship

Deacon Leslie Petrus

JOHOR BAHRU: A spirit of fraternity, dialogue, and shared celebration marked an Aidil Fitri gathering between a delegation from the Diocese of Malacca Johore and the Erth Al-Mustafa Organisation at Bandar Baru UDA.

The Catholic delegation, led by Fr Edward Rayappan, head of Interreligious Dialogue for the Diocese of Malacca Johore, attended on behalf of Bishop Bernard Paul. He was accompanied by clergy and laity from the MAJODI Centre.

The visit was characterised by warm hospitality, with members of both communities exchanging greetings, embraces, and festive wishes in a joyful “unity raya” atmosphere. Hosts Shyakh Imran Angullia al-Hafiz, founder of Erth Al-Mustafa, and Dr Jaysuman bin Puspanathan, co-founder, welcomed the delegation and served a traditional *Aidil Fitri* meal, including *ketupat*, *rendang* and the well-known *Laksa Johor*.

Beyond the shared meal, the gathering fostered meaningful interactions. Members of the Catholic delegation, particularly the women, engaged with Muslim women and children in conversation, building friendships and mutual understanding.

Shyakh Imran and Dr Jaysuman also shared insights into the work of Erth Al-Mustafa, a centre dedicated to both education and hu-



manitarian outreach. Located in Johor Bahru, the centre serves as a place of learning and support, especially for students, including those from overseas, offering guidance and counselling.

Conversations during the visit touched on deeper aspects of faith and culture. Shyakh Imran spoke about the diversity of Islamic thought in Southeast Asia and how Islam has been integrated into the region’s cultural traditions and way of life. A Yemeni third-year student from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) shared reflections on life in his home country, describing it as a stark contrast to

Malaysia, while highlighting the resilience and adaptability of his people.

Erth Al-Mustafa operates through two main branches: academic and humanitarian. Its academy provides structured learning in Islamic sciences, offering classes in English, Malay, and Arabic to meet the needs of contemporary society. Its humanitarian arm focuses on supporting vulnerable communities and providing aid during emergencies and disasters.

A key vision of the organisation is to promote peace and mercy across boundaries of race, culture, and religion. This includes ac-

tive engagement with various religious communities, including Catholics, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Taoists, through dialogue and collaborative initiatives aimed at fostering trust and mutual respect.

Both Shyakh Imran and Dr Jaysuman expressed their appreciation to Fr Edward for the visit and conveyed their gratitude to Bishop Bernard Paul for his continued efforts in strengthening interreligious ties.

The gathering concluded on a note of gratitude and shared hope, reflecting a growing commitment among communities to build bridges of understanding, unity, and peace.

## KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

### Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

#### April

- 12** Feast – Church of the Divine Mercy
- 14-15** Clergy Monthly Recollection
- 15** Meeting – AOHD Board
- 16** Meeting – Archdiocesan Finance
- 19** Confirmation – Church of the Sacred Heart, Bentong
- 21** Prison Mass – Bentong
- 24** Police Day Mass – Cathedral of St John, KL
- 25** S.C.A.N (Youth Mass) – Church of the Good Shepherd, Setapak

## MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

### Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

#### April

- 12** Masses in English and Tamil – Church of Divine Mercy, Skudai
- 14** Meeting via Zoom – Caritas Malaysia Diocesan Directors & Ecclesiastical Assistants (CM DEA)
- 18** Council of Pastoral Services Assembly – Church of St Louis, Kluang
- 21-22** Clergy Month Recollection – MAJODI Centre
- 25** Mass in BM (Vocation Sunday) – Church of the Immaculate Conception, JB

## Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #266

**Welcome to dear friends,**

The Pilgrim Cross, or the Malaysia Pastoral Convention Cross journeys through the Church of St Joseph, Plentong.

The Chrism Mass focus was on the call to be *Priests and Church Community for the Future*.

We have just celebrated Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil. Coming soon is Divine Mercy Sunday.

Let us walk with Jesus through the Way of the Cross. Love of God keeps burning despite the overpowering and oppressive presence of evil. Love Conquers Evil.

**Local Takes. Temperatures Rising.**  
The heat wave reached 40 degrees. People are retreating indoors while durian trees are bursting into bloom.

The fuel subsidy bill surged more than fourfold triggered by disruptions in the Middle-East. An MP asked if windfall gains from oil to expand fuel subsidies or for long term wealth accumulation and fiscal stability like Norway.

69 tonnes of food leftover from the *Ramadan* bazaars, were redistributed to students and communities, by MySaveFood: initiating charity, avoiding landfills, reducing carbon footprint and cutting costs for ‘sahur’.

His Majesty, the Yang DiPertuan Agong decreed that any element threatening the unity of the people must be eradicated without compromise.

**Reading the Signs: Pray that we may see!**  
Pope Leo wrote: “Christ is the light who opens our eyes to illuminate our lives. True vision comes with faith. Faith helps us to see things as Jesus Himself sees them. Faith lights up the dark world, but our faith has to be alert, attentive, prophetic, committed to peace, justice and solidarity to see the injustices, violence and suffering.

International Women’s Day renewed calls to close persistent gender pay gaps. A study shows that the Vatican is the only country in the world where men and women receive the same pay for identical work.

At the International Day for Mathematics, Pope Leo said:” Having a great deal of knowledge is not enough, if we do not know who we are or what the meaning of life is.”

**A Thought for the Week: The Hermit’s World.**  
An old hermit was once invited to visit the court of the most powerful king of those times. “I envy such a saintly man, who is content with so little,” said the ruler. “I envy Your Majesty, who is content with even less than I,” responded the hermit. “How can you say such a thing, if this entire country belongs to me?” – said the offended king.

“For precisely that reason. I have the music of the celestial spheres, I have the rivers and mountains of the whole world, I have the moon and the sun, because I have God in my soul. Your Majesty, on the other hand, has only this kingdom.

*Lesson from the hermit:* Only God

can satisfy us. Everything is ours yet it is not. One feeds the soul, the other feeds the eyes.

**QnQ. Q asks: In this competitive world, is there a place for sacrifice?**  
“The measure of our humanity is determined by how much one is willing to sacrifice for another.”

The above is the separator: it separates mere survival from meaningful existence.

Humanity isn’t measured by intelligence, achievement, status, or even kindness in the abstract- but by the concrete willingness to give up something valuable (time, comfort, resources, dreams, or even safety) for someone else’s good.

In a world that constantly rewards self-preservation and accumulation, this is a radical redefinition: “our deepest humanity shines brightest not in what we claim or hoard, but in what we’re prepared to release.”

This is both beautiful and uncomfortable because real sacrifice isn’t glamorous martyrdom — it’s often quiet, daily choices to risk discomfort to help a family member, friend or stranger. (Read Jn 15:13)

**The Spirit @ Work:** “Faith is not certainty. It is the courage to live with uncertainty.” *Rabbi Sacks*

**Something to tickle you:** “The soul is placed in the body like a rough diamond, and must be polished.” *Daniel Defoe*

**Bishop Bernard Paul**

# Chrism Mass celebrations

## Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur

SEREMBAN: The Chrism Mass for the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur was celebrated at the Church of the Visitation on March 17. The day began with a clergy recollection in a warm and fraternal atmosphere, commencing with tea and prayer, followed by a formation session led by parish priest, Fr Xavier Andrew, on *The Priesthood of Christ*.

In his reflection, Fr Xavier emphasised that the priesthood is rooted in being consecrated and blessed in order to become a blessing to others. Referring to the anointing with Chrism Oil — a sacred mixture of olive oil and balsam — he explained that priests are called to act in the person of Christ, carrying the “aroma of Christ” and strengthened by the Holy Spirit for their mission.

He noted that blessedness goes beyond happiness; it is a life rooted in right relationship with God — an inner joy that no circumstance can diminish. Christ Himself is the source of all blessings, and priests share in His mission to bless God’s people.

Fr Xavier highlighted gratitude as essential to priestly life, reminding clergy that

just as Christ gave thanks at the Eucharist, a priest’s life must become a continual act of thanksgiving. He also spoke candidly about human weakness, stressing that true strength lies in acknowledging one’s dependence on God’s grace. Priesthood, he said, is not performance-oriented, but love-oriented — grounded in humility, compassion and authentic service.

Underscoring the importance of integrity, he urged priests to live what they preach, echoing the words of ordination: “Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practise what you teach.” Joy, too, he added, is a defining mark of priesthood — a visible sign of God’s presence.

The session concluded with a reminder that the priest’s life is a living sacrifice, where what is celebrated at the altar must be lived out daily in service and self-giving.

Following the recollection, the clergy joined parishioners for a Holy Hour in the main church, with the Sacrament of Reconciliation made available. The Eucharistic celebration that followed drew more than 1,800 faithful.

In his homily, Archbishop Julian Leow



Archbishop Julian Leow leading the prayers during the Mass.

spoke with deep personal significance, describing the celebration as a homecoming to the parish where he had received his sacraments and was ordained. He called on priests to serve with humility, fidelity and love.

He also reflected on the significance of the Holy Oils — the Oil of the Sick, the Oil of Catechumens and the Oil of Chrism — used in the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Anointing of the Sick and Holy

Orders. These, he said, are visible signs of God’s grace in the life of the Church, bringing healing, strengthening and consecrating the faithful.

The celebration concluded in a spirit of joy and fraternity as clergy gathered for dinner in the parish hall — a fitting end to a day that underscored the priesthood as a call to be consecrated, grateful, humble and self-giving in service of God’s people. **Sabrina Smith**

## Diocese of Penang



Cardinal Sebastian Francis breathes upon the Chrism oil.

PENANG: “This is a celebration centred on two promises and the three oils,” said Cardinal Sebastian Francis at the Chrism Mass for the Diocese of Penang, held at the Church of Divine Mercy (CDM), Sungai Ara, on March 24.

He explained that the priestly mission is sustained by the promises of celibacy and obedience to the bishop, as well as by the three sacred oils blessed during the liturgy — the Oil of Catechumens, the Oil of the Sick and the Oil of Sacred Chrism. These, he noted, are central to the life and ministry of priests.

The annual Chrism Mass, attended by more than 40 priests, 33 seminarians and 11 deacons, was a solemn occasion highlighting communion and unity between clergy and laity.

Reflecting on the theme *Anointed for Mission*, Cardinal Sebastian drew from the Gospel of Luke, reminding the faithful that the essence of priestly mission is to bring the good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives, restore sight to the blind and set the oppressed free. He invited all present to internalise this call and proclaim the Lord’s year of favour.

He also recalled the earlier clergy recollection led by Fr Simon Anand at Stella Maris, describing it as both a reminder and a challenge for priests to be, in Christ’s likeness, “men of life, men of the cross, men of mercy and men of unity.”

During the Mass, the Holy Oils were

blessed and priests renewed their promises with faith and reverence, reaffirming their dedication to serve God and His people.

Retired priest, Fr Anthony Pillai, reflected on the significance of the occasion, noting that the annual renewal of priestly vows serves as a time of preparation for Holy Week. He also encouraged seminarians to make the most of this sacred season, describing it as “the most important week in our liturgical year.”

Second-year philosophy seminarian, David Naden, shared that the Chrism Mass reflects the deep communion between the bishop and his priests, rooted in Christ’s own sacrifice. “We are all called, in our own way, to the same self-sacrificial love of Christ,” he said, describing this as the heart of priesthood and his personal aspiration.

Parishioners of CDM prepared enthusiastically for the celebration, welcoming clergy, religious and visitors in a spirit of joy and unity. Among them was 10-year-old Isaac, part of the welcoming team, who shared candidly, “I felt happy to welcome the bishop, priests and seminarians — but I was a bit sad I didn’t get to hug the bishop like my friend.”

For many in attendance, including those who travelled from as far as Ipoh, the celebration was both joyful and meaningful — an opportunity to express support and reconnect with priests who have touched their lives through dedicated service.

**Sharon Chandra**

## Diocese of Sandakan

SANDAKAN: The faithful of the Sandakan Diocese gathered on March 12 for the Chrism Mass, one of the most significant liturgical celebrations in the Catholic Church, presided over by Bishop Julius Dusin Gitom.

Priests from parishes in Tawau, Lahad Datu, Telupid, Beluran and Paitan Mission concelebrated the Eucharist with the bishop, in a celebration that underscored the unity of clergy, religious and laity within the diocese.

In his homily, Bishop Julius reflected on the opening prayer of the Mass, describing it as brief yet rich in meaning. He highlighted three key points: that God anointed His Son with the Holy Spirit and made Him Christ the Lord; that through the sacraments, the faithful share in this consecration; and that all are called to bear witness to Christ’s redemption in the world.

He reminded the faithful that the use of sacred oils in the Church’s liturgy is a constant sign of this shared mission. “We are called to continue Christ’s work by bringing His love and mercy to others, especially to those who are not yet in communion with God,” he said, urging the faithful to live this witness through their daily lives.

Emphasising Christ as the centre of the Christian faith, Bishop Julius noted that it is through the Paschal Mystery — Christ’s passion, death, resurrection and ascension — that humanity is freed from sin and death

and given the hope of eternal life. The faithful, he said, are called to be living witnesses of this mystery.

During the Mass, priests renewed their priestly promises before the bishop and the people of God, recommitting themselves to faithfully celebrate the Eucharist and administer the sacraments. Reflecting on the Preface of the Mass, Bishop Julius noted that while all the baptised share in Christ’s priesthood, some are called to serve in sacred ministry through ordination for the good of the Church.

He also encouraged the faithful to support their priests through prayer, stressing that such spiritual support strengthens their ministry and helps them remain faithful shepherds. The community was further urged to pray for vocations and for seminarians, that more young men may generously respond to God’s call.

Despite marking two decades as a diocese, Bishop Julius acknowledged that Sandakan continues to face a shortage of priests to meet the growing pastoral needs of the faithful. At the same time, he expressed gratitude for the many blessings experienced and the steadfast faith of the community.

He concluded by commending his priests for their dedicated service and thanking the faithful for their continued support, noting that despite its limitations, the diocese remains united in prayer and mission.



Bishop Julius Dusin Gitom with the clergy of the Diocese of Sandakan.

# across Malaysia



The clergy renewing their vows before the Bishop.

MELAKA: The Chrism Mass of the Malacca Johore Diocese (MJD) was celebrated on March 24, at the Church of St Peter. It marked a significant return to St Peter's Church, where the diocesan Chrism Mass is held again after a decade.

About 35 clergy were present together with the bishop. They were joined by about 700 faithful.

In his homily, Bishop Bernard Paul spoke directly to his priests about the kind of priesthood needed at this moment in the life of the Church. Drawing inspiration from Pope Leo XIV's Apostolic Letter *A Fidelity that Generates the Future*, dated Dec 8, 2025, the bishop did not speak in abstract terms. Instead, he addressed the realities priests must face today, and the dispositions needed if they are to serve fruitfully in the years ahead. Pope Leo's letter itself stresses ongoing formation, fraternity among priests, a synodal and missionary spirit, and the need for priests who are joyful, humanly mature, spiritually solid, and a bridge rather than an obstacle to Christ.

The bishop first described what priests must be today. A priest, he said, must be a prophet

for the present time, not a museum curator preserving the past. He must be a contextualised priest, in touch with the realities around him, not detached or out of touch. He must be joyful, not mournful. He must be a bridge builder, not an obstacle to mission and unity. Finally, he must be holistic, humanly mature, and spiritually grounded, not fragmented or immature.

Bishop Bernard presented these as a pastoral response to the difficult landscape in which priesthood is now lived. The bishop named some of these realities clearly. They were the wounds caused by sexual, financial and administrative abuses, the painful reality of priests leaving the priesthood and clergy who are dissatisfied, growing individualism, the weakening of community life, the rapid pace of change, and the diminishing number of believers. In this, his emphasis echoes Pope Leo's own insistence that the Church must face with humility the crisis of trust caused by abuse, the reality of priests leaving ministry, and the urgent need for deeper formation and maturity in priestly life.

True to his style, the bishop then gave the clergy a simple framework to remember, the 5

## Diocese of Malacca Johore

Fs for priests for the future.

The first is Fidelity. Priests must return to the beginning, to their original call, to the first "Follow me" spoken by the Lord. Fidelity means renewing that first yes through prayer, the sacraments, and spiritual accompaniment. Pope Leo likewise writes that every vocation begins in a personal encounter with Christ and that fidelity is not static but a daily conversion by which the priest reaffirms and matures his vocation.

The second is Formation. The bishop stressed that formation does not end at ordination. It must continue throughout life, shaping the human, spiritual and intellectual dimensions of the priest. It is about developing mind, heart, spirit, and healthy relationships, so that the priest becomes both joyful and faithful. Here again the connection with Pope Leo's teaching is evident. His letter calls for continuous formation and says that only those who are humanly mature and spiritually solid, with integrated human and spiritual lives, can credibly proclaim the Gospel.

The third is Fraternity. The bishop reminded the clergy that fraternity is not optional. It is a sacramental gift flowing from Holy Orders itself. Priesthood cannot be lived individualistically. It calls for teamwork, mutual support, and a real brotherhood among clergy. Pope Leo makes the same point strongly, describing priestly fraternity as rooted in Baptism and Holy Orders and warning against the temptation to individualism and self-reference.

The fourth is Future. To be priests for the future, the bishop said, clergy must live the spirit of synodality, foster real co-responsibility with their bishop, fellow clergy, and lay faith-

ful, and recognise the diverse gifts present in the Church for mission. Leadership cannot remain solitary or exclusive. Pope Leo's letter speaks in similar terms, urging priests to open themselves to a synodal style, to move beyond models of exclusive leadership, and to work in collegial cooperation with the wider People of God.

The fifth is Faith-workers. Priests must be men of faith who can pass on the faith to others. Their ministry must help form believing communities and not merely maintain structures. This too reflects Pope Leo's call for priests to become missionary disciples according to the Heart of Christ, united with the faithful and at their service.

The bishop then widened the horizon. It is not only priests who must prepare for the future. The whole Church community, he says, must also ready herself for what lies ahead. As the clergy are called into this 5F vision, the faithful too must take their place in that same journey. He reminds the congregation of the 4E Catholics he often speaks about, that is, a people who are continually *Encountered, Enlightened, Empowered* and *Evangelising*. The Church must always be a people encountered by Christ, enlightened by his Word, empowered by his Spirit, and turned outward in evangelising mission.

