

Glory to God and peace on earth!

A blessed Christmas!

Every year at Christmas, we celebrate an event that took place on a cold night more than 2000 years ago. It was in a humble stable in the small town of Bethlehem, that the Son of God came to be born. This baby Jesus was welcomed into the arms of Mary and foster-father Joseph, amidst the cattle, sheep and other animals.

Nearby, in the fields, shepherds tended their flocks under the night sky. It was to these poor, overlooked figures — those on the margins of society — that God chose to reveal His love and joy. "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." (Luke 2:10)

The prophecy of Isaiah was thus fulfilled: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; on those who live in a land of deep shadow a light has shone." (Isaiah 9:2-3). Christmas celebrates Christ the Light who has come to live among us in our world. "For there is a child born for us, a Son given to us and dominion is laid on His shoulders; and this is the name they give Him: Wonder-Counsellor, Mighty-God, Eternal-Father, Prince-of-Peace." (Isaiah 9:6).

The birth of the Christ Child at Christmas ushers in the promise of Hope and Life. It is truly fitting that, during this sacred season, the Holy Doors of the four basilicas will be opened.

Doors allow us to enter into the sacred

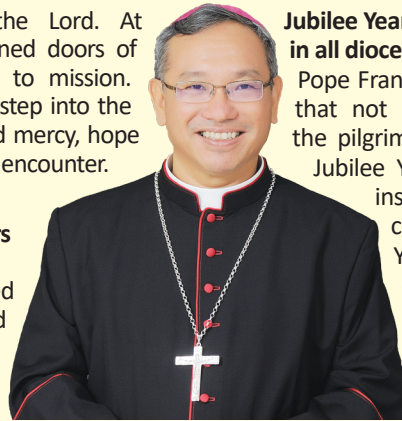
place and encounter the Lord. At the same time, the opened doors of our churches are a call to mission. Each Catholic is called to step into the streets, sharing peace and mercy, hope and joy with everyone we encounter.

Jubilee Year 2025 and the Opening of the Holy Doors in Rome

This Christmas is indeed a time of great Joy and Hope. Pope Francis has designated 2025 as a Jubilee Year focusing on *Spes non confundit - Hope does not disappoint* (Romans 5:5).

Rome, the city of the Apostles Peter and Paul will hold the following events:

- Dec 24: Christmas Eve Opening of Holy Door at the Basilica of St Peter, Rome
- Dec 29: Opening of Holy Door at the Archbasilica St John Lateran, Cathedral of Rome. Masses will be celebrated in all cathedrals in the world.
- Jan 1: Opening of Holy Door at the Basilica of St Mary Major, Rome.
- Jan 5: Vigil of Epiphany Opening of Holy Door of the Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls, Rome.
- Dec 28, 2025: Closing of the Jubilee Year in all dioceses throughout the world.
- Jan 6, 2026: Closing of the Jubilee Year in Rome.



Jubilee Year celebration in cathedrals in all dioceses

Pope Francis remembers and knows that not every Catholic can make the pilgrimage to visit Rome during Jubilee Year. Our Holy Father has instructed that all dioceses celebrate the Jubilee Year in their respective cathedrals on December 29. In Malaysia, churches have been designated as centres for pilgrimage and prayers. (See the list on the back page).

In the spirit of the Jubilee Pilgrim of Hope: Pope Francis prays that "for everyone, may the Jubilee be a moment of genuine, personal encounter with the Lord Jesus, the 'door' (cf. Jn 10:7.9) of our salvation, whom the Church is charged to proclaim always, everywhere and to all as 'our hope' (1 Timothy 1:1).

"Christmas isn't Christmas, 'til it happens in your heart"

At Christmas, Emmanuel, our God, comes into the world to dwell among us, bringing joy, peace, and hope. As we enter the 2025 Jubilee Year, we are called to be Pilgrims of Hope. Through the open doors of our churches, we are sent forth to share God's gift of mercy and hope with the world.

Let us:

- Make pilgrimages to the churches or centres designated by our bishops
- Go and serve the poor and needy
- Give generously to causes that alleviate poverty,
- Support victims of natural disasters, floods or fires,
- Commit to ensuring education is accessible for all children,
- Reject extremism and fundamentalism in our land,
- Seek dialogue, engage with one another, and listen with open hearts,
- Celebrate in unity through shared fellowship meals,
- Host "open houses" for Christmas and other festival dates,
- Collaborate for the common good of Malaysia,
- Pray for the spiritual and political leaders of our nation.

On behalf of the Catholic Bishops of Malaysia, priests, religious, and deacons, I take this opportunity to wish all our Catholics and friends of goodwill a Holy Christmas and a Blessed New Year 2025.

+ *Simon Poh*

Archbishop Dato Dr Simon Poh
President,
Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia

A reflection on Christmas and the questions He answers

Dear Friends of MJD and all Christians, wishing you a blessed and holy Christmas. Thank you for journeying with me. This is my reflection of what most of us are like, with questions that take us away from the Lord or questions that point to the One who is in our midst.

"It was close to Christmas. The parish community presented an Advent musical entitled God Speaking. It was beautiful. The theme song God Speaking asked questions.

Have you ever heard a love song that set your spirit free?

Have you ever watched a sunrise and felt you could not breathe?

Have you ever cried a tear that You could not explain?

Have you ever met a stranger who already knew your name?

Have you ever lost a loved one who you thought should still be here?

Have you ever felt so tangled up in fear?

What if it's Him? What if He's speaking

through it all?? What if He is somehow involved? What if it's God speaking in strange ways as He did as God in the Manger?

The Christmas Event evoked questions in the people of Israel and even in the people today. The people, who had waited long, had many questions. The event aroused questions that unsettled a king, his courts and the powerful. The searching questions unveiled the God in a manger, which was unimaginable. God spoke in strange ways.

Joseph, in the latest movie *Mary*, asked: Why me? God spoke through Mary.

Mary asked: How can this be? God spoke through the angel, and through Elizabeth.

The three Magi asked: where will this child, the Messiah be born? A star guided them.

The shepherds wondered: What's happening? The angels proclaimed the Good News, a Saviour born unto them.

The questions continue. People ask: "What Child is this", "Mary, did you know". When is He

coming? Where will He appear? Is it Him? How will we know Him? What will He say? Why is He so slow in coming?

Is there a question that you are struggling with?

The message is simple. The God of love is speaking. The Word of God has taken flesh. He is the Message. God is speaking.

The busyness and the business, the festivities and fanfare, and the hustle and bustle keep us from hearing Him. Quieten down. Slowdown. Listen! You will hear Him speak! Patiently, stay with the question.

You will know that it is the God in the Manger: when you hear the words: is there a room in your heart?

You will know that it is the God in the Manger: when the signs in the sky, on the earth or within us say: I am already here.

You will know that it is the God in the Manger: when the homeless, the street

people, the deprived and displaced say: I thirst.

You will know that it is the God in the Manger: when the lights and sounds, the colours and the images, the decorations and displays say: It is the Lord...He is the Light who has overcome the darkness.

Into the world that was dark and dead, came the God in the Manger.... a light of hope. Many were asleep to the event, yet there were numbers drawn to the starlit manger that night. Today He waits to be born in questioning hearts that seek Him. Ask the right question and He answers.

God bless you, dear friends of Jesus. May His Light shine within you. Remember He walks with you. A Blessed and Holy Christmas to all of you again.

+ *Bernard Paul*
Rt Rev Bernard Paul
Diocese of Malacca Johore

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In 2025 World Day of Peace Message,

Pope Francis calls for cultural and structural transformation

In his message for World Peace Day 2025, Pope Francis calls for a profound cultural and structural transformation to address the widespread injustices facing humanity. Emphasising the importance of peace, mercy, and reconciliation, the Pope urges the international community to confront global crises, particularly those impacting the environment and marginalised populations. Drawing from the themes of the Jubilee — symbolising forgiveness and liberation — he advocates for justice, solidarity, and recognition of the ecological and financial debts owed by wealthier nations to poorer countries.

Listening to the Plea of the Suffering

The Pope begins by extending heartfelt wishes for peace, especially to those burdened by past mistakes or oppressed by societal judgment. He emphasises that the Jubilee Year should be a time of grace and hope, particularly for the marginalised. Pope Francis draws attention to the exploitation of the earth, the mistreatment of vulnerable populations such as migrants, and the ecological and financial debts that wealthier nations owe to poorer countries. He condemns the "structures of sin" that perpetuate these injustices and stresses the urgent need for cultural and structural changes to achieve lasting peace.

The Call for a Cultural Change

Pope Francis urges a renewed understanding of our collective responsibility toward the earth and one another. He recalls the words of St Basil of Caesarea, who questioned the notion of private property without recognising God's

role as the Creator. The Pope underscores that forgiveness lies at the heart of Christian faith, with Jesus teaching us to pray: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." This call for forgiveness, Pope Francis emphasises, should not only apply to personal offenses but should extend to the societal debts and injustices that bind nations and people together.

A Journey of Hope and Concrete Proposals

To address the global crisis of debt and inequality, Pope Francis presents three concrete proposals:

a) Forgiving International Debt: He reiterates the call made by St John Paul II in the year 2000 to substantially reduce, if not cancel, the international debt burden on poorer nations, particularly those facing ecological debts incurred by wealthier countries. He urges the creation of a new global financial framework grounded in solidarity and justice.

b) Respect for Life and Elimination of the Death Penalty: The Pope calls for a global commitment to uphold the dignity of every human life, from conception to natural death, and advocates for the abolition of the death penalty worldwide as a concrete gesture toward a culture of life.

b) Diverting Military Resources to Combat Hunger: Following the example of his predecessors, Pope Francis proposes dedicating a portion of global military spending to address hunger, promote sustainable development, and

combat climate change in poorer nations. This redirection of resources, he argues, would foster peace and hope for future generations.

The Goal of Peace

The Pope concludes with a hopeful vision for the future, emphasising that true peace is not simply the absence of war but the creation of a world where hearts are disarmed of selfishness and anxiety. True peace arises from recognising our mutual indebtedness to God and to one another. Through simple acts of kindness and solidarity, humanity can make progress toward peace.

Pope Francis prays that the Jubilee Year of Hope will lead to a world where every individual contributes to the common good, and where the voices of the poor are heard and answered. He calls on all people — leaders and citizens alike — to embark on a journey of forgiveness and peace, rooted in hope and mercy. He envisions a world disarmed of hatred and full of compassion, where the dignity of every person is upheld, and the debts of the oppressed are forgiven.

Pope Francis' message for the 2025 World Day of Peace challenges us to confront global injustices, embrace mercy, and work together for a more just and peaceful world. By forgiving debts, respecting life, and prioritising solidarity, humanity can build a future grounded in hope, peace, and the love that only God can provide.

To read the text in full go to: <https://shorturl.at/cRXKD>

Embracing Love: Lessons from the Visitation

As we approach the end of the Advent season, it feels as though we've just begun our journey. Yet, here we are, lighting the final candle and entering into the fourth Sunday of Advent, which brings us to the beautiful event of the Visitation, as narrated in the Gospel of St Luke.

This event is rich in teaching values that inspire us in both our faith and our actions. The two central figures of today's story — our Blessed Mother Mary and Elizabeth — serve as models for shaping our own discipleship. Through their actions, we are called to live out the virtues of faith, hope, and charity.

In the Visitation, Mary exemplifies these theological virtues. Upon receiving God's Word through the Archangel Gabriel, she did not hesitate. As the Gospel tells us, she "set out and went as quickly as she could." Mary immediately identified the need to visit Elizabeth, understanding the great encouragement and blessing her presence would bring. This serves as a powerful reminder for us to recognise those around us who may need our presence and support.

Reflecting on this, I recall my pastoral experience at the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Peel Road, in 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic. The movement control orders severely limited physical

meetings and activities, making outreach challenging. Despite this, we did our best to stay connected with the community through the use of technology. We realised that, like Mary, we had to reach out to those in need, even if it was through virtual means. Just as Mary's visit affirmed Elizabeth's faith and hope, our own efforts to connect, no matter how small, can have a profound impact on others. It's a call for us to recognize that even the simplest human engagement can make a difference. We are all called to be agents of God's love, as Mary was.

While we reflect on Mary's actions, we also turn to Elizabeth, who, filled with the Holy Spirit, recognised the presence of God in her midst. This is another important lesson for us: it's not just about reaching out to those in need, but also recognising God's love and presence in those we serve. This is the essence of Christian charity — not simply performing good deeds, but also bringing Christ to others and recognising Christ in them. This is how we fulfil the command to "bring people to Christ and bring Christ to the people." Without this, our charity can risk becoming just another form of social service, disconnected from the deeper mission of spreading the Good News.

On this fourth Sunday of Advent, we

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings with Bro Gabriel Puvan

4th Sunday of Advent (C)

Readings: Micah 5:1-4;

Hebrews 10:5-10;

Gospel: Luke 1:39-45

focus on the theme of Love. Throughout the previous weeks, we have reflected on peace, hope, and joy. But love is the culmination of all these virtues. Love is the very essence of our faith and the heart of the Gospel. As followers of Christ, we are called to be promoters of God's love. This is not always easy, but with God's grace, it is not impossible. When we open ourselves to His grace, transformation happens — not just in ourselves, but also in those we encounter.

As we prepare for the birth of our Saviour, let us not only ready our homes and churches to celebrate His coming, but also prepare our hearts to welcome Him anew. The birth of Christ, the King of peace, hope, joy, and love, is not just a historical event, but a continual invitation to experience His reign in our lives. Let us look forward to His glorious second coming with hearts full of love, prepared to share that love with others.

May we all be blessed to experience the presence of Christ's reign in every aspect of our lives, now and always. Amen.





KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

December / January 2025

- 28/12 Joy to the World - Christmas Gathering
- 29/12 Mass of the Solemn Opening of the Jubilee 2025 : Pilgrims of Hope – Cathedral of St John the Evangelist, KL
- 31/12 Jubilee Year – Church of Jesus Caritas, Kepong
- 1/1 New Year Day Mass - Cathedral of St John the Evangelist
- 1/1 Jubilee Year - Church of Immaculate Conception BVM

PENANG DIOCESE

Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

December / January 2025

- 24/12 Christmas Eve Mass – Church of Our Lady of Fatima of the Holy Rosary, Kelantan at 7.00pm
- 25/12 Christmas Day Mass – Church of Our Lady of Fatima of the Holy Rosary, Kelantan at 9.00am
- 25/12 Christmas Day Mass – Chapel of Gereja Bonda Maria Timur Barat, Grik, Perak at 4.00pm
- 29/12 Mass of the Solemn Opening of the Jubilee 2025 : Pilgrims of Hope – Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Penang at 5.00pm
- 6-10/1 Meeting – Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Malaysia Singapore & Brunei & Catholic Religious Major Superiors, MAJODI

MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

December / January 2025

- 29/12 Mass of the Solemn Opening of the Jubilee 2025 : Pilgrims of Hope – Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, JB at 10.30am
- 6-10/1 Meeting – Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Malaysia Singapore & Brunei & Catholic Religious Major Superiors, MAJODI

New scholarship for sixth form students launched

Carmel Dominic & Christopher Kushi

PENANG: On December 3, Stonyhurst International School Penang (SHP) launched its Higher Line (Sixth Form) Scholarship Programme during Mass at the Chapel of St Ignatius of Loyola, marking the Feast of St Francis Xavier. The Mass was presided over by Cardinal Sebastian Francis with Fr Alvin Ho, SJ, concelebrating, assisted by Deacon Paul Kang. The event drew an assembly of guests, staff, students, and friends of the school.

