

HERALD

The Catholic Weekly

Mission Statement

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.

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Christmas message 2025

Hope builds bridges, welcomes every heart

As we draw the Jubilee of Hope to a close, Christmas greets us with its quiet radiance, a light that does not dazzle but gently heals. In a world marked by conflict, division, and the fatigue of hearts longing for peace, the birth of Christ reassures us that hope is not an escape from reality. It is God entering our reality, walking alongside us, especially those most vulnerable, and calling us to be instruments of His mercy.

In Malaysia, a land rich in diverse cultures, languages, and faith traditions of multiple races, Christmas offers a profound invitation: to become builders of bridges in a time when divisions can so easily be magnified. The Child in the manger reveals a love that is inclusive, humble, and creative. True unity does not demand uniformity but calls for patient, courageous encounters. When we look at one another with the eyes of Christ, we see not strangers, but neighbours, companions, and brothers and sisters under the same sky of God's mercy.

This bridge-building hope is alive in the daily life of our communities. I see it in families sharing their simple blessings with neighbours, in the people of God opening their

doors to those who have no place to call home, and in young people struggling and learning to listen before they speak. I see communities that celebrate one another's festivals, not merely tolerating differences but embracing them with respect. I see volunteers teaching children to read and write, youth organising clean-up drives, and neighbourhood communities helping the elderly with daily errands or as simple as a visit to the hospital. These quiet gestures reveal the heart of synodality: celebrating together, listening together, and walking together.

Christmas also calls us to the peripheries, to those whose presence is often unseen: the *Orang Asli* (indigenous) communities safeguarding ancient wisdom of the land, migrants and foreign workers labouring far from home, refugees arriving with little more than hope for safety, elderly and single parents enduring hardship, and local families facing poverty, illness, or social marginalisation. The Gospel reminds us that the first to hear of Christ's birth were shepherds, ordinary people, overlooked by society, yet chosen by God to witness His glory. Today, those on the margins continue to



reveal the presence of Christ among us.

In the smiles of *Orang Asli* children learning their traditions with pride, in the whispered prayers of migrants in cramped dwellings, in the resilience of refugees rebuilding their lives, and in the quiet faith of the elderly — there the light of the manger shines. When we draw near, we discover that they are not merely recipients of charity but teachers of hope, courage, and perseverance. Through their witness, we are reminded that the smallest gestures — sharing a meal, listening attentively, offering companionship, or helping someone find a job, become instruments of God's kingdom.

Our ongoing journey, *Walking Together Towards a Synodal and Prophetic Church - A People for Missionary Discipleship*, takes deeper meaning during Christmas. The God Who became small in Bethlehem sends us forth not as conquerors but as companions, missionary disciples who listen deeply, heal gently, and accompany faithfully. A prophetic Church stands beside the poor, speaks for the voiceless, and refuses to look away from suffering. It reflects God's tenderness not through grand gestures, but through daily fidelity to

love and service.

As the Jubilee concludes, its grace continues to guide us. The Holy Year has shown that hope must be made visible in concrete actions: crossing cultural and social boundaries, fostering communities where every person is heard, and creating spaces where the vulnerable experience dignity and belonging. Hope becomes credible when it is lived! not only proclaimed.

Christmas reminds us that peace begins in the manger, in humility, simplicity, and the willingness to be close to one another. If we allow the humility of Christ to shape and mould our relationships, our families, and our society, our communities will become places where harmony can take root. May the newborn Lord awaken in all Malaysians, a renewed desire for mutual respect, unity, and compassion, and may our Christian communities become ever more synodal, prophetic, and missionary: bridges of understanding, homes of welcome, and bearers of a hope that does not disappoint, because it springs from the God Who chose to dwell among His people.

I invite Catholics, and all men and women of peace and goodwill, to be pilgrims of hope.

Wishing everyone a blessed Christmas.

Sebastian Francis

Cardinal Sebastian Francis
Bishop of Penang



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Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre
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Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur,
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**EDITOR**

Patricia Pereira
editor1@herald.com.my

**ASSISTANT EDITOR**

Sandra Ann Inbaraj
sandra@herald.com.my

**GRAPHIC DESIGNER**

Amanda Mah
amanda@herald.com.my

**SOCIAL MEDIA**

Kevin Francis
kevin@herald.com.my

**BAHASA MALAYSIA**

Melania Liza Magnus
liza@herald.com.my

**MANDARIN**

Adelina Wong
yin4482@gmail.com

**ADMIN ASSISTANT**

Rachael Sharma
admin@herald.com.my

ADVERTISEMENT/SUBSCRIPTION
advertisement@herald.com.my

MEMORIAM

memoriam@herald.com.my

LETTERS

letterseditor@herald.com.my

Social Media

www.heraldmalaysia.com



@heraldmalaysia



heraldmalaysia
Herald Snapshot



@heraldsnapshot

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Capture and share the spirit and vibrancy of your parish or ministry life with our readers.

We're looking for concise articles between 400 to 500 words, accompanied by high-resolution photos (300 DPI) in JPG or PNG format.

Don't forget to include captions that bring your images to life.

Your contributions are essential in keeping our faith community connected and informed.

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editor1@herald.com.my



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

The message of Christmas continues ... through us

From the quiet fields of Bethlehem to our homes today, communication has always been at the heart of God's saving plan. On the night of Jesus' birth, angels broke the stillness to proclaim the Good News to humble shepherds, transforming an ordinary night into divine wonder. The Magi, guided by a star, journeyed from distant lands, following a message that stirred their hearts and awakened a longing for truth. From the very beginning, the story of Christ has been spoken, shared, and joyfully received — a message meant to be carried forward.

Centuries later, that mission remains the same: to proclaim the Good News. Yet our world has changed. In an age of constant noise, instant messages, and endless information, the Church still relies on something steady and essential — Catholic media, faithful messengers of truth, hope, and communion.

As we celebrate Christmas, we are reminded not only of Christ's birth, but also of our shared responsibility to continue proclaiming His message. For *HERALD*, this mission has always been clear: to communicate, evangelise, and form the faithful.

Some may ask: in a world of livestreamed Masses, podcasts, influencers, and AI-generated content, do we still need a Catholic newspaper? The answer is simple: technology can deliver information, but it cannot replace authentic human connection. It cannot capture the heartbeat of a community, pastor a soul, or understand the joys and struggles of the People of God.

HERALD's strength lies in this human

touch — in stories told with sensitivity and pastoral insight, shaped by the spiritual, cultural, and social life of our local Church. We give voice to parishes, ministries, youth, religious communities, migrant families, the elderly, the marginalised, and the newly baptised. We honour moments of celebration, accompany moments of sorrow, and record not just events, but encounters with grace. We challenge injustices, highlight acts of love, and walk with our readers in their journey of faith.

In a world overflowing with generic content, *HERALD* offers something irreplaceable: a Catholic lens rooted in truth, guided by the Gospel, and shaped by real human experience.

Christmas reminds us that God communicates not only through words, but through presence. The Word became flesh. God entered our world not as an idea, but as a Person — Emmanuel, God-with-us.

This is why Catholic media is more than journalism. It is evangelisation. Every testimony we share, every parish initiative we highlight, every reflection we publish shapes a people who can recognise Christ in daily life. When we tell stories of outreach to the poor, we highlight the Gospel's heartbeat. When we share the struggles of migrants, we awaken compassion. When we offer reflections on Scripture and Church teaching, we nourish understanding and deepen faith. When we tell stories of youth, catechumens, families, and vocations, we affirm that the Church is alive, vibrant, and full of hope.

Catholic media forms consciences, builds unity, and helps the faithful see the world through the light of Christ — a mission more urgent now than ever. *HERALD's* work is sustained by the community it serves. As we continue adapting to a changing media landscape, strengthening our digital presence, and refining our storytelling, we rely on you — our readers, contributors, and companions.

Your readership sustains this ministry. Your feedback sharpens our purpose. Your stories, reflections, and prayers keep the flame of Catholic communication burning brightly.

Many readers have shared that *HERALD* feels like a friend — a weekly companion on their faith journey. And truly, no algorithm can offer that. Catholic media does not simply produce content; it builds communion.

This Christmas, may we imitate the shepherds who hurried to see the Child and then joyfully shared what they had witnessed. May we follow the Magi, seeking truth with courage and perseverance. And may we, like Mary, treasure these moments of grace, pondering God's presence in the quiet corners of our hearts.

May the joy of Christ's birth fill your homes, the light of His love guide your steps, and the hope of Emmanuel inspire your hearts today and always. Wishing you and your loved ones a blessed, peaceful, and hope-filled Christmas.

Patricia Pereira

Choosing reflection over reaction

We live in an age that is *anti-ponder* and *anti-wait*, and one major culprit is the digital world of social media. We have cultivated a culture of instant self-expression and globalised it. While frustration and anxiety are not new to human experience, what is new is our ability to broadcast those feelings instantly, at the tip of our fingers.

This immediacy is often harmful. When something upsets us on Facebook or Instagram, we can fire off our anger within seconds. Before social media, an offended response might take days or weeks — time that allowed us to cool down, gain perspective, reflect, and even change our minds. We once had room to ponder, like Mary, who “kept all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Lk 2:19).

Two recent examples show this culture clearly.

First, a viral video of a husband catching his wife in adultery. In his fury, he filmed himself berating and physically abusing the couple and broadcast it live. Many viewers praised his violent outburst as “deserved” or “karma.” Instant rage became entertainment.

Second, a Catholic upset by a praise-and-worship concert held in a church sanctuary posted a YouTube video condemning clergy and leaders, gaining support from others who shared his indignation.

While their pain is understandable, we must ask: *Are instant, public reactions truly justified? Or is there a better way to respond to perceived injustice or scandal?* I believe there is. I call it the **Way of St Joseph**.

The Way of St Joseph

In the Gospel of the 4th Sunday of Advent, Joseph faces what appears to be a scandal:

Mary is pregnant before their marriage. Instead of exposing her to shame, he resolves to dismiss her quietly — an act of compassion and fidelity to the law. Then, through a dream, an angel reveals the truth: the child is from the Holy Spirit, and Joseph is to name Him Jesus. Joseph's immediate obedience transforms him from a perplexed fiancé into the guardian of the Incarnation. This fulfills Isaiah's prophecy of Emmanuel — “God with us” — and highlights Joseph's central role in salvation history.

Joseph faced profound confusion and heartbreak, yet he did not react publicly or in anger. He chose justice, mercy, and discretion. He processed his crisis through contemplation and faith, not through outcry or impulsive judgment.

His example is a powerful model for our digital age: to pause, to process emotions privately, to seek understanding before judging, and to choose a response that upholds dignity — even when we feel wronged. It is a call to replace instant reaction with intentional reflection and to transform our culture of complaint into one of grace.

Joseph's Righteousness and Obedient Faith Scripture describes Joseph as “righteous” — a man in harmony with God's will, balancing justice with mercy. His quiet protection of Mary foreshadows his lifelong vocation as guardian of the Holy Family. When the angel tells him, “Do not be afraid,” Joseph awakens and obeys without hesitation. His silence in the Gospels reveals a deep, contemplative trust.

St Joseph's Witness Today

In a world marked by family struggles, ethical

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with Fr Martinian Lee

4th Sunday of Advent (A)

Readings: Isaiah 7:10-14;

Romans 1:1-7;

Gospel: Matthew 1:18-24

dilemmas, and cultural pressures on faith, Joseph offers a blueprint for discipleship. His initial fear mirrors our own anxieties — fear of scandal, uncertainty, or failure. Yet he teaches us to listen for God's voice amid confusion, whether in prayer, conscience, or unexpected moments.

Joseph's guardianship also challenges us to protect what is sacred in our homes. In an age of distraction and moral confusion, we are invited to imitate his silent vigilance — fostering prayer, virtue, and strong family bonds without seeking recognition. As husbands, fathers, or caregivers, we share in his responsibility to nurture faith.

For all believers, Joseph reminds us that God's plans often unfold quietly, through our daily “yes.”

As we wait for Christmas, his obedience fulfils the Advent invitation to ponder and prepare our hearts for Christ's coming. By trusting amid doubt, we participate in the ongoing Incarnation, allowing Christ to dwell in our families, communities, and challenges.

In summary, St Joseph's quiet heroism shows that true strength lies not in reacting instantly but in responding faithfully. May we, like Joseph, awaken each day ready to do as the Lord commands, welcoming Christ anew.

Myanmar Catholic delegation visits College General as Pilgrims of Hope

Christopher Kushi

PENANG: On December 1, a distinguished delegation from the Catholic Church of Myanmar, led by Cardinal Charles Maung Bo, Archbishop of Yangon, visited College General, Regional Major Seminary, as part of a pilgrimage of fraternity.

The 30-member delegation had earlier participated in the Great Pilgrimage of Hope gathering in Penang from November 27 to 30, which celebrated the Church in Asia as a living community building bridges between nations.

The delegation was warmly welcomed by Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang and President of College General, accompanied by the Very Rev Ryan Innas Muthu (Rector); Fr Surain Durai Raj (Dean of Studies); Fr Cyril Mannayagam (Spiritual Father of the House); Fr Stephen Lim (Pastoral Coordinator); Fr Larry Tan, SJ (Formator and Spiritual Director), and 20 seminarians representing the living



continuity of the Church's mission.

At the Great Pilgrimage of Hope, Cardinal Sebastian had exhorted participants to embrace their shared vocation as pilgrims of hope, saying, "We are not strangers to each other, but humble pilgrims endeavouring to be instruments of Hope in Asia." Cardinal Bo echoed this spirit of joy, encouraging the faithful to bear witness through simple acts, reminding all,

"Faith is a sweet message. Let the Good News start with a smile," affirming that evangelisation begins from the heart.

The spirit of communion was evident as the seminarians greeted the delegation with a heartfelt rendition of *Hari ini Kurasa Bahagia* (Today I Feel Happy), setting a tone of friendship and togetherness. In response, the Myanmar visitors sang "Golden Footsteps," composed by Bishop

Maurice Nyunt Wai, evoking the legacy of College General, where countless martyrs and faithful have walked on its hallowed grounds.

The delegation visited the Chapel of the Sacred Heart, pausing in prayer before relics of 47 martyrs, including Saint Philip Minh. College General's history of formation and sacrifice has earned it the revered title of the College of Martyrs. Cardinal Bo was accompanied by Archbishop Mark Tin Win; Bishops Noel Saw Naw Aye, Maurice Nyunt Wai, Tin Wai, Stanilaus Min Ko, and Wai Lin Htun; along with clergy, religious, and lay leaders.

In the Visitors Book, Cardinal Bo, Bishops Maurice Nyunt Wai, Min Ko, and Noel Saw expressed their gratitude to College General for its enduring role in forming Myanmar's priests. Sr Leh Leh Khaing added her thanks, invoking the intercession of Mother Mary for protection and concluding with a blessing: "God Bless Us All."

KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

December

- 27 **Mass – Feast day, Cathedral of St John the Evangelist, KL**
- 27 **Mass – Feast day, Church of the Holy Family, Kajang**
- 28 **Mass – Closing of the Jubilee Year, Cathedral of St John the Evangelist, KL**

PENANG DIOCESE

Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

December

- 24 **Mass – Christmas Eve, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Penang at 11.00pm**
- 25 **Mass – Christmas Day, Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam at 9.00am**
- 28 **Mass – Closing for Jubilee Year of Hope 2025, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Penang at 5.30pm**

MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

December

- 22 **South Johor Clergy Christmas Fellowship**
- 24 **Mass – Christmas, Church of St Joseph, Plentong**
- 28 **Mass – Closing for Jubilee Year of Hope 2025, Sacred Heart Cathedral, JB**

Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #253

Welcome dear friends,

The Church of the Immaculate Conception, JB kindled the *Christmas spirit* and united four-language and foreign communities, through their Family Day.

The Caritas MJD board will focus on IHD and Mission *Caritas2Parishes* for 2026.

The *Charity Bazaar* at SJC Plentong, to raise funds for the parish Caritas POHD and make available affordable pre-loved and recycled items for the needy, drew parishioners and neighbours.

Local Takes. More Cracks
The Dewan Rakyat reports: Credit card debts have hit RM50.7bil, with repayment overdue reaching RM551.8 mil as of September 2025.

The *SinarDaily* highlighted a public health disaster, the once declining HIV & AIDS are surging again. And the authorities respond not with education or treatment, but with raids, fear and punishment.

The *Aliran* reflected: Parents deserve clarity, students deserve fairness, and schools deserve a system that reflects true learning outcomes. Teachers and parents are questioning the logic behind the grading systems - the end of the year exams (UASA) for Years 4,5 & 6 and Forms 1,2 & 3 and Tahap penguasaan (TP) (6-level student mastery grading system).

The *Edge* said: Spending has been made easy, thanks to buy now, pay later (BNPL) financing. Is it a friend or foe? BNPL allows consumers to pay a month later or split the payments into instalments.

Church In the World: Making a Difference:
South East Asia: When devastated

by the recent tropical cyclones, Catholic and Christian parishes and organisations stepped in together to support and "alleviate the suffering of the victims."

Indonesia: Franciscan friars joined rescue operations in the provinces of West Sumatra, North Sumatra and Aceh which were devastated by floods and landslides, with 800 dead and over 550 still missing.

Sri Lanka: Local Christian communities and organisations began to offer aid to victims of Cyclone Ditwah, with 300 dead and 200 missing.

Vatican: Ahead of the 6th Vatican's Concert with the Poor, held on December 6, Canadian singer and songwriter Michael Bubl  shared "music is a gift from God" to share his faith and "When I hear music, I hear the voice of God".

Pope Leo to ambassadors: "The Holy See will not be a silent bystander to the grave disparities, injustices and fundamental human rights violations in our global community."

A Thought for The Week: Golden Sailfish
Daro was a fisherman who lived by a storm-prone sea. He dreamed of catching the Golden Sailfish — a legendary creature said to bring fame. People warned him: "Many have chased it; none returned the same." But his desire grew into obsession. One dawn, he spotted its shimmering fin. Without thinking, he pushed into rough waters. As the waves grew monstrous, he held on — eyes fixed on the glitter of gold. He didn't notice the sky darken, the winds shift, the jagged rocks. When the storm hit, it wasn't the sea that almost killed him — it was his fixation. Washed ashore and beaten,

Daro finally understood: *It wasn't the fish that nearly destroyed him, it was the blindness of his chase.*
The lesson from the chase: Desire becomes destructive the moment it narrows our vision and numbs our awareness. "What we chase blindly may be the very thing that destroys us." (cf Mk 8:36)

QnQ: Q asks: Goodness often changes people. But are there times when it doesn't work?

- "No matter how much you feed, love, respect, or pray for a snake, it will still bite you. Be wise." Feeding, loving, respecting and praying for...these noble actions will not alter the fundamental truth: *a snake is still a snake.* The bite is not personal; *it's predictable.* The wisdom lies not in trying to reform the snake, but in recognising what it is before you get close enough to be harmed.
- It's a stark reminder about boundaries, discernment, and self-protection. *It warns us against the trap of believing that our goodness can override someone else's consistent character or patterns.*
- It's the emotional equivalent of "When someone shows you who they are, believe them the first time". (Maya Angelou) Mt 7:6 NIV "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces."

The Spirit @ work: The less Holy Spirit we have, the more cake and coffee we need to keep the Church going. (Reinhard Bonnke)

Something to tickle you: Success is not final; failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts." (Winston Churchill)

Bishop Bernard Paul

PD community celebrates parish feast amid challenges

Clara Guzman

PORT DICKSON: The parish community of the Church of the Immaculate Conception, gathered from December 4-7 to celebrate their parish feast under the theme *With Mary, We Are Pilgrims of Hope*. Despite the temporary closure of the parish church due to severe roof damage from Typhoon Senyar, parishioners demonstrated steadfast faith, unity, and resilience throughout the four-day celebration. Fr Simon Anand from the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Kampar, presided over and preached at all Masses.

To accommodate the temporary shop-lot venue, several Masses were live-streamed on the parish's new YouTube channel, allowing those unable to attend in person to join in prayer. Masses were celebrated in multiple

languages and animated by various parish zones and ministries, ensuring every community felt included.

The celebration began on Dec 4 with the traditional flag-raising ceremony, followed by the Rosary, Sacrament of Reconciliation, and Mass. The day's theme, *Mary, Pilgrim of Hope and Mother of Protection*, invited the faithful to entrust their community, families, and rebuilding efforts to Mary's guidance.

Dec 5 focused on *Grace of the Jubilee: A Contrite Heart That Believes*, with prayer, confessions, Mass, and Eucharistic Adoration. The evening encouraged reflection, repentance, and renewal, particularly in light of the typhoon's impact, with prayer candles offered for the community's intentions.

On Dec 6, the morning programme, centred on *Stay With Us, Mary, When Hope Grows Dim*, included the anointing of the

sick, bringing comfort to those facing illness or hardship. In the evening, Fr Simon reflected on the Second Sunday of Advent, highlighting Christ's peace as a sustaining force during uncertain times. A moving mini procession followed, as representatives carried the statue of Mary around the temporary venue, symbolising unity, resilience, and devotion. Video clips of the parish's Rosary Walk and para-liturgies, which touched many hearts, were also screened.

On Dec 7, the Masses were celebrated in Bahasa Malaysia and Tamil, with Fr Simon reiterating the Advent message. The feast concluded with the theme *God Did the Impossible With Mary; Now He Sends Us*, inspiring parishioners to bring hope, faith, and service into the world, following Mary's courageous example.

Though the celebrations were more



The statue of Our Lady being carried in procession.

modest than in previous years, the heartfelt participation reflected the community's unwavering spirit. Parish priest Fr Edwin Peter provided steady leadership throughout, supported by tireless volunteers, guiding the parish as it works to restore its roof and renew its mission as a vibrant 'lighthouse' parish.

The Port Dickson community has shown that, with Mary, they remain true pilgrims of hope — prayerful, united, and determined to rebuild both their church and their collective mission.

PENANG: The Church of the Immaculate Conception (CIC) marked its annual feast day with a four-day celebration from December 5-8, drawing more than 1,000 faithful for a programme centred on prayer, reflection and communal devotion. This year's feast was held under the theme *Hope Does Not Disappoint – Mary as Our Pillar of Hope*.

The parish was blessed with the presence of the Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur, Most Rev Julian Leow, who presided and preached all four days of the feast.

The feast day celebrations began on Dec 5 with a liturgy dedicated to young people, centred on the subtheme *Mary, Our Mother of Hope*.

Youth from the parish led the evening celebration, inviting their peers to rediscover Mary as a mother who walks with them through uncertainty and challenges. The opening day highlighted the parish's commitment to journeying with the next generation and strengthening their faith through Mary's example of trust in God.

The second day, themed *Mary, Our Intercessor of Hope*, shifted the focus to the poor, migrants and the marginalised.

The community gathered in prayerful solidarity, reflecting on Mary's compassionate intercession for those who suffer or face



Finding strength in Mary, 'Pillar of Hope'

injustice. Special intentions were offered for dignity, protection and hope for all who struggle on the peripheries of society.

On Dec 7, the celebration turned to families under the theme *Mary, Our Guide to Hope*.

The parish acknowledged the unique challenges families face today and honoured Mary as a model of unity, resilience and faith.

A Marian procession, with benediction was held in the morning, drawing the community together in a visible expression of devotion and gratitude for Mary's motherly guidance.

The final day of the feast focused on the sick and the elderly, recognising them as cherished members of the faith community. During the concluding Mass, priests admin-

istered the Anointing of the Sick, offering comfort, healing and renewed hope through the sacrament.

A significant moment of the day was the renewal of commitment by members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul (SSVP), who reaffirmed their mission to serve the poor with compassion and humility. Their public renewal reflected Mary's example of loving service and care for the vulnerable.

In his concluding remarks, Archbishop Julian emphasised the importance of humility, community life and an ongoing journey of faith. He reminded the faithful that Mary, as Mother of God and model of holiness, invites all believers to remain obedient and open to God's Will.

This year's celebration invited the faithful to journey with Mary — Mother, Intercessor and Guide — who continually leads the Church closer to Christ, the unfailing source of hope.

The clergy of CIC — Msgr Jude Miranda and Fr Oliver Tham, OFM, expressed their gratitude to Archbishop Julian for serving as the feast day preacher, and to Frs Frederick Joseph, Ryan Innas, Bernard Hyacinth, SJ, and seminarian Jayson Wang for joining in the parish feast day celebrations. **Nicholas Khor**

Church of St Andrew celebrates patronal feast

MUAR: The Church of St Andrew celebrated its patronal feast, St Andrew the Apostle with a triduum from November 26 to 28, culminating in a well-attended feastday Mass on Nov 29.

The triduum included Masses in Mandarin,

English, and Bahasa Malaysia. Fr Michael Goh from Melaka celebrated and preached the first day in Mandarin, while Fr Gnana Selvam Berentis from Klang presided over the English Mass on Day 2 and the Bahasa Malaysia Mass on Day 3.



Frs Jason Wong and Aaron Alammalay reciting a prayer with the altar servers and hospitality ministers.

In his Day 2 homily, Fr Selvam encouraged parishioners not to fear life's challenges, noting that such trials are signs pointing to the coming of Christ. He urged the faithful to trust in God even in the face of death and to remain steadfast, regardless of rejection by others. On Day 3, he emphasised placing total trust in Jesus, describing discernment as key in preparing for the end of times, and called on parishioners to follow St Andrew's example of courageous witnessing.

While the triduum drew fewer than 100 parishioners each day, the feastday Mass on Nov 29 attracted more than 250 attendees at 8pm. Parish priest Fr Jason Wong served as main celebrant and preacher, with his assistant Fr Aaron Alammalay concelebrating. At the start of the tri-lingual Mass, Fr Jason invited everyone to greet one another with "Happy Feast Day."

In his homily, Fr Jason highlighted St

Andrew's life as one of bravery, commitment, and humility. One of the first Apostles to follow Jesus and brother of St Peter, St Andrew left his work as a fisherman after hearing John the Baptist's call to repentance. He introduced his brother Peter to Jesus, welcomed strangers eager to learn about God, and travelled widely to share the Good News despite facing dangers and challenges. Fr Jason encouraged parishioners to emulate St Andrew's example by sharing their faith, time, and kindness with others, and by embracing humility and service in their daily lives.

The congregation also recited the Prayer and Litany of St Andrew the Apostle. At the conclusion of the Mass, Fr Jason thanked the liturgical team and all who contributed to the feast's preparation. Buns were distributed to parishioners as they departed the church grounds at 9.30pm, bringing the celebration to a joyful close. **Bernard Anthony**

Preparing the Way: Advent retreats in our parishes

Church of St Ignatius

PETALING JAYA: The Church of St Ignatius Church (SIC), recently hosted a one-day retreat for 160 parishioners on the theme *Hope in Waiting*, led by Jesuit priest Fr Christopher Wee, SJ. Organised by the parish Formation Team, the retreat began with a reverent Bible Enthronement ceremony and a warm welcome extended by assistant parish priest Fr Martin Then, CDD.

Fr Christopher opened with Socrates' timeless insight, "An unexamined life is not worth living," inviting participants to see the retreat as a privileged pause — a space to reflect, recalibrate, and deepen their relationship with God and others. He described Advent as the Church's loving invitation to slow down amid the noise and glitter of the season, reminding participants that beyond the "wow" of malls and decorations lies a deeper call to enter into the mystery of Christ's coming.

A central theme of the retreat



Fr Martin Then, CDD welcoming the parishioners while Fr Christopher Wee, SJ looks on.

was that waiting in Advent is not passive but active. Christmas, he explained, is not merely a sentimental remembrance of a baby in a manger, but an invitation for God to be born into the imperfect realities of our lives. Only by honestly acknowledging our exhaustion, spiritual struggles and unresolved wounds can we truly recognise our need for a Saviour.

Introducing the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises of St

Ignatius, Fr Christopher spoke on the Discernment of Spirits, explaining how temptation often appears attractive while discouragement and anxiety can subtly derail spiritual growth. Quoting Pope Francis, he reminded participants that "the Christian life is a battle, a beautiful battle, because God emerges victorious in every step of our life" — a victory that becomes real when believers learn to recognise God's voice amidst false consolations and

desolations.

Sharing his own vocation journey, Fr Christopher reflected on the fear of leaving the familiar and stepping into the unknown, noting how attachments to success, control and false images of God can hinder true freedom. Drawing from Thomas Halík's *Patience with God*, he spoke of "twilight moments" — seasons of dryness and doubt that are necessary for a mature faith.

He challenged participants to let go of a "magician-God" who fixes problems and instead embrace the God Who comes in humility, revealed in both the manger and the cross. True faith, he said, holds together the vulnerability of Bethlehem and the suffering of Calvary.

Fr Christopher also addressed the danger of reducing Jesus to merely a moral teacher, pointing to the Church's teaching that only a fully divine Saviour can truly transform humanity. The baby in the manger, he reminded, reveals a God Who does not fix life magically, but walks with humanity in its joy and pain — Emmanuel, God with us.

He noted that many believers carry a punitive image of God, driven by guilt and obligation. The Gospel, however, reveals a God Who welcomes, heals and accompanies. The Eucharist, he stressed, is not a burden but thanksgiving — a celebration of God's saving presence here and now.

Participants were guided toward practical spiritual practices, including praying with Scripture, using the Nativity scene for contemplation, the Ignatian method of prayerful review, and the daily practice of the Examen — noticing where God was present throughout the day.

The retreat concluded with small-group spiritual conversations and a prayerful sending forth. Parish priest Fr Thomas Koo, CDD thanked God for the gift of Fr Christopher's passionate and sincere guidance. The enthusiastic response of the parishioners made it clear that the retreat had deepened their understanding of Advent and rekindled their hope — not as passive waiting, but as a living encounter with the God Who comes close.

