

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



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.



(OSV News photo/Mario Tomassetti, Vatican Media)

The world awaits new saints

ASSISI: Pope Leo XIV has challenged young people to reject fear, embrace Christ wholeheartedly and become “the new saints” the world desperately needs, urging them to write “new pages of history” through lives of courage, compassion and radical faith.

Celebrating Mass at the Basilica of St Mary of the Angels on the Feast of the Transfiguration before 2,500 participants at the 2026 Franciscan Youth Meeting, the Pope called on young people to rediscover the revolutionary power of the Gospel and follow Christ with the same courage shown by St Francis and St Clare eight centuries ago.

“Today Europe and the whole world are looking to you to be new saints,” Pope Leo said. “Dare to believe in the word of the Gospel; become fully human with the freedom of Jesus Christ.”

The celebration formed part of the Church’s observance of the 800th anniversary of the death of St Francis and took place at the Porziuncola, the small chapel regarded as the birthplace of the Franciscan Order.

Reflecting on the Transfiguration, the Pope said the Christian life begins by lis-

tening to God and courageously responding to His call.

“The Church is the community where we learn to distinguish the voice of God and dare the obedience to the Holy Spirit,” he said. “Jesus calls us into dialogue with His story so that we may write new pages of history.”

Pope Leo urged young people not to settle for comfortable lives or be paralysed by uncertainty, but to make courageous and lasting commitments.

“In a world where everything seems temporary, the courage to make a definitive choice may well be the most revolutionary act of all,” he said.

Modern society, he warned, often creates the illusion that fulfilment comes through constantly changing direction, accumulating experiences or chasing possessions.

“Faith unmasks the illusion that our problems can be solved by running away or abandoning our commitments,” he said. “We may multiply our experiences, acquaintances and possessions, yet remain in exactly the same place. The human cost is immense, and the inner emptiness profound.”

Drawing inspiration from St Francis and St Clare, Pope Leo encouraged the young pilgrims to venture beyond their comfort zones and bring Christ’s hope to those living on society’s margins.

“We are called to go where injustice and arrogance deny the dignity and dreams of many,” he said, echoing Pope Francis’ call to “touch the suffering flesh of others” rather than keeping a safe distance from human pain.

True freedom, he explained, is found not in power or self-interest but in embracing every person as a brother or sister.

“To trust in God is to discover a world of brothers and sisters to be appreciated and served, not exploited and dominated; not a world to be defended, but one to be embraced.”

Earlier, during an encounter with the young participants, Pope Leo reflected on his own vocation, describing it as a journey sustained by God’s faithful presence.

“Looking back on my life, the Lord has never left me alone,” he said. “He has always accompanied me, often by placing people beside me with whom I could share the journey.”

Concluding the celebration, the Pope encouraged the young people to return home renewed in faith and committed to living the Gospel with courage.

The invitation to become “new saints”, he suggested, is not reserved for extraordinary people but for ordinary disciples willing to trust God completely, live with integrity and become instruments of peace and hope in a world longing for both. **Agencies**

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Walking through fear with God

Fear grows with us. As children, we fear the dark, loud noises, or being separated from our parents. As teenagers and adults, those fears evolve into worries about failure, rejection, loneliness, or not living up to expectations. While the objects of our fear may change, the emotions they stir remain remarkably similar. Left unchecked, fear can imprison our hearts. Yet when met with faith and courage, it can become one of life's greatest teachers.

When I think back to my childhood, the memory that first introduced me to fear wasn't anything spooky. I was a skinny little "bag of bones" who treated food like a suspicious stranger and gave my mum a daily roller-coaster ride with my fussy eating habits. Getting me to finish a meal was no easy task, so she invented all kinds of frightening stories. Her most effective one was that the big, hungry dog next door would gobble me up if I refused to eat. Suddenly, I would devour my food as though it were a five-star feast. Looking back, I suspect that psychological campaign is partly responsible for the extra pounds I'm still trying to lose today. Thanks, Mum!

Those childhood memories always make me smile. What terrified me then seems amusing now, yet they remind me how easily fear can influence our choices. As children, we tend to believe everything we are told. As adults, however, we discover that many of our fears exist only in our minds, while others become opportunities to trust God more deeply.

Fear is part of the human experience. It may arise from uncertainty about the future, financial pressures, illness, failure, or loss. We



all encounter moments when anxiety threatens to overwhelm us. As a parent, especially when my children were young, worry was not an occasional visitor; it became a constant companion. I worried about having enough to provide for them, making mistakes that might affect their future, and whether I was doing enough as a parent.

Over time, I realised that courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is waking each morning, thanking God for another day, and choosing to move forward despite uncertainty. It is trusting that God is greater than whatever threatens to hold us back. In those quiet moments when worry weighs heavily on my heart, the words of Isaiah 41:10 become a gentle whisper of hope:

"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."

Throughout Scripture, God's people repeatedly faced fear, yet God continually called them to trust Him. The same struggle exists in many of our parishes today. Many faithful men and women hesitate to step

forward and serve, not because they lack commitment, but because they doubt themselves. Behind that hesitation often lies insecurity, painful past experiences or the fear of being judged.

Quietly, they ask themselves: What if I make a mistake? What if I'm not good enough? What if others criticise me? Such questions reveal a deeper fear of failure or rejection. Comparing themselves with those who seem more gifted or experienced, they forget a simple but profound truth: God does not call only the qualified; He also qualifies those He calls.

Looking back, I have come to realise that fear was never my enemy. It is a natural part of life, but it does not have to control us. Now that I am in my sixties, my fears have changed once again. I no longer lose sleep over many of the struggles that once consumed me. Instead, I think more about time, health, and whether I have left my children with enough wisdom to guide them after I am gone. These fears are gentler, shaped more by gratitude than by desperation.

By trusting God's promises and turning to Him in prayer, we can face life's challenges with confidence. Difficulties may not disappear overnight, but faith assures us that we never walk through them alone. Fear may still knock at our door, but it no longer has the final word. God walks beside us, strengthening us every step of the way. In Christ, fear gradually gives way to hope, peace and the quiet confidence that nothing can separate us from His unfailing love.

Rachael Sharma

A promise of hope

The Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary is one of the Church's most joyful celebrations because it proclaims the victory of God's grace over sin and death. This teaching is not merely about honouring Mary with a unique privilege. Rather, it reveals God's saving plan for all humanity. Mary's Assumption is a sign of what awaits those who faithfully follow Christ. In a world often overshadowed by fear, conflict, injustice, and uncertainty, the Assumption offers a powerful message of hope. It reminds us that God's promises are trustworthy, that human life has eternal meaning, and that love ultimately triumphs over suffering and death.

Hope is one of the deepest needs of the human heart. Today, people across the world face numerous challenges that can make hope seem fragile. Wars continue to devastate nations, forcing families to flee their homes and leaving communities in despair. Many struggle with poverty, hunger, and inequality, while others experience loneliness, anxiety, and a loss of purpose. In such circumstances, it is easy to become discouraged or to believe that darkness has the final word.

The Assumption of Mary speaks directly into these realities. It proclaims that death is not the end, that suffering is not meaningless, and evil will not ultimately prevail. Mary's life demonstrates that those who place their trust in God will share in His victory. She is the first and greatest disciple, and her Assumption is a visible sign that God's promise of eternal life is not simply an abstract hope but a living reality. As Saint Paul reminds us, Christ's Resurrection is the foundation of our faith, and Mary's Assumption points to the destiny that awaits all who belong to Christ.

This unwavering faith makes Mary a model for Christians today. Many people experience moments when God's plans seem unclear or when suffering raises difficult questions. Mary's example teaches us that hope is not based on having all the answers but on trusting the One who holds the future. Her Assumption confirms that such trust is never in vain. God's faithfulness to Mary assures us that He will also remain faithful to those who seek Him with sincere hearts.

The Assumption also reminds us of the dignity of the human person. Mary was assumed body and soul into heaven, revealing that our bodies are not merely temporary vessels but part of God's good creation destined for glory. This truth has profound implications for the modern world. Modern society tends to see the external side of the human person, focusing on beauty that will not last. The truth is, all of us are made in the image and likeness of God, and we should be proud of our dignity as the children of God.

In a society that often measures success by wealth, power, or popularity, Mary presents a different vision of greatness. She was not honoured because of worldly achievements but because of her humility, obedience, and complete openness to God's will. This message reminds us that genuine hope is found not in possessions or status but in living faithfully according to God's love.

The Assumption also invites the Church to become a community of hope. Christians are called to reflect Mary's faith by accompanying those who are discouraged, comforting those who mourn, welcoming those who are excluded, and proclaiming the Good News with joy. Hope becomes

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with Fr Philip Tay, OCD

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (A)

Readings: Revelation 11: 19; 12: 1-6, 10;
1 Corinthians 15: 20-26;
Gospel: Luke 1: 39-56

credible when it is lived through concrete acts of mercy and love. In this way, every believer participates in Mary's mission of bringing Christ to the world.

Ultimately, the Assumption directs our gaze toward heaven without turning us away from the responsibilities of earth. It reminds us that history is moving toward God's final victory and that every act of faithfulness has eternal significance. Mary's glorification is not simply the conclusion of her earthly life; it is a promise of the future that God desires for all humanity. Her Assumption assures us that no suffering, failure, or loss can separate us from God's love when we remain united to Christ.

As we celebrate the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we are invited to renew our confidence in God's promises. In a world that often feels burdened by uncertainty, Mary's Assumption shines as a beacon of hope. It encourages us to persevere in faith, to uphold the dignity of every person, to work for justice and peace, and to trust that God's love is stronger than every darkness. Following Mary's example, may we become people who not only hold onto hope but also bring hope to others, witnessing through our words and actions that the final destiny of those who belong to Christ is not despair, but everlasting life in the presence of God.



DIocese OF PENANG

PKK/BDN/2026/08/238

Notifications and Updates

1. Heartfelt gratitude to all during the feast of Sts Anne and Joachim, Bukit Mertajam

My heartfelt thanks to all the pilgrims, volunteers, helpers and ministers of the various services, donors, celebrants and concelebrants, confessors and every single person who had contributed in making the Feast of St Anne this year an enriching, grace-filled and memorable celebration for all. May you experience the power of prayer and intercession in your lives as your faith continues to be strengthened. St Anne and St Joachim, pray for us.

2. Syukur, syukur dan tetap bersyukur

I praise and thank God for His faithfulness to me as I continue to celebrate, listen and walk this priestly journey, recalling 49

years of my Sacerdotal Ministry on July 28 and 14 years of my Episcopal Ministry on August 20 this year. With palms folded in prayer, I thank each one of you in the diocese and beyond for your continued prayers, blessings, generosity, support, love, care and concern from the time of my ordination and through all these years. God bless your kind hearts and sincere efforts for the greater glory of God.

3. Catechetical Sunday 2026

Catechetical Sunday was celebrated on August 2, with the theme *Be Christ to One Another*. This theme invites all Catholics to mirror Jesus by our love and sacrificial service to others, in relation to the Gospel of Matthew: "And the King will answer, 'I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to

one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did it to Me'" (Mat 25:40). Kindly find attached the relevant Catechetical Sunday materials for this year prepared by the Malaysian Catechetical Commission (<https://acesse.one/595pyc4>)

4. The culmination of *Perjalanan Salib* in the Diocese of Penang

The *Perjalanan Salib* in the Diocese of Penang, which has accompanied each parish, chapel, and institution since last year, will conclude with the Celebration of the Eucharist on August 25 at 10.00am at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Penang.

United in one Spirit, I invite everyone in the Diocese of Penang to gather for this significant celebration as we journey towards the Malaysia Pastoral Convention

2026. <https://acesse.one/fe4efd5>

5. Remembering our priests on the Feast of St John Vianney

The Feast of St John Vianney, the patron saint of priests, was on August 4. I warmly invite all the faithful to offer special prayers for our diocesan priests. Let us ask God to bless our priests with wisdom, strength, and a deep, enduring love for their pastoral ministry. We thank God for their selfless service and dedication to our parishes, and we pray that they continue to be guided and inspired by the holy example of St John Vianney.

Sebastian Francis
Cardinal Sebastian Francis



KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

August

- 18 Meeting – College of Consultors & Council of Priests
- 19 Clergy Monthly Recollection
- 20 Meeting – Archdiocesan Finance
- 21-22 Malaysia Pastoral Convention - On site preparation
- 22 Mass and Blessing – Cathedral of St John, KL
- 23 Confirmation – Chapel of Kristus Aman, TTDI
- 23 ASAYO (AYPC) Leaders Gathering



PENANG DIOCESE

Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

August

- 18 Meeting – College of Consultors & Council of Priests at 10.00am, Stella Maris, Penang
- 18-19 Clergy Monthly Recollection – Stella Maris
- 23 Confirmation – Church of the Immaculate Conception, Pulau Tikus at 8.30am
- 23 Thanksgiving, Evaluation and Celebration for the Feast of St Anne at 5.00pm – Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam



MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

August

- 18-19 Clergy Monthly Recollection – MAJODI Centre
- 22 Confirmation – Church St Francis Xavier, Melaka
- 23 MJD Deacons Study Day – Church of St Mary, Ayer Salak, Melaka



Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #283



Welcome dear friends,

Real peace or enforced peace? Pusat Komang has tracked heightened incidences of localised racism and religious prejudices. Everyday grievances have been magnified into national crises.

The government's aggressive reliance on the 3R (race, religion, royalty) umbrella has been construed as double standards and selective regulatory measures.

"True peace is not just the absence of conflict; it requires fairness, human rights, and the rule of law to last." Pope Paul VI

Local Takes! Making history or becoming history?

The *KLIA had slipped to third spot* after being the region's second-busiest airport, now behind Singapore's Changi and Indonesia's Soekarno-Hatta airports.

Malaysia has just been named the *best country on the planet for digital nomads*, (one who uses technology to work remotely while travelling freely) according to the Rumavi Global Relocation Index 2026.

What history says! The most dangerous sound in politics is not the roar of the opposition. It is the silence. For three decades, Malaysians sacrificed for a dream. Careers were destroyed.

Families were divided. Friendships ended. Students marched. Journalists took risks. People believed that if they could just hold on long enough, endure one more election, survive one more betrayal, a different Malaysia would eventually emerge.

Then came victory. And with victory came compromise. Compromise with old enemies. Compromise with old systems. Compromise with old habits. *G-News*

Reading the Signs:

On evangelising cities: Pope Leo

prayed for the "Good Shepherd" who "walks through our streets and squares," to "enter tall buildings and humble neighbourhoods," and to "silently accompany millions" of people who "seek meaning amid noise and haste."

On hoarding and wastefulness: Pope Leo warned against the spiritual sickness of greed, which is often manifested in hoarding and wasteful living. Lamenting that this sickness "numbs the senses, which become intoxicated with wealth, to the point of making people forget those who weep from hunger and cry out from thirst".

On the value of grandparents and the elderly: on the feast of Sts Joachim and Anne, the sixth World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, Pope Leo reminded the world that "old age is not a burden to manage but a gift to cherish".

Thought for the Week: The cup or the coffee!

A group of former students, now doing well in life, got together to visit their old university professor. Their conversation soon turned into complaints about stress at work and in life.