In his homily, Cardinal Sebastian highlighted the profound bond between St Ignatius of Loyola and St Francis Xavier, emphasising how the saint travelled eastward, as far as China, to spread the Gospel. He drew a parallel with Stonyhurst’s mission in Penang, which offers an inclusive, creative, and bridge-building education. The school’s motto, Enter to Learn, Leave to Serve, reflects its commitment to a holistic education based on Catholic and Jesuit values that transcend borders.

The cardinal also requested prayers for Fr Alvin, who celebrated his 16th Sacerdotal Ordination and for his ministry with the Malaysian Catholic Education Council.

The Higher Line (Sixth Form) A-Levels scholarship programme is designed to provide



Cardinal Sebastian Francis celebrating the Feast of St Francis Xavier at the Chapel of St Ignatius of Loyola.

financial assistance to exceptional students from all backgrounds, with special outreach to the Catholic community and the B40 income group. Scholarships offer up to 100 per cent fee coverage for B40 families, with additional fee reductions available, depending on individual circumstances. The initiative aims to foster holistic development and character formation, inspired by the 430-year legacy of Stonyhurst College in the UK. Michael Sng, Chair of the Board of Governors, shared how education had transformed his own life, and emphasised the importance of providing similar opportunities through this scholarship.

The Sixth Form curriculum is designed to support both academic and personal growth. It includes the Launchpad programme, which helps students develop skills to pursue their

future goals, the Cambridge IPQ (International Project Qualifications) for independent research, and the Stonyhurst Diploma, which integrates academics, creativity, service learning, and sports. Leadership opportunities also provide students with the chance to build essential skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving.

An Open Day for prospective applicants will be held on January 9, 2025, for Sixth Form applicants, scholarship candidates, and potential sponsors. The application deadline for the scholarship is January 17, 2025, and current SPM students may apply using their trial results.

For more information, students can visit the Stonyhurst Penang website <https://shorturl.at/nDqPb>

Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #203

Greetings dear Friends of MJD

Two sides to the coin. Two sides to a story. The reported and the unreported. The “Israel-Palestine situation is complex, dangerous and tragic. Over 45,000 people have been killed since the October 7, 2023 attack, 97 Israeli hostages are still missing, and the devastation in Gaza is estimated at over US\$18 billion (RM79 billion).”

But once the full details of the atrocities committed on Oct 7 were uncovered, Malaysian citizens, civil society groups and opposition political forces all expressed discomfort with the government’s position.

Tightening of media and freedom of the press or creating a safer digital environment, crackdown on online gambling and harmful media online content in this country?

The National Service 3.0 is back, starting next month, tailored to Malaysia’s needs, it is said. Bank Negara Malaysia is still consulting on the proposed increase in medical insurance premium rates. Mental health issues in schools and institutions of higher learning (IPT) have increased twofold in 2023.

The Notre-Dame de Paris cathedral officially reopened on Saturday, December 7, after restoration (it was devastated by a fire five years ago), with the assistance of specialists from China’s Emperor Qinshihuang’s Mausoleum Site Museum – a clear example of what the world needs - reconcilers, restorers and healers, not divisive politicians.

Choosing Times:
Viktor Frankl, when imprisoned in the

horrific German concentration camp, saw and remembered men who walked through the huts, comforting others, giving away their last bit of bread and cheerfully encouraging the suffering. And he was moved to conclude:

“Everything was taken away from them, but the one thing they refused to have taken away...THE FREEDOM TO CHOOSE ONE’S ATTITUDE IN ANY GIVEN SITUATION”. The freedom to choose our attitude is the last of our freedom. We can hold fast to it or give it away. This freedom makes us different. The saints and heroes had this. Reminds me of the candle in the dark.

“Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference.” *Winston Churchill*

A Thought For The Week:
While travelling in Kenya, two college students met a refugee from Zimbabwe. He said that he hadn’t eaten anything in over three days and looked extremely skinny and unhealthy. Then, one of the travellers offered him the rest of the sandwich he was eating. The first thing the man said was, “We can share it.”

The lesson from the Zimbabwean: Just give me a little of what you can give. I don’t want to be full, just lessen my hunger. The poor and needy ask only for daily bread.

Announcements for the Week:

1. *Msgr Peter Ng* will celebrate his 25th Sacerdotal Anniversary at the Church of St Henry, Batu Pahat on December 27 at 6.00pm.
2. The *Launch of the Jubilee Year 2025*,

with the theme “Pilgrims of Hope” will take place at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart on Sunday, December 29 at 10.30 am. All Masses on that Sunday are cancelled in South Johore Vicariate.

QnQ? The Q asks: My moods get me down. Is there a way to rise above it?
“The most important decision you make is to be in a good mood.” (Voltaire). The operational word here is “decision” - to choose, to opt for regardless - which puts you in charge of your headspace. And that can positively change the trajectory of your day, every day.

So take a deep breath, meditate, pray, listen to music, take a nap, dance, sing, read an inspirational quote or simply stretch and smile...there are many ways to choose to be in a good mood! “I’m pickin’ up good vibrations”, the Beach Boys sing.

See The Holy Spirit @ Work: “He pours light into our minds, arouses our desire and gives us strength... As the soul is the life of the body, so the Holy Spirit is the life of our souls.” *St Peter Damian*

Something To Tickle You: “I believe every one of us is born with a purpose. No matter who you are, what you do, or how far you think you have to go, you have been tapped by a force greater than yourself to step into your God-given calling.” *Oprah Winfrey*

Bishop Bernard Paul

Saint's feast celebrated at historic St Paul's Hill

Bernard Anthony

MELAKA: The Church of St Francis Xavier in Jalan Banda Kaba celebrated the annual parish feast on November 30 - December 1 at the parish. St Francis Xavier is also patron of Missions and patron of the Diocese of Malacca Johore.

On the actual feast day, Dec 3, the 9.00am Mass was celebrated in the historic ruins of St Paul's Church at Bukit Melaka (formerly St Paul's Hill). Over 500 Catholics from near and far made their way to the hilltop, joined by 12 priests to commemorate the occasion.

Parish priest, Fr Moses Rayappan, was the main celebrant, with the priests from the Malacca Vicariate concelebrating including Fr Patrick Tyoh (Batu Pahat), Fr Aaron Alammalay (Muar) and Fr Albet Arockiasamy (Tampin, NS).

At the beginning of the Mass, Fr Moses expressed gratitude for the gift of St Francis Xavier, who first brought the faith to this land in



Clergy and laity at St Paul's Church after the Feast day Mass of St Francis Xavier.

the 1500s. He thanked God for the perfect weather and for the larger-than-expected crowd. He invited the congregation to pray for their personal intentions and to emulate St Francis Xavier's zeal in bringing others to Christ.

In his homily, in both English and Bahasa Malaysia, Fr Moses reflected on the life of St Francis Xavier. He shared how the saint, born in 1506, met St Ignatius

of Loyola, and despite their differences, God used them as instruments to fulfil His mission. He emphasised St Francis Xavier's life of prayer, his unyielding commitment to missionary work, and his apostolic creativity. The saint's ability to adapt to different cultures and languages in his travels across India, Southeast Asia, and Japan served as an example of how today's Christians should embrace

new, creative approaches to share the faith.

Fr Moses also reflected on why, today, many are hesitant to share Jesus with others. He cited a lack of zeal, faith, and determination as reasons for this reluctance. He reminded the faithful that St Francis, despite language barriers and cultural differences, dedicated his life to bringing Christ to others.

Looking ahead, Fr Moses noted

that 2025 will mark the 480th anniversary of the saint's visit to Malacca in 1545 and the 180th anniversary of the parish. He invited the congregation to embrace the spirit of pilgrimage and hope, encouraging them to bring the message of Jesus Christ to others with creativity and compassion.

Fr Michael Goh and Fr Albet gave a brief homily in Mandarin and Tamil respectively.

Fr Moses expressed his thanks to all those who attended and contributed to the celebration. He acknowledged the efforts of those who helped set up the liturgy, including those who carried chairs up and down the hill for the Mass. He also reflected that St Francis himself may have walked this very path and celebrated Mass at the site, where his remains were temporarily buried before being transferred to Goa.

After the Mass, the faithful were invited to venerate the first-class relic of the saint.

Honouring St Francis Xavier in Penang

GEORGETOWN: On the evening of December 1, the Church of St Francis Xavier came alive with faith, devotion, and vibrancy as the parish gathered to honour their patron saint. The grand bilingual Mass, celebrated in English and Tamil, brought together about 300 faithful to commemorate the life and missionary works of St Francis Xavier.

The celebration was led by Fr Bernard Hyacinth Arputhasamy SJ, with parish priest Fr Edmund Woon and assistant priest Fr Desmond Jansen concelebrating.

Fr Bernard reflected on the life and legacy of St Francis Xavier, often called the "Apostle of the Indies." He spoke of the saint's humility, resilience, and unwavering commitment to spreading the Good News across India, Malaysia, and China. Fr Bernard encouraged all present to draw inspiration from St Francis' example, urging them to become modern-day missionaries, carrying the light of Christ to their communities.



The liturgy was further elevated by the angelic voices of the choir, whose heartfelt singing enriched the celebration and moved the hearts of all present. A particularly stirring moment came during the *Gloria*, when the shofar was triumphantly blown, led by Gabriel, alongside his wife Amelia and brother Aaron Roy. The resonant sound of the shofar added a profound and symbolic touch to the celebration, reminding all of the triumph and glory of God.

One highlight was the display of a relic of St Francis Xavier, (toe nail), offering the faithful a tangible connection to the saint. The relic on display until Dec 15, provided an opportunity for personal prayer and reflection.

The evening concluded with light fellowship, where the faithful came together in a spirit of unity and gratitude, celebrating not just the saint but also the sense of community that defines the Church of St Francis Xavier. **Valentino Eric Alfred**

SFX exhibition ignites faith and legacy in PJ parish

PETALING JAYA: In celebration of the feast day of St Francis Xavier, a special four-day exhibition was held at the Church of St Francis Xavier from November 30 to December 3. Themed *Re-Ignite the Spirit of Faith*, the captivating event offered a unique opportunity to explore the life and missionary journey of one of the most beloved Catholic saints.

A focal point of the exhibition was an ornate gold reliquary, which housed a tiny bone fragment of St Francis Xavier, a sacred relic that is brought out only once a year during the saint's feast day. This relic, along with other displays, offered visitors a chance to connect with the saint's profound legacy.

The exhibition featured a variety of informative panels that narrated the *Life Journey and Missions of St Francis Xavier* providing deeper insights into his life and work. Additionally, visitors were invited to reflect on the saint's personal thoughts and emotions through *The Letters of St Francis Xavier*. Daily screenings of a documentary drama on his life were also held, while the exhibition retraced the roots of St Francis Xavier Church in Petaling Jaya and showcased Jesuit saints and the Berchmans Altar Servers Society (BASS).

The exhibition was officially opened on Dec 1 by parish priest Fr Alvin Ng, SJ, and Fr Larry Tan, SJ, marking the start of St Francis Xavier's Triduum Celebrations. Fr Arnel Aquino, SJ, from the Philippines, was invited as the guest celebrant for the Triduum Masses. In his homily, Fr Arnel spoke about the importance of surrendering one's



The ornate gold reliquary, a focal point of the exhibition.

powers and gifts for the service of others, just as St Francis Xavier did when he yielded to God's calling at the end of his life.

Fr Arnel, a liturgical music composer and assistant professor of systematic theology at the Loyola School of Theology in Ateneo de Manila University, also led a liturgical music workshop during his stay.

The exhibition was co-organised by SFX's Social Communications Ministry and Berchmans Altar Servers Society (BASS), with additional support from the Sunday Fellowship Ministry, the Gardening Team, and Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS).

"We hope this exhibition has inspired parishioners to learn more about our patron saint's vision, mission, and unwavering dedication to God's work," said Cordelia Lee of the Social Communications Ministry. "Our aim was to reignite the spirit of faith and deepen the understanding of the saint's monumental missionary work and his enduring influence on the

Catholic faith."

In the words of St Francis Xavier, "It is not the physical exertion that counts towards one's progress, nor the nature of the task, but the spirit of faith with which it is undertaken."

The SFX Exhibition 2024 marked a pioneering effort in multi-ministry collaboration within the church, bringing together volunteers of all ages and backgrounds to create an event that united parishioners in celebrating the spirit of St Francis Xavier.

"Working with adults on this exhibition has been a truly memorable experience for all of us at BASS," said Hia Isaac from the Berchmans Altar Servers Society. "The various skills and experiences we gained will help us scale up our capabilities for even larger events in the future."

As the exhibition concluded, the parish community was left not only with a deeper appreciation for St Francis Xavier's legacy but also with renewed inspiration to live out the spirit of faith in their own lives. **Bryan Phuah**

More than 40,000 join Miri's Christmas parade

MIRI: Over 40,000 Christians, along with members of the wider community, were part of the 15th Miri City Christmas Parade. Held on the evening of December 7, the event emphasised the harmony of Miri's multiracial and multireligious community. The theme *Jesus Christ the Life and the Light of All People*, inspired by John 1:4, "In Him is life, and that life is the light of all mankind," highlighted the unity of people from different backgrounds.

Hosted by the Anglican Church, the event began with a praise-worship session before the parade, which covered a 10 km route through the city, passing through several main streets. The parade, which has been an annual tradition in Miri since 2005 (with a pause from 2020 to 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic), was flagged

off by deputy premier Datuk Amar Douglas Uggah Embas and featured performances by various Christian denominations, school bands, and youth groups. Participants also enjoyed Christmas carols and street performances.

Miri's mayor, Adam Yii, estimated the turnout at around 40,000 people, many of whom were non-Christians joining in the spirit of unity.

In his speech, Premier Tan Sri Abang Johari Openg praised the parade for promoting respect, tolerance, and unity among Miri's diverse communities. He emphasised Sarawak's commitment to fostering a harmonious, multiracial, and multireligious society, exemplified by the establishment of the Unit for Other Religions (Unifor), a unique initiative in



A marching band participating in the 15th Miri City Christmas Parade.

Sarawak that provides funds to various religious groups.

Abang Johari also highlighted the state's long-standing tradition of supporting all religions, noting that since 2017, RM385 million had been allocated for the construction and rehabilitation of houses of worship across Sarawak. He stressed that Sarawak's approach to social inclusiveness was reflected in both policy and action, with financial assistance being provided

in a structured way to religious groups beyond Islam, a rarity in Malaysia.

The event was further marked by the presentation of donations to six local charity organisations, including the Human Life Service and Miri Red Crescent Dialysis Centre. A grant of RM120,000 was also announced to support the Christmas Parade Committee, with contributions from various political leaders, including Datuk Uggah and Miri Mayor Yii.

A celebration of unity, peace, and joy

KUCHING: The 2024 Kuching City Christmas Parade, held on the evening of December 7, brought together 7,035 participants from various Christian denominations and backgrounds to celebrate the season of peace and goodwill. Themed *Peace Be With You*, the event resonated with heartfelt hymns, uplifting prayers, and vibrant festivities at the Kuching South City Council (MBKS) Jubilee Ground.

The evening began at 6.30pm with participants gathering in festive costumes, followed by the recitation of the Apostles' Creed, setting a reflective tone. The parade kicked off with a stirring rendition of *For Unto Us a Child Is Born* and *O Come, All Ye Faithful*, performed by a praise and worship team from the Roman Catholic Church. Captain Carmen of The Salvation Army offered a prayer, emphasising the deeper spiritual meaning of Christmas, while Scripture readings in English, Iban, Malay, and Chinese highlighted the diversity of Kuching's Christian community.

