

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?
No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.
Romans 8:35, 37



BECs – the heartbeat of parish life

■ P2



Learning to listen to God

■ P6



Where faith anchors a fishing village

■ P12

Polarisation *threatens* Asia's Church

Patricia Pereira

KUALA LUMPUR: The greatest threat facing the Church in Asia may no longer be persecution or secularisation but something far closer to home — the growing polarisation that is fragmenting societies and increasingly finding its way into Church communities.

That warning came from Malaysian academic Dr Choong Pui Yee during the 12th Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC) in Jakarta, where bishops and Church leaders from across Asia are reflecting on how the Church can become “bridges and bridge-builders” in an increasingly divided world.

Addressing delegates, the University of Malaya senior lecturer said, the political, ethnic and ideological divisions shaping Asian societies do not stop at the Church door.

“As members of society, Christians are not immune. Political, ethnic and social divisions do not stop at the Church door,” she said.

Her message resonated strongly with the Assembly’s theme as delegates considered how the Church can remain a visible sign of communion amid widening divisions across the continent.

For Malaysia, where people of different races, cultures and religions have long learned to live alongside one another, Dr Choong’s reflection carried particular relevance. While the country is often praised for its diversity, recent years have also seen increasing political polarisation, identity politics and online hostility that can strain relationships across communities.

As the nation prepares to celebrate its 69th *Hari Merdeka* on August 31 and 63rd Malaysia Day on Sept 16, her call to resist polarisation and strengthen dialogue serves as a timely reminder that unity remains a responsibility to be continually nurtured — both in society and within the Church.



Drawing on her research into identity politics, religion and social movements, Dr Choong said Asia is undergoing rapid transformation through migration, religious nationalism, shrinking democratic space and the explosive growth of digital communication.

Although these developments differ from country to country, they increasingly converge in one troubling reality — deepening polarisation.

She highlighted what scholars call “affective polarisation”, where people no longer regard those holding different views as legitimate opponents but as enemies.

“When this happens, dialogue becomes difficult because people stop listening to one another,” she said.

Social media has accelerated this trend by trapping people in information bubbles that continually reinforce existing beliefs while fostering suspicion and distrust of those who think differently.

The consequences, she warned, can also

be seen within the Church. Political affiliations, ethnic identities and cultural loyalties can gradually overshadow the deeper identity shared by all Christians as members of the Body of Christ.

Rather than merely surviving as a minority in many Asian nations, the Church must become a credible witness that disagreement need not destroy communion.

“The Church should demonstrate that disagreement does not have to lead to hostility,” Dr Choong said.

Instead of reflecting the divisions of wider society, she urged Church communities to become places where respectful dialogue, reconciliation and mutual listening flourish.

She also cautioned against allowing religious nationalism or identity politics to shape the Church’s mission. While cultural and national identities have their place, she said the Church must always place its identity in Christ above every political, ethnic or national allegiance.

“The Church is called to affirm its identity

as a community united in Christ,” she said.

Returning repeatedly to the Assembly’s call for the Church to become a bridge-builder, Dr Choong observed that bridges are needed only where divisions exist. That makes reconciliation not simply one pastoral priority among many, but one of the Church’s defining missions in Asia today.

She concluded that the Church’s response to polarisation cannot be built on political victories or ideological battles but on the Gospel values of mercy, forgiveness, love and reconciliation.

Her challenge to the bishops gathered in Jakarta was clear: synodality must be expressed not only through new structures or processes but through communities where differences are welcomed without becoming divisions, and where communion remains stronger than conflict.

• **More on the 12th Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC) in our next issue.**

The Catholic Weekly
HERALD

ESTABLISHED 1994

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

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



EDITOR

Patricia Pereira
editor1@herald.com.my



ASSISTANT EDITOR

Sandra Ann Inbaraj
sandra@herald.com.my



JOURNALIST

Christina Lazaroo
christina@herald.com.my



GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Amanda Mah
amanda@herald.com.my



SOCIAL MEDIA

Kevin Francis
kevin@herald.com.my



BAHASA MALAYSIA

Melania Liza Magnus
liza@herald.com.my



MANDARIN

Adelina Wong
yin4482@gmail.com



TAMIL

Perzeus James
tamil@herald.com.my



ADMIN ASSISTANT

Rachael Sharma
admin@herald.com.my

ADVERTISEMENT/SUBSCRIPTION
advertisement@herald.com.my

MEMORIAM

memoriam@herald.com.my

LETTERS

letterseditor@herald.com.my

Social Media



www.heraldmalaysia.com



@heraldmalaysia



heraldmalaysia
Herald Snapshot



@heraldsnapshot

Disclaimer:

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

Become a voice in the HERALD community

Capture and share the spirit and vibrancy of your parish or ministry life with our readers. We're looking for concise articles between 400 to 500 words, accompanied by high-resolution photos (300 DPI) in JPG or PNG format. Don't forget to include captions that bring your images to life. Your contributions are essential in keeping our faith community connected and informed. Send your articles to editor1@herald.com.my

When algorithms feed fear: Technology, truth and the human face

Technology has transformed the way humanity communicates. A thought can become a global conversation within minutes. A photograph, video or message can cross continents instantly. Never before have ordinary people had such powerful tools to share their voices.

But with great power comes great responsibility.

The digital world that connects us can also divide us. The same platforms that allow us to share stories of hope, faith and solidarity can also become spaces where anger, misinformation and hatred spread rapidly.

The challenge today is not simply the amount of information available to us, but our ability to recognise what is true, what is harmful and what respects the dignity of the human person.

We see this when online conversations turn against those perceived as different. Sporting events meant to celebrate unity among nations can become platforms for racism and abuse. A player's mistake can lead to attacks not only against an individual but against an entire country or community.

Closer to home, refugees and migrants can become targets of suspicion through social media posts that present incomplete, exaggerated or false narratives. A single incident can create fear towards an entire group of people. Instead of seeing individuals with names, families and personal stories, people become reduced to labels.

The same pattern can even be seen in our attitudes towards animals. A tragic incident involving a stray dog, for example, can lead to blanket condemnation of all stray animals. Fear replaces compassion, and reaction replaces responsible reflection.

The pattern is familiar: one negative example becomes a reason to judge an entire group.

Technology did not create prejudice. Human beings have always struggled with fear of the unfamiliar and the temptation to divide the world into "us" and "them". But digital platforms can magnify these weaknesses. Content that provokes anger and outrage often spreads faster because it attracts attention.

In such an environment, falsehood can travel

faster than truth.

A misleading post, manipulated image or unverified claim can reach thousands before anyone stops to ask: *Is this true? Is this fair? Does this respect the dignity of another person?*

The danger is not only misinformation. The deeper danger is what misinformation does to the way we see one another. A repeated message can slowly transform a neighbour into a threat, a stranger into an enemy, and a person into a stereotype.

Who decides what is good?

If technology is meant to serve humanity, who decides what "serving humanity" means?

The answer cannot simply be determined by what attracts the most clicks, generates the most profit or receives the most attention. Technology must be measured not only by efficiency, but by whether it promotes human dignity and the common good.

Catholic Social Teaching reminds us that every person is created in the image and likeness of God. No algorithm, political argument or online trend should cause us to forget the humanity of another person.

Pope Leo XIV has reminded the Church of the importance of preserving human voices and faces in an age shaped by artificial intelligence and digital communication. Technology must not reduce people to data or categories. Behind every screen is a person with a story, a family, a struggle and a hope.

A challenge for the Church

This challenge is not only found in society. It is also present within our own Church communities.

Social media has become a valuable tool for evangelisation, allowing parishes and ministries to share prayers, teachings and moments of grace. Yet, like every human tool, it can also reveal our weaknesses.

Sometimes, even among believers, digital spaces become places of criticism, suspicion and division. Disagreements over liturgy, music, language or pastoral approaches can quickly become battles of opinion. People who worship the same Lord can

find themselves treating one another as opponents rather than brothers and sisters.

The temptation is to believe that our own perspective is always correct, while those who think differently are less faithful. Social media can reinforce this by surrounding us with voices that confirm our views while making it harder to listen.

But the Church is not called to be a community where everyone thinks alike. It is called to be a communion of people journeying together in Christ.

The question we ask society must also be asked of ourselves: **Does our communication build communion or create division?**

A comment written in anger can wound another person. A message shared without verification can spread confusion. A public criticism can damage trust and charity within the community.

In the digital age, evangelisation is not only about what we proclaim. It is also about how we treat one another.

Before sharing a post, we need to recover the habit of discernment:

Is this true?

Does it respect the dignity of others?

Does it bring understanding or encourage hatred?

Jesus constantly crossed boundaries. He reached out to strangers, welcomed outsiders and restored dignity to those pushed aside. His example challenges us today: in a world where technology can make people appear as distant images on a screen, we must rediscover the human face behind every story.

Technology should help us encounter people, not categorise them. It should preserve human voices, not silence them. It should create bridges, not deepen divisions.

The question we must ask is not only: **"What can technology do?"**

The deeper question is: **"What kind of humanity are we becoming through the way we use it?"**

Technology can either amplify our fears or enlarge our capacity for understanding. The choice remains with us.

Sandra Ann

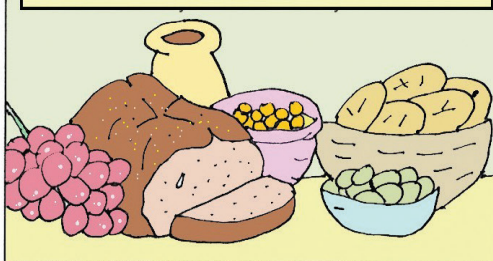
18th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

Readings: Isaiah 55: 1-3 | Romans 8: 35, 37-39 | Gospel: Matthew 14: 13-21

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings with Dr Steven Selvaraju

FOOD, A SIGN OF GOD'S STEADFAST LOVE

There is a word that can be found in all the scripture readings and the psalm this Sunday, that is "food". In the Bible, food symbolises divine providence, care and sustenance.



In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah tells the Israelites that it is God who has delivered them from captivity in Babylon and returned them to the Promised land. The prophet reminds them of God's constant care and providence for them.



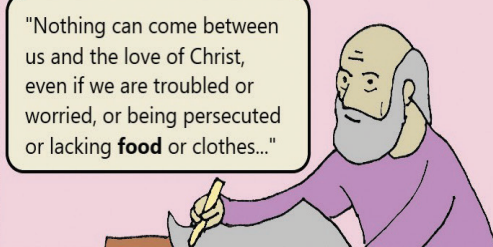
The psalmist urges all humanity to acknowledge and acclaim the kingship of God, who directs human activity and provides for His creatures.

"The eyes of all creatures look to you and you give them their food in due time."

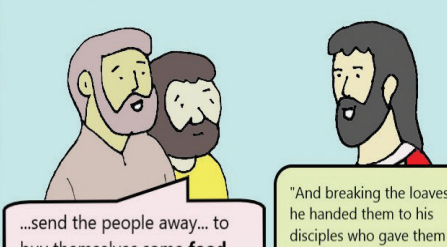


The key message in Paul's letter to the Romans is that Christ is with us, and no force or power can separate us from the love of Christ.

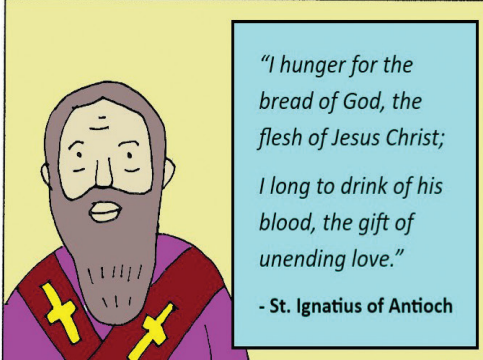
"Nothing can come between us and the love of Christ, even if we are troubled or worried, or being persecuted or lacking food or clothes..."



The gospel reading remind us that Jesus, not only gives food to the people, but will himself, through his suffering and death, become food - the Bread of Life - meaning "the food of Life".



"And breaking the loaves he handed them to his disciples who gave them to the crowds."



"I hunger for the bread of God, the flesh of Jesus Christ; I long to drink of his blood, the gift of unending love."
- St. Ignatius of Antioch

Stevens



**ARCHDIOCESE OF
KOTA KINABALU**

CHYKK/WA/7/2026

Chancery Notice

Appointment of new clergy office bearers and spiritual directors (2026–2029)

During the Kota Kinabalu Quarterly Meeting held on July 15, 2026 at Sacred Heart Cathedral, Kota Kinabalu, the following clergy office bearers were selected for the term 2026–2029:

Clergy Office Bearers – Kota Kinabalu (2026–2029)

- Chairman Fr Jeffri Gumu
- Vice Chairman Fr Eric Jerome
- Secretary Fr Sylvester Wong
- Assistant Fr Rhobby Mojolou
- Liturgy Fr Wilson Francis and Fr Lasius Gantis
- Social Concerns Fr Maxmilliano Benhor Hontor and Fr Postinus Kurup

At the same meeting, His Grace Archbishop John Wong appointed the following clergy as Spiritual Directors of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Commissions:

Archdiocesan Pastoral Commissions – Spiritual Directors

- Archdiocesan Fr Bradley Belly
- Youths Commission Stephen
- Caritas Fr Isidore Gilbert
- Couples for Christ Fr Postinus Kurup

These appointments take effect immediately and shall remain in force for the term 2026–2029.

Clergy and faithful are kindly requested to extend their full support and collaboration to the newly appointed office bearers and spiritual directors in the exercise of their pastoral responsibilities.

Yours Sincerely,

Fr Wilfred Atin
Chancellor,
Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu
July 17, 2026



**KUALA LUMPUR
ARCHDIOCESE**

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

August

- 4 **Feast – Church of St John Marie Vianney, Tampin**
- 8 **ASAYO Hadirat Mu**
- 8 **Confirmation – Cathedral of St John, KL**
- 9 **Confirmation – Church of the Sacred Heart, Peel Road**



**MALACCA JOHORE
DIOCESE**

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

August

- 8 **Assembly – Chinese Language & Cultural Council (CLCC), Kluang**
- 8 **Confirmation – Church of St Louis, Kluang**

Fr David Garaman named Vicar General of Sandakan

SANDAKAN: Bishop Julius Dusing Gitom has appointed Fr David Aloysius Garaman as the new Vicar General of the Diocese of Sandakan, effective July 15, 2026.

The appointment fills a position that had remained vacant since Fr Nicholas Ong, the diocese's first vicar general appointed in 2007, stepped down about two years ago due to health reasons.

As vicar general, Fr David becomes the bishop's principal deputy and the highest-ranking official in the diocese after the bishop. He assists in the governance and day-to-day administration of the diocese while serving as a key member of the diocesan Curia and the College of



Consultors.

Currently the parish priest of St Mary's Cathedral, Fr David is from Kampung Tempenau, Lahad Datu. He was ordained on December 31, 2010 at St Dominic's Church, Lahad Datu, in the first priestly ordination since the diocese was established in 2007. He later pursued advanced studies in Sacred Liturgy

in Rome from 2014 to 2017.

Reflecting on his appointment, Fr David said it "came as a complete surprise" but accepted it with humility, trusting that his 16 years of priestly ministry had prepared him for the responsibility.

"My commitment remains unchanged," he said. "The priesthood is ultimately about availability and obedience to God's call."

He described the faithful as the greatest influence on his priestly journey and expressed his desire that the appointment be seen not as a personal achievement but as a response to God's call to serve.

Fr David asked the faithful to keep him in their prayers "that I may always remain faithful to Christ, serve with humility, and have the wisdom and courage to make good decisions for the good of the Church".

The Diocese of Sandakan has invited the faithful to pray that Fr David will be blessed with wisdom, humility and the guidance of the Holy Spirit as he begins his ministry as vicar general.



Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #282



Welcome dear friends,

It had been a 10-day pilgrimage at the Minor Basilica of St Anne, BM. My assignment was to celebrate the nightly preached Masses. The prayer corners, the confessionals, and the many Masses were filled. Silence descends in the Shrine and the Healing and Deliverance Tent. Catholics and others, irrespective of language, culture, or race, seek God for His touch. World leaders' campaign to draw crowds. Here, a wife, a mother and grandmother attracts countless to her. A woman of God, she was. My presence was to be like the yeast — invisible catalyst or spark. Growth and grace belong to God.

Local takes! Faults, Fault-findings & Faultlines

Ancient fault lines in Malaysia are showing signs of more frequent movement and energy release. Among them, the Mersing Fault in Johor has been identified as becoming active again after more than a century without any recorded seismic activity in the area.

Malaysia will continue with its regulatory approach to children's *use of social media* instead of imposing a blanket ban, unlike the others.