For that reason, the bishop says, preaching the Gospel remains central. The Church must always and everywhere live as missionary disciples. Along the journey, the faithful are called to listen to the Holy Spirit, to discern, to design concrete responses and plans of action, and to build together the Kingdom of God, living fraternally the mission of Christ together. **Y.K. Ng**

KUCHING: The Archdiocese of Kuching marked its annual Chrism Mass on March 17 at the Cathedral of St Joseph, drawing clergy and faithful together in a significant expression of ecclesial unity.

Archbishop Simon Poh presided as main celebrant at the solemn liturgy, during which priests from across the archdiocese renewed their priestly promises, reaffirming their commitment to prayer, service, and faithful stewardship of the sacraments.

A central highlight of the celebration was the blessing of the holy oils — the Oil of the Sick, the Oil of Catechumens, and the Oil of Chrism — which will be used throughout the year in sacramental celebrations across the archdiocese.

In his homily, Archbishop Simon underscored the centrality of the Eucharist in Catholic life, describing it as "the very heart of our worship." He reminded the faithful that the Eucharist and priesthood, instituted at the Last Supper, remain essential to the Church's mission, with priests continuing Christ's

## Archdiocese of Kuching

command to "do this in memory of Me."

Reflecting more deeply on the sacred oils, the archbishop explained that each oil reveals a different dimension of God's grace at work in the life of the Church. The Oil of the Sick, he said, is a sign of healing — offering comfort, strength, and unity with Christ's suffering. He noted that this anointing not only brings spiritual and emotional healing, but also prepares the faithful, when necessary, for their passage to eternal life, assuring them of God's mercy and presence even in moments of pain and vulnerability.

The Oil of Catechumens, he continued, is a source of strength for those preparing for baptism. It equips them with the grace to renounce sin and resist evil, marking the beginning of a new life in Christ. This anointing, he said, is both a protection and a preparation — strengthening catechumens as they journey towards the Easter sacraments.

Turning to the Oil of Chrism, Archbishop

Simon highlighted its role in consecration. Through this anointing, the faithful are set apart for God's mission. Used in the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders, the oil signifies the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, empowering believers to live out their faith boldly. "To be consecrated," he explained, "is to be set apart — not for oneself, but for the service of God and His people."

He further reflected on the placement of the blessing rites within the Mass, noting that the Oil of the Sick is blessed in connection with the Eucharistic sacrifice, reminding the faithful that Christ is present in their suffering, while the oils of Catechumens and Chrism are blessed before the final blessing, symbolising the strengthening and sending forth of the faithful on mission.

Archbishop Simon also clarified that the Holy Oils blessed during the Chrism Mass are reserved strictly for sacramental use and are distinct from devotional oils commonly found



Archbishop Simon Poh presenting the Holy Oils to a priest.

at pilgrimage sites.

He concluded by inviting the faithful to pray for priests, that they may remain "good pastors and faithful servants," dedicated to serving God's people with humility and devotion.

MIRI: Gathering in unity as one presbyterate, the Diocese of Miri celebrated its Chrism Mass at the Cathedral of St Joseph on March 18 at 7.30pm. As in previous years, the liturgy was held in advance to allow priests — many serving in remote interior parishes — to return in time for the Easter Triduum. This year's celebration was further enriched by the presence of three priests from the Vicariate of Brunei.

The readings were taken from Isaiah 61:1-3, 6, 8-9; Revelation 1:5-8; and Luke 4:16-21. In his homily, Bishop Richard Ng highlighted the key word that links the first reading and the Gospel: anointing. The prophet Isaiah speaks of being anointed by the Lord, and in the Gospel, Jesus proclaims the same passage, applying it to Himself. This anointing, the bishop explained, comes from God — He chooses and equips a person with spiritual gifts for a specific mission. Christ, in His anointing,



Bishop Richard Ng addressing the congregation.

is sent to bring God's blessing and salvation to the world.

Bishop Richard emphasised that all the faithful share in this anointing through Baptism. It is

not merely an outward sign, but one that transforms us inwardly, filling us with the Spirit and conforming us ever more closely to Christ. As such, every baptised person is called to live out

this identity and mission entrusted to them.

He further noted that priests, through their vows of obedience, chastity and poverty, embrace this anointing in a distinct and ministerial way, serving the Church and her people. He urged the faithful to pray for their priests, that the Lord may continue to strengthen and deepen their faith and vocation. "We are not angels," he said. "We are human, with weaknesses like everyone else. Support us with your prayers, and be gentle with your words — let them build up and encourage."

After the homily, the priests renewed their vows before the bishop. This was followed by the blessing of the Oil of the Sick and the Oil of Catechumens, and the consecration of the Sacred Chrism. At the conclusion of the Mass, the holy oils were distributed to the parish priests to be brought back to their respective communities.

# Formation on angels and demons

Christina Lazaroo

TAIPING: Some 130 participants gathered at Taiping Catholic Church recently for a catechetical formation titled *Angels & Demons*, organised by the Penang Diocesan Catechetical Commission (PDCC) in collaboration with the Penang Diocesan Healing & Deliverance Ministry (H&D).

The formation, attended primarily by Evangelising Catechists from across the Diocese of Penang as well as members of the laity, aimed to deepen participants' understanding of the Church's teachings on

the spiritual realm and to equip catechists with a clearer foundation for teaching and accompanying others in the faith.

Deacon Clement Samuel, the Catechetical head of the Penang Diocese, gave a short introduction on why this topic matters. He shared that with the rise of secularisation and people drifting away from God, many are becoming oppressed by the evil one. Deacon Charles Lazaroo, head of the Penang Diocesan Healing & Deliverance (H&D) Ministry, then spoke on the Church's teaching about angels and demons. Drawing from the Nicene

Creed, he explained that angels are spiritual beings created by God to serve Him and assist humanity in the journey toward salvation. The session also reflected on the role of guardian angels and the reality of demons, who were created good but chose to fall through their own free will.

In the second session, Glenn Andrews from the H&D Ministry, explored how the devil works in the modern world. He explained that while possession is rare, people can experience other forms of extraordinary works such as obsession or oppression when delving into the occult or live in serious sin. More often, people experience the ordinary works of the devil such as the most common spiritual struggle that comes through ordinary temptations or doubts that slowly draw people away from God. Participants were encouraged to remain vigilant and rooted in prayer, particularly in today's digital age, where various influences can shape beliefs and behaviour.

Arokiadass Anthonysamy, also from H&D Ministry, then spoke on *Steps to Freedom in Christ*, reminding participants that through



Speakers, Deacon Clement Samuel and Arokiadass Anthonysamy.

baptism, every Christian shares in Christ's victory over sin and evil. He emphasised the importance of repentance, forgiveness, and inner healing, as well as the central role of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Eucharist in living a life of freedom in Christ.

The formation concluded with a catechesis by Deacon Clement on *The Armour of God*, encouraging participants to live lives rooted in virtue, prayer, and the Word of God.

Participants shared that the formation helped deepen their awareness of spiritual realities and the need to remain steadfast in faith. Riya, an RCIA candidate from Taiping Catholic Church said, "I learned many new teachings about angels and how demons work. Now that I understand better, I believe I can overcome these struggles."

Andrea, an Evangelising

Catechist from Church of Divine Mercy, Penang, also shared that the formation gave her a deeper insight. "I understand more now about the hierarchy of angels. At the same time, learning about demons also helped me reflect more deeply on my own spiritual life," she said.

Feedback from participants described the sessions as informative and insightful, with many noting that the formation helped them better understand how spiritual struggles can take place in everyday life. Several participants also expressed the importance of sharing this knowledge with family members and younger generations so that they may grow in awareness and faith.

The formation concluded with a time of healing prayer and ministering, providing participants with an opportunity for spiritual renewal and encouragement in their walk with Christ.



A section of the participants during the prayer.

PENANG: A 'Speakers Development' session, organised by Charis Penang Diocese, was held on March 14 at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit. Designed for current and aspiring prayer group leaders, the programme attracted about 20 participants from across Penang and Kedah who were keen to develop their skills in faith sharing.

The sessions were facilitated by Leoreen Heah Rodrigues, who has extensive experience in training individuals in public speaking.

The participants were taught several important topics that are useful for those involved in the service of speaker or spiritual facilitator. Aspects covered included choosing relatable and relevant topics, talk delivery techniques, how to impact the listener as well as measures that need to be taken



## Forming voices for God's mission

for continuous growth in becoming an effective speaker.

Each topic was interactively communicated with a combination of information, group discussions

and practical training. Participants were also given the opportunity to conduct live workshop training. During the workshop session, participants were divided into small

groups of 4-5 people to prepare and deliver a series of talks. This activity enabled them to immediately put into practice the skills learned and to receive constructive

feedback from the trainer herself and also other participants on areas that they did well and opportunities for improvement.

According to Adeline Teh, the Diocesan Head of Charis Penang, this programme was held with the aim of forming and training potential individuals in sharing their faith. Not only does it provide practical knowledge to participants, but it also created a space for them to share their experiences and build their confidence in serving for God's glory.

Hopefully, through such initiatives, more Catholics will come forward to share their faith and become God's instrument in touching the hearts of many people through the shared partnership and testimony of their faith. **Aveil Olga**

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## A spirit-filled healing encounter

PETALING JAYA: The long-awaited Healing Session conducted by the Holy Cross Ministry of Deliverance & Healing (Kuching), and organised by the Holy Cross Ministry of Assumption, at the Church of the Assumption. The session marked a return after an absence of about 29 months, with the previous session conducted by Augustine Tan on Sept 29, 2023.

The session began with a short talk centred on three key tenets — knowing God, loving God, and serving God — emphasising that this journey is made possible through growth in the Holy Spirit

in spirit, mind, and body.

Augustine Tan, who has been involved in the Ministry of Deliverance & Healing for approximately 38 years under the guidance of Stephen Bong, shared from his extensive experience in the ministry. Over the years, he has reached out to many in need of deliverance and healing across various aspects of life.

Through simple yet powerful anecdotes, he illustrated what it means to live a life led by the Holy Spirit. His ministry, spanning from Kuching to Kuala Lumpur and Melaka, has touched many lives through his humble service.

Drawing from his experience in spiritual warfare, Augustine encouraged participants not to fear the Evil One, but to place their trust firmly in the power of Jesus. He also shared instances of praying for individuals beyond Malaysia, highlighting that God's healing power knows no boundaries.

The session was engaging, spirit-filled, and impactful, with participants attentively absorbing the message. About 47 people attended, and while five individuals shared that they experienced healing during the session, many others left with renewed faith and a deeper sense of hope.

Participants expressed surprise at how simple yet powerful the healing session was, describing it as both uplifting and enriching. Many left feeling lighter, having surrendered fears, unforgiveness, and burdens to God.

The Holy Cross Ministry of Assumption will be organising a 20-week Faith Formation programme from April 11 to Sept 12, held every Saturday from 10.00am to 11.30am at Griffon Hall, Assumption Family House.

Those interested may register via WhatsApp with Betty at 019-211 6038 or Isabel at 012-927 4328. **Clare Jie**

# Caritas Penang supports charity organisations

PENANG: Caritas Penang presented RM137,200 in grants to support charity organisations serving vulnerable communities at its annual grant presentation ceremony at Pusat Keuskupan Katolik. The cheques were presented by Cardinal Sebastian Francis, the Bishop of Penang, benefitting children, women, the elderly, migrants, refugees, and Orang Asli through food aid, medical assistance, shelter, and education.

In his speech, Fr Joachim Robert, chairman of Caritas Penang, said, "Caritas, meaning 'charity' and 'love', is the social arm of the Church. Through our annual grants, we support those most in need, strengthening humanity, as the love of Christ moves into our hands to serve vulnerable communities."

In his address, Cardinal Sebastian said, "More than financial assistance, the Church stands in solidarity with your mission of service beyond religion and race. Solidarity and communion are vital. We are called to be instruments of peace — choosing peace, not



power, and serving with humility rather than seeking fame or recognition."

Also present was Fr Fabian Dicom, National Director, Caritas Malaysia, along with representatives from Fr Julien Agape Centre; Light of Shalom Society; St Joseph's

Home; Home for the Aged Simee; Little Sisters of the Poor, Mount Miriam Cancer Hospital; Persatuan Kebajikan Haemodialis St Anne, Bukit Mertajam; Mercy Home; Tenaganita, and Persatuan Pembela Wanita Pulau Pinang.

## St Jude parish launches 'Welcoming Church' campaign

RAWANG: The Church of St Jude officially launched its Welcoming Church campaign on March 14. This initiative marks a profound renewal of the church's identity, refocusing its mission on hospitality, inclusion, and the Gospel-rooted call to belong. The launch was integrated into all four weekend Masses across all four languages, ensuring the message reached the entire diverse fabric of the congregation.

The ceremony began as representatives from the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) solemnly wheeled the campaign banner into the sanctuary. The subsequent unveiling of the banner served as a visual vow to the community: that St Jude's is, and always will be, a

"spacious" home for all.

Parishioners were then presented with commemorative bookmarks — a small but powerful reminder to carry the campaign's message of "warmth, respect, and inclusion" into their daily lives.

A video montage followed the unveiling, reflecting on the parish's journey and its calling to be the "embrace of Christ extended into the world."

The campaign is designed to ensure that every individual stepping through the doors of St Jude's — whether a lifelong parishioner or a first-time visitor — experiences an immediate sense of warmth and spiritual home.

Parish priest, Fr Simon Labrooy, reminded

the congregation that the Church is not meant to be a closed circle, but rather each person who comes here is not an interruption to parish life; they are the very reason the Church exists. He emphasised that the parish must be a place where everyone feels seen, valued, and loved, regardless of their personal history or struggles.

The campaign invites parishioners to move beyond slogans and adopt a new "attitude of the heart." The initiative outlines four key pillars for the community to embrace:

- **Intentional Ministry:** Cultivating a spirit of welcome in every church group and service.
- **Active Outreach:** Reaching out specifically to newcomers and returning Catholics.
- **Deepened Bonds:** Strengthening the existing community to foster true friendship.
- **Compassionate Reflection:** Modelling the openness of Christ in daily interactions.

The atmosphere at the launch was one of joyful recommitment. The message echoing through the pews was clear: "You are welcome. You belong." As the campaign takes root, St Jude's aims to be more than just a landmark in Rawang; it seeks to be a living sanctuary where strangers become friends and friends become family—a true sign of hope for the wider world. **Mercy Almeida Stellus**



## Encountering God in the atrium

KAJANG: "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps 46:10). These words set the tone for the opening prayer at the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) Day of Discovery, which drew 13 participants from various parishes across the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.

The participants — comprising catechists, parents, and single adults — came with a shared desire to learn more about CGS and its value for their children and parish communities. The programme was organised by the Kuala Lumpur Archdiocesan CGS (KLACGS) team and hosted by the Church of the Holy Family, Kajang.

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) is a Montessori-based approach to catechesis for children aged three to twelve. It offers a sacred, hands-on environment known as the "atrium," where children and catechists come together to encounter the mysteries of God through Scripture and liturgy. Rooted

in contemplation and spiritual growth, the programme gently invites children to discover God for themselves, guided by the Holy Spirit.

Participants were given the opportunity to experience firsthand how a child is nurtured in the atrium through various presentations and individual work. Among the key presentations were The Good Shepherd, The Altar, and The Epiclesis. They also gained a deeper understanding of the vision, structure, and history of CGS.

Participants described the experience as deeply moving and spiritually enriching. One participant shared that the session allowed for an encounter with God's love in a way they had not experienced before. The discovery of CGS went beyond simply teaching children; it opened a deeper understanding of living a life of gentleness, rooted in God's love and guided by His Word.



The participant was particularly touched by the presentation on the Epiclesis, gaining a deeper appreciation of the sacred moment in the Eucharist when the bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. It was a moment marked by a quiet awareness of the presence of the Holy Spirit. The session also offered insight into nurturing children with love and care, even before one

## SGRG formally recognised as a lay association

PENANG: The Shekinah Glory Renewal Group (SGRG), a Catholic Charismatic Renewal community in the Diocese of Penang, marked its 44th anniversary on March 5, with a Mass and the formal signing and promulgation of its statutes at the Msgr Aloysius Spirituality Centre (MASC).

Founded on March 6, 1982, as the Shalom Youth Fellowship (SYF) by the late Agnes Gregory, Elaine Capel, Celine Capel, William Chan, and Michael Siew under the guidance of the late Bishop Anthony Soter Fernandez, the group began as a spiritual initiative to nurture faith among working youth. Over the decades, it has grown into a trans-parochial charismatic community committed to "transforming lives through the indwelling presence of God" (cf. Ezekiel 37:26–27).

The celebration was presided over by Cardinal Sebastian Francis, with concelebrants Frs Michael Raymond OFM Cap, Martin Orlando, Louis Loi, and assisted by Deacon Paul Kang. Fr Joachim Robert was also present.

In his homily, Cardinal Sebastian invited the community to reflect on the blessings of the past 44 years, rooted in trust in the Lord. He highlighted the Serenity Prayer, encouraging the faithful to "live, bless, and surrender" — entrusting both what is within and beyond one's control to God.

A significant highlight of the celebration was the formal signing of the SGRG statutes, the culmination of a three-year process of prayerful drafting and canonical review by the Diocese of Penang. The promulgation establishes SGRG as a recognised private association of the lay faithful, affirming its mission within the Church's canonical structure.

Offertory gifts, including the statutes, symbolised the community's identity and commitment to holiness, unity, and faithful service to the Church.

"This celebration is more than a look back at 44 years of faith," said the SGRG Core Team. "It is a public affirmation of our communion with the bishop and our commitment to serve the People of God through the proclamation of the Word and the power of the Holy Spirit."

About 150 members of the faithful and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal community attended the celebration. Participants expressed gratitude for the group's journey, describing it as one marked by God's grace and perseverance.

The celebration concluded with the cutting of the anniversary cake and a fellowship dinner. **Stephanie Cheong**

is called to parenthood.

Another participant reflected on the unique atmosphere of the atrium, describing an initial sense of childlike curiosity when exploring the materials. While the slower pace of the presentations felt unfamiliar at first, it gradually drew them into a deeper attentiveness.

More information on CGS can be obtained from <https://www.archklacm.org>

# Safeguarding mission highlighted at diocesan Study Day

PLENTONG, Johor: The Professional Standards Office of the Malacca Johore Diocese held its first Meeting and Study Day on March 7 at the MAJODI Centre. The gathering began with breakfast followed by a Holy Hour led by Bishop Bernard Paul at St James Chapel.

During the Holy Hour, Bishop Bernard reflected on Matthew 18:5–7, 13–15, emphasising the responsibility of the Church to protect children and the most vulnerable in society.