At 7.00pm, the much-anticipated parade began, featuring 11 beautifully crafted Christmas floats depicting scenes such as the Nativity, Angels, Shepherds and Sheep,



A group of nuns perform 'Feliz Navidad' to share the joy of Christmas.

Wise Men, and church displays. These colourful floats, accompanied by festive costumes, radiated Christmas cheer as they travelled through the streets. Throughout the route, Singspiration sessions led by Julian Gabriel encouraged the crowd to sing Christmas carols. At the same time, six marching bands from the Boys' and Girls'

Brigades added to the lively atmosphere.

A highlight of the evening was the distribution of gifts at 8.15pm, symbolising the love and generosity at the heart of Christmas. The parade concluded around 9.00pm, leaving participants and spectators filled with joy and unity.

Organised by the Association of Churches Sarawak (ACS) and the Sarawak Evangelical Christian Association (SECA), and hosted by the Methodist Church SCAC, the event showcased the harmonious collaboration of churches such as the Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, Salvation Army, and Seventh-Day Adventist Churches, among others.

The parade perfectly captured the festive spirit, with vibrant decorations, joyful carols, and the unity of Kuching's multicultural community. The floats, featuring scenes like angels, wisemen, and shepherds, were a visual testament to the theme of peace, while the harmonious sounds of drums, trumpets, and flutes filled the air. The parade demonstrated the deep sense of community, joy, and togetherness that defines Kuching, offering a powerful reminder of the true meaning of Christmas. It was an unforgettable night that celebrated unity and the enduring spirit of the holiday season.



Participants of the the nativity scene in front of the Catholic Church's float.

Sibu transforms into a fairytale X'mas village

SIBU: The town square was magically transformed into a *Fairytale Christmas Village* from December 6 to 25, as part of the annual Christmas Festival. The celebration, which runs daily from 5.00pm, offers a wide array of attractions for visitors of all ages.

Sibu Municipal Council (SMC) chairman, Clarence Ting, officially launched the celebration on Dec 6 with a Christmas tree lighting ceremony. This year's festival introduced several exciting new features, including the creation of the largest castle ever designed for the event. For the first time, a camping site was set up, offering visitors a unique opportunity to enjoy a camping experience while soaking in the beauty of the holiday decorations.

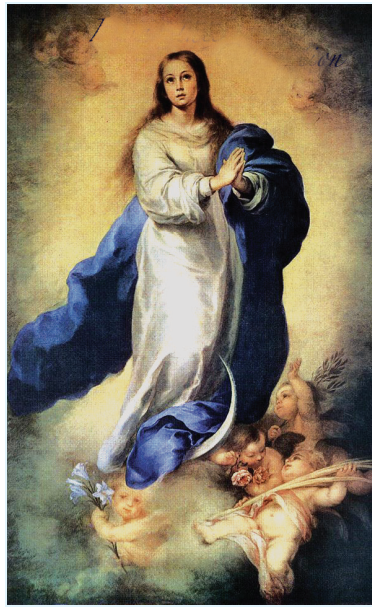
From Dec 17 to 25, the festival's main stage will showcase a variety of performances, including special events organised by local churches, further enhancing the festive spirit. The festival is entirely free and open to the public, to promote healthy activities and foster a strong sense of community during the Christmas season.

The event offers something for everyone, making it a heartwarming celebration of joy, unity, and the true spirit of Christmas.



The decorated village in Sibu town. (photo/Nathan Ngu Production facebook)

Celebrating the Feast of the Immaculate Conception



The Feast of the Immaculate Conception, celebrated annually on December 8, holds immense significance for Catholic communities worldwide, honouring the conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, free from original sin.

Across Malaysia, various churches and chapels marked this occasion with vibrant and spiritually enriching celebrations, bringing together parishioners from diverse backgrounds.

Each parish and chapel, while unique in its approach, shared a common theme of honouring the Blessed Virgin Mary and reflecting on her model of grace, humility, and faith. These vibrant celebrations highlighted the continuing strength and unity of the Catholic community in Malaysia, as they walked together in discipleship with Mary.

Changlun, Kedah

The Church of the Immaculate Conception in Changlun marked the feast with a three-day celebration from December 5 to 7.

The celebration was led by Fr. Francis Xavier Selvarajoo on Day 1, followed by Deacon Rocky Loo on Day 2, who reflected on the theme *Mary, Our Queen of Peace, Lead Us to Christ* and led a Communion service.

The triduum reached its zenith on December 7, with Fr. Surain Durai Raj from College General Major Seminary Penang preaching.

Throughout the triduum, the recitations of the Rosary and the Litany of the Immaculate Conception created an atmosphere of continuous

prayer.

Fr Surain's homily emphasised life's challenges, the Advent journey, and the importance of silence in spiritual growth. He encouraged parishioners to create their own "desert", a space for silence to hear God's voice. His reflections reminded the faithful that repentance, though difficult, brings transformative grace.

The feast concluded with a candlelight procession to the church's grotto, with Fr Surain leading the procession while bearing the Blessed Sacrament in a monstrance, followed by Benediction. The evening ended with a hymn to Mary, encapsulating the Marian focus of the celebration.

The Church of the Immaculate Conception, founded in 1925, stands



Fr Surain Durai Raj incensing the statue of Mother Mary.

as a testament to the enduring faith of Changlun's Catholic community. In recent years, the parish has welcomed an influx of Sabah and Sarawak students, enriching its cultural diversity. Fr Francis, who

also shepherds the parish in Kangar, expressed heartfelt thanks to the parishioners for their dedication in organising the triduum and feast-day celebrations.. **Bernard Anthony**

Penang



Fr Simon Labrooy giving communion to the elderly during Mass.

The Church of the Immaculate Conception in Penang held its parish feast from December 6 to 8, with the theme *Celebrating, Listening, and Walking in Discipleship with Mary*. The three-day celebration focused on different segments of the parish community: youth, seniors, and families. Over 1,000 faithful participated in the spiritually enriching experience.

The celebrations began with a Taizé prayer method Holy Hour, animated by the youth, offering a peaceful escape from daily life.

Fr. Simon Labrooy, the outgoing Rector of College General, celebrated the Mass and shared the story of St Nicholas, urging the congregation to act with love and patience in their encounters with Jesus.

On the second day, the parish prayer group led a Holy Hour and Novena to Our Lady, with Fr Simon encouraging reconciliation and transformation in the faithful's daily lives.

The highlight of the celebration was the launch of *Christmas Aglow 2024*, which included a Christmas tree lighting ceremony. The church grounds were beautifully decorated, creating a festive atmosphere. On the final day, Fr Simon's homily focused on the importance of rituals in shaping spiritual experiences, reminding the congregation of the transformative power of faith and reconciliation. The Mass concluded with Benediction, reaffirming the community's commitment to living as missionary disciples of Christ.. **Nicholas Khor**

Sg Batu, Kedah

Over 2,000 faithful gathered at the Chapel of Immaculate Conception for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. With the theme *Mary - Model of Prayer Life*, the celebration brought pilgrims from across Malaysia, highlighting the chapel's significance. The day began with a multilingual Rosary prayer, followed by Mass celebrated by Fr Surain Durai Raj with Fr Victor Louis concelebrating.

In his homily, Fr Surain explored the meaning of the Immaculate Conception, reflecting on the dogma proclaimed by Pope Pius IX in 1854. He used metaphors such as

The Mirror Room to highlight the contrast between self-importance and genuine spiritual reflection, and *The Full and Empty Bottle* to contrast the quiet fullness of a life in God with the emptiness of worldly pursuits. Fr Surain urged the faithful to reflect on their own lives and embrace the fullness of faith over the emptiness of worldly ambitions.

The celebration culminated with a 25-minute candlelight procession, with the statue of Our Lady of Immaculate Conception, followed by Benediction. The chapel, founded in 1935 and relocated in 1987, is known for reported miracles and continues to draw pilgrims from across the country. **Bernard Anthony**



Pilgrims walking in procession with the statue of Our Lady.

Port Dickson



Fr Edwin Peter and Fr Joseph Stephen CSSR during the Mass.

The Church of the Immaculate Conception in Port Dickson held a vibrant four-day celebration from December 5-8, blending spiritual devotion with community engagement and environmental awareness.

The festivities began with a flag-raising ceremony led by BECCOT leader John Paul and Fr Joseph Stephen, CSSR. Each day featured multilingual Eucharistic Celebrations animated by different zones of the parish.

On the first day, Fr Joseph's homily focused on Mary's humility and service to God. The second day

highlighted Mary's nurturing role in the Church, with a touching video tribute to the late Fr. Jestus Pereira. The day also featured a creative flash mob promoting the "Care for Creation" campaign, with the slogan *Vendam Vendam Single-Use Plastic*.

The third day saw the revival of the Marian procession, a cherished tradition absent since 2018. Five hundred faithful participated in the two-kilometer procession, accompanied by Archbishop Emeritus Murphy Pakiam.

The evening concluded with another flash mob reinforcing the en-

vironmental message.

The final day, December 8, included Rosary and Novena recitations, followed by a multilingual Mass animated by Zone A BECs. The parish priest, Fr Edwin Peter, expressed heartfelt thanks to all BEC zones, ministries, and apostolates for their dedication and hard work.

The four-day celebration not only honoured the Immaculate Conception but also showcased the parish's commitment to spiritual growth, community bonding, and environmental stewardship. **Clare Ong**



A ride with love for the children of RKK

KAJANG: The *Ride with Love* fundraiser, to support the children of Rumah Keluarga Kami (RKK) was recently held on December 7. This home, a sanctuary for abused and abandoned children, provides not only shelter but also love, healing, and hope for those who have endured unimaginable hardships.

The event brought together cyclists of all ages, sponsors, and supporters from all walks of life, united by a common mission: to make a difference in the lives of these vulnerable children.

Many of these children from RKK come

from heartbreaking circumstances. Their stories speak of fear, loss, and brokenness — experiences that no child should ever face. Yet, through the tireless efforts of the caregivers and the generosity of supporters, they are given a second chance.

The *Ride with Love* event was a success, not just in raising funds but also in raising awareness.

Thanks to the generosity of our sponsors, donors, and participants, we have been able to provide vital support to RKK. However, the journey does not end here. The needs of the



Cyclists participating in the Ride with Love to raise funds for the home.

home are ongoing, and the children continue to rely on the kindness of people.

For more information, please con-

tact: 03-38310582 / 012-2278727 or email: rumahkkk@gmail.com or visit www.rkksch.org. Shashi Peters

A bold celebration of faith, community at Seremban parish

Sabrina Smith

SEREMBAN: On December 7, the Church of the Visitation hosted its highly anticipated *Rise Up Carnival*, a full-day event that brought together joy, camaraderie, and a deep sense of purpose. Organised by the Visitation Youth Ministry, the carnival served as both a lively celebration and an important fundraiser, with proceeds dedicated to supporting the church's renovation efforts.

From 9.00am to 5.00pm, the church grounds were transformed into a vibrant hub of activity, attracting over 2,000 attendees from Seremban and beyond. The event was a beautiful reflection of the diversity and unity of the local community, bringing together people of all faiths and backgrounds in support of a shared cause.

The opening ceremony was officiated by YB Tuan Teo Kok Seong, chairman of the

State Industrial and Non-Islamic Affairs Committee (HEBI), whose presence affirmed the inclusive spirit of the event. He was joined by Visitation's parish priest, Fr Xavier Andrew, along with assistant parish priests Fr Kenneth Gopal (OCD) and Fr Philip Tay (OCD). Their leadership set the tone for a day that was not only about fun but also about fostering community, connection, and faith.

The carnival featured a wide variety of vendors, with stalls run by parishioners as well as representatives from other faith communities. This diverse mix offered something for everyone — from delicious local delicacies and refreshing beverages to intricate handicrafts and unique gifts. The marketplace became a celebration of talent and creativity, while also promoting interfaith collaboration and goodwill.

Children and families enjoyed a range of exciting activities, including games, face



Zumba session

painting, and inflatable playgrounds. Meanwhile, adults engaged in raffles and participated in interactive workshops, making the event a truly multi-generational celebration.

One of the standout highlights of the carnival was the performances. Malaysia's beloved singing sensation, Dato' Francissa Peter, captivated the audience with her set of songs. Her support for the church's renovation efforts resonated deeply with the crowd.

This was further amplified by the dynamic performance of Malaysian Indian rapper Sheezay, whose vibrant beats and charismatic stage presence energised the audience.

The success of the carnival was a testament to the dedication and hard work of the Visitation Youth Ministry. From planning and coordination, to execution, the youth team demonstrated exceptional leadership, teamwork, and passion. Their tireless efforts ensured that the event ran smoothly and underscored the pivotal role of young people in fostering positive change within the church

and the wider community.

At its core, the carnival was more than just a fundraiser or a social gathering; it was a movement — a powerful expression of faith, unity, and generosity. The overwhelming response from parishioners, neighbours, and visitors spoke volumes about the strength of the community's bonds and the shared commitment to building a brighter future together. While the funds raised brought the church closer to achieving its renovation goals, the real impact of the event lay in the connections formed and the spirit of solidarity that was cultivated.

As the day ended, the echoes of laughter, music, and heartfelt conversations lingered in the air, leaving a lasting impression on all who attended. The *Rise Up Carnival 2024* will undoubtedly be remembered as a milestone in the life of the Church of the Visitation, a celebration of the enduring power of faith, community, and generosity, and a reminder of the incredible things that can happen when a community rises together.



YB Tuan Teo Kok Seong with the clergy, fund raising chairperson and the youth committee.

Brave Hearts, Bright Holidays a healing journey for widows

PETALING JAYA: Reflecting on the success of last year's inaugural event, the Widow to Widow ministry at the Church of St Francis Xavier made its *Surviving the Holidays* workshop an annual tradition. This year's event, held on November 16 in collaboration with the AOHD's Bereavement Support Group, was themed *Brave Hearts, Bright Holidays*.

Aimed at providing support to both the newly bereaved and those further along in their healing journey, the workshop reminded participants that they had a sisterhood to rely on and offered a chance to rebuild the resilience needed to face another holiday season.

The day began with a moving memorial service, celebrated by parish priest Fr Alvin Ng, SJ. This service honoured the late husbands of the attending widows, with each name lovingly acknowledged in a heartfelt tribute. Fr Alvin's homily offered a poignant metaphor, comparing grief to the process of preparing a dish. He explained that, just



Participants and organisers of the Brave hearts, Bright Holidays workshop.

as pounding ingredients bring out their full flavour, confronting and processing one's emotions over time, allows them to blend — transforming sadness, anger, and love into a balanced harmony, where no single feeling dominates.

After the memorial, participants gathered in a supportive environment to share their personal experiences of grief. They were reassured that there is no "correct" path to healing and that grief is a deeply personal journey. Two facilitators, who had themselves faced

the first Christmas without their husbands, shared their stories. Acknowledging the challenges of those early days, they offered hope and encouragement to the newly bereaved, showing that while healing takes time and effort, it is ultimately within reach.

The presence of several veteran widows added an element of solidarity. These women, who had walked the journey of loss and healing, stood alongside the newly bereaved, demonstrating that no one needs to face this journey alone. Their support and understanding were a source of great comfort for those just beginning their healing process.

For those walking a similar path, the Widow to Widow ministry offers a community of understanding, compassion, and support — where strength and hope can be found as you move forward in your journey of healing. For more information about the Widow to Widow ministry, please contact Caroline Tay, Coordinator, at 012-7018185.

Communication for a Synodal Church in Asia

JAKARTA: The 29th Annual Bishops' Meet of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) was held from November 25–29, at the newly constructed KWI Centre, hosted by the Bishops' Conference of Indonesia (KWI). The gathering brought together 23 participants, including bishops, priests, and laypersons, from 14 member conferences across Asia. The theme, *Communication for a Synodal Church in Asia*, guided the discussions and reflections throughout the week.

