

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



'You will see greater things'

JAKARTA: The Church in Asia will discover the "greater things" to which Christ calls His Church only through ongoing synodal conversion. That journey must lead to a renewed commitment to becoming bridges and bridge-builders in a continent marked by division, inequality and rapid change.

That is the central message of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences' (FABC) Message to the Peoples of Asia, promulgated at the conclusion of its 12th Plenary Assembly on July 26.

Signed by Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrão, Archbishop of Goa and Daman and president of the FABC, on behalf of the Assembly, the message is addressed not only to Catholics but to all peoples of goodwill in Asia.

Emerging from a week of prayer, listening, silence and Conversations in the Spirit, the message reflects the spiritual fruits of an Assembly that brought together bishops, clergy, religious, lay delegates, part-

ners and friends from across Asia and beyond under the theme, *The Call to Synodal Conversion and the Mission to Be Bridges and Bridge-Builders in Asia*.

The bishops said they experienced synodality not simply as a way of working together but as "a path of conversion directed toward mission."

"Before it transforms our structures, it transforms our hearts. Before it renews our institutions, it renews our relationships," the message states.

Drawing inspiration from Jesus' words to Nathanael, from which the message takes its title, the bishops said they reached a broad consensus that, now more than ever, the Church in Asia is called to become a bridge and a bridge-builder by embracing the continent's rich cultural, religious and social diversity through ongoing synodal conversion.

The message identifies many of the challenges confronting Asia today, including polarisation, the collapse of global institutions, cultures of power, rapid technological change, migration, ecological degradation, shrinking democratic spaces, and



widening social and economic inequalities.

Rather than viewing these realities simply as obstacles to overcome, the bishops describe them as opportunities for renewed missionary witness through education, interreligious dialogue, hospitality, care for creation, and a deeper commitment to human dignity and solidarity.

The Assembly also acknowledged clericalism as one of the Church's continuing internal challenges, warning that it can hinder communion, participation and co-responsibility among all the baptised. The bishops called for ongoing pastoral and synodal conversion marked by listening, shared discernment and servant leadership.

A recurring image throughout the message is Christ as the "living Bridge" between heaven and earth, between God and humanity, among peoples, and between humanity and our common home. To follow Christ, the bishops said, is to become both bridges and bridge-builders in every local Church and society.

That vision was reinforced during the

Assembly when delegates walked through Jakarta's Tunnel of Friendship, linking the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption with the neighbouring Istiqlal Mosque. The experience, they said, served as a powerful reminder that Christians are called "to build bridges, not barriers."

The message also echoed Pope Leo XIV's appeal for stronger communion among Asia's local Churches so that they may more effectively fulfil their mission in the continent's culturally and religiously diverse societies.

The bishops pledged to return to their local Churches committed to becoming a missionary synodal Church that listens deeply, opens doors, crosses boundaries, accompanies the poor and vulnerable, embraces ecological conversion, and walks alongside people of other faiths and cultures in the pursuit of truth, justice, peace, and care for our common home.

Entrusting this mission to the intercession of Mary, Mother of Asia and Mother of the Church, the bishops prayed that Christ, "the living Bridge," would make them instruments of reconciliation and hope, so that all peoples might discover in Him "the fullness of life."

Prayer for the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 (MPC2026)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

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If we don't tell the story, who will?

I recently went on holiday to one of our neighbouring countries. Among the places I visited was its National Museum.

It is probably not the typical tourist attraction, but for me, it was the perfect place to understand the history and beginnings of a nation.

As I wandered through the galleries, I noticed groups of schoolchildren of all ages, dressed in their uniforms, moving from one exhibit to another with their teachers. Some were jotting down notes, others were listening attentively, while a few eagerly raised their hands with questions. It struck me that this was more than just a school excursion. It was a lesson in identity. These children were not simply learning dates and historical events; they were discovering who they were and where they came from.

Stories have always shaped identity.

Ask a child about a grandparent's childhood, and suddenly history comes alive. It is no longer a chapter in a textbook but a personal account of sacrifice, perseverance and hope. Children begin to understand that the freedoms and opportunities they enjoy today were made possible because others came before them.

That is why we must keep telling the story of our nation.

Malaysia's story is one of diversity, resilience and cooperation. It reminds us that people of different races, cultures and religions came together to build the country we proudly call home. When children hear these stories, they learn that patriotism is more than waving the *Jalur Gemilang* or singing the national anthem during *Merdeka* celebrations. It is about respecting one another, serving the common good and playing their part in building a better

Malaysia.

But the importance of storytelling does not end with our nation.

If we stop talking about our family history, future generations lose something equally precious. Family stories are far more than nostalgic memories. They reveal where we came from, the values that shaped our parents and grandparents, and the sacrifices that gave us the opportunities we enjoy today. They remind us that we belong to something greater than ourselves.

Sadly, many families know very little about the lives of their grandparents. Their struggles, dreams, wisdom, and even their faith remain untold because no one takes the time to ask. And when they are gone, those stories often disappear with them.

The same can be said of our faith.

The Catholic faith has always been passed on through stories. Long before the Bible was widely available, believers shared the story of God's saving love from one generation to the next. Parents taught their children about Jesus and the Apostles. Grandparents spoke of prayers answered during times of hardship and the ways God remained faithful throughout their lives. Faith was never meant to be merely taught; it was meant to be lived and shared.

Today, however, many families are simply too busy to have these conversations. Meals are rushed, evenings are dominated by screens, and meaningful dialogue is becoming increasingly rare. Yet it is often in these ordinary moments that the most important lessons are passed on.

How will our children learn to love Malaysia if we never tell them its story?

How will they appreciate their grandparents if we

never ask about their lives?

How will they treasure the Catholic faith if they never hear how God has worked in our own family?

These conversations shape identity. They help children understand not only where they came from but also who they are called to become.

The Church describes the family as the "domestic Church" — the first place where children encounter love, faith, and virtue. Parents and grandparents are more than caregivers; they are the first storytellers of the family. The memories they share become lessons that no classroom can fully replace.

Likewise, every citizen has a responsibility to pass on the story of our nation. Patriotism does not grow from obligation but from appreciation. Appreciation begins with understanding, and understanding begins with conversation.

As we celebrate National Day, perhaps we should do more than wave flags and watch parades. Let us also tell our stories.

Tell your children what Malaysia was like when you were growing up. Ask your parents about the challenges they faced. Invite your grandparents to share memories that have never been recorded. Speak openly about the moments when your faith sustained you and the blessings God has brought into your family's life.

The greatest inheritance we leave behind may not be our possessions, but our stories. Through them, we pass on our love for our country, our gratitude for our family, and our faith in God.

If we want the next generation to cherish these gifts, we cannot assume they will discover them on their own.

We have to tell the story.

Kevin Francis

A thread of hope

Let us begin by googling Ivan Aivazovsky's *Jesus Walks on the Water*. The 19th-century artist was renowned for his dramatic seascapes and masterful use of light. In his paintings of Christ walking on the water, the eye is immediately drawn to the radiant figure of Jesus. His light pierces the surrounding darkness and is reflected upon the stormy sea. That image beautifully captures the message of this Sunday's readings.

Chaos precedes

A common thread runs through all three readings. Each begins with chaos, uncertainty or despair before culminating in hope and a deeper revelation of God.

In the first reading, Elijah has just triumphed over the prophets of Baal, yet Queen Jezebel threatens to kill him. Fleeing into the wilderness, he becomes so exhausted that he asks God to take his life (1 Kgs 19:4). The verses omitted from the liturgy reveal the depth of his despair: Elijah laments that God's prophets have been killed and that he alone remains, pursued by his enemies.

In the second reading, St Paul speaks of his "great sorrow and unceasing anguish" over his fellow Jews' refusal to recognise Christ. Such is his love for them that he says he would even accept being cut off from Christ for their sake. Despite fierce opposition, Paul never wavers in proclaiming Jesus as the promised Messiah.

The Gospel presents another scene of turmoil. While Jesus withdraws to pray, the disciples struggle against strong winds on the lake. As if the storm itself were not frightening enough, they see what they think is a ghost approaching across the waves.

Yet every one of these accounts ends not in defeat but in divine encounter. Elijah discovers God not in the wind, earthquake or fire, but in the gentle whisper. Paul's anguish never diminishes his conviction that Christ is Lord. The disciples, after witnessing Jesus' authority over the storm, fall down in worship and proclaim, "Truly, You are the Son of God."

Each story moves from fear to faith, from darkness to revelation.

Hope endures

The lesson running through these passages is hope. Hope is one of the three theological virtues, together with faith and charity (1 Cor 13:13). It is a grace infused by God that enables us to trust in His promises even when circumstances seem hopeless.

Like Elijah, Paul and Peter, we all experience moments that leave us exhausted, fearful or questioning God's presence. Scripture never denies the reality of suffering. Instead, it teaches that trials produce perseverance, maturity and steadfast faith (cf. Jas 1:2-4).

Christian hope is not mere optimism. St Thomas Aquinas describes hope as the confident desire for a difficult but attainable good, and our highest good is God Himself (*Summa Theologica*, II-II, q.17, a.1). Likewise, the *Catechism* teaches that hope keeps us from discouragement, sustains us in times of abandonment and directs our hearts towards eternal life (CCC 1818).

Hope, therefore, is not simply wishing life will improve. It is the habit of entrusting ourselves to God even when we cannot yet see the outcome.

Seeing as Christ sees

During the Jubilee Year of Hope, Pope Francis chose the motto, *Hope does not disappoint* (Rom 5:5), reminding Christians that authentic hope enables us to become signs of light in a troubled world (*Spes Non Confundit*, 8-10).

Our hope rests in Jesus Christ alone. As Pope Benedict XVI wrote in *Spe Salvi*, Christian hope is not only about the future; it transforms how we live in the present (no.7). It does not guarantee freedom from suffering, but it changes how we understand it.

To see through Christ's eyes is to trust that our trials are never meaningless. Even when God's purpose remains hidden, we believe He is present and at work. Such hope also compels us to accompany others in their suffering, becoming bearers of the same hope we have received.

Suffering is inseparable from human life, but Christians never suffer alone. Christ Himself has gone before us, leaving us an example (1 Pet 2:21). His Cross assures us that pain is never the

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with Bro Leon Gautier

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

Readings: 1 Kings 19: 9, 11-13;

Romans 9: 1-5;

Gospel: Matthew 14: 22-33

final word. In Him we find hope that consolation follows sorrow, perseverance bears fruit, and beyond every cross lies the promise of resurrection.

Every human heart longs for perfect love, and that longing ultimately finds its fulfilment in God (CCC 27). When our hearts are fixed on Him, our daily responsibilities are not diminished but transformed. We begin to see our lives, our work and our relationships through the eyes of Christ.

The calm after the storm

Returning to Aivazovsky's painting, notice how Christ's light creates calm upon the stormy waters even while the waves continue to rage around Him. His presence does not always remove the storm immediately, but transforms it.

The same question confronts us today. Amid the storms of our own lives, does Christ shine most brightly? Do we allow His light to illuminate our fears and be reflected through us, even when He seems absent?

Like Peter, let us cry, "Lord, save me!" and cast all our anxieties upon Him, knowing that He cares for us (1 Pet 5:7). But our response cannot stop there. Like the disciples, we too must proclaim, "Truly, You are the Son of God." Christian hope is never meant to be kept to ourselves; it is meant to be shared with a world searching for light.

May we also imitate Elijah, learning to recognise God's presence not only in dramatic moments but in the quiet whisper that strengthens us to continue the journey.

May the words of St Teresa of Avila guide us through every storm: "Let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you. All things pass away; God never changes. Patience obtains all things. Whoever has God lacks nothing; God alone suffices."

CFM commends Sarawak's model of harmony

KUCHING: The Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) has commended Sarawak's longstanding model of religious harmony and inclusive governance following a courtesy call on the Premier of Sarawak, Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri (Dr) Abang Haji Abdul Rahman Zohari bin Tun Datuk Abang Haji Openg, at the Satria Pertiwi Complex, Petra Jaya, on July 28.

The meeting reflected the long-standing relationship between the Sarawak government and Christian communities in Malaysia while providing an opportunity to exchange views on Sarawak's development, religious harmony and matters of mutual interest.

Led by CFM chairman Rev Dr Eu Hong Seng, the delegation described the meeting as warm and constructive. Discussions centred on Sarawak's development, its long-standing model of peaceful multi-religious and multi-racial coexistence, and the work of the Unit for Other Religions (UNIFOR) in supporting non-Islamic faith communities and fostering mutual respect.

The delegation commended the Premier's leadership and vision, noting that they had contributed significantly to Sarawak's



Dr Eu Hong Seng (fourth right) hands over a memento to Tan Sri Abang Johari to commemorate the meeting. (Photo courtesy of Sarawak Premier's Office)

socio-economic progress and strengthened the state's reputation as a model of harmonious coexistence and one of Malaysia's leading economies.

Both parties also exchanged views on current national developments and the role Sarawak can continue to play in promoting unity, stability and nation-building.

The meeting reaffirmed a shared commitment to ongoing dialogue and collaboration in advancing interfaith understanding, so-

cial harmony and community development. The CFM delegation also welcomed the opportunity to hold its Executive Committee meeting in Kuching and praised Sarawak's culture of inclusiveness, mutual respect and acceptance.

Among those present were CFM vice-chairman Archbishop Julian Leow Beng Kim, Bishop Datuk Danald Jute, assistant honorary treasurer Archbishop Dato Simon Poh, executive secretary Rev Andy Chi

Cheng Khee, and representatives of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, the Council of Churches of Malaysia and the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship, together with other members of the CFM Executive Committee.

The delegation expressed its hope that Sarawak's enduring example of harmony, mutual respect and interfaith cooperation would continue to inspire greater unity throughout Malaysia.


**KUALA LUMPUR
ARCHDIOCESE**

**Diary of Archbishop
Julian Leow**

August

15	Confirmation – Church of the Holy Redeemer
15	70th Anniversary of Legion of Mary, Queen of the Apostles Curia
16	Confirmation – Church of the Holy Rosary, KL
16	Confirmation – Church of St Ignatius, PJ
18	Meeting – College of Consultors & Council of Priests
20	Meeting – Archdiocesan Finance
21-22	Malaysia Pastoral Convention - On site preparation

Shepherd takes to the road for his flock

PETALING JAYA: Faced with a growing congregation and increasingly limited space, the Church of the Holy Family in Ulu Tiram, Johor, has embarked on a fundraising roadshow to help realise its long-awaited dream of building a new church.

Parish priest, Fr Martinian Lee, and a six-member team visited the Church of St Ignatius (SIC) on July 18 and 19, appealing for donations after the weekend Masses to help bridge a RM14.4 million funding shortfall.

"I am here to ask you for money," Fr Martinian told the congregation with candour. "We have a huge shortfall of RM14.4 million. I have come to seek your generosity and good hearts. Please support us."

Explaining the need for the new church, Fr Martinian said the existing building could no longer adequately accommodate the growing parish community.

"Our community has outgrown the present building. We need more space, not only for the celebration of Mass but also for our pastoral activities, including faith formation and catechism classes," he said.

Fr Martinian also thanked Archbishop Julian Leow for permitting the Diocese of Malacca Johore to appeal for support in parishes



Fr Martinian Lee with his church members.

within the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur. He also expressed his appreciation to SIC parish priest, Fr Thomas Koo, CDD and the parish community for their warm welcome and generous support.