INSAP, a think tank, found that the *Johor state election* had defied three assumptions: older voters support BN while younger voters support PH, outstation voters return home to vote for Pakatan, and Barisan only wins mixed seats because Chinese voters stay home. The findings instead suggest that voters were increasingly rewarding governments based on their delivery and track record.

The *Negeri Sembilan election* highlights Malaysia's political immaturity. Mature democracy is not one coalition at the federal level and another at the state level; it shuns politicians facing criminal charges; nor makes election promises to free one who had stolen billions.

Reading the Signs: Unseen Yet Visible!

On the yeast: Pope Leo urged Christians to reject the temptation to seek spectacular displays of God's power, reminding the faithful that the Kingdom of God grows quietly and patiently, like a tiny seed or a little yeast working unseen.

On community life: Indeed, it is precisely through sharing everything in common, including material goods, spiritual experiences, apostolic ideals and charitable service that the hidden presence of the risen Lord is made manifest among you.

On Jakarta's FABC Plenary: More than 120 Asian cardinals and bishops gathered for a week of prayer, discernment, and reflection on the Church's mission under the theme, *The Call to Synodal Conversion and the Mission to Be Bridges and Bridge-Builders in Asia*.

Thought for the Week: The Special Olympics

At the Seattle Special Olympics, nine contestants, all physically or mentally disabled, assembled at the starting line for the 100 yard dash. At the gun, they all started, not exactly in a dash, but with a relish to run the race to the finish and win. All, that is, except one boy who stumbled on the asphalt, tumbled over a couple of times, and began to cry.

The other eight heard the boy. They slowed down and looked back. They all turned around and went back. Every one of them. One girl with Down's Syndrome bent down and kissed him and said, "This will make it better." All nine linked arms and walked across the finish line together. Everyone in the stadium stood, and the cheering went on for several minutes.

The lesson from the disabled: What matters most in this life is more than winning for ourselves. What truly matters in this life is helping others win, even if it means slowing down and changing our course.

QnQ? Q asks: How do we handle problems?

"If your fish tank is dirty and the fish is sick, would you medicate the fish or clean the tank?" If a fish gets sick from dirty water, medicating the fish treats a symptom while the cause keeps poisoning it. Clean the tank first: the medicine has a chance to actually work once the environment stops making things worse.

People do this too. We reach for the "medicate" move — more willpower, a new habit tracker, gritting through it — when the real problem is the water we're swimming in: a toxic job, a relationship that drains us, chronic sleep debt, an environment with no room to recover. Symptom-fixes aren't wrong, but they're limited if the tank stays dirty.

Applying the framework:

Pause before you fix it yourself.

Ask: Is this a fish problem or a tank problem?

Fish problem: I need skill, rest, support, medicine.

Tank problem: I need to change what I'm surrounded by every day.

Be honest about which one it really is. It reminds us that the water we swim in shapes us, no matter how strong the fish thinks it is.

The Spirit @work: "Just as two rushing rivers intermingle in such a way that the smaller loses its name and is absorbed into the larger, so the divine Spirit acts upon the soul and absorbs it." *St Mary Magdalene de Pazzi*, virgin (1566-1607 A.D.)

Something to tickle you: The creative intelligence of humanity is a gift that can alleviate suffering and open up new possibilities, but it must remain ordered toward the common good, justice, the care of the vulnerable and creation (*Magnifica Humanitas*, 129).

Bishop Bernard Paul

BECs – the heartbeat of parish life

Sabrina Smith

SEREMBAN: This year's Month of the Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC) carries special significance as the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur celebrates the 50th anniversary of the BEC movement in August — five decades of nurturing small Christian communities rooted in prayer, fellowship and mission.

At the Church of the Visitation, the Month of BEC was celebrated during all Sunday Masses on July 19. One of the most uplifting moments was the entrance procession, where BEC leaders proudly carried their colourful banners, each representing a com-

munity united in faith and purpose.

It was a beautiful witness to the vitality of the BEC movement and a reminder that these small communities remain the heartbeat of parish life, bringing families and neighbours together to pray, share life, care for one another and grow as missionary disciples.

As the archdiocese marks this jubilee milestone, every BEC is invited to rediscover its story and renew its mission. Communities are encouraged to learn about their beginnings, reflect on the faith journey that has shaped them over the years, and give thanks for the many lives touched through their witness.



BEC leaders holding their respective banners at the Eucharistic celebration.

The celebration also calls BEC members to reconnect with one another through simple gatherings of prayer, faith-sharing and fellowship. Such moments strengthen relationships, deepen the sense of belonging, and renew the commitment to journey together as one family in Christ.

More than a parish programme or organisational structure, the BEC is a way of being Church — a place where faith is lived in everyday life, neighbours become companions on the journey of faith, and no one walks alone.

As our BEC motto beautifully proclaims, “BEC is our lifestyle; we ensure that no one is left behind.”

May the Month of BEC rekindle in every member a renewed love for their community, inspire fresh commitment to Christ's mission, and encourage every BEC to become an ever more vibrant sign of His love, mercy and unity. After all, the strength of the Church is not measured by the size of its buildings, but by the depth of its communities and the love they share with one another.

St Jude parish strengthens pastoral care for its senior members

RAWANG: The Church of St Jude launched its new Grandparents and the Elderly Ministry (GEMs) on July 18, marking a significant step in strengthening pastoral care for the parish's senior members.

The ministry, spearheaded by the Family Life Ministry under the leadership of Simon Saveriyah and Dr Sharen Lovina Aseervadem, was officially inaugurated during a Hi-Tea gathering attended by grandparents and elderly parishioners.

The launch was held in conjunction with the 6th World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, celebrated under the theme, *I will never forget you* (Isaiah 49:15). Chosen by Pope Leo XIV, the theme is a powerful reminder of God's unfailing love for older persons and a call for the Church to honour, accompany and cherish those who have faithfully nurtured families and communities.

Parish priest Fr Simon Labrooy and assistant parish priest Fr Jonathan Rao welcomed the guests before officiating at the unveiling of the GEMs logo. The celebration continued with the symbolic release of birds, representing hope, freedom and a new beginning for the ministry.

The afternoon was enlivened by musical performances from the parish choir led by



Fr Simon Labrooy unveiling the GEMs logo.

Raeanne Cheong and presentations by children from the catechism classes, highlighting the joyful bond between generations.

In his address, Fr Simon described grandparents as treasures whose wisdom, sacrifices and quiet acts of love have shaped countless families.

“The words, ‘I will never forget you’, are God's own promise,” he said. “Our grandparents and elderly remain precious in His eyes. As a parish family, we too must ensure they are loved, respected and remembered.”

Several grandparents shared heartfelt reflections on family life, recalling both the

challenges and blessings of parenthood. They spoke of raising children through difficult times, making sacrifices for their education and future, and now embracing the joy of watching their grandchildren grow. Others shared how caring for their grandchildren has brought renewed purpose following the loss of a spouse, while many expressed gratitude for the opportunity to pass on the gift of faith by teaching younger generations their daily prayers.

Participants also welcomed the establishment of GEMs, expressing hope that the ministry would provide more opportunities for fellowship, formation and meaningful engagement for senior parishioners.

The launch marks the beginning of a new chapter for the parish as it seeks to strengthen relationships across generations and recognise the invaluable contribution of its elderly members.

GEMs aspires to become a spiritual home where older persons are not merely cared for but celebrated — where their wisdom is treasured, their faith continues to inspire, and their presence reminds the parish that every generation has an essential place in the life and mission of the Church. **Mercy Almeida Stellus**

A journey of clues and camaraderie

PETALING JAYA: Teamwork, quick thinking and a keen eye for detail took centre stage as 37 parishioners from the Church of St Ignatius (SIC) Family Life Ministry (FLM) participated in the parish's 3rd Motor Treasure Hunt 2026.

Ten teams set off on July 5 for a day of adventure, solving puzzles and searching for clues across SS2, Solaris Mont Kiara and Desa Sri Hartamas in a friendly competition that combined fun, fellowship and healthy rivalry.

The event began with a pre-hunt briefing the previous evening, where Clerk of Course Christopher Foo — an active parishioner from the Church of St Francis Xavier, Petaling Jaya, and the creative mind behind SIC's treasure hunts since 2024 — explained the rules while keeping the challenges themselves a closely guarded secret.

At 9.00am participants received 25 signage-based questions together with clues leading

to four hidden treasures. Armed with maps, smartphones and plenty of determination, the teams navigated the three locations, putting their observation skills, problem-solving abilities and teamwork to the test.

This year's hunt proved to be the most challenging yet, with cleverly crafted clues and intricate wordplay keeping participants guessing throughout the day.

Adding to the excitement, a sudden afternoon downpour transformed the final stretch into a race against both the weather and the clock, as teams hurried to locate the remaining treasures and submit their answers before the 2.00pm deadline.

Despite the rain, spirits remained high as participants returned to the SIC cafeteria, where volunteers from the SIC FLM Crafters welcomed them with refreshments after an energetic morning on the road.

The prize presentation and fellowship session concluded the event, with participants



eagerly awaiting the explanation of the answers. As Christopher revealed the logic behind each clue, the hall echoed with laughter, cheers and the occasional playful groan from teams who realised they had narrowly missed the correct answers.

Prizes were presented by the Parish Coordinating Council chairperson, Jo Lee, on behalf of parish priest Fr Thomas Koo, CDD.

While only a handful of teams claimed the top prizes, every participant left with cherished memories, stronger friendships and a renewed appreciation for teamwork and community spirit.

The organisers expressed their gratitude to the volunteers, sponsors and participants who contributed to the success of the event, looking forward to an even bigger and more challenging Motor Treasure Hunt next year.

Bishops reflect on *ad limina*, plan and prepare for MPC

Richard Chia

PLENTONG, Johor: The fruits of the bishops' recent *Ad Limina Apostolorum* pilgrimage to Rome and final preparations for the Malaysia Pastoral Convention (MPC2026) dominated discussions at the 118th Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei (CBCMSB), held at MAJODI Centre in July.

The gathering brought together the bishops to reflect on their recent audience with Pope Leo XIV and meetings with the Roman Curia, while also reviewing plans for the first-ever national pastoral convention of the Catholic Church in Malaysia, scheduled to take place in Sibul, Sarawak, from September 9 to 13.

Reflecting on the *Ad Limina* pilgrimage

Having journeyed together in Rome for the *Ad Limina Apostolorum* visit in May, the bishops shared personal reflections on what many described as a spiritually enriching yet demanding pilgrimage.

Each day involved up to four meetings with Vatican dicasteries, along with visits to the major basilicas and periods of prayer at the tombs of Saints Peter and Paul. Despite the packed schedule, the bishops described the experience as deeply fruitful, with evenings providing valuable opportunities for fraternity and mutual encouragement.

The meetings with the Vatican dicasteries were widely praised for their openness and pastoral spirit. Several bishops who had participated in previous *Ad Limina* visits



in 2008 and 2018 observed that this year's pilgrimage was particularly well organised, noting the welcoming atmosphere and the increased use of English, which made dialogue more accessible.

The bishops also cherished the opportunity to celebrate Mass in Rome's four major basilicas and to pray at the tomb of Pope Francis in the Papal Basilica of St Mary Major.

The highlight of the pilgrimage was the private audience with Pope Leo XIV.

Although preceded by a lengthy wait, the 90-minute meeting allowed every bishop to speak personally with the Holy Father.

Reflecting on the encounter, Cardinal William Goh, Archbishop of Singapore, noted: "We are quite fortunate that our conference is small. We were all able to ask questions and engage in real dialogue, unlike larger conferences where only a few bishops were able to speak because of time constraints."

Final preparations for MPC2026

The plenary meeting also received a comprehensive progress report on the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 from the Central Working Committee led by Msgr Peter Ng of the Diocese of Malacca Johore.

The committee presented the final programme for the five-day convention, outlining the schedule of liturgical celebrations, prayer, silent reflection, keynote presentations and communal discernment sessions.

The bishops encouraged every parish across Malaysia's nine dioceses to hold a Holy Hour or prayer gathering on Sept 4, entrusting the convention, its delegates and the future of the Church in Malaysia to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Held under the vision of "The Catholic Church in Malaysia coming together as clergy, religious and laity to celebrate, listen and walk in the light of the Lord," the convention aims to strengthen communion and mission among the People of God.

Its mission calls the Church in Malaysia, rooted in the life of the Holy Trinity, to become a voice for the people, a Church reaching out in mercy, communicating the fullness of life, and growing in holiness.

Approximately 890 participants — including bishops, clergy, religious, lay delegates, speakers, guests and volunteers — are expected to attend, making it the largest national gathering ever organised by the Catholic Church in Malaysia.

Preparations are being coordinated by the Diocese of Sibul, with parishioners and volunteers from across the country assisting with logistics, transportation and hospitality.

One of the most anticipated moments of the convention will take place on its opening day, when the nine wooden crosses that have journeyed through each of Malaysia's nine dioceses as part of the *Perjalanan Salib* (Journey of the Cross) will be reunited.

The pilgrimage of the crosses began on April 3, 2025, at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Kota Kinabalu. Their reunion in Sibul will symbolise the unity of the Church across Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak, reflecting the rich diversity of cultures, languages and traditions that together form the one Body of Christ.

Concluding the plenary, the bishops expressed their appreciation to the MPC Central Working Committee and its many sub-committees for their dedication over the past year. They also appealed to Catholics throughout Malaysia to keep the convention in their prayers, asking for an abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon all who will participate.

Golden Jubilee of St Michael's first youth group

IPOH: Who could have imagined that a handful of enthusiastic young Catholics gathering half a century ago would leave a legacy that continues to shape lives, nurture vocations, and inspire generations?

On July 18, the Church of St Michael (SMC) witnessed a homecoming unlike any other. Around 60 pioneer members of the parish's first Youth Group returned — some travelling from Singapore and Hong Kong — to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of a ministry that has touched countless hearts over the past five decades.

It was far more than a reunion. It was a celebration of God's faithfulness across the years. It was a thanksgiving for lives transformed by His grace. Above all, it was a powerful reminder that when young people wholeheartedly entrust their lives to Christ, He can accomplish far more than they could ever imagine.

What began in the mid-1970s as a small gathering of young believers blossomed into a vibrant community of faith, friendship, prayer and service. Through weekly meetings, camps, retreats, outreach programmes and active parish involvement, generations of young people encountered Christ, discovered their gifts, and learned to live as joyful disciples.

The fruits of those formative years extended well beyond the parish grounds. Former members today serve as parish leaders, ministry coordinators, catechists, devoted spouses and parents, and committed Catholics whose witness continues to enrich both the Church and society.

The Youth Group also proved to be fertile ground for priestly and religious vocations.



Among those who first heard and responded to God's call within its community were Fr Michael Cheah, Fr Ravi Alexander OFM Cap, Sr Theresa (Maria) Wong, LSP, Sr Patricia Lim, RGS, and Bro Gerard Choo, SJ. Their vocations stand as a beautiful reminder that God continues to call, and that generous young hearts can change the future of the Church.

One of the most moving moments of the celebration came during the golden jubilee Mass, concelebrated by Fr Michael and Fr Ravi — once members of the very youth group whose anniversary they had returned to celebrate. Their presence offered a living testimony to the enduring power of a parish that invests in its young people.

The celebrations continued with a joyful anniversary dinner at Atrium Villa, Ipoh. Old

photographs sparked laughter, familiar songs rekindled treasured memories, and stories from long ago were shared with warmth and affection. Friendships, though separated by time and distance, seemed untouched by the passing years. Yet the gathering was about far more than reminiscing. It celebrated a living legacy. It honoured a generation of young Catholics who chose to place Christ at the centre of their lives and, in doing so, became instruments of His love for others.

The anniversary also carried a quiet message for today's young people. The faith they live now, the friendships they build, and the service they offer today may become tomorrow's legacy. No act of generosity, no prayer, no sacrifice made for Christ is ever in vain. Seeds sown in faith often bear fruit in ways only God can foresee.

As the celebrations drew to a close, hearts overflowed with gratitude — for enduring friendships, faithful mentors, cherished memories, answered prayers, and above all, for God's unfailing love that has accompanied this remarkable journey for fifty years. There was also deep appreciation for the many individuals who made the celebration possible, especially Fr Aloysius Tan, parish priest of St Michael's, whose support was instrumental in bringing the golden jubilee to fruition, and Louise Wu for her dedicated assistance in preparing the liturgical celebration.

Fifty years on, the story of the St Michael's Youth Group continues to remind us that when the Church believes in its young people, nurtures them with love, and entrusts them to Christ, the fruits can endure for generations.