The old professor offered them coffee. He went to the kitchen and returned with a large pot of coffee and an assortment of cups – porcelain, plastic, glass, crystal. Some looked expensive, some exquisite. Each had a cup of coffee in their hands.

Then the professor said: Did you notice? The nice and expensive-looking cups were taken up. The plain and cheap-looking ones were untouched. This move is not unusual. You want the best for yourselves. And that's the cause of your problems and stress.

Lesson from the cups: Coffee was what they wanted, but consciously, they went for the best cups and were eyeing each other's cups. Now if life is coffee, then the jobs, money

and position in society are the cups.

Sometimes, by concentrating only on the cup, we fail to enjoy the coffee in it."

QnQ? Q asks: People say that our worth is in being recognised or being visible. Is it worth being unseen?

"The night shift is more than working after dark. It is the quiet discipline of carrying responsibilities that rarely receive recognition. It is the unseen work that keeps families functioning, organisations stable, and communities safe. While others celebrate the visible results, someone has already cleaned, prepared, repaired, watched, and prevented things from falling apart.

What our culture is blind to: Our culture often rewards visibility over faithfulness. Yet many of *life's greatest contributions are invisible*: Character is formed not by applause but by consistency. Their value lies not in being noticed but in *making life possible for everyone else*.

If your efforts often go unnoticed, let excellence be *rooted in purpose* rather than applause.

God measures greatness not by visibility but by faithfulness. The "night shift" of life: those quiet acts of responsibility, care, and diligence often become the training ground for deeper trust and greater stewardship.

The Spirit @work: Happy the man whose words issue from the Holy Spirit and not from himself!" *St Anthony of Padua*

Something to tickle you: Work remains a fundamental dimension of the human experience, for not only is it a means of sustenance, but it is also a context for expression, relationships and contributing to the community." *MH154-155*

Bishop Bernard Paul



A Church where everyone belongs

Desiree Kaur

KAJANG: A Church where everyone belongs — that was the spirit of this year's annual Mass for Special Needs held at the Church of the Holy Family on August 1. Organised by the Kuala Lumpur Archdiocesan Catechetical Ministry, the celebration brought together children and adults with special needs, their families, carers, volunteers and supporters in a joyful expression of faith, inclusion and community. Now in its third consecutive year, the Mass welcomed participants from across the archdiocese, including families who travelled from Teluk Intan, as well as attendees from other faiths, demonstrating that the values of love, dignity and belonging

transcend religious boundaries.

The Mass was celebrated by Most Rev Julian Leow, Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur, with Fr Michael Chua, parish priest of the Church of the Holy Family, who also served as a sign language interpreter during the liturgy, reflecting the Church's commitment to making worship accessible to all.

The Mass began at 10.00am, with individuals with special needs proclaiming the First Reading and leading the Responsorial Psalm, beautifully demonstrating that everyone has a place to serve within the Church community.

In his homily, Archbishop Julian reminded the congregation that God often speaks through people we least expect. "God has sent Prophets — special people in our

lives to teach us lessons we may find difficult to learn," he said.

Reflecting on the readings of the day, he encouraged the faithful to recognise that children with special needs are among the special people God places in our lives, to teach us compassion, patience and understanding. He challenged everyone to ask themselves whether they truly listen to God's voice through others, especially those whose voices are often quiet or overlooked. Drawing from the examples of the prophets Jeremiah and John the Baptist, Archbishop Julian reminded the congregation that God speaks not only through Scripture, but also through our conscience, through nature and through every person we encounter on our journey of faith. He concluded by

encouraging everyone to cultivate hearts that are quiet enough to hear God's gentle voice.

Before the final blessing, Dr Steven Selvaraju, director of the Archdiocesan Catechetical Centre, reminded attendees of the purpose behind this annual celebration. Firstly, it provides parents and carers with the opportunity to worship in an inclusive setting. Secondly, it raises awareness within parish communities, as the Mass is hosted by a different parish each year.

"By having this Mass in different parishes, we hope that the members of the hosting parish will come to know the Special Needs persons in their midst and understand how essential it is for them to try to adapt to the unique situations faced by the Special Needs person," said Dr

Steven.

Following the Mass, participants took part in a Jubilee Walk organised through three interactive stations within and outside the church — the stained-glass window, the statue of St Michael the Archangel and the Grotto. Moving together in small groups, they learnt about the significance of each location. A specially prepared booklet containing reflections and activities was also provided for children who wished to participate.

The celebration concluded with fellowship over light refreshments in the church hall, allowing families, volunteers and parishioners to connect, share their experiences and continue building a welcoming and inclusive faith community for all.



The participants lighting a candle at the grotto.

St Anne's feast inspires faithful to become peacemakers

PORT KLANG: The Church of St Anne celebrated its annual patronal feast from July 17 to 26 with a renewed call for parishioners and pilgrims to become "Pilgrims of Peace," carrying the peace of Christ into their families, communities and the wider world.

Inspired by the theme *Peace Be with You – Pilgrims of Peace*, the ten-day celebration centred on Christ's greeting to His disciples and the Beatitude: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Mt 5:9). The theme drew inspiration from the 800th anniversary of the death of St Francis of Assisi, whose life remains a witness to peace, simplicity and care for creation, as well as Pope Leo XIV's World Day of Peace message, *Peace Be with You All: Towards an Unarmed and*

Disarming Peace.

Preparations for the feast were briefly overshadowed when parish priest, Fr David Arulantham, suffered a fractured shoulder after a fall. Yet his resilience and encouragement inspired parishioners to press on with renewed confidence, becoming a lived witness to the very peace and trust in God's providence that the feast would proclaim.

Throughout the novena, each Eucharistic celebration explored different dimensions of Christian peace — from reconciliation and healing to hope, dialogue and care for creation. The homilies challenged the faithful not merely to admire peace as an ideal but to make it a way of life through forgiveness, compassion and everyday acts of love.

A distinctive feature of this

year's celebration was the active participation of the parish's Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs). Before each evening Mass, the respective BEC creatively presented the day's theme through drama, music, narration and symbolic reflections, helping pilgrims prepare their hearts for the Eucharist.

As the feast progressed, pilgrims arrived in growing numbers to light candles, offer petitions, seek the intercession of St Anne and celebrate the Eucharist. Twenty Masses were celebrated over the ten days, including eight during the final weekend. Special liturgies for the elderly and the sick, including the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, reflected Christ's compassion and brought comfort, healing and hope to many families.



Pilgrims collecting alms.

Several initiatives reinforced the theme of peace throughout the celebration. The parish youths' Peacemaker Tree invited pilgrims to write prayers and personal commitments on leaf-shaped cards, transforming bare branches into a vibrant symbol of faith, hope and the shared mission to become peacemakers.

Pilgrims also found moments of quiet prayer at the *Sukkat Shalom* (Tabernacle of Peace), a space inspired by the biblical understanding of shalom as wholeness, harmony and communion with God.

Another meaningful symbol was the Peace Candle, presented to principal celebrants, visiting priests and later to BEC leaders during the Mass. The gesture expressed gratitude while commissioning them to

continue fostering reconciliation, unity and hope within their communities throughout the year.

Behind every liturgy and programme stood hundreds of volunteers, ministry members and benefactors whose generosity and quiet service reflected the very message the feast sought to proclaim — that peace is built not only through words but through humble acts of love and selfless service.

As the celebration ended, pilgrims returned home with more than memories of a parish feast. They left challenged to become peacemakers in their own homes, workplaces and communities, living out Christ's enduring call: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."



The pilgrims following the statue of St Anne during the procession.

SANDAKAN: “You are the miracle in the Church. Through your ministry, God’s miraculous work continues to live on, to grow and to touch the lives of His people.”

Those words from Msgr Gilbert D Lasius captured the spirit of the Third Sabah Catechetical Assembly (PKS 3), where more than 1,000 catechists from across Sabah gathered in Sandakan to renew their calling as witnesses, teachers and servants of the Gospel.

Held over three days at Wisma Tay Chee Ming, the biennial assembly brought together 1,048 delegates from the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu and the Dioceses of Sandakan and Keningau, together with five invited delegates from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur. Organised by the Sabah Catechetical Commission and hosted by the Diocese of Sandakan, the gathering carried the theme *Be Christ to One Another (Mt 25:40)*.

The assembly opened with the Eucharistic celebration presided over by Bishop Julius Dusin Gitom of Sandakan, setting the spiritual tone for three days of prayer, formation and fellowship as participants renewed their commitment to proclaiming and handing on the Catholic faith.

Preaching at the Mass, Msgr Gilbert reflected on Jesus’ miracle of the multiplication of the five loaves and two fish, drawing a parallel with the vocation of catechists. Just as the disciples placed their seemingly inadequate gifts into Jesus’ hands, catechists, too, are invited to offer what they have in faith, trusting that God will multiply their efforts for the good of His people.

Acknowledging that many catechists may sometimes feel inadequate, he reminded them that God does not ask for extraordinary talents, but for willing hearts.

“What we have to offer is a spirit of service,

“You are the miracle in the Church,” catechists told



Catechists during the small group sharing.

love, humility, patience, perseverance and dedication. Even with our weaknesses and limitations, God takes what we place in His hands and uses it to accomplish His mission.”

He encouraged every catechist to continue placing their gifts in God’s hands, confident that even the smallest offering can become a source of abundant blessings for the Church.

The assembly’s formation programme centred on helping catechists deepen both their faith and their ministry.

In the opening session, *Catechists: Living the Person of Christ*, Msgr David A. Garaman

reminded participants that Christ remains the perfect model for every catechist — one who teaches by example, serves with humility, shows compassion, remains faithful to the Father’s mission and willingly embraces sacrifice. He challenged delegates to become authentic witnesses whose lives themselves proclaim the Gospel.

The second day focused on evangelisation and synodality through bilingual sessions conducted in Bahasa Malaysia and Mandarin. Archbishop John Wong and Fr Boniface Kimsin encouraged catechists to proclaim

the joy of the Gospel in ways that remain relevant and meaningful in today’s world. This was followed by presentations from Msgr Nicholas Stephen and Fr Mitchelly Kiun on *Catechists and Synodality*, highlighting the call to walk together, listen deeply to one another and foster greater participation within parish communities.

Delegates also journeyed through the history of the Catholic Church in Sabah, tracing its growth from the arrival of the first Catholic missionaries in 1855 to the present day. Small-group faith sharing, spiritual conversations, discernment sessions and Eucharistic Adoration provided further opportunities for prayer, reflection and renewal throughout the assembly.

The gathering was marked not only by learning but also by a deep spirit of communion. Catechists from Sabah’s three dioceses strengthened friendships, shared pastoral experiences and renewed their common commitment to forming disciples of Christ within their respective parishes and communities.

Before the assembly concluded, it was announced that the Diocese of Keningau will host the Fourth Sabah Catechetical Assembly, continuing the biennial tradition of strengthening catechetical formation, collaboration and communion among Sabah’s three dioceses as they continue their shared mission of proclaiming the Gospel.

Where faith is learned and lived

PENANG: On August 2, Risen Christ Catholic Church celebrated Catechetical Sunday with a multilingual Mass, bringing together parishioners from the different language communities in a shared celebration of catechesis. The celebration recognised the important role of catechesis at every stage of life, bringing together Catechism children, dedicated catechists, and adults journeying through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA).

The Mass was animated by the catechism children. They served as hospitality ministers, choir, readers, commentators, and gift bearers. Seeing the children take an active part in the liturgy was a proud moment for their parents and catechists. It reminded us that faith is not only learned in the classroom but is also lived through serving others.

This year, the Presentation of Gifts carried a special meaning. Wherever possible, the offertory was presented by pairs of siblings, reflecting the important role of families in living and sharing the faith. The groceries they carried had been donated by the catechism children and their parents for a welfare home. Through this simple gesture, the children learned that the offertory is not just about bringing gifts to the altar, but also about sharing God’s blessings with those in need.

A significant part of the celebration was the commissioning of catechists by parish priest,

Friar Crispus Mosinoh, OFM. Through this commissioning, the catechists publicly affirmed their commitment to serve the Church by accompanying children and adults in their faith formation with dedication, compassion, and love.

The children and their parents were then invited to recommit themselves to their faith journey. It was a reminder that faith formation begins at home. Parents are the first teachers of faith, while catechists and the parish community journey alongside them in helping our children know, love, and follow Christ.

After Mass, the Catechism Ministry hosted breakfast for the children and their families. It was a wonderful opportunity for everyone to spend time together, catching up over a simple meal and celebrating as one parish family.

Catechetical Sunday may be one day in the year, but the mission of catechesis continues every day. As our children continue their journey of faith, may we always walk beside them, encouraging them with our words, our example, and our prayers. Together, let us continue to help them know Christ, love Christ, and live His Gospel in their daily lives.

The success of the celebration reflected the dedication of our parish priest, catechists, children, parents, and the parish community, whose support and participation made Catechetical Sunday a meaningful celebration of faith, service, and unity. **Punitha Mary**



Never let go of the Cross

KUALA LUMPUR: As the *Perjalanan Salib* (Journey of the Cross) made its way through the Church of Our Lady of Fatima, Brickfields, from July 22 to 28, the Cross became more than the focus of prayer. It became a teacher, a companion and an invitation to encounter Christ more deeply as the Church prepared for the Malaysia Pastoral Convention (MPC2026).

Held under the theme, *Celebrate, Listen, Walk — that we may walk together as Christ’s people: listening, discerning and loving*, the week formed part of the Church’s nationwide spiritual preparation for MPC2026. Each day was dedicated to one of Malaysia’s nine arch/dioceses, with Scripture reflections and prayers for its pastoral intentions, reminding participants that walking together begins by listening to God and to one another.

Yet it was often the quiet, unexpected moments that left the deepest impression.

Among them was the reflection of a parishioner serving as photographer on the opening day. So intent on capturing the perfect photograph, the parishioner almost missed the experience itself. During the entrance procession, however, the most memorable image was not seen through the camera lens. It was the sight of several people gently supporting the large wooden Cross as it was carried towards the altar, every hand helping to steady it along the

way.

Watching that simple act of shared responsibility, a question quietly arose in prayer: ‘*Lord, were You too heavy to carry — or was it simply the fear of letting You fall?*’ As the Cross was finally placed upon its stand, another insight emerged: perhaps the Christian journey is not about carrying the Cross perfectly, but about never letting go of it until we reach Christ.

If the Cross invited some to deeper reflection, it led others to unexpected healing.

One evening, an unbaptised young man accompanied a parent to Mass after many years away from the Church. During Eucharistic Adoration, the parent encouraged the young man to place his anxieties before Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. Afterwards, he shared that he had experienced a deep sense of connection with Jesus during prayer and was especially moved by Fr Andrew Manickam’s reflection on “sacred wounds”. Having never seen his own wounds as sacred, he left with a new understanding of suffering through the eyes of faith.

Although the Cross has now left Our Lady of Fatima, its pilgrimage continues through the churches of the Kuala Lumpur Central District before joining the eight other diocesan crosses at the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026. Together, they will stand as a visible sign of the Church’s unity and shared mission in Christ.