An information and donation booth was set up outside the church entrance, where members of the Holy Family team met parishioners after Mass. They were assisted by volunteers from the SIC Hospitality Ministry, who helped direct the faithful to the booth.

Construction of the new multipurpose church complex is already underway following the groundbreaking ceremony officiated by Bishop Bernard Paul on May 1, 2024.

The Church of the Holy Family traces its beginnings to a small chapel established in 1951 before being elevated to parish status in 1972. The proposed new church represents the fulfilment of a vision that has been more than three decades in the making and will provide a larger space for worship, faith formation and parish life.

As construction progresses, the parish continues to appeal for the generosity of the faithful to help bring the project to completion.

For more information or to make a donation, contact the parish office at 07-863 1485 or visit www.holyfamilychurchjb.org. **Bob Ho**


**MALACCA JOHORE
DIOCESE**

**Diary of Bishop
Bernard Paul**

August

11-14	Conference – Episcopal Commission of Migrants & Itinerants (ECMI) MAJODI Centre, Plentong
15	MJD Counselling Ministry Day
16	Parish Pastoral Assembly – Church of St Theresa, Melaka
18-19	Clergy Monthly Recollection – MAJODI Centre
22	Confirmation – Church St Francis Xavier, Melaka



The volunteers working together to build 20 emergency flood rafts in Kelantan.

Caritas outreach strengthens flood preparedness in Kelantan

KOTA BHARU: Volunteers from Penang, Perak and Kelantan joined forces with local residents to build 20 emergency flood rafts for vulnerable communities in Kelantan during two outreach missions organised by Caritas.

Hosted by Caritas Church of Our Lady of Fatima of the Holy Rosary, Kota Bharu, in collaboration with Caritas Penang, the missions were carried out from June 25-29 and July 9-13. Working alongside Crisis Relief Services & Training (CREST Malaysia), the Kelantan Disaster Response Network (KDRN), the Archdiocese of Human Development (AOHD), village heads and residents, volunteers built eight rafts while villagers completed a further 12, providing families with a practical way to safeguard essential belongings during the annual flood season.

The initiative also fostered closer ties be-

tween volunteers and the local community as they worked side by side. Volunteers said the experience gave them a deeper appreciation of the villagers' resilience, generosity and spirit of mutual support.

Fr Joachim Robert, chairman of Caritas Diocese of Penang, thanked the volunteers, partner organisations and residents for their commitment to the mission.

"We came to build rafts, but we also built stronger communities. By working together, we experienced the joy of serving one another and witnessed faith in action. Every act of service, no matter how simple, becomes a sign of hope," he said.

The outreach formed part of Caritas' ongoing efforts to strengthen community resilience in flood-prone areas while accompanying vulnerable communities through practical service and collaboration.

Prayer must come before ministry

PENANG: Before the Church can be led well, its leaders must first learn to listen — to God, to one another and to those they serve.

That was the central message as members of the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) of the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit gathered for a morning of recollection on July 18, led by parish priest, Fr Raymond Raj.

The day began with praise and worship, followed by an opening prayer that invited members to set aside the busyness of parish life and enter into a spirit of reflection.

Fr Raymond reminded the council that recollection is not simply a break from ministry but an opportunity to return to its source. He encouraged members to slow down, listen attentively to God's voice and rediscover the deeper purpose behind their service.

As part of the reflection, members were invited to prayerfully consider two questions: *Why did I choose to serve on the Parish Pastoral Council?* and *What continues to motivate me in this ministry?*

Reflecting on Christian leadership, Fr Raymond contrasted it with the world's understanding of leadership. While secular leadership often values qualifications, achievements and influence, Christian leadership begins with God's call and a willingness to serve, even amid feelings of inadequacy or fear.

He reminded members that failure does not disqualify anyone from serving the Lord. What matters is faithfulness rather



Leaders spending time in prayer and reflection.

than worldly success, echoing the words of St Teresa of Calcutta: "God has not called me to be successful. He has called me to be faithful."

Fr Raymond centred his reflection on three essential qualities of Christian leadership: humility, charity and listening.

Drawing on the teaching of St Augustine, he described humility as the foundation of every virtue. Service, he said, must never become a search for recognition or personal status but should always place God's mission above self-interest. Ministry rooted in humility seeks to serve rather than to be seen.

Speaking on charity, Fr Raymond emphasised agape — selfless and unconditional love — as the heart of servant leadership. Christian leaders, he said, are called to place the needs of the community above personal

ambition, empower rather than create dependence, stand in solidarity with the poor and marginalised, and uphold the dignity of every human person while promoting the common good.

He also stressed the importance of listening as an essential ministry. Genuine listening, he explained, does not mean agreeing with every request, but seeking first to understand before responding with wisdom and compassion. Quoting the familiar saying that "God gave us two ears and one mouth," he encouraged members to listen more than they speak and to communicate with the gentleness of Christ.

Fr Raymond urged the PPC to continue working as one body, drawing inspiration from St Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 12. Every member brings different gifts, he said, but all share the same mission. Col-

laboration, mutual respect and unity remain essential as the Cathedral strives to fulfil its vision of *Walking Together as a Synodal and Prophetic Church*.

He also encouraged members to ground every important decision in prayerful discernment. Not every good idea, he noted, is necessarily God's will. Referring to the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15, he highlighted the importance of seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit before making decisions that affect the life of the Church.

Recognising the demands of parish ministry, Fr Raymond also reminded members to care for their own spiritual well-being. Rest, he said, is not a luxury but a necessity. Citing Jesus' invitation to His disciples to "come away by yourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile" (Mk 6:31), he encouraged members to spend regular time before the Blessed Sacrament to renew their strength and guard against spiritual burnout.

Concluding the first part of the recollection, Fr Raymond underscored that prayer must always precede ministry.

"We cannot give what we do not possess," he reminded the council before inviting members to reflect on two final questions: *What is my deepest motivation for serving?* and *Am I a bridge that builds unity or a wall that creates division?*

Following a period of silent prayer, members were divided into small groups for a round-robin affirmation exercise, where each person expressed words of gratitude and encouragement to the others. The session strengthened mutual appreciation and reinforced the spirit of communion among the council members.

The morning concluded with the presentation of appreciation gifts, a group photograph and a closing prayer, sending participants forth, renewed in their commitment to serve the parish with humility, faithfulness and a spirit of synodality.

Nine churches unite for Ecumenical prayer service

CHERAS: More than 250 Christians from nine churches in and around the district of Cheras gathered at the Church of St Francis of Assisi (SFA) on July 19 for an Ecumenical Prayer Service.

Inspired by this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity theme, *There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling* (Ephesians 4:4), the evening brought together pastors, church leaders and the faithful for a time of prayer, worship and reflection on the shared call to Christian unity.

Representatives from the participating churches — Church of St Francis of Assisi (SFA), Charis Sanctuary, Emmanuel Community Church AG, Faith Covenant Church International, Full Gospel Assembly Cheras English, Abundant Life, Bethsaida Assembly of God, Gospel Lighthouse Church and Mudun Chinese Methodist Church — gathered in a visible expression of fellowship across denominational boundaries.

Also present was the Parish Ministry of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (PMEIA) team from the Cathedral of St John



Fr Paul Cheong OFMCap (extreme right) with the pastors and their spouses.

the Evangelist, showing archdiocesan support for the ongoing journey of Christian unity.

The service was organised by SFA's PMEIA team, which continues to foster relationships and dialogue among churches in the Cheras area.

During his reflection, SFA's parish priest, Fr Paul Cheong OFMCap, reminded participants that Christian unity is not something created by human effort, but a gift of the Holy Spirit. While churches may differ in traditions and practices, he said, all Christians are called to walk together in humility, gentleness and

patience, bearing witness through acts of justice, mercy and service.

Pastor Stewart Law from Abundant Life Church shared about the history of the Cheras Christian churches' fellowship and highlighted initiatives such as monthly inter-church prayer gatherings and rotating prayer altars, which have helped strengthen relationships among pastors and communities.

Fr Paul said gatherings such as this are essential in building mutual understanding, sharing experiences and enabling churches to serve society together.

"When we come together in prayer, we bear witness to Christ's prayer 'that they may all be one' (John 17:21). Though we come from different traditions, we are united by one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one hope," he said.

The evening concluded with fellowship over a shared meal at St John Paul II Hall, where participants continued conversations and renewed friendships.

SFA's PMEIA team expressed hope that the gathering would become part of a sustained journey of collaboration and deeper Christian friendship, rather than a one-time celebration. **Sandra Ann**



Sr Mary John celebrates her silver jubilee

KUALA LUMPUR: The faithful gathered at the Church of the Sacred Heart on June 15 to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of Sr Mary John Male Lu Mai, SFX, marking 25 years of dedicated religious life.

Sr Mary is a member of the Congregation of the Sisters of St Francis Xavier (SFX), an indigenous Catholic religious institute for women based in Patheingyi, Myanmar.

The celebration began with a Thanksgiving Mass celebrated by Fr Robert Kham and Fr Sixtus Thawng Uk, where the community gave thanks to God for Sr Mary's vocation and faithful service.

A fellowship followed, bringing together family, friends, clergy and parishioners in a joyful celebration with songs and traditional food. The occasion was a fitting tribute to Sr Mary's life of faith, humility and commitment to serving the Church.

The community prayed that God will continue to bless Sr Mary with good health, strength and abundant grace as she continues her ministry.



Christopher Kushi

BUKIT MERTAJAM: For ten grace-filled days, the Minor Basilica of St Anne became a place where faith, hope and community converged, as an estimated 100,000 pilgrims journeyed to the Shrine of St Anne — affectionately known today as the Shrine of Harmony. From July 17 to 26, pilgrims from across Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah, Sarawak, Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines and beyond came with hearts full of prayer, thanksgiving and hope, united by a shared devotion to St Anne.

The celebration reflected the universal beauty of the Church. A total of 55 Masses were celebrated in various languages, welcoming pilgrims from diverse cultures and backgrounds. Behind the scenes, about 220 helpers served each day tirelessly ensuring every pilgrim felt welcomed and cared for. At a special Mass for helpers, Cardinal Sebastian Francis reminded them that they were not merely volunteers but pastoral workers ministering to thousands who had come seeking rest, healing and renewal for their souls.

This year's theme, *Walking Together with St Anne*, beautifully echoed the Church's synodal journey. Each day invited pilgrims to reflect on a different aspect of Christian discipleship — from building trust and fostering inclusivity to caring for our common home, empowering young people, accompanying one another and living synodality. The final day, themed *The Cry of the Earth is the Cry of the Poor*, coincided with the Feast of Sts Joachim and Anne and the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly.

Although Cardinal Sebastian was away attending the 12th Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian



Shrine of Harmony welcomes 100,000 pilgrims



Bishops' Conferences (FABC) in Jakarta, his pastoral presence remained deeply felt throughout the celebrations.

The highlight of the feast came on July 25, when Bishop Bernard Paul presided over the solemn open-air Eucharistic celebration before leading thousands of pilgrims in the traditional 1.6-kilometre candle-light procession. As darkness fell, the gentle glow of countless candles illuminated the streets of Bukit

Mertajam, transforming the procession into a moving witness of faith and hope as the faithful accompanied the float of St Anne through the town before returning to the basilica.

In his homily, Bishop Bernard reflected on Sts Joachim and Anne, the grandparents of Jesus, as enduring examples for grandparents and the elderly today. Their lives, he said, reveal the quiet strength of patient perseverance, the importance of leaving a legacy of faith and the

enduring witness of lives faithfully lived before God.

He invited parents, grandparents and senior citizens to prayerfully ask themselves, "Why am I a parent, a grandparent or an elderly person?" Like King Solomon, he said, they should seek not worldly success but "an understanding and discerning heart" — a wisdom that enables people to face life's anxieties, distinguish right from wrong and recognise what truly lasts. Such wisdom, he added, takes root only when people surrender their own plans to God, make room for prayer and imitate the faithful lives of Sts Joachim and Anne.

"As we walk with Sts Anne and Joachim, we are also walking with our grandparents and the elderly," Bishop Bernard reminded them.

The celebrations also reflected the spirit of harmony that has become synonymous with the shrine. On July 24, Penang Chief Police Officer, CP Datuk Dennis Lim Kwang Keng, attended under the Royal Malaysia Police's Community Policing Programme, affirming the

force's commitment to unity and social harmony. Also present was Steven Sim Chee Keong, Minister of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives and Member of Parliament for Bukit Mertajam, who joined the pilgrims in solidarity.

Adding to this year's celebrations was the unveiling of a new devotional statue depicting St Joachim, St Anne and the Blessed Virgin Mary. Blessed by Cardinal Sebastian on July 16, the statue invites pilgrims to contemplate the holiness of family life and to entrust their loved ones to God's providence through the intercession of the Holy Family of Nazareth.

The feast concluded with the vibrant St Anne's Youth Concert at Dataran St Anne, where music, praise and joyful fellowship filled the evening. It was a fitting finale to ten unforgettable days — a celebration that reminded every pilgrim that faith is not merely a destination but a journey best made together, strengthened by prayer, inspired by the saints and sustained by the hope that never disappoints.

ALOR GAJAH: For one week each year, the quiet Chapel of St Anne in Alor Gajah, Melaka becomes a homecoming of faith, where generations gather to honour the grandmother of Jesus, seek her intercession and rediscover God's unfailing mercy.

From July 19 to 26, the 58-year-old chapel welcomed hundreds of pilgrims and parishioners for its annual feast celebration, centred on the theme, *His Mercy is from age to age, on those who fear Him* (Lk 1:50).

Throughout the week, the faithful journeyed through daily Novenas and Eucharistic celebrations that reflected on different dimensions of God's mercy — as blessing, abiding presence, restoration, relationship, justice, transformation and gift. As the feast drew closer, the chapel grounds filled with families, elderly parishioners and visitors from neighbouring communities, creating an atmosphere of joyful devotion and warm fellowship.

The celebrations reached their peak on July 25 and 26 with the Feast of Sts Joachim and Anne.

More than 1,000 faithful attended the Tamil Mass on July 25, celebrated by Fr Devadasan Madalamuthu, with Fr Moses Rayappan concelebrating.

The following day, Fr Philip Tay, OCD, was the principal celebrant

Where generations gather under St Anne's care

and homilist at the English and Mandarin Masses, attended by about 650 and 300 faithful respectively.

Preaching on the theme, *God's Mercy as Gift*, Fr Philip reminded the congregation that devotion to St Anne should always deepen one's relationship with Christ.

"As we honour St Anne, we honour a woman whose life quietly prepared the way for God's plan of salvation," he said. "Every devotion ultimately leads us back to Jesus Christ and to the Eucharist, the source and summit of our faith."

Inviting the congregation to reflect on what they would ask if God were standing before them, Fr Philip noted that many people instinctively seek wealth, success or a long life. Yet Scripture presents a different example.

King Solomon, he said, asked not for riches or power but for a discerning heart to govern God's people wisely. Even so, Solomon later fell through pride and idolatry, reminding Christians that not everything they desire will necessarily bring them closer to God.

"Sometimes God does not grant what we ask because He sees what we cannot," Fr Philip said. "His answer is always shaped by His love

and His desire for our ultimate good."