The meeting that followed included a presentation by Francisco Overee on the Charter for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Persons. The infographic-style charter will be introduced in parishes to raise awareness about the rights and responsibilities of those who interact with minors and vulnerable persons. It is designed to communicate the Church's safeguarding mission in a clear and accessible manner.

Fr Joseph Heng then reflected on the current definition of a vulnerable person as outlined

in Pope Francis' Apostolic Letter *Vos estis lux mundi*. The document adopts a broader understanding of vulnerability, recognising that anyone in a state of physical or mental infirmity may be considered vulnerable.

"A minor can also be vulnerable, but not all vulnerable persons are minors," he explained. "The Church treats offences against both categories with the highest level of seriousness, and such cases are normally handled by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith."

He emphasised that safeguarding extends beyond preventing and reporting abuse. It also involves recognising the inherent dignity of every person, created in the image of God, and fostering environments where all can feel safe and respected.

Bishop Bernard later delivered a reflection on the themes of abuse of conscience and spiritual abuse. Grounding his reflection in the Christian understanding of human dignity, he reminded participants that safeguarding is rooted in the Church's belief that every

person bears the image of God.

"Safeguarding is not optional charity; it is reverence for the Divine Image," he said, noting that Christ's Incarnation and His identification with the most vulnerable make this dignity visible.

He further explained that authority in the Church exists for service rather than domination. "Safeguarding is evangelisation in action. It manifests the justice of the Kingdom," he said, adding that transparency is embraced not as a response to external pressure but as an expression of Gospel obedience.

Bishop Bernard highlighted that spiritual abuse and abuse of conscience are increasingly recognised within the Church's safeguarding frameworks, particularly where authority, trust and vulnerability intersect.

Spiritual abuse, he explained, occurs when religion, Scripture, theology or Church authority is used to control, manipulate or silence another person. Abuse of conscience, on the other hand, arises when Church authority intrudes upon or pressures a person's inner moral freedom — especially in areas where the Church teaches that conscience must remain free. Both forms of abuse distort a person's relationship with God, not merely their relationship with a leader.

Such abuse often occurs in contexts where individuals approach Church leaders in trust and vulnerability — including children, migrants, minorities, seminarians and novices. Warning signs may include language that discourages questioning authority, lack of accountability for leaders, discouraging contact with family or external advisers, or a culture of secrecy around leadership decisions.

Victims may display signs such as excessive guilt or fear of sin, loss of confidence in personal judgement, anxiety about displeas-



Bishop Bernard Paul during the Exposition.

ing a spiritual authority, social isolation, or the belief that leaving a ministry would mean betraying God.

Safeguarding policies now increasingly address spiritual abuse and abuse of conscience because they can create psychological dependency and may precede other forms of misconduct. Victims may not always recognise the abuse, especially when it is framed as spiritual guidance or holiness.

Effective safeguarding therefore requires clear boundaries in spiritual direction, proper separation between roles of formation and governance, awareness of power dynamics, and independent reporting structures.

The meeting concluded with an open discussion among participants, allowing clergy and safeguarding personnel to reflect on the presentations and strengthen their shared commitment to creating safe environments for all who come into contact with the Church.



Bishop Bernard Paul with members of the Professional Standards Office of the Malacca Johore Diocese.

## Penang diocese reinforces commitment to child protection

BUKIT MERTAJAM: A discourse on the safeguarding of minors and vulnerable adults was held recently for the clergy of the Diocese of Penang at Domus, Minor Basilica of St Anne.

Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang, addressed the clergy and religious through a pre-recorded message. The address, intended as a common diocesan directive, will be shared with ministries working with children across the diocese to raise awareness on safeguarding responsibilities.

Emphasising the central place of children in the Gospel, Cardinal Sebastian reminded those present that Jesus placed the child at the heart of faith and the Kingdom of God.

"Keep the child at the centre of the narrative of the Kingdom of God as Our Lord Jesus did, and you will never go wrong," he said.

The cardinal encouraged all clergy, religious and lay leaders to actively participate in safeguarding formation programmes. Protecting children, he stressed, is not merely an administrative responsibility but a sacred duty — an expression of love and reverence for those entrusted to the Church's care. Safeguarding, he added, is an essential dimension of evangelisation and a witness to the Gospel, affirming that the Church must always remain a safe and nurturing environment for every child.

He also expressed gratitude to clergy, religious, lay leaders and the People of God for their commitment to safeguarding initiatives, recalling the words of Matthew 19:14: "Let

the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

Dr Mary Bharathy, a psychiatrist, outlined the various forms of child abuse — physical, emotional, sexual and neglect — noting that abuse most often occurs within relationships built on trust. She emphasised that a child below the age of 18 cannot give consent and that responsibility always rests with the adult.

Children, she added, rarely disclose abuse immediately. Sudden behavioural changes, fear of a particular adult, withdrawal, regression, or inappropriate sexualised behaviour may be warning signs that require attentive and compassionate response.

Fr Martin Arlando, a canon lawyer, presented an overview of the revised *Vos estis lux mundi* (March 2023), the Church's procedural norms for addressing clerical sexual abuse and strengthening accountability among Church leaders. The updated norms expand the scope to include lay leaders of international associations, strengthen protections for victims, define victims to include vulnerable adults, and clarify the responsibilities of bishops and major superiors in conducting investigations.

He also highlighted the importance of the *Vademecum* issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in July 2020, a procedural handbook intended to guide Church authorities in handling cases of sexual abuse of minors committed by clerics. Together, the two documents reflect the Church's ongoing effort to address abuse with greater transpar-



The members of the clergy listening intently to the session.

ency, accountability and pastoral care.

Lawyer Dato' Dominic Selvam Gnanapragasam briefed participants on canonical developments, particularly the revision of Book VI of the Code of Canon Law. The revisions, he explained, provide clearer norms and more effective mechanisms to ensure accountability, discipline and the protection of the faithful.

Christopher Kushi addressed Malaysian legal developments related to child protection, highlighting the growing risks faced by young people in the digital environment. He noted that the government has introduced several updated legal measures to strengthen child protection, including the Anti-Sexual Harassment Act 2022, anti-bullying provisions added to the Penal Code in July 2025, and the Online Safety Act 2025, which came into force on January 1, 2026.

He also referenced the Universal Guidelines

Framework issued in March 2024 by the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors (*Tutela Minorum*), which seeks to establish clear safeguarding standards across the global Church.

At the conclusion of the discourse, Cardinal Sebastian Francis joined the clergy and religious in formally signing the Diocese of Penang's revised Standards of Pastoral Conduct. The standards were last affirmed in 2022 but have now been expanded from 10 to 15 in response to developments in local legislation and the Universal Guidelines Framework.

The Professional Standards Office of the Diocese of Penang has also introduced new protocols, including the Case Management of Concerns, Allegations and Complaints and the Safeguarding Risk Management Plan, to strengthen safeguarding practices across the diocese.

# Musical brings the life of Jesus to stage at St John's Cathedral

KUALA LUMPUR: A musical titled *The Life of Jesus* was staged at the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist on March 15, drawing parishioners into a moving portrayal of Christ's journey, from His birth to His passion and resurrection.

The production, held after Mass on Laetare Sunday, brought together a diverse group of participants, including the parish choir, catechism students, and members of the Parish International Community (PIC), together with numerous volunteers working behind the scenes. The collaboration reflected the rich diversity of the parish, with people of different backgrounds, languages, and ministries contributing to the production.

Preparation for the musical began weeks in advance, with regular rehearsals following weekend Masses. While the process was at times hectic, with multiple groups coordinating their roles, the team gradually found its rhythm. Scenes were refined, challenges addressed,

*As we journey from Lent into the joy of Easter, this issue brings together a rich collection of Lenten articles (pages 9-11). Owing to space constraints, the articles have been carefully condensed. While shortened, they retain their essential insights, inviting readers to revisit the spirit of repentance, renewal, and hope that leads us to the Resurrection.*



and new elements, including the addition of young "angel" characters, were incorporated to enhance the performance.

As the weeks progressed, what initially appeared chaotic evolved

into a cohesive production. In the final hours before the performance, participants gathered in prayer, placing the musical in God's hands. One cast member portraying Jesus shared that while he understood why he was

chosen for the role, it remained "a big role to fill," reflecting the sense of humility felt among the cast.

With the encouragement of the parish priest, Fr Gerard Theraviam, the musical unfolded after Mass

before an appreciative audience. Despite the challenges encountered during preparation, the performance was widely regarded as a success — not only for its artistic presentation, but for the dedication and faith of those involved.

The musical touched many, with both cast and audience moved by the retelling of Christ's life. For participants, the experience went beyond performance. It became a journey of spiritual growth, fostering friendships and a deeper connection with Christ.

It was also a testament of unity, as individuals from different cultures and ministries came together with a shared purpose — to bring the Gospel story to life. **SJC Parish International Community Team**



## Donating blood to save lives

KAJANG: A blood donation campaign organised by the Ministry of the Poor of the **Church of the Holy Family**, in collaboration with the BEC Cuepacs Zone and supported by Pusat Darah Negara, was held on March 15 at the church hall.

The campaign, held from 8.00am to 1.00pm, received an encouraging response from both parishioners and the wider public. A total of 207 donors registered, with 155 pints of blood successfully collected to help replenish the nation's blood supply.

Although 52 donors were deferred due to medical reasons, organisers expressed gratitude for the strong turnout and willingness of the community to contribute to this life-saving effort.

PENANG: A blood donation drive held at the **Church of Divine Mercy** was successfully carried out on March 14 at St Faustina Hall, from 8.00am to 4.15pm.

The initiative, organised during the Lenten season, served as a meaningful expression of compassion and generosity within the parish community.

The programme was organised into three main sections: the Blood

Medical personnel from Pusat Darah Negara conducted the donation process, ensuring that all procedures were carried out safely and professionally. Volunteers from the parish supported the event by assisting with registration, guiding donors, and coordinating activities throughout the programme.

Priscilla Joseph, leader of the BEC Cuepacs Zone, expressed appreciation to all who contributed to the success of the campaign.

"We are grateful for the strong support from both the parish community and the public. Every donation helps save lives, and we hope more people will continue to come forward in future campaigns," she said.

The organising committee also extended their thanks to the doc-



tors, nurses, volunteers, and parish members for their dedication and teamwork.

The organisers hope that the positive response will encourage continued support for future blood donation drives. **Priscilla Joseph**

others, echoing the words of Acts 20:35, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Through this act of generosity, parishioners extended hope and care to those in need.

Caritas Church of Divine Mercy expressed gratitude to all donors, volunteers, and organisers whose commitment and support contributed to the success of the programme. **Jude Ravi**

## The Power of the Cross

KUALA LUMPUR: The parish of St Joseph, Sentul hosted a Lenten concert titled *The Power of the Cross*, presented by Broadway Academy in collaboration with the Archdiocesan Office of Human Development (AOHD).

The concert invited the faithful to reflect more deeply on Christ's suffering, sacrifice, and the boundless love revealed through the Cross. Through sacred music and narration, the evening became a journey of prayer, contemplation, and hope.

Among those present were Archbishop Julian Leow, Apostolic Nuncio to Malaysia Archbishop Wojciech Zaluski, parish priest, Fr Frederick Joseph, and AOHD director, Dr Gary Liew.

The performance featured the Catholic Chamber Orchestra of Kuala Lumpur, founded by Dr Casey Broadway, together with the BAVE Chamber Choir and guest soloist Diana Klycheva. The programme opened with orchestral and choral works that set a reflective tone, including Giordano's *Intermezzo* from the opera *Fedora*, followed by two renditions of *Ave Maria* by Schubert and Mascagni. The choir also presented sacred classics such as Mozart's *Laudate Dominum* and *Ave Verum Corpus*, as well

as Rheinberger's *Stabat Mater*, drawing the audience into a deeper meditation on Christ's Passion.

The second half of the concert featured a choir formed by The Catholic Singing Ambassadors, a choral initiative that brings together singers from multiple parishes across the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur. Founded by Dr Casey, the ensemble reflects unity within the Catholic community, fostering collaboration through sacred music.

The highlight of the evening was the cantata *The Power of the Cross* by Mark Hayes, a seven-movement musical reflection on Christ's journey to Calvary. Through a blend of Scripture, narration by Suzan Manen and Mandaking, and choral performance, the cantata conveyed the depth of Christ's suffering and redeeming love.

The concert concluded with *Via Dolorosa*, a moving reminder of Jesus' path to crucifixion. In a symbolic moment of unity, members of the Catholic Ministry of the Deaf, together with dignitaries and AOHD representatives, joined in the finale.

Many were moved, with some brought to tears by the combination of music, message, and artistic expression. **Sheela Theivanthiran**



# Parishioners renew baptismal identity at recollection

Christine Ong

MELAKA: Approximately 200 parishioners of the Church of St Theresa gathered on March 8 for a Lenten recollection centred on rediscovering the grace of Baptism as a journey from death to life, from sin to grace, and from isolation to communion.

Led by parish priest Fr Thomas Chong, SJ, together with assistant parish priest Fr Louis Chin, the recollection brought together both English- and Mandarin-speaking parishioners in a reflective and prayerful experience.

The programme guided participants through seven stations, each representing a key moment in the Sacrament of Baptism. Rooted in the Synodal themes of



Parishioners symbolically burning their personal struggles.

Communion, Participation, and Mission, each station incorporated Scripture, meditation, prayer, and symbolic actions to help

parishioners renew their baptismal identity.

The journey began with a call to conversion, where participants

reflected on areas of their lives needing renewal through silent journaling. This was followed by a communal renunciation of sin, during which parishioners identified personal struggles and symbolically burned written notes, signifying their desire to turn away from sin.

At the profession of faith, participants reaffirmed their belief in the Holy Trinity. The fourth station invited them to recall their Baptism by dipping their fingers in holy water and making the Sign of the Cross as they entered the church.

In a symbolic moment, the priests anointed parishioners with the Oil of Chrism, representing the gift of the Holy Spirit. This was followed by the presentation of a white cloth, recalling the garment worn at Baptism, as participants prayed for re-

newal and new life in Christ.

The final station focused on bearing witness to the light of Christ. Parishioners lit candles from the Paschal candle and, holding their lights, sang *Christ Be Our Light* in both English and Mandarin — a powerful expression of their call to live out their faith.

Throughout the recollection, participants moved in silence between the church and parish hall, allowing space for deeper reflection. The combination of Scripture, symbolic gestures, and communal prayer created a meaningful and grace-filled experience.

The recollection concluded with a renewed sense of purpose, as parishioners were reminded of their call to live out their baptismal mission in daily life.

## Lend yourself wholeheartedly to LENT

PENANG: More than 150 parishioners, mainly from the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit (CHS), and other parishes, gathered for a full-day Lenten recollection titled: *Holy Week – The Meaning, Message, and our Mission* – with Martin Jalleh.

“It is time indeed for information and formation, an ongoing journey whereby God informs you, forms you, to transform you,” said Martin. Failing which, one might “become deformed” and mindlessly “conform to ‘Catholic culture’ of rites-rituals-rules.” That is exactly when we become, and remain mere “recipients” unto receiving “the last rites!” What is received must in turn “result in a personal relationship with God through growth in faith. Reflect: Are we ‘giving’ to church simply to ‘receive’? Or are we as ‘giving’ as

Jesus the Son of God who gave His all to redeem us?” He stressed, “ponder, pray, personalise, and prepare through Lent to encounter the glory of God in Easter.”

He then guided us through all the days of “God’s Holy Week, also called Passion Week;” its significant call that we be holy (Leviticus 19:2). “A sacred time where the past becomes present.” It draws us into ponderous participation in God’s revelation of His heart of love. “Reflect how His love serves, suffers, gives, forgives ... and calls us to conversion.” We are to dwell on John 12:1-8, “a powerful prelude” to help us interiorise the meaning of Lent – an outpouring of fragrant and extravagant love that kneels and serves at the feet of God. It anticipates Jesus’ ultimate act of sacrificial love

– “Love that does not count the cost is the love that understands the cross” – Henri Nouwen’s apt summation for our reflective consumption. Holy Week with its Paschal Mystery is the heartbeat of our faith. It both commemorates and celebrates the key points of Jesus’ life, suffering, death, and resurrection, and its pivotal role in our lives.

In harking back and forth from the Old Testament to the New, Martin painstakingly drew prophetic pronouncements, parallels, divine perspectives, promises, paradoxes, symbolisms, contrasts, comparisons... and more. With zeal he detailed the unfolding of substantial events of each day in the Holy Week to show connectivity; to show God’s glory in all episodes; to throw light for clarity of understanding how the message-filled movements of each day therein point to “a continuous revelation of Jesus’ self-giving love” culminating in His crucifixion for our redemption.

Martin posed faith-based reflective questions to help us identify ourselves with the protagonists of each day of the Holy Week, for a personal awakening and a takeaway. He preached to reach out to inform our minds and form our hearts. **Lucille Dass**



Some of the participants during the group sharing.

## Holiness begins at home

PORT DICKSON: The Queen of Mission BEC of the Church of the Immaculate Conception (CICPD) hosted a Lenten formation on March 15, drawing parishioners from Zone D into an evening of reflection, renewal, and communal prayer.

Held at Bandar Springhill, the session was facilitated by seminarian Brother Ashvin together with CICPD parish priest, Fr Edwin Peter. Centred on the theme *In the One, We Are One*, the session invited participants to rediscover the family as the first and most vital place of Christian formation.

The multilingual format of the gathering enabled participants from diverse language backgrounds to engage fully, reflecting the unity of the Church while reinforcing the message that holiness within families transcends cultural and linguistic differences.

Participants were encouraged to reflect on their role as “domestic churches,” where faith is first lived and witnessed. Parents, in particular, were reminded of their responsibility to model Christ-like love, recognising that children often learn more from actions than words. Simple practices such as praying together and demonstrat-

ing patience, forgiveness, kindness, and self-control were highlighted as practical ways to nurture holiness in everyday family life.

The session included Scripture sharing, small group discussions, and interactive reflections, allowing participants to connect personal experiences with the Lenten call to conversion — especially in reaching out to the last, the lost, the least, and the little.

A key moment of reflection centred on the question, “Who is my neighbour?” Participants were reminded that a neighbour is not limited to those within one’s immediate circle, but can be anyone encountered in daily life — a family member, a person with disabilities, a colleague, a stranger, or someone in distress. The call to love and compassion, they were told, extends to all whom God places in their path.