Encountering God through our humanity

YC Hwang

PETALING JAYA: More than simply seeing, hearing or touching, our human senses can become pathways to encountering God.

That was the central message of *Sensing Humanity, Sensing the Divine*, a three-evening formation series presented by Fr Hung Pham, SJ, during the annual Triduum celebrations at the Church of St Francis Xavier (SFX) from July 28–30.

Fr Hung, a familiar speaker at SFX who has conducted several formation programmes there over the past three years, drew on Ignatian spirituality to show how ordinary human experiences can become places of divine encounter. His presentations were inspired by the Jesuit theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's famous insight that human beings are "spiritual beings having a human experience," and were further illuminated by Pope Leo XIV's encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*, which

calls Christians to safeguard the dignity of the human person in an increasingly technological age.

The opening session, *Coming Home to Our Senses – Moving Towards Our Conversion*, invited participants to rediscover the wonder of everyday experiences as gifts from God. Drawing on Scripture, the spirituality of St Ignatius of Loyola and insights from *Magnifica Humanitas*, Fr Hung reflected on how the senses of sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell help shape not only human relationships but also our relationship with God. He also explored Ignatian discernment, encouraging participants to become more attentive to the inner movements of the heart through prayerful reflection.

The second evening, *Our Senses as the Gateway to Know, Love and Follow Jesus*, focused on Christ as the model of authentic humanity. Using the Ignatian practice of contemplating Gospel scenes through the imagination, Fr Hung invited participants

to encounter Jesus more personally by entering key moments in His public ministry, including His encounter with the Samaritan woman, the calming of the storm, the anointing at Bethany and His agony in Gethsemane. The session emphasised that discipleship begins not simply with intellectual understanding but with a personal encounter that transforms the heart.

The final session, *Sensing Love, Sensing God*, explored how human desires, rightly ordered, lead us towards God. Fr Hung explained the Ignatian understanding of holy indifference — not as detachment or apathy, but as the freedom to place Christ above every other desire. Reflecting on St Peter's journey from denial to restoration and finally courageous witness, he illustrated how God's love transforms human weakness into faithful discipleship.

Throughout the series, participants were encouraged to move beyond faith as merely an intellectual exercise and to recognise that



Fr Hung Pham, SJ

God continues to reveal Himself through the ordinary experiences of daily life. Rather than escaping our humanity, Ignatian spirituality teaches that it is precisely through our humanity that we encounter the divine.

Each evening concluded with the blessing of incense and the anointing of participants with oil, a symbolic reminder that God's grace touches not only the soul but the whole person.

Fr Hung serves as Provincial Assistant for Formation for the Jesuits' Central and Southern Province of the United States. Before his current appointment, he taught Ignatian Spirituality at the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University.

CMfD embraces synodal listening

PETALING JAYA: Members of the Catholic Ministry for the Deaf (CMfD) gathered for a one-day community retreat on Synodality on July 19 at the Church of St Francis Xavier. The retreat was facilitated by Sr

Margarete Sta Maria, FdCC, director of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Institute (API), together with Gregory Pravin Rajah.

The retreat, held as part of the Church's journey towards the Malaysia Pastoral

Convention (MPC) 2026, invited participants to deepen their understanding of synodality — walking together as one People of God, where every person is welcomed, heard and valued.

Opening the morning session, Gregory explored the meaning of synodality, drawing on *The Church Is Our Home*, a document that emerged from the Synod Listening Session with Persons with Disabilities in September 2022. He highlighted the document's central message that every person, regardless of ability, has an equal place and an essential role in the life and mission of the Church.

Participants were then introduced to Conversation in the Spirit, a prayerful method of listening, dialogue and communal discernment. Through small-group sharing, each participant was given equal opportunity to speak while others listened attentively and respectfully. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the groups later presented their shared reflections, demonstrating how genuine listening strengthens communion and encourages the active participation of the

Deaf community in the Church.

In the afternoon, Sr Margarete led participants through *The Synodal Pathway*, inviting them to reflect on practical ways of strengthening CMfD's ministry. Through group discussions, they considered proposals that inspired them most and identified areas where the ministry could continue to grow in service to the Deaf community.

The final session, *A Synodal Church in Mission – Towards MPC2026, Sibü*, encouraged participants to see the Church as a pilgrim people journeying together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Rather than remaining passive observers, they were challenged to embrace co-responsibility, offering their unique gifts in the Church's mission. The session also included a brief update on the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur's participation in the upcoming Malaysia Pastoral Convention.

The retreat concluded with a renewed sense of purpose and hope. Participants left inspired to embrace synodality not simply as a concept, but as a way of life — one rooted in listening, mutual respect, shared discernment and active participation in the mission of the Church. **Pamela Ngeau**



A participant leading the prayer.

KUCHING: Sometimes, the most memorable pilgrimages are not measured by the number of churches visited, but by the people encountered and the faith experienced along the way.

That was the sentiment shared by 44 pilgrims from the Chapel of Kristus Aman, Kuala Lumpur, who journeyed through the Archdiocese of Kuching from July 23 to 26, visiting seven churches across the archdiocese.

For many, it was their first visit to East Malaysia. They were captivated not only by the grandeur and beauty of the churches, but also by the faith they reflected. From the majestic Cathedral of St Joseph to the charming village churches, each place of worship revealed thoughtful architecture, meaningful symbolism and artistic beauty born of prayer and devotion. One particularly memorable stop was Mt Hosanna Chapel in Sri Aman, whose unique design bore witness to the power of contemplation expressed through sacred architecture.

Yet it was not only the buildings that left a lasting impression.

The pilgrims were deeply touched by the warmth, humility and hospitality of the people they met. Parish priests, lay leaders and pa-



Seven churches, one unforgettable pilgrimage

rishioners welcomed them with open hearts, making them feel less like visitors and more like members of one family in Christ.

One especially memorable evening followed Mass at the Church of St Thomas More in Bau. The local community invited the pilgrims to a simple potluck dinner that soon blossomed into an evening of joyful fellowship, with laughter, karaoke and even line dancing. What began as strangers sharing a meal quickly became brothers and sisters ce-

lebrating their common faith.

Among the other places visited were the chapel at St Peter's Seminary, Church of St Anne, Kota Padawan, Church of St Theresa in Serian, Church of St Stephen, Bau and the newly consecrated Church of St Peter in Padungan.

The journey became more than a tour of churches. It was a pilgrimage of encounter — one that revealed the beauty of the Church not only in its buildings, but also in the generous

hearts of its people.

The pilgrims returned home with grateful hearts, carrying with them a renewed appreciation of the rich faith, vibrant communities and warm hospitality of the Church in Kuching.

"Thank you, Kuching, for reminding us that the Church is built not only of bricks and mortar, but of people whose faith, simplicity and love make Christ present to all." **Eugene Joseph**

Sacred music celebrates faith across Asia

Christopher Kushi

PENANG: Sacred music, faith and thanksgiving came together as the Mandarin service of *Radio Veritas Asia* (RVA) celebrated its Golden Jubilee with a series of concerts across Malaysia, drawing Catholic communities together in joyful praise through song.

The celebrations began on July 31 at the Church of St Mary, Ayer Salak, in the Diocese of Malacca Johore, continued on Aug 1 at the Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, and concluded on Aug 2 at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in Penang.

The Penang concert, organised by RVA's Mandarin service in Manila and co-organised by the Penang Island Deanery Mandarin Apostolate, filled the cathedral as Mandarin-speaking Catholics and lovers of sacred music gathered for an evening celebrating five decades of evangelisation through media and music.

Opening the celebration, Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang, reflected on the deeper purpose of sacred music. Invoking the intercession of St Cecilia, patron saint of musicians and singers, he reminded those present that sacred music is far more than artistic performance — it is a proclamation of the Gospel.

Recalling that St Cecilia “sang in her heart to the Lord,” Cardinal Sebastian encouraged musicians to use their gifts to tell the story of Christ and bring people closer to God. He also congratulated RVA on its longstanding commitment to nurturing original sacred compositions in Mandarin that inspire faith and glorify God.

Extending a special welcome to performers from Taiwan, Kuala Lumpur, Penang and mainland China, the cardinal expressed gratitude for the witness of Chinese-speaking Catholics throughout Asia and offered



Cardinal Sebastian Francis addressing the people as Fr John Mi Shen looks on.

prayers for the Church in mainland China.

The celebration also marked the 12th anniversary of the Veritas Cup Global Chinese Hymn Composition Contest, an initiative established to encourage the creation of original Chinese-language sacred music. Newly composed hymns featured prominently throughout the evening, reflecting the richness of Chinese Catholic spirituality and the enduring power of music as a



One of the groups performing at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in Penang.

vehicle for evangelisation.

Among those present were Fr Feil Felmar SVD, general manager of RVA; Fr John Mi Shen, executive secretary of the FABC office of Social Communication and project director of RVA; and Fr Francis Han, coordinator of RVA's Mandarin service, together with musicians, composers and singers from across Asia.

The concert featured performances by CHS Youth Penang, Philip Ng, Lu Dan

Yan, Xiao Jia Wen, Liu Xia, Geliya Band, Jaron Khor, Albert Loh, Chen Xiao Yang, Su Xing Band and Chen Mingbo, whose diverse musical styles reflected both the universality of the Church and the richness of Chinese sacred music.

For five decades, RVA's Mandarin service has accompanied Chinese-speaking Catholics throughout Asia through radio broadcasting, digital platforms and new media, bringing the Gospel to communities where access to Catholic resources is often limited. Beyond broadcasting, it has fostered collaboration among local Churches and promoted evangelisation, faith formation, and cultural expression through music.

As the Golden Jubilee celebrations ended, they looked not only to the past with gratitude but also to the future with renewed missionary zeal. The anniversary celebrated fifty years of faithful service while reaffirming RVA's commitment to proclaiming Christ and accompanying Chinese-speaking communities across Asia for generations to come.

Archdiocesan photography workshop inspires new perspectives



Timothy Choy

KUALA LUMPUR: What makes a great church photographer? Is it the latest camera? The perfect lens? Or simply being in the right place at the right time?

Close to 40 participants discovered that the answer goes far beyond camera settings at the Archdiocesan Photography Workshop, organised by the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur Social Communications Ministry on Saturday, August 1, at Auditorium Cahayasuara.

Leading the session was Timothy Choy from the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist, who has spent nearly a decade documenting parish life through photography and videography. What began as a personal hobby has since grown into a career in communications and creative content

production, making him the perfect person to guide aspiring church photographers.

But this was far from your typical photography workshop. Yes, participants learnt the fundamentals of photography — from understanding ISO, aperture and shutter speed to mastering composition, lighting and visual storytelling. Timothy also showed how simple tools such as grid lines, exposure adjustments, focus points and manual settings can dramatically improve photographs. Whether participants arrived with professional DSLR cameras or simply their smartphones, everyone discovered how to get the best out of the equipment they already owned.

The real highlight, however, was learning to see photography through the lens of the Catholic liturgy. Rather than treating Mass as just another event to document, participants were invited to understand the deeper purpose of liturgical photography: capturing moments that help others encounter God without ever distracting from the sacred celebration itself.

The workshop explored the different parts of the Mass, where photographers should direct their attention during each moment, and how to anticipate meaningful images without becoming a distraction. Timothy also shared practical dos and don'ts, from moving discreetly and respecting sacred spaces to knowing when to and not to take photographs at all. It was a refreshing reminder that church photographers are not

simply content creators, but ministers of the liturgy, helping preserve moments of faith with reverence and sensitivity.

The learning did not stop in the auditorium. After the presentations, participants headed outdoors for a hands-on photography exercise, putting theory into practice as they explored different angles, lighting conditions and compositions. Cameras clicked, phones snapped away, and the excitement was evident as participants experimented with their newly acquired skills while receiving tips and feedback along the way.

The atmosphere throughout the day was one of enthusiasm, curiosity and shared learning, with photographers of all experience levels encouraging one another and exchanging ideas.

Judging by the overwhelming response and the many positive comments received, one thing is clear: this is only the beginning.

For those who attended, the workshop offered more than technical skills. It was an invitation to see differently, to recognise that behind every photograph is an opportunity to tell a story of faith, capture the beauty of the liturgy and reveal God's presence in ordinary moments.

Missed this one? Don't worry. With such encouraging feedback, a follow-up session is already on the horizon. So, keep your cameras charged, your phones ready, and your eyes open — you won't want to miss what's coming next. **Tianne Pereira**



Vatican launches Christian-Confucian dialogue

SEOUL: The Vatican has launched its first formal dialogue with the Confucian tradition, marking a significant milestone in interreligious relations and highlighting the shared responsibility of religions to help build a more just, peaceful and harmonious world.

Opening the two-day *Christian-Confucian Dialogue* at Sogang University in Seoul on August 4, Cardinal George Jacob Koovakad, Prefect of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, said that while Christianity and Confucianism arise from different religious, philosophical and cultural contexts, both express humanity's deep desire to build societies founded on peace, justice, inclusion and compassion.

Organised by the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue in collaboration with the Sungkyunkwan Confucian Academy, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea



Confucian and Catholic scholars, religious representatives, and those involved in interreligious dialogue from various countries gathered for dialogue. (Vatican News)

and Sogang University, the meeting brings together Catholic and Confucian scholars, religious leaders and dialogue practitioners from several countries. The theme, *Dialogue on the Contribution of Christianity and Confucianism to an Ideal Society: The New Heaven, the New Earth, and Datong (Great Unity)*, explores how both traditions can contribute to

the common good.

Cardinal Koovakad observed that both the Christian vision of the "New Heaven and New Earth" and the Confucian ideal of Datong or "Great Unity" emerged during periods of profound social and moral crisis, offering hope and guiding communities towards justice, harmony and human flourishing. Although rooted

in different foundations, he said, both traditions reject the notion that conflict, selfishness and oppression are inevitable.

He stressed that genuine dialogue does not seek to erase differences but encourages mutual respect, learning and cooperation. Religions, he added, have a responsibility to place their ethical and spiritual wisdom at

the service of humanity by promoting moral renewal, social harmony and the dignity of every person.

Archbishop Indunil Janakarathne Kodithuwakku Kankanamalage, Secretary of the Dicastery, described the gathering as "a new chapter in relations between Christians and Confucians" and said it offers a broader horizon for dialogue, mutual learning and cooperation in service of humanity. A final version of the Guidelines for Christian-Confucian Dialogue will be published at the conclusion of the meeting.

The dialogue also carries particular significance for Korea, where many of the country's earliest Catholics were Confucian scholars. Sogang University President Fr Luke Jong Hyeok Sim, SJ, said the meeting represents not something entirely new, but the continuation of a shared history rooted in intellectual inquiry and mutual respect. **Vatican News**

Filipino bishops urge scrutiny of major development projects

MANILA: Two Filipino bishops have called for greater transparency, public consultation and a stronger commitment to the common good as the Philippines pursues major development projects.

Bishop Renato Mayugba of Laoag raised concerns over a proposed 330-billion-peso offshore wind project in four coastal towns of Ilocos Norte, warning it could displace more than 6,500 fisherfolk and harm marine ecosystems.

Stressing that the Church is not opposed to development, he said progress must put people and the environment before profit.