He encouraged the faithful to seek wisdom, discernment and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, trusting that prayers offered in accordance with God's Will, will be answered in His perfect time.

Reflecting on the life of St Anne, Fr Philip described her as a model of holiness, humility and quiet fidelity. As patron saint of mothers, grandmothers, married women, women in labour and childless couples, St Anne continues to inspire countless families to entrust their hopes and struggles to God's providence.

"Our prayers may be directed through the intercession of the saints," he said, "but every grace comes from God. The saints always lead us back to Christ."

At the conclusion of the Mass, chapel administrator Fr Moses Rayappan thanked the many volunteers whose dedication had made the week-long celebration possible, especially parishioners from the predominantly Tamil-speaking chapel community and members of the Church of St Francis Xavier, Melaka, including the parish choir.

He also reflected on the significance of Sts Joachim and Anne. Al-



Pilgrims praying at the statue of St Anne.

though their names do not appear in Sacred Scripture, they have been honoured by the Church since the earliest centuries through Christian tradition. Their hidden lives remind the faithful that God often accomplishes His greatest works through humble and ordinary people.

As the liturgical celebrations concluded, the chapel compound came alive with fellowship. Volunteers served *nasi lemak*, traditional *kuih* and freshly brewed coffee beneath shaded tents while families lingered to renew friendships and share stories of prayers answered through the intercession of St Anne. Others quietly lit candles and offered flowers before her shrine, entrusting loved

ones, especially grandparents and families, to her maternal care.

The annual feast once again demonstrated that faith is not lived in isolation but flourishes in community. In the simple surroundings of a village chapel, prayer, hospitality and shared meals became visible signs of God's mercy at work among His people.

As pilgrims departed, they carried home more than fond memories of a parish celebration. They left with renewed confidence that, like St Anne, they too are called to nurture faith in the next generation, trusting that God's mercy continues to embrace every family "from age to age."

Bernard Anthony

Parenting through grief

PETALING JAYA: The loss of a spouse changes every part of life. For parents, the challenge is even greater. While carrying the weight of their own grief, they are also trying to help their children understand and cope with the loss of a parent, a burden no child should have to bear.

Through their ministry to bereaved families over the past few years, Widow to Widow and the AOHD Bereavement Support Group have witnessed firsthand the unique challenges faced by young widows, widowers, and their children. Their stories of loss, resilience, and hope revealed a growing need for support tailored specifically to families navigating life after the loss of a spouse and parent.

The inspiration for this programme emerged during a bookmark message exchange activity at a recent ministry event. Participants were invited to write words of encouragement to one another. One eight-year-old boy wrote:

"My dear friend, I lost my father before I turned six. I hope and wish you have as much courage and strength to go through challenges as I have gone through. Jesus is always with you. God bless you."

His simple yet heartfelt message made us pause and reflect on the silent grief that many children carry, often without anyone realising it. It reminded us that while grieving parents are learning to rebuild their lives, children are also carrying their own burdens of sorrow, often quietly and unseen. Like adults, they need space to express their feelings, process their loss, and receive support from those who understand what they are going through.

That moment affirmed the need for a dedicated support programme for young widows, widowers, and their children. In response, we are launching a new initiative in which families can come together to find support, learn practical coping strategies, and encourage one another on the journey ahead.

The first session of this new programme has been specially designed to support both parents and children as they navigate life after the loss of a spouse and parent. As part of the programme, child psychologist Raymund Jagan will lead a session entitled *The Psychology of Play*, offering practical guidance on how play can help children express their feelings, process

grief, and heal. Parents will also gain valuable insights into supporting their children's emotional well-being while coping with their own loss.

While parents attend the session, children will participate in games and activities, followed by an age-appropriate session with a psychologist. In a caring and supportive environment, they will be gently guided in expressing and understanding their feelings surrounding the loss of a parent.

Participants can expect to gain:

- Practical parenting strategies
- A deeper understanding of how children grieve
- Helpful ways to talk with children about the death of a parent
- Encouragement and support from other parents on a similar journey

We will also hear from a widow who lost her husband while her two sons were still young. She will share her experience of navigating grief, raising her children through difficult years, and watching them grow into adulthood. Her story offers a powerful reminder that al-

though the path is difficult, hope remains.

If you are a young widow or widower reading this, we know that taking the first step is not always easy. Whether your loss is recent or occurred years ago, there is a place for you here. Perhaps you are carrying sadness, anger, fear, guilt, or simply exhaustion. Whatever you are experiencing, your feelings are valid. You do not need to have everything together. Come as you are. Healing often begins when someone walks beside us, listens without judgement, and understands the road we are travelling.

Whether you come with hope, questions, or simply a heavy heart, we look forward to meeting you and your children.

This programme is jointly organised by Widow to Widow, the AOHD Bereavement Support Group, and the SFX Grief Ministry.

Session Details

Date: Saturday, September 5, 2026

Time: 10.00 am – 3.30 pm

Venue: Council of Churches of Malaysia (CCM), Petaling Jaya

For catering purposes, please confirm your attendance with Caroline Tay @ 012-701 8185

From suffering to sacrificial offering

PETALING JAYA: Twenty-seven women gathered for a three-day, two-night live-in retreat organised by the Women Ministry of the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development (AOHD), which began on Friday, July 10. Held at the Council of Churches of Malaysia (CCM), the retreat, themed, *From Suffering to Sacrificial Offering*, sought to foster prayer, reflection and healing under the guidance of Sr Margaret Sta Maria, FdCC.

The retreat began with the arrival of participants from parishes across the Klang Valley, with one participant travelling from Jerantut, Pahang. Following dinner, they watched the award-winning film *Room*, whose compelling story of a mother and her young son escaping years of captivity resonated deeply with the retreat's theme. The screening set the tone for the weekend, inviting participants to reflect on suffering, resilience and the journey towards freedom. These reflections formed the basis of a group discussion the following day.

The following morning began with breakfast and morning prayer before participants spent time in personal reflection on Matthew 15:21-28, the account of the Canaanite woman's persistent faith. They were invited to identify the emotions they brought into the retreat and prayerfully offer them to the Lord before sharing their reflections in small groups.

The exercise revealed a common thread. As participants opened their hearts, many spoke

of the burdens, grief and struggles they were carrying. While each person's circumstances differed, the sharing underscored a universal truth: suffering touches every life.

Building on these reflections, Sr Margaret introduced the Church's teaching on redemptive suffering, drawing on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Participants reflected on the Christian understanding that suffering is never meaningless. Rather, when united with Christ's own Passion and embraced in faith, it can become a path to spiritual growth, hope and redemption.

In the afternoon, participants revisited the previous evening's screening of *Room*, discussing how its themes echoed the retreat. Many observed that suffering can make a person feel trapped and unable to see a way forward, while the support of others often helps reveal a path to healing. They also reflected that even in the darkest moments, God's grace is present, and that suffering, though painful, does not have the final word.

Later in the day, participants were invited to place themselves spiritually beside Mary at the foot of the Cross, contemplating their own experiences of suffering in the light of Christ's sacrifice. The day concluded with the Rosary and Vespers.

The evening took on a lighter tone as participants enjoyed fellowship through line dancing, a Bible quiz and other group activities.



ties. Amid the laughter and conversation, new friendships were formed and existing bonds strengthened, providing a welcome reminder of the joy found in Christian community.

On the final morning, participants were introduced to the Gratitude Examen, a prayerful practice that encouraged them to recognise God's presence in the ordinary moments of daily life and to respond with gratitude for His many blessings. The retreat concluded with a reflection on the poem *The Weather*, whose message of discovering hope and meaning amid life's storms echoed the retreat's theme of transforming suffering into a sacrificial offering.

This was followed by the Sacrament of Reconciliation, with Fr Nalerin Erone, SJ, of the Church of St Francis Xavier hearing confessions before celebrating Mass. He

later joined the participants for lunch before they bid their farewells. Many departed with a renewed appreciation that suffering, when embraced in faith and offered to the Lord in love, can be transformed into a meaningful sacrificial offering.

The participants were grateful for Sr Margaret's guidance on the topic of *Redemptive Suffering*. The topic, though so serious, drew laughter and tears. There were participants who were cancer survivors, widows, caregivers etc. During the group sharing, some just broke down and cried, sharing their personal stories in the company of strangers.

The retreat ended with the participants grateful for the fellowship and newfound friendships during the three days spent together. **Sabrina Dilini**

A decade of grace for St Jude's Legion of Mary

RAWANG: The Legion of Mary's *Ark of the Covenant Praesidium* at the Church of St Jude celebrated its 10th anniversary on July 22, marking a decade of prayer, fellowship and dedicated apostolic service to the parish community.

The celebration began with Mass at 7.30pm, celebrated by Fr Simon Labrooy, with Fr Jonathan Rao, Fr Surain Durai Raj and Fr Vincent Thomas concelebrating. The celebration was a thanksgiving for God's abundant blessings over the past decade

while seeking Our Lady's continued guidance for the years ahead.

After Mass, members, auxiliary members and guests gathered for a fellowship dinner, filled with gratitude, joyful reunions and shared memories. The evening provided an opportunity to reflect on the praesidium's humble beginnings and its journey of faith over the past ten years.

The *Ark of the Covenant Praesidium* was established in 2016 during the tenure of parish priest Fr David Arulanatham. The idea for an English-speaking Legion of Mary praesidium emerged independently from two parishioners, Roseline Jayasooria and Pauline, who approached Fr David within the same week. Recognising this as a providential sign, he encouraged the formation of the praesidium.

With the guidance of Michael from the Regia, five pioneer members began meet-

ing each week faithfully. In its early days, Fr David generously opened his kitchen for the weekly meetings until parish classrooms became available.

From those modest beginnings, the praesidium has grown steadily to 17 active members and some 20 auxiliary members, continuing its mission of prayer, evangelisation and service under the loving care of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The anniversary celebration also featured heartfelt testimonies from members, lively entertainment — including a delightful performance by Fr Simon — and the cutting of a commemorative cake, making the occasion both meaningful and memorable.

As the *Ark of the Covenant Praesidium* celebrates this milestone, its members give thanks to God for His faithfulness, honour the Blessed Virgin Mary for her constant intercession, and renew their commitment to serving Christ through Mary for many years to come. **Christine Vincent**



Remembered by God, treasured by the Church

Francis Leong

KUANTAN: A parish that honours its elderly honours its own roots. With hearts full of gratitude and joy, the Parish Family Life Ministry and Women's Ministry of the Church of St Thomas the Apostle celebrated the Sixth World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly on July 26, bringing together about 50 senior parishioners for an evening that affirmed their enduring place at the heart of the Church.

The celebration began with a warm welcome and an opening prayer led by parish priest, Fr George Packiasamy, who thanked God for the priceless gift of the elderly. He reminded those present that grandparents and senior parishioners are far more than keepers of treasured family memories. Through lives marked by faith, perseverance and sacrifice, they continue to be living witnesses to Christ, inspiring younger generations to remain steadfast in their own journey of faith.

A highlight of the gathering was the screening of the heart-warming film *The Sun Horse*. Its themes of hope, resilience, compassion and the dignity of every human life reso-

nated deeply with those present. The film sparked meaningful conversations as many of the elderly shared personal reflections drawn from their own experiences, transforming the session into a touching exchange of wisdom and encouragement.

The celebration continued with a cake-cutting ceremony, a simple yet meaningful expression of thanksgiving for the gift of life and the blessings that accompany the passing of the years. A fellowship dinner followed, offering an opportunity to reconnect with old friends, strengthen parish bonds and celebrate the gift of belonging to one faith family.

This year's World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly was observed under the theme chosen by Pope Leo XIV, *I will never forget you* (Isaiah 49:15). Throughout the evening, participants reflected on the reassuring promise of God's faithful love. Even when advancing age may bring loneliness or the feeling of being overlooked, God's love never diminishes. Every elderly person remains precious in His eyes, with a unique vocation to enrich both the Church and society through prayer, wisdom and the quiet witness of a life lived in faith.

The gathering concluded with heartfelt appreciation for the grandparents and elderly whose love, sacrifices and steadfast faith have shaped countless lives within their families and the parish community. Gratitude was also extended to the Parish Family Life Ministry, the Women's Ministry and the many volunteers whose generous service made the celebration a memorable reminder that those who have journeyed longest in faith continue to light the way for those who follow.



Grandparents and senior parishioners celebrate with a cake-cutting ceremony during the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly.



Senior parishioners enjoying a screening of *The Sun Horse* during the celebration.



Honouring the elderly

CHERAS: In conjunction with the Sixth World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, the Silver Liners Ministry (SLM) of the Church of St Francis of Assisi animated the 9.30am Mass on July 26 before hosting a dinner celebration for senior parishioners, grandparents and their families.

The evening began with prayers, a video tribute and a special song dedicated to grandparents and the elderly. A highlight was the cake-cutting ceremony by the two oldest members of the ministry, aged 92 and 86, symbolising gratitude for lives of faith and perseverance.

Guests also enjoyed sing-alongs, line dancing and fellowship, while both the SLM chairman and parish priest, Fr Paul Cheong OFMCap, shared words of appreciation and encouragement.

Adding to the celebration was a moving percussion performance by the Assisi Beloved Community

(ABC), the parish ministry for persons with special needs. Their rendition of *Worthy Is the Lamb* drew warm applause from those present.

This year's celebration was especially meaningful as grandchildren and parents were invited to join their grandparents, making it a true gathering of three generations. The initiative reflected SLM's desire to strengthen family bonds and encourage younger people to cherish the wisdom, faith and life experiences that grandparents lovingly pass on.

The celebration served as a timely reminder that grandparents are living treasures whose quiet witness, enduring faith and unconditional love continue to shape families and inspire future generations. By honouring and spending time with them today, families preserve a legacy of faith and love that will continue to flourish for years to come. **Consuela Foong**

Celebrating the gift of family, faith and culture

KUALA LUMPUR: Parents are often the first to teach us how to love, forgive and trust in God. Recognising their invaluable role in nurturing both family life and faith, the Catholic Kachin Community in Malaysia came together on July 27 for a joyful Parents' Day celebration at the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The celebration began with the Holy Eucharist in the Jinghpaw language, celebrated by Fr Joseph Gawlu Yung Wa. The Mass offered heartfelt thanksgiving for the gift of parents, whose quiet sacrifices, steadfast love and enduring faith continue to shape the lives of their children and strengthen the Christian family.

After the Mass, members of the community gathered for a fellowship lunch that reflected the warmth and hospitality for which the Kachin community is well known.

The afternoon came alive with colourful cultural performances as children, youth and adults presented traditional Kachin dances and songs. The performances became a joyful expression of gratitude, celebrating a rich cultural heritage lovingly handed down from one generation to the next.

In a touching gesture of appreciation, gifts were presented to parents and families, acknowledging their steadfast dedication and the countless sacrifices they make each day. Their love

and example continue to inspire younger generations to remain rooted in faith, family values and community.

The celebration concluded with an exciting lucky draw, followed by a closing prayer and final blessing.

The Parents' Day celebration served as a beautiful reminder that strong families are built on love, strengthened by faith and enriched by traditions that bring generations together.

Through prayer, fellowship and shared cultural heritage, the Catholic Kachin Community once again affirmed that when families remain centred on Christ, they become living witnesses of hope, unity and God's enduring love.