Philip Justin

Learning to listen to God

PENANG: More than simply learning how to make good decisions, participants at a weekend formation on Ignatian discernment discovered that discernment begins by recognising a God who never stops communicating.

Organised by the Penang Diocesan New Evangelisation Commission (PDNEC), the two-day programme on *Spiritual Discernment in Charisms for Evangelisation* was held at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Pulau Tikus, on July 18 and 19. The sessions were facilitated by Jesuit priest Fr Hung Pham, SJ, following three preparatory online sessions that introduced participants to the foundations of Ignatian spirituality.

Music, prayer and reflective exercises created an atmosphere that encouraged participants to slow down, become attentive and open their hearts to God's presence.

Rather than presenting discernment as a method for making decisions, Fr Hung invited participants to begin with a fundamental question: Who is God?

Throughout salvation history, he explained, God has never ceased communicating with humanity — through creation, the prophets and, ultimately, through Jesus Christ.

Discernment, therefore, is not about trying to decode God's hidden will, but learning to recognise the many ways God is already speaking in everyday life.

"It is less about searching for answers and more about learning to listen," Fr Hung emphasised.

He reminded participants that discernment is a lifelong journey, shaped through prayer, experience,



Fr Hung Pham, SJ leading the participants in cultivating silence and attentiveness in God's silence

failures and growth, rather than sudden moments of certainty.

One recurring theme throughout the weekend was the importance of stillness.

Drawing from a Vietnamese prayer tradition, Fr Hung encouraged participants to cultivate silence and attentiveness — not as passive inactivity, but as an openness to God's presence.

He pointed to King Solomon, who asked God not for power or wealth, but for "a discerning heart."

Rather than asking immediately, "What should I do?", Christians are first invited to ask, "What is God trying to communicate to me?"

Only then can action become a faithful response.

Using the image of doors and hinges, Fr Hung illustrated how God often speaks through the ordinary experiences of daily life.

The "doors", he explained, are our five senses — seeing, hearing, tasting, touching and smelling —

through which God's grace continually reaches us.

The "hinge" represents the balance between remaining firmly anchored in Christ while adapting how faith is expressed according to different cultures and contexts.

Using the simple example of offering a durian as a gift, Fr Hung showed how the same gesture may communicate love in one culture but be misunderstood in another.

Similarly, he reflected on the missionary approach of Jesuit Matteo Ricci in China as an example of faithfully proclaiming Christ while respecting local cultures.

One insight that resonated strongly with participants was Fr Hung's perspective on distractions during prayer.

Rather than seeing recurring thoughts or worries as failures, he suggested they may actually reveal areas of life where God is inviting healing and deeper trust.

"If the same concern keeps re-



Fr Hung Pham, SJ facilitating the session.

turning in prayer," he explained, "perhaps that is precisely where God wants to meet us."

Instead of fighting distractions, participants were encouraged to bring them honestly before the Lord.

The weekend also explored the discernment of charisms — the unique gifts given by the Holy Spirit for the service of the Church.

Fr Hung identified three signs that often accompany authentic charisms: a deep sense of peace and fulfilment when exercising the gift; fruitfulness that flows naturally rather than through constant strain; and recognition by the Christian community.

He reminded participants that charisms are never exercised in isolation but complement one another in building up the Body of Christ.

As the retreat drew to a close, Fr Hung invited participants to reflect on their image of God.

Rather than imagining a God

waiting to judge every failure, he presented the biblical image of Emmanuel — God who walks alongside His people with compassion, patience and unconditional love.

Discernment, he said, ultimately grows out of relationship.

The goal is not merely making better decisions, but becoming more attentive to God's loving presence in every aspect of life.

Throughout the weekend, participants were also introduced to the *First Week Rules for Discernment* from St Ignatius of Loyola's Spiritual Exercises, together with practical case studies that helped translate Ignatian principles into everyday situations.

The formation concluded with a renewed invitation to listen more deeply, trust God's ongoing communication, and discover how each person's unique gifts can contribute to the Church's mission of evangelisation.

SIC hosts exposition of 103 relics

PETALING JAYA: Around 1,800 faithful from across the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur spent the weekend deepening their faith at the exposition and veneration of 103 Holy Relics of Saints and Blesseds at the Church of St Ignatius (SIC) on July 18 and 19.

Featuring relics of 92 saints and blesseds, the two-day exposition invited visitors to reflect on the witness of holy men and women whose lives continue to inspire the

faithful to pursue holiness. The steady stream of pilgrims throughout the weekend prompted organisers to extend Sunday's closing time by an hour, from 2.00pm to 3.00pm.

The exposition attracted people of all ages — from young children to grandparents — with many families making it a shared day of prayer. Clergy, religious and parishioners from across the archdiocese also attended as part of the lead-up to SIC's parish feast celebrations.

Among the visitors were catechism children from the English and Mandarin-speaking catechism classes. Irene Tan, a Mandarin Standard One catechist, guided her class of eleven seven-year-olds through the exposition, introducing them to the lives of the saints and the meaning of relic veneration.

Opening the event, parish priest Fr Thomas Koo, CDD, expressed his hope that the exposition would "renew our desire to become holy" by encouraging the faithful to imitate the virtues of the saints and live the Beatitudes (Mt 5:1-12).

Parish Coordinating Council

chairperson, Jo Lee, said the exposition sought to help participants encounter the living God through the witness of the saints while deepening their understanding of Catholic teaching on relics.

To complement the exposition, organisers set up an information gallery explaining the lives of the saints, the Church's canonisation process and the significance of relics. Visitors were reminded that Catholics venerate, but do not worship, relics or saints. Rather, relics point to God's grace at work in the lives of those who faithfully followed Christ and inspire hope in the Resurrection.

Each visitor received a cloth to touch one First- or Second-Class relic, creating a Third-Class relic to take home as a devotional aid. Following the veneration, pilgrims were invited into a prayer corner for silent reflection before stopping at the "Echoes of Grace" station, where they could write testimonies, prayers or reflections. More than 350 written responses were received.

One visitor wrote: "From beginning to end, I felt I was walking on holy ground. We could almost sense the presence of the saints.



A catechist explaining the lives of the saints to the children.

Thank you for making this exposition so meaningful."

Jo expressed gratitude to the organising committee, parish ministries, BECs and more than 80 volunteers whose dedicated service helped make the event possible. She also thanked Fr Thomas, who initiated the exposition, together with assistant parish priests Frs Martin Then and Philip Tan, for their support.

The relics were brought to SIC by the Penang Diocese Catechetical Commission Relic Team, led by Johnson Louis. The collection comprised 38 First-Class relics, 46 Second-Class relics and 19 Third-Class relics.

For many volunteers, the expe-

rience was deeply spiritual.

"My two days here moved me to become more prayerful and deepen my relationship with God," said Wana Pius of the Bahasa Malaysia Apostolate.

Retiree Peter Francis, 75, smiled as he reflected on his time serving. "I cannot stand for long, but here I have been standing for hours," he quipped.

Students Keith Daniel, Tayshaawn Mathew and Phineas Tan also found the exposition inspiring. Keith was especially moved to see a First-Class relic for the first time, while Phineas said he was inspired by St Carlo Acutis and his devotion to God.

Bob Ho

FERNZ & CO.

(AF 1972)

(Since 2008)

LICENSED AUDITORS & TAX AGENTS

017-729 1800

edra999@yahoo.com

- Company formations
- Auditing
- Taxation services

Jesuit leader highlights mission of reconciliation

Ann Teoh

PETALING JAYA: Catholics are called to become agents of reconciliation in a fractured world by embracing discernment, walking together in synodality and collaborating in the Church's mission, Jesuit Superior General Fr Arturo Sosa Abascal SJ said during his first visit to Malaysia.

The 31st Superior General of the Society of Jesus visited the Church of St Francis Xavier (SFX), Petaling Jaya, on July 18, where he met young adults, celebrated the parish's sunset Mass and later spent the evening in dialogue with about 180 parishioners over dinner.

Fr Sosa arrived in Kuala Lumpur after visiting Kuching earlier in the week. He was accompanied by Fr José Cecilio Magadia SJ, General Counsellor and Regional Assistant for Asia Pacific; Fr Tomasz Kot SJ, who will soon serve as Delegate for Interprovincial Houses and Works in Rome; and Fr Robert Ballecer SJ, widely known as the "Digital Jesuit" for his work in technology and evangelisation.

Also present at the dinner were Malaysia-Singapore Regional Superior Fr Francis Lim SJ, treasurer Fr Sebastian Koh SJ, parish priest Fr Alvin Ng SJ, Fr Alvin Ho SJ and Br Gerard Choo SJ.

The visit marked only the second time a Jesuit Superior General has visited St Francis Xavier Church, which has been entrusted to the Society of Jesus since its establishment in 1961. The first was the late Fr Pedro Arrupe SJ during his visit in 1980.

Addressing parishioners after dinner, Fr Sosa reflected on three

themes he described as essential to the Church's mission today: reconciliation, discernment, and collaboration.

Fr Sosa observed that today's world is marked by conflict, inequality, forced migration, environmental degradation and growing social polarisation.

Yet these realities, he said, should not lead Christians to despair.

"God is already reconciling the world to Himself in Christ. That is our starting point," he said.

He stressed that reconciliation is not simply the absence of conflict but active participation in God's work of healing broken relationships — with God, with one another and with creation.

This, he explained, requires personal conversion, authentic Christian witness, hospitality towards those on the margins and a renewed commitment to caring for the environment.

Ultimately, he said, the mission of reconciliation is measured by "the depth of human healing, the restoration of dignity and the cultivation of hope."

Turning to discernment, Fr Sosa reminded parishioners that it is far more than making decisions based solely on reason.

Instead, discernment begins by creating space for prayerful listening to the Holy Spirit.

"It is about making time to pause and ask: 'Where is the Holy Spirit moving?'" he said.

He encouraged Catholics to root discernment in the Eucharist, Sacred Scripture and the daily Examen, while recognising that discernment is both personal and communal.



Fr Arturo Sosa SJ with the Jesuits.

Communities, he said, grow when people pray together, listen deeply to one another and seek God's will even amid differing opinions.

Fr Sosa also emphasised that the Church's mission belongs not only to clergy and religious but to every baptised person.

"The time of the lone hero is over," he said. "The challenges of our times are too interconnected and too complex."

He also called for greater collaboration among clergy, religious and laity, as well as with people of goodwill beyond the Catholic community, particularly within Malaysia's diverse society.

Describing synodality as "the way Jesus lived His mission," Fr Sosa said parishes must become communities that pray, listen and discern together, rather than simply administer programmes.

Parish councils, ministries and committees, he noted, should become places of spiritual conversation where the wisdom of senior parishioners, families, young adults and those on the margins is genuinely heard.



Fr Arturo Sosa SJ, Superior General of Society of Jesus, addressing parishioners during his visit to the Jesuits of the Malaysia-Singapore Region. He is flanked by Fr Francis Lim SJ (Regional Superior of Malaysia-Singapore) and Fr José Cecilio Magadia SJ (Regional Assistant for Asia Pacific)

"The local bishop gives guidance, but it is the Holy Spirit we must listen to, speaking through each and every one," he said.

Fr Sosa concluded by challenging parishioners to measure success not by numbers or activities but by transformed lives.

"Jesus measures success by transformation," he said. "Do people encounter mercy? Do relation-

ships heal? Does justice take root? Does hope grow?"

Encouraging the faithful to persevere in their baptismal mission, he prayed that the Church would continue to walk together "not as isolated individuals, but as a synodal Church — listening, discerning, collaborating and working for reconciliation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit."

KUALA LUMPUR: Fifteen couples from parishes across the Klang Valley stepped away from the demands of everyday life to invest in something often overlooked amid life's busyness — their marriage.

The participants attended the Marriage Encounter Weekend (ME194), organised by the Worldwide Marriage Encounter (WWME) Selangor/Wilayah Persekutuan at Days Hotel & Suites, Fraser Business Park. Joining them for this experience was a priest from the Diocese of Malacca Johore.

For decades, the WWME movement has helped married couples strengthen their relationships through a simple yet effective method of loving communication. The programme encourages husbands and wives to listen deeply, express their feelings honestly and rediscover one another with Christ at the centre of their marriage.

Set in a peaceful environment away from the pressures of work, family commitments and digital distractions, the weekend allowed couples to focus exclusively on

Where good marriages become better



Fr Gerard Theraviam and Fr Adrian Francis with the Marriage Encounter facilitators (back row) and participating couples.

each other.

Many participants described the experience as transformative.

Mark and Christine, from the Church of the Holy Rosary, Kuala Lumpur, said the structured communication process was one of the weekend's greatest gifts. "It was more than a retreat; it was a new beginning for us," they shared.

Phillbert and Caron, from the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Klang, said the sessions helped them reflect more deeply on their marriage while strengthening

their communication and appreciation for one another.

Others echoed similar sentiments.

Kenny and Fiona, from the Church of St Ignatius, Kelana Jaya, said the weekend restored their sense of togetherness with God at the centre of their relationship. At the same time, Ignatius and Beatrix, from the Church of St Jude, Rawang, spoke of gaining a deeper awareness of themselves and each other, providing a stronger foundation for their

future together.

For Prasant and Marlene, also from St Jude Parish, the weekend offered practical tools to work through issues they had struggled to resolve.

"We learned to communicate better, listen more intentionally and understand each other more deeply," they said.

Gabriel and Jackie, from the Church of the Divine Mercy, Shah Alam, described the weekend as an invitation to make their relationship a priority once again.

"No matter how many years you have been married, it is never too late to deepen your relationship, renew your love and transform a good marriage into an even better one," they reflected.

Melvin and Roanna, from the Church of Jesus Caritas, Kepong, said the weekend renewed both their marriage and their faith.

"It allowed us to step away from the busyness of life, rediscover one another and freshly encounter God," they said. "We returned home with renewed hope, grateful hearts and a deeper commitment to continue choosing each other and placing Christ at the centre of our marriage and family."

Organisers said the ME Weekend continues to play an important role in strengthening marriages by helping couples grow together in love, communication and faith.

Married couples interested in future ME Weekends may contact James (019-356 2321), Mandy (012-371 8756) or email wwmeselangor@archkl.org for further information.

A journey into the heart of the Eucharist



Participants during the Enthronement

Tianne Ramona Pereira

PETALING JAYA: What really happens at Mass? Why does it matter? And how is God at work through every celebration of the Eucharist?

These were some of the questions explored during the second session of the *Deepening Our Liturgical Life* formation series, organised by the Kuala Lumpur Archdiocesan Liturgical Commission (ALC).

Held on Saturday, July 18 at the Church of the Assumption, the half-day formation welcomed almost 80 participants from parishes across the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur. The session themed *Entering Deeper into the Mystery of the Mass*, invited everyone to look beyond the rituals of the Mass and discover the deeper meaning behind everything we celebrate.

The formation was conducted by Fr Leonard Lexson, ecclesiastical assistant to the ALC and chairperson of the Liturgical Music Committee of the Episcopal Regional Commission for Liturgy for Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei. With his wealth of experience, clear teaching, and deep love for the

liturgy, Fr Leonard led participants through a fiery, enlightening and inspiring session.

Participants explored how the Liturgy is alive and much more than just a weekly obligation. They reflected on the Mass as Christ's sacrifice made present, where heaven and earth meet. They also discovered the biblical roots of the Eucharist and why the Mass is called the source and summit of our Catholic life.

The session also unpacked each part of the Mass, from the Introductory Rites to the Concluding Rites, helping participants understand the meaning behind the prayers, responses, gestures and even the moments of sacred silence. The formation concluded with a reflection on encountering Christ in the Eucharist, His Real Presence, and how we are called to live what we celebrate long after Mass has ended.

The objective of the series is simple, to help Catholics grow in their understanding, appreciation, and active participation in the Holy Mass by exploring its biblical foundations, theological meaning, and spir-

itual significance.

Participants left with more than just new knowledge. They departed with renewed awe, practical insights and a deeper desire to participate in the Mass with greater faith, understanding and love. It was a truly enriching session that reminded everyone that the liturgy is not simply something we attend, it is the privileged place where God meets His people and transforms them.

If you were unable to attend this session, don't worry — the journey continues.

The next formation in the series will be held on Saturday, Sept 19, with the theme *Called to Serve: Formation for Liturgical Ministers*. Whether you already serve in a liturgical ministry or are discerning a call to serve, this promises to be another enriching opportunity to deepen your understanding of the Church's liturgy and your role within it.

Mark your calendars and join us. Come and discover that every time we enter the liturgy, we are invited into something far greater than ourselves, the very mystery of God's saving love.