"We are not anti-development. We are for just and inclusive development," he said, urging dialogue and independent scientific study to ensure "genuine human ecology

over corporate greed."

Meanwhile, Cardinal Pablo Virgilio David of Kalookan questioned whether a proposed artificial intelligence hub in Tarlac under the US-led Pax Silica initiative would primarily benefit the Philippines or serve foreign strategic interests. President Ferdinand Marcos Jr has promoted the project as a driver of jobs, industrial competitiveness and economic growth.

"These are legitimate questions — not because we oppose foreign investment, but because genuine partnership should strengthen the nation that hosts it," Cardinal David said.

Referring to Pope Leo XIV's encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*, he added that technological progress should build "a civilisation of love

rather than a culture of power," serving human dignity, social fraternity, care for creation and peace among nations.

Although addressing different projects, both bishops emphasised a common principle of Catholic social teaching: authentic development must respect human dignity, protect creation and ensure that the benefits of progress are shared, especially by those most directly affected.

Their interventions come as the Philippines seeks to sustain economic growth following its recent reclassification by the World Bank as an upper middle-income country, even as concerns over inequality, environmental protection and inclusive development remain central to public debate. **ucanews.com**

Church, villagers sue over Flores geothermal projects

JAKARTA: The Archdiocese of Ende and indigenous communities on Indonesia's Catholic-majority Flores Island have filed a lawsuit in the Supreme Court challenging government approval of geothermal projects, arguing they threaten livelihoods, the environment and indigenous land rights.

The July 29 legal action seeks a judicial review of three ministerial decrees that designated Flores a "Geothermal Island" in 2017 and approved geothermal working areas in Sokoria, Ende district, and Mataloko, Ngada district.

Archbishop Paulus Budi Kleden said the Church supports renewable energy but believes geothermal development is not suitable for Flores.

"This is not a rejection of progress or the transition to renewable

energy, but geothermal is not the right choice for Flores," he said.

The archbishop noted that the island's mountainous terrain leaves limited land for farming and settlements, while geothermal drilling requires large amounts of water at a time when communities already face seasonal shortages and the effects of climate change.

"This issue goes far beyond compensation or corporate social responsibility. It concerns people's right to life," he said.

Residents from the affected areas also reported environmental damage and growing social tensions. In Mataloko, villagers cited hot mud eruptions, suspected water pollution, land subsidence and community conflict. In Sokoria, farmers claimed coffee, candlenut and clove trees had stopped bearing

fruit since geothermal operations began, while disputes over customary land had divided families.

Lawyer Azas Tigor Nainggolan, representing the archdiocese and villagers, alleged the projects proceeded without meaningful consultation and violated the principle of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC).

"Flores is being treated as if it were an empty island, without considering the people who have lived there for generations," he said.

The geothermal projects form part of Indonesia's renewable energy strategy, with authorities identifying 16 potential sites across Flores, which has an estimated geothermal capacity of 902 megawatts.

Home to more than two million people, Flores is predominantly Catholic, with over 80 per cent of residents relying on agriculture. Many fear the projects will have lasting consequences for their livelihoods and the island's fragile environment. **ucanews.com**



First doctor from remote hill parish honoured

KALIMPONG, West Bengal: What began as a dream in a remote mountain village has become a beacon of hope for an entire community.

The faithful of St Alphonsa Quasi parish, Samthar, celebrated a historic milestone on August 1 as Jennifer Lepcha became the first young person from the parish to earn a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) degree.

Nestled amid forests and terraced hills near the Indo-Bhutan border, Samthar is one of the more isolated villages in the Kalimpong district. Despite its rugged terrain and limited infrastructure, the community has flourished through its rich cultural heritage and the dedicated educational, pastoral and social ministry of the Salesians of Don Bosco, whose presence has opened new opportunities for local families.

Jennifer, who completed her medical studies at Purulia Medical College and Hospital, received a Certificate of Appreciation from Bishop Stephen Lepcha of the Diocese of Darjeeling-Sikkim in the presence of clergy, religious and parishioners.

Presented on behalf of parish priest Fr Savio Rai, the parish community and the Salesian community, the award recognised not only

Jennifer's academic excellence but also the hope and inspiration her achievement brings to countless young people growing up in similar circumstances.

The citation commended her perseverance, dedication and commitment in completing the demanding medical programme and expressed confidence that she would serve society with compassion, integrity and professional excellence. It described her success as a source of pride not only for her family but also for the parish and the wider Salesian family.

The felicitation formed part of the annual feast of St Alphonsa, drawing Catholics from across the region together in prayer and thanksgiving.

The celebration also highlighted the remarkable growth of the Salesians' mission in Samthar. Established in 2017 under the leadership of Fr Savio Rai, the mission has, within just nine years, grown into a vibrant quasi-parish under Suruk Parish, about seven kilometres away.

Today, the quasi-parish serves 74 Catholic families and operates a Don Bosco School up to Class VIII, providing quality education and faith formation for children in the remote hill community. **Matters India**

Pope urges SIGNIS to foster truth and peace

RWANDA: Pope Leo XIV urged Catholic communicators to help ensure that digital platforms serve the common good and warned that online communication shapes culture, public perception, and the collective conscience.

Archbishop Arnaldo S. Catalan, apostolic nuncio to Rwanda, read the Pope's message during the opening of the SIGNIS World Congress in Kigali on August 4.

The message, dated July 30 and signed by Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin, conveyed Pope Leo's "cordial greetings and the assurance of his spiritual closeness" to participants.

"He hopes that your deliberations will contribute to a new impetus for ensuring that communication platforms advance the common good of the human family," the message read.

Pope Leo noted that digital technology and the internet increasingly shape people's daily lives.

"Our era is often referred to as the digital age, since so much of our lives is driven by digital technology and the internet," he said.

Citing his encyclical letter *Magnifica Humanitas*, the Pope said digital communication does more than transmit information.

"Online communication is not simply the transmission of information, but the creation of a culture, as it has the power to shape the way people perceive the world and thereby profoundly influences the collective conscience," the pontiff said.

Pope Leo called on congress participants to examine how digital communication could promote cultural harmony and environmental well-being while remaining



grounded in truth and respect for human dignity.

He expressed hope that their reflections on the theme, "Digital Communication for Cultural Harmony and Environmental Wellbeing," would "seek ways to promote communication strategies and tools that are inspired by the pursuit of truth and respect for human dignity."

"In this way, your work will lead to a culture that reflects the Gospel

values of communion, peace, and environmental stewardship," he said.

The Pope entrusted the congress participants to the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, and assured them of his prayers that their efforts would "bear lasting fruit."

He also imparted his apostolic blessing "as a pledge of wisdom and strength in the Lord."

SIGNIS, or the World Catholic

Association for Communication, is recognised by the Vatican as an International Association of the Faithful with the mission to "help transform cultures in the light of the Gospel by promoting human dignity, justice, and reconciliation."

It has consultative status with UNESCO, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, in Geneva and New York, and the Council of Europe. **LiCAS News**

One dollar, 219 churches

JAKARTA: A Catholic lay initiative that began with a single US dollar and a word of encouragement has helped build 219 churches and chapels in some of Indonesia's most remote communities, demonstrating the transformative power of faith, generosity and lay collaboration.

Founded by Albertus Gregory Tan, 36, Vinea Dei and its digital crowdfunding platform, *Jala Kasih*, have supported Catholic communities across the country by raising funds for church construction while fostering unity, hope and participation among the faithful.

For Gregory, however, the buildings are only part of the story.

"The buildings are only the visible result," he said. "The real mission is to build people — to bring hope, strengthen faith and remind those on the margins that they are not forgotten."

The ministry traces its origins to a defining moment more than a decade ago when Gregory, discouraged by limited resources and mounting obstacles, questioned whether he should continue. An unexpected letter containing a single US dollar and a brief note of encouragement changed his perspective.

"I felt that God was telling me, 'Keep going,'" he recalled.

What seemed an insignificant gift became the catalyst for a mission that has since reached thousands of Catholics in isolated villages.

Initially, Gregory believed his calling was simply to build churches where communities lacked places of worship. Years of travelling to remote areas, however, reshaped his understanding.

"The Church is rebuilt long before the first stone is laid," he said. "It begins when people accompany one another, share each other's burdens and become signs of God's love."

He noted that every construction project becomes a journey of faith, with villagers contributing labour, building materials, food or other support. By the time a church is completed, communities have often grown stronger through their shared commitment and renewed sense of belonging.

One experience that left a lasting impression came at the first church supported by Vinea Dei in the Diocese of Sibolga, where Gregory encountered children living in poverty yet singing hymns with great joy.

"They had so little, yet their faith was overflowing," he said. "They

taught me that God's love does not depend on material wealth."

The foundation also promotes inculturation by encouraging local communities to incorporate their own cultural heritage into church design. A recently completed church in Flores, for example, draws inspiration from the traditional Mbaru Niang architecture of the Manggarai people.

"When people recognise their own culture within the Church, they also recognise that Christ is already present in their history, traditions and way of life," Gregory said.

As the ministry has grown, so too has its mission. Besides church construction, Vinea Dei now provides scholarships and educational assistance to children from economically disadvantaged Catholic families, believing that investing in young people is another way of building the future of the Church.

Supported almost entirely by lay Catholics from different professions and backgrounds, the initiative reflects what Gregory describes as a synodal Church in action.

"Everyone has a vocation. Everyone has something to offer. The mission of the Church belongs to all the baptised," he said.

Looking ahead, Gregory hopes to expand assistance to seminarians facing financial hardship and eventually extend the ministry beyond Indonesia.

His appeal, however, is not primarily for donations.

"We are not asking everyone to support *Jala Kasih*," he said. "Support your own parish. Help your local community. Visit someone who is lonely. Encourage those who are struggling. Begin with something small."

"God often starts great missions through very small acts of love." **Vatican News**



Albertus Gregory Tan with some of the community members.

Cameroonian youth called to treasure Christ



National Youth gathering in Cameroon 2026

BERTOUA, Cameroon: Thousands of young Catholics concluded the sixth National Youth Days in the Diocese of Bertoua on August 2 after six days of prayer, catechetical formation, fellowship and cultural activities.

The closing Mass was presided over by the Apostolic Nuncio to Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea, Archbishop José Avelino Bettencourt, who encouraged young people to discover Christ as the greatest treasure and to anchor their future in faith.

Drawing on the gathering's theme, *Take courage! I have overcome the world* (Jn 16:33) — also the theme for World Youth Day 2027 in Seoul — the nuncio urged participants to remain steadfast amid life's challenges.

"The treasure of Jesus Christ is you, dear young person. You are precious in His eyes," he said, encouraging the youth to entrust their academic, professional, family and personal struggles to God.

Using the example of King Solomon, Archbishop Bettencourt called on young people to seek the wisdom that comes from God rather

than pursuing material success alone. Like the man who sold everything to obtain the treasure hidden in a field, he said, Christians are invited to place Christ at the centre of their lives.

Archbishop Joseph Atanga of Bertoua described the week as a genuine encounter with Christ that combined spiritual renewal, catechetical formation, cultural exchange, sports and fraternity. He urged the participants to become ambassadors of peace, joy, love and reconciliation wherever they live.

On behalf of the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon, Bishop Mbarga of Ebolowa thanked the young organisers, volunteers and benefactors whose commitment contributed to the success of the national gathering.

The celebration concluded with the performance of the official World Youth Day theme song, followed by the apostolic blessing imparted by Archbishop Bettencourt together with the bishops, sending the young participants home renewed in faith and mission. **Vatican News**

A dream takes shape

The road to the first Malaysia Pastoral Convention has been a decade-long pilgrimage of prayer, listening and collaboration. From a bold vision in 2016 to a nationwide journey of discernment, that shared pilgrimage now culminates in MPC2026 in Sibü, Sarawak, where the Church in Malaysia will gather to listen to the Holy Spirit and discern together the next chapter of its mission.



Malaysian Catholic Clergy Assembly in 2018.

Richard Chia

Every significant journey begins with a vision. For the Malaysia Pastoral Convention (MPC2026), that vision was first articulated during the Fourth Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Convention (PMPC IV), held from October 2–5, 2016. It was there that Archbishop Emeritus John Ha proposed something unprecedented: bringing together all nine dioceses of Malaysia for a single national pastoral convention.

The proposal came at a providential moment.

For four decades, the Church in Peninsular Malaysia had been shaped by the PMPC process, while the Churches in Sabah and Sarawak had followed their own rich pastoral journeys. Although each region had developed according to its own history and context, all shared the same faith, the same mission and, increasingly, the same pastoral challenges. The time had come to move beyond regional conversations and begin discerning together as one Malaysian Church.

PMPC IV had already affirmed the Bumiputera character of the Malaysian Church and recognised the need to build stronger bridges between the Churches of Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak. The bishops embraced this vision wholeheartedly. Rather than moving immediately towards a national pastoral convention, however, they chose a gradual and carefully discerned path. The first step would be to gather the country's clergy. The religious would follow. Finally, the laity — the largest part of the People of God — would join the national discernment.

It was a process that reflected the very essence of synodality: walking together, one step at a time.

The First Malaysian Catholic Clergy Assembly

Planning began soon after. During the January 2017 plenary meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei (CBCMSB), the organising and working committees were established.

The assembly adopted as its guiding theme Jesus' prayer from John's Gospel: *May they all be one, just as, Father, You are in Me, and I am in You, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. (John 17:21)*

Its objectives were strikingly simple yet profoundly important: friendship, learning and embracing pastoral challenges together.

Even before the gathering took place, the process itself reflected the spirit of synodality. Questionnaires were distributed to priests and deacons across the country, inviting them to identify pastoral concerns, suggest discussion topics and help shape the programme. Listening came before planning.

Then, from July 16–21, 2018, history was made.

Some 281 participants — bishops, priests and deacons from all nine dioceses — assembled at the MAJODI Centre in Plentong, Johor, for the first Malaysian Catholic Clergy Assembly (MCCA).

For many, it was their first experience of seeing the Malaysian Church, in all its diversity, gathered under one roof.

Priests serving in the remote interiors of Sabah and Sarawak exchanged stories with those ministering in bustling cities.

Younger clergy learnt from the pioneers who had helped shape the post-*Aggiornamento* Church. Conversations flowed effortlessly across languages and cultures, with Bahasa Malaysia, English, Chinese and Tamil heard throughout the assembly.

The week became far more than a conference.

It became an experience of communion.

At the opening Eucharist, Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Joseph Marino reminded the clergy that authentic priesthood begins with embracing one's humanity and sharing in the struggles and hopes of God's people. The Church in Malaysia, he said, must continue to be a welcoming Church, revealing the compassionate heart of Christ to all.

Bishop Bernard Paul of Malacca Johore echoed the assembly's deeper purpose. The friendships forged among the clergy, he observed, were never meant to end with fellowship alone. They were the foundation for mission. The clergy were called to witness to Christ by living unity amid diversity and becoming bridge-builders among all people of goodwill.

Bishop Richard Ng of Miri looked one step further. If the clergy had begun this national journey together, he suggested, the religious congregations should also be invited into the same process. Greater collaboration between East and West Malaysia and stronger pastoral cooperation would further strengthen the Church's common mission.