Synodality must become the Church's way of life

JAKARTA: One of the strongest messages to emerge from the 12th Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) was that synodality is not another pastoral programme but the Church's way of life.

Speaking at a press conference on July 24 during the assembly, Fr Dr Clarence Devadass, Associate Secretary of the FABC and Executive Secretary of its Office of Synodality, said the future of synodality in Asia depends on whether local Churches embrace it as the ordinary way of being Church.

Many Catholics, he noted, mistakenly view synodality as another activity to add to an already demanding pastoral calendar.

"Many people think synodality is one more activity or one more programme," he said. "But synodality is not about adding more things. It is about doing what we already do differently."

Fr Clarence acknowledged that many priests and pastoral workers already feel stretched by their existing responsibilities.

"I've heard priests say, 'You're giving us one more thing to do,'" he said.

Instead, he stressed, synodality is not an



Fr Dr Clarence Devadass speaking at the press conference. (RVA photo)

added burden but a different way of carrying out the Church's mission — one rooted in listening, discernment, participation and shared responsibility.

He also pointed to the unique challenges of implementing synodality across Asia, the world's largest and most culturally, linguistically and socially diverse continent. Even translating the word synodality into local languages, he noted, is not always straightforward.

"There is a presumption that everyone un-

derstands what synodality means. But when you go to remote parts of Asia where English is not spoken, how do you translate that concept?" he asked.

Because of Asia's diversity, Fr Clarence said there can be no single model for implementing synodality.

"There isn't one solution that will solve all the problems of the Churches in Asia. Each local Church must discern what synodality looks like within its own context."

More important than terminology, however,

is the spiritual conversion that synodality requires.

Drawing on the Malay and Indonesian word *kerohanian* (spirituality), Fr Clarence said synodality should become the Church's spirituality — its very way of being — rather than simply a process or methodology.

"If synodality remains only a process, people will eventually ask, 'What's next?' But if it becomes a spirituality, it shapes how we live every day."

He said this spirit should permeate every aspect of ecclesial life — from parish pastoral and finance councils to diocesan assemblies, parish ministries and everyday decision-making.

"We have to move from a maintenance Church to a missionary Church that goes out," he said.

His reflections echoed one of the assembly's recurring themes: synodality is, above all, a call to conversion. It challenges the Church to move beyond maintaining existing structures towards becoming a more missionary community, attentive to the Holy Spirit through listening, dialogue, communal discernment and shared mission. **RVA**

Bombay archdiocese honours 550 senior parishioners

MUMBAI: More than 550 senior Catholics from parishes across the Archdiocese of Bombay gathered on July 26 to celebrate the Feast of Saints Joachim and Anne and the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly.

Organised by the Bombay Archdiocesan Senior Citizens Association (BASCA), the annual celebration at Our Lady of Salvation Church in Dadar brought together elderly faithful for prayer, fellowship and thanksgiving.

The Eucharist was presided over by Auxiliary Bishop Stephen Fernandes and concelebrated by Fr Aniceto Pereira, Fr Baptist and Fr Colman Carlos.

In his homily, Bishop Fernandes described senior citizens as "very precious" to the archdiocese, reminding the congregation that true youthfulness comes from the heart.

Reflecting on the vocation of grandparents and the elderly, he thanked them for faithfully handing on the faith to younger generations through their sacrifices, steadfast love and enduring witness.

"A visit, a phone call, a shared meal, or simply spending time with an elderly person are powerful signs of Christian charity that affirm they are remembered, loved and valued," he said.

The bishop also emphasised that the mission of older people in the Church continues, noting that their wisdom, experience and prayers remain indispensable in building up the Christian community.

BASCA president Denzil Rego outlined plans to expand the association's outreach by strengthening parish and cluster networks, establishing support groups, organising educational and recreational programmes, and working with healthcare providers and charitable organisations to improve the quality of life of senior citizens. He also highlighted the need to make medical aids, palliative care and other essential services more accessible. **RVA**

Respecting what others hold sacred

SYDNEY: Archbishop Anthony Fisher OP, *pic*, has defended Catholics' right to speak out against performances that mock their faith, saying artistic freedom should never come at the expense of beliefs held sacred by millions.

In a statement responding to the controversy surrounding Sydney's Divine Playhouse arts venue, Archbishop Fisher said freedom of speech includes not only the right to create and perform but also "the right, and at times the responsibility, to say plainly when something is inappropriate, offensive, wrong."

The comments follow weeks of debate over Divine Playhouse, a temporary arts venue operating in a deconsecrated former



Catholic church in Sydney's CBD. The venue, which received a A\$100,000 (RM286,713) Create NSW grant, drew criticism for performances and promotional material incorporating Catholic imagery, including events titled *Sunday Mess* and *Unholy Confessions*, as well as artwork depicting McDonald's fries as the Eucharist.

While acknowledging that satire and criticism have a legitimate place in public life, Archbishop Fisher distinguished them from what he described as "the deliberate appropriation, sexualisation and denigration of symbols and rituals specific and sacred to the Catholic faith."

"For Catholics, the Eucharist is not a cul-

tural motif available for parody. It is the sacrament at the heart of our worship," he wrote.

The archbishop also rejected suggestions that Catholic objections were aimed at the LGBT community or artistic expression itself.

"The objection is to the deliberate ridicule of beliefs and practices Catholics hold sacred," he said, adding that a genuinely pluralistic society should protect artistic freedom, religious freedom and the right to peaceful protest alike.

Archbishop Fisher welcomed New South Wales Premier Chris Minns' decision to review the government grant but expressed disappointment that some had dismissed Catholics' concerns as homophobia. He urged critics to consider whether they would respond similarly if another religion's sacred rites were publicly sexualised and parodied using taxpayer funds. **The Catholic Weekly**

Chiang Mai welcomes new bishop

CHIANG MAI: Thousands of Catholics gathered on July 29 for the installation of Bishop Peter Suphot Roeksujarit, *pic*, as the fifth bishop of Chiang Mai, ending a vacancy that lasted more than two years in Thailand's largest northern diocese.

The installation Mass was led by Archbishop Francis Xavier Vira Arpondratana in the outdoor courtyard of Sacred Heart School, adjacent to Chiang Mai's Sacred Heart Cathedral.

The large turnout quickly filled the courtyard, with additional worshippers gathering inside the cathedral, the school cafeteria and the kindergarten courtyard, where large screens broadcast the ceremony.

The installation ended a leadership transition that began on June 27, 2024, when Pope Francis appointed Bishop Vira, then bishop of Chiang Mai, as apostolic administrator of the Archdiocese of Bangkok. After being installed as archbishop of Bangkok on March 2, 2025, he continued overseeing Chiang Mai until handing the pastoral staff to Bishop Suphot during the July 29 ceremony.

Fr Juan Pablo, a Colombian priest serving in neighbouring Chiang Rai province, described the installation as a long-awaited moment.

"It's a new opportunity for the diocese, to have a new bishop, a new pastor," he said. "For almost two years, we've been without a pastor, so it's a sign from God, and a sign for the Church that the Church is alive, still walking."

During the liturgy, Bishop Suphot received the episcopal ring and mitre before being presented with the crozier, or pastoral staff, symbols of his ministry as bishop.

Most of those attending were members of northern Thailand's ethnic minority communities, many wearing traditional dress. Hymns were sung in several local languages, reflecting the cultural diversity of the diocese.

Bishop Suphot now leads a diocese covering four northern provinces and about 48,000 square kilometres (18,500 square miles), bordering Myanmar. The diocese is home to numerous Indigenous and ethnic communities, including Karen, Hmong, Lahu, Akha and Lisu peoples, each with its own language and



traditions.

His episcopal motto, *Caritas Omnia Corda Unit* (Love Unites All Hearts), reflects the diversity of the local Church.

The installation comes as the Catholic Church in Thailand confronts wider challenges, including secularisation, consumerism and the migration of young people to urban areas, trends that have weakened many rural parishes. Even so, the Diocese of Chiang Mai ordained a record number of priests earlier this year. **ucanews.com**

Pope: Music's beauty points us to God

CASTEL GANDOLFO: As dusk settled over the Pontifical Gardens of Castel Gandolfo on July 29, Pope Leo XIV listened as Andrea Bocelli led 164 young voices in a hymn, prompting the Pope to offer a reflection on how beauty can lead us to God.

"The beauty of music invites us to encounter the One who is beauty itself," Pope Leo remarked after the international children's choir performed with the tenor in the Vatican's Borgo Laudato Si' gardens.

"It is significant that Sacred Scripture and the Liturgy of the Church speak of 'choirs of angels and saints' when describing the joy of heaven," he added, "not because they are literally singing all the time, but because united in love they behold God together and find in Him the fullness of



Pope Leo XIV poses with Andrea Bocelli after the Italian tenor and a 164-member children's choir sang for the pontiff at the "Canticle of Peace" event in the Vatican Gardens at Castel Gandolfo. (OSV News photo/Simone Risoluti, Vatican Media)

happiness."

The Pope sat before the choir as Bocelli led children and teenagers

from the Holy Land, Uganda and Italy in singing *Amazing Grace* as the final song of the evening. The

Italian tenor also sang the Latin hymn *Panis Angelicus* for the Pope.

The children's choir was made up of participants in the Andrea Bocelli Foundation's "Voices Of" programme, which pairs choral singing with educational workshops for children in communities affected by poverty, conflict or limited access to schooling.

"My dear young friends, as you were singing, did you notice how music drew all of us into an experience of something new, something that was greater than any one of us alone could create? This is the experience of beauty," Pope Leo told the choir.

When one seeks beauty, the Pope added, "we discover not simply something, but Someone. We encounter God our Creator."

The young singers, ranging in

age from 8 to 19, travelled from Bethlehem and Jerusalem, the Ugandan village of Nabikabala, and the Italian cities of Naples and Camerino to take part in the performance, the culminating moment in a 10-day programme in Italy sponsored by the charitable foundation. Choir members from Haiti were unable to travel because of ongoing instability in the country, organisers said.

"Continue to cultivate the gifts that God has given you, and allow them to lead you towards him," Pope Leo told the young singers. "He is everything we are looking for in life, the one who alone can quell our restless hearts."

"Remember that you have been made for great things, and that this world is not enough to quench your thirst for meaning and happiness," he said. **OSV**

Peru's new president pledges to recognise Church's role

LIMA: Peru's newly inaugurated president, Keiko Fujimori, *pic*, has pledged to recognise the Catholic Church's vital contribution to the nation's cultural and moral formation while promising policies that uphold the dignity of every human life "from womb to tomb."

Fujimori, who won a closely contested runoff election, was sworn into office on July 28 during a formal session of Congress, becoming the first woman elected by popular vote to lead Peru. She will serve a five-year term from 2026 to 2031.

In a solemn oath, Fujimori invoked God, the homeland and the Holy Gospels, pledging to faithfully discharge the office entrusted to her. She vowed to defend democracy, uphold the constitution, protect national sovereignty, and safeguard the physical and moral well-being of all Peruvians, especially those who have long been marginalised.

She then made a notable affirmation of the Catholic Church's place in the nation's life.

"While respecting freedom of worship, I will recognise the importance of the Catholic Church in the cultural and moral formation of Peru, and I will work tirelessly for a safe, prosperous and united coun-



try," she declared.

Opening her inaugural address, Fujimori said she assumed office "with profound humility" and "a heart full of faith in the destiny of our homeland."

"I thank God and place in His hands the work we begin today in the service of Peru," she said, praying for wisdom in making decisions, strength to persevere and the grace "never to forget that power only finds meaning when exercised to serve."

Among her administration's priorities is a commitment to improve the quality of life for all Peruvians "from womb to tomb." She pledged to introduce a comprehensive policy supporting children, adolescents and families by reorganising frag-

mented social programmes into an integrated system of care at every stage of life.

"Protecting our children and strengthening their families means protecting Peru's future," she said.

Describing the nation she inherits as burdened by corruption, insecurity, healthcare shortcomings and deep social divisions, Fujimori noted that three in 10 Peruvians still lack the certainty of having enough food each day, while 35 per cent of children aged six to 35 months suffer from anaemia — a situation she described as "truly immoral."

She also announced plans to strengthen the police force, reform the prison system, raise the monthly minimum wage to 1,300 soles (about RM1,561), and uphold the independence of the judiciary as well as freedom of expression and the press.

Concluding her address, Fujimori appealed for national unity, urging political opponents to build bridges of dialogue and think "of future generations, not the next elections."

"There are not two different Perus; there is but one Peru — vibrant, multicultural, strong and ancient — ready to stand tall," she declared. **EWTN**



Christian unity on display at Singapore Harmony Fest

SINGAPORE: Catholics and Protestants jointly represented Christianity for the first time at Singapore's annual Harmony Fest, presenting a united Christian witness at the national festival promoting racial and religious harmony.

The Archdiocesan Interreligious Dialogue and Ecumenism Centre of Singapore (AIRDECS) and the National Council of Churches of Singapore (NCCS) operated a shared Christian booth at Harmony Fest! 2026, marking the first joint Christian participation since the festival began in 2023. Christianity was absent from the inaugural event, while only Catholics were represented in 2024.

Organised by Singapore's Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth to launch Racial and Religious Harmony Month, the festival, themed Interweaving: SG in Harmony, featured exhibits from 10 faith traditions.

The Christian booth showcased

the Holy Trinity, the Apostles' Creed, various editions of the Bible, a cross, crucifix, sacramentals, statues and icons. Catholic and Protestant youth welcomed visitors, answered questions and led interactive activities, including a Catholic faith quiz.

Singapore President Tharman Shanmugaratnam attended the opening ceremony, which included a silent interfaith prayer. Brian Theng of the Archdiocesan Catholic Council for Interreligious Dialogue represented Christianity alongside a senior Methodist layperson.

"It enabled me to express both Christian unity and interfaith harmony, as I joined others in prayer for Singapore's continued peace and social cohesion," Theng said.

Volunteer Richmond Sng of the Church of the Holy Spirit said the experience allowed him to represent both Catholics and the wider Christian community while building friendships across religious and cultural boundaries. **LiCAS News**

KARACHI: About 40 diocesan priests of the Archdiocese of Karachi gathered for a three-day Clergy Renewal Programme from July 22 to 24, focusing on spiritual renewal, emotional well-being and sustainable pastoral ministry.

Held at the Catechetical Centre, the annual programme combined prayer, reflection and practical formation to strengthen priests spiritually, emotionally and psychologically as they respond to the growing demands of ministry.

Designed to promote ongoing priestly formation, the programme equipped participants with practical tools for self-care, stress manage-

ment and healthy pastoral leadership.

Dr Glenis D'Souza, a family medicine specialist at Holy Family Hospital and the College of Physicians and Surgeons Karachi, stressed that caring for one's emotional and psychological well-being is essential for effective ministry.

"A priest must first care for his own emotional and psychological well-being in order to serve others effectively," she said.

Fr Ryan Joseph, parish priest of St Lawrence Parish, highlighted the importance of healthy boundaries in

ministry.

"Establishing healthy boundaries is not a sign of weakness but a requirement for sustainable service," he said.

Fr Mario Rodrigues, principal of St Patrick's School, reflected on leadership within parish communities, emphasising that emotional intelligence and constructive conflict resolution are indispensable qualities for priests.