The evening concluded with communal prayer and fellowship, leaving participants with a renewed sense of purpose. The initiative by the Queen of Mission BEC served as a timely reminder that true renewal begins at home, where faith is lived, love is shared, and Christ is encountered in daily life. **Susan Teng Yee Ling**

## Children keep Lenten spirit alive through online Rosary

GOPENG: For the children of the Church of St Jude, Lent became a meaningful opportunity to grow closer to Jesus through the Rosary.

This simple devotion has helped the children deepen their understanding of faith. As they journey through the joyful, sorrowful, glorious, and luminous mysteries, they reflect on the life of Christ and the role of Mother Mary in God’s plan of salvation. Praying together has also strengthened their sense of unity, forming a small but vibrant community of faith.

The initiative has also taught the children discipline and commitment.

By setting aside time for prayer, they learn to trust in God, seek His guidance, and practise kindness, patience, and forgiveness in their daily lives.

Gathering physically proved to be a challenge. With busy schedules, finding a common time to meet was not always possible.

Undeterred, the children turned to technology. Drawing from experiences during the pandemic, they began praying the Rosary online. From their homes, they now connect virtually, forming a united prayer community despite the distance. This “online Rosary” has become a creative and meaningful way to remain

faithful and connected.

There are moments of imperfection. Some younger children pray with great enthusiasm, their voices rising above the rest, while older students may speak more softly. At times, pauses are missed or prayers overlap. Yet these small moments only add to the beauty of the experience, as the children learn, guide one another, and grow together.

Their commitment is supported by catechists and parents. Catechists patiently guide the children in leading prayers and managing the online sessions, while parents encourage participation and create space for prayer



at home.

In many ways, this initiative has also become a quiet witness to adults. The sincerity and determination of the children serve as a gentle reminder of the simplicity and depth

of true faith.

There is hope that this practice will become a lasting habit. The seeds of prayer planted today may well guide these young hearts for years to come. **Isabel Joseph**

## Catechism students experience Seder meal

TELUK INTAN: As part of their Lenten formation, catechism students from the Church of St Anthony participated in a simplified Seder meal, helping them better understand the biblical significance of the meal shared by Jesus with His disciples at the Last Supper.

The session, introduced by catechist Marie Ann Dawson, marked the first time such an activity was organised for the parish's catechism students. Approximately 50 children took part, making it a meaningful addition to the catechesis programme.

Using a simple platter, catechists presented symbolic foods including flatbread, lettuce leaves, an apple and honey mixture, a hard-boiled egg, salt water, and grape juice. Each item was explained in relation to its biblical meaning: the flatbread symbolised the haste of the Israelites' escape from Egypt; the lettuce and salt water represented bitterness and

tears; the apple and honey signified hope and sweetness; and the egg pointed to new life.

The children were then invited to assemble their own wraps using the ingredients, allowing them to experience the symbolism in a hands-on and engaging way. The activity was met with enthusiasm, curiosity, and a sense of joy, making the lesson both meaningful and memorable.

Catechists also explained that while the traditional Passover meal includes lamb, Christians recognise Jesus as the Lamb of God, whose sacrifice brings salvation to all.

The session concluded with the children participating in the Stations of the Cross, prayerfully reflecting on the love and sacrifice of Christ during Lent.

Such initiatives help young Catholics connect Scripture with lived experience, deepening their understanding of faith as they prepare for Holy Week. **Marie Ann Dawson**



Children experiencing the Seder meal.

## Kulim parish's mission to prison inmates

KULIM: The Prison Ministry of the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, organised an outreach programme centred on a Soap Moulding Workshop for inmates — a simple act that carried a deeper message of compassion and hope.

The session brought together English, Mandarin, and Tamil catechism students for a three-hour activity from 9.00am to 12.00 noon. It began with an opening prayer led by parish priest, Fr Desmond Jansen, setting a reflective tone for the morning, followed by light refreshments for participants.

Under the guidance of chairperson, Albert Phillips, and assistant, Mary Ann, the students were introduced to the art of soap moulding. What seemed like a simple hands-on activity soon became something more — an opportunity to serve, to create, and to give.

This Lenten initiative encouraged young participants to look beyond themselves, to respond to the call of the season through acts of service, creativity, and community involvement. Organised in collaboration with the Penang Diocesan Prison Ministry, the programme was more than just an annual activity — it was a quiet mission of compassion.

With tools and raw materials provided by the ministry, parishioners and students worked side by side. In just three hours, they produced nearly 600 bars of soap, each one carefully set aside to dry before being packed and sent to inmates the following day.

Yet beyond the numbers, what lingered was something far more meaningful. In the gentle fragrance of the handmade soap was a reminder of Christ's love in action — a love that reaches beyond walls, bridges differences, and brings dignity and care to those often forgotten.

The programme concluded with a final blessing by Fr Desmond, followed by a shared meal. Participants — students, parents, and parishioners alike — returned home not just with the satisfaction of a task completed, but with hearts quietly touched by the experience.

In this small but significant way, Lent became not just a season observed, but a love lived.



## Gunavathi Thurchinamurthy

SHAH ALAM: A meaningful outreach organised by the Ministry for Special Needs under the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development was held at the Church of the Divine Mercy over the weekend of March 14–15. Anchored on the theme, *In the One we are one*, the programme highlighted inclusion, dignity, and the shared faith of all members of the Church community.

The highlight of the weekend was the Sunset Mass, celebrated by Archbishop Julian Leow with Petaling District Senator and parish priest, Fr George Harrison, concelebrating. The liturgy was specially prepared and animated by the Ministry for Special Needs, with a focus on persons with disabilities and members of the Deaf community.

They served as lectors, psalmists, offertory presenters, and hospitality ministers, affirming that everyone has a role within the Church. Their voices in prayer and gestures in sign language became a powerful witness to a faith that transcends words. Prior rehearsals ensured that participants were confident and fully engaged in the liturgy.

In his homily, Archbishop Julian emphasised the importance of belonging, reminding the faithful that the Church is called to live out the reality that all are one in Christ. He stressed that every person, regardless of ability, is an essential part of the Body of Christ.

A Makers Market provided a platform for participants from the Deaf community and individuals with special needs to showcase and sell their handmade creations. Items on display included paintings, jewellery, sewn crafts, candles, cookies, and other artisanal

# Outreach promotes inclusion and unity



Archbishop Julian Leow engaging with participants at a Makers Market booth at the Church of the Divine Mercy, Shah Alam.

products. The initiative drew support from parishioners, while Archbishop Julian personally visited the booths, engaging with participants and learning about their work.

Another highlight was the Interactive Way of the Cross, specially designed to be inclusive for those who may find traditional devotions challenging. Each station incorporated simple, hands-on activities, allowing participants to engage both physically and spiritually with the Passion of Christ.

Families, children, and individuals with special needs journeyed together through

the stations — some in quiet reflection, others in prayer — with many deeply moved by the experience. The initiative received overwhelmingly positive feedback, with parishioners and catechists expressing hope that similar inclusive devotions would be adopted in other parishes.

The Makers Market and Interactive Way of the Cross continued into Sunday, drawing large crowds and further demonstrating the community's openness in embracing and celebrating the gifts of persons with special needs.



## Contemplation lies at the heart of all prayer

PENANG: Contemplation took centre stage at the World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM) silent retreat themed *The Spirit of Lent and the Future of Religion*, held at the Stella Maris Retreat Centre from March 15 to 18.

The retreat drew more than 80 participants, including over 13 from Singapore, for a period of silence, reflection, and meditation rooted in the tradition of contemplative prayer.

Retreat facilitator, Fr Laurence Freeman OSB, a Benedictine monk and Director of WCCM, highlighted the importance of interior discipline during Lent. While acknowledging the human tendency towards darkness and negativity, he emphasised that the season ultimately leads to joy through deeper self-awareness and openness to God.

"We must acknowledge the darkness, reflect on our purpose with compassion, and

develop the discipline of attention within," he said. "Only then can we discover true joy and become expressions of the Divine mystery."

Fr Laurence stressed that contemplation is central to Christian prayer and essential for the future of the Church. "The prayer of the heart allows us to listen deeply to the Word of God. The essential teacher is the Spirit within us," he said.

He explained that contemplative prayer,

grounded in silence and stillness, goes beyond words while complementing other forms of devotion. Practised through daily meditation, it fosters a deeper relationship with God.

Reflecting on the spiritual journey, Fr Laurence spoke on the relevance of *asceticism*, *apatheia*, and *agape*, noting that growth often involves passing through discouragement before reaching inner freedom and unconditional love. He pointed to the Cross as both a sign of love and apparent failure, ultimately fulfilled in the Resurrection.

Citing Hosea 6:6 — "I desire mercy, not sacrifice" — he urged participants to reflect on love as the foundation of faith. "Who do I love? Where do I see love? How do I receive it?" he asked.

The retreat concluded with an oblation ceremony for 14 individuals from China, six present and eight joining online. The six oblates, together with Fr Laurence, also paid a courtesy visit to Cardinal Sebastian Francis. **Anita Matthews**

# Choose life, walk in hope



SEOUL: Archbishop Peter Chung Soon-taick, *pic*, of the Archdiocese of Seoul has urged Christians to defend life amid war, suffering and moral uncertainty, calling the faithful to make concrete, life-giving choices rooted in the hope of the Resurrection.

In his 2026 Easter message, he remembered “those who suffer amid war and tension,” praying that “the Lord’s comfort and hope be with those living in anxiety, and all who strive to live according to their conscience.”

Quoting Luke 24:5-6 — “Why do you seek the living among the

dead? He is not here, but has risen” — the archbishop said the empty tomb is “not a place of despair, but where new life begins.”

“We are called to a life that gives life in the hope of the Resurrection,” he said, pointing to those who are suffering and marginalised as places where the risen Christ is encountered.

Drawing from *Dilexi te*, he echoed Pope Leo XIV: “In the wounded faces of the poor and the suffering of the innocent, we see the suffering of Christ himself,” urging the faithful to remember, pray for, and stand in solidarity with all

who suffer, especially those threatened by war and violence.

He stressed that this call must be lived daily. “In small acts of care and in responding to those around us, our faith becomes alive,” he said, adding that such witness includes caring for creation and respecting life.

Amid rapid technological change, Archbishop Chung also underscored the primacy of human dignity. “All technologies, including artificial intelligence, must not alienate, but serve to connect and give life,” he said.

Quoting Mark 16:7 — “You will

see him there” — he noted that “there” is in the very places of daily life, where the faithful are called to discern and respond to God’s will through life-giving choices.

Calling on Christians to be witnesses of the Resurrection, he urged them to “move forward not on the path of despair but of hope,” and to “walk the path of love shown by the Lord.”

He also pointed to the upcoming World Youth Day in Seoul, saying the 2027 gathering will be “a time of grace to experience anew the joy of the Resurrection.” **LiCAS News**

## Churches in Indonesia opens doors to Muslim travellers

JAKARTA: For the first time, Indonesia’s Ministry of Religious Affairs involved churches in a nationwide programme that turned houses of worship into rest stops for millions of Muslims travelling home for *Eid al-Fitr*.

Previously limited to mosques, the initiative expanded to include 477 Catholic and 106 Protestant churches, which operated 24-hour rest posts for travellers taking part in the annual mudik homecoming.

In total, 7,487 houses of worship participated in the programme, which began on March 17. Most were mosques (6,859), along with 45

Buddhist temples.

Travellers had access to rest areas, toilets, food and drinks, and mobile phone charging stations, the ministry said.

Secretary-general Kamaruddin Amin said the initiative aimed to extend the role of houses of worship beyond ritual. “Religion should not be limited to faith or personal morality — it must enlighten and offer solutions,” he said.

Salman Habeahan, director of Catholic affairs, said the inclusion of churches followed nationwide coordination, with participating parishes located across Sumatra, North

Sulawesi, Java, Papua, East and West Nusa Tenggara, and Maluku.

Describing the effort as a sign of harmony and brotherhood, he said it reflected “tolerance and humanitarian solidarity” during *Eid al-Fitr*, alongside the Lenten spirit of Catholics.

Fr Malvin Karundeng of St Andrew’s parish in North Sulawesi said his church joined due to its strategic location along the Trans-Sulawesi highway.

“This programme was an opportunity for the Church to show brotherhood and offer concrete service to travellers,” he said. **ucanews.com**



St Joseph Dabuk Rejo Church in Ogan Komering Ilir Regency, South Sumatra Province, is one of the churches involved in the programme to assist Muslim travellers. (**ucanews.com**)

## Singapore welcomes largest number of new Catholics this Easter



SINGAPORE: More than 1,200 catechumens and candidates entered the Church this Easter — the highest number in a decade — reflecting growing interest in the faith, the Archdiocese of Singapore said.

According to the Office for Catechesis (OFC), 978 catechumens and 155 candidates participated in the English-language Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion on February 21 and 22 at the Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the Church of Christ the King. A further 111 catechumens and six candidates took part in the Mandarin Rite of Election on March 1.

Speaking at the rites, OFC Catechetical Director Fr Terence Kesavan reminded participants that faith is ultimately a response to God’s initiative.

“You have made a choice to come to church and to learn more of God and the faith,” he said. “But today, we celebrate God’s choice — God is choosing you.”

He also encouraged the faithful to see Lent not merely as a time of sacrifice, but as an opportunity for deeper conversion. “The more important question,” he said, “is whether these practices help us become who God wants us to be.”

Fr Kesavan noted that while no formal study has been conducted, the rise in numbers may be linked to active evangelisation — particularly among young people — as well as the impact of Pope Francis’ visit to Singapore in 2024.

“It is through the evangelisation efforts of the Catholic community that people are touched and inspired to follow Christ,” he said. **Vatican News**

## Bangladesh religious aid plan draws mixed reactions

DHAKA: A new state-funded monthly allowance for religious leaders of all major faiths in Bangladesh has drawn mixed reactions, with broad support from Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist leaders, but reservations from Christian clergy.

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman recently launched the scheme in Dhaka, fulfilling a pre-election pledge of his Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which secured a landslide victory on February 12.

“This programme seeks to recognise the sacrifices and services of religious leaders and ensure their financial well-being,” Rahman said.

Under the scheme, each mosque will receive 10,000 taka (approx. RM327) monthly — 5,000 taka for

the imam, 3,000 for the muezzin, and 2,000 for caretakers. Head priests in Hindu, Buddhist and Christian places of worship will receive 5,000 taka (approx. RM65), with assistants entitled to 3,000 taka.

Traditionally, religious heads in Bangladesh depend on donations from the faithful — mosque committees support imams, temple offerings sustain Hindu priests, monks rely on alms, and Christian clergy are supported by their communities.

While leaders from Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist communities welcomed the move, Christian clergy — particularly Catholic leaders — have declined the allowance.

Oblate Archbishop Bejoy N.

D’Cruze of Dhaka, president of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Bangladesh, said the Church appreciates the initiative but will not accept the funds. He noted that Catholic priests rely on voluntary contributions, which foster a close relationship with the faithful and encourage a simple lifestyle.

However, he added that the Church would welcome government support for social and community development, including infrastructure projects and assistance for underprivileged students.

Fr Joy Joseph Quiah of the Chattogram Archdiocese said local contributions remain sufficient to support priests.

Others, however, expressed strong support. “Our priests live on a limited income, so it is sometimes difficult to manage,” said Subhash Chakraborty of Chanakutia Kalibari Temple. “A monthly grant will be helpful.”

Mohiuddin Kasem, an imam at the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque, described the initiative as a positive step, expressing hope that its benefits would reach imams nationwide.

Sunanda Priyo of the Bangladesh Buddhist Federation also welcomed the move, noting that state support for religious leaders has long been lacking.

Muslims make up about 90 per cent of Bangladesh’s population of more than 170 million, with Hindus accounting for around 8 per cent, and the rest comprising other faiths, including Christianity and Buddhism. **ucanews.com**



Prime Minister Tarique Rahman (centre) presents a token cheque to a Buddhist monk during an event launching a nationwide scheme for a monthly state allowance for religious clergy in the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka on March 14. (**ucanews/Press Information Department - PID**)

# Synod report proposes Church ‘Observatory on Disability’



Participants in the Jubilee of People with Disabilities share testimonies and prayers in St Peter's Square at the Vatican on April 29, 2025. (CNS photo/Pablo Esparza)

VATICAN: A study group of the Synod on Synodality has proposed the creation of an “Ecclesial Observatory on Disability,” alongside calls for greater inclusion of voices from the poor and marginalised in Church life and leadership.

The final report, published March 24, stressed that listening to “the cry of the poor and of the earth” is not optional but central to the Church’s mission. While recognising existing structures such as parishes, basic communities and charitable organisations, it noted that responsibility for social outreach rests with all Christians, not just specific ministries.

The report, part of the work of 10 study groups established by Pope Francis in 2024, will now be reviewed by Pope Leo XIV and is not binding.

Within the group, a subgroup

largely made up of persons with disabilities proposed the creation of the observatory at diocesan, national and international levels. It aims to foster structured listening and extend this model to other marginalised groups.

The document acknowledged that many groups including women, Indigenous peoples, young people, persons with disabilities, and those facing discrimination or poverty continue to seek a stronger voice in the Church. It called for deeper listening and “transformative action,” urging the Church to become “a means of listening” in service of its mission.

It also emphasised the importance of respectful, “person-first” language that reflects the dignity and diverse experiences of those in vulnerable situations.

Among its recommendations, the

report suggested support groups for single parents, widows and widowers, and called for more effective ways of listening to those affected by war and violence. It also urged the inclusion of vulnerable groups, women, and those from regions impacted by conflict and climate change in Church bodies.

The report further proposed greater inclusion of theologians from poor or marginalised contexts in drafting Church documents, with particular attention to women, persons with disabilities and people of colour.

It also encouraged the creation of global networks linking theologians, grassroots organisations, Catholic media, universities and young people, to ensure theological reflection is grounded in real-world experience and leads to concrete action. EWTN

## Pope explains why priesthood is reserved to men

VATICAN: Pope Leo XIV said the Catholic priesthood, entrusted to men, must be understood in light of apostolic succession, while calling for priests who are “ardent with evangelical charity” and “courageous missionaries.”

In his March 25 catechesis on *Lumen Gentium*, the Second Vatican Council’s dogmatic constitution, the Pope explained that the Church “is founded on the apostles, whom Christ appointed as the living pillars of his mystical body.”

Speaking in St Peter’s Square, he stressed that the Church’s hierarchical structure serves unity, mission and sanctification, and is not merely organisational but of

divine origin.

The apostles, as witnesses of the Resurrection, were entrusted with the mission to teach, sanctify and guide — a ministry handed on through their successors in pastoral office. This continuity forms the basis of apostolic succession and the sacrament of Holy Orders, structured in three degrees: episcopate, presbyterate and diaconate.