Church of St Francis of Assisi

CHERAS: The Formation Ministry of the Church of St Francis of Assisi, in conjunction with the Jubilee Year theme *Pilgrims of Hope*, organised an Advent Retreat in English, Tamil, Bahasa Malaysia and Mandarin on December 6, centred on the theme *Waiting in Hope*. Fr Simon Agbo conducted the retreat for the English-speaking participants.

Advent is a sacred season of hope — a time of quiet waiting for the birth of our Saviour. It calls us to slow down, to step away from the chaos of daily life, and to reflect deeply on what hope truly means in our personal lives. It is also a precious opportunity to seek God's mercy, to renew our faith, and to allow ourselves to become instruments of change and healing in the world.

Through his personal experiences, encounters and reflections on Scripture, Fr Simon shared how hope was forged in his own moments of struggle and discernment, reminding participants of the im-

portance of pausing, listening, and trusting in God's timing.

The retreat began with a vibrant session of praise and worship, after which participants moved into their respective language groups. The English group was further divided into small sharing circles of seven to eight participants, creating a safe and welcoming space for personal reflection and honest sharing. Fr Simon offered guiding questions for meditation, which were later shared within the larger group. Some of the reflective questions that deeply resonated with participants were:

- How can you bring hope into your family this Advent?
- What keeps people from living with hope?
- Where do you see darkness in the world that needs your light?
- How can you become a source of encouragement to someone who is struggling?
- What practical acts of charity can you commit to this Advent?
- What obstacles weaken your

hope?

- What one change will you make to live the hope of Advent more deeply?

Several key insights from the retreat left a lasting impact. Advent is a season for forgiveness, reminding us to let go of grudges so that we may truly rest in peace; holding on to resentment only causes us to "rest in pieces." The retreat also encouraged participants to take stock of their possessions—if there are clothes in our closets that have gone unworn for six months, we are called to share them with those in need. Finally, we were reminded that a clenched fist represents a closed heart, while open palms reflect generosity, openness, and a willingness to give and care for others.

These insights opened participants' hearts to a deeper understanding of the love of God and love of neighbour, and how hope is shared through simple acts of care, mercy and compassion. The retreat provided a meaningful opportunity for participants to practise many of the Eight Habits of Effective Christian Living, inspiring them to live their faith more intentionally.

The retreat concluded with the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament (Holy Hour) and Benediction by Fr Chin See Wee, OCD. This prayerful time allowed participants to rest quietly in the presence of the Lord. Before the Holy Hour, participants were invited to take a candle and a Bible verse, symbolising their personal commitment to carry the light of hope beyond the retreat.

The retreat was a spiritually enriching experience, leaving participants renewed, encouraged and strengthened in their journey as true Pilgrims of Hope. **Sharon Dabi**

Church of St Anthony



KUALA LUMPUR: The Church of St Anthony organised an Advent recollection for its parishioners on December 7, held in three separate sessions in Tamil, English, and Bahasa Malaysia. The English session was led by parish priest Fr Dr Clarence Devadass, while assistant parish priest Fr Michel Dass, *pic*, guided the Tamil and Bahasa sessions. Around 250 participants came together to prepare their hearts for the Advent season.

Parishioners who attended Fr Michel's sessions, later shared how engaging and meaningful his talks were, noting moments of insight and realisation about aspects of Advent they had previously overlooked amid the season's busyness.

Meanwhile, the English session, welcomed nearly 80 participants.

In his sharing, Fr Clarence reminded us that Advent is a season of hope, preparation, watchfulness, and joyful expectation. He reflected on how the modern world can easily push Christ out of the centre of this season. Amid dazzling decorations, endless shopping, gifts, and noise, we often forget the true purpose of Advent, to prepare our hearts for Jesus.

We then reflected on four key themes of Advent:

Hope invites us to trust in God's promises, even when answers seem delayed. Fr Clarence pointed to the Blessed Virgin Mary as a model of obedience, highlighting how she and her cousin Elizabeth experienced God's miraculous work — Elizabeth bearing a child in her old age — a reminder that nothing is impossible for God, even after a long wait.

Preparation calls us to allow God to shape and purify us. Fr Clarence emphasised the importance of silence — quiet moments in which God can work within us. In our busy, distraction-filled lives, these moments help us acknowledge our weaknesses, forgive others, accept those who have hurt us, and seek reconciliation. Advent may also invite small sacrifices that open our hearts more fully to God.

Watchfulness asks us to stay alert to God's presence. How can we bring Christ to those who have lost hope? How can we restore light to those who feel forgotten?

Finally, *Joyful Expectation* reminds us that true joy is expressed through reaching out to the needy and the broken-hearted. Are we ready to embrace the inner conversion that clears the way for the Lord's coming into our lives?

After the sessions, many shared that it was a privilege to be reminded of the importance of preparing ourselves to celebrate Christmas. Advent becomes meaningful when we understand how to prepare our hearts. Some also expressed their desire to make personal change, prioritising simplicity and allowing God to transform them through reading the Bible and reflecting on His Word. **Tina Patricia**



Some of the faithful who attended the retreat at the Church of St Francis of Assisi, Cheras.

Beautiful sanctuary inspires Kulim pilgrims

KULIM: A group of 60 students, teachers, and parents from the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus — embarked on a meaningful spiritual pilgrimage to the Church of the Holy Name of Mary in Permatang Tinggi. What began as a simple journey soon unfolded into an experience of deep faith, shared gratitude, and renewed hope.

The pilgrimage began at 9.00am with prayers at our home parish, entrusting the day to God's guidance. Upon arriving in Permatang Tinggi an hour later, we were warmly welcomed by the parish community, led by Bro Thomas. Their hospitality set the tone for a day marked by fellowship and grace.

Bro Thomas introduced us to the rich heritage of the church. The old church, now 97 years old, stands as a silent witness to nearly a century of prayer, sacrifice, and unwavering faith. Its walls carry the stories of early Catholics who laid the foundations of the community through devotion and perseverance. Today, a newly built church rises beside it, modern in design



yet grounded in the same enduring faith. Parishioners, many from the surrounding *kampung* areas, poured their hearts into its construction. Some contributed financially, while others offered their labour, skills, and time. Their collective sacrifice has created a beautiful sanctuary that inspires awe and draws hearts closer to God.

Our pre-Communion students then led the Rosary before we entered into the celebration of the

Eucharist, presided over by our parish priest, Fr Desmond Jansen. The Mass became the spiritual centre of our pilgrimage, a moment of unity, thanksgiving, and grace.

After Mass, we were blessed to hear from Fr Louis Loi, parish priest of Permatang Tinggi, who explained the sacred symbolism woven into the architecture of the new church. Designed in the shape of a tent, the church recalls the Old Testament Tabernacle, reminding

worshippers that God journeys with His people. The tent form symbolises the New Covenant fulfilled in Christ and honours the Holy Name of Mary, who carried the Saviour in her womb.

Every detail within the church speaks a language of faith:

- The ceiling's 12 lights echo the 12 stars of Mother Mary's crown.
- The altar houses relics of Filipino saints alongside St Maria Goretti and St Carlo Acutis,

drawing pilgrims into communion with holy lives.

- Behind the altar, 12 stones represent the 12 tribes of Israel.
- At the entrance, 12 pillars honour the 12 Apostles — foundations of the early Church.
- A beautifully illustrated 16-stage Way of the Cross, created by a local artist, offers a vivid invitation to meditate on Christ's passion.

Together, these elements reflect the truth of Mary as the Ark of the New Covenant, the one who bore Christ, the living Word.

The lunch at 1.00pm — deepened the bonds of community formed throughout the day. Gratitude filled our hearts as we thanked our parish priest, Fr Desmond, for his support and guidance in making this pilgrimage truly meaningful.

As we journeyed back to Kulim, our hearts were full, strengthened by prayer, enriched by fellowship, and renewed in faith. We returned home with gratitude for the graces received and with a deeper appreciation of the gift of being a pilgrim people, walking together towards the hope that does not fade.



KUALA LUMPUR: About 70 parishioners of the Church of Our Lady of Fatima recently gathered for a recollection entitled *Hope Does Not Disappoint*, led by renowned Catholic facilitator and speaker, Martin Jalleh, *pic.* The central theme of the session was both simple and profound: in a world often overshadowed by fear, we are called to rediscover hope in a God who is personal, faithful, and ever-present.

The recollection opened with a reflection on the human experience of fear, which Martin described as the new pandemic of our times. Fear, when persistent and irrational, can consume us, leaving us paralysed and distant from God. Left unchallenged, it can lead to despair and hopelessness. Martin encouraged participants to acknowledge

fear, but not to surrender to it, emphasising that the first step toward hope is recognising how fear works within us and how God invites us beyond it.

Drawing from Scripture, Martin reminded participants that God's people are guided not merely by commandments or rituals, but by a God of Hope. Hope, he explained, is not a fleeting feeling but a conviction grounded in God's character — truthful, reliable, and faithful. Quoting Pope Saint John Paul II at the dawn of the new millennium, he echoed the exhortation to "never, ever, give up hope," and reminded everyone that "we are an Easter people, and Alleluia is our song." Christian hope, he stressed, is not naïve; it is born from the Resurrection.

A key focus of the recollection

was that our faith journey must lead to a personal encounter with God, Who loves us intimately. Martin illustrated this through the Trinity: God above us as Creator and Sustainer, God among us in Jesus who lived with humanity, and God within us through the Spirit Who dwells in our hearts. This understanding of a relational, intimate God resonated deeply with the participants.

Participants were also encouraged to draw strength from God's promises in Scripture: He protects us like a "wall of fire around" with His glory within us (Zechariah 2:5); He has "plans to prosper you... plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11-12), and His mercies are new every morning, demonstrating His unfailing faithfulness (Lamentations 3:21-23). These passages reaffirmed the consistent truth that God is faith-

ful, provides for us, and listens to our hearts.

The recollection called parishioners to take courage and trust anew. Jesus came to give hope, and this hope is meant to overflow. Like St Peter, who denied Jesus three times but repented and became the first Pope, we too are invited to rise from fear, step forward in faith, and trust in the Lord Who never disappoints. In a world still healing from the wounds of the pandemic and facing ongoing uncertainties, the message was clear and consoling: God is with us, God is for us, and God is within us.

Hope, Martin concluded, is not a mere theory — it is a way of living, an ongoing personal relationship with Jesus, our true Hope. When we place our lives in the hands of the infinitely faithful God, we can trust that He never disappoints.

Faith and hope overcome all fear



Participants listening attentively to Martin Jalleh's session.



Catholic Lawyers' Society, Kuala Lumpur

ANNUAL VOTIVE MASS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

RED MASS

The President of the Catholic Lawyers' Society, Kuala Lumpur cordially invites members of the Legal Community and all Parishioners to the Annual Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit to celebrate the start of the Legal Year 2026.

Principal Celebrant:

His Eminence Cardinal Sebastian Francis
The Titular Roman Catholic Bishop of Penang

Date : Saturday, 24 January 2026

Time : 10.00 a.m.

Venue : Cathedral of St John the Evangelist

Address : 5, Jalan Bukit Nanas Kuala Lumpur
50250 Wilayah Persekutuan

All Lawyers are to be robed in Open Court attire.

Virtual pilgrimage brings hope and inclusion for differently abled

KUALA LUMPUR: The Church of the Immaculate Conception, Port Dickson, organised a virtual pilgrimage for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) from November 30 to December 2, culminating with Mass on Dec 3 celebrated by Archbishop Julian Leow. Nature, however, had its own story: an unprecedented storm in Port Dickson damaged the church roof, forcing the event to be relocated. Despite this, a smaller group participated via a live-streamed virtual pilgrimage from the archbishop's chapel at Cardijn House in Bukit Nanas, Kuala Lumpur.

Lily Anthony, a physically challenged member of the Prayer Missionaries Group and Vice President of Wheels for the differently abled, shared her experience: "This event has given me hope. Instead of waiting for others, I want to reach out to differently-abled persons within my capacity. Many homebound cannot attend Mass, receive the sacraments, or access proper faith formation. Family members are often busy or burnt out from caregiving." She also praised the archdiocesan website as a trusted source of



Archbishop Julian Leow and Fr Edwin Peter with some of the representatives from the various differently-abled groups who attended the Mass at the chapel in Bukit Nanas.

information and programmes for homebound PWDs.

Lily appealed to the able-bodied: "A support system — someone to chat with, guide us in faith, or accompany us to hospital visits — would be invaluable. We are spiritually starved and need guidance too. Please share

your faith with us."

Reena Karuppiah, visually impaired, helped establish Eagles Wings for the differently abled in her parish of St Joseph, Sentul, and contributed her voice for prayers during the virtual pilgrimage. Though she could not attend physically, she joined the live-streamed

Mass on Dec 3 and was spiritually uplifted. Reena emphasised that events should prioritise mobility and accessibility for the differently abled and urged the Church to continue reaching out so PWDs are not marginalised.

Another participant was Nicolas Ludersamy, both visually and hearing impaired. Assisted by his mother, Margaret Arokiasamy, he carried the Offertory during Mass — a special and honoured moment. Margaret, who travels by public transport with Nicolas from Klang, encouraged organisers not to make such events a one-off encounter and expressed gratitude to Fr Edwin Peter and his team for meticulously organising the virtual pilgrimage.

Despite challenges, the Jubilee celebrations highlighted the resilience, faith, and active participation of Persons with Disabilities, inspiring communities to continue building an inclusive and welcoming Church.

The virtual pilgrimage for Persons with Disabilities may be viewed on <https://tv.archkl.org>

Healing hearts this holiday season

PETALING JAYA: The Widow to Widow Ministry of the Church of St Francis Xavier held its third annual *Surviving the Holiday* workshop in collaboration with the AOHD Women's Ministry Bereavement Support Group. This year's theme, "Warm Memories, Light of Hope," carried a gentle reminder that even when the festive season feels tender, love continues to shine quietly among us.

The day began with a memorial Mass for departed spouses, celebrated by Fr Richard Anthonysamy SJ. His homily invited the women to let grief move at its own pace, trusting that in time, sorrow can soften into compassion.

After Mass, the community gathered for a workshop where the participants were encouraged to honour the memories that warm their hearts and recognise the strength they have to carry on. Among them were veteran widows whose quiet presence added a steadying strength to the room. Having walked through the darkest parts of the journey themselves, they gently supported those newly bereaved—standing as living reminders that healing is possible.

Although the workshop was organised for widows, the ministry also welcomed a special guest, Peter, who lost his wife 16 years

ago. His story, still carrying a deep and steady resonance, offered an honest reflection on facing the festive season after loss. By speaking so openly, he helped others gently soften, creating a space where vulnerability met understanding and where shared grief became a source of strength. It was in this spirit of openness that, after the session drew to a close, the women began sharing their own reflections on how the day had touched them.