Fr Arthur Charles, director of the Catechists Commission of Karachi, spoke on affective maturity in priestly celibacy, noting that it enables

priests to love and serve with greater freedom and authenticity.

Sessions covered topics including human integration, stress management, compassion fatigue, psychosexual integration and pastoral boundaries, with participants sharing experiences and practical ways to strengthen fraternity and mutual support within the presbyterate.

The programme concluded with the Eucharist celebrated by Archbishop Benny Mario Travas of Karachi.

Reflecting on the Gospel,

Archbishop Travas urged priests to cultivate hearts prepared to bear lasting fruit through humility, detachment and charity. He reminded them that humility fosters dependence on God's grace, detachment frees them from attachment to material things, and charity finds expression in loving service to God's people.

The renewal ended with a renewed commitment to priestly fraternity, ongoing formation and the holistic well-being of the clergy as they continue their mission of serving the People of God. **RVA**

Karachi clergy embrace renewal for mission



From listening to living the vision

This concludes our series on the Church in Sabah by tracing how the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu transformed decades of prayerful listening through PAX into the Diocesan Organisational Pastoral Plan (DOPP) — a shared vision that continues to shape its way of being Church today.

Joseph Tek & Richard Chia

For more than two decades, PAX had taught the Church in Sabah how to gather, pray and discern together. Bishops, priests, religious and lay faithful learnt to listen not only to one another but, more importantly, to the quiet promptings of the Holy Spirit.

By the mid-1990s, Sabah itself was changing rapidly. Urbanisation, economic growth, improved communications and globalisation were reshaping family life, education and society. New opportunities emerged alongside new pastoral realities, prompting Church leaders to ask an important question: How could the Church remain faithful to its mission while responding confidently to an increasingly complex world?

The annual PAX assemblies remained an invaluable forum for dialogue and discernment. Yet Church leaders recognised that listening alone was no longer enough. The local Church needed a shared pastoral roadmap that could translate prayerful discernment into coordinated action.

So, in 1996 and 1997, bishops, priests, religious and lay leaders gathered once again — not to abandon the PAX journey, but to take its next natural step.

What emerged from those workshops would shape the Church in Sabah for decades to come.

Giving direction to discernment

The fruit of those consultations was the Diocesan Organisational Pastoral Plan (DOPP), officially launched in 1997 at Sacred Heart Cathedral, Kota Kinabalu.

DOPP articulated a clear vision: to build Christ-centred communities journeying together in faith, hope and love.

If PAX was the conversation, DOPP became the roadmap. One listened; the other gave direction to action. Together, they shaped the rhythm of Church life in Sabah.

The two were never intended to compete. They complemented one another naturally. PAX remained the space where the local

Church gathered to pray, listen and discern.

DOPP translated that discernment into shared priorities and practical initiatives across parishes and ministries, fostering a pastoral culture rooted in communion, participation and mission.

A Church that walks as one

The introduction of DOPP also brought an important development in the Church's structures.

A year after DOPP's launch, the PAX Board of Directors concluded its service on Oct 18, 1998. The following day, the Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC) was established, marking the next stage in the Church's journey.

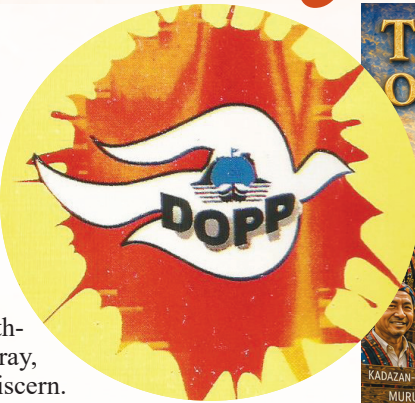
Far from signalling the end of PAX, it represented its natural evolution.

The DPC became the bishop's principal consultative body, assisting him in planning, policy development and the coordination of diocesan initiatives. At parish level, Parish Pastoral Councils carried that same spirit into local communities, ensuring that every parish became an active participant in the Church's mission. Formation, outreach and evangelisation increasingly became the shared responsibility of clergy, religious and laity alike.

The bishop remained the chief shepherd and final decision-maker, but leadership was increasingly understood as a process of communal discernment in which bishops, priests, religious and laity each contributed according to their vocation and gifts.

It was neither governance by committee nor democracy in the secular sense. It was the Church discerning as one under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Although no longer held annually, the PAX Assembly continued to play an important role within the DOPP framework. Under the leadership of the bishop, delegates from parishes, religious institutes and the clergy gathered to listen, share experiences and discern pastoral responses to the challenges facing the local Church.



Renewing the journey

DOPP was never intended to be the destination. It provided a framework that continued to guide the Church's pastoral journey in the decades that followed.

Under Archbishop John Wong, the 2015 PAX Assembly renewed the archdiocese's pastoral direction through three simple yet profound invitations: *Go Inward*, *Go Smaller* and *Go Outward*.

Go Inward called every Catholic to continual conversion through prayer, Scripture and the sacraments.

Go Smaller encouraged the growth of Basic Ecclesial Communities and other small faith communities where genuine relationships and discipleship could flourish.

Go Outward challenged Catholics to move beyond the walls of the Church, bearing witness to Christ through service, dialogue and engagement with society.

Three years later, the archdiocese introduced its first Pre-PAX Gathering, inviting parish representatives to share their experiences, hopes and concerns before the formal PAX Assembly convened.

The principle remained unchanged: the Church listens before it decides.

Long before synodality became familiar

When Pope Francis invited the universal Church to embark on the Synod on Synodality, Catholics in Sabah recognised something remarkably familiar. Long before synodality became part of the Church's everyday vocabulary, PAX — and later DOPP — had already embodied many

of its essential principles.

Bishops, priests, religious and lay faithful gathered not to promote personal agendas, but to seek God's will. They prayed before planning, listened before speaking and discerned before acting.

What gradually emerged was far more than an organisational framework.

It became a way of being Church.

By the close of the twentieth century, the Church in Sabah had cultivated something rare: a pastoral culture that united consultation with mission, participation with leadership and discernment with decisive action.

Perhaps that is PAX-DOPP's greatest legacy.

The word PAX simply means "peace." In Sabah, however, it has come to represent something much richer — a Church that walks together in faith, trusting that the Holy Spirit speaks not only through its shepherds but through the whole People of God. That journey has united Catholics from every background — Kadazan-Dusun, Murut, Chinese, Bajau, Filipino, Indian and many others — into one faith despite their diversity.

From its humble missionary beginnings to a vibrant metropolitan archdiocese, the Church in Sabah has grown by walking together. That quiet Sabahan way of being Church remains one of its greatest gifts to the Catholic Church in Malaysia. More than a pastoral programme or organisational structure, PAX-DOPP has left a lasting legacy: a Church that has learnt to pray together, listen deeply, discern faithfully and walk forward as one.

From pastoral plan to pastoral culture

Twenty years after the launch of the Diocesan Organisational Pastoral Plan (DOPP), Dominic Lim — a member of the DOPP Core Team and one of the principal drafters of the plan — offered a thoughtful assessment of its legacy. Speaking in a 2017 interview, he argued that DOPP's greatest achievement had little to do with programmes or timelines.

Its lasting legacy, he said, was the gradual emergence of a Church that understood itself as "a communion of Christ-centred communities journeying together in the faith, hope and love of Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit to build up the Kingdom of God."

"The journey towards the dream takes time. The pastoral plan may have expired, but the vision continues."

For Dominic, the clearest signs of that vision taking root were seen in the growing par-

ticipation of clergy, religious and laity in the Church's mission. Parish Pastoral Councils, Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), ecclesial movements and diocesan programmes fostered a stronger sense of belonging to one diocesan family.

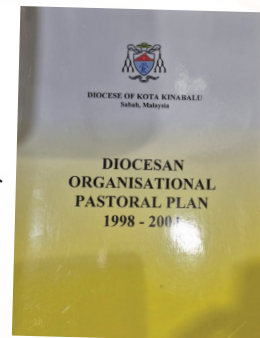
The DOPP also transformed the Church's pastoral structures. In 1998, the PAX Board of Directors gave way to the Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC), followed a year later by the establishment of Parish Pastoral Councils. Leadership became increasingly collaborative, with clergy, religious and laity sharing responsibility for pastoral planning and mission.

Dominic also pointed to encouraging signs of renewal: increased participation at daily Mass, growing involvement in RCIA, Alpha and parish ministries, expanded faith formation programmes, stronger ecumenical engagement,

and a heightened awareness of the Church's responsibility towards justice and peace.

The plan also inspired the establishment of new pastoral structures and ministries, including the Social Communications Commission, Human Development Commission, Montfort Youth Training Centre, Sacred Heart Charity and Pusat Kebajikan Good Shepherd, extending the Church's outreach beyond parish boundaries.

Beyond structures and programmes, however, Dominic believed DOPP's greatest contribution was spiritual. The diocesan vision was kept alive through simple but enduring practices. Vision and mission banners became familiar sights in churches and parish halls, while the Archdiocesan Prayer — introduced during the DOPP era and still recited today — continues to unite the faithful around a common mission.



By 2017, Dominic believed the term "DOPP" itself had served its purpose. What mattered was not preserving the pastoral plan, but remaining faithful to the vision it had inspired — a conviction shared by fellow DOPP

Core Team member Magdalene Chu, who described the process as translating the universal mission of the Church into the lived reality of the local Church.

Recalling the launch of DOPP in 1997, Dominic pointed to Bishop John Lee's words as capturing its enduring spirit: "Our new way of being Church begins not in what we do, but in how we live with one another in the Church and with the world around us."

Before we become bridge-builders

Patricia Pereira

The Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences' Message to the Peoples of Asia bears the hopeful title, "You will see greater things..." (Jn 1:50). It is a promise rooted in the Gospel, but it is also a summons to conversion. As the Malaysian Church prepares for the Malaysia Pastoral Convention (MPC2026) in September, those words invite us to ask whether we are truly ready to see the "greater things" God desires for His Church.

The message, issued at the conclusion of the 12th Plenary Assembly in Jakarta, is far more than the customary closing statement of an ecclesial gathering. It is both a vision for the Church in Asia and an invitation for every local Church — including our own — to examine whether we are truly becoming the synodal, missionary Church Christ is calling us to be.

At the heart of the message lies a simple but demanding truth. Synodality is not another ecclesiastical programme or fashionable slogan. It is first and foremost "a path of conversion". Before it changes structures, it changes hearts. Before it reforms institutions, it renews relationships.

That changes everything.

There is always a temptation to believe that renewal comes primarily through new committees, fresh pastoral plans or well-organised conventions. These have their place. Yet the FABC reminds us that genuine renewal begins much closer to home: in the way we listen to one another, speak to one another and walk together.

That is precisely why MPC2026 matters. It did not emerge overnight, but stands on the foundations laid by the Third and Fourth Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Conventions in 2006 and 2016, both of which laid important foundations for a more participatory, dialoguing and missionary Church. As delegates from all nine dioceses gather in Sibul, Sarawak, next month, the question is no longer whether we understand these ideals, but whether they have truly taken root in our parishes, ministries and communities.

The success of the convention will not ultimately be measured by the quality of its presentations or even by the resolutions it produces. Its true measure will be whether it helps us become a Church that genuinely listens, discerns together and shares responsibility for mission.

That requires more than attendance. It requires conversion.

The FABC message does not shy away from naming the realities confronting Asia: polarisation, migration, ecological degradation, widening social and economic inequalities, rapid technological change, shrinking democratic spaces and the erosion of trust. These are not abstract issues discussed in distant capitals. They are realities Malaysians encounter every day.

We see polarisation creeping into public discourse, often amplified by social media. We witness widening economic gaps even as our nation continues to develop. Young people struggle with uncertainty, loneliness and the pressures of an increasingly digital world. Environmental concerns are no longer theoretical as floods, rising temperatures and ecological degradation become more frequent.

The Church cannot pretend these realities exist outside its walls. Nor can it assume it is immune from them.

Perhaps one of the Assembly's most courageous acknowledgements is its recognition that clericalism remains a persistent obstacle within the Church itself. Clericalism is not simply about priests exercising authority poorly. It is a way of thinking that limits the gifts of the baptised, reducing the laity to passive recipients rather than recognising them as co-responsible partners in the Church's mission.

That acknowledgement deserves careful reflection in Malaysia.

Yet clericalism is not solely a challenge for the clergy. It can also be unintentionally reinforced by the laity. We sometimes place priests and bishops on pedestals, expecting them to make every important decision while we remain content to leave the work of the Church to "Father". In doing so, we risk surrendering the responsibility that belongs to us by virtue of our baptism. If clericalism concentrates responsibility in the hands of a few, passive lay participation can quietly perpetuate it.

Synodality calls both clergy and laity to a different way of being Church — one marked by mutual trust, shared discernment and genuine co-responsibility.

We often speak about involving young people, empowering women, strengthening Basic Ecclesial Communities and

encouraging lay leadership. But are we truly creating spaces where the voices of the laity are heard, trusted and valued? Are parish councils genuine places of discernment or merely advisory bodies? Do our ministries foster collaboration and shared responsibility, or do they simply reinforce existing ways of working?

Synodality asks uncomfortable questions because it demands honest answers.

Significantly, the Assembly's theme was *The Call to Synodal Conversion and the Mission of Being Bridges and Bridge-Builders in Asia*. That order matters. It reminds us that bridge-building is not simply another pastoral activity; it is the fruit of conversion. Before the Church can become a bridge-builder in society, she must first undergo synodal conversion. Only a Church that learns to listen, discern and walk together can become a credible bridge-builder in the world.

That is why the Assembly's image of the Church as a bridge-builder is so compelling.

In Jakarta, delegates walked through the Tunnel of Friendship linking the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption with the Istiqlal Mosque. It was a powerful symbol, but it was more than symbolic. It reflected the reality that the Church in Asia cannot fulfil its mission by withdrawing into itself.

Malaysia is a nation built upon relationships across cultures, religions and languages. Every day, Catholics study, work and live alongside Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs and people of other beliefs. Bridge-building is therefore not an optional extra; it is integral to our vocation as Christians living in a plural society.

Yet bridges are difficult to build in an age that often rewards division. It is far easier to retreat into familiar circles than to engage those who think differently. It is easier to argue than to listen, easier to judge than to accompany.

Christ calls His Church to something greater.

The bishops do not view the challenges facing Asia merely as crises to survive but as opportunities for renewed missionary witness. That shift in perspective is both refreshing and deeply hopeful.

Too often, conversations about the Church become dominated by statistics, shortages and anxieties. While these concerns are real, they need not define us.

Instead, the bishops invite us to see possibility where others see only problems. A youthful Asia is not simply a pastoral challenge but a missionary opportunity. Religious diversity is not merely a difficulty but an invitation to deeper dialogue. Ecological concerns become an opportunity to witness to our shared responsibility for creation. The very challenges confronting our societies can become places where the Gospel is proclaimed through service, dialogue and solidarity.

Such hope is neither naïve nor sentimental. It is Christ-centred. The Assembly beautifully describes Christ as the "living Bridge" between God and humanity.

Perhaps that is the message Malaysia most needs to hear as we head towards the MPC2026.

The convention should not be seen as the culmination of a long planning process but as the beginning of a renewed way of being Church. The pastoral priorities that emerge will matter only if they take root in parish communities, diocesan structures and, ultimately, in the lives of ordinary Catholics.