Quoting *Lumen Gentium*, the Pope noted that this structure “is not a human construct” but a divine institution through which Christ’s mission continues in history.

He reiterated that the ministerial priesthood differs “in essence

and not only in degree” from the common priesthood of the faithful, though both participate in the one priesthood of Christ.

The ordained ministry, he said, is conferred on men who receive *sacra potestas*, sacred authority for service, in continuity with the mission entrusted to the Twelve Apostles. This link, he explained, underpins the Church’s understanding of a male priesthood in fidelity to Christ and tradition.

At the same time, the Pope emphasised that hierarchy must always be seen as service, recalling the Council’s teaching that pastoral authority is a true *diakonia*, or ministry.



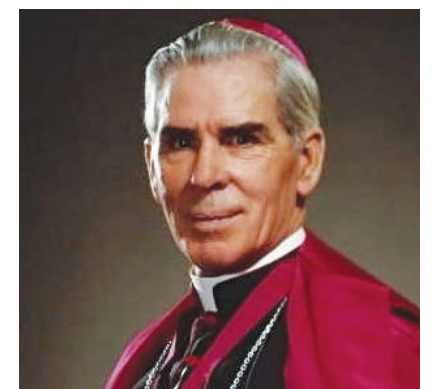
Concluding, he urged prayers for vocations: “Let us ask the Lord to send ministers to his Church who are filled with evangelical charity, devoted to the good of all the baptised, and courageous missionaries throughout the world.” EWTN

## Venerable Fulton Sheen to be beatified in September

VATICAN: Venerable Fulton J. Sheen, *pic*, of the United States will be beatified on September 24, 2026, in St Louis, Missouri.

Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, Pro-Prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelisation, will preside at the Mass, representing Pope Leo XIV.

Sheen was declared Venerable in 2012 by Pope Benedict XVI after recognition of his heroic virtue. In 2019, Pope Francis approved a miracle attributed to his intercession, clearing the way for his beatification and the title “Blessed.”



Renowned for his dynamic preaching, Sheen reached millions through radio and television. His programme *The Catholic Hour*, launched in 1930, drew an estimated four million listeners, while his television series *Life is Worth Living*, which began in 1951, attracted up to 30 million viewers.

Born on May 8, 1895, in El Paso, Illinois, to an Irish family, Sheen was ordained a priest in 1919. He pursued further studies at the Catholic University of America, the Catholic University of Leuven, and the Pontifical University of St Thomas Aquinas in Rome.

He began teaching at the Catholic University of America in 1926, serving there until 1950. He was later appointed Bishop of Rochester, New York, where he served from 1951 to 1969, before being named Titular Archbishop of Newport, Wales, by Pope Paul VI.

Archbishop Sheen died in New York on December 9, 1979, at the age of 84. Vatican News

## Indonesian becomes 57th language of Vatican News

VATICAN: A Memorandum of Understanding signed on March 25 between the Dicastery for Communication and the Commission for Social Communications of the Bishops’ Conference of Indonesia has made Indonesian the 57th official language of *Vatican News*.

The agreement, signed at Vatican News and Vatican

Radio headquarters in Rome, enables more people to receive the Pope’s message in their own language. Present at the signing were representatives of the Dicastery, the Indonesian bishops’ communications commission, and Indonesia’s Ambassador to the Holy See.

Bishop Agustinus Tri Budi Utomo, chairman of the

Indonesian commission, described the milestone as “a celebration of enduring friendship” and a strengthening of the bond between Indonesia and the universal Church. He added that it offers a direct pathway for Indonesian-speaking Catholics — including those in neighbouring Malaysia — to access Church news and the voice of the Holy Father in their

mother tongue.

Paolo Ruffini, Prefect of the Dicastery for Communication, together with Editorial Director Andrea Tornielli and Deputy Editorial Director Massimiliano Menichetti, said the initiative would promote inclusivity, strengthen pastoral communication, and deepen the connection between the Vatican and local communities. It would also support the local Church in presenting messages of peace and fraternity within the Indonesian cultural context.

Indonesia’s Ambassador to the Holy See, Michael Trias Kuncahyono, welcomed the agreement as a “historic moment,” especially for Catholics in the country.

With Indonesian now added, Vatican News expands its reach, enabling more people to access Church news and engage with the global Catholic community in a language familiar to them.

Vatican News



Representatives of the Dicastery for Communications, the Indonesian Ambassador, and members of the Indonesian Bishops’ Conference. (Vatican News)



# Leadership and community in transition

Richard Chia

By the early 1980s, a historic milestone had been reached: the Conference of Bishops of Malaysia and Singapore were now composed entirely of local bishops. The long era of missionary leadership had gently given way to indigenous stewardship. The passing of Bishop Karl Reiterer, MHM, in 1975 — the last missionary bishop serving in Kuching — symbolised this transition. Leadership was now firmly in local hands, with Bishop Peter Chung guiding the Church into a new chapter.

Archival records from the Catholic Bishops' Conference capture this moment vividly. Archbishop Peter Chung of Kuching served as President, with Archbishop Dominic Vendargon of Kuala Lumpur as Vice-President, Archbishop Gregory Yong of Singapore, Bishop Anthony Soter Fernandez of Penang, Bishop Simon Fung of Kota Kinabalu, Bishop Anthony Lee of Miri, and Bishop James Chan of Malacca-Johore, who served as Episcopal Secretary and later Treasurer. It was a leadership body rooted in the soil of its own people — a Church no longer mission territory, but a maturing local Church finding its voice.

The transition continued in 1983. Following the retirement of Archbishop Dominic Vendargon, the Auxiliary Bishop of Kuala Lumpur, Rt Rev Antony Selvanayagam was appointed Bishop of Penang, while Bishop Anthony Soter Fernandez was elevated as the second Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur. These developments reflected more than administrative change — they signalled a growing confidence in local leadership to shepherd the faithful in an increasingly complex and modern society.

Between 1980 and 1986, the Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Renato Raffaele Martino, based in Bangkok, accompanied the Church of Malaysia and Singapore — a reminder that even as the local Church matured, it remained deeply connected to the universal Church.

## **Building Communities: A vision ahead of its time**

If leadership marked one aspect of the Church's coming of age, the life of the community marked another — one that continues to shape the Church even today.

At *Aggiornamento* 1976, when 126 clergy gathered at College General, Penang, a bold and Spirit-led conviction emerged: the Church must become a communion of Christ-centred communities. Inspired by the early Christian community in Acts 2:42–47 — a people united in prayer, fellowship, and shared life — the vision was clear.

That moment, in hindsight, was more than a pastoral decision. It was the seed of what would later grow into the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) movement in Malaysia.

**The early years: Zeal, simplicity and struggle**  
In the years immediately following *Aggiornamento*, the responsibility of bringing this vision to life rested largely with individual parishes, resulting in varied expressions across communities.

Recognising the need for formation, the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur took a decisive step. On Easter 1980, it launched a three-year training programme for lay leaders. Participants committed to weekly two-hour sessions over the course of three years, with intervals for reflection and practical assignments. The

first year focused on foundational formation, while the subsequent years prepared participants for specific ministries such as liturgy, catechetics, pastoral care, and community-building.

The response from the laity exceeded all expectations. When the first cohort completed their formation, some 200 men and women were commissioned as Lay Ministers — a clear sign that the Church was beginning to take root more deeply among its people.

This renewed sense of ownership soon translated into action. Throughout the early 1980s, urban parishes in Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya witnessed a surge of enthusiasm, establishing numerous Basic Christian Communities (BCCs), sometimes numbering ten or more within a single parish. Even in the early stages, lay leaders — many still growing into their roles — embraced the mission with remarkable dedication.

They walked the streets of their neighbourhoods, knocking on doors, searching for fellow Catholics. Their guide? The quiet but unmistakable signs of faith — a crucifix on the wall, an image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, or a picture of the Blessed Virgin Mary above the doorway. These symbols became markers of belonging, gradually weaving together fragmented urban communities into small circles of faith.

Yet, as noted by Fr Ken Williams, CSsR, in FABC Papers No. 26, the experience was not uniform. Rural communities, where Catholics lived in closer proximity and shared a simpler rhythm of life, often embraced the BCC model more naturally. Urban settings, by contrast, posed greater challenges — mobility, busy schedules, and the anonymity of city life often hindered sustained participation.

*While the winds of renewal swept visibly across the Church in Peninsular Malaysia in the years following *Aggiornamento* 1976, quieter but equally significant shifts were unfolding — shifts that would come to define the identity of the local Church.*

## **From ideal to reality**

In theory, the BCC model was simple and compelling: families within a neighbourhood gathering regularly for prayer, reflection, and fellowship. In practice, however, it was anything but straightforward.

The first challenge was space. A home had to be found, and not every household was ready to open its doors. Then came the logistics — fixing a date and time that suited everyone.

More significantly, the role of leadership quickly emerged as crucial. The BCC coordinator was not merely an organiser, but a facilitator of faith — someone who needed to lead prayer, guide reflection, and encourage meaningful sharing. Without proper formation, this responsibility could be daunting.

And then came the most human element of all — food. Evening gatherings often revolved around meals, and what began as hospitality sometimes became a burden for hosts. Out of this, the now-familiar “potluck” culture was born, transforming obligation into shared participation.

Even when these practical matters were resolved, the content of the gatherings varied widely. Some became prayer meetings, others turned into talks, video sessions, or even informal social gatherings. Creativity filled the gaps where structure was lacking — but it also revealed a deeper need.

For nearly two decades, communities navigated this journey largely on their own. It was only in 1998 that the first formal Guidelines for Basic Ecclesial Communities were introduced, offering direction, formation, and a clearer pastoral framework.

## Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Convention I

A decade after *Aggiornamento*, the Church in Peninsular Malaysia paused — not to celebrate prematurely, but to reflect honestly.

In 1986, the bishops convened the First Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Convention (PMPC I), a landmark gathering intended to assess the progress made and to rekindle the spirit of renewal. But before the convention itself, something significant took place: the Church listened.

A nationwide consultation began at parish and diocesan levels. Five carefully prepared communication pamphlets were distributed to Catholics across Peninsular Malaysia, each addressing a key dimension of Church life. Beginning on the Feast of Christ the King in November 1985, and continuing through the liturgical seasons of 1986 — New Year, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost — these materials invited the faithful to reflect, respond, and evaluate.

The themes were telling:

- Formation.
- Integral Human Development of the Poor.
- Unity and Dialogue.
- Building of Christian Communities.

The responses gathered from these consultations became the foundation upon which the convention would stand.

From November 23 to 26, 1986, 171 Church leaders gathered in Port Dickson for PMPC I under the theme: *Thy Kingdom Come*.

It was a diverse assembly — two Archbishops, two Bishops, 45 priests, 23 religious, and 99 lay leaders — a visible expression of a Church seeking to journey together.

The objectives were clear:

- To review the decade since *Aggiornamento*,
- To recognise God's work in the Church's history,
- And to renew its identity as a sign and sacrament of communion.

The agenda was both comprehensive and courageous. It included a presentation of developments since 1976, a critical review based on nationwide feedback, reflections on Malaysian realities, and discernment of future priorities.

## **The hard truths**

What emerged from the consultations was both encouraging — and sobering.

Many among the laity admitted that they were largely unaware of the Church's call to build Christian communities. Structures had been introduced, announcements made — but guidance, formation, and sustained support were often lacking. Much had been left to individual BCC leaders, who struggled to carry the vision forward with limited resources.

The clergy, on the other hand, recognised the value of lay formation and acknowledged that progress had been made in certain parishes. Initiatives such as the Parish Renewal Experiences (PRE) had helped foster stronger bonds between priests and the faithful.

Yet deeper challenges surfaced.

Divisions along language lines within parishes remained a significant concern. Communication gaps between clergy, religious, and

lay communities were evident. Efforts in ecumenism and interreligious dialogue were still limited, often lacking depth at the parish level.

It was, in many ways, a moment of truth — a recognition that renewal required not just programmes, but conversion.

## **A renewed commitment**

The final statement of PMPC I, issued as a message to the People of God, reaffirmed the Church's foundational direction.

At its heart remained the Core Need: Building Christ-centred communities.

Together with this, four related priorities

- were reaffirmed:
- Unity among bishops, priests, religious and laity
- Ongoing formation for all
- Dialogue with Christians and people of other faiths
- Integral human development of the poor

To this, PMPC I added a fifth — one that would prove increasingly urgent: Ministry for Youths.

The Church recognised that the future depended on forming young people not just as participants, but as disciples and leaders.

## **A voice of honest reflection**

Among those present was Bishop James Chan of Malacca-Johore, a member of the original *Aggiornamento* team. His reflection captured both the hope and the frustration of the moment:

“There has been a lack of concerted effort

at different levels. Some parishes have done more, some less, and because of this, I do not think the *Aggiornamento* or the PMPC of 1986 had the desired impact. I hope that the coming 20th anniversary of *Aggiornamento* will be an occasion to remind our people of what transpired in 1976 and 1986 — of the resolutions and the needs, and where we have failed in implementing them.”

In response, the Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Team (PMPT) was entrusted with a renewed mandate: to strengthen existing efforts and chart new directions for the Church.

## **Fifty years later: The question remains**

As the Church in Malaysia marks 50 years of Basic Ecclesial Communities in 2026, these early efforts take on renewed meaning.

The questions raised in 1986 still echo today:

- How do we build communities, not just structures?
- How do we form people, not just programmes?
- How do we ensure that no one is left merely informed, but truly involved?

The story of BECs in Malaysia is not one of immediate success, but of ongoing conversion — a Church learning, sometimes slowly, how to become what it is called to be.

And perhaps that is the real legacy of *Aggiornamento* and PMPC I — not a finished chapter, but a living invitation.

One that still calls the Church — even now — to become a people gathered, formed, and sent.

# When the shepherd is wounded

*Let us pray for priests going through moments of crisis in their vocation, that they may find the accompaniment they need and that communities may support them with understanding and prayer.*

This intention of the Holy Father touches something deeply personal and often unspoken within the life of the Church. As a priest myself, I know that moments of crisis in vocation are not abstract ideas. They are real. They can arise quietly, sometimes unexpectedly, sometimes gradually, even while ministry continues outwardly as usual.

Many priests carry their responsibilities faithfully, accompanying others through illness, grief, family struggles, and moments of uncertainty. Yet we ourselves are not immune to struggle. We too can experience fatigue, discouragement, confusion, or even a sense of isolation.

To pray meaningfully for priests in crisis, we must first understand who a priest is, what vocation means, and why moments of crisis can occur. This reflection does not attempt to analyse priests or expose their struggles. Rather, it seeks to help the Church recognise the human reality within which vocation is lived, so that prayer may become more compassionate, more understanding, and more real.

## Who is a Priest?

The priesthood is first a mystery before it is a function.

The Church teaches that the priest acts *in persona Christi* - in the person of Christ - particularly in the celebration of the Eucharist and the sacraments. This does not mean that the priest replaces Christ, nor that he becomes somehow superhuman. Rather, it means that through the frailty of a human person, Christ continues to shepherd His people.

The uniqueness of the priesthood lies not in privilege, but in responsibility: to make visible, in a sacramental and pastoral way, the presence of Christ who teaches, sanctifies, and accompanies His people.

Yet the priest does not cease to be human.

He carries his personality, family history, temperament, limitations, hopes, and fears. He grows, learns, matures, and sometimes struggles, just like every other disciple. Ordination does not remove human vulnerability. It situates that vulnerability within a vocation of service.

The priest is not called to be perfect. He is called to remain faithful. And fidelity is lived over time, often through moments of uncertainty as well as clarity.

## What Do We Mean by Priests in Crisis?

A crisis in vocation does not always appear dramatic or visible. Often, it unfolds quietly, even while ministry continues outwardly as usual. Pastoral experience and studies on clergy wellbeing show that priests may experience struggles in several areas:

### 1. Spiritual Struggle

Moments when prayer feels dry and the sense of meaning that once sustained ministry feels less clear.

### 2. Emotional and Psychological Strain

Loneliness, anxiety, burnout, or compassion fatigue arising from constantly accompanying others in their suffering.

### 3. Questions of Identity

Uncertainty about purpose, direction, or feeling valued mainly for what one does rather than who one is.

### 4. Pastoral Pressure

The weight of multiple responsibilities and expectations placed on priests as spiritual leaders, administrators, and problem-solvers.

## Pope's prayer intention for April For priests in crisis



## Prayer Prism

Fr Fabian Dicom

(NCR photo)

### 5. Isolation

Despite being surrounded by people, some priests lack safe spaces for honest sharing, friendship, and support.

### 6. Personal or Moral Struggles

Human weaknesses, unhealthy coping habits, or personal difficulties that may be hard to acknowledge openly.

### 7. Digital Challenges

Struggles linked to online environments, including unhealthy digital habits that can affect emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

### 8. Relationship with Authority

Tensions or difficulties in relationships with bishops or superiors which may sometimes leave a priest feeling unheard or unsupported, especially in moments of vulnerability.

### 9. Personal History and Personality Factors

Unresolved wounds or personality traits that may influence how stress and ministry pressures are experienced.

This reflection cannot cover every dimension of crisis. Each priest's journey is unique. The purpose here is not to categorise struggles, but to understand why compassion, accompaniment, and prayer are so necessary.

Crisis does not necessarily mean the opposite or absence of vocation. Sometimes it reveals how deeply the vocation has been lived.

## Scripture Reminds Us That Struggle is Not Foreign to Vocation

The Scriptures reveal that those called by God often walk through moments of difficulty.

Elijah, after courageously confronting injustice, becomes exhausted and discouraged. Sitting beneath a tree, he prays in despair. God does not rebuke him. Instead, God allows him to rest and provides nourishment for the journey ahead. (1 Kings 19:4-9)

Jesus Himself recognises the limits of those He sends on mission: "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." (Mark 6:31)

St Paul speaks openly of weakness: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9)

## The Church Must Care for Her Priests

The Church also acknowledges the human dimension of priesthood. The Second Vatican Council reminds us that priests are chosen from among the people and share the same human condition (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 3). Canon Law emphasises the responsibility of bishops to ensure that priests receive the support necessary for their spiritual and personal wellbeing (Canon 384).

Care for priests is therefore not an optional kindness. It is part of the Church's responsibility.

## The Gift of Accompaniment

The Holy Father's intention highlights a key word: accompaniment.

Accompaniment means that no one should have to walk through darkness alone.