DEPTh students complete first phase of Theology exams

KUALA LUMPUR: Thirty-nine students sat for the Phase I examinations of the Distance Education Programme in Theology (DEPTh) on July 11 at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre. The candidates, comprising both lay faithful and religious, are part of the programme's third intake, which runs from 2025 to 2028. Earlier cohorts completed the programme from 2016–2019 and 2020–2023.

The students sat for two examination papers: Paper I – *Scripture* and Paper II – *Systematic and Moral Theology*. Each paper lasted two-and-a-half hours, with candidates required to answer four out of six questions.

Paper I commenced at 9.30am and concluded at noon, with students fully immersed in writing their responses. They were given the option of typing their answers directly onto their laptops or handwriting them before scanning and uploading them to the online learning management system, Schoology.

Although online access was available for submitting their answers, students were strictly prohibited from using the internet to search for information. They were permitted to consult only the Bible, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the documents of the Second Vatican Council.

Following a brief lunch break, the candidates returned to the examination hall to sit for Paper II, which began at 1.30pm.

The three-and-a-half-year diploma programme is offered by Vidyajyoti College of Theology, India, in collaboration with the Archdiocesan Pastoral Institute (API), Kuala Lumpur. Students will sit for their Phase II examinations towards the end of 2027.

Admission to the programme requires a pass in the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) or O-Level examination, proficiency in English, prior participation in formation programmes, and basic computer literacy.

Since the programme began in October 2024, API has organised three contact sessions, allowing students to meet in person, build friendships and participate in lectures by various speakers. In addition, Vidyajyoti College of Theology has conducted regular online classes throughout the course.

The students from Brunei, Sarawak and Peninsular Malaysia, have expressed appreciation for the opportunity to deepen their understanding of the Catholic faith through structured theological formation, describing the programme as both enriching and a privilege to undertake.

PIHDM leaders trained in case management, pathways out of poverty



KUALA LUMPUR: On July 11, the Ministry of the Poor (MOP) under the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development (AOHD) conducted a training session for Parish Integral Human Development Ministry (PIHDM) leaders from the five districts of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur. A total of 36 PIHDM leaders and members of their core teams participated.

The first session, led by Christopher Victor, assistant coordinator of the Ministry of the Poor, introduced participants to the Case Management System (CMS). The training focused on recording and managing information on individuals and families seeking assistance from PIHDM.

The CMS is designed to improve the Church's ability to accompany those in need by maintaining accurate records, ensuring coordinated follow-up, and helping beneficiaries move towards greater self-reliance rather than relying solely on financial aid. It also helps prevent the duplication of cases across parishes, enabling

resources to be directed more effectively to those most in need.

The second session highlighted a new collaboration between AOHD and DHS Hospitality Academy. Working together with International College Yayasan Melaka (ICYM), DHS Hospitality offers two programmes aimed at equipping young people with employable skills.

The Talent Spark programme is designed for school leavers who did not complete their secondary education, providing them with hospitality training that prepares them for employment in the hotel industry.

The Talent Rise programme targets youths who have obtained at least three SPM credits. Participants can pursue a diploma in Hotel Management before embarking on careers in the hospitality sector.

DHS Hospitality founder and group director, Dr S. Sri Kumar, outlined the challenges faced by many young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, noting that limited educational opportunities often leave

them vulnerable to unemployment and social problems. He said both programmes offer practical pathways to sustainable employment, reducing the risk of homelessness and helping participants build a more secure future.

Also present was ICYM chief executive officer Encik Amin Rashid Mohd Hussain, who reaffirmed the college's commitment to ensuring that quality education and career opportunities remain accessible regardless of socioeconomic background.

The collaboration was spearheaded by AOHD acting director Aaron Koh, who worked closely with DHS Hospitality through a series of planning meetings to bring the initiative to fruition. AOHD hopes PIHDM leaders will make full use of these programmes by identifying suitable candidates among the individuals and families they regularly assist, enabling them to break the cycle of poverty through education and meaningful employment.

JOBITA HOME AN ASSISTED-LIVING CATHOLIC ELDERLY CARE HOME



The Spiritual needs of our Residents are met in a Fully-Catholic Comfortable environment by our Catholic Caregivers



- HOLY COMMUNION Every Sunday
- Occasional Mass is celebrated, Confessions and Anointing by Catholic Priests
- Hospital Accompaniment with Caregivers
- Healthy Meals
- Gentle Exercises
- Affordable & Reasonable Rates



No.140 Jalan 14/15, Section 14, 46100, Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia
For further enquiries:

Kindly Call John : 016-2167751

Bringing children back to the Eucharist

JAKARTA: The Archdiocese of Jakarta is encouraging Catholic families to bring young children into the full celebration of the Mass, marking a pastoral shift away from the long-standing practice of placing them in separate children's rooms during the liturgy.

The renewed approach reflects a growing conviction that children develop a lasting love for the Eucharist by worshipping alongside their families, rather than being separated from the celebration.

The initiative was presented at a recent seminar titled *My Home Is My Child's First Church*, themed *Building Eucharistic Spirituality in the Family*, at Wisma Samadi in Klender, East Jakarta.

Organised by the Archdiocese of Jakarta's Catholic Class Desk in collaboration with its Catechetical Commission, the seminar drew 443 participants from 70 parishes across the Indonesian capital. Representatives from the

archdiocese's catechetical, liturgical, family, youth and vocations commissions also attended.

"For decades, many parishes have provided separate rooms where young children could play during Mass before returning to the church for the final blessing," said Fr Carolus Putranto Tri Hidayat, chairman of the Catechetical Commission.

"Love for the Eucharist cannot grow if children are kept away from experiencing the liturgy itself," he said.

To support the renewed pastoral direction, the commission has introduced *Prokat Dia-Rekat* (Early Childhood, Children and Youth Catholic Catechesis Programme), which places participation in the Mass at the heart of children's faith formation.

Maria Fifin Finetta, who heads the archdiocese's Children's and Youth Faith Formation Desk, said the programme encourages children to

experience every part of the liturgy with their families — from the entrance procession and Scripture readings to the prayers, music, incense and Holy Communion.

"The goal is to help children encounter Christ through the liturgy rather than simply learn about the faith in a classroom," she said.

Frans Widiyanto, chairman of Catholic Class Jakarta, said such experiences gradually nurture a genuine love for Christ.

"Let children experience the beauty of the Eucharistic celebration firsthand. Through those experiences, their love for Christ will naturally grow," he said.

Speakers throughout the seminar emphasised that parents remain their children's first teachers of the faith.

Fr Fransiskus Asisi Budiyo, MSF, chairman of the Family Ministry Commission, described the family as "the first school of faith."

"The home is where children



The Archdiocese of Jakarta encourages families to bring children to participate in the Eucharist. (RVA photo)

first learn to pray with their father, mother and siblings. From that experience, they are prepared to participate meaningfully in the Eucharist," he said.

Fr Albertus Monang Rianto Sidabutar, chairman of the Liturgical Commission, recalled that his own lifelong love for the Eucharist began because his parents faithfully brought him to Mass.

Meanwhile, Fr Salto Deodatus Simanullang, chairman of the Youth Commission, said research by the archdiocese found that many young Catholics continue to seek authentic spiritual experiences through Eucharistic Adoration and the Mass, despite the distractions of digital life.

Fr Carolus acknowledged that changing long-established pastoral practices would take time, but said the renewal was essential if children were to develop a personal relationship with Christ through the Eucharist.

The archdiocese plans to expand formation programmes and parish workshops to support the new approach while strengthening collaboration among its catechetical, liturgical, family, youth and vocations ministries.

Church leaders said the initiative aims to help families become the "first church" for their children, with participation in the Eucharist serving as the foundation of lifelong faith. **Mathias Hariyadi, RVA**

China ordains new bishop under Vatican-Beijing agreement

CHINA: A new Catholic bishop has been ordained in China, marking the latest episcopal ordination since Pope Leo XIV became head of the Catholic Church in May.

Bishop Chang Yanfeng, *pic*, was ordained bishop of the Diocese of Chifeng on July 22 in Hongshan district, Chifeng City, Inner Mongolia, according to the state-sanctioned Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China (BCCCC).

The ordination was presided over by Bishop Meng Qinglu of Hohhot, vice-chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA), the government-backed body that oversees the state-recognised Catholic Church in China. Also present

were Bishop Pei Junmin, vice-chairman of the bishops' conference, and Bishop Yao Shun of Ulanqab. About 400 priests, religious and lay faithful attended the ceremony.

During the ordination, Fr Yang Yu, secretary-general of the bishops' conference, read the official letter approving Bishop Chang's appointment.

Born on April 4, 1984, in Hebei Province, Bishop Chang studied philosophy and theology at Shenyang Catholic Theological Seminary before completing a master's degree in biblical theology at Daejeon Catholic University in South Korea. Ordained a priest in 2010, he was appointed Bishop of Chifeng on



March 20, 2026.

The Diocese of Chifeng traces its origins to the early 19th century. It became the Prefecture Apostolic of Chifeng in 1931 and was elevated to a diocese in 1949.

The appointment of Catholic bishops has long been one of the most contentious issues in rela-

tions between the Holy See and Beijing, which severed diplomatic ties following the Communist takeover in the 1950s.

The Vatican and China signed a provisional agreement on the appointment of bishops in 2018. Although its contents have never been made public, it is widely understood to provide a framework under which both sides participate in the selection of bishops. The agreement has been renewed several times, most recently in October 2024, for a further four years.

The accord has drawn mixed reactions. Supporters view it as a pragmatic step towards greater unity among Catholics in China, while critics argue it has strength-

ened government control over the Church and failed to protect underground Catholics who remained loyal to Rome despite decades of persecution.

Since Pope Leo XIV's election, four bishops have been ordained or formally recognised in China. In June 2025, the Chinese government recognised Bishop Joseph Lin Yuntuan, previously an underground bishop, as Auxiliary Bishop of Fuzhou. Bishop Joseph Wang Zhengui became the first bishop of the newly established Diocese of Zhangjiakou in September 2025, followed by the ordination of Bishop Francis Li Jianlin for the Apostolic Prefecture of Xinxiang in Henan Province in December 2025. **ucanews.com**

Zambia's bishops urge peace ahead of elections

VATICAN: Zambia's Catholic bishops have appealed to the nation to safeguard its long tradition of peace as the country prepares for presidential and parliamentary elections on August 13, warning that political violence could erode one of the country's greatest national strengths.

In a pastoral statement issued ahead of the polls, the bishops reminded Zambians that the country has enjoyed a remarkable history of peaceful coexistence and democratic transitions since gaining independence in 1964.

"Zambia has built its identity since independence on peace," the bishops wrote. "That peace has not been an accident; it was built, generation after generation, by ordinary Zambians choosing dialogue over confrontation. It remains, even now, fragile enough to be lost."

The bishops stressed that peace is more than the absence of conflict. It is rooted in justice, mutual respect and solidarity, they said, warning



Members of the Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops (ZCCB). (CNA/ZCCB)

that every act of political violence wounds the common good and undermines trust in democracy.

Calling for violence-free campaigns, the bishops said no political office or electoral victory could ever justify intimidation, aggression or bloodshed.

"We wish to be unambiguous on the issue of violence, because ambiguity may cost lives," they said, insisting that retaliation must never be an option and that political vio-

lence "must not be tolerated under any circumstances."

The bishops also challenged those who fuel violence behind the scenes, including financiers, political leaders and social media users who spread hatred, misinformation or inflammatory content.

"Silence or tacit approval in the face of one's own supporters' violence is itself a form of support," they said, urging political leaders to speak out firmly against violence

within their own ranks.

They made a special appeal to young people not to allow themselves to become instruments of political violence, but instead to become builders of peace.

The pastoral statement concluded with the Prayer of St Francis, asking God to make each person "an instrument of Your peace."

President Hakainde Hichilema welcomed the bishops' message, particularly its unequivocal condemnation of political violence, intimidation and hatred.

In a statement issued by chief communication specialist Clayson Hamasaka, the president said the bishops' appeal reflected the government's own commitment to ensuring peaceful, free, fair and credible elections.

"The president agrees that Zambia must never return to the dark days of political violence, cadreism and fear," the statement

said, adding that every eligible citizen must be able to campaign and vote without intimidation. **Vatican News**

CHRISTIAN DESIGNS

Vol. 5 - Part I
— CATALOGUE —

The Symbol of Love

THE TSHIRTMOB

002025755 - T

<https://www.facebook.com/thetshirtmobXOXO>
<https://www.youtube.com/@TheTshirtMob>
 WhatsApp 011 7915 7129



Long before synodality became part of the universal Church's vocabulary, Catholics in Sabah were already living it. Through PAX and later DOPP, the local Church developed a distinctive culture of listening, discernment and shared responsibility that continues to shape its mission today.

Joseph Tek & Richard Chia

In Sabah, there is a word that sounds almost like a quiet blessing — PAX.

Short. Gentle. Familiar whether spoken in the hills of Ranau, the plantations of Tenom or the fishing villages of Kudat.

Behind this simple Latin word meaning peace lies one of the most remarkable stories in the history of the Catholic Church in Malaysia. More than an organisation, PAX came to represent a distinctive way of being Church — one in which bishops, priests, religious and laity prayed, listened and discerned the Church's mission together.

Today, synodality has become a familiar expression throughout the universal Church. Yet decades before the term entered the Church's vocabulary, Catholics in Sabah were already practising many of its essential principles.

Remarkably, this pastoral culture did not begin with an ambitious strategic plan or a Vatican document.

It began with something much simpler.

A problem.

When the Church had to grow up

By the 1960s, the Catholic Church in Sabah was flourishing.

For almost a century, missionaries — especially the Mill Hill Missionaries from England — had travelled by boat, horseback and on foot to proclaim the Gospel across the state. They crossed rivers, climbed mountains and endured difficult conditions to establish churches, schools and mission stations from Penampang and Papar to Tambunan, Keningau and the northern coast.

Their legacy extended far beyond bricks and mortar. They founded schools, formed catechists and nurtured communities that would become the foundation of today's local Church.

Yet beneath this remarkable growth lay one undeniable reality.

The Church depended heavily on overseas missionaries.

As the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) called for greater participation by the laity in the life and mission of the Church, some leaders in Sabah began asking an important question:

What would happen if the missionaries could no longer carry the work alone?

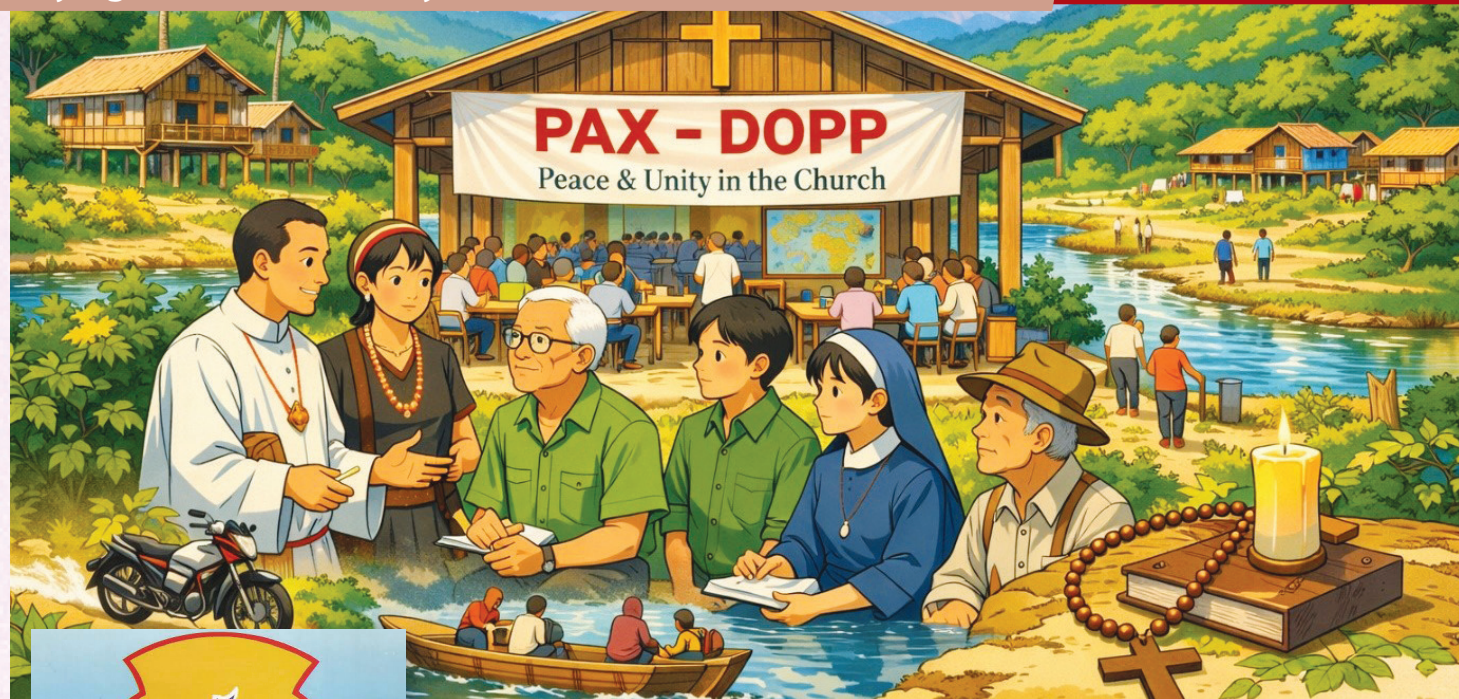
Among those who recognised the challenge early was Dutch Mill Hill missionary Fr Willibrord Smit.