Marilyn shared that the discussions brought her a deep sense of reassurance. One moment that stayed with her was hearing another widow say, "I finally feel that I'm not weird anymore." Marilyn found unexpected comfort in those words, recognising how powerful it is to know that one's emotions — no matter how complicated — are normal and shared by others. She also reflected on approaching the festive season: this would be her third Christmas without her husband, Paul. Although she still isn't ready to put up her own decorations at home, she felt a small spark of happiness seeing the Christmas decorations at the workshop, a gentle reminder that the season of joy is approaching.

Peter's reflections on creating Christmas memories for his young son also resonated



with her, prompting Marilyn to consider her own children's emotional needs and the importance of leaning on God's strength as she navigates the season.

For Theresa, Fr Richard's homily stayed with her long after the session ended. His message on allowing grief to deepen into charity gave her much to ponder. While her current priority is caring for her daughter's health, she acknowledged that healing will eventually require her to turn inward as well. As she put it, "When she recovers, I know I need to nurse myself — physically, psychologically, and then spiritually — back to order." It was a quiet, honest recognition of how grief and care-giving often intertwine.

Caroline found the entire session deeply

meaningful. The homily resonated with her, and the sharing — both from the speakers and from fellow widows — offered insights into her own journey through loss. She expressed gratitude for the ministry community, describing the members as sisters whose understanding and wisdom continue to guide her.

For many, the festive season can be a mix of longing and tenderness. Yet this gathering offered a quiet truth: No one walks through it alone; love continues to guide, God continues to hold, and in the warmth of community, hope grows — gentle, steady, and real.

For more information, contact Caroline Tay, Coordinator of Widow to Widow Ministry at 012-6018185.

Letters to Editor

Dear Editor,

This Christmas will be my first without my mother. The absence is tender and deep. The rituals she loved — the Mass, the cooking, the quiet joy of giving — now live in memory. And while the season still sparkles, it carries a quiet ache.

Grief during the holidays isn't always loud. Sometimes it's the silence at the dinner table, the missing voice in a carol, or the longing for a hug that won't come. But even in this, I've come to believe that grief is love that hasn't stopped. And this Christmas, I choose to carry her legacy forward — with

kindness, with faith, and by simply showing up for Mass.

To those grieving this season

I understand how hard it can be. There are many "helpful" suggestions on how to navigate Christmas after loss, but here's my encouragement: do what feels right for you. No apologies, no explanations. A loss is a loss — and your grief is personal, valid, and sacred.

Whether you choose to celebrate quietly, attend Mass, or simply rest — know that you are not alone. A community of worshippers stands behind you and beside you. If you

can, come to church. Let the liturgy hold you. Let the prayers carry you.

To parishioners and BEC members

If you notice someone attending Mass alone this Christmas, here are a few gentle ways to offer support:

- Smile and wish them well: A simple "Merry Christmas" can mean more than you know.
- Offer to take a photo: Many solo churchgoers would love a memory but may feel awkward asking.
- Avoid probing questions: Grief is personal. Kindness doesn't need interroga-

tion — and church corridors are rarely the right place for a catch-up.

- Invite gently: Whether it's a meal, a seat, or a quiet conversation — let them know they're welcome, without pressure.

This Christmas, let us be the light for one another. Let us honour those we've lost by loving those who are still with us. And let us remember that in every pew, behind every smile, there may be a story of quiet courage.

Merry Christmas. May your heart be held gently this season.

Josephine Dionisappu
via email



Send your letters to ► letterseditor@herald.com.my

The Editor, HERALD, 5 Jalan Robertson, 50150 KL | Please include your name and address. Letters without name and address will not be entertained.

Christmas story beyond the stage

Dr Ivan Filmer

PENANG: “Breaking News! Breaking News! Breaking News!” rang out as newsboys ran through the audience at the musical *What is Christmas Without Christ?*, staged on December 6 and 7 by the Church of Divine Mercy (CDM), Sungai Ara. The dramatic opening set the tone for an evening that carried not only the message of Christ’s hope, joy, peace and love, but also marked a long-awaited milestone for the parish — the official announcement of the construction of a new community hall.

In his opening address, Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang, announced that the diocese had approved the start of the project on land adjacent to the church. Plans for the building had been delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which the Cardinal described as a providential

time of deeper prayer and patient trust in God’s timing. Initially offered a 10+10 year lease, the land was eventually secured under a 99-year lease at half the original cost, with the diocese agreeing to fully bear the expense as part of its vision to “Enlarge the Tent”.

The new facility is envisioned as a multipurpose community centre serving the wider Sungai Ara neighbourhood. Cardinal Sebastian also shared that the historic Chapel of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary on Pulau Jerejak, built in 1890, would come under the pastoral care of CDM. The symbolic groundbreaking moment took place when a young “angel” performer presented a spade to Fr Michael Raymond, OFM Cap, parish priest of CDM, and Zackry Chan, PPC chairperson, signalling the start of the project.

The musical was staged with a dual purpose: to reaffirm that Christ-

mas finds its true meaning only in Christ, and to joyfully mark the launch of the new building initiative.

Preparations began three months in advance and involved auditions, script development, choir rehearsals, costume design and the construction of props. With no hall large enough at the parish, College General was secured as the venue, made possible through the diocese’s support and a minimal rental fee. Power Trax Network Sdn Bhd generously provided the technical setup.

One of the most moving aspects of the production was its inclusivity. Performers ranged from preschool children to senior citizens, reflecting the full life of the parish. Dedicated parents trained the young actors, while seniors faithfully rehearsed to revive their performing skills. Musicians with physical challenges performed alongside more experienced guides. Costumes were handmade



One of the performances by the children.

and many props crafted from recycled materials, demonstrating both creativity and stewardship.

As the performance dates drew near, generous sponsors came forward, making it possible to offer free admission. Attendance exceeded expectations, with more than 400 people present on each evening. Holy Mass was celebrated before each performance, and the children lined up reverently to receive blessings from Fr Michael before taking the stage.

Parishioners and visitors from across Penang filled the hall. Among those present were Most Rev Julian Leow, Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur, priests, religious sisters from the Sis-

ters of the Poor, and the Member of Parliament for Tanjung Bungah. The audience response was overwhelmingly positive. Minor technical issues were met with patience and applause, and the performances of the young actors, musicians and choir drew warm admiration. Even after the final curtain call, many remained seated, hoping for more.

The event united the parish’s various ministries in a shared mission. It became a living expression of Advent — bringing together joy, hope, peace and love — and offered children and adults alike a deeper experience of what it truly means to celebrate Christmas with Christ at its heart.

Women’s Advent gathering focuses on embracing hope

KUALA LUMPUR: About 60 women from diverse backgrounds, including the elderly, differently abled and those with health challenges, gathered for a women-only Advent reflection themed *Embrace Hope this Advent*, led by Sr Margarete Sta Maria.

The session highlighted Advent as a season of expectant waiting, prayer and inner renewal, and was linked to the Jubilee Year 2025, “Pilgrims of Hope,” proclaimed by Pope Francis. Participants were reminded that hope is not passive optimism but a deep trust in God’s faithfulness amid personal struggles and global uncertainties.

Sr Margarete highlighted that hope is not passive optimism but a deep trust in God’s faithfulness.

Drawing from the spirituality of Richard Rohr and Scripture, she encouraged participants to acknowledge personal and societal “darkness” as a pathway to transformation and renewed hope.

Small-group sharing sessions

provided a safe space for women to express fears, hopes and encouragement.

The session also reflected on the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose life of trust, obedience and community support was presented as a model of hope rooted in God’s promises.

As part of the reflection, participants were guided through three key questions: whether there is room in their hearts for Christ, what reminds them to anchor their hope in Jesus, and how they might grow in hope through daily life.

Simple action ideas were shared, including setting aside quiet moments for prayer, reducing distractions, practising gratitude, strengthening family bonds and finding practical ways to live out hope through service.

The gathering concluded with a call for women to live Advent as active participants in God’s transforming work, carrying hope into their families, parishes and the wider communities. **Joanne Ting**



Charity bazaar creates awareness and support for adults with autism

PETALING JAYA: Kelab Sokongan Pekerjaan Autisme (SEA Club) welcomed hundreds of visitors to its Charity Bazaar #3 recently, an event aimed at raising awareness within the community and highlighting the importance of supported employment for adult Persons with Autism (PWA).

SEA Club was established in 2020 as a dedicated space that supports adults on the autism spectrum to work in a sheltered and safe work environment, and also incorporates social and leisure engagement in indoor and outdoor activities.

Charity Bazaar #3, held at SEA Club’s centre, drew a flow of diverse visitors, creating a lively and welcoming atmosphere. Members of the public, neighbours from the surrounding area, curious first-time visitors, and even family members eager to learn more about autism added warmth and energy to the bazaar throughout the day. Visitors also enjoyed the breakfast, lunch, on the spot *thosai* and tea on sale.

This year’s bazaar featured a wide range of freshly baked items



and handmade crafts that were made due to the tireless efforts of PWA. Antiques, paintings, books, and quality pre-loved goods were also available for purchase.

Beyond fundraising to help sustain their programmes, the annual charity bazaar serves as a meaningful platform to deepen the connection between PWA and the wider community.

Adult Persons with Autism (PWA) face many challenges in order to live a full and productive life with dignity. SEA Club Chairperson, Rita Anthony, said that SEA Club hopes to bring employment

opportunities to these young adults with autism.

She explained that it is often not possible for adult PWA to go out and work even though some have basic skills, which is why under the supported employment model, SEA Club sources jobs according to the preference and abilities of the PWA, where they engage in work meaningfully.

“Community events like these are vital in de-stigmatisation and provides an opportunity for the community to see for themselves the work skills and abilities of the PWA,” added Rita.



The women during the group sharing sessions.

Holy Land needs world's prayers, support amid 'disaster'

PLYMOUTH, Michigan: Gaza remains in "abject ruin" despite the October ceasefire in the Israel-Gaza war, said



Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, during a December 5 news conference in Plymouth, Michigan. Speaking at St John's Resort ahead of a fundraising dinner hosted by the Archdiocese of Detroit, the cardinal described life in Gaza as "catastrophic," with the vast majority of homes and public infrastructure destroyed.

"The only difference is that we don't have bombs every day," he said. "Houses are destroyed. No water, no electricity, no schools, no hospitals. People are living in tents without anything."

Only 541 Christians remain in Gaza, all living within the Holy Family Parish compound. Their homes have been levelled, leaving the church grounds functioning like a monastery, he added. Three priests and five nuns are currently ministering to the community, maintaining daily prayers, sacraments and activities to keep morale intact. "It's not just to keep busy. It is to stay



Palestinians sit near a tent that stands next to debris in Gaza City, November 17, 2025, amid a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. (OSV News photo/Dawoud Abu Alkas, Reuters)

united," the cardinal said.

The dinner drew nearly 500 Catholics from southeast Michigan and was part of the cardinal's four-day pastoral visit to the region at the invitation of Detroit Archbishop Edward J. Weisenburger. Bishop Francis Y. Kalabat of the Chaldean Eparchy of St Thomas the Apostle also joined the event. The visit concluded Dec 7 with a Mass at the National Shrine of the Little Flower Basilica in Royal Oak.

The fundraising efforts were substantial.

Archbishop Weisenburger announced that Catholics in the region have raised more than US\$500,000 (RM2.6 million) this week alone for humanitarian and pastoral needs in the Holy Land —adding to US\$533,000 collected in August for Gaza relief efforts through Catholic Relief Services and the Catholic Near East Welfare Association.

"We look to Jesus Christ as the foundation of our faith," the archbishop said. "Tonight, where we help preserve the mission of Christ in the land where He was born,

lived, died and resurrected."

Cardinal Pizzaballa emphasised that despite the ceasefire, "living standards have not changed much." Every resident of Gaza has been displaced, he said, with more than one million people living in tents, vulnerable to rain, cold and disease. Food scarcity remains severe: although trucks have begun entering Gaza, most supplies end up in markets. "If you don't have money, how do you buy food?" he asked. With banks destroyed, "you cannot access money."

Emotional and spiritual trauma is now surfacing among the population. "During the war they were in survival mode. Now the psychological consequences are emerging," he said. Yet the community continues to show extraordinary resilience. "Every time I speak with them, I never hear a word of anger," the cardinal noted.

Archbishop Weisenburger, recalling his 2014 visit to Gaza, said the poverty and devastation are "beyond comprehension," stressing that the United States has a moral responsibility to support those who have lost everything.

Despite ongoing instability, Cardinal Pizzaballa encouraged Catholics to resume pilgrimages to the Holy Land, a vital source of economic support. "People are afraid to come," he said, "but pilgrimages are safe." OSV News

Haitian bishops call for hope and change in a Christmas message

PORT-AU-PRINCE: The Episcopal Conference of Haiti (CEH) has issued a Christmas message calling for renewed hope and responsible action as the nation continues to grapple with deep insecurity, political turmoil and worsening hardship.

Released on December 8 under the theme

"The light of Christ shines in our darkness," the message acknowledges the suffering of Haitians "journeying through the dark night of uncertainty and pain," while emphasising the people's capacity for "unexpected achievements."

The bishops noted that Jesus was born "in

the shadow of poverty," a reality that mirrors the struggles of many in Haiti today. They stressed, however, that Christian hope must not become escapism or "superficial optimism." Instead, it must inspire decisive, responsible action to rebuild the nation.

Haiti remains engulfed in violence, with at least 4,388 people killed between January and September, according to the UN office in Haiti (BINUH). More than 1.4 million people have been displaced, and over half of the country's nearly 12 million citizens face acute food insecurity.

Despite these staggering challenges, the CEH encouraged Haitians of all ages and vocations to persevere in their call to be "peacemakers." The bishops also highlighted the national football team's qualification for the 2026 World Cup as a sign of unity and resilience.

Looking ahead to the February 7, 2026 elections, the bishops urged political leaders and institutions to "rise above partisan interests" and commit to rebuilding state structures weakened by years of instability. They

reaffirmed the central role of the 1987 Constitution as Haiti prepares for the end of the Presidential Transitional Council's mandate.

The CEH warned that credible elections —"democratic, inclusive and transparent"—will only be possible if genuine security is established. They called on authorities to restore safety and ensure conditions that prevent disorder.

The bishops also appealed for a "new leadership" grounded in integrity, service and the courage to reject corruption and privilege. Haiti, they said, needs leaders who work for the common good rather than personal gain.

Concluding their statement, the bishops entrusted Haiti to Christ, the "Prince of Peace," and placed the nation under the protection of the Virgin Mary. They expressed hope that Christmas will rekindle the desire for meaningful national renewal ahead of 2026.

The message was signed by all members of the Episcopal Conference of Haiti. Vatican News



People protest in Port-au-Prince. (Vatican News)

Interfaith Christmas event celebrates inclusion

NEW DELHI: The fifth *Kristu Mahotsav*, an inter-religious and ecumenical Christmas celebration, gathered more than 1,000 specially-abled and underprivileged children on December 7 at St Michael's School, New Delhi. Organised by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), Arts and Culture Resource India (ACRCI) and the Chavara Cultural Centre (CCI), the event promoted inclusivity, inter-faith harmony, cultural dialogue, and compassion. Held shortly after the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, the celebration emphasised unity, peace, joy, and love.