The greatest success of MPC2026 will not be measured by the number of delegates, the quality of its discussions or the pastoral priorities it produces. It will be measured by whether it leads to genuine conversion — conversion of hearts, relationships and communities. Everything else flows from that.

The bishops remind us that before synodality transforms structures, it must first transform hearts. That may well be the greatest challenge before MPC2026 — and its greatest opportunity.

The FABC leaves us with a simple but demanding challenge: to become bridges of trust where others build walls; bridges of peace where communities are divided; bridges of compassion where the poor and forgotten long for dignity; and bridges of hope for a generation searching for meaning.

No convention, however successful, can build those bridges for us.

They must be built in every parish, every ministry, every family and every Catholic heart across Malaysia.

Only then will the promise proclaimed in the Message to the Peoples of Asia become our own.

Only then will we truly begin to "see greater things."

(Photos courtesy of Radio Veritas Asia/FABC)



God's love would not let me go



entrust his future entirely to God's providence.

"I had my own timeline — at this age I would do this, at another age I would accomplish that. But once I surrendered everything to God, a great burden was lifted from my shoulders. I no longer chase my own dreams. I am learning to rejoice in Lady Poverty, trusting that God's providence is never lacking."

Allowing God to reshape the heart

For Friar Joshua, formation was never simply about theological studies or preparing for ministry. It was about allowing God to transform his heart.

With characteristic humour, he likened the experience to being placed inside "God's washing machine."

"It makes you dizzy as all the dirt of pride is washed away. It is painful, but that is exactly the process."

God, he said, wanted to strip away the carefully crafted image he had built for himself.

"He wants to remove the 'good boy' mask that I have been wearing. He wants me to stand before Him with nothing to hide."

One of the greatest lessons he learned was confronting his own ego.

"I used to think I could manage my life on my own because I believed I was clever enough. Even when people praised me, I still felt empty; when criticised, I was deeply hurt."

Recalling a lesson he learned from Pope Francis, he added: "Who I am before God — that is who I truly am. There is no point pretending to be a 'king' when, before God, I am simply His little servant."

Finding God in ordinary moments

Religious life, Friar Joshua discovered, is lived not only in prayer, liturgy or ministry but also in the hidden routines of everyday community life.

Whether washing dishes, working in the kitchen or patiently serving others, he discovered that holiness often grows through ordinary acts performed with extraordinary love.

Inspired by St Felix of Cantalice, he quietly repeats *Deo Gratias* (Thanks be to God) whenever fatigue or discouragement sets in.

"God is present in every drop of sweat and every moment of exhaustion."

Fraternity has become another school of holiness. With another memorable image, he described community life as "sandpaper."

"Each person has a different texture — some are rough, others are sharp."

It hurts when we rub against each other, but that is how God smooths my character."

It is within fraternity, he says, that he continues learning what it truly means to be a Minor — one of the "Lesser Brothers" — serving others without expecting anything in return.

A 'Yes' for life

Perhaps the most striking image came when Friar Joshua reflected on the meaning of perpetual profession.

"This is the only check-in that has no check-out — I have burned the bridge behind me."

For him, perpetual profession is not merely a ceremony but the complete offering of his life to Christ until his final breath.

Inspired by the humility and obedience of St Felix of Cantalice, he has only one ambition — not success, recognition or prestige, but lifelong faithfulness.

"I have no desire to become famous or to be praised by others. My sincerest hope is simply that my life may become a channel of blessing for others."

His prayer is equally simple.

"Grant me a steadfast and courageous heart to carry my cross while remaining full of compassion in serving others. Above all, I ask for the grace of faithful perseverance until my final breath as a friar."

Then, with a touch of humour, he said he hopes his commitment will never fade like the brief enthusiasm of "hot chicken manure (*hangat-hangat tahi ayam*)."

"I simply want to remain small, so that only God's greatness may shine through my life."

A grace for the Church

In his message marking the perpetual professions of Friar Joshua and Sarawakian Friar Pius Kallang, who professed perpetual vows on May 23 at the Church of St Francis of Assisi, Cheras, Archbishop John Wong described their lifelong commitment as "a significant and grace-filled moment" not only for the two friars but also for the Church they are called to serve.

Reflecting on the Franciscan identity as "Lesser Brothers," he reminded them that humility is not about diminishing oneself but about freely choosing the path of Christ, "who came not to be served, but to serve." He encouraged them to let their lives become living witnesses of Christ's mercy and love.

Friar Gilbert James likewise described the occasion as a grace for both the Capuchin Custody and the universal Church. Although religious profession is not a sacrament, he said, it flows from the grace of Baptism and deepens one's commitment to follow Christ through the evangelical counsels.

Quoting St Luke's Gospel, he reminded the faithful that authentic discipleship always demands sacrifice.

"The price of love is sacrifice, and the prize of sacrifice is union with Christ."

He expressed the hope that the witness of the two newly professed friars would inspire more young people to listen courageously to God's call and discover the joy of giving their lives completely to Christ.

The young man who once tried to outrun God's invitation now asks for only one grace: to remain faithful until the end.

"When the day comes for me to die," he said, "may I still be deeply in love with this vocation, with no regrets. May I remain an ordinary friar — a brother to everyone — and peacefully complete the journey God has entrusted to me."

In a world that often measures greatness by achievement and recognition, Friar Joshua's witness offers a quiet but powerful reminder that the deepest joy is found not in becoming great, but in becoming minor — small enough for God's greatness to shine through.



For years, I viewed spiritual life and spiritual growth as something serious, strenuous, stressful, self-striving, and a relentless struggle. But thanks be to God, through a slow and gentle process of grace, I experienced a profound epiphany of a humorous God.

Many of my funniest and most unforgettable encounters with God have taken place during my prayer time. What once seemed to be the most solemn moments of my day often became occasions of unexpected joy, gentle laughter, and profound spiritual insight.

The humour of God in prayer unfolds only when our understanding of prayer undergoes a profound paradigm shift. Then we begin to smile at the beautiful irony of it all — the contrast between our perspective and God's, between what we imagined He was doing and what He was quietly accomplishing all along. I hope you will enjoy the examples given below.

We must become prayer

As a Catholic, I was taught to say prayers. For many years, I quietly measured the "success" of my prayer by what I said to God — and how much I said. Somehow, I imagined that more words meant better prayer.

But there were moments when I sensed God smiling at me, almost playfully whispering, "Be silent... Be still... Stop talking." It was not a rebuke. It was an invitation.

He was gently drawing me beyond words, beyond petitions, beyond even thoughts — simply to be with Him. And then, more astonishingly, to become prayer itself.



God's So Funny
Martin Jalleh

Discovering the humour of God in our prayer life

It is not enough merely to say prayers. We are called to become prayer — prayer incarnate. Prayer is no longer confined to a chapel, a rosary, or a particular hour of the day. It becomes the very atmosphere of our lives.

Every act of love, every hidden sacrifice, every gesture of kindness, every tear, every act of forgiveness, every smile that brightens another's day becomes a hymn of adoration rising to God. When our hearts are united with His, life itself becomes liturgy.

Even our emotions can become prayers without words. A heart overflowing with joy is a prayer of praise. A heart weighed down by sorrow is a prayer of lament. Our fears become prayers of trust. Our longing becomes prayerful hope. Our silence becomes loving communion.

God hears not only the words on our lips but the language of our hearts. The Orthodox theologian Paul Evdokimov expressed it with breathtaking simplicity: "One should offer not what one has but what one is."

That is the deepest prayer of all — not offering God beautiful words, but offering Him our very selves. Perhaps the highest form of prayer is not when we are speaking to God, but when our entire lives begin speaking of God.

God always answers prayers

There was a time I found myself

disappointed, impatient, and even quietly frustrated with God for not answering my prayer. Had He not promised, "Ask, and you shall receive; seek, and you shall find; knock, and the door shall be opened to you"?

When young people asked me why God had not answered their prayers, I would offer the familiar response: "It is a mystery. We cannot fully understand the ways of God." The truth was, I was trying to convince myself as much as them.

Then, with His characteristic gentleness — and no small measure of divine humour — God slowly changed my understanding and perceptions. It dawned on me that He had never failed to answer a single prayer — God ALWAYS answers prayers.

Sometimes His answer is "Yes." Sometimes it is "Wait." And sometimes, because He loves us more than we love ourselves, His answer is a firm but compassionate "No."

The silence I had mistaken for God's absence was often His wisdom. The closed doors I had resented were often His protection. The prayers He seemed not to answer were, in fact, being answered in ways my limited vision could neither see nor understand.

God's answers are not determined by the strength of our desire but by the perfection of His wisdom and the depth of His love. I have since discovered that the greatest miracle is not that God gives me everything I ask for, but that He never stops giving me

what I truly need — God always answers prayer.

The gift of "unanswered prayer"

"Some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers." — Garth Brooks

Another example of God's humour in my prayer life is when I look back with gratitude and whisper, "Thank You, Lord, for the prayers You did not answer."

Many years ago, I was very interested in becoming an English teacher and there was a great opportunity in Singapore to achieve this dream. In fact, I went for three interviews. I was so very disappointed when I did not succeed in getting the job. Now, when I look back, I am so very glad and grateful that God "did not answer my prayer". The dream that never came true has made room for a greater calling today — one that has brought me immeasurable joy and fulfilment.

God has a wonderful sense of humour. Just when we think He has ignored our prayers, He is often busy writing a far better story than the one we had drafted for ourselves.

Sometimes, God's greatest answer is not "Yes." It is a loving, smiling, and wonderfully wise "No." **God is so funny!**

Martin describes himself as what many have described him: "An Excellent, Exciting, Enlightening, Engaging, Empowering and Exceptionally-humorous speaker and motivator."

The day before my goddaughter Chloe received the Sacrament of Confirmation at the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist, marked a year since my mum left us for heaven.

Somehow, I have already gone once around the sun without her by my side.

People often ask whether the first year is the hardest. I don't know if it is. What I do know is that this past year has taught me more about grief than I ever expected.

One lesson, in particular, has stayed with me.

Over the past year, I have leaned heavily on mom's tribe. Her friends still call to check in on me. People at church stop to ask how I'm doing or simply to offer a reassuring smile as we pass. When my brother Nick and I struggled to manage her overgrown garden, volunteers from the cathedral quietly stepped in to help.

I loved that garden.

It was our travel journal, written not in words but in flowers. The jasmine that perfumed the mornings came from a cutting a kind gardener in Thailand had given Mum. The pink-blushed white frangipani came from Cambodia, despite my very sensible objections that bringing home a plant from overseas was probably not the best idea. Mom listened patiently, smiled, tucked it beneath layers of clothes in her suitcase, and brought it home anyway.

Every Saturday morning, she would arrive at my house carrying fresh jasmine cuttings. Before I even opened the front door, I knew she was there because the fragrance always arrived before she did.

After she died, Nick and I did our best to keep the garden as she had left it. We pruned what we could and hoped to somehow preserve this little piece of her.

Grief in ordinary places

Instead, the shrubs grew faster than we could manage. One afternoon spent clearing left my arms and legs covered in angry welts from the sap. As the months passed, the neighbours quite rightly worried that snakes might have taken up residence in the overgrown bushes.

The garden had to be cleared.

When Nick told me it was done, I felt strangely numb. To everyone else, it was simply an overgrown garden. To me, it was the last place where our travels still quietly bloomed.

Life, of course, carried on.

One morning, the banana seller where Mom had bought fruit for years asked me for my name.

"Agnes," I replied.

He tried gamely to pronounce it before giving up, so I smiled and offered my Chinese name instead.

Driving home, it suddenly struck me that hardly anyone calls me by that name anymore.

Mom did.

It was such a small thing, but grief has a way of hiding inside small things. I realised I hadn't only lost the person. I had also lost the voice that called me by a name I no longer heard every day.

Then, just when I thought I had learnt how grief behaved, it surprised me again.

I wandered into a newly-opened shop at my local mall that specialised in Chinese snacks.



Getting Sidetracked
Agnes Ong

Mom and I had travelled through China not long before she passed away. For two Chinese people who couldn't read Chinese, every supermarket became an adventure. We'd scrutinise brightly coloured packets, confidently guess what was inside and almost always get it spectacularly wrong.

Once, I triumphantly bought several packets of what I was convinced was sweet preserved meat. It turned out to be seasoning for instant ramen.

We laughed so hard when we found out my mistake.

Standing in that shop brought it all rushing back.

Without thinking, I wandered slowly through the aisles, picking up packets and reading the English labels.

"Mom, what do you think this is?"

"Would you look at that!"

"Mom, come and see this."

For those few moments, it felt perfectly natural. I wasn't remembering her. I was simply talking to her.

"Excuse me!!" A tiny, shrill voice interrupted my conversation.

I looked down to find a little girl patiently waiting for me to move aside so she could reach the shelf behind me. She had been watching this middle-aged woman smiling to herself, lost in thought, in the snack aisle.

Only then did I realise what I had been doing. For those few moments, I had simply forgotten that mom wasn't there.

As I drove home that day, something

quietly fell into place.

For months, I had been waiting for grief to become smaller, lighter, easier to carry.

Instead, I discovered something else: grief never really leaves.

It simply changes the clothes it wears.

Sometimes it arrives dressed in sadness, when tidying up a beloved garden.

Sometimes it wears the familiar sound of a name that almost no one calls anymore.

Sometimes it comes smiling through a packet of instant ramen seasoning and a conversation in a supermarket aisle with someone who is no longer physically beside you.

Whatever clothes it chooses to wear, it remains. And strangely, I no longer wish it away.

Because every time grief finds me, it reminds me that love is still finding its way into the ordinary moments of my life.

It reminds me that my mom is no longer walking beside me, yet she still walks with me — in the flowers she taught me to notice, the memories we still laugh about, and the conversations I instinctively continue.

Which is why I've never really understood the phrase "death anniversary".

The anniversary simply tells everyone else that another year has passed.

For those of us who grieve, the remembering never really stopped. Nor did the conversations.

Mom, I still have so much to tell you.

Agnes is a self-professed curious traveller and lifelong learner with a lamentable tendency to get sidetracked. These days, she's on a journey of grief and growth, and welcomes your thoughts in the comments section on HERALD online.



Fr Gerard Theraviam

Light comes with the dawn

-waiting through the dark night-

Someone who has recently become aware of the presence God and faith normally starts out excitedly at the awakening that they experience — this leads to a conversion experience. Both awakening and conversion may be experienced many times over in life — after all, why else would we have Lent each year, if not to re-discover God in a new way and respond to God's initiatives? This might be followed by a process of purgation where the 'old self' gives way to the 'new self' that emerges. Our minds and hearts are in a process of being re-set, as it were. Here we experience a sense of growth and conversion, sometimes very visible to us, other times less obvious — but real nevertheless. However, at some point, it would seem as if we have hit a brick wall. The balloon is burst — and we feel deflated as the earlier excitement gives way to gloom. Like the psalmist in Psalm 88, we may complain that we have been 'tossed into the bottom of the pit, trapped with no escape, crying out to God who seems to have rejected us and hid His face and left us in darkness.'

The initial consolations/rewards have disappeared like a mirage. Where has God gone? It is not as if we have become lazy or neglected our spiritual life. Prayer may be dry, as if a cloud is blocking our vision of God and we seem to encounter a desert experience. Yet there is still a thirsting for God — but we may question if we were indeed longing for the consolations of God, rather than the God of consolations.