Those conversations would prove prophetic.

As delegates reflected on eight discussion questions, four broad pastoral priorities consistently emerged: **Church, Family, Society and Ecology**.

What began as workshop discussions would later become the four pillars of the first Malaysia Pastoral Convention.

Consecrated life joins the journey

The next milestone came five years later.

From June 8–11, 2023, nearly 190 religious, representing 28 congregations, gathered once again at the MAJODI Centre for the inaugural Malaysia Religious Assembly (MRA).

Recognising that many religious had seldom met outside their own congregations, the organisers first hosted an online gathering a month earlier. Before discussing pastoral priorities, participants simply got to know one another. Relationships, after all, are the foundation of collaboration.

The assembly reflected on the same four pastoral priorities identified during the Clergy Assembly — Church, Family, Society and Ecology — ensuring continuity in the national discernment process.

Opening the assembly, Bishop Sebastian Francis, then President of the CBCMSB, situated the gathering within the wider vision of a synodal Church. The MRA, he explained, was not merely another conference but part of a new way of being Church, where bishops, clergy, religious and laity journey together as the People of God, sharing responsibility for communion, mission and service under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Although the term Conversation in the Spirit would later become widely associated with the Synod on Synodality, the Malaysian Church had already begun cultivating that same

culture of prayerful listening, respectful dialogue and communal discernment through these national assemblies.

Yet the assembly's greatest gift was found not only in its presentations but in the encounters themselves.

Religious from Sabah, Sarawak and Peninsular Malaysia discovered one another's ministries, shared pastoral experiences and forged friendships that transcended geography, language and congregational identity. Many spoke of a renewed appreciation for their vocation, a deeper commitment to collaborative ministry and a stronger sense of belonging to one Malaysian Church.

The assembly concluded by producing a comprehensive reflective report outlining the distinctive contribution of consecrated life to the four pastoral priorities of Church, Family, Society and Ecology. That report would become an important resource in preparing for the Malaysia Pastoral Convention.

Voices from the Malaysia Religious Assembly

The spirit of the assembly was perhaps best captured in the reflections of its participants.

La Salle Brother Peter Foo, FSC, described the gathering as a rare opportunity to learn from religious serving throughout Malaysia, particularly in Sabah and Sarawak. Inspired by the conversations on ecology and the deep sharing within his small group, he returned home determined to translate those insights into practical action, one small step at a time.

The Sisters of St Francis of Sarawak reflected that the assembly had deepened their gratitude for their religious vocation while challenging them to become like the Good Samaritan — stopping, noticing and accompanying those who are wounded. The true spirit of the MRA, they said, would only come alive when compassion was translated into concrete action.

For Sr Nora Gomes, FMM, the gathering broadened her appreciation of religious life beyond the boundaries of her own congregation. She described it as a transformative experience that reaffirmed the importance of collaborative missionary work and strengthened the bonds of communion through mutual prayer and support.

Bro Peter Kolandaisamy, FSG, spoke of experiencing the unity of the Church tangibly as nearly 200 religious from 28 congregations, together with bishops and archbishops, gathered as one family. For him, the assembly became a celebration of listening, learning and walking together with renewed purpose.

Fr Giovanni Chrysostom Sugau, CSE, echoed that sentiment. Meeting religious from every part of the country broadened his perspective and helped him appreciate the many ways different congregations respond to today's pastoral challenges. Friendships formed during those few days, he remarked, had made distance "just a number."

Preparing the whole Church

By the end of 2023, the foundations had been carefully laid. The clergy had discerned together. The religious had found a common voice. The four pastoral priorities had been identified.

Only one step remained.

The journey now had to be entrusted to the whole People of God, especially the laity, whose lived experience would enrich the national discernment process.

The dream, first articulated in 2016, was no longer just a vision. It had become a shared journey that united bishops, clergy, religious and laity across Malaysia. After years of prayer, dialogue and discernment, the Church now stood on the threshold of a defining moment in its history.

In September 2026, the People of God would gather in Sibü for the first Malaysia Pastoral Convention — not merely to hold another assembly, but to listen together to the Holy Spirit, discern God's call and renew the Church's mission as one.

With this chapter, we conclude the historical narrative tracing the Catholic Church's journey in Malaysia towards the first Malaysia Pastoral Convention (MPC2026).

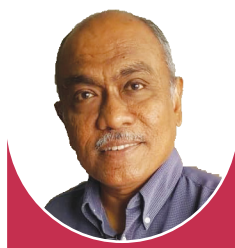
All historical information in this series has been taken from various sources.



Malaysia Religious Assembly in 2023.



For some time now, one of the main concerns of the Church has been the family. No one can deny that the nature and reality of the family have changed rapidly. This has led to "...new relationships, new couples, new civil unions and new marriages, creating family situations which are complex and problematic for the Christian life" (Directory for Catechesis, 233). In the face of these situations, it is all the more important for parents to play a crucial role in transmitting the Faith to their children. After all, they are their children's first catechists or primary faith educators. In fact, the educational task of parents is not limited to catechesis alone. It extends to the education of their children as a whole.



Echoing the Faith

Dr Steven Selvaraju

The educational task of the Christian family

Parents have to take on the task and to do their best to help that child live a fully human life. The document adds that, "The role of parents as educators is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their failure in it" (CF, 36).

It means that the right and duty of parents to give education is original and primary in comparison to the educational role of others (such as teachers, catechists, etc.). It is irreplaceable and inalienable, and cannot be entirely delegated to others or usurped by others. In other words, parents have been appointed by God Himself as the first and principal educators of their children, and their right is completely inalienable.

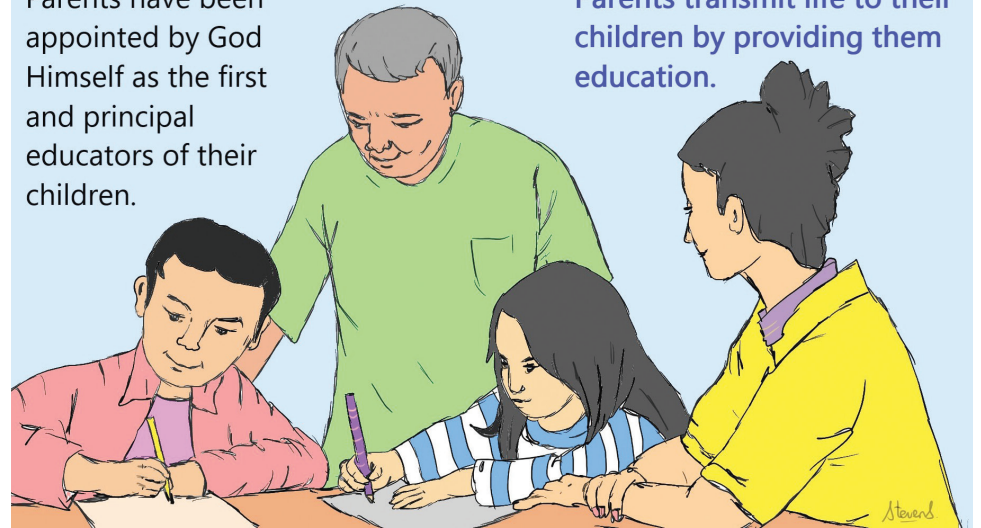
Educating in the essential values of human life

An important aspect of educating their children means that, even in the face of daily challenges, parents must trustingly and courageously train their children in the essential values of human life. Children must grow up with a correct attitude with regard to material goods, by adopting a simple lifestyle and being fully convinced that "man is more precious for what he is than for what he has" (FC, 36). In a society filled with tensions and conflicts and various kinds of individualism and selfishness, they must be taught the meaning of the sense of true justice, which leads to the respect for the personal dignity of each individual and also a sense of true love, understood as sincere care and service to others, especially the poorest and those in most need.

The family is the first and fundamental school of self-giving

As a community of love, the principle that guides it and makes it grow is self-giving. The self-giving that inspires the love of husband and wife for each other is the model and norm for the self-giving that must be seen and practised in relationships between family members and the different generations living together in the family. In fact, the communion and sharing that are part of everyday life in the home, in times of joy and difficulty, are the most concrete and effective pedagogy for the active,

Parents have been appointed by God Himself as the first and principal educators of their children.



Parents transmit life to their children by providing them education.

responsible and fruitful inclusion of the children in society and in the world.

Basic right and duty regarding sex education

Education in love as self-giving is also the indispensable factor for parents to give their children clear and prudent sex education. Sex education, which is a basic right and duty of parents, must always be carried out under their attentive guidance, whether at home or in educational centres, including schools. In this regard, the Church reaffirms the law of subsidiarity, which the school is bound to observe when it cooperates in sex education, by entering into the same spirit that animates the parents.

Relations with other educating agents

While the family is the primary educator, it is not the only and exclusive educating community. Parents have to collaborate with other agents of education. All these agents are necessary, even though each can and should play its part in accordance with the special competence and contribution it can provide. The educational role of the Christian family therefore has a very important place in organic educational work in society. This involves cooperation between parents, the various educational groups and institutions in society.

The right of parents to choose an education in conformity with their

religious faith must be guaranteed too. But corresponding to their right, parents have a serious duty to commit themselves totally to a cordial and active relationship with the teachers and the school authorities. In case ideologies opposed to the Christian faith are taught in the schools, the family must join with other families and with all their strength and with wisdom, help the young not to depart from the faith.

Conclusion

For Christian parents, the mission to educate has its source in the Sacrament of Marriage, which gives parents the dignity and vocation of being educators. So important is the educational ministry of parents that St Thomas of Aquinas has no hesitation in comparing it with the ministry of priests: "Some only propagate and guard spiritual life by a spiritual ministry: this is the role of the sacrament of Orders; others do this for both corporal and spiritual life, and this is brought about by the sacrament of marriage, by which a man and a woman join to beget offspring and bring them up to worship God."

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To educate is to transmit life

The document, *Familiaris Consortio* (FC), on *The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World* published in 1981, following the 1980 Synod of Bishops on the family, highlights the educative task of the Christian family. According to the document, the family has four general tasks to fulfil. These are: forming a community of persons, serving life, participating in the development of society, and sharing in the life and mission of the Church (FC, 36).

In this article, we will focus on the second task, that is, serving life, since the area of education falls under this category. Within this task, there are two aspects to consider, namely, the transmission of life and education.

Transmission of Life

The fundamental role of the family is to serve life, namely, to transmit by procreation the divine image from person to person. However, the gift of conjugal love is not restricted only to the procreation of children. It is expanded and enriched by "all those fruits of physical, moral and spiritual life" which the father and mother are called to hand on to their children, and, through the children, to the Church and the world (FC, 36). It includes the giving of education to their children. In other words, parents transmit life to their children by providing them with education.

Education

The task of giving education to their children is rooted in the primary vocation of married couples to participate in God's creative activity (CF, 36). Every child has, within himself or herself, the potential [vocation] for growth and development.

Can someone touched by a miracle still go astray?

The extraordinary story behind a Vatican-recognised miracle raises a question few of us have probably stopped to ask.

For more than a decade, doctors, theologians and Vatican officials examined the medical records of a baby born in Rhode Island in 2007. They interviewed witnesses, scrutinised expert testimony and wrestled with a question the Church never takes lightly: Had God worked a miracle?

Last year, the Vatican concluded that He had. The baby's remarkable recovery after suffering severe oxygen deprivation at birth was formally recognised as the miracle attributed to the intercession of the Spanish priest Fr Salvador Valera Parra, paving the way for his beatification.

Recently, however, that same child —

now 19 years old — made headlines for a very different reason. Tyquan Johnson has been charged in connection with a shooting in Newport, Rhode Island, in which two men were injured. Police allege the attack was targeted rather than random. Johnson, who was later arrested in Virginia, denies the allegations, which have yet to be tested in court.

It is difficult to read those two chapters of the same life without feeling a certain unease. We instinctively want them to fit together, as though a miracle should determine everything that follows. If God intervened so dramatically at the beginning of this young man's life, shouldn't the story have unfolded differently?

It is an understandable expectation. We like stories with tidy endings. Yet the

Gospels rarely work that way. Ten lepers were healed, but only one returned to thank Jesus. Peter witnessed miracle after miracle, yet still denied his Lord when fear overtook him. Miracles changed lives, but they never removed human freedom.

Perhaps we sometimes expect miracles to do what they were never meant to do. When the Church investigates a miracle, it asks a specific question: Did something happen here that points beyond the limits of medical or scientific explanation? If the answer is yes, it says something extraordinary about God's action in that moment. It does not guarantee what happens next.

That may be less comforting than we would like. We often want miracles to function as guarantees — as though divine intervention automatically secures a life of

holiness or happiness. Christianity offers something both more hopeful and more demanding. God gives grace, but He never overrides our freedom. Every person must still choose, day by day, how to respond to that grace.

Perhaps that is why this story lingers. Not because it casts doubt on miracles, but because it reminds us that even the most extraordinary encounter with God does not exempt us from the lifelong work of conversion.

A miracle reveals God's power and love at a particular moment in time. The rest of the story is still being written — through every choice, every failure, every act of repentance and every fresh beginning. And that, perhaps, is the greatest miracle of all: that God's grace never abandons us, no matter which chapter we are in. **Aleteia**

A shepherd faithful to the last moment

Fr Nicholas Ong (1950 – 2026)

By Joseph Tek Choon Yee

On August 3, Fr Nicholas Ong Se Tshin of the Diocese of Sandakan returned to the Father at the age of 76, after nearly 48 years of priestly service.

His passing brings sorrow, but even deeper gratitude for a life poured out in faithful service. Fr Nicholas did not merely spend almost half a century as a priest; he inhabited the priesthood with conviction, humanity, perseverance and an unmistakable sense of mission.

His greatest legacy lives not in titles or offices, but in people: seminarians he formed, parishioners whose faith he strengthened, young people he inspired, families whose homes he entered, migrants he welcomed, and communities that learned through him to recognise Christ in one another.

A son of Sabah answers the call

Born in Sandakan on Jan 5, 1950, Nicholas Ong studied at St Mary's School. The building, later known as the Fr Mulder Catechetical Centre, within the cathedral compound, had once housed his primary school. The boy who first learned within those grounds would later return to the same parish compound, kneel before the altar and offer his life to God.

Fr Nicholas was one of seven children of Daniel Ong King Chai and Francesca Funk Sheet Fong. At home, his parents helped shape the faith, values and character of Nicholas and his siblings. The younger of two brothers, he was remembered by his brother Benno as gentle, loving and unfailingly kind, even towards animals. Their mother often recalled that, as a baby, Nicholas clasped his hands as though in prayer, prompting relatives to remark that he might one day become a priest.

By Primary Three, Nicholas already sensed God's call. Although his father initially hoped he would one day take over the family timber business, Nicholas chose a different path. What began as a childhood stirring gradually matured into a lifelong vocation.

His decision carried historical significance. In 1971, as foreign missionaries were being expelled and Sabah's Catholic communities faced an uncertain pastoral future, Nicholas entered seminary formation. After studies

in Singapore and Penang, he was ordained on Oct 3, 1978, at St Mary's Church, becoming the third local priest.