Dignitaries included West Bengal Governor Dr. C.V. Ananda Bose, representatives from nine religions, diplomats, clergy and religious.

A highlight came when specially-abled children led dignitaries to the stage, symbolising empowerment and dignity.

The programme also honoured St Kuriakose Elias Chavara on his 220th birth anniversary. Speakers such as Archbishop Anil Couto, Auxiliary Bishop-Elect Stephen Fernandez, and CCI Director Fr Roby Kannanchira reflected on the meaning of Christmas and the importance of serving the marginalised. Guests of honour praised the children's performances as powerful testimonies of resilience and talent.

Participants from multiple faith traditions commended the event's spirit of unity, diversity, and hope. The evening concluded with a Christmas dinner for all present. RVA



Religious leaders light the ceremonial candle during the *Kristu Mahotsav* Christmas celebration in New Delhi on December 7, 2025. (RVA photo)

In many ways, *Gaudium et Spes*, or the “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,” is the culmination of what the Second Vatican Council hoped to accomplish, the capstone of the council.

The English title helps us see why. When Pope St John XXIII called the council, he wanted a pastoral council, not a dogmatic one. He desired a council that would not so much produce condemnations or “anathemas” in response to pressing heresies, but rather, a council that could lay out a vision for the future of a Church with updated expressions for our ancient faith.

The promulgation of *Gaudium et Spes* in 1965, at the very end of the council, was the council’s first and only pastoral constitution. The title also tells us that it is addressed toward the modern world.

Almost exactly 100 years before *Gaudium et Spes*, Pope Pius IX had all but rejected the modern world, saying in the “Syllabus of Errors” that he need not “reconcile himself” to “modern civilisation.” The violence directed at him and the Church was intense. However, the Church in 1965 found itself in a far different relationship with a postwar world, one exhausted by violence and solicitous of the Church’s leadership for peace.

The modern world needed the Church, and *Gaudium et Spes* responded to that need.

The Church and the human person

The first step in this pastoral approach was an extension of the Church’s open hand. The first words of the document are “the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.”

One would be hard-pressed to find words more tender and more inviting than these. *Gaudium et Spes* continues addressing the “genuinely human” when it declares that the Church is dedicated not just to Catholics but to the whole world. More than that, the Church is dedicated to more than mere socio-economic freedom, but to the freedom that comes from knowing and accepting God’s love. As we come to know God, say the conciliar fathers who wrote the document, we come to know ourselves.

The modern desire for self-discovery and self-actualisation is answered ultimately in Jesus Christ: “The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come . . . Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and

The importance of *Gaudium et Spes*, 60 years later

His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear. It is not surprising, then, that in Him all the aforementioned truths find their root and attain their crown” (No. 22).

The Church’s role in all of this is first and foremost to be the gateway through which every person, and all of human society receives life in Christ. It is through the Church that we encounter Christ, so it is through the Church that we realise our vocation, our meaning and our innermost truth. She offers God to us and so meets our desires and teaches us that without Him we are lost.

By teaching us about the poor, leading us into service of the defenceless and by speaking for the voiceless, the Church points us to the dignity of the human person. In her prophetic mission, the Church stands before the world to denounce injustice and support the love of neighbour.

But we ought not think this is the work of our bishops and priests alone. The laity have a particular duty.

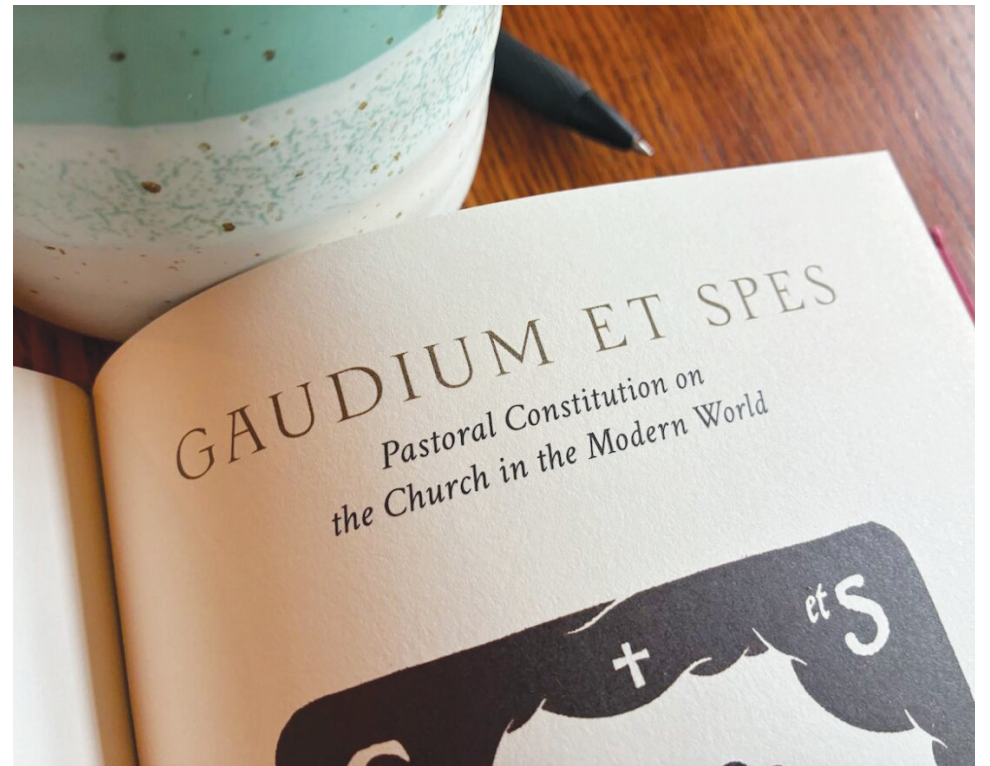
From our pastors the laity may seek “spiritual light and nourishment,” but it is their primary duty to make sure “that the divine law is inscribed in the life of the earthly city” (No. 43). Enlightened by the teachings of the Church, the layperson must both act in a Christian spirit and “be witnesses to Christ in all things in the midst of human society” (No. 43). The laity must carry Christ Whom we encounter in the church out into the world so that all men might be saved.

The modern world and human action

Up to this point in *Gaudium et Spes*, the council fathers have addressed human nature, our need for Christ, the role of the Church, and the role of the laity in bringing about the kingdom of God. The second part of the document focuses on specific areas which “go to the roots of the human race” (No. 46) and into which Catholics are called to action.

In the first area we are called to foster “the nobility of marriage and the family.” As the fundamental cell of society, the family is “a kind of school of deeper humanity.”

The family must be grounded in prayer, for through family prayer children and everyone in the family “will find a readier path to hu-



“*Gaudium et Spes*,” or the “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,” turned 60 on December 7, 2025. In many ways, the document is the culmination of what the Second Vatican Council hoped to accomplish, the capstone of the council. (OSV News illustration/Maria Wiering)

man maturity, salvation and holiness.” The purpose of family is holiness, and that holiness fosters a deeper humanity that informs and shapes society.

The next section of *Gaudium et Spes* deals with the “the proper development of culture.” Culture, a word rich in meaning, is that by which human persons develop and perfect physical and spiritual qualities. It presumes the family; but it also includes art, labour, literature, customs, institutions, civic memory and much more that may exist outside of one’s particular family.

The council fathers state that our action within culture must begin with fostering an understanding of the universals: “truth, goodness and beauty.” In this way the culture provides man with authentic liberty; for freedom is not doing what we want, but rather the freedom to pursue the good. This approach is accessible to both Catholics and non-Catholics.

As Catholics, however, we understand that truth is not merely a concept. Truth is a person Who took on flesh and dwelt among us.

“The Gospel of Christ constantly renews the life and culture of fallen man,” say the council fathers. This is because liberty cannot be authentic unless it is founded on the truth of the human person; and since Christ reveals man to himself, only Jesus Christ and the truth of His Gospel can truly provide us with the fullest liberty to create a culture of life.

This liberty can nevertheless be frustrated by a material poverty which isolates. This is why the next area of human action is “economic and social life.” Here the council fathers insist that society views human labour as more than a commodity.

“Human labour,” they write, “which is expended in the production and exchange of goods or in the performance of economic services, is superior to the other elements of economic life, for the latter have only the nature of tools” (No. 67). Work is connected to real persons with full dignity. Everything else is merely a tool in the hands of humankind.

The council fathers also articulate what is referred to as the universal destination of goods, one of the principles of Catholic social teaching.

Private property is a natural right of the human person, and God desires that all people have access to what is necessary for life and for human flourishing. Therefore, property exists to secure our own life and to be sure that everyone has enough to live. All are called to share his or her wealth with radical generosity.

Now the council fathers introduce the penultimate area for human action: “the life of the political community.” Government is necessary in order to secure the common good for a society. That is its whole purpose. However, the fathers write that “citizens . . . must be careful not to attribute excessive power to public authority.” Though necessary, governments must be kept in check, especially when they ignore our “eternal vocation.”

Rich in tradition, yet boldly new

Finally, the last area of human action involves the “fostering of peace and the promotion of a community of nations.” Here the foundational principle is solidarity, that we are all responsible for all, an idea rooted in the natural law.

We read that “contemplating this melancholy state of humanity, the council wishes, above all things else, to recall the permanent binding force of universal natural law and its all-embracing principles. Man’s conscience itself gives ever more emphatic voice to these principles” (No. 79). This natural law helps to connect one nation to another, and connect denominations.

As *Gaudium et Spes* closes, it strikes an ecumenical note, encouraging cooperation between Catholics and our “separated brothers” as we try to advance the kingdom of God.

The “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” is rich in tradition and yet boldly new in the way it presents that tradition to the world. It is a manifesto of love directed toward an ever more secularised world, a world that looks at the Church with scepticism.

In this way, it is truly a pastoral constitution, for it aims to win the heart and mind of that sceptical, modern soul and bring the whole world closer to Christ Jesus, in whom all “truths find their root and attain their crown” (No. 22). OSV News

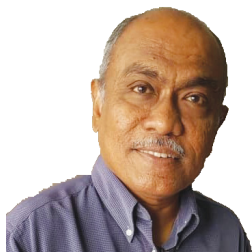


Bishops at the first session of Vatican II. (CNS photo)

Getting to know the RCIA

In the last article, I discussed the restoration of the adult catechumenate in the Catholic Church.

Today, the catechumenal process of initiating adults into the Church is known as the RCIA which is the acronym for “Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults”. Through the process, an adult who is interested in becoming a member of the Church is helped and guided in making this commitment through a series of liturgical rites and formation sessions with the support and prayers of the members of the Christian community, especially in the parish. In this article, I wish to explore further the RCIA process using a question-and-answer approach.



Echoing the Faith

DR STEVEN SELVARAJU

catechumenate, catechesis and catechist.

How were adults initiated into the Church before the RCIA?

Before the RCIA, there was no formal process for initiating adults. Adults interested in becoming Catholics were usually given religious instructions in

private by the parish priest or a person delegated by him. When the priest felt the individual was ‘ready’, a day and time would be set for his or her baptism. The individual was baptised in a ceremony (not during the Mass) where only the godparent, close family members or friends may be present. After that, the individual was expected to integrate into the community.

How is the RCIA different?

With the introduction of the RCIA, the whole parish community is now called to take responsibility for the initiation of its new members. The parish priest would delegate a group of parish members known as ‘RCIA facilitators’, to share in the task of teaching the faith and in guiding the candidates, who would also be supported by their sponsors and godparents. Furthermore, unlike in the past where the initiation rites were celebrated in a private ceremony isolated from the rest of the community, these now occur within the community during the celebration of the Eucharist. As such, the parish community celebrates the rites with the candidates, prays and supports them, and welcomes them into the Church.

How long does the RCIA process take?

The duration can vary according to regions and countries upon the discretion of the bishops. In Malaysia, the process may take about nine months that is, beginning in the month of June or July and concluding sometime in April the following year. Through the rites of initiation, the Church ‘conceives’ and gives ‘birth’ to new members through the RCIA. By her preaching and through the Sacrament of Baptism, the Church as Mother brings forth ‘to a new and immortal life, children who are conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of God.’

Why does the RCIA take so long?

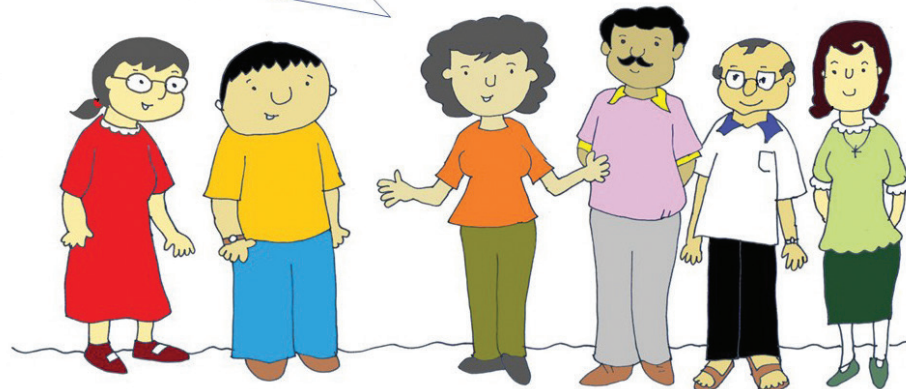
The goal of the RCIA is not only to help someone become a Catholic. It is not about a person ‘converting’ from one religion or belief to Catholicism. At the very heart of the RCIA is ‘conversion’.

Conversion is about a change of life, that is, the turning of the whole person — mind, body and soul — towards Jesus



Welcome to the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA).

RCIA is an initiation process where an adult who is interested in becoming a Catholic is guided and supported by the parish community in making this commitment.



Christ. Throughout the entire RCIA process, the individual is guided towards turning away from an ‘old’ way of believing, thinking and living, to a ‘new’ way which is focused on becoming a true follower of Jesus Christ and a member of the Catholic Church. It is important to realise that conversion does not happen ‘over-night’ nor can it be determined or fixed by a time limit. In other words, ‘conversion’ cannot be programmed.

What is the main aim of RCIA?

Unlike in some non-Catholic churches, where an individual can become a member over a very short period of time, for the Catholic Church, the RCIA aims to help the candidate come to know Jesus and to have a deep relationship with Him and also to know what it means to be a Catholic. After all, it takes time to build a relationship or to become a member of a new group or community. In the same way, having a relationship with God and becoming a member of the Church also takes time. It calls for the candidate to hear God’s word, know and grow in the

Catholic Faith, experience conversion and be spiritually strengthened. This is so that when the moment comes for him or her to make the decision to become a Catholic, he or she will do so willingly, knowingly and wholeheartedly.

Is the RCIA a programme?