Priests are often expected to accompany others — the sick, the grieving, the confused, the searching. But who accompanies the priest?

Accompaniment can take many forms:

- a brother priest who listens without judging,
- a bishop who shows fatherly care rather than only administrative concern,
- a spiritual director who helps discern God's presence, even in confusion,
- professional counsellors or therapists who offer psychological support,
- friends who provide honest companionship,
- communities that allow priests to be human.

Sometimes, a priest in crisis may not even recognise that he needs help. He may feel ashamed, confused, or afraid of disappointing others. In such moments, the presence of understanding and compassionate people can make an immeasurable difference.

Professional help, when needed, should never be seen as weakness. Seeking help can be an act of courage and responsibility.

## What Can Deepen the Crisis?

Moments of crisis rarely arise from a single cause. Often, they are intensified by certain attitudes and expectations within the life of the Church.

## Gossip and Loss of Trust

When a priest's difficulties become the subject of speculation or quiet conversations, trust can quickly erode. Gossip isolates. It discourages openness and creates fear of being misunderstood or labelled. A priest who feels exposed rather than supported may withdraw further into silence. Charity and discretion are essential if healing is to be possible.

## Unrealistic Expectations

Priests are often expected to fulfil many roles at once — spiritual guide, counsellor, administrator, leader, organiser. When these expectations are not balanced with adequate support and space for rest, the weight can become heavy. Sometimes priests themselves feel they must always appear strong and capable. Yet a vocation cannot flourish when a person feels valued only for what he produces.

## A Functional View of Priesthood

Priesthood can sometimes be reduced to activity and efficiency - how much is done, how well things run. While these have their place, they cannot define the identity of the priest. He is first called to witness to the

presence of God. When ministry becomes purely functional, the deeper meaning of vocation can be obscured, and the priest may begin to feel like an instrument rather than a person entrusted with a living mission.

## A Word to Priests Who May Be Struggling

If you are a priest going through a difficult moment, know this: you are not alone. Crisis does not erase the sincerity of your yes to God, nor the grace that has worked

through your life and ministry.

Such moments can feel confusing and heavy, yet they do not mean your vocation has lost its meaning. Sometimes they are an invitation to rediscover its deeper foundation - not in constant activity or expectations, but in relationship with the One who first called you.

Do not carry everything alone. Seeking accompaniment - spiritual, fraternal, or professional - is not weakness, but fidelity. Your humanity is not an obstacle to your vocation; it is where grace continues to work.

Amid the demands of ministry, do not neglect care for your own soul and wellbeing. Prayer, rest, friendship, and support are part of remaining faithful.

Sometimes, the most faithful step is simply not to walk alone.

## A Call to the Whole Church

This prayer intention is addressed to the whole Church.

Communities play an important role in creating environments where priests can flourish as human beings and as ministers of the Gospel.

We are invited:

- to pray intentionally for priests
- to offer encouragement rather than constant criticism
- to allow priests space for rest and renewal
- to avoid gossip and harsh judgement
- to recognise the complexity of their responsibilities
- to foster relationships marked by trust

Those entrusted with authority in the Church carry particular responsibility to ensure that structures of support, accompaniment, and ongoing formation are available and accessible.

Care for priests is care for the mission of the Church.

## A Prayer That Leads to Hope

St Paul reminds us: "If one member suffers, all suffer together." (1 Corinthians 12:26)

Priests are not outside the Body of Christ. They are part of it.

When priests are accompanied, they are better able to accompany others.

When priests are supported, communities become stronger.

When priests are allowed to be human, the Church becomes more credible as a sign of God's mercy.

Perhaps this prayer intention invites the Church to become a community where no one carries their struggles alone.

Not the poor.

Not the wounded.

Not the searching.

Not even the priest.

Because sometimes the shepherd also needs care.

And when the Church learns to care for those who serve, hope quietly grows.

And Christ, the true Shepherd, continues to lead His people forward.

Fr Fabian Dicom is the National Director of Caritas Malaysia

# Called to 'stand behind the priest'



Marlina Sara Sylvester

From the quiet, mist-lined hills of Kampung Damat in Tamparuli, Sabah, God began writing a story that would unfold gently, patiently and beautifully.

Isaac Alfred Simbun was the fourth of five children, raised in the close-knit community of Kota Belud, where life was simple and faith was woven into daily rhythm. Yet even at the age of eight, something stirred within him — a question that would one day shape his destiny.

It was 1992. During Holy Mass, as Fr Felix Chung was preaching, the young *kampung* boy leaned toward his father and asked with childlike curiosity, “Dad, why can’t a priest get married?”

His father replied softly, “As a sign of sacrifice, for the sake of us all.” Then, almost prophetically, he added, “Perhaps one day, you will join the order and stand behind a priest.”

At the time, those words seemed simple. But in truth, they were a whisper of grace — a seed planted deep in his heart. What appeared to point toward the priesthood would, decades later, reveal a deeper and more precise call.

## A journey of searching

As he grew, the desire to belong wholly to God intensified. He seriously considered entering the Discalced Carmelite Order in Singapore. Later, he joined the Confraternity of Penitence, a Third Order community living by the 1221 Rule of St Francis of Assisi. Immersed in Franciscan spirituality, he tasted the richness of consecrated life — yet the Lord was not finished shaping him.

Eventually, he stepped back into secular life. But God’s call is patient. It waits. It matures.

During the COVID-19 lockdown of 2020–

2021, while stranded at the Champagnat Youth Centre in Port Dickson, silence became his companion. In that unexpected solitude, the seed planted in childhood began to bloom. He experienced a profound vocational reawakening — a call to be, in his own words, “a brother for all.”

In August 2021, just one week after his father’s passing, he was accepted into Komuniti Betania in the Diocese of Keningau. It was a moment marked by both grief and grace, as though heaven had affirmed what earth had just surrendered.

For two years, he lived joyfully as a consecrated lay person. Yet within his heart stirred a deeper summons — a “call within a call.”

## Standing behind the priest

In 2023, during a five-day silent retreat led by Sr Lily Bong IJ, clarity came. The phrase spoken by his father decades earlier — “stand behind the priest” — was no longer symbolic. It was literal.

In the Eucharistic liturgy, the deacon stands behind the priest or bishop, especially during the consecration.

The Lord had been faithful to His word.

With courage and peace, he applied to the Bishop of Penang to enter formation for the Permanent Diaconate.

## Formation rooted in service

Since 2023, his formation has taken root within the Diocese of Penang, journeying closely with East Malaysian communities and under the guidance of the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. Their convent became his home of formation, deepening his Franciscan charism — inspired by St Francis of Assisi, himself a celibate deacon.

He pursued theological formation through international programmes, earning a Certificate in Theology in Singapore, followed by Diplomas in Catechetics, Theology and



Deacon Isaac with the young people.

Canon Law. He is currently completing his Bachelor’s degree in Theology from India.

His academic journey mirrors his vocational depth. With a Diploma in Information Technology, a degree in Bioinformatics from MSU Shah Alam, two Master’s degrees from the University of Malaya, and a PhD in Artificial Intelligence underway at UiTM Shah Alam, he bridges faith and reason with remarkable integrity. Professionally, he serves as an AI Scientist at F&N Malaysia, having previously worked as a Senior Scientist, Data Scientist, and lecturer.

His life stands as a testament that vocation does not erase one’s gifts — it redeems and elevates them.

## A servant for the Church

On March 30, 2025, he was instituted as Acolyte and Lector by Cardinal Sebastian Francis, the bishop of Penang. His pastoral immersion at the Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam, allowed him to serve closely alongside priests and deacons, growing in humility and love for the people.

He was entrusted with drafting the Permanent Diaconate Guidelines for the Diocese of Penang, began Clinical Pastoral Training at Hospital Fatimah in Ipoh, and later served as local secretary for *The Great Pilgrimage of Hope* event organised by the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences in Penang. His passion for creation led him to coordinate — and later head — the diocesan Creation Justice Commission, living out the spirit of *Laudato Si’* in concrete ways.

On February 25, 2026 at the Minor Basilica of St Anne, he was ordained a Permanent Deacon — the first Sabahan-born Permanent



Ministering to the Orang Asli community.

Deacon belonging to the Diocese of Penang.

He embraces celibacy not merely as an ecclesial discipline, but as a wholehearted and personal offering of love — a gift of himself to the Church and to God’s people.

Today, serving at the Church of the Most Holy Redeemer in Tanjung Malim, Perak he assists Fr Vincent Paul in ministering to East Malaysian communities, migrants, Orang Asli and local faithful alike.

From a boy in a *kampung* who once asked a simple question during Mass, to a deacon who now literally stands behind the altar — his story reminds us that God’s call often begins quietly — a whisper, a question, a father’s gentle prophecy.

And when we listen — truly listen — grace unfolds beyond what we could ever imagine.



Children colouring their clay models.

## Hands that shape, minds that express

PETALING JAYA: In a quiet space filled with laughter, colour, and gentle concentration, something beautiful began to unfold at Pusat Jagaan Istimewa Nathanael.

The Ministry for Special Needs under the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development (AOHD) organised a four-part Clay Therapy programme for children with autism, an experience that was not simply an activity, but a journey of expression, creativity, and calm.

Clay, soft and humble in the hands, became a language. For many children on the autism spectrum, expressing emotions through words can be difficult. Yet when clay is placed gently in their palms, it begins to speak for them. Through touch, pressure, and imagination, thoughts and feelings slowly take shape.

Clay therapy is known as a sensorial activity, one that engages the senses, calms the mind, and allows creativity to flow freely. As fingers press, roll, and mould the clay, the children experience focus, relaxation, and joy. In those quiet moments, the mind settles and creativity awakens.

The programme unfolded through four

unique sessions, each bringing a new discovery. The journey began with the first session, where the children shaped hearts from clay in celebration of love and kindness during the season of Valentine’s. Small hands carefully rolled and moulded the clay, shaping hearts that symbolised warmth, friendship, and love.

In the second session, colours came alive. The children were invited to paint their clay creations, using their own imagination and creativity. There were no limits, no right or wrong, only colours dancing across the clay as each child expressed themselves in their own beautiful way.

The third session introduced the art of creating clay tiles. With curiosity and excitement, the children pressed, shaped, and designed their own tiles, exploring textures and patterns. Each tile became a small canvas of creativity.

Finally, in the fourth session, the tiles were brought to life with vibrant paints, transforming simple clay into colourful works of art. The pride and joy on the children’s faces spoke louder than words as they admired their creations.

Behind this meaningful initiative stood many caring hearts. The programme was conducted in collaboration with *Suara Minda*, led by the president Ms Mala Davi, Ms Vishalachi and her dedicated team, whose patience, warmth, and expertise guided the children through each step of the creative journey.

Their efforts were further supported by a generous sponsor who believed in the power of art and therapy, making it possible for these children to experience the healing and joy of clay therapy.

Together, the facilitators, caregivers, and supporters created a space where children were free to explore, express, and simply be themselves.

In those moments, clay was more than clay. It became a bridge between silence and expression, between anxiety and calm, between imagination and creation.

Small hands shaped clay, but something greater was being shaped as well confidence, creativity, and a sense of belonging.

And perhaps that is the true beauty of therapy through art. **Gunavathi Thurchinamurthy**

# The real work of Easter

Sorry to burst your bubble, but though Easter has come and the alleluias ring, and you'll not have to see a filet-o-fish until next year, the truth of the matter is that the real grind is just beginning. Easter is the happy rejoicing at the arrival of a child born safely after the tribulations of pregnancy: worthy of great rejoicing, but just a prelude to the hard work that comes with bringing up a child.

My child came into the world via caesarean, making me feel quite smug that I hadn't invested time in Lamaze and breathing classes only to be cut open like a Shopee package. I didn't opt for a caesarean, but it became necessary because I had pregnancy-induced hypertension and was in early pre-eclampsia, so my obstetrician ordered me to pick a date for the procedure.

I was awake for the entire event, but felt nothing because of the epidural I opted for. I was nearly gloating at the ease, because the throes of birthing didn't exactly excite me. It was a whole different story when the epidural wore off. I begin experiencing marrow-freezing chills that set my teeth chattering uncontrollably.

Then the pain from the surgical incision kicked in. I may have skipped labour, but the feeling after layers of skin and fat have been cut through and then sewn up is a particular kind of agony. Zero stars, would not repeat. While a friend who was in labour for 14 hours and delivered naturally was walking a few hours after becoming a new mother, I was calling for a bedpan and painkillers.

It was two days before I could get off the bed, and even then, had to be flanked by visiting friends when I tried to make my way to the bathroom. Very few things can cement a friendship like someone holding

close the gaping back of a hospital gown while trying to ignore the sound of their friend going number one!

Recovering from surgery was hard, but trying to grasp the new intricacies of motherhood was so tough that my hopes of breastfeeding ended with me breaking down after trying to express the all-important colostrum and first milk. Very few things make a new mother feel like a failure than the inability to extract nourishment from swollen breasts, in spite of trying every single model of breast pump available.

While it was a relief to count and recount ten little fingers and toes, and bask in the rejoicing of family over the first granddaughter, reality began to sink in quite quickly. After all the celebration, the new mother needs to find her own way to cope.

That's us, in Eastertide and post-Easter, when the Church returns to Ordinary time, and the knees bruised by assiduous attendance at Way of the Cross heal. What happens to the Easter people when Easter ends is the reason I love this faith.

For a long time, I struggled with the continuity loop of faith observance. Fast, rejoice, forget, return to normal, then fast and celebrate again. This cycle of repetition is not meaningless. Just as a Ferris wheel goes round and round without going anywhere, its slow, circular movement allows people different viewpoints at different times of the ride. A rider on the wheel only has a finite time on the ride, and so needs to know just when it will stop in order to capture the best photos, before they are told to get off.

While in life our getting off point is death, there is so much to do before that day comes. The dying to self that Lent teaches

must be amplified by Easter joy. Knowing that our Lord died for us to take away our sins, should spur us to endeavour to be more and more worthy of His sacrifice. This does not mean that we should continue fasting to the point of ill health. Rather, it means going out into the world with greater purpose, to seek out those that continue to fall through the cracks of society.

With eyes opened by faith, we pray for continued discernment as to the needs of our family members and the community we live in. We ask for wisdom in the course of action we should take which will best benefit the need at hand.

Just as Catholics believe that our celebration of the Eucharist is not a mere memorial but Christ sacrificing Himself for us again, so must we believe that the seasons of the liturgical year move us to something deeper each time we go through the cycle.

It is not enough to feed the poor, clothe the naked and visit the shut-in during Lent. Everything we do in Lent should be slowly transforming us into people who mirror Jesus. The exercises of Lent should have built enough spiritual muscle in us that we become more able to shoulder the needs of more people, and to recognise need and hunger even when they are hidden from the world.

As Catholics, the crucifix is always before us. Not the sanitised, empty cross, but the cross where Jesus hangs still in humiliation, thirst and agony. But this time, He is not so alone. Though still timid, those of us who have been transformed during Lent gather at the foot of the cross with the blessed mother and Saint John. We shuffle, we are furtive, but we are there because our love has brought us to this place.

Tentatively, we look at each other. The beloved apostle has already been commissioned to treat Mary as his mother. She will be going home with him. But we, the new arrivals at the foot of the cross, we are still pilgrims from different places, with a variety of baggage. It is up to us to look at each other with eyes opened by the suffering of others, to see how we can help each other.

That friend of mine who held me up as I shuffled in my hospital gown became a mother seven years after me. While I failed to breastfeed, I successfully helped her to nurse. When she developed postpartum depression, I recognised it and was able to help her get the help she needed.

Lent urges us to get right in to people's hurts and needs. Easter challenges us to keep up the momentum because something done repeatedly over 40 days should have become a habit. So go ahead, enjoy those Easter treats befitting the celebration of all celebrations. But let us never forget that we who have emerged from the tombs of our indifference and apathy need to work at ensuring the shackles of others are unlocked, hunger pangs assuaged, and the ointment of companionship applied to those who believe they have not a friend in the world.

*Karen is a poet, writer and editor who seeks out God's presence in the human condition and looks for ways to put the Word of God into real action.*



## Word in Progress

Karen-Michaela Tan

Safeguarding minors and vulnerable persons within the Malaysian Catholic Church is not just a programme — it is a deeply committed mission to protect those who are most at risk. I've been part of this journey since 2017, serving with the Professional Standards Office (PSO) in the Diocese of Penang, and have also had the opportunity to work alongside the PSOs in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur and the Malacca Johore Diocese.

One thing that has always struck me is how much care and thought goes into this work. The PSO isn't made up of just one type of expert — it brings together people from all walks of life, each offering their own perspective and experience. We have counsellors, psychologists, psychiatrists, former police officers, social welfare officers, accountants, and even language specialists. It's a team effort in the truest sense.

We are also guided by a bishop's delegate, along with a canon lawyer who advises on matters of Church law. This ensures that everything we do is not only pastorally sensitive, but also accountable — both within civil law and the Church's own structures.

The work of the PSO is, by its very nature, quiet and often unseen. Much of what we do involves walking alongside deeply emotional and sensitive situations — stories that touch the lives of children and vulnerable adults. It's never easy. Every conversation has to be handled with great care, because even a single word can unknowingly reopen wounds from the past.

I'm always aware of my own limitations. I'm not a trained counsellor, and I don't pretend to be one. So, whenever someone is in distress, I make it a point to refer them to those who are properly trained — psychologists and counsellors who can

## If not us, then who?

provide the support they truly need.

One of the key areas of our work is putting together the Child Protection Manual. It may sound like just another document, but it's actually the result of many people coming together, each contributing their expertise. The Manual lays out clear guidelines on how we, as a Church, can better protect our children. It doesn't just address what to do when concerns arise — it also looks at how to prevent situations from happening in the first place.

It includes practical things too — complaint forms, step-by-step protocols, and guidelines for everyday situations like retreats, outings, and parish activities. These may seem like small details, but they make a big difference in ensuring children are always safe.

Once the Manual is finalised, it's shared with parishes, especially with those involved in children's ministries. Because at the end of the day, safeguarding isn't just the responsibility of a committee — it's something the whole Church must take seriously.

Ongoing formation and training are really at the heart of safeguarding. It's not enough to simply know what needs to be done — we have to keep reminding ourselves, and one another, to live it out in practice.

To support this, we now have a Standards of Pastoral Conduct, along with a Declaration that everyone signs after completing the awareness training. It's not just a formality — it's a personal pledge, a commitment to



## Turun Padang

Christopher Kushi

accountability and to protecting children. In February and March 2026, these training sessions were conducted for clergy in the Dioceses of Penang and Sibul, as well as for about 300 evangelising catechists across four language groups. What was encouraging was seeing every participant willingly sign the Declaration, affirming their commitment to uphold these standards.