The meeting provided an ideal space for prayer, reflection, and dialogue, with presentations from Prof Richardus Eko Indrajit, Cardinal Sebastian Francis, and Fr George Plathottam, SDB. Prof Richardus focused on the human aspects of communication, Cardinal Sebastian explored the Christian dimension rooted in Scripture and the ministry of Jesus, and Fr George delved into the ecclesial dimension, discussing synodality and Pope Francis' ecclesiological vision.

One of the highlights of the event was the Conversation in the Spirit sessions — small group reflections that fostered deep, Spirit-led discussions. These sessions highlighted the importance of attentive listening, inclusivity, and communion, and participants found the method highly effective for building strong



Bishops, priests, and lay leaders engage in discussions on fostering synodal communication during the 29th Annual Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences - Office of Social Communication (FABC-OSC) Bishops' Meet at the Bishops' Conference of Indonesia Centre in Jakarta, Indonesia. (LiCas News/FABC-OSC)

bonds among them. “The participation and bonding among us were strong, which could be attributed to the method's effectiveness,” said Cardinal Sebastian, President of FABC-OSC, underscoring the relevance of such an approach for synodal communication in Asia. Daniel Roy from Malaysia also shared, “Participating in the Bishops' Meet was a truly enriching experience. The sharing from various countries' social communication offices provided valuable insights and strengthened collaboration for a Synodal Church.”

Technology also emerged as a crucial topic in the discussions, with a strong call for its responsible adoption to enhance evangelisation

while maintaining personal connections. The bishops discussed how digital tools could support the mission of a Synodal Church, but emphasised that technology should not replace personal encounters or real presence.

The meeting concluded with a solemn Holy Mass presided over by Archbishop Piero Pioppo, Apostolic Nuncio to Indonesia. In his homily, Archbishop Piero reminded the participants of their mission to reveal God's message through their communication efforts, manifesting the redemptive and salvific mystery of Christ in today's world.

At the close of the gathering, the bishops issued several key recommendations for strengthening com-

munication ministries in the Synodal Church:

1. Listening at All Levels:

The bishops recommended prioritising “listening with the ears of the heart,” aligning with Pope Francis' call for openness and inclusion in pastoral leadership. Attentive listening is vital for building a Synodal Church.

2. Investment in Digital Technology:

The participants emphasised the need to invest in communication infrastructure to keep up with the rapid technological advancements in digital communication. This investment is necessary to avoid falling behind in the Church's mission.

3. Training and Skill Development: The bishops stressed the importance of training Church personnel — including priests, seminarians, and youth — in using digital platforms effectively and creatively for pastoral ministry.

4. Collaboration and Networking: There was a call for more frequent and high-quality interactions among the Offices of Social Communication across episcopal conferences. Networking and collaboration are seen as essential for strengthening the Church's communication ministry in Asia.

5. Balancing Digital Innovation with Personal Connections:

While embracing digital innovation, the bishops advocated for a balance, emphasising the importance of personal encounters. Communication must reflect the spirit of the Gospel, with a focus on listening to marginalised voices and fostering genuine human connections.

6. A Spirit-Led Mission:

The gathering affirmed the Holy Spirit's essential role in guiding communication efforts. The Spirit enables the Church to transcend traditional barriers and overcome resistance to change. Communication ministries are called to become instruments of peace, hope, and communion.

Source: FABC

In Aleppo, Church leaders and rebels pledge to maintain religious normalcy

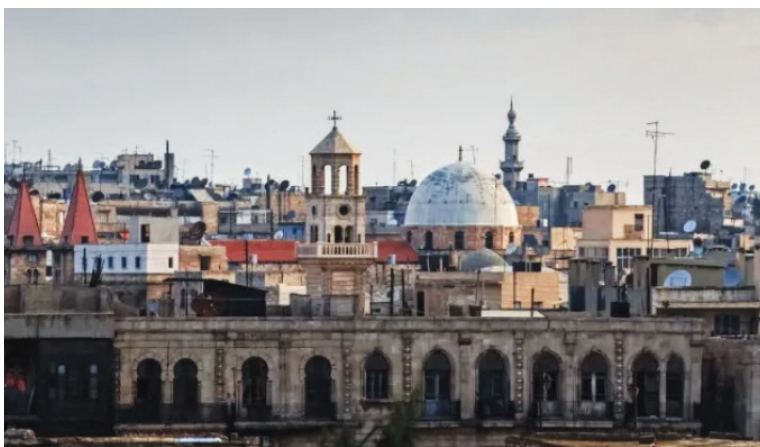
ALEPPO, Syria: On December 9, a historic meeting took place in Aleppo, marking a significant step toward dialogue and trust-building in the war-torn city.

For the first time since the fall of Damascus and the departure of President Bashar al-Assad, leaders of all Christian Churches and ecclesial communities in Aleppo held a second meeting with representatives of the armed groups now controlling the city.

The gathering, described by Jesuit Antoine Audo, Chaldean Bishop of Aleppo, as “very positive,” took place at the Franciscan church and convent, which also houses the Apostolic Vicariate for Catholics of the Latin Rite.

The meeting, attended by bishops, priests, and religious leaders, was a sign of hope as it focused on building trust amidst the dire conditions in Aleppo, which continues to suffer from power shortages, soaring prices, and widespread food insecurity.

Despite these challenges, Bishop Audo noted that the Islamist groups now in control seem committed to maintaining normalcy for the Christian community. “They are trying to build trust by respecting our traditions and our prayers,” he said. He also emphasised the



The historic city of Aleppo, Syria. (Shutterstock/Stepanov Ilya)

unique historical relationship between Arab Christians and Muslims, recalling how Christians have contributed to the region's history alongside Muslim Arabs.

During the summit, the armed groups assured Christian leaders that ecclesiastical schools, which offer mixed-gender classes, would continue to operate as usual. They also confirmed that the longstanding military service would end, and public officials were encouraged to return to their duties. Bishop Audo suggested that these developments were part of a broader international agreement, mentioning the roles of Turkey, the United States, Russia, and Iran in the decision-making

process. He explained that Russia had asked Assad to leave the country, which helped avoid further bloodshed.

While Bishop Audo welcomed the relative calm, he acknowledged the difficulties Aleppo faces in recovering from years of conflict. Parishes have stepped in to provide meals for those in need, and modest preparations are underway for Christmas. “Perhaps there will be no parades and spectacular moments,” said Bishop Audo. “But anyone who wants to visit us in our churches and bishoprics during the holidays is more than welcome.”

Source: Fides

Bishops collaborate to update Lectionary

SYDNEY: The bishops' conferences of Australia, Ireland and New Zealand are pooling their expertise and resources in a joint Lectionary project.

For more than 50 years, parishes and communities have listened to the Scripture readings proclaimed in church from the same translations given in the Lectionary for Mass.

Many of these books are now in a poor state and in need of replacing.

The bishops have recognised that this is an opportunity for a new edition of the Lectionary, taking advantage of a revised translation of the readings, which is both accessible and faithful to the evolving nuances of the English language and contemporary biblical scholarship.

After consultation with experts in both Scripture and liturgy, and also among the faithful, the Revised New Jerusalem Bible was chosen as the text for the Lectionary.

This translation recognises the need for the text to be proclaimed in the liturgy, to be faithful to the original biblical texts and it is sensitive to inclusivity.

The editorial leadership for the project will be provided by Martin Foster, an experienced editor who previously oversaw the prepara-



The Revised New Jerusalem Bible has been chosen for the new Lectionary (Bigstock)

tion of the Lectionary for England and Wales.

Foster will work with experts from all three conferences to ensure the quality and liturgical appropriateness of the final text.

The first draft texts, the Sundays of Advent and Christmas, will be sent to bishops for review early in 2025, with the rest of the Lectionary following over the next couple of years.

This project is a major collaboration and it is hoped that it will enrich the celebration of the Eucharist in parishes and communities into the future across Ireland, Australia and New Zealand. *Cathnews*



Pope meets with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas

VATICAN: Pope Francis held a 30-minute long meeting December 12 with Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine.

Speaking to *Vatican Media's* Roberto Cetera immediately afterwards, President Abbas described the meeting as "fruitful", adding that "every time I meet the Pope, it's like meeting an old friend".

It was the pair's first face-to-face meeting in three years.

"I thanked the Holy Father for his constant words about peace in the Middle East," President Abbas said, "and for the solidarity he always expresses with the Palestinian civilians who are victims of the war in Gaza."

"I asked him to continue to promote the recognition of the State of Palestine in the international community," Abbas added. "If peace is to be achieved, there is no alternative to the two-state solution."

A statement from the Holy See Press Office noted that, after his meeting with the Pope, President Abbas met with the Holy See's Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, and the Holy See's Secretary for Relations with States, Archbishop Paul Gallagher.

The statement said that the "very serious humanitarian situation in Gaza" was discussed at the meetings, as was the hope for "a ceasefire and the release of all hostages as soon as possible".

Another topic was "the Catholic Church's important contribution to Palestinian society", including its current humanitarian efforts

in Gaza.

The Holy See Press Office statement also noted that the discussions had covered the necessity of implementing a two-state solution, not with violence but via "diplomacy and dialogue", and the importance of a special status for Jerusalem, in order that it might be a "place of friendship for the three great monotheistic religions".

Finally, the Catholic Church's upcoming 2025 Holy Year was discussed, and hope was expressed that the Jubilee Year might lead to "the return of pilgrims to the Holy Land".

At the end of the Pope's meeting with

President Abbas, the pair exchanged gifts.

Pope Francis gave the Palestinian President several presents, including his message for the World Day of Peace and a bas-relief with the words "Peace is a fragile flower".

President Abbas gave the Pope several gifts in return, including a painting depicting him with the Pope and one depicting the Pope during his visit to Bethlehem in 2014.

He also presented the Pope with an icon of Saint Porphyrius, the patron saint of Gaza – a gift from Patriarch Theophilus, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem. **Joseph Tulloch, CNA**



Pope Francis with Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas. (Vatican Media)

Catholic Church to European Union: Fight against anti-Christian hate

BRUSSELS: The Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) has called on the European Union (EU) to appoint a coordinator for the fight against anti-Christian hatred in the same way it already employs coordinators to combat hate directed against Jews and Muslims.

"The time is mature for the appointment of an EU coordinator on combating anti-Christian hatred in Europe," said Alessandro Calcagno *pic*, an adviser to the bishops on fundamental rights, during his speech at the European Prayer Breakfast held at the European Parliament recently.

"It is not a question of victimism but equal access to tools of protection," Calcagno said.

COMECE is the body that officially repre-

sents the Catholic Church to the EU.

Calcagno explained that the right to freedom of religion, as well as provisions to fight against discrimination on the grounds of religion, should not be seen only through the prism of protecting faith communities that are religious minorities.

"It is necessary to break the 'majorities vs. minorities' dynamic that underpins the approach of certain actors and policymakers," Calcagno stated.

Appointing a coordinator is one of the priorities that Calcagno, on behalf of the European bishops, outlined in relation to the exercise of religious freedom in the EU, among which is "need to ensure equal protection to all dimensions of this core fundamental right, including the institutional one," he highlighted.

"Too often, freedom of religion is depicted as a 'problematic' right, and its collective dimension, compared with its individual dimension, is neglected," the adviser said.

The need to protect places of worship and data of a religious nature as well as better integrate the defence of religious freedom into EU policies was also addressed during the event.

The European Prayer Breakfast, attended by some 450 participants from across the continent and beyond, was held in conjunction with a panel focused on current trends of rising religious intolerance in Europe. **Nicolás de Cárdenas/CNA/Aci Prensa**



The Pope with some participants of the conference. (Vatican Media)

VATICAN: Theology should serve as a guiding companion for those seeking meaning and truth, particularly during life's pivotal moments, Pope Francis said December, calling on theologians and theology faculties to expand their outreach.

Speaking to participants in a conference on the future of theology organised by the Dicastery for Culture and Education, the Pope asked that the discipline be made "accessible to all", particularly those engaging with theological questions during middle age.

"Middle age is a special time in life," when, upon achieving greater stability in one's work and personal life, "failures are painfully felt and new questions arise as youthful dreams fade," he said.

In response to such situations people "can feel abandoned or even at an impasse – a

mid-life crisis – and sense a need to renew their quest, however tentatively, perhaps even with a helping hand," he said. "Theology can be that guide on the journey."

Pope Francis asked that theology programmes make adjustments to accommodate people interested in advancing their studies in middle age.

"Please, if any of these people knock at the door of theology, of the schools of theology, may they find it open," he asked the scholars.

"Make sure that these women and men find in theology an open house, a place where they can resume their journey, a place where they can seek, find and seek again."

The Future of Theology: Legacy and Envisioning two-day international congress, held at the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome, concluded on Dec 10.

Foundation gives RM3.5 million worth of scholarship

WASHINGTON: The Papal Foundation, a US-based organisation that provides funding for Catholic projects around the world, recently announced that it has awarded \$800,000 (RM3.54 million) to recipients of its scholarship fund.

The awards were distributed across 42 countries and helped enable 110 priests, brothers, sisters, and laypeople to pursue their studies at 14 pontifical universities in Rome as participants in the foundation's St John Paul II Scholarship Programme.

"Since its founding, the programme has provided nearly \$14 million (RM62 million) in scholarships to more than 1,700 individuals, known as Saeman Scholars, to advance their education and prepare them to return home and serve in leadership positions in their own countries," the foundation stated in a recent press release.

Eustace Mita, president of the Papal Foundation's board of trustees, in the release invoked the foundation's establishment at the request of Pope John Paul II.

"We are inspired by, and committed to, St John Paul II's vision to prepare Catholic leaders and educators for service," she said. "These scholarships help train those called to lead in developing nations, where resources for ongoing leadership formation are limited."

The Papal Foundation is "the only charitable organisation in the United States that is exclusively dedicated to fulfilling the requests of the Holy Father for the needs of the Church" and has dedicated more than \$225 million (RM998 million) to causes designated by popes since its inception.

The foundation receives its funding from personal money donated by its Stewards of St Peter, while the Holy Father designates the use of funds based on recommendations from his nuncios or ambassadors around the world.

In the past year alone, the foundation has successfully supported 118 projects in over 60 countries. Among the beneficiaries include efforts at "providing for basic needs such as access to clean water," "constructing schools and renovating classrooms," and "translating Church teachings for evangelisation."

Madalaine Elhabbal CNA

Make theology accessible to all

The programme included sessions addressing themes such as the geographical and cultural diversity of theology; the integration of non-theological perspectives such as music, literature and science; and theology's role within society, the Church and the world.

Participants include theologians, academics and artists from various global contexts, with contributions highlighting interdisciplinary approaches and local theological traditions.

Reflecting on the state of theology, the Pope stressed the need to expand the role of women in academic theology: "There are things that only women understand, and the theology needs their contribution."

"An all-male theology is an incomplete theology," he said. "We still have a long way to go in this direction." **CathNews**

New cardinals from 17 nations called to build church unity

Pope Francis created 21 new cardinals in St Peter's Basilica December 7, urging them to resist the "seduction of power" and instead follow "the path of Jesus."

"In spiritual life as in pastoral life, we risk focusing on what is incidental and forgetting what is essential," the pope cautioned. "Too often, secondary things replace what is necessary, external appearances overshadow what truly counts."

"We should constantly be returning to the centre, to what is basic, and divest ourselves of all that is superfluous, in order to clothe ourselves in Christ."

The Pope highlighted that the term "cardinal" symbolises a "hinge," emphasising their vital role in holding the Church together.