By its nature, the RCIA should not be considered a programme. A programme has a fixed length of time and a specific course of studies with a pre-determined goal. Initiation into the Catholic Church is not about being concerned about fulfilling a goal or a time limit. Instead, it is aimed at helping the candidate grow in his or her relationship with Christ and the knowledge of the beliefs and values of the Christian way of life. Through the different stages of the RCIA, each of which serve as a key point or doorway, the individual gradually progresses towards experiencing ‘conversion’ and to a greater awareness and commitment to Christian discipleship. Therefore, the RCIA should be viewed more as a journey of faith rather than a programme.

Conclusion

The RCIA is an important development in the Church. Therefore, it is essential that all members of the Church understand its significance and become involved in the catechumenal process. In the next article I will explore the nature and structure of the RCIA.

Dr Steven Selvaraju, STD, STL, holds a Doctorate in Theology with Specialisation in Catechetics and Youth Ministry from Pontifical Salesian University, Rome. He serves as Director of the Archdiocesan Catechetical Centre, Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.

What does the term ‘initiation’ mean?

In its general sense, ‘initiation’ is synonymous with the Latin term, *initium*, that is, “beginning”, “training” or “instructing”. It indicates a period of training or mentoring in which an apprentice or a novice is helped to acquire a certain skill, trade or service. In its restricted sense, initiation means, “to enter into” (from the Latin term, *in-ire*). It indicates the entrance of an individual or individuals into a religious or social group, a tribe or secret organisation. This is usually done through the celebration of rituals, ceremonies or traditions. In the case of the RCIA, the term ‘initiation’ means “to enter” into the Catholic Church.

What does the term ‘rite’ mean?

Most initiation processes involve the celebration of rites or rituals. A rite or ritual is a formal act or ceremony which can be religious, cultural or social in nature. These are held to mark the beginning or an important stage or the conclusion of the initiation process. The celebration of these rites usually involves members of the community. In the RCIA, there are a number of liturgical rites which are held to mark important stages of the initiation process, and which are celebrated in the presence of the parish community.

What does the term ‘liturgical’ mean?

The term ‘liturgical’ comes from the word ‘liturgy’. Liturgy is an important part of the life of the Catholic Church. The word originally meant a “public work” or a service done in the name of or on behalf of the people. In the Church, it means the participation of the People of God, that is, the Christian community, in the “work of God”. It takes place when Catholics gather to pray, celebrate and worship God. It is considered the highest point of the activity of the Church. The most important form of liturgy is the celebration of Holy Eucharist. Usually, the liturgical rites of the RCIA take place during the celebration of the Holy Mass.

What does the term ‘catechumenate’ mean?

The term ‘catechumenate’ originates from an ancient Christian word, which comes from the Greek verb *katechein*, which means “to resound”, “to echo” or “to hand down”. The word implies an “oral instruction” or “oral reechoing” usually understood as a verbal teaching or exhortation to live a moral life. The term is also related to the process or activity of ‘re-echoing’ or re-telling the story of the Christian faith that has been handed down from generation to generation to the candidates. It is from the word *katechein* that we have terms such as, catechumens,



The RCIA is like a spiritual journey where the person (candidate) is guided to gradually grow in his or her relationship with Jesus Christ and to know the beliefs and values of the Catholic way of life.



Andrea Bocelli

on faith, fame, and 4 popes

Andrea Bocelli's legendary voice has graced the world's greatest stages for three decades, but it is his enduring faith and humility that truly set him apart. As he marked 30 years of milestones in his life and career recently, the renowned tenor reflected not only on musical triumphs but on the spiritual journey that accompanied them.

In a recent personal reflection, Bocelli expressed profound gratitude for the "30 years of life, of music, of gratitude" he has enjoyed – highlighting how faith has been a guiding light throughout his rise to fame. It's a heartwarming reminder that even at the pinnacle of celebrity, one can remain grounded in a higher purpose.

Reflecting on three decades of song and spirit

Bocelli's 30-year musical journey is intertwined with his spiritual growth. From humble beginnings singing in church as a boy in rural Tuscany, to performing for millions around the globe, he has always regarded his voice as a gift from God. In fact, he describes his faith as a "priceless gift" at the very heart of his identity as an artist, as shared by *Catholic Standard*.

This gift, he says, influences everything – from the songs he chooses to sing to the causes he supports.

"Whoever has this same gift improves their own life and the world around them," Bocelli explains. "I believe that having faith means believing in the power of good and at every crossroad, choosing the road that leads to it."

Such words reveal how deeply faith and music are linked for Bocelli. For him, music is more than entertainment – it's a form of devotion.

"When we touch our spiritual chords, we create a bridge ... behind the veil of everyday life," he says. "Personally, when I interpret a holy song or one that is spiritually elevated, I experience it as a form of prayer."

Bocelli views music as a bridge between earth and heaven, capable of elevating the spirit. This perspective has infused his performances with a unique reverence, especially when he sings sacred pieces or hymns. It's no surprise that he counts classics like "Adeste Fideles," "Ave Maria," and Puccini's "Messa di Gloria" among his favourite works – songs that nourish the soul as much as the ears.

Singing for popes: A privilege and a prayer

Among the many highlights of Bocelli's career, few compare to the honour of singing in the presence of the popes.

"It has been both a privilege and a deep inner joy to sing, over the decades, in the presence of the pontiffs who have



In one of the most poignant moments of his life, Andrea Bocelli delivered a heart-wrenching performance of "Ave Maria" for Pope John Paul II in 1993 – just hours after his beloved father, Alessandro, passed away.

succeeded one another on the Throne of Peter," Bocelli reflected, noting that each occasion moved him immensely.

In fact, he says that performing for four popes – St John Paul II, Benedict XVI, Francis, Leo XIV – were among the most emotional moments of his life.

To put this in perspective, Bocelli's first papal performance came early in his career. In the mid-1990s, shortly after he returned to his Catholic faith as a young man, he was invited to sing "Adeste Fideles" (O Come All Ye Faithful) before Pope John Paul II at Christmas in St Peter's Basilica.

Imagine the scene: a newly famous Italian tenor, blind since the age of 12, standing in the grandeur of the Vatican, offering his gift of song to the beloved pontiff. That moment set the tone for Bocelli's relationship with the Vatican and marked the beginning of a special ministry through music.

Over the years, Andrea Bocelli has sung for four successive popes, each time with the same awe and devotion. He has shared the stage at Vatican events and large global gatherings of the faithful. For instance, in 2010 he performed in Pope Benedict XVI's presence at a packed Audience Hall in the Vatican. In 2015, he lent his voice to the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia, moving the crowd (and the Holy Father) with an "angelic Lord's Prayer" as Pope Francis looked on.

He would reunite with Pope Francis again in 2018, singing for thousands at a World Meeting of Families festival in Dublin. Each performance was not just a concert, but a prayerful offering, with Bocelli using music to connect hearts to something transcendent.



Bocelli himself marvels at the gentle power he senses in the Vicars of Christ. He observed that each Holy Father emanated "gentle strength and radiant light" – the kind of grace, he says, that belongs to those who embody the greatness of goodness and the goodness of greatness.

The singer fondly recalls how St John Paul II once placed a hand on his shoulder "like a father," a gesture that deeply moved him. He describes John Paul II as "magnetic," a spiritual giant who "changed history" and inspired millions. Pope Benedict XVI, in Bocelli's eyes, radiated "pure intellect," reflecting a brilliant mind united with deep faith. And Pope Francis he calls "a man of few words but of great deeds," someone whose humility and actions speak volumes.

Most recently, Bocelli, along with his son Matteo, sang for Pope Leo XIV, continuing a cherished tradition. The encounter was, in his words, "a deep inner joy," a reminder that even after three decades, the sacredness of singing in the presence of the Pope never loses its awe.

Faith at the heart of fame

One might not expect a world-famous superstar to be so openly devout, but Andrea Bocelli defies stereotypes – proving that faith and fame can co-exist in a beautiful way. Despite achieving global renown and selling over 90 million records, Bocelli remains remarkably grounded.

He credits his faith for this, calling it the foundation of his life and career. "Faith is at the heart of who [I am] as a person and a performer," he says, and he means it literally.

This conviction guided him even when

fame might have led others astray. Bocelli admits that as a teenager he had drifted into agnosticism, thinking he didn't need religion. But as a young adult facing life's crossroads, he reconsidered.

He ultimately chose belief, describing it as "the most logical" and fulfilling path. From that point on, he embraced his Catholic faith with a passion, convinced that life's true meaning unfolds only with trust in God's plan, as reported by Missionaries of the Holy Family.

"For me, [my Catholic faith] is the reason for life," Bocelli has said plainly, adding, "Without an eternal perspective, worldly success would ring hollow."

What's striking is how Bocelli integrates his faith into his daily life despite a hectic schedule. He often seeks out moments of prayer and quiet, no matter where in the world his performances take him.

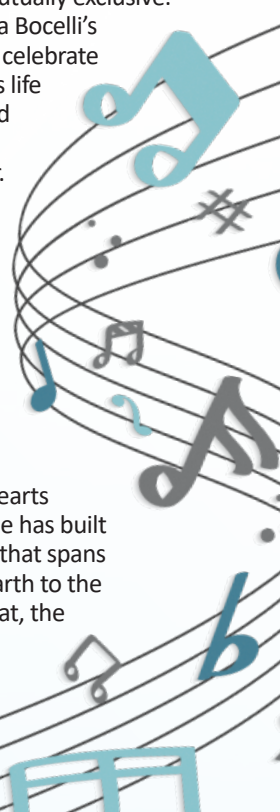
"Silence, I believe, hides true treasures ... essential to collect one's thoughts in prayer," he observes, noting that he deliberately makes time for solitude and reflection amid the noise of fame.

Whenever possible, he escapes the spotlight to spend time in nature or at his family's quiet seaside home, recharging spiritually. This discipline of prayer keeps him humble. It's not uncommon for Bocelli to pray with his family before concerts or to sing a quick Ave Maria backstage – small rituals that keep him centred on why he sings: not for applause, but for higher praise.

Bocelli's example shows that celebrity and sincere faith are not mutually exclusive. And as we celebrate Andrea Bocelli's remarkable career, we also celebrate the values he stands for. His life is a testament that faith and fame can not only co-exist but can enrich one another. The stage may be his domain, but his soul belongs to something higher.

Through every triumph and trial of the past 30 years, Bocelli has lifted his voice in gratitude – to God, to the popes who inspired him, and to the people whose hearts he's touched. In doing so, he has built a bridge of music and faith that spans from the concert halls of earth to the gates of heaven. And for that, the world can only be grateful.

Cerith Gardiner, Aletheia



The gift is His presence

Freecycling is a movement which tries to regift things individuals do not want, need or have to get rid of, to a community of people who either do not have the means to procure items, are trying to live more sustainable lives by reusing and recycling, or who are collectors and hobbyists who find treasure in things others see no value in.

I have been a member of Malaysia's first and largest freecycling group – *Beli Nothing Project Klang Valley* (Original and 1st) – for just under ten years. There are 21,800 members on this Facebook group, and I am one of the most regular gifters. While my participation in this group began as part of a decluttering exercise, it has, over the years evolved into something much deeper. While I mostly post in order to give away things my teen has outgrown, unnecessary gifts of the mediocre kind, or appliances I no longer use, I now also take great pleasure in the fulfilling of ISO (In Search Of) posts. This is when individuals put out public requests for particular items. Most are trite: a costume for a kindergartener's play, which a parent knows if bought will never be worn again, a cutting of certain plants, or a missing item from a fast-food collectibles range.

What I am on the lookout for most, however, is real need: a mother requesting for a rice cooker for her child who is on a scholarship at a local university and needs to cook in her dorm to save money; uniforms for a family who lost their breadwinner. Most notable was a woman who pleaded for a specific infant formula because her newborn had a medical condition with adverse reaction to cow's milk. While I had to actually buy some of these items to fulfil the ISO, I did it because it seemed the right thing

to do.

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a five-tier model of human need which outlines five basic needs, which are physiological, safety, love, esteem and self-actualisation. Commonly presented as a pyramid of needs, Maslow believes that unless each tier of need is met sufficiently, mankind cannot aspire or achieve the next level. The base of the pyramid lists the fundamental biological requirements for survival: air, water, food, shelter, clothing and sleep.

The tier above biological requirements is that of **Safety** which encompasses security and predictability in one's environment. The middle tier is **Love** and **Belonging** which is the need for social connection and acceptance. Then comes **Esteem** and lastly, **Self-Actualisation**.

When I juxtapose the founding objectives of the *Beli Nothing Project* and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, I see in freecycling a way for me to achieve the apex of the pyramid, which in my Catholic life means dying to certain aspects of self in order to live with and like Christ.

Seeing that the freecycling movement predates *Laudato Si'* by a few years, I had already cleared all the 'not using but *sayang* to give away' things before Pope Francis' exhortation to honour the earth by prudent use of resources, and the inculcation of habits of under-consumption. However, Papa Francisco's second encyclical concretised my efforts of reusing and recycling because it became part of my Catholic duty.

As Christmas approaches, the temptation of over-purchasing – even in these economically repressed times – will be rife. The slogan for the season may well be, "But it's only once a year." Influenced by social media personalities

who present themed trees, and beguile with images of perfectly wrapped presents in uniform wrapping paper and beautiful bows, we lesser mortals want in on these picture-perfect Christmases too. Suddenly our 25-year-old Christmas tree is too wonky, too bent and balding for a 'proper' celebration, so it is tossed or maybe given on a freecycling site, and a new one bought. Trouble is, the old tree was a five foot one. The new one is seven feet, and new décor is needed to fill that extra space. But then the new baubles put the old ones to shame, and so brand new decorations are purchased.

This cycle is self-promulgating. Like some parasite in sci-fi movies, it slowly takes its host over, and by the end of the ill-afforded Yuletide season, the credit card bill drops like a bomb, sending shockwaves of realisation that Chinese New Year can only happen if the credit cards continue to work overtime.

These over-consumptive patterns are in stark contrast with the night of Jesus' birth. Joseph wasn't cashing in frequent flier miles for a night in a Hyatt. There was no welcome drink at the inn, and certainly no valet for the donkey which carried the heavily pregnant Virgin.

Yet, as mean and meagre as the stable was, it met the physiological and safety needs of the holy family. The Social aspect of Maslow's Hierarchy was met when the shepherds came to laud the newborn saviour, and the Self Esteem tier was fulfilled when kings came to revere baby Jesus. Despite the basic way in which the needs of all the first four of the hierarchical tiers were met, it was enough to ensure that Joseph, Mary and Jesus reached the top of the pyramid, and achieved their higher purpose.

It may be prudent this Christmas to be

a 'need fulfiller' rather than just a gift giver. Forego that tacky holiday treat set of overpackaged Christmas cookies and dry fruit cake for a rations basket for a family in need. Even if your parish is not doing a drive for this, your St Vincent de Paul representative will be able to tell you about the needs of the people who depend on them for food.