As early as 1960, Fr Smit proposed a simple but visionary idea: every parish should establish a council where clergy and lay faithful could meet regularly to reflect on the spiritual and pastoral needs of their community.

Today, parish pastoral councils are taken for granted. In 1960, however, Fr Smit's proposal represented a significant shift in thinking.

For generations, parish life had revolved largely around the missionary priest. Fr Smit believed the Church would become stronger when the faithful themselves accepted greater responsibility for its mission.

He probably did not realise it then, but the



The Sabahan way of being Church

seeds he planted would eventually grow into one of the most distinctive pastoral models in the Catholic Church in Malaysia.

From Parish Councils to PAX

Penampang became the first mission to embrace Fr Smit's vision.

In 1967, it established what is widely regarded as Malaysia's first parish council. Other parishes soon followed, discovering that collaboration strengthened not only parish life but also the sense of shared mission.

The councils discussed everything from catechesis and youth ministry to finances, parish development and community outreach. More importantly, they helped ordinary Catholics recognise themselves not merely as recipients of pastoral care but as co-workers in the Church's mission.

The meetings were not always easy. Opinions differed, debates could be spirited, and contemporary reports observed — with refreshing honesty — those discussions sometimes produced "concern, joy, grief and great hilarity."

Behind those lively conversations, however, the Church in Sabah was quietly learning to listen.

Recognising the value of this emerging model, parish representatives met in October 1970 to explore the formation of a territory-wide pastoral council that could address common pastoral challenges.

Their vision became a reality on Easter Monday, April 12, 1971.

Delegates from throughout Sabah gathered at Sacred Heart Parish Hall in Kota Kinabalu to establish the Persatuan Agama Katolik Sabah (PAX).

The initiative was led by Bishop Peter Chung, the first local bishop in East Malaysia, together with clergy and respected lay leaders, among them Datuk Peter Mojuntin, whose commitment to both Church and society earned widespread admiration.

For the first time, clergy and laity were formally brought together within a common structure to pray, consult and discern the future direction of the Church in Sabah.

PAX was never intended to replace the bishop's leadership. Rather, it reflected the growing conviction that the whole People of God share responsibility for the Church's mission, each according to his or her vocation.

Few could have imagined that what began as a practical pastoral initiative would soon be-

come one of the defining moments in the history of the Church in Sabah.

Looking back, its timing seems almost providential.

Barely a year later, the young local Church would face one of the greatest challenges in its history.

Providence at work

During the administration of chief minister Tun Datu Mustapha Datu Harun, immigration regulations affecting foreign religious personnel were enforced more strictly. As many Catholic parishes still depended heavily on overseas missionaries, the consequences were immediate and far-reaching.

On Dec 2, 1972, police operations were carried out at mission stations in Bundu Tuhan, Papar, Tambunan and Kuala Penyu. Further actions followed in Keningau, Tenom and Limbahau, resulting in a number of missionary priests leaving Sabah or being reassigned elsewhere.

For many Catholics, it was a painful chapter. Priests who had faithfully served remote communities for years suddenly departed, leaving behind congregations that had looked to them not only as pastors but also as teachers, counsellors and trusted friends.

Yet what appeared to be a crisis became a defining moment in the growth of the local Church.

Looking back, it is difficult not to see a quiet providence at work. Barely a year before the missionary crisis, the Church had already begun organising itself through parish councils and PAX. What first appeared to be a practical pastoral initiative became the very structure that enabled the Church in Sabah to weather one of the greatest transitions in its history.

Local clergy assumed greater leadership, while lay Catholics stepped forward to sustain parish life, organise ministries and strengthen their communities. Rather than weakening the Church, the crisis accelerated a transition that had already begun.

The Church in Sabah was learning to stand on its own feet.

Learning to listen

From its birth in 1971, PAX quickly grew into far more than an organisation. It became the principal consultative body of the local Church and one of the defining features of Catholic life in Sabah.

Between 1971 and 1997, annual PAX as-

semblies brought together delegates from parishes across the west coast, the Interior and the east coast. Bishops, priests, religious and lay leaders gathered to pray, reflect and discern the pastoral needs of the Church.

The assemblies examined every aspect of Church life — from evangelisation and catechesis to family ministry, education, parish development and social concerns. Their purpose was not simply to solve problems but to discern how the Church should respond to the changing realities of society.

Unlike conventional conferences or committee meetings, PAX assemblies combined prayer, listening and dialogue with pastoral planning. They sought not merely consensus, but the guidance of the Holy Spirit for the mission of the Church.

In this sense, PAX became more than an annual gathering. It became a school of discernment.

PAX was successively guided by Bishop Peter Chung (1971–1974), Bishop Simon Fung (1976–1985) and Bishop John Lee (1986–1997).

They were supported by clergy vice-chairmen Fr Thomas Sham, Fr Tobias Chi, Fr John Lee and Fr Cornelius Piong, together with dedicated lay leaders including Datuk Peter Mojuntin, Dato Fong Peng Loi, Tan Sri Ben Stephens, Francis Chong, Donald Malinggang and John Paujik.

While leadership changed over the years, the vision remained constant: building a Church in which responsibility for the Gospel was shared by the whole People of God.

PAX became Sabah's living expression of the Second Vatican Council. It demonstrated that greater participation did not diminish episcopal leadership; rather, it enriched it, enabling bishops, clergy, religious and laity to discern the Church's mission together.

More importantly, it fostered a culture that would shape generations of Catholics. Parish representatives returned home not merely with reports and resolutions, but with a renewed sense that the Church belonged to everyone. The mission of proclaiming the Gospel was no longer seen as the work of priests alone. It was the shared vocation of the entire People of God.

● In the next instalment, we explore the Diocesan Organisational Pastoral Plan (DOPP) and how it gave the Church in Sabah a shared pastoral vision for the future.

Pope's prayer intention for August

When the Gospel becomes visible

"For evangelisation in the city. Let us pray that in large cities often marked by anonymity and loneliness, we find new ways to proclaim the Gospel, discovering creative paths to build community."

- Pope Leo XIV's

Prayer Intention for August

A young professional leaves his apartment in Cheras before sunrise. He walks to Taman Connaught MRT Station, joining hundreds of commuters beginning another working day. The train is already crowded as it heads towards Tun Razak Exchange (TRX). By the time he reaches his office, he has passed thousands of people. His day is filled with meetings, deadlines, emails and endless messages on his phone. As evening falls, he boards the train home, standing shoulder to shoulder with the same sea of unfamiliar faces, before finally returning to the apartment where his day began.

He has spent the entire day surrounded by people, yet no one has really noticed him.

His story is repeated every day in Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Johor Bahru, Kuching, Kota Kinabalu and many of our growing towns and cities. We share trains, lifts, offices, shopping malls and even the pews at Sunday Mass, yet many of us scarcely know the people around us. We are more connected than ever before, but many have never felt more alone. In cities built for speed and efficiency, people easily become invisible.

It is into this reality that Pope Leo XIV speaks through his prayer intention for August. He invites us to discover new ways of proclaiming the Gospel and creative paths to building community. His words challenge us to ask not simply how we evangelise, but *what evangelisation truly is*.

More than bringing people to Church

For many Catholics, evangelisation means bringing people into the Church. We think of preaching, catechism classes, parish missions or inviting someone to become Catholic. These are important expressions of the Church's mission, but they are not where evangelisation begins.

The word *evangelisation* comes from the Greek *euangelion* — Good News. The question is not simply whether we have spoken about Jesus. It is whether people experience the Good News because they have encountered us.

When Jesus began His public ministry, His first proclamation was not, "Come and join My movement." He proclaimed, *"The Kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the Good News"* (Mk 1:15). Throughout the Gospels, Jesus spoke repeatedly about the Kingdom — a Kingdom where the poor are lifted up, the hungry are fed, the stranger is welcomed, the sinner is forgiven and those on the margins discover that they matter.

This changes everything.

Evangelisation is not first about bringing people into the Church. It is about bringing the Kingdom of God into the world.

The Church exists because of the Kingdom, and for the Kingdom. Every Eucharist gathers us around Christ only to send us back into our homes,

workplaces and society to continue His mission. Jesus Himself described that mission when He proclaimed, *"The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."* (Lk 4:18-19). He then walked out into the streets and lived those words. Before He asked people to follow Him, He restored their dignity.

Pope Francis reminds us in *Evangelii Gaudium* that the Church is called to be *"An evangelising community (who gets) involved by word and deed in people's daily lives"* (EG24). Likewise, the Second Vatican Council begins *Gaudium et Spes* by declaring that the joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties of humanity are also those of Christ's followers. The Church was never meant to be a spectator of history. She was sent into it.

The Kingdom made visible

What might that look like in Malaysia today?

Over the past few weeks, social media has fuelled a growing wave of hostility towards refugees in Malaysia. Rumours, misinformation and fear have spread rapidly, creating false narratives that portray an already vulnerable community as a threat. In one part of our country, more than fifty Rohingya families who have lived peacefully there since the early 2000s have been given an ultimatum to leave their homes or face violence. Over 250 persons, many of them children, suddenly face the possibility of displacement, not because of anything they have done, but because fear has become louder than truth.

This is not simply a political issue. It is a Gospel moment.

As I write this article, I have just returned from spending the day listening to the leaders of this refugee community. I heard their fears, their uncertainty and their quiet question: "Where will our families go?" As I listened, I realised that this was no longer simply a story about refugees. It had become a question about our discipleship.

How do we evangelise in such a situation?

We evangelise when a parish priest immediately opens part of his parish compound to shelter families who may



Prayer Prism

Fr Fabian Dicom



soon have nowhere to go — one parish priest actually did.

We evangelise when parishioners organise food and basic necessities without asking whether these refugees deserve help.

We evangelise when Christians refuse to forward false information because truth matters.

We evangelise when we courageously challenge prejudice, even when it costs us friendships, popularity or comfort.

We evangelise when we choose encounter over fear.

This is precisely what Jesus did. Again and again, He crossed the boundaries that society created. He touched those others avoided. He spoke with those others condemned. He welcomed those others rejected. He constantly reminded His disciples that every human person possesses an inalienable dignity because each is created and loved by God.

Evangelisation that builds community

Pope Leo XIV speaks of discovering "creative paths to building community." After listening to the refugee families today, I found myself wondering whether those paths are often much simpler than we imagine. I think they really begin whenever ordinary Christians choose to 'do' the Gospel rather than merely speak about it: by confronting and rejecting corruption wherever it is found, by defending the truth when lies are easier, by welcoming those whom others reject, and by standing with people who have no one left to stand with them. None of this is easy. But this is where evangelisation takes flesh. This is where strangers become neighbours, communities are born, and the Kingdom of God becomes visible.

In Malaysia, this evangelisation will take many forms. It will mean welcoming migrant workers into our parish communities, defending the dignity of

stateless children, caring for the elderly who live alone, accompanying young people struggling silently with loneliness and mental health, rejecting corruption in our workplaces, caring for our common home, and working alongside people of other religions to build a more just and compassionate society.

This is Catholic Social Teaching in action. It is not an optional extra to our faith. It is the Gospel made visible.

The courage to stand where Jesus stood

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing the Church today is not whether we know enough about evangelisation, but whether others can recognise the Gospel because of the way we live.

In every generation, the Church is called to read the signs of the times and ask a simple but demanding question: Where would Christ be found today? Would He remain where it is safe and comfortable, or would He once again be among those who are forgotten, excluded and burdened by fear?

Evangelisation begins the moment we decide to meet Him there.

Perhaps, then, Pope Leo XIV is inviting us to rethink evangelisation itself. It is not merely the task of bringing people into our churches. It is the mission of bringing the compassion, justice and hope of Christ into the places where they are most absent. When we do that, we discover that we are not simply building stronger parishes — we are helping to build the Kingdom of God.

Tomorrow morning, that young professional from Cheras will once again board the MRT at Taman Connaught and travel to TRX. He will pass thousands of people before returning home that evening. The question Pope Leo XIV leaves us with is not whether he will hear another sermon about the Gospel. It is whether, somewhere along that journey, he will encounter someone whose life reflects Christ — someone who notices the lonely, welcomes the stranger, defends the vulnerable and refuses to be silent in the face of injustice.

For the Gospel is never most powerful when it is merely explained. It is most powerful when it is seen. And when people can see Christ in the way we welcome, accompany, forgive and stand beside one another, the Gospel becomes visible, communities begin to flourish, and our cities become just a little more like the Kingdom that Jesus came to proclaim.

Fr Fabian Dicom is the National Director of Caritas Malaysia



Where faith anchors a fishing village

Evelyn Khor & Sharon Tan

Every year, as the Feast of St Peter approaches, attention naturally turns to Melaka's Portuguese Settlement, where the colourful Fiesta San Pedro attracts thousands with its traditional blessing of fishing boats, Kristang music and festive celebrations.

Yet, some 300 kilometres away, another St Peter's feast unfolds in a very different setting.

There are no large crowds or tourist buses in Kuala Sepetang, a quiet coastal fishing village in the Larut, Matang and Selama district of northwestern Perak. Once known as Port Weld, it offers something quieter but equally compelling: a close-knit community whose faith, generosity and deep devotion to St Peter bear a beautiful witness to the Gospel.

We had the privilege of joining the villagers this year, for their annual feast. What we encountered was one of those hidden treasures that reminds us how deeply the Christian faith can become rooted in the life, culture and traditions of a community.

A chapel with a remarkable story

The history of St Peter's Chapel stretches back more than a century.

In 1925, Fr René Cardon, parish priest of the Church of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, Taiping, established the chapel to serve the Chinese Catholic community in Port Weld, then one of the busiest ports in Peninsular Malaya and the terminus of the country's first railway line.

Dedicated to St Peter, the patron saint of fishermen, the chapel became the spiritual home of fishermen, dock workers and railway labourers.

In 1965, Fr René Chineau, *pic*, rebuilt the original wooden-and-zinc chapel on a newly acquired site to better serve the predominantly Teochew-speaking Catholic fishing community. Assisted by parish catechist Mrs Agatha Kwa, he nurtured a community that faithfully preserved many of its inherited traditions, including the distinctive sing-song recitation of the Rosary brought by their forebears from China. The chapel was officially blessed by Bishop Gregory Yong on April 20, 1969.

As Port Weld gradually declined in importance, many families left in search of better opportunities. The congregation dwindled, the chapel fell into disrepair and, for a time, it seemed destined to disappear.

But the village had other plans.

In an inspiring display of unity, Catholics and non-Catholics rallied together to save the little chapel they all regarded as part of the village's heritage. Donations poured in — not only from parishioners, but also from local businesses, hawkers and neighbours of other faiths.

Following an extensive rebuilding project,



the restored chapel was officially reopened on June 29, 2024, the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, ushering in a new chapter in its history.

The chapel itself has become a testimony to that communal spirit.

The altar is constructed in the shape of a fishing boat by a non-Catholic from the village who then donated it to the parish. The paintings portraying scenes from the lives of Jesus and Peter were done by two artists, who worked together — Anna Chin Siew Fang, a Catholic and Ong Kar Ping, a non-Catholic. It is difficult to imagine a more fitting expression of a community united by mutual respect and shared affection for its patron saint.

Faith expressed through culture

From the moment the feast began, we were struck by how naturally Christian faith had become intertwined with the traditions of the local community.

The first thing that caught our attention was the use of large red candles, each adorned with a gold cross, instead of the customary white altar candles, placed at the foot of the statue of St Peter. The striking red-and-gold palette, so closely associated with Chinese celebrations, beautifully reflect the heritage of Kuala Sepetang's predominantly Teochew and Hokkien fishing community.