We've also taken things a step further by developing two additional key documents. One is the Safe Environment Programme, which looks at both physical and online spaces to ensure they are as safe as possible. The other is the Complaints and Allegation Handling Policy — a clear, step-by-step process on how cases are received, handled, and resolved. These may sound technical, but they are essential in ensuring transparency, accountability, and consistency in how we respond.

As the PSO contact person for the Diocese of Penang, I've noticed something heartening — people are becoming more aware. Parishioners are beginning to speak up when something doesn't seem right. That growing vigilance is a sign that the message is getting through, and that we are slowly building a culture that looks out for the most vulnerable.

On a personal level, I keep in close contact with the heads of PSOs across the dioceses. Fr Gregory Chan, our national coordinator, has also established the Safeguarding Institute for Malaysia and Brunei. It brings

together dioceses, the Apostolic Vicariate of Brunei, and various religious congregations — a space where we can share resources, support one another, and discuss real issues as they arise.

What has been especially reassuring is the strong support from our bishops. Cardinal Sebastian Francis often reminds us that safeguarding is not just a duty, but something sacred — rooted in Christ's call to place the child at the centre of our faith. Archbishop Julian Leow has also emphasised that protecting minors and the vulnerable must remain a top priority for the Church. Bishop Bernard Paul speaks of the deeper foundations — that safeguarding flows from the dignity of every human person and reflects the very heart of Christ, who identifies with the vulnerable. And Archbishop Simon Poh, in his Red Mass homily this year, reminded us that to uphold justice and integrity is to protect the vulnerable, especially in a world that is increasingly divided.

And perhaps the most important reminder comes from Pope Leo XIV, who recently said that safeguarding is not just about rules or procedures. It is, at its core, a culture of care — a natural expression of our faith. Because if we truly believe in the dignity of every person, then safeguarding is not optional. It simply becomes part of who we are as Church.

*Christopher possesses experience across a diverse array of job portfolios both in government and private sector. He is happy to share his professional journey and is engaging with the principles outlined in Pope Francis's encyclical Fratelli Tutti to transcend border and embrace a culture of fraternity, social friendship and dialogue.*



Fr Joseph Stephen, CSsR

# Theology, synodality and the rise of global Catholicism

Global Catholicism has evolved significantly over the past decades. Today, one might wonder whether seminarians are still familiar with theologians such as Karl Rahner. Those ordained in the 1980s and 1990s would likely have encountered Rahner during their theological formation.

In 1964, Rahner introduced ideas such as the “anonymous Christian” and the concept of a “world Church.” While the former later drew criticism — including from Pope Benedict XVI — the notion of the Church as a global reality remains significant. Catholicism today is no longer centred primarily in Europe but increasingly reflects the faith, cultures, and experiences of communities across the world.

## Vatican II and the Global Church

Looking back at the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), about 2,000 to 2,500 bishops participated in the sessions. Roughly one-third — around 800 to 900 — came from Europe. Asia was represented by about 250 bishops, while the United States sent around 45. South America also had a strong presence.

In addition to the bishops, the Council welcomed theologians and other experts who contributed to its discussions. Around 400 theologians served as *periti* (theological experts), while about 40 laypeople and religious participated as observers, reflecting the Council’s wider engagement with the whole Church.

Theological voices played an important role in shaping the Council’s renewal. Figures such as Yves Congar, Karl Rahner, Bernard Häring, Henri de Lubac, Marie-Dominique Chenu, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Denis Hurley helped guide the theological discussions that influenced the Council’s documents and pastoral vision.

In the years following Vatican II, theological reflection continued to flourish. Journals such as *Concilium* brought together theologians from around the world to explore the Council’s meaning and implications. At the same time, debates emerged about how Vatican II should be interpreted. Some theologians, including

Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) and Hans Urs von Balthasar, emphasised interpreting the Council faithfully according to the intentions of its fathers.

## A Changing Papacy

The changing face of global Catholicism can also be seen in the papacy. For more than four centuries, every pope came from Italy. The last non-Italian pope before the modern era was Adrian VI from the Netherlands, who served briefly from 1522 to 1523.

This long tradition ended in 1978 with the election of Pope John Paul II of Poland, the first non-Italian pope in more than 450 years. Since then the papacy has continued to reflect the Church’s universal character — with Benedict XVI from Germany, Francis from Argentina, and now Pope Leo XIV.

In truth, the Church has always been universal. The Acts of the Apostles already describes the spread of the Gospel beyond its Jewish origins. Yet in recent decades the demographic centre of Catholicism has clearly shifted. While Christianity once flourished strongly across Europe, the Church today is growing rapidly in regions such as Africa, Asia, and parts of Latin America.

## Signs of Change

Statistical trends highlight these shifts. In several parts of Europe, baptisms have declined. France recorded 5,463 adult baptisms in 2023, suggesting some renewed interest, though long-term trends remain uncertain. Germany reported more than 131,000 baptisms, though this represents a decline from earlier years. Ireland has also seen baptisms fall by about ten per cent, and even its Prime Minister has remarked that the country can no longer be described simply as a Catholic nation.

In contrast, the Church continues to grow elsewhere. Africa has experienced remarkable expansion, with more than 13 million baptisms recorded in recent years. Asia has also seen steady growth with nearly 1.5 million baptisms, while parts of South America show a more complex pattern of growth and decline.

Personal experience sometimes confirms these trends. During Holy Week with the Redemptorists in Brooklyn, New York, I witnessed an Easter Vigil where 87 Chinese Elect were baptised, along with many Spanish and Vietnamese candidates. In parts of the United States, some observers even speak of the Church “coming alive” again.

An interesting observation comes from Rick Warren, founder of the evangelical Saddleback Church in California. He once noted that many Catholics joined his congregation, drawn by the preaching, music, and sense of community. Yet they rarely stayed long. Eventually many returned to the Catholic Church because they missed the sacraments.

These stories remind us that the Church’s vitality cannot be measured by numbers alone. Spiritual hunger often leads people back to the sacramental life of the Church.

## The Synodal Journey

Today the Church is entering a new stage through the synodal process initiated by Pope Francis. The first phase ran from 2021 to 2024, followed by a second phase extending to 2028. Synodality invites the entire Church — bishops, priests, religious, and lay faithful — to walk together, listen to one another, and discern the voice of the Holy Spirit. It represents a renewed effort to deepen participation and dialogue within the Church.

Pope Francis often described the Church as a “field hospital.” Unlike a perfectly organised institution, a field hospital exists to care for the wounded and bring healing where it is most needed. This image captures the pastoral mission of the Church in today’s world.

The French theologian Christoph Theobald has even suggested that the synodal process could be seen as preparation for a future Vatican III. Whether or not such a council ever takes place, the synodal journey is already shaping how the Church reflects, listens, and discerns.

## Doing Theology in a Synodal Church

In this emerging vision of global Catholicism,

three dimensions shape the way theology is carried out.

The first is collegiality. The Holy Father together with the bishops share responsibility for guiding the Church. Leadership is exercised not in isolation but in communion.

The second is the role of theologians. Priests, religious, and lay scholars help the Church interpret the realities of the world through teaching, research, and reflection on questions of faith, liturgy, social justice, and moral life.

The third is synodality itself — the Church’s ability to listen and discern together. One pastoral framework often used is the method See, Judge, Act: observing reality, evaluating it in the light of the Gospel, and responding with actions that promote justice and dignity.

The formation of priests also reminds us of the importance of theological education. Training seminarians requires significant resources, and those given opportunities for advanced studies are called to place their knowledge at the service of the Church.

## A Church Walking Together

Today the Catholic Church is no longer defined primarily by European or Western perspectives. It is a global community shaped by diverse cultures, languages, and social contexts.

Because of this diversity, no single pastoral solution can address every situation. Bishops, priests, religious, and lay faithful must discern — guided by the Holy Spirit — the path God is calling the Church to walk.

Across dioceses and parishes, people have gathered to listen, reflect, and share their experiences of faith. The challenge now is to allow this spirit of synodality to take deeper root.

For ultimately, the Church’s mission remains the same: to walk together as the People of God and to bring the hope of the Gospel to an ever-changing world.

*A priest for 46 years, Fr Joe holds a Master’s degree in Pastoral Theology from Chicago. He has authored several books on spirituality and pastoral issues, his latest focusing on ageing.*

## Reflecting on the PMP theme - April

# Walking together with our youth

“Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.” (1 Tim 4:12)

In many conversations about the Church, young people are often described as the future. While that may sound hopeful, it can sometimes unintentionally place them at a distance — as if their time to contribute lies somewhere down the road.

But St Paul’s words to Timothy challenge that assumption. Timothy was young when Paul entrusted him with leadership in the Christian community. Paul did not tell him to wait until he was older or more experienced. Instead, he urged him to live his faith so authentically that no one could dismiss him because of his age.

The message is clear: youth is not a limitation in the life of the Church. It can be a powerful witness.

The Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral theme for April invites us to reflect on the conversion of relationships, particularly in the area of youth

empowerment. Conversion in the Christian sense is more than a change in behaviour; it is a transformation in how we see one another and how we journey together as the People of God.

Sometimes, relationships between generations in the Church can fall into comfortable patterns. Adults plan, decide and lead, while young people participate in activities that have already been designed for them. While such initiatives are valuable, true empowerment requires something deeper. It requires a willingness to listen, to trust, and to include young people in discernment and decision-making.

A Church that walks the synodal path recognises that the Holy Spirit speaks through all the baptised — not only through the experienced or the ordained, but also through the hopes, questions and insights of the young.

Young people often carry a keen sensitivity to the realities of the world around them. They notice injustice quickly. They long for

authenticity in relationships. They are drawn to communities that reflect compassion, integrity and courage. When their voices are welcomed, they can help the Church rediscover the freshness of the Gospel.

Youth empowerment therefore begins with acknowledgement. It begins when the Church recognises that young people are not merely recipients of pastoral care but active partners in mission.

This means inviting them into spaces where decisions are made, encouraging them to share their ideas, and trusting them with real responsibility. It also means accompanying them patiently as they grow in faith, leadership and service.

At the same time, St Paul’s exhortation reminds young people themselves that empowerment is not simply about having a voice. It is about living a life that reflects Christ. “Set the believers an example,” Paul writes, “in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.”

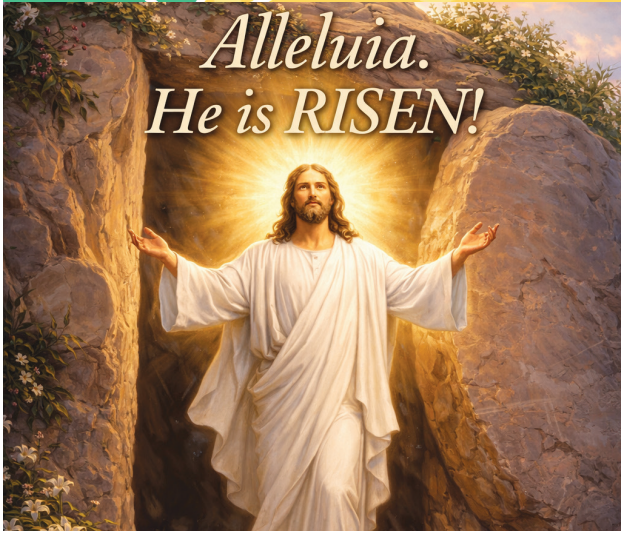
In a world that often measures influence by

popularity or power, Christian leadership looks different. It is expressed through integrity, compassion and courage. When young people live their faith sincerely — in how they speak, how they treat others and how they pursue what is good and true — they become powerful witnesses to the Gospel.

The conversion of relationships that the Church seeks today is therefore mutual. Older generations are called to listen, encourage and make space. Young people are called to step forward with generosity, responsibility and faith.

The Church does not empower young people simply to keep them involved; she empowers them because the Spirit is already at work in their lives. When their voices are welcomed and their gifts trusted, the whole community grows richer. For when young people are encouraged to live their faith boldly in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, the Church does not merely prepare for the future — she begins to shine more brightly in the present.

# LITTLE CATHOLIC'S CORNER



Hello children,

Today we celebrate the greatest feast of all — Easter Sunday!

On this special day, we remember that Jesus rose from the dead. This means He is truly alive! By rising again, Jesus showed that He is the Son of God and that everything He taught is true.

When Jesus died on the cross, His friends were sad, afraid, and confused. They

thought everything was over. Can you imagine how they felt?

Then suddenly, some women came with amazing news: "Jesus is alive! He has risen!"

At first, it was hard to believe.

Later, while the disciples were in a locked room, Jesus came and stood among them.

He said, "Peace be with you."

Now they knew — Jesus had truly risen!

Dear children, this is the Good News of Easter:

- Jesus is alive
- He brings us peace and hope
- He is always with us

So whenever you feel afraid, sad, or alone, remember:

Jesus is alive — and He is right beside you.

Happy Easter! Alleluia!

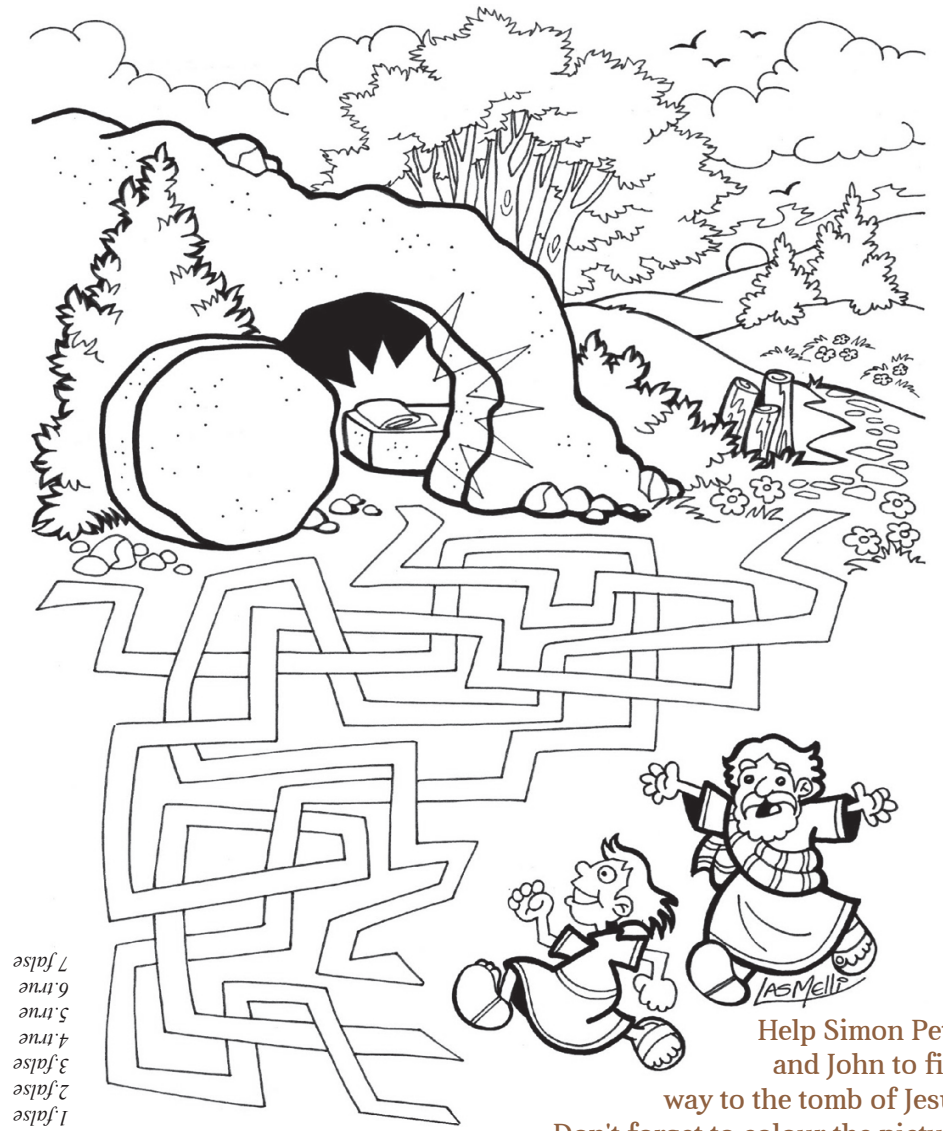
Aunty Eliz

## Can you find 10 differences



*How well do you know the Easter Story?  
See if you can figure out which of these are true and which are false.*

1. After Jesus died on the Cross He was buried in a tomb for four days. True or false?
2. The first time the women went to the tomb on Easter morning, they saw Jesus' dead body in it. True or false?
3. Nobody went to Jesus' tomb until the afternoon on Easter Sunday. True or false?
4. At first when she saw Him, Mary Magdalene didn't recognize Jesus. True or false?
5. When Jesus rose from the dead, He could never die again. True or false?
6. With His resurrected body, Jesus could go through locked doors. True or false?
7. The disciples were not surprised when Jesus came back after He died, since they knew all along that was going to happen. True or false?



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

Help Simon Peter and John to find way to the tomb of Jesus. Don't forget to colour the picture.

# YOUTH

## On the Boat Together: Youth Set Sail for PDYD-6

**PENANG:** About 70 young people from parishes across the diocese gathered on March 7 at College General for a vibrant and spirit-filled prelude to the Penang Diocesan Youth Day (PDYD-6), set to take place from November 20–22, 2026.

The day began with registration, breakfast, and lively fellowship as participants reconnected with friends and met new faces. The celebration of the Holy Mass anchored the programme, drawing everyone into a deeper encounter with Christ. This was followed by a meaningful veneration of young saints — Carlo Acutis, Maria Goretti, and Gabriel of Our Lady of Sorrows — whose lives reminded the youth that holiness is not out of reach, but can be lived in the ordinary.

Energy levels soared during the ice-breaking session, filling the space with laughter and creating a strong sense of belonging. This was followed by an engaging input by Fr Simon Anand, head of the Penang Diocesan Youth

Network, titled “On the Boat, Together.” His message centred on unity, shared mission, and the call for every young person to recognise their role in the life of the Church, journeying together in faith.

After lunch, the momentum continued with one of the day’s highlights — a session on the PDYD-6 journey and World Youth Day by Jason Alexander, Youth Coordinator of the Penang Diocesan Youth Network. He presented an inspiring overview of the road leading to PDYD-6, encouraging participants to see it not simply as an event, but as a meaningful journey of faith. Central to his sharing was the Youth Cross, a symbol of unity, mission, and pilgrimage that calls young people to walk together as one Church.