When missionary voices were gradually falling silent, a local son stepped forward. His ordination became part of the maturing of Sabah's local Church.



Formed to form others

Fr Nicholas served in parishes across Sabah before pursuing postgraduate studies in Christian spirituality at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, California. Upon returning, he helped form future priests at St Peter's College in Kuching. He also served in various diocesan bodies, contributed regularly to *Catholic Sabah*, was chaplain to the Carmelite Sisters and became the first Vicar General of the Diocese of Sandakan.

Yet titles never defined him. His priesthood was most clearly seen when he stood at the altar, opened the Scriptures, entered a family home or simply sat among the people entrusted to his care.

The Eucharist and the fire of the Word

At the heart of Fr Nicholas' priesthood was the Eucharist. He believed that a community celebrating the "Sacrament of sacraments" with faith must itself be transformed. Grace received at the altar had to flow towards the poor, the marginalised, creation and the practical proclamation of the Gospel.

For him, the Eucharist had to become compassion; Scripture had to become action; worship had to become welcome.

He prepared his homilies with great care, always searching for fresh ways to connect Scripture with daily life. Parishioners came not merely to hear his homilies but to experience them. His resonant voice, expressive gestures and the occasional emphatic thump upon the ambo made his preaching instantly recognisable. Beneath the passion, however, lay a single desire: that the Word of God would awaken hearts, challenge complacency and transform lives.

When cancer treatment eventually weakened his voice, the thunder softened, but the conviction behind every word remained undiminished.

Through Words of Spirit and Life, his reflections in English, Bahasa Malaysia and Hakka reached far beyond parish boundaries. His published homily collections for Liturgical Years A, B and C continue to nourish personal prayer and parish reflection, extending his ministry of the Word long after they were first preached.

A shepherd among his people

Appointed rector of Holy Trinity Church, Tawau, in April 2008, Fr Nicholas nurtured a parish marked by prayer, fellowship, inclusion and service.

He championed Basic Ecclesial Communities because he believed a parish should be far more than a Sunday congregation. By 2018, he estimated that he had personally visited more than 400 BECs. A shepherd, he believed, must go where the people live.

His pastoral vision also embraced those easily overlooked. Holy Trinity opened its premises to educate migrant children. Broken chairs, damaged doors and blocked drains never discouraged him; he regarded them as a small price to pay for a child's education.

Neither did he see young people merely as the Church of tomorrow. When trusted, accompanied and challenged, he believed they could become agents of renewal today.

Faith beneath the stars and at the dining table

Fr Nicholas' fascination with astronomy and cosmology lifted his gaze towards the heavens, while his love for creation kept his feet firmly on the earth. Through star-gazing programmes, he invited others to glimpse the majesty of the Creator through the vastness of the universe.

Inspired by *Laudato Si'* and the call to care for our common home, he also reminded people that creation begins with everyday choices.

One YouTube reflection from 2021 remains especially memorable. Speaking gently about eating only vegetables every Tuesday and growing okra, chillies, papaya and spinach, Fr Nicholas demonstrated how care for creation could begin around the dining table and in one's own garden.

That was unmistakably Fr Nicholas. He had a gift for bringing profound theology into



ordinary life, showing that faith is lived one meal, one garden and one faithful step at a time.

Suffering without surrender

In 2014, Fr Nicholas was diagnosed with cancer of the nose. Treatment forced him to slow down, but illness never extinguished his desire to serve. If anything, it clarified what mattered most: loving God and neighbour, proclaiming the Gospel, building communities, serving the poor and caring for creation.

During his 38th sacerdotal anniversary in 2016, he reminded parishioners that "priests are also human beings." Behind the vestments stood a man who could become tired, unwell and discouraged, and who also depended on the prayers of God's people.

It was then that he spoke the words that would become the defining refrain of his priesthood:

"God is my everything ... I will serve Him to my last moment."

Spoken a decade before his passing, those words were tested through suffering and ultimately fulfilled through a lifetime of faithful service.

His final homily

A priest's final homily is not delivered from a pulpit. It is proclaimed through the life he leaves behind.

Fr Nicholas' final homily reminds us that the Word must become life, the Eucharist must become service, the parish must become family, the forgotten must find welcome, and suffering need never have the final word.

Now, in the quiet dawn of eternity, that faithful priest has completed his earthly ministry. The hands that raised the Sacred Host, opened the Scriptures and blessed God's people have completed their work. He walked through illness without surrender, served through weakness with steadfast faith, and remained beside his flock until the very end.

Rest now, Fr Nicholas.

You were a son of Sabah who answered God's call when the local Church most needed shepherds of its own. You became a priest of the Eucharist, a preacher of the Word, a builder of communities, a formator of future priests, a friend of migrants and the poor, a guide to the young and a gentle guardian of God's creation.

You served faithfully.

You loved generously.

You remained at your post until your last moment.

May the Christ whom you held so reverently in the Eucharist now hold you in His eternal embrace.

"Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord."

May the soul of Fr Nicholas Ong Se Tshin, and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.



When all we could do was pray

It started with a YouTube recommendation. One apologetics video became three, three became ten. Before I knew it, I was spending hours listening to debates about Catholicism. One criticism surfaced so often: “Catholics pray to dead people.”

Every time I heard it, I found myself thinking, “Hellooo! That’s not what we’re doing at all!”

If we want to get technical about it, there are of course biblical reasons why we Catholics ask the saints to intercede for us. The Catholic Bible includes books like 2 Maccabees which offer a deeper understanding of prayer beyond this life. Jesus Himself reminds us that He “is not the God of the dead, but of the living” in Matthew 22:32, and the Book of Revelation gives us a beautiful image of the saints in heaven presenting the prayers of the people before God. Together, these passages reveal a simple truth — those who have died in Christ are not dead but very much alive in Him.

Some Christians read a Bible with seven fewer books than the Catholic canon, so perhaps this understanding isn’t as clear as it could be. But this isn’t really about proving anyone wrong or winning a theological debate.

Because if you asked me why I believe in the intercession of the saints, I wouldn’t start with Scripture. Instead, I’d have a hundred stories to share, and I would start with the story of my darling nephew.

Years ago, my sister was expecting her first child. What should have been one of the happiest seasons of our lives quickly became one of the hardest. During a



A Blessed Life

Tianne Pereira

routine check-up, doctors told my sister the baby was not developing normally. Hoping it was a mistake, they sought a second opinion. The second doctor said the same thing. Our hearts sank.

I remember watching my sister and her husband somehow remain so brave. They smiled when I knew they were terrified. Watching my sister carry that worry with such courage broke my heart. Then there was my dad. Every

time he spoke about my sister or the baby, his voice cracked. Sometimes he couldn’t even finish a sentence. Seeing the man who had always been our rock suddenly so vulnerable reminded me just how deeply love can hurt. All we could do was pray. Not because prayer was our last resort, but because it was our only source of comfort.

At that time, I didn’t have a particular devotion to St Anthony. However, I volunteered regularly at Samaritan Hope in Pudu, and every day, Philip (my now-husband) and I would stop by the church to pray.

Without really planning it, I found myself asking St Anthony to pray for my sister and her unborn baby. Day after day. Quietly and faithfully. I did invoke the intercessions of many other saints too, but then came June 13, the Feast of St Anthony. I attended the Mass carrying the weight and fear our family was quietly carrying. I don’t think I’ve ever prayed that intensely before. I remember tears, trembling and a heart that simply cried out, “Please... please I’m begging... help!”

Ten days later, on June 23, my nephew was born. Healthy, beautiful and perfect.

Not a single sign of the abnormalities the doctors had warned us about. To this day, I still get emotional just thinking about it.

Let me be clear, I am in no way saying my prayers brought about this miracle. They didn’t. Everyone in the family prayed. Countless hearts were lifted to God on behalf of my sister and her baby. And no, I do not believe it was St Anthony or any other saint who answered those prayers. It was God. God alone is the source of every miracle, every healing and every blessing. But do I believe the saints, particularly St Anthony, had something to do with it? With all my heart!

I believe they faithfully interceded for us before God. Just as I ask my family and friends on earth to pray for me, I asked a friend in heaven to do the same. St Anthony didn’t replace God or perform the miracle himself. He simply joined his prayers to ours before the throne of the One who alone has the power to answer.

Today, St Anthony is a treasured part of my faith journey and family. He is the patron saint of both my husband and my son, and every June 13 reminds me of the day God strengthened my faith through the prayers of His faithful servants.

People often misconstrue that the saints divert our attention away from Jesus. Well, my experience has been the complete opposite. The saints have never distracted me but always led me closer to Him.

They are like stained glass windows. You don’t admire its beauty by stopping merely at the glass; you look through it



(Church of St Anthony facebook)

and see the light shine beyond. Every saint reflects the beauty of Christ. Every saint desires that we know, love, and follow Jesus more closely.

I write this for anyone carrying a burden that feels too heavy to bear alone. Whether you’re waiting for a diagnosis or your family is falling apart. If you’re praying for a child, grieving someone you love, struggling with your faith or simply wondering if God still hears you. Don’t be afraid to ask the saints to pray with you. They are not dead. They are alive!

And if my faith journey has taught me anything, it’s that heaven is far closer than we dare imagine. God, in His goodness, has given us a family that stretches beyond this earth, a family that prays with us, walks with us and leads us closer to Him. Because no one who walks towards God ever has to walk alone.

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

I have a new hobby. It’s writing postcards. Up to my mid-20s, I was a prolific letter writer. When the cost of telephone calls came down, I slowed down and stopped, but I continued to send greeting cards long after it was no longer fashionable.

The new hobby is not my idea. I responded to Fahri Azzat’s Facebook invitation to send him a postcard. Fahri is a highly respected lawyer who takes up public interest cases from time to time. He is also the author of a few books. I followed him on Facebook for a couple of years before finally meeting him at his book launch last year. I felt (and still feel) a connection with Fahri partly because his late father Datuk Azzat Kamaluddin was a member of the Securities Commission Malaysia at the time I was working there years ago.

I was so happy to meet both father and son at Fahri’s book launch last year, but the elder sadly passed away a few months after. I am sharing this backstory because these emotions matter in my response to Fahri’s open invitation in June.

Fahri posted on Facebook weekly when I first followed him — I enjoyed his observation of life, and he’s both humble and funny. When he stopped posting weekly after his father’s passing in May 2025, I noticed his absence and waited for him.



Connecting the Dots

Ann Teoh

In June this year, when he issued his open invitation about postcards, I sent him one. I also decided to send a card to my sister in Tokyo to surprise her. When I received Fahri’s reply some weeks later, it was such a pleasure (and a shock) to see his handwriting as I have only read his thoughts in print fonts. You never think about

it until you see it.

Let’s say I enjoy the process so much that I want to write to a few others. Who wouldn’t be happy to get a postcard among bills and flyers?

Recently, while looking for some papers for my son (at his request), I found the letter I wrote him in September 2018. It was filed among his papers. The emotions I felt that night writing it at his London flat came flooding back. Mother and son had never been apart for more than a week at that time. In the two pages, one foolscap sheet, I expressed my love and hopes for him, and how proud I was of him. I

also told him how amazed and grateful I was that God chose me to be his mother. Reading my thoughts and my feelings in my handwriting eight years later was an amazing experience.

Letters are different from emails. I love technology, and thank God for Facetime, especially when my son was 10,000 km away, but there are two aspects in all communications: the content and the medium. Marshal McLuhan said the medium is the message. The medium may sometimes be as important as the content, as our senses take in the message differently.

When Fr Hung Pham SJ expounded on *Sensing Humanity, Sensing the Divine* over three evenings at the Church of St Francis Xavier, Petaling Jaya, recently, he encouraged us to be aware of our senses as they are a gateway to our emotions and the movements inside of us, to ultimately sense the divine.

Back to Fahri, I wrote to him in friendship, and with gratitude for his writings, and also for opening a new door for me. By responding to his invitation, I discovered more of myself.

Fr Hung said, “The more high-tech you are, the more high-touch you ought to be.” I love my video calls, my WhatsApp,

and my social media, but letters and cards are “high-touch” because handwriting is a different type of personal.

Reading for information and reading for pleasure and reflection are different, although not mutually exclusive. For spiritual material, I prefer physical books and my bookmarks.

My bookmarks are receipts to exhibitions, old flight tickets, tickets to shows, and even luggage tags. When I see my bookmarks, I remember with joy and gratitude the people, places, and events associated with them. Thus, my pleasure in reading a physical book is often doubled.

E-books are excellent because I can reference online documents immediately. I get e-books or read online because they are efficient, but I won’t give up my physical books and magazines.

Back to my new hobby, the wait for the postcards, or letters, to reach your friends, and anticipating their replies, is part of the pleasure. Maybe you should surprise someone with a card.

Ann lives in Petaling Jaya. She believes we will see God’s lacework of truth, beauty and goodness when we connect the dots He gives us.

Postcards and the art of reading books



Fr Leonard Lexson

Can a funeral Mass be held on a Sunday?

A Funeral Mass may be celebrated on most Sundays, but the Church's universal liturgical law excludes certain days of higher liturgical rank. In practice, however, most parishes generally avoid scheduling Funeral Masses on Sundays for pastoral and practical reasons.

The relevant norms are found in Articles 380–381 of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), under "Masses for the Dead".

GIRM 380 states: *"Among the Masses for the Dead, the Funeral Mass holds first place. It may be celebrated on any day except for Solemnities that are Holydays of Obligation, Thursday of Holy Week, the Paschal Triduum, and the Sundays of Advent, Lent, and Easter, with due regard also for all the other requirements of the norm of the law."*

GIRM 381 states: *"A Mass for the Dead, on receiving the news of a death, for the final burial, or the first anniversary, may be celebrated even on days within the Octave of the Nativity of the Lord (Christmas), on days when an Obligatory Memorial occurs, and on weekdays other than Ash Wednesday or the weekdays of Holy Week."*

Other Masses for the Dead may also be celebrated on weekdays in Ordinary Time when Optional Memorials occur or when the Office is of the weekday, provided the Mass is genuinely offered for the deceased.

Sundays when a funeral Mass is not permitted

A funeral Mass is not permitted on:

1. Solemnities that are also Holy Days of Obligation, such as Christmas, Epiphany, Pentecost, Most Holy Trinity, Corpus Christi, the Assumption, Ascension, All Saints and Christ the King.
2. The Paschal Triduum: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday.
3. Sundays of Advent.

4. Sundays of Lent.

5. Sundays of the Easter Season.

On these days, although the Funeral Mass cannot be celebrated, the Church's funeral rites outside Mass may still take place according to the funeral ritual and particular law. These may include the Liturgy of the Word, prayers of commendation and the committal rite. A Memorial Mass may be celebrated at a later appropriate time.

Sundays when a funeral Mass is permitted

Outside these excluded days, universal liturgical law permits the celebration of a Funeral Mass, including on Sundays in Ordinary Time, provided that no higher-ranking solemnity or feast takes precedence.

However, the fact that something is permitted by liturgical law does not always mean that it is the normal pastoral practice.

Most parishes avoid Sunday Funeral Masses because Sunday Eucharist already holds a unique place in the life of the Church. The Lord's Day is the primordial feast day, the weekly celebration of Christ's Resurrection, and the foundation of the Church's liturgical life.