We have discovered the Dark Night! St John of the Cross (1542-1591) called it

the *noche oscura* where the certainty of earlier times gives way to a lack of clarity. Sadly, some may give up entirely on their religious practice or just go back to being 'Sunday Catholics'. The keyword here is perseverance — the breakthrough might be around the corner if we don't give up on ourselves and God. Here, the words of St Mother Theresa of Kolkata ring true: "It is more important to be faithful than to be successful." So plod along then, but never give up! God is certainly there, although seemingly absent.

St John of the Cross saw the Dark Night as happening in two distinct phases: the Dark Night of the Senses and the Dark Night of the Soul. In the former, the emotional and sensory spiritual comforts seem to dry up — there is no longer joy in prayer or answers to our petitions or even the sense of God's presence in worship. It all seems mechanical and dry.

The second phase — the Dark Night of the Soul may not be experienced by everyone. It is certainly much deeper. The person feels entirely abandoned, and rejected. God seems to have completely disappeared and all our spiritual pride and our anchor in God's goodness or our belief system seem to have crumbled.

Between these two dark phases, there is a period of illumination in which God becomes real again, and everything makes sense. We grow in depth of faith — the Sacraments now have a much deeper significance, and our fervour reaches new heights never experienced before. We seem to have become more whole and, looking back, we see that God

was always there, even in the darkness.

Be aware that we may pass through these phases many times over — it is like playing Snakes & Ladders. The moment we think we are all OK, we might find ourselves crashing down the next! Furthermore, we might actually be in more than one phase at a time. But the important thing is that we are patient with ourselves (and God) and keep on trusting and praying without giving up.

St Mother Theresa is a beautiful example of someone who experienced the Dark Night and yet continued to serve God enthusiastically. As early as in 1957, she wrote in her private diaries published ten years after her death: "I am told God lives in me and yet the reality of darkness and coldness and emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul." For most of her public ministry, she endured unrelenting feelings of desolation and abandonment by God. Nevertheless, she continued trusting and praying and serving the poorest of the poor as best as she could. The world might have looked at her in bewilderment and questioned if she was a fraud when her private letters were published ten years after her death, but if we understand the phases of spirituality, we must admire and imitate her perseverance and tenacity in her belief and faith.

Another example of someone who lived through great darkness is St Therese of the Child Jesus (the Little Flower) who, in her short life, faced many difficulties in her life as well as extreme illness and yet clung on to God. Of course, the writings

of St John of the Cross and St Therese of Avila much earlier have much to teach us about the Dark Night.

Beyond the second phase of Darkness, there is the ultimate phase of Union with God. This comes with age and experience and perhaps some of us might not arrive there on earth but see our union in Heaven. At this stage, there is no more desire for personal pleasure or wants, just God's will. There is an utter awe and wonder of God. The person is now rooted in the world without being dominated by it — real, active and alive and able to cause change.

So, if you are experiencing the Dark Night, take heart! God has not abandoned you at all. We need to 'walk by faith, not by sight' (2 Corinthians 5:7). Instead of striving and straining with our own efforts, we need to just Be Still — and let God be God! Accept dryness as a form of purification and embrace the Cross. Keep trusting in the Resurrection which comes after the cross and the grave. God has not finished with us yet! Embrace silence and the quiet, and if necessary, get spiritual guidance.

Finally, know that after the long dark night, the dawn surely brings the light.

Fr Gerard has been a seminary formator and is currently the parish priest of the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist in Kuala Lumpur. He also serves in Worldwide Marriage Encounter and is the Spiritual Director of the World Community of Christian Meditation (WCCM) in Malaysia.



Fr Ron Rolheiser

What is purgatory?

Most Christian denominations do not believe in purgatory. This is specifically a Roman Catholic belief. And in the popular Catholic mind, purgatory is too often mistakenly conceived of as a place distinct from heaven, a place where you are purified and made ready for heaven.

But purgatory is not a place distinct from heaven and hell. Protestants and Evangelicals are right in pointing out that Scripture attests that there are only two states after death, heaven and hell. So how can Roman Catholics postulate a third state, purgatory?

Because purgatory is not a geography, a place distinct from heaven, it's the *pain of being purified by love and the pain of giving up the illusion of self-sufficiency*.

Here's an example of each.

Several years ago, I was counselling a young man who was experiencing an intense pain which was new to him. He had fallen in love with a wonderful young woman and was preparing to marry her. Before meeting her, he had been living irresponsibly, been sexually promiscuous, and had been comfortably smug and insensitive in that state.

The woman he had fallen in love with was aware of his past but was not throwing this into his face. The opposite. She was loving and forgiving him unconditionally.

But there was the rub! Being in love with this wonderfully good, generous, and moral person made him see himself in a clearer way. Her love was a prism through which he began to see his own immaturity (which is what unconditional love always does). Her love was a light that gave him new eyesight and what he saw inside himself (his selfishness, his irresponsibility, his smugness) caused him a lot of pain. To his credit, he sought help — confession, spiritual direction, psychological counselling.

Her loving him, purely and unconditionally, caused him the deepest pains he had ever endured. It was his first taste of purgatory.

Here's a second example: A number of years ago, I attended the funeral of a man who died at the age of ninety. From every indication, he had been a good man, solidly religious, the father of a large family, a man respected in the community, and a man with a generous heart. However, he had also been a strong man, a gifted man, a natural leader, someone to whom a group would naturally look to take the reins and lead.

Hence, he held a number of prominent positions in the community. He was a man very much in charge.

One of his sons, a Catholic priest, gave the homily at his funeral. He began

with these words: Scripture tells us that the sum of a man's life is seventy years, eighty for those who are strong. Now our dad lived for ninety years. Why the extra twenty years? Well, it's no mystery. He was too strong and too much in charge of things to die at seventy or eighty. It took God an extra twenty years to mellow him. And it worked. The last ten years of his life were years of massive diminishment. His wife died, and he never got over that. He had a stroke which put him into assisted living and that was a massive blow to him. Then he spent the last years of his life with others having to help him take care of his basic bodily needs. For a man like him, that was humbling. But it mellowed him.

In those last years, whenever you visited him, he would take your hand and say, "help me." He hadn't been able to say those words since he was five years old and able to tie his own shoelaces. By the time he died, he was ready. When he met Jesus and St Peter on the other side, I'm sure he simply reached for a hand and said, "help me."

That's a parable that speaks deeply and directly about a place we must all eventually come to, either through proactive choice or by submission to circumstance. We all must eventually come to a place where we accept that

we are not self-sufficient, that we need help, that we need others, that we need community, that we need grace, that we need God — and the pain we experience in giving up our illusion of self-sufficiency is the pain of purgatory.

Purgatory is not a place, a geography separate from heaven. It's the pain, metaphorically, of having the grain of wheat fall into the ground and die to come to a new fruitfulness. And it's the lot of everyone and everything that's mortal, not just of Roman Catholics.

When we die, unless we have so totally hardened our hearts to reject the embrace of unconditional love itself, God embraces us — fully, affectionately, passionately, and unconditionally. Inside that embrace, to the extent that we are not yet fully saints, we will, like the two men whose story I shared, experience some purgative pain.

Paradoxically, in the ecstasy of embrace comes the agony of purification.

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

LITTLE CATHOLIC'S CORNER

Dear children,

Have you ever been afraid of something? Maybe it was a thunderstorm, your first day at school, or trying something new. In today's Gospel, Jesus' disciples were in a boat when a strong storm came. The waves were crashing, and they were scared. Then they saw Jesus walking on the water! At first, they thought He was a ghost, but Jesus told them, "Take courage. It is I. Do not be afraid." Peter wanted to be with Jesus, so he stepped out of the boat and began walking on the water. But when he looked at the strong wind and big waves instead of Jesus, he became frightened and started to sink. Right away, he cried, "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately reached out His hand and helped him. Jesus teaches us that when we trust Him, He is always with us, even when life feels scary or difficult. We may not walk on water like Peter, but we can remember to pray and ask Jesus for help whenever we are worried or afraid. He will never leave us alone. So, the next time you feel scared or worried, say this simple prayer: "Jesus, I trust in You. Please help me." Remember, no storm is bigger than Jesus' love for you.

Love, Auntie C

KEEP YOUR EYES ON JESUS!

LIGHTNING

BIG WAVES

CLOUDS

ROCKS

Trace the lines to see which path leads to Jesus! ❤️

Jesus Walks on the Water

During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. Matthew 14:25 (NIV)

Based on Matthew 14:22-33 (NIV)

WORD SEARCH

G	E	V	E	N	I	N	G	R	P	B	C	Y	P	O
S	S	C	P	Q	N	T	S	D	U	R	O	O	A	W
C	I	V	D	O	U	B	T	K	O	X	A	A	M	C
U	D	N	W	A	L	K	I	N	G	F	F	Y	T	E
O	N	E	K	G	A	X	B	Y	A	U	Y	S	U	O
S	J	D	U	K	L	A	W	C	F	Q	N	I	T	M
D	L	V	H	O	Q	L	B	O	G	A	M	Y	P	H
D	Z	O	E	I	C	O	J	U	W	Q	N	B	L	Z
D	J	Y	F	M	M	N	O	R	V	A	J	W	N	W
T	K	V	W	L	I	E	A	A	D	X	T	O	Q	A
I	A	W	I	N	D	M	F	G	P	V	R	E	F	V
F	P	S	A	V	E	U	R	E	W	S	B	A	R	E
V	L	A	K	E	D	Y	A	S	P	K	Y	Y	S	S
C	Y	O	X	H	E	Z	I	T	U	Z	U	A	I	K
R	H	A	N	D	A	N	D	Q	Y	N	H	W	X	H

EVENING
COURAGE
LAKE
PRAY

HAND
AFRAID
WALKING
COME

DOUBT
SAVE
BOAT
WATER

WAVES
SINK
WIND
ALONE

What Would You Say?

Finish this Bible comic by writing the speech bubbles!

1

2

3

YOUTH

CU2026

DEEPENS FAITH, BUILDS CAMPUS COMMUNITY

Claudia L Francis

SHAH ALAM: More than 100 Catholic varsity students gathered for a three-day live-in programme aimed at deepening their faith, strengthening fellowship and preparing them to be witnesses of Christ on their campuses.

Organised by the Catholic Varsity Students (CVS) of Church of the Divine Mercy, the programme, titled *CVS: United and Rooted in Faith* (CU2026), was held from July 10 to 12 at the parish premises. The gathering was centred on Matthew 13:23: "The seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word and understands it."

The programme brought together 110 students from universities and colleges around Shah Alam and nearby areas, including UiTM campuses in Shah Alam, Puncak Alam and Puncak Perdana, as well as Xiamen University, CENTEXS, MSU, UOW, Lincoln and UNITAR.

Participants included Malaysian students as well as international students from Indonesia, Timor-Leste and Sudan who are currently studying in Malaysia.

Supported by parish priest, Fr George Harrison, parish pastoral coordinator, Joseph Asim and UiTM Senior Lecturer Dr Lovelyna Jipiu, CU2026 sought to help students strengthen their spiritual foundations, discover their role in the Church, and become confident witnesses of Christ in their academic communities.

The three-day programme featured formation sessions, prayer, fellowship activities and creative expressions of faith. The opening evening included interactive ice-breakers, Praise and Worship, and a Taizé prayer with Christian meditation led by the Faith & Liturgy Bureau.

On Saturday, participants took part in a formation session by ASAYO KL titled *Cultivating the Soil of My Heart*, which reflected on the Parable of the Sower and encouraged students to examine how they receive and live out God's Word.

Fellowship continued through Zumba and



team-building activities organised by the Sports & Games Bureau, allowing students from different institutions to build friendships and a stronger sense of community.

The evening featured "Sketch the Word", a Bible Month-inspired talent showcase where students creatively presented Scripture through drama, singing and dance. Stories such as Daniel in the Lions' Den, David and Goliath, the Good Samaritan, the Parable of the Lost Son and Zacchaeus were brought to life, highlighting the relevance of the Gospel in everyday situations.

Bringing faith beyond the campus

The final day featured a session titled *From the Newsroom to the Pews* by veteran broadcast journalist Charles Mohan, who shared lessons from his 25-year media career and his ministry among Orang Asli children and the homeless.

Encouraging students to bring their faith beyond church walls, Charles reminded them that Christian witness is expressed through service, compassion and engagement with society. An interactive role-play also allowed participants to experience reporting from a news anchor's perspective.

Before celebrating the 12 noon Mass, students gathered for a final sharing session and reflected on their experiences throughout the weekend. During Mass, they presented prayer



intentions collected through the "Jesus Mail" initiative.

As the students prepared for their final semester examinations the following week, Fr George and Fr Philip offered a special blessing and encouragement. The programme concluded with testimonies from participants, who shared how CU2026 strengthened their faith and sense of belonging.

The success of CU2026 was made possible through the commitment of the organising committee, formators, parish leaders and participants. Beyond connecting students from different universities, the programme helped nurture a supportive Catholic campus community — one rooted in Christ and ready to face the challenges of university life together.

Testimonials

As a final-year student in my last semester, CU2026 was both my first and last CVS programme, making the three days truly unforgettable. I met wonderful people and realised there was no reason to regret what I had missed when this experience itself was so special. During ASAYO KL's session, I chose the Fear Leaf because fear often comes when I try something new. Like Peter stepping out of the boat, I learned to move forward despite my fears, placing them in the Lord's hands like David. I feel relieved knowing that future juniors will be in good hands. I hope more students will have the courage to join CVS, nurture their soil, and let their seeds grow. Thank you for making my final CVS experience one I will always treasure. **Jacques Ronaldo Anak Jacky (UiTM Shah Alam)**

It was an awesome event where we experienced our spiritual journey in different ways and met new people who shared the same journey. As a music lover, my favourite part was expressing my thoughts and feelings through music and seeing how each person experienced it differently. I also enjoyed the group sharing. Listening to different stories broadened my perspective and the moments of silence helped us reflect and support one another in our spiritual journeys, especially for me as a new convert. Overall, it was a beautiful event, especially when you need a safe and peaceful environment during difficult times. It reminded me that God will always send the best people to us at our lowest moments; all we have to do is respond. **Anna**

It was a great pleasure to take part in CU2026, especially as an international student. I made new friends who quickly felt like family and found a place where I could openly share my thoughts and feelings about life's ups and downs. CU2026 also helped me grow closer to God, deepen my faith, and build meaningful bonds within a community that supports one another spiritually, emotionally and relationally. I look forward to joining more activities like this in the future. **Caroline Rachel Maria Kaparang (Indonesian student from Xiamen University Malaysia)**

Joining CU2026 was one of the most fulfilling decisions I have ever made. Throughout the programme, I experienced warmth and peace among people who share the same faith. Praying, singing and spending time together reminded me that, despite our different backgrounds, we can always find a family in the Church. What I enjoyed most was the positive energy and hospitality shown by everyone throughout the programme. Winning the Best Female Participant Award came as a complete surprise, but the award itself means less to me than the beautiful memories and friendships I will cherish forever. **Alice Amaral Pires da Silva (Timor Leste student from MSU Malaysia)**



Confirmed in faith, sent in mission

Some experiences last only for a moment, while others leave footprints in our hearts forever. Our Confirmation journey at the Church of St Joseph, Sentul is one of those memories that we will cherish for a lifetime. What we thought would be just another camp became a life-changing experience. They told us to “expect the unexpected” — and they were right.