The new cardinals include Archbishop

Frank Leo of Toronto; Archbishop Dominique Joseph Mathieu of Tehran-Isfahan, Iran; and Archbishop Tarcisio Isao Kikuchi of Tokyo, reflecting Pope Francis' emphasis on the Church's global mission.

Ten of the new cardinals belong to religious orders, including Dominicans, Franciscans, and the Society of the Divine Word — a notable proportion from consecrated life.

Cardinals assigned titular churches in Rome

As tradition dictates, each new cardinal received a titular church in Rome, symbolising their connection to the Diocese of Rome and the pope's pastoral ministry.

Archbishop Rolandas Makrickas of Lithuania was assigned the deaconry of

Sant'Eustachio, a historically significant minor basilica near the Pantheon in Rome's historic center, while Dominican Fr Timothy Radcliffe was given the deaconry of SS. Nomi di Gesù e Maria in via Lata, located on the Via del Corso, part of one of Rome's most fashionable districts. With these appointments, the College of Cardinals now includes 140 members eligible to vote in a future conclave. Of these, 110 — or 79 per cent — were appointed by Pope Francis.

Synodality and fraternity

Cardinal Angelo Acerbi, speaking on behalf of the new cardinals, reflected on the Synod on Synodality and Pope Francis' latest encyclical, *Dilexit Nos*.

"We are united today by profound grati-

tude toward the supreme pontiff and by a sincere desire to serve in ecclesial unity," he said.

The 99-year-old cardinal described the Pope's recent encyclical — which explores the human and divine love of the Sacred Heart of Christ — as an inspiration for the pastoral missions entrusted to the new cardinals.

On Sunday, the new cardinals concelebrated Mass with Pope Francis in St Peter's Basilica for the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, marking their first liturgical act as members of the College of Cardinals.

The liturgy emphasised Mary's purity and dedication, reflecting the themes of humility and service woven throughout the consistory. CNA

New cardinals, an ageing Pope and the upcoming conclave

Pope Francis turned 88 on December 17. Depending on how one keeps score, that makes him something like the fifth or sixth oldest man ever to occupy the Chair of Peter.

According to legend, Pope St Agatho holds the all-time record. A Benedictine hermit from Sicily, he was supposedly 104 years old (some say perhaps even 107) when he died in the late 7th century as Bishop of Rome. Nonetheless, Agatho, who was called the Wonderworker, had a short reign. He did not even become a cardinal until he was 99 years old. And he was already 101 when elected pope.

More than fourteen centuries later, another 99-year-old finally became a cardinal of the Holy Roman Church. He's Archbishop Angelo Acerbi, a retired papal nuncio who was among 21 men who received the red hat from Francis during a Dec 7 consistory in St Peter's Basilica.

No one seriously expects that the same fate awaits Acerbi as that of the ancient St Agatho, though stranger things have happened — some would say even in this current pontificate!

But more than doing strange things, Francis has deliberately been disruptive, putting forth new challenges and instituting reforms of various magnitude at many different levels throughout the Church.

He's done this to rouse a tired institution that is helplessly watching its centre of gravity dramatically shift away from Europe towards Africa and Asia. He's done this to shake the Church from its complacency and self-preservation, its tendency to wallow in self-absorption.

This year's Advent consistory, the tenth of the Francis pontificate, is the Jesuit Pope's latest "shock to the system." Among the 20 new cardinals who are under the age of 80, and thus still able to participate in a conclave, are men with a wide variety of talents and experience.

Seventeen are still under the age of 70, 13 of them are 65 or younger, and seven have not yet reached their 60th birthday. These younger members — like Frank Leo, 53, the archbishop of Toronto; Baldassare Reina, 54, vicar of Rome; and Roberto Repole, 57, archbishop of Turin — will likely become increasingly influential in the Church's life over the coming decades.

The Pope certainly expects them to be major actors in ensuring that his ambitious project of synodality takes root throughout the Church. Francis has also chosen impressive, more senior men to be members of the College of

Cardinals.

Keep an eye, especially, on two Divine Word Missionaries. The first is Tarcisio Kikuchi, 66, who is archbishop of Tokyo and president of Caritas Internationalis. The second



is Ladislav (László) Németh, 68, a polyglot Hungarian who is archbishop of Belgrade (Serbia).

But perhaps the most interesting in this otherwise "younger" group is 79-year-old Timothy Radcliffe, the English Dominican and former head of the worldwide Order of Preachers. A Scripture scholar and popular author and speaker, he was the chief spiritual director and preacher at the past two Synod assemblies.

Those gatherings focused on ways to make synodality an essential component of the Church's life, witness and decision-making. By making Radcliffe a cardinal, the Jesuit Pope has ensured that the Dominican theologian's voice will be heard during (or at least in the closed-door meeting before) the next conclave to elect his successor as Bishop of Rome.

And when might that happen? No one — except, perhaps, Francis himself — can say for sure. The first-ever pope to come from the Society of Jesus and the New World is still extremely busy.

But it cannot be denied that he is increasingly showing signs of slowing down. He has good days and, more and more, days that are not so good. He is sometimes short of breath



and his voice is audibly weaker, which is only normal.

Still, he is determined to soldier on, some say stubbornly so. Before he marked his 88th birthday, he not held the cardinal-making consistory, but he also made a day trip to the neighbouring French island of Corsica (roughly a one-hour flight from Rome).

The fact that he decided to go there instead of to Paris for the inauguration of the newly restored Notre Dame Cathedral has angered many in France and dismayed some more classical-minded Catholics from around the world.

Their discontent over the "papal snub," as many have called it, demonstrates that they still have failed to understand what Francis holds as top priority — people (especially those on the existential and spiritual margins), rather than church buildings and artefacts (especially those ornate ones bankrolled for cultural or political reasons).

After blowing out the 88 candles on his birthday cake, the Argentine Pope will officially open the Church's latest Holy Year on Christmas Eve at the Vatican. A few months later — on March 13, specifically — he will mark the 12th anniversary of his election as Bishop of Rome.

That number is especially significant for the Jesuits, whose superiors (with the exception of the Father General in Rome) usually serve terms of six years. Thus, it will be the equivalent of two such terms for Francis, who, in this span of time, has never returned to his "former diocese" (as he likes to call it) in Buenos Aires or to his native Argentina.

For the last several years, he's occasionally mentioned that he'd like to visit his South American homeland again, "maybe next year." But "next year" has never come. Perhaps, in the coming months? There has been

no serious talk of such a visit, but the Pope of surprises could easily decide to make one at the drop of a hat.

One trip abroad seems all but certain — a visit to Turkey to celebrate with the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. Patriarch Bartholomew has said that is likely to take place in May. And then after that?

Again, the question arises: could Francis retire? If he were to do so, it would make papal resignations normal, rather than something that occurs once every six or eight centuries. It would also further demythologise the Roman papacy and give the cardinals greater confidence to choose a younger man for pope with the understanding that he would not cling to office until death.

But if Francis dies before relinquishing the papacy, Benedict XVI's resignation in 2013 will remain an exception rather than the "institution" that Francis himself has said it should be seen as.

It's interesting to note that the last Roman Pontiff to resign voluntarily was not Celestine V in 1294, but Gregory XII in 1415. During a time of rival popes, he stepped down in order to end the Western Schism. Next July 4 marks the 610th anniversary of Gregory's resignation. Incidentally, he was 88 years old. **Robert Carl Mickens, ucanews.com**

Robert Mickens has been a "Roman observer" of the papacy, Vatican and the Catholic Church. Since 1986, he has lived in Rome, where he studied theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University before working 11 years at 'Vatican Radio'. He was also the correspondent for 'The Tablet' of London and editor-in-chief of 'La Croix International'. Mickens is currently on sabbatical.



Pope Francis prays at the consistory for the creation of 21 new cardinals at St Peter's Basilica, Vatican, December 7, 2024. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)



My wish list if I were to have Dementia

Last night, I watched the movie *Out Of My Mind* which touched me so immensely that it made me sob. I felt a sharp pain deep in my being, the pain for Melody, for her parents, and for the people around her who simply were unable to see her and acknowledge her as a person. The movie is about the life of a girl named Melody Brooks. Melody has cerebral palsy, a condition that makes simple things like eating, moving and even talking extremely difficult. Melody has a voice but no one can hear it. She is curious to learn, interested in her world, pining for connections with girls (and boys) her age, and has so much to say which makes it painfully frustrating for her because she is unable to communicate. It is as though she does not exist and her feelings and emotions are completely disregarded.

However, she is blessed to have a family that fiercely supports her and believes in her ability. The movie ends with her brilliantly profound message telling us that if we feel uncomfortable looking at her disability and feel disgusted because she looks different, that is OUR problem, not hers. She advised that we had better deal with it. I am tearing up as I type this; it resonates with my work.

People living with dementia face the same treatments as Melody daily. Yesterday I sat with our member (let's call her Mary) living with a diagnosis of dementia. Mary has an MMSE score (a test used for scoring dementia) of 14. Mary has minimal vocabulary and because of this, all her friends and relatives deserted her. I saw her waving at the dark clouds and making noises that we would label as nonsensical.

So, I went and sat beside her, and joined her staring at the clouds while she muttered on. We connected with our eyes. She began to hum a familiar Hokkien song and I joined her. Her joy was contagious because, in no time, I felt the simple joy in my heart. I felt honoured to share that moment with her, to play a part in her unhurried dance in her world. Watching her I did not see her as the victim of a debilitating disease but, rather, as an inspired messenger creating moments of joy. She was so absorbed in the moment – full of unfettered pure playfulness. When was the last time since I'd stopped to celebrate a moment



Dancing with Dementia

DR CECILIA CHAN

so exuberantly? When was the last time I was mindfully aware of the beautiful gifts I am surrounded with? I am glad that I joined in and hummed and danced with her... This was one of the most intense and delightful connections I had ever had. Deeply touched, I thanked her for the wisdom she had offered me – reminding me in my crazy, hectic life, to remember to savour the precious gift of each moment. And I realised that...like the movie if I succumbed to my fear I would

have missed this amazing gift entirely.

Joanne Koenig Coste who wrote *Learning To Speak Alzheimer's*, puts the case succinctly as follows: "It isn't Alzheimer's that takes away a person's dignity, it's other people's reactions that do it." Having dementia then becomes a matter of how a person is perceived as a citizen.

What may be almost as difficult as living with dementia is living within the negative impressions our society has created. We tend to fixate on what people with dementia have lost, rather than the abilities they still have. Their families and friends often feel ashamed by the condition, as if it's something to hide. It is so tempting to want to tuck them away so that their deficiencies won't disturb and annoy anyone.

I was at a dinner recently, and someone

casually asked me about my profession and when I explained, he simply shrugged and said, "Why should you bother? Why should anyone bother?" That statement hit me hard. Why indeed should we be bothered about people living with dementia? Is every life precious or only those we think are fit to be qualified as a human being? What if they are different from us?

The world as it is in 2024 does not offer a cure for dementia, so we must focus on care. Dementia does not discriminate; it can happen to us. If it were to happen to us, what do we want? I know for sure that if I were to have dementia, I would want my life to be meaningful. I would want to connect with my world, which would include other human beings. I would want to laugh, to have fun, and to connect with others, however fleeting those emotions will be. I would want to know that there are people out there who would support me and allow me to enjoy my life to the end.

What would you want if YOU were diagnosed with dementia?

"The quality of a society, I mean of a civilisation, is also judged by how it treats elderly people and by the place it gives them in community life."

Pope Francis

Dr Cecilia Chan is a Gerontologist and Dementia Advocate and Activist. She can be contacted via WhatsApp (013-4384388).

We begin the Christmas journey with Mary who, in response to Caesar's call for a census to be taken – each one to be registered in the home country, leaves Nazareth for Bethlehem. Mary is with Child. She has no time, no priority for anything else except who she is carrying for the journey ahead and she is focused on her destination. Who or what are you carrying in your life today? The trivialities of this world will all be claimed back in decay. What useless hurts or grievances are still in your memory? You allow them to harden your heart. Is it worth it?

Quietly, Joseph walks by her side, aware of his responsibility, not heavy because she is his wife and the Child she is carrying is special as it was told to him in a dream. Marriage and parenthood are God's gifts. What is Joseph telling you? Work as a provider to put food on the table, the worry and anxiety

The Christmas journey

in the place of work, the never-ending demands on you even if you are the CEO, which many of you are not, can weaken your resolve to be faithful and loving. If you forget who your partner is, remember who the Queen of Heaven and her child are, your Saviour. Join Joseph at the carpenter's workshop to change your drudgery into a labour of love.

The donkey plods along the dusty bumpy country road, mindlessly accepting his stereotype epithet. An image of stupidity. If you subscribe to that, you have a problem. His value is not determined by you but by his inner awareness and connection to the 'burden' on his back. You work and work. You stretch and strain, day after day, week after week etc etc. Why? The people you

carry in your life, for whom you live, care for and work need you to transport them to their next level of growth, physical, social and spiritual. Give thanks for all the people who carried you over the bumpy paths in your life.

Twinkle twinkle little star! In the darkness of night. Social media feeds our greed or lust for bad news - the more violent, the more salacious, the better. Caught in this web, you can choose to shine even if it is only a small ray. Walk away from gossip, throw in a kind word for the one who is being maligned, say a silent prayer when you hear a curse word, avoid harmful websites, control your handphone and computer. The Eucharist, Holy Communion and daily prayer will keep you shining in the gloom of negativity.

You live in a comfortable home furnished with what would be the height of luxury compared to a humble stable, a refugee centre, a detention camp. Of course, you worked hard for it. You were blessed with health, education, opportunities all the way. Was there a donkey who carried you? A star (role model, mentor) who lighted your way? Do the people and the contents of the stable challenge your discipleship? Any trophy won is paid for by someone's loss. What is the price of our redemption? Where have you risked something to gain something for another person. Are you a taker or a giver? Mother Teresa's words "give till it hurts or don't give at all." We were given the only Son!

The little lamb in the stable is young, innocent, a potential big sheep that will

command big money with its valuable fleece (can be shorn again and again!) and much sought-after mutton. Many of his kind were slaughtered in the past and many will continue to be slaughtered. By whom? His owners and / or those with power. Perhaps you share his fate at different times in your life. Have you power or control in the stable of your environment? Who is the little lamb? You decide whether he or she will be your redemption or your damnation (if you slaughter him / her for sordid gain). Decide to-day.

The roof of the stable shrieks to a world that is increasingly exclusive. Gates and doors to power, wealth, resources, opportunities, growth, keep the minority inside, safe and sound, immune to hardship and suffering – an earthly 'heaven'. Cries for inclusivity outside these golden gates, from Church and missionary disciples, are murmurs falling on ears hardened by excessive indulgence. Which side of the gates are you on? The Shepherd's staff draws you to Him. Why resist?

A baby comes into the world with clenched fists and loud cries, responding to a smack on his bottom to initiate a rush of life-giving oxygen to his lungs. A welcome reception to humanity. Join Mary and Joseph gazing at Baby Jesus, with hands not clenched but extended to receive, one little foot crossed over the other, eyes limpid with emotion, communicating enough love and compassion to save and redeem every Child of God in every place and time. Will you allow Him to embrace you and will you embrace Him in everyone you meet along life's highway? Sr Anne Wong IJS



Hospital Fatimah celebrates 50 glorious years

IPPOH: On December 7, 2024, Hospital Fatimah marked its 50th Golden Jubilee with a Gala Dinner, celebrating five decades of exceptional healthcare and community service. The event brought together distinguished guests and dignitaries, including Cardinal Sebastian Francis, who delivered the welcoming address. It was a momentous occasion to honour the hospital's enduring commitment to compassionate care, a legacy built on its founding principles of integrity, compassion, and service.