In many parishes, especially where one priest serves several communities, Sunday schedules are already demanding. The availability of liturgical ministers, musicians, parish personnel and other support teams may also be limited. In addition, cemeteries and crematoria may not operate on Sundays, or may involve additional costs and logistical difficulties.

Thus, while the law permits Funeral Masses on many Sundays, pastoral prudence often leads parishes to schedule them on other suitable days unless there are serious pastoral reasons.

Why are funeral Masses restricted during certain liturgical seasons?

The Church restricts Funeral Masses

during certain seasons and days in order to protect the integrity of the mystery being celebrated by the whole Church.

The liturgical year follows a theological journey: Advent focuses on expectation and preparation for Christ's coming; Lent calls the faithful to conversion and repentance; the Paschal Triduum celebrates the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ; and Easter proclaims the joy of new life.

The hierarchy of liturgical days ensures that these mysteries are celebrated with their proper emphasis and continuity. If Masses for the Dead could freely replace the liturgy of these days, the Church's communal journey through the mysteries of Christ would be interrupted.

As Fr Edward McNamara explains in a discussion on this matter, "every day of the year is somebody's anniversary." If every anniversary Mass or Mass for the Dead were permitted without restriction, the Church's liturgical rhythm would constantly be displaced by individual intentions.

The ranking of liturgical days therefore serves a pastoral and theological purpose: it preserves the Church's common prayer and allows the faithful to enter together into the unfolding mystery of Christ.

The restriction applies specifically to Funeral Masses, not to the Church's prayer for the dead. The Church continues to accompany the deceased and their families through the funeral rites and through prayer, while safeguarding the central mysteries of the liturgical year.

The difference between a Mass for the Dead and the Sunday Eucharist

A Requiem Mass (Mass for the Dead) and the Sunday Eucharist are the same Eucharistic celebration in substance. Both make present Christ's one sacrifice and participate in the Paschal Mystery of His Death and Resurrection.

The difference is not that one is more truly Eucharistic than the other, but rather the liturgical orientation and pastoral emphasis of each celebration.

The Sunday Eucharist is the weekly celebration of the Lord's Resurrection and the gathering of the whole People of God. It celebrates the Church as the Body of Christ assembled around the Word and the Eucharist. Through its prayers, readings and liturgical texts, it unfolds the mystery of Christ throughout the liturgical year and sanctifies time itself.

The Requiem Mass, while still a celebration of the Paschal Mystery, has a more specific orientation. The Church gathers to commend a deceased member to God's mercy, to pray for their purification and eternal rest, and to comfort those who mourn with the hope of the Resurrection.

The liturgical texts of the Requiem focus especially on themes of death, judgment, mercy, resurrection and eternal life. It expresses the Church's role as intercessor for her members who have died, within the communion of saints.

Therefore, the Sunday Eucharist celebrates Christ's Resurrection as the weekly feast of the entire Church, while the Requiem Mass applies that same saving mystery in a particular way to the deceased and their loved ones.

Both celebrations proclaim the same hope: that through Christ's Death and Resurrection, death is not the end, but the passage to eternal life.

Fr Leonard is the parish priest of the Church of the Assumption. He also serves as the Ecclesiastical Assistant to the Kuala Lumpur Archdiocesan Liturgy Commission and is the Chairperson of the Liturgical Music Committee of the Episcopal Regional Commission for Liturgy for Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei.



Fr Ron Rolheiser

When the bloom has left the rose

There's a difference between being in bloom and being fruitful. Take a flower for example.

It begins as a wee bud, hardly noticeable, and eventually in full bloom grows into a beautiful flower. In full bloom it's very noticeable. This is its optimal moment of beauty, of being admired, of glory. But this isn't its final purpose nor indeed its fully mature moment. At this point it is not yet fully fruitful, albeit it's bloom is beautiful, and is giving something special to the world. But it only becomes fully fruitful later, when its bloom has withered as it is dying. That's when the flower gives off its seed and spreads its seeds for new life.

There's a life lesson in this which we struggle to understand and accept. We understand the bloom, but not the withering. We accept the bloom, but not the withering. We find it almost impossible to believe that our most life-giving moments might come after the bloom, in the withering of the bloom.

We can see the primal example of this in Jesus. During the peak of His ministry when He is very popular, doing miracles, drawing crowds of thousands, and people are pressing round just to touch Him, His ministry is in full bloom. He is fruitful and is already giving life to others, but not nearly in as deep a way as

when His ministry withers, when the crowds abandon Him, when He is humiliated and scorned in His passion, and when He dies helpless, abandoned by most everyone.

Like a flower, in His dying He spread the seeds for new life in a deeper way than He could when, metaphorically, He was in full bloom.

The renowned mystic John of the Cross employs this metaphor at the heart of his spirituality. He writes: *"The deepest centre of an object we take to signify the furthest point attainable by that object's being and power and operation and movement."* For him, unlike how we normally conceive of this, our deepest centre is not the virgin spot inside our heart and soul. No. For John of the Cross our deepest centre is the furthest point of natural growth (aided by grace) that anything or anybody can reach in this life.

For a flower, as we saw, this is not its bloom, rather it's when the flower gives off its seed in its withering. The same is true for us as humans; our deepest centre is not our bloom, namely, the beauty and energy of our youth. Rather, our deepest centre is the fullest maturity our soul can attain in this life, and normally we reach this sometime after our physical bloom has begun to wither. This may sound somewhat morbid, but viewed in

a deeper way, it's anything but that. Allow me an example:

Take our normal human sexual development. What's its deepest centre?

Its deepest centre is not its bloom, namely, that time in our lives when our bodies are most attractive and our desire for sexual intercourse is the strongest. Nor is it even after we have given birth to new life through sexual union, albeit that is a wonderful fruitfulness and one of the ultimate intentions of God and nature in creating us as sexual beings. That's a deep centre though not sexuality's deepest centre.

It is not good for the man to be alone! Our sexuality is meant to take us beyond our aloneness. Thus, our sexuality relentlessly drives us outward, beyond ourselves, towards community of life with others. But aloneness is not easy to overcome. We can be very lonely, even while having sex. As a married colleague once shared with me: "What's lonelier than sleeping alone? Sleeping alone when you're not sleeping alone." Also, when we are still developing in our sexuality, sexuality's spontaneous urge is to possess beauty rather than admire it – and this still leaves us alone.

What takes us beyond our aloneness? Standing before beauty and giving it the

pure gaze of admiration. At that moment our ego no longer separates us from union with others, and for that moment we are no longer alone. We have reached our deepest centre.

Our deepest centre as a sexual person is when we can look at someone else (for example, a child or a grandchild) and give him or her the pure gaze of admiration. It is when we can look at energy and beauty in full bloom and admire and bless them by seeing them as God saw creation at its origins: *It's good! It's very good!* In the gaze of admiration, we bless creation in the same manner as God blessed Jesus at His baptism with the words: *"This is my beloved child in whom I take delight!"*

When we are in full bloom we are admired; but we only fully overcome our aloneness when we stand in admiration of the energy and beauty of others and of creation and spontaneously utter words of blessing.

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

LITTLE CATHOLIC'S CORNER

Dear children,

Have you ever been so happy that you wanted to sing? That is how Mary felt after the Angel Gabriel told her she would be the mother of Jesus.

Mary quickly went to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who was also expecting a special baby — John

the Baptist. When Mary greeted Elizabeth, the baby inside Elizabeth leaped for joy! Elizabeth said, "Blessed are you among women!"

Mary was filled with joy and praised God with a beautiful song called the Magnificat. She thanked God for His love and for keeping His promises.

On the Feast of the Assumption,

we celebrate the wonderful gift Jesus gave Mary — at the end of her earthly life, she was taken up into heaven, body and soul, to be with Him forever. Mary is our loving Mother in heaven who always listens to our prayers.

Make a Praise Jar

- Find a jar or small box and

decorate it.

- Write one thing you are thankful for each day and place it inside.
- On Sunday, read your notes with your family and thank God for His blessings.

Like Mary, let us fill our hearts with joy and praise God!

Love, Auntie C





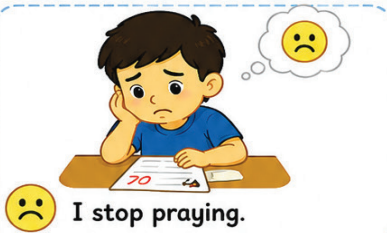
What Would You Do?



Circle the best response.

1

You prayed for good marks but didn't get them.



I stop praying.



I keep trusting Jesus.

2

Your friend is sick.



I pray for them.



I ignore them.

3

Mum says you have to wait.



I complain.



I wait patiently.

TEST 70

THEME:

Great faith keeps trusting.







DECORATE MARY'S CROWN!



Colour Mary's crown and decorate it with 10 stars, flowers, hearts, or jewels.



Make it beautiful for our Queen of Heaven!

"All generations will call me blessed."
(Luke 1:48)

COMPLETE JESUS' WORDS!

Fill in the missing words from the Gospel.

O woman,

_____ is

your _____!

WORD BANK

Great

Faith

Love

Joy



YOUTH

WALKING TOGETHER

First JAYA gathering inspires young adults through Ignatian Leadership

Kenneth Jeremiah, MAGIS Malaysia

PETALING JAYA: Even before Jesuit Father General Fr Arturo Sosa, SJ, arrived, Loyola Hall at the Church of St Francis Xavier was already buzzing with conversation and anticipation. Young adults from Malaysia, Singapore, Sabah and Penang gathered, many meeting for the first time, united by a desire to discover how Ignatian spirituality could shape the way they lead, serve and journey with others.

Held on July 18 in conjunction with Fr Arturo's Apostolic Visitation to the Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific (JCAP), the first-ever Jesuit-Affiliated Young Adult (JAYA) Gathering brought together 131 participants from across the Malaysia-Singapore (MAS) Region. Representing MAGIS Malaysia, Via Ignis—MAGIS Singapore, parish youth ministries and other Jesuit-affiliated communities, they spent the day reflecting on the theme Ignatian Leadership — leadership rooted not in status or achievement, but in discernment, humility and service.

The gathering began with prayer and fellowship before participants entered a series of "Human Library" workshops, where young leaders shared personal stories of faith, ministry and discernment. Rather than lectures, the sessions invited participants to encounter lived experiences of Ignatian leadership and reflect on how God was calling them to serve.

Among the facilitators was Arianne Arshwani Vincent of the SFX Life Teen Ministry, who encouraged fellow youth leaders who often struggle with feelings of inadequacy.

"I was inspired to reassure youth leaders that they are not alone on this journey," she said. "God tunes His instruments, but always with gentleness and never with force."

Participants later gathered in small MAGIS Circles

for Spiritual Conversation, prayerfully sharing and listening to one another's experiences as they discerned God's presence in their lives.

The highlight of the gathering was an extended dialogue with Fr Arturo Sosa, who described the event as "a convergence of aspirations and dreams" that offers hope for the future.

Acknowledging the pressures facing young people today — from rapid technological change to uncertainty about the future — he encouraged them to embrace one of the greatest gifts of Ignatian spirituality.

"Discernment is a special word," he said. "It is a spiritual practice. It is the grace to listen."

Rather than pursuing success according to the world's standards, he urged participants to cultivate hearts attentive to God's voice and direction.

During the dialogue, participants raised questions about burnout, artificial intelligence and leadership.

Responding to concerns about serving without becoming overwhelmed, Fr Arturo reminded them that Ignatian spirituality is not a shortcut to success.

"Ignatian spirituality is not a magic wand or an ideology; it is an instrument — an instrument to grow closer to Jesus."

On artificial intelligence, he shifted the focus from technology itself to human responsibility.

"The question should be: Who is using this AI?"

While AI offers immense possibilities, he said, it can never replace the uniquely human gifts of conscience, relationships, love and authentic encounter.

Reflecting on his own ministry as Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Fr Arturo said the most important responsibility of leadership is prayer.

"The most important task of the Superior General is to pray — to pray for the Society of Jesus to receive the grace to fulfil its mission."

With characteristic humour, he added that Jesus alone is the Head of the Society. The Superior General, he joked, is simply "the neck" that connects and serves the body.

The gathering concluded with the Eucharist, where Fr Arturo reflected on

the Gospel of the wheat and the weeds (Mt 13:24-43). Using the image of a mango tree, he reminded the congregation that although people may care for the tree, they cannot force it to bear fruit before its time.

Drawing the lesson together in a single word — "Wait" — he encouraged the faithful to trust God's patient work in their lives. In a world driven by instant results and quick judgments, God transforms hearts gradually, through grace, perseverance and love.

Following Mass, members of MAGIS Malaysia and MAGIS Singapore gathered in fellowship, marking the first time both communities had journeyed together in person as they look towards MAGIS 2027 in Korea.

For Fr Nalerin Erone, SJ, MAS Delegate for Vocations and Ministry to Young People and Spiritual Director of the JAYA Gathering, the event was only the beginning.

"I hope JAYA can be one of the events that will unite young people to encounter God through Ignatian spirituality," he said.

The first MAS Region JAYA Gathering ended not with every question answered, but with renewed confidence in the God who continues to lead His people. In a culture that prizes instant success, these young adults discovered a different rhythm — one rooted in discernment, patience, community and hope.



Helen Xavier

KULAI, Johor: The Church of Christ the King was filled with joy and thanksgiving as 58 candidates received the Sacrament of Confirmation during a solemn Eucharistic Celebration on Saturday, August 1 at 6.00 pm.

The Eucharistic Celebration was presided over by Bishop Bernard Paul, concelebrated by parish priest, Fr James Rajendran, with Deacon Arama Das assisting at the altar.

The confirmands represented the parish's four language-speaking communities — Bahasa Malaysia, English, Tamil and Mandarin — a beautiful reflection of the Church's unity in diversity. For a parish of approximately 400 families, having 58 candidates receive the Sacrament of Confirmation in one celebration was indeed a significant milestone and a source of great joy for the entire parish community.

A particularly heartwarming highlight of the celebration was the inclusion of three teenagers with special needs, who were lovingly prepared to receive the Sacrament alongside the other candidates. This initiative reflects the Church's journey along the synodal path of inclusiveness, where every baptised person is welcomed, valued and encouraged to participate fully in the life of the Church.

The parish's effort to embrace these teens as an integral part of the faith community was deeply appreciated by their parents, who expressed heartfelt gratitude for the opportunity given to their children. They also shared their commitment to continue bringing them to Mass regularly so that they may grow in faith and remain actively connected to the parish community.

Surrounded by their parents, sponsors, catechists, relatives and fellow parishioners, the candidates renewed their baptismal promises before receiving the sacred anointing with the Holy Chrism. It was a profound moment as they were sealed with the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and commissioned to live as faithful witnesses of Christ.

In his homily, Bishop Bernard captivated the congregation through an engaging multimedia presentation comparing the "Way of the Survivor" with the "Way of the Holy Spirit." He explained that the mentality of the world often teaches us to outwit by thinking to win, outplay by competing to win, and outlast by living only for personal success.