Both the life-sized processional statue and the smaller shrine statue of St Peter were draped with colourful flower garlands, a gesture of honour that resonates strongly with Hindu cultural traditions.

Even the list of benefactors told its own story.

Pink donation slips fluttering gently in the breeze bore the names of contributors that included the local Chinese temple, the Hindu temple, market traders, hawkers and many villagers from different faith traditions.

It was deeply moving to witness how St Peter had become more than the patron saint of the Catholic community. For many in Kuala Sepetang, he is lovingly regarded as the protector of the entire fishing village.

A celebration rooted in tradition

The feastday Mass, celebrated by Msgr Stephen Liew together with Fr Augustine Lee and Deacon Charles Lazaroo, drew Catholics, neighbours of other faiths and visitors alike.

Although the liturgy was celebrated in Mandarin, the Penitential Act, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer were chanted in the distinctive Teochew style lovingly preserved through generations — a living reminder of the community's ancestral roots.

The offertory procession beautifully

reflected the village's identity.

Alongside the bread and wine came gifts from the sea — steamed fish, boiled cockles and dried prawns — together with a plate of red eggs, a traditional symbol of joy, blessing and new life as well as several packets of *nasi lemak*.

After Mass, a brass band led the statue of St Peter through the village streets. Young and old followed joyfully in procession while residents emerged from their homes, smiling and waving as their patron saint passed by.

There was no sense of spectators and participants. The whole village seemed to celebrate together.

Hospitality from the heart

If the procession celebrated faith, the meal that followed celebrated community.

Guests were served Kuala Sepetang's famous Teochew dried prawn porridge, prepared by one of the village's best-known porridge shops. Judging by the number of people returning for second helpings, it was every bit as good as its reputation suggested.

Local organisations and businesses had also donated an abundance of snacks, while volunteers insisted that visitors leave with takeaway porridge and generous bags of food.

Their hospitality was offered so naturally and generously that one quickly realised it was not simply about feeding guests. It was their way of sharing themselves.

Following Peter today

As we left Kuala Sepetang, we found ourselves reflecting on Christ's invitation to Peter: "Come, follow Me."

In this quiet fishing village, those words are no longer merely part of the Gospel story.

They are lived out in a community that refused to let its little chapel disappear; in neighbours of different faiths who joined hands to preserve it; in fishermen who continue to entrust their lives to their patron saint; and in villagers whose warmth and generosity reveal the very heart of the Gospel.

Kuala Sepetang may never draw the crowds that flock each year to Melaka's Fiesta San Pedro.

Yet, in its own quiet and unassuming way, this little village offers something equally inspiring. It reminds us that the Church is often at its most beautiful not in grand cathedrals or famous pilgrim sites, but in small communities where faith is lived simply, traditions are lovingly preserved, cultures enrich one another, and Christ continues to call ordinary people to become His disciples.

Perhaps that is the enduring legacy of St Peter himself — not merely the fisherman who became the Rock upon which Christ built His Church, but the Apostle who continues to inspire humble communities like Kuala Sepetang to cast their nets ever deeper into faith, hope and love.

Light, salt and chilli powder

Recently, I went to meet a person I did not know to collect a kilo of chilli powder sent from Bangladesh. The courier was a fellow villager of my friend Salamat, who had returned to his home country two years ago. Salamat used to work in a restaurant I frequented in 2020. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the restaurant shut, and as the lockdowns continued, the restaurant owners began skimping on the food they provided their employees.

I used to walk my dog past the rental house the workers lived in and, as days became months, I noticed that there were fewer smells of cooking as the weeks went by. One morning, Salamat hailed me from the balcony of the house and asked if I could spare some food. His boss, he explained, had not given them their monthly rice ration, and there was nothing to eat in the house.

Appalled, I asked about the number of occupants (eleven), and their dietary preferences or restrictions, only to be shyly told that rice, salt and dhal were enough. The foodie in me was appalled. Here I was, in pandemic time, enjoying the new recipes cooked up by my husband for breakfast, lunch, tea and dinner, while roads away, men starved.

A trip to the shop nearby, and I came back with rice, eggs, instant noodles, bread, tofu, chicken, vegetables, coffee, tea, chocolate drink, salt, pepper and sugar. I had no idea of the state of their pantry, and did not want them to have to eat unseasoned food.

When Salamat appeared on the balcony in response to my car honk, he stared unbelievably at the bags and bags of

shopping. The occupants spilled out on the balcony to shout their thanks, and I told Salamat I would bring them what they needed if he would text me on the number on the business card I left. I was barely home when my phone buzzed, and Salamat's messages of thanks came in by way of voice messages.

I kept the house fed, and my eye on the men as I walked every day, and it soon became a ritual that Salamat would share photos of the food they cooked daily. That progressed into little packets of food placed on their gate for me to share, and my reciprocated gifts of fruit.

When restrictions eased and businesses were allowed to reopen, my food deliveries stopped. Each time I went to eat at the place they worked, I was greeted by friendly faces and bigger than usual portions.

After four years, Salamat decided to return home to Bangladesh, where he opened a spice shop. He continued to stay in touch, sending me photos of his humble wares and explaining what each spice was used for. One conversation centred around how I ruined a curry because the chilli powder I had bought was explosively spicy.

Just a few months back, my friend announced that a friend from his village was coming to Malaysia to work. Salamat had entrusted a kilo of sweet chilli powder to this man, with the instructions to get it to me, no matter the effort. Which is how a rather surreptitious exchange happened in an LRT station between a stranger and I.

The chilli powder was, according to



Word in Progress

Karen-Michaela Tan

Salamat, from chillies he had specially selected and ground himself, for a well-balanced heat and flavour profile. He had given his friend money for transport to ensure the package was delivered. It was his way of showing gratitude for providing them food through the pandemic.

As I stored the vibrant powder in my pantry, I thought about how little effort it took to ensure the well-being of our fellow human beings. In this day and

age when an assaulted person lying in the road is probably subject to more picture-taking than help, it is easy to wonder where humanity has gone. News of teachers sexually grooming young students, cruel drivers who purposely run over stray dogs, and the unhinged, unstatesman-like behaviour of certain world leaders can make us question the value of little acts of kindness, but I continue to look for ways to be light in this world because of John 13:34-35. I cannot speak at the United Nations or force through safeguards for the vulnerable, but I can love as many around me as is possible. "By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another" is not an impossible exhortation. In fact, to me, it is one of the smallest and easiest things to do if we look at each person as an extension of ourselves.

For instance, food is important to me. I enjoy writing about it, designing recipes, trying out new dishes, and relish the communion of the dining table. It is an easy stretch to believe that others too would like

to have full bellies, and the comfort and camaraderie that good food brings.

When people tell me expressing their faith is daunting, I suggest they focus on low-hanging fruit. Forget emulating Padre Pio's gift of bi-location, or St Catherine of Siena's rigorous fasting to the point of only surviving on the Eucharist. It is not for all of us, St Damien's service to the lepers, or the flaying and grilling of Saint Lawrence of Rome, but love and service are paths for anyone who loves the Lord and wishes to walk in His ways.

While we all, as Catholics and emulators of Christ, are called to go out of our comfort zone and experience Christ's cross, I do believe that each individual's cross is measured to size. Some are called to shoulder crosses of such gargantuan proportions that we, who look on, shudder. Others have more manageable crosses, and some, seemingly stroll with theirs. Yet, it is not for us to compare. Each life is measured differently, and each person is created for a purpose specific to their life.

It is not for me to thank God for a lighter cross, but rather, because I am not so bowed down, I should keep my eyes open to see if I can help bear the load of someone else's burden, as did Simon of Cyrene with Christ's cross. All crosses are laid down at the end. It is for those who seek to be of service to God's kingdom to open hearts and offer shoulders and strength to those whose crosses tower over them.

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

I count myself fortunate to have lived through several technological revolutions - each so transformative that it reshaped how people learn, communicate, and live. My generation grew up in the age of television, when a glowing box in the living room felt like both a miracle and a threat. And now, in my later years, I find myself standing at the threshold of another epoch: the rise of artificial intelligence, a force as invisible yet as powerful as any invention humanity has ever created. I still smile when ChatGPT tells me, "Please wait...I am thinking." Imagine that, an app is thinking!

I take heed of Pope Leo XIV's *Magnifica Humanitas*, the encyclical on safeguarding the human person in the age of artificial intelligence. The message is strikingly relevant: the magnificent humanity created by God stands before a decisive choice: to erect a new Tower of Babel or to build the holy city, where God and humanity dwell together. *Magnifica Humanitas* reminds us that no machine can replace the human spirit, and that every individual possesses an absolute, intrinsic dignity bestowed by God alone, a depth and mystery no algorithm can measure or reduce to data points. The encyclical challenges us to confront the 'Threat of the Technocrat Mindset', to 'Protect Human Vulnerability', and to 'Uphold the Dignity of Work', in an era of accelerating automation.

In the early 1960s, television arrived in Malaysian homes. Families gathered around it with a mix of excitement and joy. The flickering screen was magic: moving pictures



Turun Padang

Christopher Kushi

From television to artificial intelligence

from around the world. But not everyone welcomed it. I remember my teacher, a stern, old-fashioned gentleman who believed discipline and books were the only true path to knowledge. In school, we debated the pros and cons of television, just as people today debate the impact of artificial intelligence. One morning, when I was in Standard 6, he stood before the class and declared he would never buy a television set. "It is the Devil's Box," he said. "It will rot your mind."

We were children; we kept quiet. But his warning stayed with me. Communities echoed the same fear. They worried television would corrupt morals, distract students, weaken family bonds, and infuse foreign ideas that would erode tradition. And yet, slowly, television became a member of the household. It brought families together after dinner. It showed Hollywood programmes, the moon landing, the Olympics and World Cup, political debates, and Malaysian variety shows. Television didn't destroy society, it enhanced it.

By the 1990s, computers crept into offices and schools. They promised something television never could: interaction. We didn't just watch; we typed, clicked, created. Then came the internet, and the world cracked open. Suddenly, information was everywhere. News no longer arrived with the morning paper or evening broadcast. Letters became emails. Libraries became search engines. Smartphones blurred the line between the digital world and daily life. Today, I am experiencing a digital data



tsunami. My average daily screen time is eight hours; one-third of my day is spent communicating, scrolling, reading, or researching online.

Cardinal Sebastian Francis, responding to my growing addiction to online activity, once told me: "Don't worry. Humanity will begin with Information Excitement, move into Information Overload, and eventually settle into Information Indifference." I can already feel that indifference taking hold. I delete videos the moment I sense they're AI-generated, no time to watch, no desire to see. I tap the thumbs down icon, knowing that if I don't, the algorithm will drown me in more of the same. The news stream keeps flowing, but my appetite for it fades, and most of the time, my phone is on silent mode.

For those of us who lived through the first television revolution, AI feels less like a threat and more like a continuation, a new chapter in the story of human intelligence.

In one lifetime, I am experiencing two eras. To live from the age of television to the age of AI is to witness humanity progressing.

I have watched the world evolve from radio to black-and-white screens, then to colour; from the electrical grid to satellites; from landline phones to smartphones; from libraries to search engines; and now from machines to intelligent machines. I have lived long enough to see the so-called Devil's Box transform into Artificial Intelligence. And looking ahead, I can imagine the possible rise of something even more astonishing still: the artificial human!

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



Fr Ron Rolheiser

Unfinished business and the communion of saints

When I was growing up, as part of our family prayer, we used to pray for a happy death. In my young mind, I had a certain conception of what that might look like. A happy death would be to die in grace, warmly cradled in the loving arms of family and church, fully at peace with God and others, having had time to speak some final words of love and gratitude.

Unfortunately, not everyone gets to die that way.

Accidents, unfortunate circumstances, and the complexity of human relationships sometimes conspire in nefarious ways so that people die in less-than-ideal situations: angry, compromised, unforgiving, bitter, immature, unreconciled.

Sometimes too, the very cause of death speaks of a less-than-happy parting: drunkenness, an overdose of drugs, depression, recklessness, suicide. Death often catches people before they have had the chance to say and do things that make for a peaceful farewell. Invariably there's unfinished business.

We all know examples of this: A man dead in an accident whose last words to his family were ones of anger; a woman dead of an overdose who hasn't talked to her family in years; a colleague dead by his own hand; a friend who dies bitter, unable to forgive; or even simply the loved one who's taken away

by a sudden heart attack before he or she has had the chance to speak some last words of love and farewell. Rarely do people die without any unfinished business.

The pain of this can linger for a long time. I remember once counselling a man in his fifties who still carried pain and guilt from his mother's death more than forty years previous. He had been taken to his mother's bedside in the hospital; but was unaware that she was dying. She had asked him to give her a hug and he, a child, frightened and reticent in this tense situation, had backed away. The next day she died, so his last memory of his mother was his refusal to hug her. Forty years later and he still hadn't made peace with that.

Many of us have had people close to us die with whom we had unfinished business, a hurt never reconciled, an injustice never rectified, a bitterness that never softened. Death has now separated us, and the unfinished business remains precisely unfinished, and we are left saying: "If only there was another chance!"

Well, there is another chance. One of our most consoling (albeit neglected) Christian doctrines is our belief in the Communion of the Saints. It's a doctrine enshrined in the Apostle's Creed itself, and it asks us to believe that we are still in vital communication with

those who have died. Moreover, it tells us that the communication we now have with them is free from many of the tensions that coloured our relationship with them while they were alive.

Hence, to believe in the Communion of Saints is to believe that we can still tend to unfinished business in our relationships, even after death. Simply put, we can still talk to those who have died, and we can, even now, say the words of love, forgiveness, gratitude, and regret that ideally should have been spoken earlier. Indeed, inside the Communion of Saints, the reconciliation that eluded us while that person was alive can now more easily take place. Why?

Because inside the Communion of Saints our communication with the one deceased is privileged. Death washes clean. It clarifies perspective and takes away a lot of relational tensions. Why do I say this? Because both faith and experience teach us this.

For example, all of us have experienced situations where, inside of a family, a friendship circle, a community, or a group of colleagues, a bitter tension with an individual can arise and fester so that, eventually, there's an unresolvable rift. Things have happened that can no longer be undone. Then the one who has been at the source of the tension dies and his or her death changes everything.

Strangely, the death brings with it a peace, a clarity, and an understanding which, before it, were not possible.

Why is this? It's not simply because the death has changed the chemistry of the group or because, as we may simplistically conclude, the source of the tension or bitterness has died. It happens because, as Luke teaches in his Passion narrative, death can wash things clean and release forgiveness in the same way as Jesus forgave the good thief upon the cross as He died.

This should be an immense consolation. If we are attentive to the Communion of Saints, what we can't bring to wholeness and peace in this life can be completed afterwards. We still have communication, privileged communication, with our loved ones after death.

Among the marvels of that is the fact that we still have a chance to fix the things, after death, that we were powerless to mend before death took a loved one away.

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

The village around the child

Breastfeeding and the gift of community care

A baby's first nourishment is an intimate moment between mother and child. Yet this precious bond is sustained by a wider circle of care — supportive fathers, loving grandparents, healthcare professionals, compassionate employers, and welcoming communities.

The 2026 World Breastfeeding Week theme, *Breastfeeding for a Sustainable Start in Life: Strengthen What Works*, reminds us that mothers need more than information and encouragement. They need people who will walk with them through the joys, sacrifices and challenges of nurturing new life.

A newborn's complete dependence on its mother also reminds us of a deeper truth: we are created for relationships through which we grow in love, receiving and giving ourselves to one another. Breastfeeding is among the earliest expressions of this self-giving love, but a mother's generous gift of herself is strengthened by the care that surrounds her. When she is tired, uncertain or facing difficulties, she needs compassion, encouragement and companionship, rather than judgement.

This call to accompaniment has become increasingly relevant in Malaysia today. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM), the country's total fertility rate declined to 1.6 children per woman in 2024, well below the replacement level. At the same time, Malaysia is projected to become an aged nation by 2030, with more than 15 per cent of its population aged 60 and above, rising to an estimated 17.3 per cent by 2040.

These demographic trends invite us to reflect on how society can create conditions that enable families not only to welcome



new life but also to nurture it with confidence and hope. Young families today often juggle demanding work commitments, urban living, migration and smaller households. As traditional networks of relatives, neighbours and extended family become less accessible, many mothers no longer enjoy the natural support that previous generations took for granted, leading to greater reliance on commercial post-partum and childcare services.

Against this backdrop, the Church has an important role in strengthening a culture of communal care rooted in our rich heritage of togetherness. A parish is far more than a place of worship; it is a family where people should experience belonging. It reflects God's love when young families know they are welcomed, children are celebrated, and mothers encounter understanding rather than isolation.