My niece and nephew are quite indulged, so instead of buying rubbishy token gifts like mugs or socks, I wrote each a card and told them that I was giving each a sum of money to spend on social causes. The café-hopping girl got a gift card to a café run by the deaf, while the train-loving nephew asked me to buy preloaded Touch and Go cards to give to young migrants. This meant that there was no packaging to discard, and no unwanted gift to try to pass on to someone else.

The ultimate Christmas gift was given to us all over two thousand years ago. It being the gift that surpasses all things, we should not still be trying to outdo the greatest gift of all. Our role this Christmas and beyond is the amplification of Christ's message to the world. Because like John the Baptist, it is only by bringing people to Jesus — do we find our true purpose.

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



Word in Progress

KAREN-MICHAELA TAN

We have come full circle and full throttle toward the end of the year. *With the kids jingle-belling and everyone telling you "Be of good cheer"! It's the most wonderful time of the year! There'll be parties for hosting, marshmallows for toasting, and carolling out in the *rain...*

It's that time of the year, again, when we hustle and bustle to get the best roasts in town, throw the most lavish parties, and gather friends and families near and far. Social media will be abuzz with the trendiest OOTDs (Outfit of the Day), a good old Christmas feast spread out upon tables, decorations down to the tee with trend-setting vigour and themes to match the homeowners' personalities and aesthetics. And presents! *gasp* which one of the kids did we forget to buy something for? Do we have enough wrapping paper?

Amid all this external excitement and noise, *Christmas isn't Christmas 'til it happens in your heart*, isn't it? While the festivities sure uplift the gaiety of the season, we tend to sometimes get lost in the hype that we overlook the reason we celebrate the season, myself included. Christmas celebrates the birth of Christ, the beginning of a course of history that would change the destiny of mankind forever. So, what does that really mean for us?



To be honest

MARTIN ARUL

Albeit, we are accustomed to a Gregorian calendar that celebrates key feast days and occurrences in a fixed cycle within a liturgical year, it is somewhat a chance for us to renew of our faith, and be rooted deeper in the belief that we hold close to our hearts. *Christmas is Jesus, the day God came to be with us...* Christ's coming to earth as man calls for a reflection

deeper than sparkling celebration, to look into ourselves who embody Christ's virtues in our daily life. During the season of Advent, we focus on 4 main themes: Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. How are these themes reflective of what is to come? We have heard it all our lives, we await the coming of Christ, *O come Divine Messiah, Maranatha!* Beyond the waiting, we are called to embody these themes that Advent prepares us for: Hope for the coming, Peace in our hearts and homes, Joy to everyone we meet in life's journey, and Love. This week, we prepare ourselves to **Love**; Love in the greatest sacrifice of God sending His Only Begotten Son for the salvation of mankind, Love in the meek and lowly, the oppressed and the marginalised, love in our thoughts, words, and deeds. Our lives are not fulfilled by merely loving Jesus and proclaiming our love for Him, rather, in embodying that love daily as we carry

And so, this is Christmas...

our crosses.

2025 has been a fairly difficult year for most people — friends I know have lost parents, spouses, children, jobs, and even been estranged from their families. But in all my personal conversations with these very people who received the short end of the stick, there is Hope; hoping for a turn of events in their lives, Peace; knowing everything happens in God's timing and in His timing alone, Joy; to continue bringing that happiness despite personal adversities, and Love; loving wholeheartedly and genuinely the people they care about, and in some cases, myself included.

And this is truly a testament of our faith; when we embody Christ-like virtues, and live according to His Will, we learn that our sufferings are prompting us closer to the love of the Father. In Exodus 14:14 (which really is an Easter reading), God assures us to trust in Him and the Lord will fight for you.

Among my circle of friends, I have a very diverse Catholic group, a priest — to start, an inter-religious married couple, an agnostic, and a Catholic couple. Today, as you read this, we would have all come together to share love around a table. Roasts and toasts aside, we gather because of the unity we have with each other, gently nudging us closer to share that bond of love, regardless of what our personal relationship with religion is. And this is the beauty of our circle; we keep

prayer as the centre of our gatherings, we have cried together, celebrated milestones together, and prayed for and with each other through it all. Christmas, in particular has been a huge part of our gatherings, more so for the symbolism of fellowship in Christ, celebrating Him who brought us together in faith.

As we approach the final days of this season of Advent, let us open our hearts with love to welcome Christ, Who is the beginning, refreshing ourselves in the faith that Christ has called us to church and live; living as examples of a church beyond the walls of a building. Amidst the festivities, let us not forget that Christ has come, in a humble and lowly manger, without any glitter and glamour, calling for us to meet Him there. In the stillness of the night, in the quiet of our hearts, He will come to give us Hope, Peace, Joy and Love, only if it starts in our hearts.

Wishing all our Herald readers the gift of Jesus this Christmas. No matter what life throws at you, *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me* (Philippians 4:13), and the time is now. **Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus.**

Martin is a believer who questions everything that is wrong, believing that everyone is equal in the eyes of God, and one must live as a Christian more in deeds than in words, outside the conformities of the building of the church.



Fr Ron Rolheiser

Images for Advent

Advent should never be confused with Lent. Lent is a penitential season. Its colour is purple and its symbol is ashes. Unlike Lent, Advent is not about fasting and penance. It's about waiting. Advent is a time to get in touch with longing, with desire, with what it means to wait. Its colour is crimson, the colour of desire.

With that in mind, here are some images for Advent.

Every tear brings the Messiah closer! That's an axiom drawn from Jewish apocalyptic literature which highlights that the Messiah can only be born into our lives when we have created the proper space within which to receive Him. And that space is created through longing, through waiting, through aching, through tears, through letting frustration and tension stretch our hearts and our vision enough that the Messiah can come, not as superman who is the hero in a Hollywood movie, but as a helpless Christ Child who manifests what love actually is by the way He lives, suffers, dies, and forgives.

For something to be sublime, there first must be some sublimation! The word sublime takes its roots in the word sublimation. For something to be sublime, there first must have been some tension. And the greater the tension, the more sublime it will be if that tension is carried to its proper end and is not resolved prematurely. Gestation cannot be rushed, healing demands its proper season, soulful consummation is predicated on prior waiting, and even wine demands a sufficient time to mature.

In our longing and loneliness, we intuit the Kingdom of God! We are all familiar



with St Augustine's dictum: *You have made us for Yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.* What can we do when we feel lonely, as unanimity-minus-one, when the pain of our aloneness is most acute? We can use that moment, that painful sense of our distance from intimacy, to intuit the Kingdom of God, that is, to let that pain stretch our hearts enough to give us a truer sense of what really constitutes the Kingdom of God.

Our longing and aching can help raise our psychic temperature! This is an image drawn from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Teilhard, a scientist and a mystic, draws a spiritual lesson from the chemistry lab. Sometimes, a scientist will put two chemicals together in a test tube, but they won't unite. Instead, they simply lie beside each other, unable to fuse into one. Now if the scientist applies heat to the test tube, they often, at a higher temperature, will fuse and become one. Teilhard applies this to

human relationships. Sometimes, for all kinds of reasons, we refuse meaningful relationships with each other and like two chemicals in a test tube remain separate, too cold to unite. However deep longing, aching, hurt, loss, and, bitter waiting can, in Teilhard's words, raise our "psychic temperature" to a point where it melts our coldness and opens us to union. Advent is a season to raise our psychic temperature, through letting our longing, loneliness, and frustrations make us less cold, less judgmental, and less selfish.

A damp log must first sizzle in a fire before it can burst into flame! This is an image from John of the Cross. When you throw a damp log into a fire it does not catch flame immediately. It must first lie in the fire and sizzle until the heat dries it out sufficiently. Only then will it burst into flame. John suggests that in our longing and our frustrated desires, we are metaphorically "sizzling" inside the fire of love (human and divine).

In a manner of speaking, the pain is "drying us out", so that at a point we too can burst into flame in love. Advent is a time to let our unfilled longings and our bitter frustrations "sizzle" within us, so as that the flame of love might eventually catch fire within us.

In the end, these images say the same thing. Advent is about proper waiting, about not resolving tension prematurely, about patiently carrying it to let divinity, intimacy, the Messiah, and the sublime, be born more deeply into our lives. Perhaps the one word that summarizes all this is the word patience. *Advent is the season to practise patience.*

Carlo Carretto was a monk who for a long stretch of his life lived in the Sahara Desert as a desert hermit, where he wrote a series of deeply challenging books. After he had been in the desert for a number of years, a journalist interviewed him and asked him this question: After all these years of silence and prayer, if you had to send one message back to the world, what would it be? What do you hear God saying to the world?

Carretto's answer: *God is telling us to learn to wait! To wait for many things! To wait for God!*

That's the challenge of Advent.

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



In every culture and language, Christmas is wrapped in song. From soft lullabies to joyful carols that fill churches and homes, music becomes the language of the heart — carrying what words alone cannot express. It is no surprise that the mystery of the Incarnation has always been celebrated through melody, rhythm, and praise. Christmas, somehow, feels incomplete without song.

Pope Leo XIV reminds us that music is more than sound; it is a bridge that leads us to God, an invisible stairway connecting earth and heaven. Music has the rare power to touch the deepest movements of the soul. It awakens something holy within us, lifting our hearts beyond the noise of life and drawing us closer to the divine. This gift is not reserved for a privileged few. It belongs to everyone — rich and poor, learned and simple — because it

flows from the very heart of God.

The first Christmas itself was marked by music. As a child lay in a humble manger in Bethlehem, the heavens burst forth in song. Angels filled the night sky with praise, announcing peace and goodwill. Yet, it was not kings or scholars who heard this heavenly concert, but shepherds — ordinary, tired, working men who kept watch over their flocks in the darkness. This detail is not accidental. God's music is first heard by the humble, the forgotten, and the faithful who stay awake in the night.

Music does not erase suffering, nor does it numb pain or distract us from life's difficulties. Instead, it reminds us of something far greater than our struggles: our true identity. We are not just the sum of our failures, fears, or disappointments. We are God's beloved children. When we

sing, or even when we simply listen, our hearts are gently lifted out of despair and anchored again in hope.

During Advent, we are invited to quiet our hearts and tune them to a different sound — not the frantic noise of consumption and distraction, but the gentle, persistent song of God's love. This season calls us to unclutter our hearts, to loosen our grip on selfishness and material concerns, and to awaken our eyes and ears to the cries of those in need. To be truly awake in Advent is to be attentive — to God, and to one another.

At the heart of this song is not merely melody, but a Person. Jesus Himself is God's song of love to humanity. He is the living hymn of mercy, compassion, and salvation, sung into the world through the silence of a stable and the vulnerability of a Child. When we listen to Him, we hear

not condemnation, but invitation — an invitation to live differently, to love more deeply, and to hope more boldly.

Christmas carols, then, are not meant to stay on our lips alone. They are meant to be learned by the heart and lived through our actions. We are called not only to hear God's song, but to become part of it — to sing it with our lives through kindness, generosity, patience, forgiveness, and love.

As we journey through Advent and move towards Christmas, let us ask: What song is shaping our hearts? Are we listening to the restless music of fear and selfishness? Or are we allowing ourselves to be carried by the gentle, powerful song of God's love?

Let us listen well. Let us learn His song by heart. And when Christmas comes, may our lives themselves become a hymn of praise. **Agencies**

Little Catholics' corner

Dear Lord, we thank you for your great love. We thank you that you showed us that love by sending your son, Jesus, to save us. In his name we pray, Amen.



JESUS' BIRTHDAY IS ALMOST HERE!

Now there is only a week left until Christmas!

In today's Gospel reading, God gave St Joseph a special job. He told him to take care of Mary and the baby Jesus.

St Joseph thought he was just an ordinary person and didn't expect to have such an important responsibility, but he did what God asked.

God has given us a responsibility too. We have to

love Jesus as much as we can. How can you love and honour Jesus at Christmas time?

Children, if your family has a nativity scene you can pray to Jesus while you look at it.

Right now, you have a few days left to get ready for Jesus' birthday. Ask St Joseph to help you prepare for Jesus' coming.

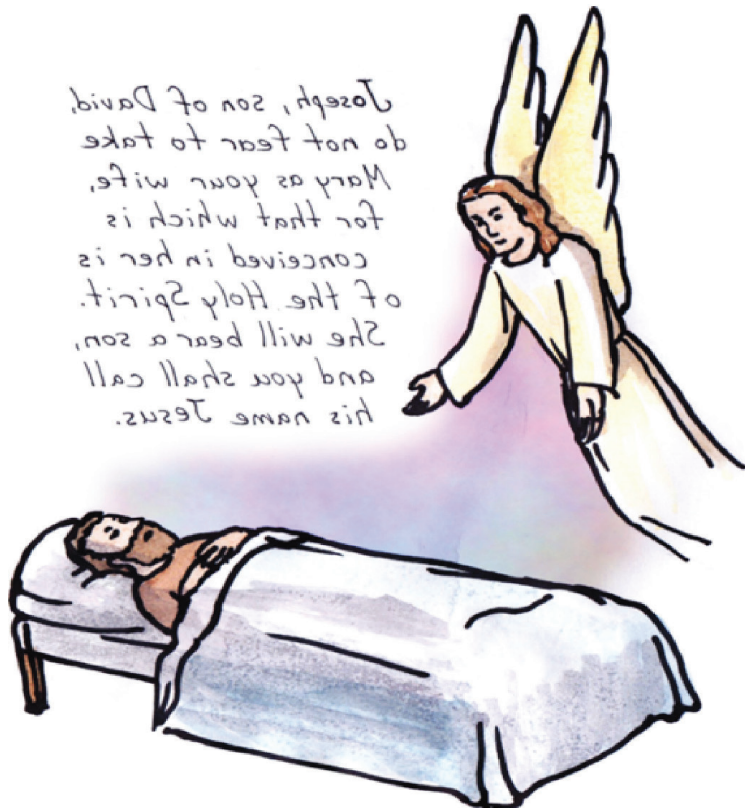
Aunty Eliz

Fill in the missing vowels (A, E, I, O U). Look at the word banks to help you figure the correct vowels.

1. B _ R T H
2. M _ S S _ _ H
3. J _ S _ S
4. M _ R Y
5. J _ S _ P H
6. H _ L Y S _ R _ T
7. F _ _ T H F _ L
8. _ N G _ L

MESSIAH FAITHFUL ANGEL HOLY SPIRIT
JESUS MARY JOSEPH BIRTH

Joseph, son of David,
do not fear to take
Mary as your wife,
for that which is
conceived in her is
of the Holy Spirit.
She will bear a son,
and you shall call
his name Jesus.



An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him what God wanted him to do. What did the angel say? Look in a mirror to find out!

Let's colour





Sandakan: The Diocese of Sandakan's Youth Apostolate successfully hosted a Youth Pilgrimage and World Youth Day (WYD) commemoration on November 22-23. This event coincided with the Jubilee Year and the 40th World Youth Day, drawing 217 young participants from across the diocese.