In contrast, the bishop reminded the confirmands that the Holy Spirit calls Christians to a different way of life — not to outwit others but to be wise with the wisdom of God; not to outplay others but to serve one another in humility and love. He challenged everyone

Say 'yes' to life, love and the Lord



Bishop Bernard Paul administering the Sacrament of Confirmation to one of the special needs teenagers during the celebration.

present to say "No" to outwit, outplay and outlast, and instead say "Yes" to Life, Love and the Lord. Encouraging the newly confirmed to persevere in their Christian journey, he concluded with a memorable message: "It is okay to fall, but rise again and finish the race. Aim to be a finisher."

The liturgy reflected the active participation of the confirmands themselves, who served as lectors, psalmists, leaders of the Prayer of the Faithful, and members of the offertory procession. Their involvement added a meaningful dimension to the celebration and demonstrated their readiness to serve within the Church.

The parish choir also deserves special commendation for leading the congregation in prayer through beautifully rendered hymns that incorporated all four languages represented in the parish. Together with the excellent accompaniment by the pianist, the liturgical music enhanced the solemnity of the celebration and flowed seamlessly throughout the Mass.

Much appreciation is also extended to the organising and preparation team whose

months of planning ensured that every aspect of the celebration proceeded smoothly and prayerfully. At the conclusion of the Mass, Bishop Bernard presented Confirmation certificates to a representative of the newly confirmed candidates on behalf of the entire group.

The celebration continued with a fellowship gathering at Porta Fidea, where members of the BECs lovingly prepared refreshments for the newly confirmed, their families, sponsors and parishioners. The gathering provided a wonderful opportunity for the parish community to celebrate together, strengthening the bonds of faith and fellowship.

As the celebration came to a close, hearts were filled with gratitude for God's abundant blessings. The Confirmation celebration was not only a joyful milestone for the 58 newly confirmed but also a beautiful witness to a parish that continues to journey together in faith, unity and inclusiveness.

May the Holy Spirit continue to guide and strengthen these young Catholics as they live out their calling to become faithful disciples of Christ, always choosing Life, Love and the Lord.

WYD Seoul 2027 Unveils official theme song

SEOUL: The local organising committee for World Youth Day (WYD) Seoul 2027 has officially released the event's theme song, *Confidite, Ego Vici Mundum* (Take Courage, I Have Conquered the World), marking one year until the global Catholic gathering in South Korea.

Key Highlights

The Song: Composed by Francis Jiyeon Kim, the song was selected from 434 global entries and approved by the Vatican. It blends contemporary Catholic music, Gospel text, and subtle Korean cultural influences.

The Launch

Unveiled via a bilingual livestream on August 3, 2026, the launch featured two music video arrangements: a classical choir/orchestral version and an accessible pop version. Here is the link: <https://www.youtube.com/@WYDSeoul2027/videos>

Multilingual Themes

Based on John 16:33, the song emphasises Christ's message of courage and light. The international version features Korean, Latin, English, Italian, French, Spanish, and Portuguese lyrics.

Next Steps

The launch marks the transition from planning to full execution. Pilgrim registration is slated to open in October 2026.

Event Dates

Diocesan gatherings will take place July 29 - August 2, 2027, followed by the main WYD Seoul event from August 3-8, 2027. This will be the second WYD in Asia (after Manila in 1995) and the first hosted in a non-Christian-majority nation.

Talk equips teens to stay safe in today's world

RAWANG: The Prison Ministry and the Catechetical Ministry of the Church of St Jude organised a session on Personal Safety for Teenagers recently.

The session featured Raymond NC Jagan, a retired Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat officer, who has extensive expertise in the Child Act as well as years of real-life experience

handling sensitive cases involving minors and families. About 50 students attended the one-and-a-half-hour programme.

During the talk, Raymond addressed several important and relevant issues affecting teenagers today, including understanding personal boundaries and consent, key Malaysian laws relating to sexual offences

involving minors, how everyday situations can lead to serious legal consequences, and the importance of making wise and respectful decisions in relationships.

The session was conducted engagingly and educationally, supported by factual evidence and real-life examples that helped students better understand the realities and dangers faced by teenagers in today's society.

His talk shed light on critical areas of child protection — from counselling to care and protection measures, investigations, arrests and proceedings, as well as offences and penalties. These themes resonate closely with the challenges and responsibilities we face daily in advocating for children's rights and protecting their welfare.

Teachers who attended the programme described the talk as "eye-opening" and highly relevant to current social challenges. They appreciated the factual approach and practical information shared during the session.

Students also responded positively, shar-

ing that the talk made them realise the importance of personal safety, both online and in everyday life. Many expressed that the session helped them better understand how to protect themselves and respect others.

The main objective of the programme was to create awareness, encourage responsible behaviour, and ensure that every teenager feels secure, respected and confident as they navigate daily life and relationships.

Parish priests, Fr Simon Labrooy and Fr Jonathan Rao, expressed their appreciation on the success of the programme and agreed that similar talks should also be organised for parents in the future. They acknowledged that such learning opportunities are equally important for parents, especially in today's rapidly changing times and social environment.

The organisers hope that programmes like this will continue to empower young people with knowledge, awareness, and confidence to make safe and responsible choices in life. **Mercy Almeida Stellus**



Raymond NC Jagan with the participants

Cardinal Langa remembered as a herald of peace

VATICAN: Pope Leo has paid tribute to Cardinal Júlio Duarte Langa, Bishop Emeritus of Xai-Xai, the Mozambican diocese he led for around 28 years. The cardinal died on August 3 at the age of 98.

In a telegram addressed to Capuchin Franciscan Archbishop Francisco Chimoio, Apostolic Administrator of the Mozambican diocese, the Pope expresses his condolences, saying he offers "spiritual closeness and condolences to the bishops of Mozambique, to the family of this beloved brother, to the diocese he served with dedication, and to the entire country as it mourns the loss of such an illustrious shepherd".

At this time of loss, but "above all, of hope," Pope Leo praises God for "Dom Júlio's long life and for the grace

of his priesthood for Mozambique and the universal Church." He recalled some of the defining features of the late Cardinal's pastoral ministry.

"Faithful to Jesus, his Teacher and Lord," Pope Leo wrote, Cardinal Langa "learned from Him the art of closeness in the pastoral care of souls, devoting himself with simplicity, zeal and perseverance to the flock entrusted to him."

"He did not allow himself to be discouraged by difficulties," Leo continued, "but saw in those very difficulties places thirsting for the Good News, particularly when it became necessary to proclaim the Gospel of peace and reconciliation for a future of fraternity among all Mozambicans."

Vatican News



Indonesia islanders mourn last foreign missionary

LEMBATA, Indonesia: Catholics on Indonesia's eastern island of Lembata have paid tribute to an American priest who spent six decades serving the islanders and empowering generations of Catholics with pastoral activism.

Divine Word missionary Fr Nicholas Strawn, popularly known as Fr Niko, died at Bukit Lewoleba Hospital in Lembata, East Nusa Tenggara province, on August 4. He was 92.

He arrived in Indonesia in 1963 at the age of 29. He had been mostly based in the Diocese of Larantuka in East Nusa Tenggara, serving Catholic parishes of Sacred Heart in Lerek and St Joseph in Boto.

According to the Divine Word congregation, Fr Strawn's demise marks the end of an era in the history of the island where foreign missionaries preached Catholicism and nurtured faith for decades.

"We remember him as a priest who was very close to the people, willing to visit remote areas and greet us warmly, while reminding us to study well," said Anselmus Deri, a Catholic and journalist from Lembata.

Deri recalled that after Mass, Fr Strawn



often invited young people to the rectory and told them stories from international magazines so they could learn about the wider world.

"I later realised that such experience helped shape our decision to become writers and journalists," Deri said, adding that dozens of writers and journalists like him came from his St Joseph in Boto.

He said some students who could not afford school fees sometimes borrowed money from the priest.

"They later repaid him with pork, venison or chicken," Deri said.

Deri said Fr Strawn's witness also helped foster priestly vocations. Sacred Heart Parish in Lerek, where the missionary served for 24 years, now has about 50 priests, including retired Franciscan Bishop Leo Laba Ladjar of Jayapura, and dozens of nuns.

Justin Wejak, a Catholic researcher and ethnographer from Lembata who lives in Melbourne, Australia, said he first met Fr Strawn in the 1970s when the priest visited Lewokukung station in Kalikasa Parish to celebrate monthly Mass.

He came to know the missionary more

closely at San Domingo Seminary in Hokeng in the early 1980s, where he remembered him as a priest who encouraged students to study hard and pray.

Wejak said many Lembata Catholics remembered Fr Strawn for his constant smile, simple manner and ability to make people feel close to the Church.

Fr Strawn was born on Sept 24, 1934, in Oelwein, Iowa, in the United States.

He began serving in Sacred Heart Parish in Lerek in February 1964 and later moved to St Joseph Parish in Boto in 1987. ucanews.com

MEMORIAM

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22nd Anniversary
In Loving
Memory of

G. Sebastiammal
Born: 28/11/1926
Rest: 12/8/2004

Dear mother, your love and kindness remain with us.
Though years have passed, your memory shines
like a light that never fades.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of
my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Psalms 23:6

Always loved and missed by daughters, sons,
daughters-in-law, sons-in-law, grandchildren,
great-grandchildren, relatives, friends, and loved ones.

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4th YEAR ANNIVERSARY



Thirasa Sinnappan
(Mrs Raymond)

Came from the Lord: 21.11.1960
Returned to the Lord: 20.08.2022

Not a day passes without
thoughts of you. Your love
continues to guide us, and
your beautiful memories
remain forever in our hearts.
Eternal rest grant unto Her,
O Lord, and let your perpetual
light shine upon her. May her
soul rest in peace. Amen.

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Pope encourages Catholics to deepen prayer through Liturgy of the Hours

VATICAN: Returning to his weekly general audiences after a month-long summer break, Pope Leo XIV urged Catholics to embrace the Liturgy of the Hours more fully in their daily lives, saying the Church's public prayer is an antidote to a world shaped by technology, consumerism and an efficiency-driven mindset.

"Every week and every day, the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours are the breath of the life of the Church, which makes the Holy Spirit circulate through her Body," he said August 5.

Because of Rome's summer heat, the Pope held the audience inside instead of St Peter's Square; however, this time it was held in St Peter's Basilica rather than in the Paul VI Hall. As he processed to the altar, he stopped to shake hands with attendees and bless babies and rosaries.

Continuing his series on the documents of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Leo reflected on *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Constitution on the liturgy. He said "it is the Holy Spirit who teaches us to pray," and that Christians unite themselves with Christ in offering praise and thanksgiving to God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Bound to the Eucharist, the Liturgy of the



Melody Martin prays using the Liturgy of the Hours book with her son Edmund on her lap. (OSV News/Julianna Leopold)

Hours sanctifies the rhythm of the day, the Pope said, beginning with morning prayer, continuing at midday and evening, and ending with night prayer as the faithful entrust themselves to God's peace.

"Each hour is an act of hope," he said.

The Liturgy of the Hours is the Church's official daily prayer, consisting of psalms, Scripture readings, hymns and prayers

recited at designated times throughout the day. Pope Leo said the tradition of prayer is "no longer passed on" even in many Christian families, even though prayer is a "fundamental dimension of our humanity."

In societies "dominated by an efficiency-driven and consumerist mindset," prayer can seem "pointless and trivial," the Pope said. In a world "where science and tech-

nology claim to provide all the answers," he added, prayer may appear to be a form of escapism.

"Brothers and sisters, may we find the spiritual nourishment necessary on our earthly pilgrimage by joining with the whole Church in her liturgical prayer as we await the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ," the pope said in his greeting to English-speaking pilgrims.

"Far from avoiding the world and its needs, all prayer, especially in the entire liturgy, is the essential dimension of our humanity," he added.

The Pope's encouragement comes after the Vatican approved a new English-language edition of the Liturgy of the Hours in November 2025. After 13 years, the US bishops produced a translation that more closely reflects the original Latin texts. The first volume is expected to be released ahead of Lent 2027.

In his greeting to French-speaking pilgrims, Pope Leo encouraged those on summer vacation to deepen their interior life by spending more time with the Lord in prayer. Even leisure and rest, he said, "belong to Him" and "can be sanctified by His presence." **OSV News**

FEAST OF SAINT PIO TRIDUUM MASSES

Day 1: Unfailing Faith and Trust

Thursday, 17 September 2026

Rosary: 7:30 PM | Mass: 8:00 PM

Day 2: The Holy Eucharist

Friday, 18 September 2026

Rosary: 7:30 PM | Mass: 8:00 PM

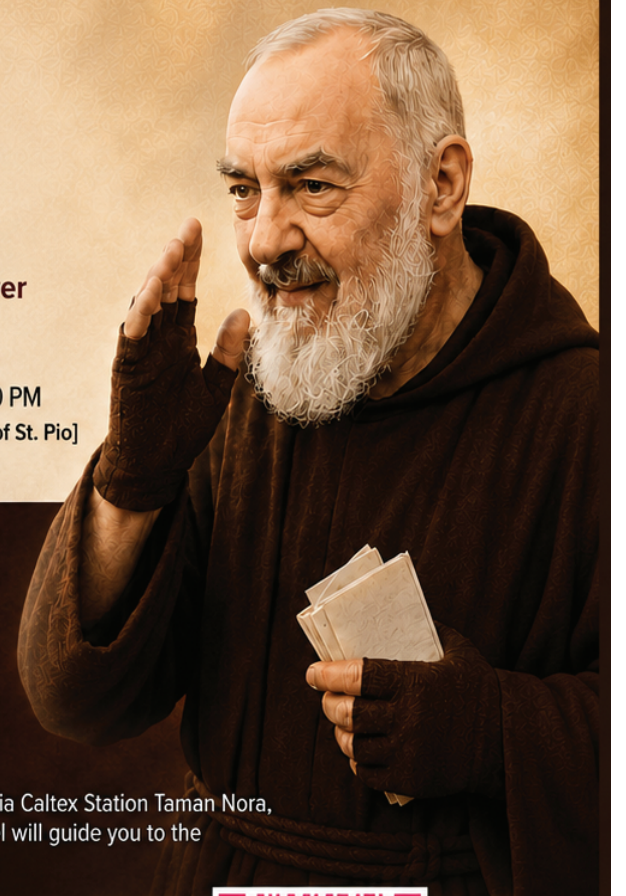
Day 3: The Healing Power of the Sacraments

Saturday, 19 September 2026

Rosary: 5:30 PM | Mass: 6:00 PM

[The Final Blessing with the Relic of St. Pio]

Venue: Church of the Holy Family, Ulu Tiram
Lot 1062, Jalan Bedara, 81800 Ulu Tiram, Johor



FEAST DAY MASS

Theme: *Love for the Cross and Redemption*

Sunday, 20 September 2026

Rosary: 10:00 AM | Mass: 10:30 AM

Celebrant: Rev. Fr. Sebastian (from India)

Venue: Saint Pio's Spirituality Centre, Ulu Tiram
253 A, B, C, Jalan Kubur Cina Dalam, 81800 Ulu Tiram, Johor, Malaysia

Directions: Please enter via Caltex Station Taman Nora, Ulu Tiram. RELA personnel will guide you to the centre from there.

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