From the very first day of the three-day camp, the atmosphere was filled with excitement, laughter, and anticipation. Although many of us already knew one another, the camp allowed us to truly connect. Walls that had once stood between us came down, allowing us to spend time together in new and meaningful ways.

One of the greatest blessings was growing closer to people we had barely spoken to before. Through team activities, heartfelt conversations, and shared experiences, strangers became friends, and friends became family. Every smile, every joke, and every challenge we faced together strengthened the bonds between us. Even past misunderstandings were healed through this

extraordinary journey.

Yet the camp was about much more than friendship. Through inspiring talks, prayer, worship, and personal reflection, we deepened our relationship with God. We learned the importance of forgiveness, kindness, trust, and living according to His purpose. Our faith grew stronger as we realised that God is always present, even in life's most difficult moments.

The final day was especially unforgettable. It was deeply emotional as many of us found the courage to share our struggles. For some, it was the first time tears flowed so freely — a sign of hearts being touched and lives being changed. We left the camp as different people from those who had first arrived, transformed by the experience.

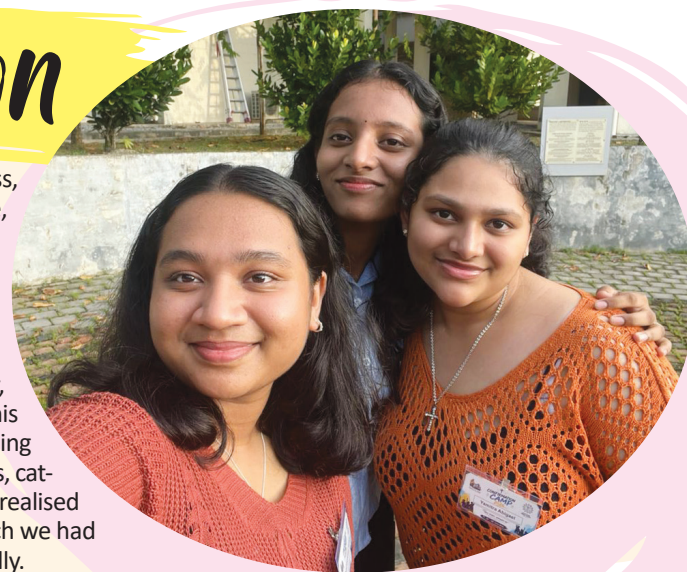
As the camp drew to a close, misunderstandings and differences were left behind. New friendships were formed, and lasting memories were created not only among the confirmands but also with the catechists and facilitators who journeyed alongside us. It was a bittersweet farewell, reminding us how deeply these relationships had grown. Those

tears were not only tears of sadness, but also of gratitude for the love, care, and unforgettable memories we had shared.

Then came the day we had been preparing for — receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation. It was a beautiful celebration filled with joy, pride, and gratitude as we took this important step in our faith. Standing together, surrounded by our families, catechists, and parish community, we realised how far we had come and how much we had grown, both spiritually and personally.

Even amidst the joy, there was a quiet sadness in our hearts. We knew that after this milestone, we would each begin new chapters of our lives and gradually go our separate ways. It was difficult to imagine not seeing one another every week as we had for so many years. Yet we also knew that the friendships, lessons, and faith we had built together would never fade, no matter where life takes us.

Looking back, we can proudly say that these 11 years have been nothing short of



extraordinary. From our first catechism lessons to the unforgettable camp and the joyful celebration of Confirmation, every step has shaped us into the people we are today. Although this chapter has ended, its impact will remain with us forever. We may walk different paths from here, but we will always be connected by the memories we created the faith we strengthened, and the journey we shared. Once a Confirmation class, always a family. **Thashaendraa, Kesmitta & Yamitra**

Young Korean soldiers welcome WYD symbols



SEOUL: The World Youth Day (WYD) Cross and the Icon of Our Lady Salus Populi Romani were welcomed by the Military Ordinariate of Korea, becoming companions of prayer and reflection for hundreds of young Catholic servicemen preparing for World Youth Day Seoul 2027.

The WYD Cross, entrusted by St John Paul II to young people in 1984, has travelled around the world as a symbol of Christ's love and the mission entrusted to young people to proclaim the Gospel. Accompanying the Cross is the Icon of Our Lady Salus Populi Romani, a Marian image venerated in Rome, which represents Mary's maternal care and guidance for young pilgrims.

The Military Ordinariate of Korea was the fourth diocese in the country to receive the WYD symbols. From April 22 to May 6, the symbols journeyed through

major churches of the ordinariate, including the Cathedral of Armed Forces Central and the Holy Trinity Church in Gyeryong.

The second Military Ordinariate Youth Day gathered more than 600 soldier-faithful from military bases across the country, with the WYD Cross and Marian icon placed at the centre of the celebration.

The Military Ordinariate of Korea provides spiritual care for members of the country's Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps. It is also a significant place of evangelisation, where around 10,000 young people receive Baptism each year during their military service.

Through their encounter with the WYD symbols, these young servicemen were reminded of their call to become pilgrims of hope and builders of peace as they continue their journey towards World Youth Day Seoul 2027. **WYD Seoul 2027**

Pope Leo XIV urged young people not to be “couch potatoes” in a video message on July 25, adding that the Church needs their missionary energy and “holy rebelliousness”.

“Jesus doesn't want you to be ‘young couch potatoes,’ complacent or content with the comfort of ‘that's just the way it's always been done,’” Pope Leo said, quoting the Spanish phrase Pope Francis used during his 2016 World Youth Day speech in Krakow.

In a Spanish-language video message sent to young people in Chota and Cutervo, Peru, for the celebration of their second Diocesan Youth Day, the Pope urged young people to “feel the call to be missionaries in your schools, your universities, on your streets and in your fields.”

The Church “needs your holy rebelliousness, your pure energy, and your desire to transform situations of suffering into spaces of hope,” the pope said. “Serve with joy, especially the most forgotten, for that is where the suffering face of Jesus is found.”

It was one of three video messages Pope Leo sent to gatherings of young people around the world over the weekend.

In a July 26 video message to the Halleluya Festival in Fortaleza, Brazil, Pope Leo pointed to the example of St Carlo Acutis, encouraging young people never to lose the “missionary zeal that is indispensable for transforming this world, which so desperately needs the Gospel.”

“In our day, there are still many people who need to know that it is Jesus who answers

JESUS DOESN'T WANT YOU TO BE 'COUCH POTATOES'



their deepest longings, revealing to human beings the truth about themselves,” he said in Portuguese. “Therefore, proclaim with courage that a life without Christ is a life without grace! He is the way, the truth and the life; it is He who gives meaning to existence and to all things.”

“Let us draw inspiration from the example of St Carlo Acutis: He shows us how to keep Christ always at the centre, even in our use of technology,” Pope Leo told the Brazilian youth,

urging them to use social media and artificial intelligence “in a moderate and disciplined way,” and warning that such tools can pull people into “an unreal world where the ephemeral, mere appearances, and deception end up taking the place of true values and what really matters.”

The Pope acknowledged that the enthusiasm felt at a festival like Halleluya can fade over time, and he said sustaining it requires

remaining in God's presence through prayer, with “constancy, perseverance and the firm certainty that the Father in heaven never abandons us.”

Quoting Pope Benedict XVI, he added, “Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything.”

In a third video message, sent to young people gathered in Lamego, Portugal, for the second “Rejoice” National Youth Day, Pope Leo reflected on his own recent encounters with young Catholics, from the Jubilee of Youth in Rome to a youth vigil during his apostolic trip to Spain, and said he is looking forward to World Youth Day in Seoul, South Korea, in August 2027.

“It is always special to be with young people, because the enthusiasm of your faith is infectious!” the Pope said.

Pope Leo encouraged young people to “harness your restlessness so that, in moments of prayer and silence, in dialogue with God, you may ask Him: ‘Lord, what do You want me to do in the Church and in the world? What is my vocation? Are You calling me to start a family through marriage? Or are You calling me instead to the priestly life? Or to the religious life?’”

“Do not be afraid of the restlessness within you! Make the most of its drive to draw even closer to Christ and to bear witness to the values of the Gospel,” the Pope said. **ucanews.com**

MEMORIAM

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26th Anniversary

10th August 2026

In Ever Loving Memory of

Datin Marjorie Rukumani Subramaniam @ Margaret Bonney

Hands that never stopped giving
A heart that never stopped loving
and A soul that never stopped believing

Fondly remembered and missed by family and friends.



17th Anniversary

In Loving Memory of

Sr Betilda D' Cruz, fdcc

Born on 22nd March 1949
Called home to the Lord on 10th August 2009

God created you.
Jesus loves you.
The Holy Spirit dwells within you,
Entrusting you and every need you have,
To the Lord's ever present faithful care.
Deeply missed and forever cherished by loved ones.

In Loving Memory



A. SIMON LOPEZ

Called to the Lord: 8 August 2016

I place all my trust in you my God;
All my hope is in your mercy.

Forever in our hearts
Sampson, Clifton and Ewan, Sharon & Ben.

25th Anniversary

In Loving Memory of



Arul Dass

Departed: 10-08-2001

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

Dearly missed and forever remembered by:
Wife, children, son-in-law, daughters-in-law, grandchildren, relatives and loved ones.

16th Anniversary

In Loving Memory of



Anthony s/o Savrimuthoo

From the Lord: 13 August 1940
Returned to the Lord: 6 August 2010

"I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live even though they die."
(Jn 11:25)

"Although time has passed, your presence is dearly missed and not forgotten."

Lovingly remembered by beloved wife, sons, daughters, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, relatives and friends.

11th Anniversary

In Loving Memory of



Thomas Fong Choon Tuck

Called home to be with the Lord on 10th August 2015

"You are forever in our hearts and minds.
The most precious and dearest memories of you,
and the legacy of kindness you left behind will carry us through until we meet again."
Deeply missed by family, relatives and friends.

23rd Anniversary

In Loving Memory of



Margaret Boniface Gomez

Departed: 13-08-2003

Even after we lose one we hold so dear,
The warmth of her love keeps her memory near.
Sadly missed by loved ones.

1st Anniversary

In Loving Memory of



S. Salveen Sundram

9th August 2025

This past year has taught us that love lives on.
We carry you with us in a new way – through your love, our memories, and in all that we do.
Forever in our hearts.

17th Anniversary

In Loving Memory of



Steven Subramaniam

Remembering and honouring you on this day,
seventeen years after this world lost a precious soul.

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

9th Anniversary

In Loving Memory of



Mark Toh

Departed: 13 August 2017

"Though sad, memories of you always bring smiles to our faces. Though painful, we are still learning to live without you. Though you are gone, we will always love and cherish you in our hearts.
Deeply missed and fondly remembered by family and loved ones.

In Loving Memory of our beloved Father & Grandfather



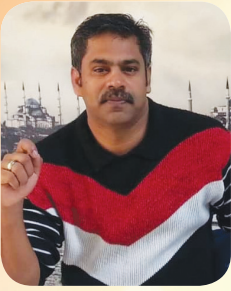
Arokiasamy a/l Jacob

Born: 28-07-1937
Departed: 9-08-2009

Your love, wisdom, and beautiful memories will remain in our hearts forever. May God grant you eternal rest and everlasting peace.
Forever loved, forever missed.

5th Year Anniversary

In Loving Memory of



Robert Ganesan A/L Kuppan

Departed: 10th August 2021

Dearest Pa
Five years have passed since you left us, yet not a single day goes by without thoughts of you. Though you are no longer by our side, your memories remain with us that time can never take away. You will always be remembered in our prayers and cherished in our hearts.
Until we meet again, may you rest peacefully in God's eternal embrace.
Deeply missed and forever cherished by
Wife Elizabeth Amutha,
Son Maxximilian Robert, Goopenthiran,
Daughter Sylvia Robert and Daughter-in-law Esther.

Pakistan mourns its first native Capuchin priest

LAHORE: The Catholic Church in Pakistan is mourning the loss of a pioneering priest whose life of humility, faith and service helped shape generations of Catholics and left a lasting legacy.

Fr Mahboob Evarist, OFM Cap, the first native Pakistani Capuchin priest, passed away in Lahore on July 27 at the age of 75 after several weeks of hospitalisation.

Born on Jan 18, 1951, Fr Mahboob made history as the first indigenous Pakistani to join the Capuchin Order. After making his perpetual profession on May 18, 1979, he devoted more than four decades to pastoral ministry, priestly formation and community building. Deeply rooted in the Franciscan charism, he also pioneered the inculturation of Franciscan spirituality by embracing the richness of Punjabi language, literature and local culture in the Church's life and mission.

A gifted scholar, writer and artist, Fr Mahboob believed beauty could draw people closer to God. He designed numerous Marian shrines, grottos and sacred artworks that continue to inspire the faithful across Pakistan.

Bishop Samson Shukardin of the Diocese of Hyderabad described him as a pioneer whose witness would continue to inspire future generations.

"As the first local Capuchin priest, he blazed a trail of selfless service, humility and dedication to the Gospel. His faithful commitment to the Franciscan charism has left an enduring mark on the Church in Pakistan, and his witness will continue to inspire generations of religious and lay faithful," he said. **RVA**

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Synod releases guide for 2027 local Church assemblies

VATICAN: The General Secretariat of the Synod has published a new resource to help dioceses and eparchies prepare for local evaluation assemblies, marking the next stage of the Synod's implementation process.

The document, *Recollecting: Accompanying the Preparation of the Local Church's Evaluation Assembly*, was released on July 27 and is available in several languages. It aims to help local Churches prayerfully reflect on how synodality has taken root in their communities before the process moves to national, continental and universal levels.

"Evaluation is not a technical exercise, but an experience of gratitude and truth," said Cardinal Mario Grech, Secretary General of the Synod. "Recollecting means recognising what the Lord has brought to maturity in the journey of our communities and allowing ourselves to be guided towards the next steps."

Drawing on Scripture, the document explains that recollecting is more than looking back. It is about recognising God's action in history, discerning the present and opening oneself to the future.

Addressed primarily to bishops, eparchs and diocesan synodal teams, the resource offers practical questions and discernment criteria rather than a single model, allowing each local

Church to adapt the process to its own context.

Reflecting Pope Leo XIV's description of synodality as "a spiritual style" that "is born of encounter, grows through listening, and matures in discernment," the guide is divided into two parts.

The first helps local Churches prepare a narrative report by gathering testimonies and reflecting on the three areas of conversion identified in the Synod's Final Document: relationships, ecclesial processes and bonds. The second focuses on preparing the evaluation assembly as a prayerful experience centred on silence, shared reflection and Conversations in the Spirit.

Each assembly will produce a narrative report and a Letter to the Other Churches, sharing its experience, future priorities and a message of hope. Both documents are to be approved by the bishop and submitted to the national or regional synodal team and the General Secretariat of the Synod by June 30, 2027.

The process will continue with assemblies of bishops' conferences and Eastern Catholic hierarchical structures in the second half of 2027, followed by continental assemblies in early 2028, before concluding with an Ecclesial Assembly at the Vatican in October 2028.

Vatican News

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