The event began on Nov 22 with the observance of the 40th WYD, featuring a reading of Pope Leo's message themed, "You are also my witness, because you have been with me" (John 15:27), delivered by Sr Noemi Mejia FSIC. This was followed by a Spiritual Conversation led by Fettwinda Sipaan, concluding the day with a BBQ and campfire.

The pilgrimage commenced before dawn on Nov 23, starting with a prayer led by Fr Dafrinn Diwol at St Joseph's Church. Despite challenging weather, the enthusiastic pilgrims processed toward St Mary's Cathedral, preceded by the Jubilee Cross. Upon arrival, they attended Holy Mass celebrated by Fr David Garaman, who reiterated the significance of Pope Leo's message. The journey then continued to the Marian Mount Pilgrimage Centre while praying the Rosary.



The pilgrimage formally concluded with the entering of the Jubilee Door and a final prayer before the Jubilee Cross, led by Fr Dafrinn Diwol.

KUALA LUMPUR: The spirit of service shone brightly among the Standard 6 and Form 2 Catechism students of the Church of the Good Shepherd, Setapak, recently, as they transformed their entrepreneurial skills into a heartfelt act of charity, raising funds and gathering essential supplies for Pertubuhan Kebajikan Anak Yatim Mary.

The initiative came to life on November 30, with a vibrant breakfast sale that captured the hearts of the parish community. The students prepared a menu that brought people together, offering savoury delights like Nasi Lemak and fried Mee Hoon, refreshing beverages such as Milo and Vitagen, and a sweet selection of cookies, chocolates, and cupcakes. Their enthusiasm, teamwork, and dedication turned every sale into an act of love, and their efforts were met with generous support from the parish, resulting in a substantial sum raised. This heartwarming success was a testament not only to the students' hard work but also to the power of community spirit in action.

The second phase of their mission took place on Dec 7, when the students embarked



Young hearts, big impact

on a meaningful journey to Pertubuhan Kebajikan Anak Yatim Mary. Braving the hot sun, they carried the grocery items purchased with the funds they had worked so hard to raise. This simple yet powerful

act of service reflected their heartfelt commitment to helping those in need.

After completing their important mission, the students returned to the Parish Hall to celebrate their final Catechism class of the

year. The hall was filled with joy and laughter as they gathered for a festive year-end party, sang Christmas carols together, and shared a hearty feast. The day was a perfect blend of the joy of giving and the warmth of Christian fellowship, leaving lasting memories of service, community, and celebration.

This project would not have been possible without the immense support of the church community. Heartfelt thanks go to the parents for providing items for the breakfast sale and for encouraging their children in these meaningful acts of service. To the Catechism teachers, sincere gratitude for your tireless efforts in preparing and organising the grocery items, coordinating transport, and creating a memorable, festive final class party. Your dedication to teaching faith through action has left a lasting impact on these young hearts.

The students' hard work in selling and their dedication in carrying and delivering the goods under the hot sun stand as a powerful reminder that giving back is one of the greatest joys of the Christmas season. **Gerard Sebastian**

Burning Hearts: A DAY OF CONNECTION AND CELEBRATION

KEPONG: The Christ the Light and Christ the King Youth Committees recently came together to organise an inspiring event, *Burning Hearts*, at the Church of Christ the Light, Desa Jaya. Designed to reunite youth from both the church and the chapel after a long period apart, the gathering marked the first major collaborative programme since the Chapel of Christ the King moved to its own premises last year. It was truly heartwarming to witness the young people reconnect, share laughter, and enjoy one another's company. Adding to the excitement, the event was held in conjunction with Pesta K.A.M.I., making the day even more vibrant and memorable.

A total of 77 enthusiastic youths participated in the event, which began with an energetic and uplifting welcome speech by the parish priest, Fr Peter Anthony. This was followed by a dynamic Praise and Worship session led by the CTL KUBM team. The energy continued to rise as the youths took part in fun and interactive ice-breaking activities, including Human Bingo and group-forming games, which encouraged everyone to mingle freely regardless of whether they knew each other beforehand or not.

The programme then shifted to a more reflective tone as Deacon Anthony Robert

shared his personal calling and journey towards the priesthood. His testimony deeply inspired many of the youth. He later led a guided meditation session, inviting participants to reflect quietly and write down one thing that had been troubling them — something they wished to surrender during this Advent season. The atmosphere grew serene as the youth focused earnestly on their reflections.

The spiritual experience continued with a meaningful bonfire session held at the church carpark. Deacon Anthony lit the fire, symbolising the start of a renewed commitment for the Advent season. The youth were then invited to throw the notes

they had written into the flames, marking their intention to let go and begin anew. This was followed by a warm and lively fellowship potluck prepared by the youth themselves, strengthening the sense of community and belonging.

To close the night, the youths had three ways to share their thoughts — public sharing around the bonfire, private sharing with Deacon Anthony, or by writing their reflections and placing them in a confidential box. The event concluded with a group photo that captured the joy and unity of the evening.

The CTKL Youth Ministry is truly blessed to have the unwavering support of our par-



ish priest, Fr Peter Anthony. His continuous guidance, encouragement, and prayers have been instrumental in the successful planning and execution of this event. His leadership and pastoral support have inspired our youths to grow in unity, faith, and service while striving to achieve the objectives set for this programme.

We would also like to express our heartfelt appreciation to Deacon Robert and Sr Mary David, our dedicated CTKL Youth advisors, whose commitment and guidance remained constant throughout the entire journey of this event. Their tireless support, wisdom, and encouragement played a crucial role in shaping our efforts and strengthening the spirit of teamwork among the youths.

Burning Hearts will be remembered as a meaningful and unforgettable event for the CTKL Youth Committee. Despite challenges during the planning stages, the teams pulled through together. More exciting programmes are already in the pipeline, so stay tuned for what's next.



STUDENTS SPREAD CHRISTMAS JOY AT LSP

KUALA LUMPUR: Trading a typical year-end celebration for a profound act of service, the Form 3 catechetical students of the Church of the Good Shepherd, Setapak, dedicated their final class to living out the true spirit of Christian charity. Instead of a party, they brought warmth, joy, and companionship to the residents of the Little Sisters of the Poor (LSP) in Cheras.

The day began with a moment of quiet reverence as students, teachers, and the Sisters gathered in prayer, grounding the visit in gratitude and faith while asking for God's blessings upon the elderly residents. This simple yet powerful start set the tone for a day filled with compassion and fellowship.

The mood quickly brightened as the students performed a lively dance, lighting up the hall with energy that drew smiles and applause from the residents. Following the

performance, they distributed thoughtful Christmas gifts — including essential care items, festive treats, and daily necessities — spreading cheer throughout the home.

The sounds of Christmas carols soon filled the air. As the students sang, the residents joined in softly, tapping their feet or mouthing familiar words, their voices bridging past memories with the joy of the present.

One of the day's most touching moments was the sharing session. Students sat with residents, listening to stories of rich life experiences, from former professionals and world travellers to those courageously facing illness. Some residents recounted how

they came to the home, while others spoke of choosing LSP for the genuine care and community they found there — a testament to the nurturing environment created by the Sisters.

The visit also included a guided tour, allowing the students to see firsthand the thoughtful care that supports residents' daily lives. The day concluded with a festive lunch sponsored by the teachers and students. Each resident received a handmade Christmas card, filled with personal messages and prayers, and the class presented a generous cash donation to support the home's ongoing needs — an act deeply ap-

preciated by the Sisters.

What began as an alternative to a year-end party became a profoundly enriching experience. For the students, it was a living lesson in empathy, selfless service, and the Gospel values they had been learning all year. For the residents, it was a day of music, companionship, and the joyful spirit of Christmas.

As the students departed, they carried with them the powerful realisation that charity is not just an action — it is a calling. For many, this heartfelt visit became the most meaningful and memorable final class they could have imagined.





(Unsplash/Alberto Casetta)

Death is not the end

VATICAN: At the Wednesday General Audience on December 10, Pope Leo XIV urged the faithful to reclaim the often-avoided practice of reflecting on death, saying that doing so opens the heart to the power of Christ's Resurrection and gives deeper meaning to life.

Speaking to thousands gathered in St Peter's Square, the Holy Father said that acknowledging the reality of death — and taking time to ponder it — helps us discern what truly matters. "To know that death exists, and above all to reflect on it, teaches us to choose what we really want to make of our existence," he said.

Prayer, he added, is essential to living with clarity and authenticity. "The secret to living authentically is praying, so that we understand what truly brings the Kingdom of Heaven, and letting go of what is superfluous and ties us to passing things. We must remember that our time on earth prepares us for eternity."

The Pope's catechesis continued the series Jesus Christ Our Hope, focusing this week on *The Resurrection of Christ and the Challenges of the Contemporary World*.

Death as a modern taboo

Pope Leo XIV noted that death has always stirred deep questions within the human heart. Though it is the most universal and natural of life's events, it often feels like a contradiction, he said, because our longing for life and eternity conflicts with the reality of mortality.

He observed a "striking shift" in contemporary attitudes. Whereas cultures of the past created rituals and symbols to accompany the dead toward an afterlife, modern societies tend to push death out of sight. "Death seems to be a sort of taboo, an event to keep at a distance," he said. "It is spoken of in hushed tones, to avoid disturbing our sensibilities and our tranquillity." This, he added, is one reason many hesitate to visit cemeteries.

Science, technology and false promises

The Pope also warned of ideologies that suggest immortality is within reach through technology. "Many current anthropological views promise imminent immortality and theorise the prolongation of earthly life through technology," he said. "This is the transhuman scenario, which is making its way into the horizon of the challenges of our time."

He posed a direct question: "Could death really be defeated by science? And even if that were possible, could science guarantee that a life without death is a happy life?"

The human condition and the Christian answer

Reflecting on the human experience, the Holy Father said that people feel "burdened" by the awareness of death in ways other creatures do not. Animals live and die without contemplating meaning or destiny, but humans grapple with these profound questions—and often feel powerless before them. This powerlessness, he said, leads many to suppress or avoid the topic altogether.

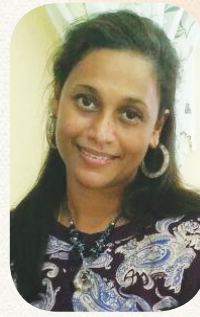
Yet the Pope stressed that Christianity offers a hopeful answer: the Resurrection of Christ transforms death from a frightening end into a passage to eternal life. "Only the Resurrection is capable of illuminating the mystery of death to its full extent," he said. In this light, "death is not the end, but the passage towards full light, towards a happy eternity."

Because Christ has gone before humanity in death and risen in glory, believers can await their own death with hope rather than fear. The Pope concluded by recalling St. Francis of Assisi, who called death "sister," saying that faith in the Resurrection "preserves us from the fear of disappearing forever and prepares us for the joy of life without end." *Vatican News*

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We love you

~ Fondly remembered by all loved ones ~

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Meeting Pope Leo 'is something I will carry with me forever'



VATICAN: A few days after his concert at the Vatican, Canadian crooner Michael Bubl  took to Instagram December 10 to reflect on his time there, which included a meeting with Pope Leo XIV.

"Trying to put this past weekend into words feels almost impossible," Bubl  wrote. "Faith has always been woven into my life, little me in that white First Communion outfit is proof of that," he said, referencing a short video he posted of him as a child that faded into a shot of him shaking hands with the Holy Father.

Bubl  met Pope Leo on Dec 5 ahead of the annual Vatican Christmas concert for the poor.

"For this young kid from Burnaby (British Columbia), who grew up Catholic ... It's almost impossible to really express to you how it feels," Bubl  said in a news conference following the meeting.

With an impressive repertoire of pop, jazz and Christmas standards that span over 20 years and five Grammy awards, it's no sur-



Pope Leo XIV applauds during the Vatican's annual Christmas concert with the poor, featuring Canadian singer Michael Bubl , in the Vatican's Paul VI Audience Hall Dec 6, 2025. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

prise to see videos of the American pontiff clapping and singing along during Bubl 's set list, which included a few requests from Pope Leo himself. The experience of performing for 3,000 attendees at the Dec 6

concert and meeting the pope with his wife and parents is something that Bubl  said he will "carry with [him] forever."

"God has quietly remained at the centre of everything I do and when I look back on my

life and career, I can see his hand in all of it: in my family, my friends, everyone I've worked with, and in all of you," Bubl  wrote in his post. "Nothing prepares you for this."

"I've always believed there's a light in each of us, and this experience renewed mine in a way I didn't expect. I'm deeply grateful and humbled to have shared my music in this setting," Bubl  continued.

Pope Leo shared a similar sentiment in remarks following the concert.

"As the melodies touched our hearts, we felt the inestimable value of music: not a luxury for the few, but a divine gift accessible to everyone, rich and poor, learned and simple," the Pope said Dec 6.

"As we move into the holiday season, I hope you find moments of peace, connection, and comfort. Whatever you may be holding, I hope it feels a little lighter," Bubl  concluded in his message. "And may we keep choosing gentleness with ourselves and with one another." Margaret Murray, OSV News

Penang Christmas parade returns after 25 years

PENANG: After a 25-year hiatus, the Penang Christmas Parade made a spirited comeback on December 6, drawing more than 3,000 participants to the Penang State Christmas Celebration 2025. The parade, last held in 2000, was the highlight of the celebration hosted at St George's Church and jointly organised by the Christian Federation Malaysia (CFM) Penang

Chapter and the Penang State Government through Penang Harmony Corporation (HARMONICO).

Churches of various denominations, families, community organisations, and friends gathered in a strong display of unity, joining in worship, music, fellowship, and a colourful procession featuring 10 Christmas floats. The Chief Minister of Penang, YAB Chow Kon Yew; Penang State Exco for Social Development, Welfare & Non-Islamic Religious Affairs, YB Lim Siew Khim; Bishop of Penang, Cardinal Sebastian Francis, and Anglican Bishop Dr Stephen Soe Chee Cheng were among those present.

CFM Penang praised the Chief Minister and state leaders for marching in the parade despite the rain, saying their presence reflected a genuine commitment to harmony and support for the Christian community's cultural and religious expressions. The CFM also thanked HARMONICO for its

dedication and smooth coordination of this year's celebration.

The revival of the parade was described as a milestone made possible through five years of close collaboration between CFM and HARMONICO. Under the leadership of YB Lim Siew Khim and CEO Paul Au Chong Yee, the effort galvanised churches, volunteers, and community groups, strengthening inter-church cooperation and reviving a tradition for a new generation.

CFM Penang also acknowledged the unity and support of churches across the state, whose volunteers, performers, and congregations contributed significantly to the event. Their collective effort embodied the spirit of Christmas as a season of hope, peace, and goodwill.

The Christian Federation said it looks forward to continued collaboration with the State Government, HARMONICO, and all Christian partners to strengthen fellowship and contribute to the well-being of Penang.



The Christmas floats by various denominations. (HARMONICO)



The children performing a rendition of Christmas songs. (HARMONICO/Samuel Gopal)

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