Such accompaniment is especially important for families facing financial

hardship, migration, loneliness or limited social support. Before offering solutions, the Church is first called to listen attentively, understand deeply, and respond with practical compassion. Walking alongside families in their everyday struggles is itself a powerful witness to the Gospel.

Mary offers a beautiful model of this journey. Her generous "yes" to God brought Christ into the world, yet her vocation was lived within a network of holy relationships. St Joseph faithfully protected and cared for the Holy Family, while Elizabeth offered encouragement during Mary's pregnancy. Their witness reminds us that welcoming new life has never been the responsibility of one person alone.

The life of Jesus, likewise, reveals the sacredness of human dependence. The Son of God entered the world as a vulnerable child who needed the ordinary acts of feeding, comfort, protection and love from Mary and Joseph. In doing so, God affirmed the dignity of caregiving and the importance of families and communities working together to nurture life.

Building such a culture of accompaniment begins in simple but meaningful ways. Parishes can intentionally welcome young families so that parents know they belong and children are embraced as a blessing rather than a distraction. Mothers can be given opportunities to meet, share their experiences and encourage one another, reducing the sense of isolation that many quietly carry.

Fathers and extended families can be reminded that nurturing children is a shared vocation, while collaboration with healthcare professionals can help ensure that families receive practical, compassionate

In conjunction with World Breastfeeding Week (August 1–7), **DR JUNE JOSEPH** reflects on the community of care that stands behind every breastfeeding mother. As Malaysia faces changing family structures and an ageing population, the Church is called to accompany families so that every child is welcomed as a gift and every mother walks her journey with hope.



guidance. Above all, the Church is called to reach out to those facing hardship with friendship, practical assistance and the reassuring presence of a community that walks with them.

Breastfeeding reminds us that every child is nurtured not only by a mother's love but also by a community willing to share in her journey. When families are strengthened, children flourish; when children flourish, society itself is renewed.

Ultimately, creating sustainable support systems is about far more than promoting breastfeeding. It is about building a culture where mothers are accompanied, fathers are engaged, families are strengthened, and every child is welcomed as a gift. In choosing compassion over indifference and accompaniment over isolation, we reflect the heart of God, who never walks with His people from a distance but remains close, sustaining them with tenderness, mercy and unfailing love.

Dr June Joseph, PhD is a Catholic public health academic working at the intersection of faith, maternal-child health, international diplomacy and justice. She is passionate about Catholic-rooted programmes on women's dignity, breastfeeding advocacy and nutrition during the first 1000 days of life. She is an Honorary Senior fellow with the University of Queensland and can be contacted for collaborations at j.joseph@uq.edu.au

LITTLE CATHOLIC'S CORNER

Dear children,

Today's Gospel begins with a sad moment. Jesus had just heard that His cousin, John the Baptist, had died. Jesus felt sad and went by Himself to a quiet place to pray and be with His Father.

But when the people heard where Jesus was, they followed Him because they needed His

help.

Even though Jesus was grieving and sad, He did not turn them away. Instead, He welcomed them with love, healed those who were sick, and cared for them.

As evening came, everyone became hungry. The disciples only had five loaves of bread and two fish. It didn't seem like enough to feed such a huge crowd. But

Jesus thanked God, blessed the food, and asked the disciples to share it out. Then a miracle happened! Everyone had as much as they wanted to eat, and there were still twelve baskets of leftovers.

This Gospel teaches us that Jesus always loves and cares for us, even when He Himself is going through a difficult time. It also

reminds us that no gift is too small when it is given to God.

When we share what we have: our kindness, our time, our talents, or even a simple smile to someone in need, Jesus can multiply our small gifts to bless many people.

Love, Auntie C



Write or draw something you can share or do this week on each loaf.

What Can I Share?



"Give them some food yourselves."
— Matthew 14:16

I SPY...



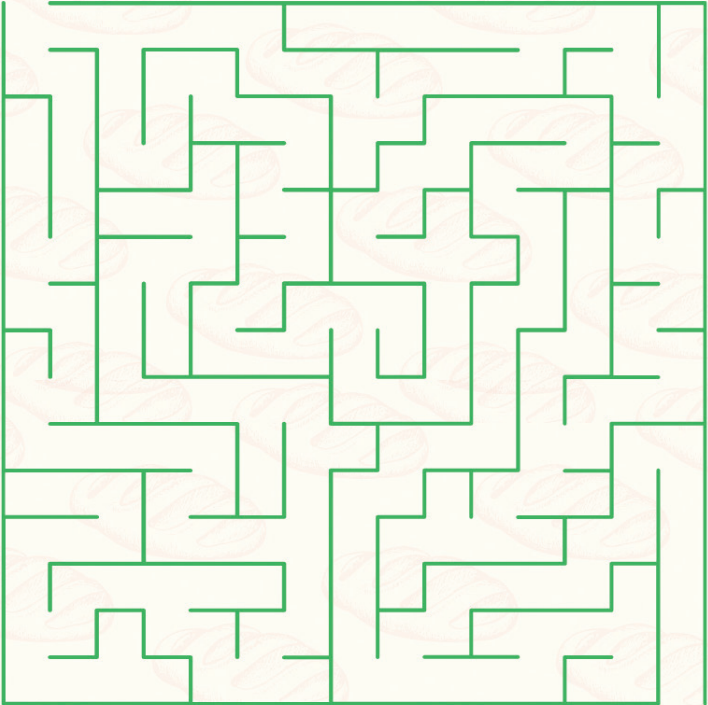
Can you find...

5x  2x 

HELP FIND THE FIVE LOAVES OF BREAD AND TWO FISH
— MATTHEW 14:13-21

BRING THE LOAVES TO JESUS

Oh no, Jesus has the fish but no bread!
Help the child bring the bread to Jesus.



YOUTH

Discovering God's call

Marcus Leong

NILAI: Thirty-six young men attended a weekend of prayer, formation, and vocational discernment from July 10-12. Hailing from the different parts of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, they converged at the Church of St Theresa for a Diocesan Vocation Camp with the theme, *The Interior Discovery of God's Call* organised by the Vocation Promotion Team of the archdiocese.

The sessions, conducted by Fr Simon Labrooy and Fr Surain Durai Raj, explored God's call, the interior life, discipleship, and the response to vocation. Through prayer, reflection, and fellowship, participants were invited to deepen their relationship with God and discern His call in their lives.

The first session, *God Who Calls – A Personal Invitation*, with the theme *Come and See*, was presented by Fr Simon. Reflecting on the truth that every person is created in the image of God, he encouraged participants to ask the deeper question: "Lord, what do You desire of me?" Referring to Genesis 3:9, "Where are you?", he invited them to examine the state of their hearts, reminding them that it is not we who search for God, but God who first searches for us. Rather than seeking success, participants were encouraged to pursue faithfulness, recognising that God calls each person out of love and invites them to holiness. Echoing the words of Pope Leo XIV, Fr Simon described every vocation as a "path of beauty".

The second session, *The Interior Life*, under the theme *Learning to Listen*, was led by Fr Surain. Focusing on the importance of cultivating an interior life, he encouraged participants to encounter God through



prayer, silence, and attentiveness. He explained that recognising one's vocation begins with developing a heart that is open to God's will, reminding participants that silence and solitude are not empty moments but sacred spaces where God speaks and where we discover our true selves.

Fr Surain continued with the third session, *Discipleship*, under the theme *Following the Good Shepherd*. Drawing on the Gospel accounts of Jesus calling His first disciples, he reflected on discipleship as the foundation of every vocation. Participants were encouraged to return to their "first love" — their initial encounter with Christ — and to respond to His invitation to "Come and see". The session also highlighted the witness of St Paul, reminding participants that authentic discipleship requires self-emptying and a wholehearted gift of oneself in love.

On Saturday evening, participants gathered for an informal sharing session where they had the opportunity to ask questions and share their personal experiences of discerning God's call.

The final session, *Responding to the Call*, with the theme *Every Vocation Begins with*



an Answer, was presented by Fr Simon. Beginning with the words of 1 Samuel 3:10, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening", he reminded participants that vocation is not only about hearing God's call but also responding with trust, obedience, and openness. He encouraged them not to be afraid of God's invitation, emphasising that vocation is measured not by prestige or achievement but by generous love and

faithful self-giving.

The vocation camp offered participants a meaningful opportunity to deepen their relationship with Christ and reflect prayerfully on God's call in their lives. As they returned to their respective parishes, they were encouraged to continue listening to the Lord with open hearts and to respond generously to His invitation, becoming faithful witnesses of His love in the world.

TOB FOR TEENS MINISTRY TRAINS NEW PRESENTERS AND FACILITATORS



The participants listening attentively to the presenter.

KUALA LUMPUR: A training session for future presenters and facilitators of the Theology of the Body (TOB) programme was held at the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on July 19. The session was facilitated by the TOB for Teens Ministry, under the care of the Kuala Lumpur Archdiocesan Catechetical Commission.

Participants from parishes across the archdiocese gathered to deepen their grasp of St John Paul II's *Theology of the Body* and to build the skills needed to share its message with young people. As part of this Phase 2 formation, facilitators Sr Retta Savariannan FdCC and Brian Jude Lazaroo led a recap of core concepts and gave participants a basic induction into facilitating the ministry's upcoming TOB camps.

One participant called it "an eye-opening session," adding, "We enjoyed fellowship with our fellow aspirants from the different

parishes in the archdiocese and learned a lot about the facilitation and presentation techniques that were shared with us." Another found the formation immediately practical: "The session was so useful that what I learned, I know I could use in my work as a catechist and as a teacher."

For others, the day struck a deeper chord. "The recap of Phase 1 terms and core messages was both intense and deeply profound," one shared. "I'm now filled with new energy and am eagerly looking forward to continuing the journey and completing this Phase 2." They added their gratitude to Sr Retta and Brian "for their self-giving and perseverance in imparting these teachings," asking for prayers for all sharing the journey.

As the ministry grows, sessions like this ensure its message of hope and truth continues to reach teens across the archdiocese.

Confirmands urged to make good choices



SEREMBAN: The Church of the Visitation joyfully celebrated the Sacrament of Confirmation on July 19, with 56 young people receiving the gifts of the Holy Spirit and being fully initiated into the Catholic Church. The Eucharistic Celebration was presided over by Archbishop Julian Leow and concelebrated by parish priest, Fr Xavier Andrew, together with assistant priest, Fr Philip Tay, OCD.

The celebration marked an important milestone in the faith journey of the confirmands, who had spent months preparing themselves through formation, prayer, and spiritual guidance. Family members, sponsors, catechists, and parishioners gathered to witness and support the candidates as they publicly affirmed their faith and received the Sacrament of Confirmation.

In his homily, Archbishop Julian

spoke directly to the young people about the importance of the choices they make in life. Drawing a contrast between the path that leads towards heaven and the path that leads away from God, he reminded the congregation that each person is given the freedom to choose the direction of their life. He emphasised that God does not force anyone to follow Him, but lovingly invites each person to respond to His call.

The archbishop then explained that Confirmation is not simply a ceremony or the completion of catechism classes. Rather, it is a personal and conscious "yes" to God. By receiving the sacrament, the young people were affirming their desire to continue living out their Catholic faith as young adults and to remain faithful disciples of Christ. He encouraged them to allow the

Holy Spirit to guide their decisions, strengthen them in moments of difficulty, and inspire them to be witnesses of Christ in their homes, schools, workplaces, and communities.

During the Rite of Confirmation, each candidate approached the archbishop to be anointed with Sacred Chrism. The anointing symbolised the sealing of the Holy Spirit upon the confirmands, strengthening them to live out their faith with courage, conviction, and commitment.

The Mass concluded with prayers of thanksgiving as the parish rejoiced with the 56 newly confirmed. We continue to pray that these young men and women will remain rooted in Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit, and inspired to use their gifts and talents in service of God and His Church. **Sabrina Smith**

Church of St Aloysius & St Theresa

MANTIN: "Heaven is where God is. Where is your choice?" This was the central message of Archbishop Julian Leow's homily during the Confirmation on July 18, where seven confirmands from the Church of St Aloysius and nine confirmands from the Church of St Theresa, Nilai, received the Sacrament of Confirmation.

The homily reflected on the gift of free will and the daily choices each person makes to follow God's ways, speak His words, and live according to His will.

He encouraged the congregation to respect the gift of life and to strive to live according to God's commandments, reminding them that God invites us to walk with Him, but the choice is always ours.

The archbishop also reminded the faithful that none of us knows the day or the hour when God will call us home. Therefore, he said, we should always be spiritually prepared, living each day with faith, hope, and love.

"When Jesus calls, may we be ready to leave everything behind and follow Him with joyful hearts," he said. Reminding the faithful that nothing in this world truly belongs to us, Archbishop



Julian said that our lives are God's gift and that one day we will return to Him.

"Be ready at all times, for heaven is where God is."

As they receive the Sacrament of Confirmation, may the Holy Spirit continue to guide and strengthen these 16 young Catholics to live their faith with courage, bear witness to Christ through their words and actions, and actively serve the Church throughout their lives.

Selva Manogary

It all started when the CDM Leaders' Retreat poster began circulating among the ministry leaders. I saw it, and my immediate reaction was, "Oh dear...not interested. I'm sure someone from the BEC will go." With my calendar already overflowing, I initially declined the invitation. However, two weeks before the retreat, I received another invitation. After prayer and surrendering to God, I finally signed up.

The day of the retreat arrived. Before heading to church, I told my friend, "I'm super tired. I'm going to be quiet, mind my own business, and probably sleep through the sessions." We reluctantly dragged ourselves onto the bus. To my surprise, instead, of everyone catching up on sleep, the bus was buzzing with conversations and laughter. That should have been my first hint that this retreat was going to be something special.

Late that night, we arrived at Dominic Villa, Genting Highlands, where we were greeted with loud cheers and applause. The atmosphere was electric. As I looked around, I thought, "How on earth am I going to be a leader among so many people with different personalities, opinions, and ways of thinking?"

The ice-breaking session began, and they chose my least favourite activity: 'Human Bingo'. I dread it because it means approaching strangers and keeping conversations going until I get all the answers. Some even copied each other's answers like it was an examination. After surviving 'Human Bingo', I called it a night.

The next day, I woke up early to enjoy the cool Genting breeze. The crisp morning air brought peace and calm. Little did I know, God was preparing something special. During breakfast, I told myself, "I'm just going to sleep during the talks." The moment



Re-treat to re-lead

Fr Xavier Andrew began his session, my sleepiness disappeared. He opened his session with John 15:1-11 on the True Vine, drawing our attention to the words, "Abide in Me as I abide in you."

He then introduced a song centred on the words "Refine and Transform," which caught my attention. The theme, *Healing Through Christ: Restoring the Heart of Leadership*, was exactly what I needed. Every reflection felt like a gentle slap across the face — though in the best possible way.

Reflecting on Matthew 20:26-28, Fr Xavier reminded us that true leadership begins with the heart. To lead is to serve, and to serve requires humility. Ouch. That was probably the hardest lesson for me to swallow. Some people are easy to love, while others truly test our patience. Yet Jesus chose to humble Himself and serve others, even when it was difficult. He calls us to do

the same.

The Gallery Walk was an unforgettable moment. As I journeyed through Stations 1 to 9, every reflection card I picked seemed to speak directly into my own life, struggles, and beliefs. Coincidence? Perhaps not. Well played, Holy Spirit!

Fr Xavier then reflected on Philippians 2:1-11, once again reminding us that authentic leadership is not rooted in authority, but in humility, self-giving love, and the willingness to imitate Christ.

Sr Margaret Sta Maria's session on synodality was another eye-opener. She helped me understand where the Church stands today and reminded us of the importance of listening, not only with our ears but also with our hearts. She also highlighted the pitfalls mentioned in the *Vademecum*, reminding us that genuine dialogue requires humility, openness, patience, participation, and

a willingness to understand one another. As leaders, I realised this is an area where many of us struggle. We may hear people's words, but we do not always make time to truly listen.

She concluded with an invitation that stayed with me: "Walk with purpose, listen with love, and hope with confidence." Before we knew it, the retreat had come to an end. Although we were physically exhausted, our hearts were full of joy, meaningful conversations, and renewed zeal. Three days passed by quickly, yet they left a lasting impact.

The inspiration to write this came from a song that surfaced while reflecting on the retreat: *Hero* by Mariah Carey. I realised that we spend so much time looking for heroes to inspire us that we forget God has already placed within us the courage, strength, and calling to serve. Leadership is not about having all the answers or being perfectly prepared. It begins when we allow Christ to refine our hearts and transform us from within.