Jason also connected this local journey to the global experience of World Youth Day, reminding participants that they are part of a much larger community of young Catholics around the world. His session was both informative and energising, inviting the youth to take ownership of their role, actively participate in the preparations, and embrace their identity as missionary disciples.

The programme then moved outdoors with activities and group sharing, giving participants space to reflect, bond, and grow in community. As evening fell, the youth gathered for a quiet and prayerful time of Eucharistic Adoration, encountering the Lord in stillness.

The day concluded with a sending forth, commissioning the participants to carry their renewed faith and unity into their daily lives. Over dinner, conversations continued, friendships deepened, and the excitement for PDYD-6 grew stronger — a clear sign that the journey has already begun.



## IGNITE THE WAY: *Youth journey in faith through pilgrimage*

**RAWANG:** This Lent, the youth of the Church of St Jude, Rawang embarked on a pilgrimage that was as much about the journey within as it was about the roads they travelled. It was a time to grow closer to God, deepen their faith, and discover more about themselves through prayer, reflection, and community.

Though the journey ahead was long, excitement filled the air. Amidst the fatigue of travel, a strong spirit of unity and enthusiasm carried them forward, as they encouraged and supported one another every step of the way.

The first stop was at the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception at Sungai Batu, Kedah. Before arriving, they were told to reflect on a powerful question: “Who is Mother Mary to me?” Uncle Francis, who oversees the chapel, shared inspiring stories of miracles and testimonies that touched their hearts. Praying the rosary together as one family became a moment of true connection for them. Some of them carried unresolved questions, others carried burdens, but all of them lifted them up in



prayer. One participant shared a deeply personal experience, expressing how strongly they felt Mother Mary’s presence during the communal prayer.

The journey continued to the Church of the Assumption in Georgetown, where the youths were captivated by the majestic pipe organ, a symbol of the Church’s rich heritage. In the quiet stillness of the sacred space, they spent time in personal prayer, reflecting on their intentions and the journey thus far. They

left with lighter hearts, renewed in spirit.

At the Minor Basilica of St Anne in Bukit Mertajam, where they stayed overnight, the pilgrimage took on a more intimate and reflective tone. A highlight of the evening was a session called “Real Talk Box.” What began as a simple activity quickly became a moment of honest sharing and spiritual depth. The questions invited them to confront their struggles, reflect on their relationship with God, and recognise how they were growing in faith. In

opening up to one another, they discovered a powerful truth — that no one walks this journey alone.

The evening concluded with a lively jamming session filled with music, laughter, and fellowship — a joyful reminder that faith is not only lived in silence and prayer, but also in community and shared moments of joy.

The following day, the youths gathered for Mass at St Anne’s, a fitting culmination of their time there. On their return journey, they made a final stop at the Church of St Michael, Ipoh, for one last moment of prayer and reflection, bringing their pilgrimage to a peaceful close.

Throughout the pilgrimage, many experienced a deep sense of Mother Mary’s presence and came to appreciate the strength of walking together in faith. They returned not only spiritually renewed, but also more closely bonded as a community. This journey reminded them that faith is stronger when shared, and the memories we made will stay with them for a long time.

# FAITH ON FIRE

## Youth for Christ Camp

Isaac Pellven

MELAKA: The YFC Camp 2026, organised by the Couples for Christ (CFC) – Youth for Christ (YFC) ministry, came alive on March 14–15 at Good Shepherd Seminary. Set in a vibrant and spirit-filled atmosphere, the camp brought together 18 enthusiastic participants, supported by a dedicated team of 17 service members. It was a weekend filled with energy, meaningful encounters, and moments that truly touched hearts and deepened faith.

The camp was led by Jeremiah, a dedicated Youth for Christ member, together with a team of CFC couple coordinators namely Andrew, Veronica, Toby, and Sarah, who served as advisors throughout the programme. Their guidance, leadership, and commitment played an important role in ensuring the smooth flow and success of the camp.

The main objective of YFC Camp 2026 was to bring youths together to grow in faith, build stronger friendships, and deepen their relationship with God. The camp also aimed to create a safe and encouraging environment where participants could reflect on their personal journeys and strengthen

their identity as young Christians.

The programme began with a warm welcome session followed by an opening prayer. This allowed participants to settle down, focus their minds, and prepare their hearts for the camp experience. Throughout the two days, various sessions and activities were conducted, including praise and worship, talks, sharing sessions, group discussions, and team-building games.

One of the key highlights of the camp was the series of five talks that guided participants through their spiritual journey. The talk on *God's Love* was delivered by Isaac Pellven, which reminded participants of God's unconditional love for each and every one of them. This was followed by *Who is Jesus Christ to Me* by Meghan, which encouraged personal reflection on one's relationship with Jesus. The third talk, *Repentance, Faith, Healing, and Forgiveness* by Angelina, allowed participants to reflect on their struggles and the importance of seeking healing and forgiveness. The fourth talk, *Receiving God's Gift: The Power of the Holy Spirit* by Angelica, helped participants understand and experience the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Lastly, *Growing in the Spirit* by Echo guided participants

on how to continue their spiritual journey even after the camp.

Another deeply impactful session was the pray-over session. During this session, participants were given the opportunity to share their personal struggles, challenges, and feelings with their respective team leaders. The team leaders then prayed personally with each participant, creating a safe, comforting, and spiritual environment. This session had a strong emotional and spiritual impact on many participants, as they felt heard, supported, and uplifted through prayer.

The praise and worship sessions were also one of the most powerful parts of the camp. Participants were able to express themselves freely, connect deeply with God, and experience a sense of peace and renewal. These moments helped create a strong spiritual atmosphere throughout the camp.

In addition, group discussions and sharing sessions allowed participants to open up and build trust with one another. This created a sense of unity and belonging among the youths. The team-building activities organised by the service team brought joy, laughter, and excitement while



encouraging teamwork and cooperation.

The service team, consisting of 17 dedicated members, played a crucial role in facilitating the camp. They ensured that every activity ran smoothly and that participants felt welcomed, supported, and included. Their efforts and commitment greatly contributed to the success of the camp.

The camp concluded with a reflection and sharing session, where participants expressed their thoughts and experiences. Many shared that they felt renewed, inspired, and spiritually uplifted. This session also provided valuable feedback for future camps.

Personally, I felt truly grateful and blessed to be part of YFC Camp 2026. The camp was a meaningful experience that helped me grow spiritually and strengthen my relationship with God. The praying-over session and the talks had a deep impact on me, and I was able to reflect on my own journey and faith. Overall, the camp was well-organised, impactful, and unforgettable, leaving a lasting impression on everyone who attended.



## LOVE IN ACTION: CHOICE Youth Make a Difference

PAPAR, Sabah: The CHOICE youth group recently brought to life the spirit of compassion through a charity visit titled *Make A Difference* at the Holy Family Residence for Senior Citizens in Purak, Papar. Rooted in their motto of *Knowing, Loving and Serving*, the initiative was a heartfelt encounter of faith in action.

The day began with a Holy Mass celebrated by Fr Aloysius Fidelis, setting a prayerful tone for what would unfold. It continued with lively ice-breaking sessions, uplifting praise and worship, and moments of genuine fellowship that bridged generations.

A total of 37 youths participated, each contributing to an atmosphere filled with warmth, joy, and presence.

At the heart of the experience was a simple yet powerful message: "What I want is love, not sacrifice." It served as a gentle reminder that it is often the smallest gestures — a listening ear, a shared smile, a moment of companionship — that carry the greatest meaning in the lives of others.

The programme concluded with a reflective sharing session, where participants spoke of how the encounter had touched them deeply, opening their eyes to the beauty of giving and the quiet dignity of those they had come to serve.

CHOICE Weekend continues to offer young Catholics a space to grow in faith, build lasting friendships, and discover the joy of serving others. Though brief, such experiences often leave a profound and enduring impact.

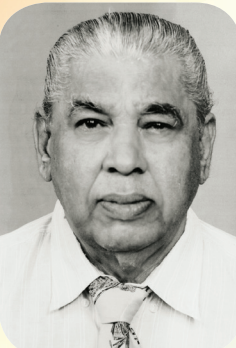
Open to single individuals aged 18 to 40 who have not attended before, the upcoming CBMCK3 Weekend will be held from August 28 to 30 at the Bundu Tuhan Retreat Centre.



For enquiries, please contact:  
Email: [memoriam@herald.com.my](mailto:memoriam@herald.com.my)  
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MEMORIAM

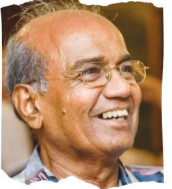
**15th Anniversary In Loving Memory**



Deeply missed and fondly remembered by  
**Wife:** Doris  
**Children and Grandchildren:** Bernard & Stephanie (Timothy, Tashia, Tessa) Andrew Irene & Mok (Mandy & Chen, Joanne, Andy)  
**Great-grandson (Xavier Chen)** Allan & Mercy (Caroline, Joshua, Sophia, Melanie) Catherine Relatives and Friends.

**David Scott**  
Born: 22 October 1932  
Entered Eternal Glory: 31 March 2011

**7th Anniversary Remembrance**





*"I am the Resurrection and the Life."  
(John 11:25)*

**L. A. FERNANDEZ**  
December 20, 1936 - April 5, 2019

Remembered with love and gratitude, we are comforted by the hope of the Resurrection and God's promise of eternal life.

*Always in our hearts, forever loved, never forgotten.*

**SEBASTY EMMANUEL & AGNES CHOW**  
27 January 2011 Returned to the Lord 18 April 2023


Remember me when I am gone away,  
Gone far away into the silent land;  
When you can no more hold me by the hand,  
Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.

Remember me when no more day by day  
You tell me of our future that you planned:  
Only remember me; you understand  
It will be late to counsel then or pray.

Yet if you should forget me for a while  
And afterwards remember, do not grieve:  
For if the darkness and corruption leave  
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,  
Better by far you should forget and smile  
Than that you should remember and be sad.  
~Christina Rossetti

**Jesus said: I am the resurrection. Anyone who believes in me, even though that person dies, will live, and whoever lives and believes in will never die. Do you believe this?**  
John 11: 25-26

**2nd Year Anniversary In Loving Memory**



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

**Samuel Martin Devadas**  
13-Nov-1933 to 04-Apr-2024

Dearly missed and forever cherished by wife, daughter and relatives.


Mass will be offered on 5th April 2026 at 9am at Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Ipoh

**3rd Anniversary**

**Mr Paul Thanaraju Devasahayan**  
Born: October 6, 1952  
Reunited with the Lord: April 9, 2023

**A Father's Legacy**  
*Three years have passed, yet in our hearts you stay,  
Your love, your strength, your guiding light each day.  
A father true, who walked the faithful road,  
Who bore with grace and love life's every load.  
You shaped our lives with patience, steady hands,  
And raised us to walk on solid lands.  
Your laughter echoes still through time and space,  
We see your smile in each familiar face.  
Though three years on, the missing never ends,  
Yet through our faith, our grieving heart still mends.  
Sweet father, your memory lives on strong,  
In every prayer, in every grateful song.*

**A Memorial Mass will be offered in his loving memory on Thursday, 9th April 2026 at 8:30pm at the Church of the Divine Mercy Shah Alam.**  
Forever in our hearts, Lovingly remembered by his Children, Children-in-law and Grandchildren.



**In Loving Memory of Our Beloved Parents**





**Emile Victor Lessler**  
Born: 6/12/1907  
Died: 7/4/1985

**Lucy Elizabeth Isabella Yoong**  
Born: 29/1/1925  
Died: 5/11/2023

*"Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever."*

Lovingly remembered by children: Julie (deceased), Rita, Evelyn, Linda, Hazel, Gerard, Kelly, Selena, their Spouses, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

**5th Anniversary In Loving Memory of**



**Marianthony Peter s/o Marianthony**  
21/11/1925-09/04/2021

*We loved you then, we love you now. We will love you forever, to infinity and beyond. Gone but not forgotten, Gone but ever here, always and ever near.*

Deeply missed and cherished by loved ones.

**In Loving Memory of Clarice De Souza**



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

*It's been a year since you left us on 03/04/2025. You are always in our hearts.*

Forever missed by children, in-laws, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

**6th Anniversary In Loving Memory of**



**Jackie Tong Choy Ping**  
Departed: April 3, 2020

*"But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself."*  
Phil. 3:20-21

**Requiescat in pace**



**Donald De Cruz**  
9th February 1929 – 2nd April 2021  
(5th Anniversary)


**Theresa Danker**  
1st December 1933 – 13th January 2015  
(11th Anniversary)

*"Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."*

Deeply missed by children, in-laws, grandchildren and great grand-daughter.

**In Loving Memory 10th Year Anniversary**

*Jesus said;  
'I am the Resurrection and the Life, whoever believes in Me, will live even though He dies, and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die.  
(John 11:25)*



**Santanasamy Diraviam**  
Born: 20-09-1947  
Departed: 21-03-2016

**A Loving husband and a caring Father.**  
*Eternal rest grant unto him O Lord,  
May his soul rest in peace.*

*You are missed but always loved,  
You are gone but never forgotten,  
We know your soul is at peace above,  
In eternal joy in the Lord's kingdom in heaven.*

Deeply missed by wife, children, a host of relatives and friends.

**IN LOVING MEMORY OF ROSALIND MICHAEL**  
5th April 2022  
4 YEARS SINCE HER PASSING

*We are deeply grateful for everything you did for us, and we love you so much.*

With love from the Soosai Innasi family:  
Valentina Anne, Adelina Anne, Celestina Anne, Henri, Morgan, Felix Sakthikumar, Theresa, William, Vernon, Lukeisha, Esha, Zachary, Sharney, Kilian and Niel.


**1st Year Celebration of Eternal Life for My Beloved Husband, Methuselah @ Mathuranthahan A/L Sathurukan**  
DOB: 20th May 1972  
Baptised: 31st March 2025  
Return to the Heavenly Kingdom: 2nd April 2025

*John 14:2 - In my Father's house there are many mansions.  
Philippians 3:20 - Our citizenship is in Heaven.  
My Beloved Methuselah @ Mathuranthahan, you are indeed blessed with Eternal Life.*

*On this blessed remembrance of your homecoming to the Lord, I glorify God Almighty for his grace and mercy knowing that you are now in His Heavenly Kingdom - a faithful soul and a true citizen of Heaven. I am sure you are engulfed in His Heavenly embrace and rejoicing in God's presence.*

*I am thankful to the Lord God Almighty for the blessed journey with you while you were here on earth.  
Till we meet again in the Heavenly Glory.*

Deeply missed by your devoted wife, Camilla Ann and Family.



**10th Anniversary In Loving Memory of Our Beloved Amma (oopi)**



**Kristy Kamalam**  
Called to rest: 03-04-2016

*Those we love don't go away  
They walk beside us everyday  
Unseen, Unheard, but always near  
Still loved, Still missed and very dear.  
Eternal rest grant unto her.  
O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon her.  
May her soul rest in peace.  
Amen.*

Always loved and remembered by Husband, Children's, Sons-in-law, daughter-in-law, Brother, Sister, grandchildren and a host of relatives and friends.

**FOR PRIESTS IN CRISIS**  
We pray for priests going through moments of crisis in their vocation, that they may find the accompaniment they need and that communities may support them with understanding and prayer.

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The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei

## Notice on matters concerning Julia Youn of Naju

Dear People of God,

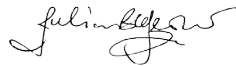
The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei received a letter from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea (CBCK), to advise all the clergy, religious, and faithful to refrain from participating in any events associated with Ms Julia Youn (also known as Julia Kim) of Naju. The faithful are cautioned against attending Masses, liturgies, or sacraments in private places associated with her, and not to be misled by online media regarding her problems.

Please be informed that the Archdiocese of Gwangju, Korea, in close communication with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (now the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith), had issued several official notices (in 1998, 2001, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012) admonishing the faithful not to be swayed by the agitation of Julia Youn and her followers. Despite these official diocesan prohibitions, Julia

Youn and her followers continue to defy the Magisterium, and spread false claim that the Church's official recognition of the alleged 'Miracle of the Blessed Mother of Naju' is imminent. These actions are causing confusion among many of the faithful.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei is in agreement with the Archdiocese of Gwangju in that the actions and attitudes of Julia Youn and her followers are not in accord with Catholic practice and they are not promoting a sound devotion.

Wishing you the Lord's abundant blessing.



**Most Reverend Julian Leow Beng Kim,**  
D.D  
President  
The Catholic Bishops' Conference of  
Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei  
March 24, 2026

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## Restore my Family

### DIVINE MERCY NOVENA & FEASTDAY CELEBRATION

DAY	DATE	TIME	CELEBRATION / THEME
Monday	6 <sup>th</sup> April	8.00pm	Novena / Mass / Fellowship <b>Fear Less : Build Trust</b>
Tuesday	7 <sup>th</sup> April	8.00pm	Novena / Mass / Fellowship <b>Love More : Increase in Compassion</b>
Wednesday	8 <sup>th</sup> April	8.00pm	Novena / Mass / Fellowship <b>Grow Intimacy : God Walks with Us</b>
Thursday	9 <sup>th</sup> April	8.00pm	Novena / Mass / Fellowship <b>Nourish Peace : Unity in Families</b>
Friday	10 <sup>th</sup> April	8.00pm	Novena / Mass / Fellowship <b>Move in Mission : Witness for Christ</b>
Saturday	11 <sup>th</sup> April	5.00pm	Novena / Mass / Veneration of Relics / Fellowship <b>Restore My Family : Refresh in Love, Renew in Mercy</b>
Sunday	12 <sup>th</sup> April	5.30pm	Mass / Candlelit Procession with Chaplet / Benediction / Fellowship <b>Restore My Family : Refresh in Love, Renew in Mercy</b>

**Refresh in LOVE + Renew in MERCY**

**DAY 4** Fear Less: Build Trust  
**DAY 5** Love More: Increase in Compassion  
**DAY 6** Grow Intimacy: God Walks with Us  
**DAY 7** Nourish Peace: Unity in Families  
**DAY 8** Move in Mission: Witness for Christ  
**DAY 9** Restore My Family: Refresh in Love, Renew in Mercy

**12 APR**  
**CANDLELIT PROCESSION**

**CHURCH OF DIVINE MERCY**  
Sg Ara, Penang

117 Jalan Kenari, Sungai Ara, 11900 Bayan Lepas, Penang, Malaysia.

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