The journey of Hospital Fatimah began in 1953 when the Brothers of Mercy, also known as the German Doctors, arrived in the Kinta Valley with the mission of providing healthcare to the local community. This noble endeavour culminated in the official opening of Hospital Fatimah on December 7, 1974, by the late Sultan of Perak, DYMM Sultan Idris Shah.

Today, the hospital stands as a beacon of hope and healing, continuously upholding these values in its service to the people of Ipoh, Perak, and beyond.

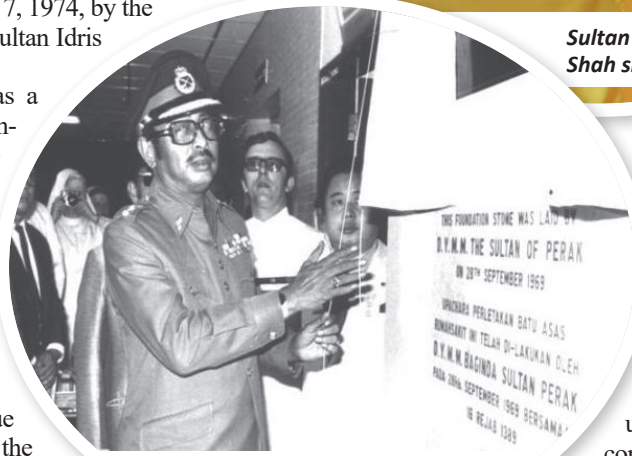
Cardinal Sebastian shared that they had the gracious presence of HRH Sultan Nazrin Shah and HRH Raja Permaisuri Tuanku Zara Salim of Perak at the 50th Golden Jubilee Launch and Plaque Signing Ceremony earlier in the day.

In his address, Cardinal Sebastian reflected on the hospital's legacy and the significant role of the Brothers of Mercy, whose motherhouse is in Trier, Germany, along with the Franciscan Sisters from Salzkotten, Germany, and the Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood. He expressed heartfelt gratitude for their unwavering dedication to healthcare. He highlighted the hospital's guiding principles: Strength in Purpose, Gentle in Action, which have been the foundation of its success.

"As we celebrate this golden milestone, we also honour



Sultan Perak, Sultan Nazrin Muizzuddin Shah signing a commemorative plaque.



His Royal Highness The Late Sultan of Perak, DYMM Sultan Idris Shah officially opening the hospital on December 7, 1974.

the values that have guided us through the years," Cardinal Sebastian shared. "Compassion, integrity, and a deep sense of service have been at the heart of everything we do. These values have not only defined our past but also light the path to our future." He added that Hospital Fatimah has faithfully upheld the mission words of the congregation founder, The Blessed Peter Friedhofen: "To care for the sick as well as possible in every aspect."

As part of the celebration, the cardinal requested the band to perform *Edelweiss*, a song symbolic of true love and sacrifice, in tribute to the Brothers of Mercy. The rare Edelweiss flower, which grows in the Alps, was a fitting tribute to the Brothers' decades of dedication and selfless service.

The evening took an emotional turn when Fr Michael Cheah, Chairman of the Board of Directors, announced a generous bonus for the hospital's staff. In recognition of their hard work and dedication, the

staff of Hospital Fatimah would receive a bonus of 2 ½ months' salary, with a minimum bonus of RM5,000.

Bro Peter Berg, representing Brother Benedikt Molitor, the Superior General of the Brothers of Mercy, also took the stage to acknowledge the significant contributions of the religious order. He reflected on the 20-year journey of fundraising and planning that led to the establishment of Hospital Fatimah, and expressed gratitude for the tireless work of doctors, nurses, and staff in providing exemplary care.

Cardinal Sebastian concluded the evening by thanking everyone who has supported the hospital's mission, emphasising that this success was only possible through the collective effort of all those involved. "This achievement would not have been possible without the unwavering support of our Brothers of Mercy, FMDM Sisters, Board of Directors, clergy, consultants, doctors, nurses, staff, and friends of Hospital Fatimah," he said. "We also extend our gratitude to the people of Ipoh, Perak, and beyond for their contributions. Your belief in our vision and continued support have been invaluable, and we look forward to continuing this journey together. The Legacy Continues."

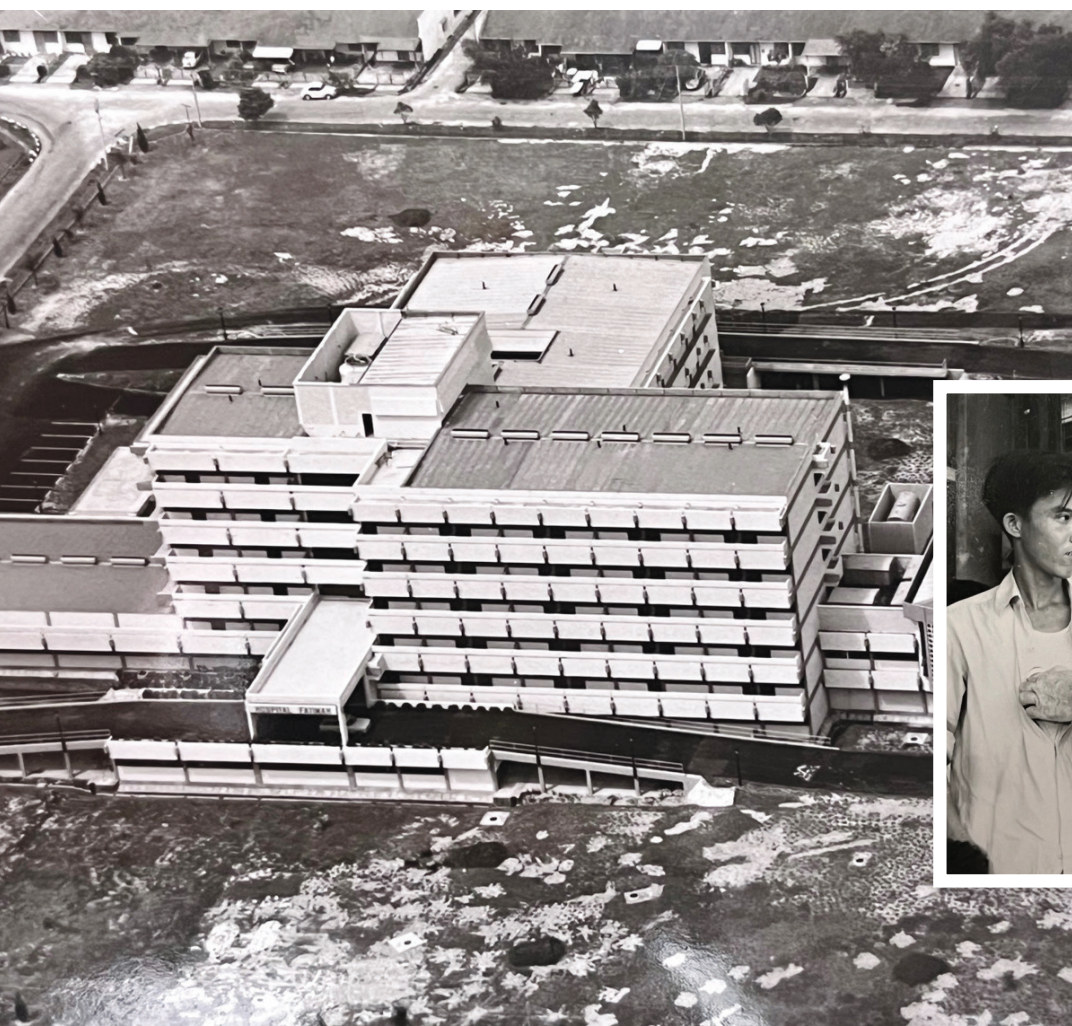
The Gala Dinner was attended by distinguished members of the Board of Directors, Perak State Health EXCO YB Sivanesan Achalingam, healthcare professionals, and friends of the hospital.

Hospital Fatimah has grown over the past 50 years, expanding the range of medical treatments and care offered, including pastoral care to address the holistic well-being of patients. The hospital has maintained ISO certification from 1999 to 2022 and MSQH Certification Awards from 2006 to 2028, reflecting the high quality, commitment, and professionalism of all staff.

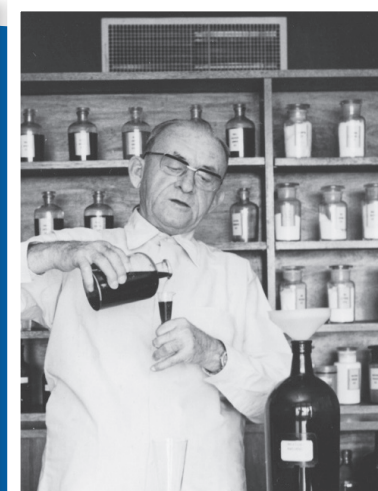
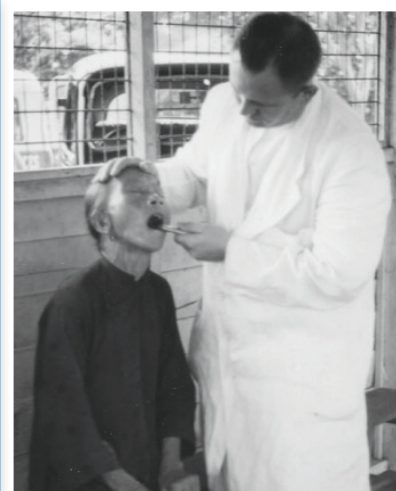
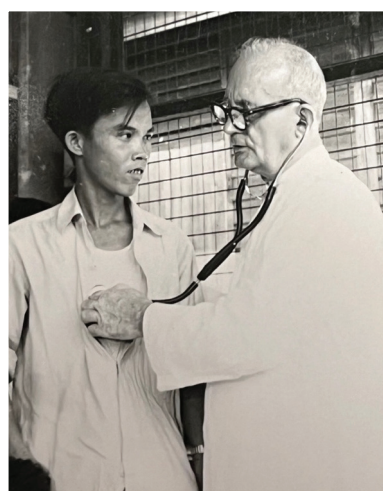
As the hospital embarks on the next chapter of its journey, it remains committed to serving the community with the same values that have defined it for five decades. The 50th Golden Jubilee celebration not only reflects on the hospital's past achievements but also looks forward to a future of continued growth and service to the people of Ipoh and beyond. With gratitude to Almighty God, Hospital Fatimah looks forward to many more years of making a difference in the lives of its patients and the community.



Hospital Fatimah in 2024.



(Malaysia Gazette/Aniq Nabilafiq)



Brothers of Mercy at work..

Photos courtesy of Hospital Fatimah

Silent Night, all is calm? But a genocide is taking place now

When I was mulling over what to write this time, La Salle Bro Anthony Rogers texted to suggest I write about *Genocide at Christmas: Walking with the Palestinian Jesus into the 21st Century* in the context of Jesus' prayer for "Your Kingdom Come".

Really, how do we celebrate the birth of Jesus with joy and good tidings when a genocide is taking place in the Holy Land? Many of the Christmas celebrations in church and outside are taking place without even a mention of the massacres not far from Bethlehem.

This hamlet, in occupied Palestinian territory today, where Jesus was believed to have been born, is overshadowed by an illegal "security wall" built by the Zionist regime.

If Jesus was born today, the wise men from afar would have had to cross security checkpoints to reach Bethlehem.

Just over 70km southwest of Bethlehem, bombs are raining down on a population of two million in Gaza. Tens of thousands have been killed, many others displaced. There is no inn, no safe haven for them to take refuge on Christmas Eve.

No one knows for sure how many victims lie buried under the rubble of flattened buildings. The actual death toll could perhaps be closer to 200,000, many of them women and children.

This is a modern-day Massacre of the Innocents. It is reminiscent of the Gospel account of King Herod's killing of the firstborn when he heard about the prophecy of the coming of the Messiah.

It is difficult to find historical evidence



Sunday Observer

ANIL NETTO

of that massacre. But we do know that Herod ordered the execution of potential rivals, including his own son. Suffering from paranoid personality disorder, his remorse over the killing of his wife Mariamme could have triggered his own psychotic illness, on top of other illnesses like Fournier's gangrene.

This is the same Herod that, around 20BC, decided to expand the Temple of Jerusalem, covering an area double its original size. This

architectural marvel was built on the back of heavy taxes and hard labour at a time when Mary, the mother of Jesus, was growing up. Would God really have been pleased with Herod for building this magnificent edifice?

Today, God's Word is being used by Zionists (whether Christians or otherwise) to justify the killing of ordinary people. In reality, the Zionists in the early 20th Century were mainly secular. Many orthodox Jews opposed Zionists' manipulation of Jewish theology to justify their worldly goals.

There is nothing new about this. The history of "Christian civilisation" is littered with wars and savagery in the name of religion.

A dear Pakistani Muslim friend, a former hostel mate of mine during my student days, sent me a video clip which suggested that the "Christian civilisation" is responsible for most of the deaths from genocides and wars fought over the last two millenniums.

He said he genuinely wanted to know what I thought and was "not trying to insult any religion".

I texted him back: Actually, those who engage in war and violence are motivated

more by greed and power than by love of God (no matter what religion). People who love God will not harm or kill anyone.

This was something my Muslim friend agreed to wholeheartedly.

In fact, leaders of "Christian civilisation" often made use of the trappings of Christianity to engage in wars and genocide with "the Bible in one hand and a conqueror's sword in the other".

Exactly 110 years ago, a Christmas Miracle took place in the week leading up to Christmas, 1914. German, British and French soldiers ceased hostilities and crossed their trenches and exchanged souvenirs, gifts and Christmas wishes. Some even took part in a football game.

This reminds me of a quote by US President Herbert Hoover who said in 1944: "Older men declare war. But it is youth that must fight and die."

Author Brandt Legg put it more eloquently: "War is a place where young people who don't know each other, and don't hate each other, kill each other, by the decision of older rulers who know each other and hate each other, but don't kill each other..."

But then again, what is happening in the Holy Land today is not a 'war' in the conventional sense. It is a genocide between one side armed to the teeth with the latest weapons and a largely defenceless population – the result of a settler colonialism project that began in 1948 and even earlier.

Unlike the tranquil Silent Night setting of the Nativity, Jesus was familiar with the massacres and savagery inflicted on the ordinary people of His homeland.

After Herod died in 4 BC, a rebellion broke out in the Sepphoris, a wealthy city close to Nazareth, in Galilee. The Roman legate in Syria, Quintilius Varus, sent in his legions,

supported by allies, to crush the rebels in Galilee. They captured and burned Sepphoris. Many were killed or sold to slavery.

Mary, in nearby Nazareth, would have been familiar with savage suppression. Growing up, Jesus would also no doubt have heard about this brutal suppression.

"The most disturbing cries of humanity are also the tears of our God of Mercy!" Bro Anthony added in his text. "If we still have a semblance of love in our hearts, we too will want to wipe those tears from their eyes and restore joy to their hearts."

"Joy to the world that began at Christmas in the Holy land has been smothered by violence in the name of our common Abrahamic God."

"My personal sadness for the past 30 years has given me faith to live with hope in my daily life. My friends in Palestine have helped me to understand the reason for my faith." The above urgings of my spirit cannot be accompanied by silence, he added.

So, this Christmas, we have much to reflect on about the meaning of the birth of the Prince of Peace. What can we do to stop violence and bloodshed in our times, whether it is Gaza, Ukraine, Syria or Lebanon? How can we stop arms manufacturers and contractors from profiting from war, death and destruction?

Jesus has no hand in the world, apart from our own. How can we hasten the day when "they will hammer their swords into ploughshares and their spears into sickles"?