If I could summarise my entire experience in one sentence, it would be this: "You don't have to be worthy, you just have to be willing." — St Pio.

I left Dominic Villa with heartfelt lessons, joyful conversations, countless jokes, and beautiful friendships with people from all walks of life. I arrived exhausted, expecting to sleep through the retreat. Instead, I left spiritually refreshed.

Sometimes, God does not call the well-rested, the most qualified, or the most prepared. He simply calls the willing.

To the organising committee, thank you for your tireless efforts in making this retreat a meaningful experience. A special word of appreciation to Fr George Harrison for making this retreat possible. It was a weekend to remember. **Adrian Thomas Elvin**

MEMORIAM

For enquiries, please contact:
Email: memoriam@herald.com.my
Tel: 03-2026 8291



4th Year Anniversary
In Everloving Memory of
Mr Mariasusai Innasi Udayar

Date of Birth: 11-07-1944
Departed: 05-08-2022

*God saw that he was getting tired,
A cure was not to be. So, He put His arms
around him and whispered, "Come with Me".
With tearful eyes, we watched him suffer,
and saw him fade away. Although we loved
him dearly, we could not make him stay.
A golden heart stopped beating, hard working
hands to rest. God broke our hearts to prove
to us He only takes "the best".*

Deeply missed by wife, Jayanyanam
Sinnappan, sons, daughter, son-in-law,
daughters-in-law, grandchildren,
relatives and friends.

Anthony Griffon: 019-3104264



In Loving Memory of

Clarence F. Sta Maria
Departed: 4.8.2005
21st Anniversary

Tan Gaik Sim @ Molly Tan
Departed: 12.6.2024
2nd Anniversary

*We lie down and sleep in peace for you alone, O Lord.
Make us feel safe and secure.
We miss you dearly.
You are always in our thoughts and in our prayers.*

Fondly remembered by
son, daughter, daughter-in-law (deceased),
son-in-law, and grandson.



7th Year Anniversary
In Ever Loving Memory of

Sandanasamy Anthony Pillay (JPN)

Gift from God: 8th April 1934
Returned to the Lord: 7th August 2019
Wife: Late Ruth Mary Michael Pillay

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

We Love and Miss you

Forever loved & dearly missed by
family members, relatives and friends.

A Jesuit who taught a generation to love creation

PATNA, India: Some lives are measured by the positions they held. Others are measured by the forests they planted, the hearts they awakened and the hope they left behind.

Patna Jesuit Fr Robert Athickal, who died last month at the age of 73 following cardiac-related complications, belonged firmly to the latter.

For nearly four decades, he inspired countless young people to see the Earth not as a resource to exploit but as a gift to cherish. His vision transformed environmental care from an occasional activity into a way of life for hundreds of thousands of students across India and beyond.

In 1988, Fr Athickal founded *Tarumitra (Friends of Trees)* with a small group of school students in Patna. What began as a modest initiative soon blossomed into one of India's most influential student-led environmental movements.

Believing that young people possessed both the energy and idealism needed to change the world, he often said, "Students have the enthusiasm for activities. We are only directing them for the environmental cause."

His confidence in the next generation proved well founded.

Within just four years, Tarumitra had organised more than 1,000 one-day camps and over 300 residential workshops for students and teachers. Nature Clubs sprang up in schools and colleges, eventually reaching some 800 institutions, while Tarumitra units spread to more than 1,600 schools and colleges across 22 Indian states. By 2025, the movement had grown to more than 300,000 members.

Yet Fr Athickal's vision extended far beyond numbers.

As director of Tarumitra from 1988 to 2019, he established the Tarumitra Ashram, a 10-acre bio-reserve in Patna that today shelters around 450 varieties of trees, plants and herbs. It became a living classroom where young people encountered creation not merely through textbooks but through experience.

His students planted trees, transformed rubbish dumps into roadside "Oxygen Belts", campaigned against environmental destruction and encouraged communities to embrace sustainable living.

"Our aim is to protect the environment, fight pollution, save the Earth through planting trees, and above all, to create eco-consciousness in the students and the public at large," he told *Matters India* in 2017.

His passion soon crossed national borders.

Under his leadership, Tarumitra was granted Special Consultative Status by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 2005. The recognition enabled students and staff to represent the movement



at international forums across Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas, while contributing to United Nations Environment Programme initiatives and the Millennium Development Goals.

One memorable milestone came in 2009, when Yugratna, a student from St Fidelis College in Lucknow, joined 1,200 young delegates at the United Nations Climate Summit in Norway alongside 100 world leaders. It was a powerful sign that Fr Athickal believed young people should not merely inherit the future — they should help shape it.

At the heart of his life's work was a profound spirituality.

Inspired by the Upanishadic vision of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* — "the whole world is one family" — Fr Athickal taught that creation is bound together in a single community of life. For him, family embraced not only people of every race, religion and culture, but also trees, plants, animals, birds and all living creatures. Long before Pope Francis invited the world to care for "Our Common Home", Fr Athickal was already nurturing that same vision among India's youth.

His influence also reached deep into the Church. Through workshops, seminars and retreats, he encouraged priests, religious and lay leaders to embrace eco-spirituality. Today, many religious congregations in India have ministries dedicated to caring for creation — a quiet but lasting testament to the seeds he planted.

Those who knew him remember not only his passion but also his warmth, humility and ability to inspire others. He drew countless religious sisters and volunteers into the Tarumitra mission, proving that lasting change is never the work of one person alone, but of a community united by a shared dream.

The Jesuit community has lost a devoted priest. The environmental movement has lost a visionary pioneer. Yet Fr Athickal's greatest achievement was never simply the organisation he founded.

His true legacy lives on in every child who plants a tree, every young person who chooses stewardship over exploitation, every community that protects creation, and every Christian who recognises that caring for the Earth is an act of faith.

The man has gone home to the Lord, but the seeds he sowed continue to grow. In every tree planted, every young heart awakened to care for creation, and every community that chooses stewardship over exploitation, Fr Robert Athickal's legacy lives on — a quiet reminder that when we nurture God's creation with love, we also leave behind a harvest of hope for generations yet to come. **Matters India**

24th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of



Nepoans James
Departed:
07- 08- 2002

*The Lord bless you, and keep you:
the Lord make his face
to shine upon you, and be
gracious unto you:
the Lord lift up the light of his
countenance upon you,
and give you peace.*

Always remembered by
loving children, grandchildren
and loved ones.
May he rest in peace.

24th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of



Arukiamaria Rayappan
10 June 1946 –
20 July 1997

Maria Susay Nathan
19 April 1940 –
3 August 2015

*"The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God,
and no torment shall ever touch them.
They seemed, in the eyes of the foolish,
to have died, but they are at peace."
— Wisdom 3:1-3*

*Though time has carried you beyond our sight,
your love continues to light our path.*

*Your gentle presence lives on
in every cherished memory,
every lesson shared, and every prayer whispered.*

*Though absent from our embrace,
you remain forever present in our hearts.*

Forever loved. Forever remembered.
Forever in our hearts.

Lovingly remembered by
Jessintha & Samymuthu Sinnappan
Joshua Nathan & Bernice Thien,
Jeremiah Nathan & Cheryl Marie Christopher,
Theodore Paul Samymuthu, Elijah Nathan
Samymuthu, Judith Cecilia Nathan,
Joachim Clarence Nathan.

NOTICE

The cost for placing a memoriam is RM150 per column.

For enquiries, please contact us:

Tel/WhatsApp:
03-2026 8291

Email:
memoriam@herald.com.my

BE FORMED AND INFORMED

SUBSCRIBE TO 

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

Subscription Rates:

COUNTRY	YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION
Malaysia	RM220
Singapore	RM1,400

For enquiries, please contact:

HERALD The Catholic Weekly
5, Jalan Robertson, 50150 Kuala Lumpur
Tel/WhatsApp: 03-2026 8291 | E-mail: advertisement@herald.com.my
Website: www.heraldmalaysia.com

Peace begins with disarmament

VATICAN: Pope Leo XIV has written a foreword to a new book, calling for peace and the elimination of nuclear weapons.

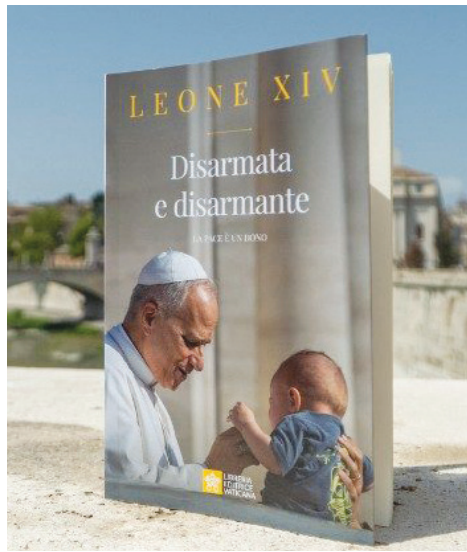
Originally published by *Vatican News*, the pontiff's text is part of the new book *Disarmed and Disarming: Peace Is a Gift*, published by the Vatican Publishing House (*Libreria Editrice Vaticana*) in Italian on July 21. Edited by Alessandro Banfi, the book is a collection of Leo XIV's addresses and reflections on peace since his election to the papacy in 2025.

The Pope also invoked in his foreword American singer-songwriter Bob Dylan, as well as Servants of God Dorothy Day, Floribert Bwana Chui, and Giorgio La Pira.

Pope Leo began the foreword with what had been his first words as pontiff, proclaimed from the balcony of St Peter's Basilica: "Peace be with you." He explained the theological significance of those words, spoken by Christ after His resurrection, and decried the modern tendency for war.

"This was also the first gift the risen Christ offered to His friends and to the whole world: peace," Leo wrote. "That gift, however, did not come 'cheap.'"

"Today, a good 103 states are involved in some way in a war on Earth. Weapons boom and kill in Ukraine, in the Middle East, in Sudan, in Myanmar, in Yemen, in Congo, and in many other situations."



He also referred to his predecessors Pope Francis and Sts Paul VI and John Paul II, who also called for peace and nuclear disarmament: "Especially after the terrible consequences of the events of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the recourse to war is ever more an 'adventure with no return,' as St John Paul II stressed."

In his foreword, the Pope referenced American singer Bob Dylan, who criticised the manufacture of nuclear bombs during the Cold War in his 1963 song *Go Away You Bomb*.

"As singer-songwriter and poet Bob Dylan wrote, figuratively addressing the atomic bomb, in one of his poetic compositions: 'I hate you cause yer man-made and man-owned an' man-handled,'" Pope Leo said.

The Pope also explained that the threat of nuclear catastrophe looms large unless action is taken.

"History has already seen us come close to nuclear catastrophe."

"A world in which machines, albeit sophisticated and faster than us, are the ones to decide to bomb defenceless people would be truly frightening," he wrote.

Pope Leo's new foreword is emblematic of his stance on peace and nuclear disarmament, including with regards to the US-Iran war.

Pope Leo and other Church officials have criticised the US government under President Donald Trump for attacking Iran. In response, Trump claimed on May 4 that the Pope "would rather talk about the fact that it's OK for Iran to have a nuclear weapon."

Pope Leo denied Trump's accusation that he supported nuclear weapons, stating to journalists at Castel Gandolfo on May 6 that "the Church has spoken for years against all nuclear weapons."

An English edition of the book *Disarmed and Disarming: Peace Is a Gift* will be published in the coming months. **EWTN News**

Asian Church urged to confront clericalism

JAKARTA: The Church in Asia must confront clericalism as one of the greatest obstacles to its mission, as concentrating authority in ordained ministers weakens participation, accountability and the Church's response to pressing social issues, two senior cardinals said.

The leaders of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) stressed that overcoming clericalism begins with honestly acknowledging it as a problem within the Church.

FABC president Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrão and vice-president Cardinal Pablo Virgilio David of Kalookan made the remarks at a July 20 press conference as the federation opened its 12th Plenary Assembly in Jakarta.

Cardinal Pablo, who also heads the FABC Commission for Synodality, recalled Pope Francis' repeated warnings that clericalism undermines the vision of a synodal Church.

He said synodality requires Church leaders to recognise the gifts of the laity and to work collaboratively rather than allow one group to dominate decision-making.

Cardinal Ferrão, Archbishop of Goa and Daman, said clericalism remains a significant challenge in Asia, where lay Catholics, religious sisters and women sustain schools, healthcare, social outreach and parish ministries, yet are often excluded from decision-making.

Cardinal Pablo said clericalism also limits the Church's social mission when ministry is reduced to charity dispensed from above rather than embraced as a shared responsibility.

He urged local Churches to examine the structures that perpetuate inequality, noting that while Asia has made remarkable economic progress, its benefits have not been shared equally.

Many communities, he said, remain excluded from development, making the promotion of justice, peace and the integrity of creation an essential part of the Church's mission.

Cardinal Ferrão added that ecological concerns cannot be separated from poverty. Despite sustained economic growth across much of Asia, many people remain vulnerable to poverty, exclusion and climate-related disasters.

Cardinal David also pointed to corruption as evidence that faith cannot be confined to worship or private devotion but must shape public life.

"Corruption is one of the biggest sources of embarrassment for us, especially in the Philippines. I usually say I'm not truly proud that we are a majority Catholic nation when this is such a challenge," he said.

He warned against compartmentalising faith, reducing it to "religion, piety, worship" while disconnecting it from action in society. **ucanews.com**

New Pope Leo XIV medal honours care for the poor and creation

VATICAN: Villanova University, Pope Leo XIV's alma mater, has announced a new international award recognising individuals who unite care for the poor with care for creation. The Pope will personally present the inaugural medal in October at Castel Gandolfo, just outside Rome.

The biennial Pope Leo XIV Sustainability Medal was announced on July 20 by Villanova's Office for Sustainability, which promotes care for creation and the common good through research, education and campus life.

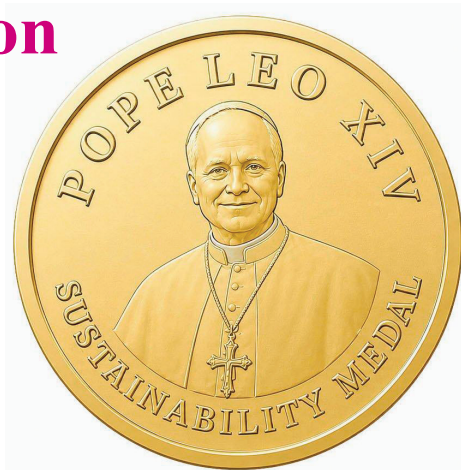
Pope Leo will confer the medal at Borgo Laudato Si' during the *Villanova International Sustainability Conference* in Rome, to be held from Oct. 12-15. The recipient, selected through a rigorous assessment by the university's Sustainability Leadership Council, will be announced in September.

Augustinian Fr John Abubakar, Villanova's chief sustainability officer, said Pope Leo first learned of the award during a meeting in Rome in May.

"He's a very humble, simple man," said Fr Abubakar, who has known the Pope for many years. "Once we told him, he simply said, 'OK, if you think it will help the common good, why not?'"

The conference, themed *Responding to the Cries of the Earth and the Poor*, is expected to attract about 300 participants from a wide range of disciplines, with the aim of moving "from dialogue to concrete, collaborative action."

Partners include the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development



Villanova University announced July 20, 2026, this inaugural Pope Leo XIV Sustainability Medal, which the pope himself will present at Castel Gandolfo in October during the 2026 Villanova International Sustainability Conference in Rome. (OSV News photo/courtesy Villanova University)

and the *Centro di Alta Formazione Laudato Si'*, established by Pope Francis to advance the implementation of his landmark 2015 encyclical on ecology.

Cardinal Fabio Baggio, director general of the centre, said the medal recognises "individuals whose lives bear witness to the inseparable bond between care for creation and the promotion of human dignity, rooted in the light of our faith."

He added that it honours leaders whose example inspires future generations to embrace an integral ecology that responds "to both the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor."

Villanova described the medal as "a new international honour" recognising leadership in sustainability, ecological responsibility and integral human development — values deeply rooted in Catholic social teaching and strongly emphasised by recent



popes.

The university said the award reflects a vision of sustainability that goes beyond environmental protection to embrace human flourishing, social justice and responsibility towards future generations.

Fr Abubakar emphasised that a faith-based approach to sustainability can make a lasting difference.

"If people see sustainability as a God-given responsibility, we begin to change the conversation," he said. "Your life is God's gift to you. What you do with it is your gift to God."

Open to nominees from any field or discipline, the medal will honour individuals whose work demonstrates a holistic vision of sustainability by integrating environmental stewardship, social justice, care for vulnerable communities and responsible use of economic and natural resources. **OSV News**