May we be instruments in ushering in the era when "nation will not lift sword against nation, no longer will they learn how to make war" (Isaiah 2:4).

Anil Netto is a freelance writer and activist based in Penang. He believes we are all called to build the kingdom of God in this world.

Readying my heart to see Him face to face

I can't believe that Christmas is a few days away and then the New Year will soon follow.

In all honesty, I have been planning for Christmas for a while now; making notes about what I should do differently this Christmas, writing down what gifts to buy, deciding where to go and what to eat for Christmas, planning the activities for the family in December, and just trying to make it a "perfect Christmas".

Then there is the preparation for 2025! At the office I have been working on plans since September – and am waist deep in work for events in Q1 2025. I know it sounds strange, but I also purchased a planner in September, already plotting in dates that are important to me and meetings I need to attend (yes, I have a few meetings that have been diarised till December 2025 – how efficient!).

I am also on a perpetual spring-cleaning mode around my home, I mean Chinese New Year 2025, is in about a month's time, so I am trying my best to sort out the accumulated stuff from way back when. There were days when I channelled my inner Marie Kondo – hoping to discard as much as I can with the principle of "does it spark Joy" – and on days when I just get too tired (there are many of them!) I just stuff things in boxes and bags to deal with another day.

Despite the rush and tendency to focus



Mustard Seed Journeys

JOANNE WONG

on the external aspects of this holiday season (and life in general), this year it's been a little different. Thankfully, I am reminded daily about the simplest, most important part of Christmas that I have often overlooked and forgotten... the blessed season of Advent.

At its core, Advent is a time of preparation. The word "Advent" comes from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning "coming." During Advent, we are called to prepare not just for the outward celebration of Christ's birth but

for the coming of Christ in our hearts. It is a reminder that Christ's birth over 2,000 years ago was only the first coming of the Saviour, we also anticipate His second coming at the end of time.

Advent, which began so coincidentally on December 1 this year, lasts until Christmas Eve, and is a season dedicated to preparing our hearts and minds for the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. It is a time meant for us to pause, reflect, and refocus on the deeper meaning of Christmas, rather than really being sucked into "all the things I wrote about above".

This Advent, I decided to follow Fr Mike Schmitz as he led a daily Advent programme called *Face to Face* on the Ascension app. This programme was premised around these questions, "What if Dec 25 was the day that I would die... how would I live my life over these

25 days? How would I live each day so that I can be ready to see God face to face?" We'd have to live with intentionality, with purpose, and with grace.

So, each day, besides the daily readings, there were questions for reflection and a short sharing by Fr Mike. Fr Mike also shared that Advent was a season to prepare for three things:

1. Preparation to celebrate Christ's first coming
2. Preparation to recognise Him when He comes to us in our daily lives, and
3. Preparation to meet Him when He comes at the end of time, or when He comes at the end of our time

This led me to living Advent differently this year – I spent more time reflecting on the things that mattered most. I spent more time with God's Word and listened daily to Dr Tim Gray from Formed, who reminds me every so often that we also need to embrace a spirit of penitence during Advent and, though while not as intense as the season of Lent, Advent is still a time for reflection and self-examination, a time to give up something. A time to sacrifice – which is honestly hard to do in this season of merriment, and pretty decorations and delicious food.

And much like Fr Mike, Dr Tim reminded me that Advent was also a time when we can pause and look at our relationship with God and with others. Are we prepared to receive Christ into our lives? Are we making room in our hearts for Him amidst the distractions of the world?

I was also reminded that Advent is a time to focus on the needs of others, to align ourselves with the message of Christ's birth: that He came to serve, not to be served. Acts of kindness and the Spirit of giving and sharing during Advent should help shift our focus away from the consumerism of Christmas and toward the love and generosity that are central to the heart of the season.

On Formed, there was also a series called 'Rooted' which had a daily reflection using the Jesse Tree model – a journey through salvation history, exploring Christ's ancestors, Scripture, and daily insights. It was my first time learning about the Jesse Tree and I think I might set one up next year and involve my children.

Lastly, as I reflect on this season of Advent, what I have loved most about it is the pause – the moments of silence I carved out for myself, the moments I spent reading God's Word and reflecting on what His words mean to me, and the moments I listened to music that reminded me of His coming and the waiting for the promised Messiah.

So, while we all wait with joyful anticipation for the birth of Christ, let us prepare our hearts for the Christ child. Let us put aside our busyness, sit patiently in silence and hope, and listen to what God is saying to us. Let us be prepared to meet Him face to face.

Joanne Wong is on a journey towards having faith the size of a mustard seed. She welcomes thoughts and suggestions on how to have a closer walk with God. Email her at joanne.wpm@gmail.com



Fr Ron Rolheiser

From saints to celebrities: our evolution in admiration and imitation

When I was a young boy growing up in a Catholic community, the catechesis of the time tried to inspire the hearts of the young with stories of martyrs, saints, and other people who lived out high ideals in terms of virtue and faith. I remember one story in particular which inspired me, the story of a third-century Christian martyr, St Tarcisus.

As legend (or truth) has it, Tarcisus was a twelve-year-old acolyte during the time of the early Christian persecutions. At that time, Christians in Rome were celebrating the Eucharist in secret in the catacombs. After those secret Masses, a deacon or an acolyte would carry the Eucharistic species, the Blessed Sacrament, to the sick and to prisoners. One day, after one of those secret Masses, young Tarcisus was carrying the Blessed Sacrament enroute to a prison when he was accosted by a mob. He refused to hand over the Blessed Sacrament, protected it with his own body, and was beaten to death as a result.

As a twelve-year-old boy, that story inflamed my romantic imagination. I yearned for that kind of ideal in my life. In my young imagination, Tarcisus was the kind of hero that I wanted to be.

We've come a long way since then, both in our culture and in our churches. We are no longer moved much romantically by

either the saints of old or the saints of today. Yes, we still make an official place for them in our churches and in our abstract ideals, but we are now, in effect, moved much more by the lives of the rich, the famous, the beautiful, our pop stars, our professional athletes, the physically gifted, and the intellectually gifted. They now inflame our imaginations, draw our admiration, and it's them we want to be like.

In the early nineteenth century, Alban Butler, an English convert, collected stories of the lives of the saints and eventually set them together in twelve volume set, famously known as *Butler's Lives of the Saints*. For nearly two hundred years, these books inspired Christians, young and old. No longer.

Today, *Butler's Lives of the Saints* has effectively been replaced by multiple magazines, podcasts, and websites which chronicle the lives of the rich and famous and stare out at us from our phones, our laptops, and from every newsstand and grocery store checkout line.

In effect, we have moved: from St Tarcisus to Justin Bieber; from Therese of Lisieux to Taylor Swift; from Thomas Aquinas to Tom Brady; from St Monica to Meryl Streep; from St Augustine to Mark Zuckerberg; from Julian of Norwich to Oprah; and from the first African American saint, St Martin de Porres, to

Lebron James. It's these people who now inflame our romantic imagination and whom we would most want to be like.

Don't get me wrong, it's not that these people are bad or that there's anything wrong with admiring them. Indeed, we owe them some admiration because all beauty and talent take their origin in God who is the author of all good things. From a saint's virtue to a movie star's physical beauty, to an athlete's grace, there's only one author at the origin of it all, God.

Thomas Aquinas once rightly pointed out that to withhold a compliment from someone who deserves it is a sin because we are withholding food that someone else needs to live on. Beauty, talent, and grace need to be recognised and acknowledged. Admiration is not the issue. Rather, the issue is that, while we need to admire and acknowledge talent, grace, and beauty, these do not, in themselves, radiate virtue and saintliness. We shouldn't automatically identify human grace with moral virtue, though that's the temptation today.

Also, a weakness in our churches today is that while we have vastly refined and upgraded our intellectual imagination and now have better and healthier theological and biblical studies, we struggle to touch hearts. While we have more power to satisfy the intellect, we struggle to touch the

heart, that is, we struggle to get people to fall in love with their faith and, especially, with their churches. We struggle to inflame their romantic imagination, as we once did by invoking the lives of the saints.

Where might we go with all of this? Can we find saints again who inflame our ideals? Can the fine work on hagiography (on the lives of the saints and other moral giants) being done today by Robert Ellsberg become the new Butler's Lives of the Saints? Can secular biographies of some moral giants in our own age draw our imitation? Can the life of a Dag Hammarskjöld become for us a moral and faith inspiration? Is there a new Therese of Lisieux out there? Today, more than ever, we need inspiring stories about women and men, young and old, who have lived out heroic virtue. We need moral exemplars, moral mentors. Otherwise, we cheat ourselves by simplistically identifying human grace with moral virtue.

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

Will God be on Santa's Christmas list this year?

As December's chill fills the air and festive cheer peeks around every corner, the season of giving is upon us once again. Santa's sleigh is loaded, and his famous list is ready, meticulously checked twice. But as we bask in the glow of tinsel and fairy lights, a peculiar question lingers: Will God be on Santa's Christmas list this year?

This year has been anything but merry. From wars that left nations grieving to famine stealing smiles from children's faces, from businesses shutting doors to families breaking apart — it's as if the world has had coal stuffed into its stocking. Anxiety and mental health struggles have skyrocketed, relationships have frayed, and many people, in their despair, have turned to the skies and asked, "Why, God? Why?"

Some have gone further, blaming God for the world's troubles. "If He's so powerful, why doesn't He step in?" they ask. It's a sentiment that resonates with many, especially in a year filled with hardship. But let's flip the script for a moment: Does God deserve to be blamed — or is it possible we've misunderstood His role in this season and beyond?

Let's imagine for a moment that Santa and God had a conversation at the North Pole. Santa might ask, "So, God, what would you like for Christmas?" God doesn't need a present this Christmas, because He is the present. In our hustle to find meaning, we forget that He is the source of every good thing in our lives. Every breath we take, every act of

kindness, and every moment of joy — it all flows from Him.

Think about it. In every Christmas miracle, in every moment of resilience, and in every act of kindness, God is there. While Santa may bring gifts that dazzle and delight that bring temporary joy, God offers gifts of a different nature - hope in the darkest times, strength when we feel like giving up, and love when the world feels loveless. His gifts sustain and heal: peace amidst chaos, hope in despair, and love that transcends all understanding. These are gifts no wrapping paper can contain.

But how often do we forget this? Caught up in our hustle for the "perfect" Christmas, we lose sight of the fact that God is the source of everything that truly matters. He doesn't slide down chimneys, but He shows up in the little things: the courage to face another day, the ability to forgive, and the unexpected kindness of a stranger. In many ways, God isn't just on Santa's list — He's the one who helps write it.

This isn't to say life's challenges aren't real or overwhelming. They are. But even in the most difficult times, there's a quiet reassurance that we are not alone. God's presence — like the Christmas star — guides us through, even when the path feels uncertain.

So, as we gather around the Christmas tree this year, let's take a moment to reflect. Santa may deliver the gifts, but it's God who makes the season meaningful.



He's not the one who needs a gift; He's the one who keeps giving.

Will God be on Santa's list this year? Maybe. But the real question is, will we let Him into our hearts this Christmas? Because, in doing so, we'll realise that the greatest gift isn't under the tree — it's the light of hope, joy, and love that God kindles within us all. This Christmas, let us be the faithful receivers of His greatest gift

to mankind - His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Alleluia, our Saviour is born for us today. **Julian Leicester**

Julian Leicester is a renowned mental health consultant in the nation. He has been a columnist in many major newspapers. Each year he writes a Christmas story that stirs the minds and hearts of Christians

Little Catholics' corner

Mary Visits Elizabeth True or False?

How well do you know the story of the Visitation? See if you can figure out which are true and which are false?

1. Mary was expecting baby Jesus when she went to visit her cousin Elizabeth. True or False?
2. Elizabeth was married to Jeremiah. True or False?
3. Elizabeth was a bit sad when she saw Mary. True or False?
4. When Elizabeth heard Mary, her baby inside her jumped. True or False?
5. Elizabeth's baby was Saint John the Baptist. True or False?
6. Mary had to tell Elizabeth that she was going to have a baby because Elizabeth didn't know. True or False?
7. Elizabeth knew that Mary's baby was the Messiah. True or False?



Answers: 1.True 2.False 3.False 4.True 5.True 6.False 7.True
among women!



Luke 1.39-45

Elizabeth knew that Mary was the mother of the Messiah. What did she say to Mary when she came to visit her? Use the code to find out!

A B D E G L M N O R S U W Y
▲ ▼ ○ ↑ △ × - □ ● + ! ▣ ↓

Answers: Blessed are you among women!

Can you spot NINE differences in the picture?



Dear children,

Today is the last Sunday before Christmas. Are you excited? I am!!

The Bible tells us that Mary was shocked when the Angel Gabriel announced to her that she was going to have a baby whom she would name Jesus.

After she recovered from her shock, the Bible tells us that Mary hurried to the home of a relative, Elizabeth, to tell her the news.

Elizabeth was also expecting a baby and the Bible tells us that when she heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Elizabeth gave a glad cry and said to Mary, "God has blessed you

above all women, and your child is blessed."

That is amazing! Before Mary even said a word about having a child, Elizabeth knew it and she knew that the child was going to be a very special child!

So, at the very beginning of the Christmas story was an event that was shared with family and it is a time that has meaning for us, as families, today.

As we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, it is certainly appropriate that we celebrate it with our families just as Mary did with Elizabeth. Have a blessed Christmas, children!

Love
Aunty Melly



Penang Diocese leaders EMPOWERED



KAMPAR, Perak: The Church of the Sacred Heart played host to the PDYN (Penang Diocesan Youth Network) Leadership Retreat from November 22 to 24. It was a gathering that brought together 82 young leaders from across the Diocese of Penang. Aged between 18 and 29, the participants engaged in three days of spiritual growth, leadership development, and personal reflection.

The retreat, titled *PDYN Leadership Retreat 3.0*, aimed to nurture, conscientise, and equip young people to become the "Now of God." Each day of the retreat centred on a unique theme, guiding participants through introspective journeys and actionable lessons.

The retreat began on Friday, Nov 22, with an atmosphere of excitement as participants arrived for registration. The day's highlight was a keynote address by PDYN head, Fr Simon Anand, setting the tone with the theme *Called for a Purpose*. The opening session, "Who Am I?", facilitated by Jonathan Charanraj from SEEDS Ministry, encouraged participants to explore their identity and God-given purpose.

Saturday's activities began with *Lauds* (morning prayer), fostering a reflective start to the day. The sessions that followed addressed various aspects of leadership and personal growth. Johnny Bong led a thought-provoking talk on *Financial Literacy*, equipping participants with practical tools for managing finances responsibly while aligning with Christian values. Paul Julianose delved into *Emotional Well-being*, offering strategies for maintaining mental and emotional

health amid life's pressures. The sensitive topic of *Sexuality* was handled with care, with Samuel and Monica Merli conducting separate sessions for male and female participants. The evening concluded with Mass and Confession, celebrated by Fr Simon Anand and Fr James Pitchay, offering participants a chance to renew their spiritual connection.

The final day, themed *In the World but Not of the World*, provided participants with practical insights for living their faith in daily life. Paul Julianose returned to deliver an inspiring session on *Faith and Reason*, bridging spirituality with intellectual understanding. The featured session, titled *The Psychology of Social Media*, was led by Raymund Jagan, who discussed the profound psychological impact of social media and urged participants to use these platforms responsibly. The retreat culminated in a Missioning Mass, celebrated

by Fr Simon, symbolising the participants' commissioning to be lights of the world. The event closed with heartfelt testimonies and reflections, leaving participants inspired and renewed.

This leadership retreat stemmed from a Youth Council held last year at Stella Maris, where youth leaders from parishes and university campuses across the Diocese of Penang gathered to discuss the challenges faced by young people, particularly those on campus. The council identified key concerns that shaped the foundation of this retreat, with each session designed to address or prepare participants for these challenges. While the retreat concluded successfully, it also marked a step in a larger journey, with follow-up events and programs planned to build on this momentum and continue empowering young leaders to serve their communities.



Participants from Tanjung Malim.



Fr Simon Anand blessing the young people.



Praying for one another.



The youth receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation.



Against all odds: Good Shepherd camp a success

KUALA LUMPUR: The lead-up to the annual Good Shepherd Youth Camp 2024 was filled with uncertainty, a lack of direction, and a sense of hopelessness. With chaotic planning and the camp being held within the church rather than the expected outdoor venue, many feared the camp would not succeed. Yet, in His infinite wisdom, God's providence prevailed, turning the event into a resounding success against all odds.

The camp kicked off on Friday night with an ice-breaking session to help participants get to know each other, followed by a vibrant time of praise and worship to set the tone for the weekend. After supper, attendees had the option to watch a movie or socialise outdoors, creating a relaxed atmosphere before the heavier schedule on the following day.

Saturday was the heart of the camp. The day's programme was led by Alvin Teoh, a parishioner with vast experience in giving sessions for young people. His sessions delved into powerful topics: discerning God's voice over the world, understanding the spiritual battle for our souls, and hearing the inspiring testimonies of individuals who had experienced God's transformative grace.

The most impactful moment of the camp came during the inner healing session, where participants confronted their deepest wounds and surrendered them to God. While this writer did not experience a dramatic change, watching others, particularly those who had previously dismissed spiritual matters, undergo a visible transformation



Praise and worship.

was a moving and powerful experience.

On the third day, the camp coincided with World Youth Day, and the youth participants took the lead in animating the Mass, from

serving as hospitality ministers to singing in the choir. A highlight of the day was the Mass for the Feast of Christ the King, during which the youth choir, composing of both English

and BM-speaking youth, filled the church with their passion and energy, creating a memorable and uplifting experience.

The camp concluded with a heartfelt session led by former youth member Junior Jacob Jude John, where youth from Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia exchanged stories about their upbringing. The final moments of the camp saw participants exchanging love letters and taking a group photo to commemorate the event.

While the camp may have come to an end, the memories, experiences, and, most importantly, the bonds formed will last for a long time. It is the hope that the youth of Good Shepherd Church will carry the momentum from this camp into the future, continuing to build a vibrant, united community of faith in the year ahead. **Jayden Pradeep**



CHS Youth Day inspires faith, fellowship and prayer

PENANG: On November 23, the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit (CHS) hosted its first-ever CHS Youth Day, which gathered the parish youth for a day of reflection, fellowship, and spiritual renewal. Rooted in Pope Francis' message from World Youth Day 2024, the event challenged young people to embrace the call to be "Pilgrims of Hope" — to walk with purpose, seek Christ, and share His hope with the world.

The day's theme focused on the distinction between being a tourist and a pilgrim. The youth were encouraged to reflect on how a tourist moves through life aimlessly, rushing from one experience to the next, without truly engaging with the present. In contrast, a pilgrim walks with intention, seeking God's guidance and finding

meaning in every moment. This reflection prompted the youth to examine their own lives: Were they living like tourists, moving through life without purpose, or were they choosing to be pilgrims, focused on Christ and walking intentionally toward Him?

Throughout the day, the youth were invited to reflect on how feelings of hopelessness could creep into their lives due to daily struggles, whether from school, family challenges, or societal pressures. As "pilgrims of hope," they were encouraged to rise above these moments of despair by keeping their focus on Christ and inviting Him into every aspect of their lives. The youth came to realise the importance of shifting their mindset from being self-centred to Christ-centred, allowing His hope to transform their hearts.



A question and answer session with the youth.

The highlight of the day was the Night of Prayer, a time that united the youth with the broader CHS parish community. The evening began with Adoration, where the youth spent quiet, reflective time before the Blessed Sacrament, surrendering their struggles and renewing their commitment to seeking God. This sacred time allowed them to open their hearts to God's pres-

ence and deepen their connection with Him.

As the night progressed, a powerful exchange took place. Parishioners gathered to pray over the youth, offering words of encouragement and blessing them with strength for their spiritual journey. In return, the youth prayed for the adults, expressing gratitude and seeking God's guidance for their lives. This exchange symbolised the unity of both generations in supporting one another in their faith and spiritual growth.

By the end of the day, the youth left the event feeling inspired, filled with renewed hope, and eager to embrace their roles as pilgrims of hope. They were reminded that being a pilgrim doesn't require a long journey — it begins with the decision to invite Christ into every situation, to live with intention, and to walk in faith.

The first-ever CHS Youth Day proved to be a day of reflection, spiritual renewal, and deep connection. The youth departed from the event ready to continue their spiritual journey, fired up and inspired to live as pilgrims of hope in their daily lives. **Adele Gwyneth Yeoh**



For enquiries, please contact:
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MEMORIAM

**40th Day Memorial Mass
In Loving Memory of
My Beloved and Dearest Mum**



**Madona a/p M.M. Pereira
(Mrs Antony)**

27 May 1948 – 24 November 2024
*'Eternal Rest Grant unto her, O Lord, and
Let Perpetual Light Shine upon her.'*
May Her Soul Rest in Peace.

I cordially invite your presence to attend the 40th day Memorial Mass at the Church of St Philip, Segamat. No. 8, Jalan Buloh Kasap, 85000 Segamat, Johor at 6pm on Saturday, 4th January 2025 and thence followed by fellowship at St Joseph's Hall after mass.

On behalf of my late mum, I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude for your prayers, presence and assistance during my recent bereavement.

A Special Thanks to BEC St Paul of St Philip's Church Segamat and also lovely parishioners of St Philips's Church Segamat for their love and support.

Deeply and Dearly Missed, Remembered and Forever Cherished always by Daughter Claina Antonette Antony @ Molly, Relatives and Friends.

Kindly treat this as a personal invitation to attend my beloved Mum's 40th day Requiem and Memorial Mass.

**5th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of**



**Augustus Anthony Muthu
Departed: 22.12.2019**

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

Deeply missed
and never forgotten by
wife: Josia
Children: Angelo, Bruno,
Consuelo, their spouses
and 10 grandchildren.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF



**S. SABASTIAN
Departed on: 26-12-2005**



**RAJANAYAKI
SABASTIAN
Departed on: 9-11-2011**

In memory of our loving parents/grandparents.

*We dearly miss you, your laughter, and your presence.
Though it has been years since you have left us, it just
feels like yesterday. The memories of you always close,
and forever cherish in our hearts. No words can describe
the emptiness with you gone.*

We love you

~ Fondly remembered by all loved ones ~

**13th Anniversary
In Ever Loving Memory of**



**Ruth Mary Michael Pillay
Gift from God 18th November 1947**

Returned to the Lord 31st December 2011
Husband: Late Sandanasamy Anthony Pillay

*Eternal rest grant unto her; Oh Lord
and let perpetual light shine upon her.*

May her soul rest in peace. AMEN.

We Love and Miss you

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

In Loving Memories of

28th Anniversary



**Bernard James Pereira
4.9.1923 – 16.4.1996**

23rd Anniversary



**Thresa Philomena Pereira
4.10.1952 – 27.12.2001**

51st Anniversary



**Douglas Clarence Pereira
9.3.1956 – 23.12.1973**

*What we shared will never die, they live within our hearts,
bringing strength and comfort, while we are apart.*

*Your memories are our keepsake, with which we'll never part,
God has you in His keeping, we have you in our hearts.*

Psalm 116:15 "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints."

With all our love, till we meet again, from:
Your Loving Wife/Mother: Florence Josephine Loone
Children/Siblings: Malcolm, Fr Raymond, Ann, Royston, Lilian
and their spouses, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nieces and nephews.

40th Day Prayers of



Wilson Peter

5TH AUGUST 1965 - 19TH NOVEMBER 2024

**Please join us as we honor Wilson Peter on
his 40th Day Memorial**

SATURDAY 28 DECEMBER

Mass @ 6pm

Cathedral of the Holy Spirit (CHS), Penang
followed by Fellowship @ 8pm

Cafeteria, CHS

*He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more of
death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of
things has passed away - REV 21:4*

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**1st Anniversary
In Loving Memory of**



**Anthony Pushparaj
Returned to the Lord:
30.12.2023**

*It's been a year, but not a day
goes by without thinking of
you. We're reminded of the
love you showed to those
around you and your laughter
that brightened up every room.*

Deeply missed by
wife, daughters, siblings,
and loved ones.

**12th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of**



**Anthony Dass
P. Arokiam
Departed: 18.12.2012**

*In the eyes of those who loved you, You will always be there.
As you were, you will always be, treasured forever in our
hearts. We keep in our hearts the love of the past, for it was
planted forever to last. Your presence we miss dearly, loving
you always and forever your memory we will treasure.*

Forever loved and missed by
Beloved daughters, sons-in-law, grandchildren,
relatives and friends.

**2nd Anniversary
In Loving Memory of**



**Rebecca @
Rebena C. Lawrence
Departed: 19.12.2022**

In Ever Loving Memory of



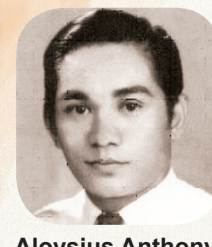
**Joseph
Fernandez
30.12.1949 –
31.12.2017**

*Seven years have
passed since that
sad day when one we
so dearly loved was
called away.
God took him home,
It was His will,
But in our hearts
he liveth still.*

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

Sadly missed by
wife lyfin, daughters
Ivanna and Justine,
family and friends.

**34th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of**



**Aloysius Anthony
Theseira
Departed: 24-12-1990**

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

Deeply missed
and always remembered in
our hearts and with love by
Wife, daughters, son,
relatives and friends.

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Diocese of Keningau prepares for 2025 Jubilee with pilgrimage and hope

KENINGAU: The Diocese of Keningau joyfully anticipates the upcoming Jubilee Year 2025, as declared by Pope Francis, with the theme *Pilgrims of Hope*. Bishop Cornelius Piong said this in a statement released December 9. “This year-long celebration presents a unique opportunity for the people of Keningau to deepen their faith and seek reconciliation with God, reinforcing their hope through His mercy and grace.”

Pope Francis’ selection of the theme *Hope Does Not Disappoint* in his Papal Bull *Spes Non Confundit* is deeply relevant to the current global challenges, including famine, disease, natural disasters, wars, and widespread disobedience to God’s will. In this time of uncertainty and suffering, the faithful are called to renew their trust in God’s healing power and abundant mercy.

The Jubilee Year in Keningau will officially begin on December 29, with the opening Mass at 10.30am at the Church of the Pusat Ziarah Keluarga Kudus Nulu Sosopon Keningau (PZKKNS). Following

the launch, the pilgrimage sites will be open throughout 2025, welcoming both the people of Keningau and pilgrims from other dioceses.

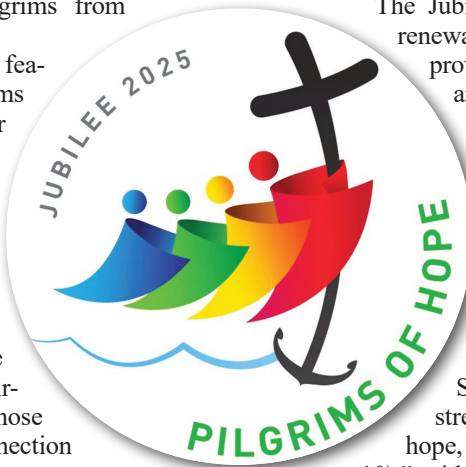
At PZKKNS, several features will inspire pilgrims and strengthen their hope, including the Holy Cross Tower, the statue of Our Lady of Lourdes, the statue of the Holy Family, the Stations of the Cross, and the statue of Msgr August Wachter. These sacred sites provide spiritual nourishment for those seeking a closer connection with God.

In addition to visiting PZKKNS, pilgrims can also visit the Keningau Diocese Retreat House in Tatal (RRKKT). Here, pilgrims are invited to reflect on God’s creation, particularly in the *Laudato Si’* Tatal Church area,

and to spend time in prayer at the Blessed Sacrament in the Adoration Chapel.

The Jubilee Year is a time for renewal and spiritual growth, providing the faithful with an opportunity to overcome life’s challenges with a deepened sense of hope and faith. “The Diocese of Keningau invites all to embrace this journey of spiritual renewal, to come closer to Jesus, the Door of Salvation, and to be strengthened in their faith, hope, and love (John 10:7-10),” said the prelate.

He ends the statement by urging everyone to “seize this moment to walk as pilgrims of hope, finding peace and joy through the sacred pilgrimage sites of the Jubilee Year 2025. Welcome to the Jubilee Year of Hope!”



Opening of the Jubilee Year in Malaysia

December 29, 2024

Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur
Cathedral of St John the Evangelist at 6.00pm

Diocese of Malacca Johore
Cathedral of the Sacred Heart at 10.30am

Diocese of Penang
Cathedral of the Holy Spirit at 5.00pm

Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu
Cathedral of the Sacred Heart at 5.00pm

Diocese of Keningau
Keningau Pusat Ziarah Keluarga Kudus, Nulu Sosopon at 10.30am

Diocese of Sandakan
Cathedral of St Mary at 6.00pm

Archdiocese of Kuching
Cathedral of St Joseph at 7.00am

Diocese of Miri
Cathedral of St Joseph at 11.00am

January 1, 2025

Diocese of Sibiu
Cathedral of Sacred Heart at 2.00pm

Jubilee pilgrimage centres in Malaysia



file photo

Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur

- Cathedral of St John the Evangelist, KL
- Church of the Immaculate Conception, PD
- Church of Jesus Caritas, Kepong
- Church of St Francis of Assisi, Cheras
- Church of St Thomas, Kuantan

Diocese of Penang

- Chapel of Annai Velangani, Ipoh
- Church of the Assumption, Penang
- Church of the Holy Name of Mary, Permatang Tinggi

Diocese of Malacca Johore

- Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, JB
- Church of St Louis, Kluang
- Church of St Mary, Ayer Salak

Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu

- Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, KK
- Church of St Michael, Penampang
- Church of St Peter, Kudat
- Church of St Peter Claver, Ranau
- Church of the Holy Rosary, Limbahau

Diocese of Sandakan

- Cathedral of St Mary, Sandakan

Archdiocese of Kuching

- Cathedral of St Joseph, Kuching
- Catholic Memorial and Pilgrimage Centre, Mt Singai, Bau
- Church of St Peter, Padungan
- Gethsemane Pilgrimage Centre, Bunan
- Mt Hosanna Pilgrimage Centre, Sri Aman

Diocese of Miri

- Cathedral of St Joseph, Miri
- Church of St Anthony, Bintulu
- Church of St Edward, Limbang

Diocese of Sibiu

- Church of St Anthony, Sarikei
- Church of the Sacred Heart, Kanowit
- St Teresa Oratory, Sungei Merah

Diocese of Keningau

- Cathedral of St Francis Xavier, Keningau
- Church of St Anthony, Tenom
- Church of St Peter Bundu, Kuala Penyu
- Church of St Theresa, Tambunan
- Church of the Holy Spirit, Sook
- Holy Family Retreat Centre, Nulu Sosopon
- Keningau Retreat Centre, Tatal

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Thank you for being a part of our journey.

May the light of Christ fill your hearts with boundless peace, love, prosperity, and happiness & may His presence bring you renewed hope and joy for the year ahead.

Merry Christmas
&
HAPPY NEW YEAR
2025