

# HERALD

The Catholic Weekly

The Publisher, Editor and staff of  
HERALD wish all our readers a  
Blessed Christmas & Holy New Year.

There will be no issue on  
January 4, 2026.  
Our next issue  
will be on January 11, 2026.

TERHAD

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Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.  
*Col. 3:12-13*



Rain fails to dampen spirit at ACS Sibu Christmas parade

■ P5



Cardinal Sebastian offers comfort to juvenile inmates

■ P6



Youth, Faith, Hope – Shine On!

■ P16

## Holy Father's message for 2026 World Day of Peace



# Peace not Power

(CNS/Vatican Media)

**VATICAN: Pope Leo XIV has issued a strong appeal for an “unarmed and disarming” peace, urging the world to turn away from fear-driven militarisation and rediscover peace as a lived reality rooted in trust, dialogue and the conversion of hearts.**

In his message for the 59th World Day of Peace, January 1, 2026, the Holy Father centred his reflection on the Easter greeting of the risen Christ: “Peace be with you.” Far from a polite wish, he said, this greeting carries the power to transform lives and societies, offering a peace that is “humble and persevering” and grounded in God’s unconditional love.

From the outset of his pontificate, Pope Leo XIV noted, he has deliberately echoed this greeting as a daily proclamation of hope in a world marked by violence, conflict and fear. The peace Christ offers, he stressed, is not imposed by force but arises from nonviolence, mercy and fidelity to the Gospel.

Reflecting on Christ as the Good Shepherd, the Pope described Jesus as “our peace”, the one who has broken down walls of division and conquered death. This peace, he said, continues to shine through the witness of those who resist despair and stand as “sen-

tinels in the night”, even amid what Pope Francis once described as “a third world war fought piecemeal”.

Pope Leo XIV warned that contemporary realities often tempt people to surrender to pessimism and narratives stripped of hope. Such outlooks, he said, are frequently labelled “realistic” but distort reality by ignoring goodness, beauty and the quiet work of grace within wounded human hearts. Quoting St Augustine, he reminded believers that peace must first dwell within before it can be shared with others.

“Peace is more than a goal; it is a presence and a journey,” the Pope said, urging people of faith and goodwill alike to protect it, even when it seems fragile. Even in places reduced to rubble and despair, he noted, peace endures in the memories, choices and courage of those who refuse to abandon it.

Turning to nonviolence, the Pope recalled Jesus’ words before his arrest: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.” This peace, he explained, unsettled the disciples because it rejected violent self-defence — a path Jesus insisted upon even as he faced death. Christians today, he said, are called to bear prophetic witness to this unarmed peace, acknowledging with humility the Church’s failures.

Addressing the paradox of modern insecurity, Pope Leo XIV observed that while

many hearts long for peace, they are often overwhelmed by a sense of powerlessness. Treating peace as a distant ideal, he warned, numbs societies to its denial and allows aggression to seep into public and private life.

The Pope expressed grave concern over the steady rise in global military spending, which increased by more than nine per cent in 2024 to an estimated US\$2.7 trillion (RM11 trillion). Appeals to deterrence, including nuclear deterrence, he cautioned, are rooted in fear rather than justice or trust, leaving humanity in a state of constant anxiety.

He also warned against educational and media narratives that normalise rearmament and present armed defence as the only response to threats, while neglecting the painful lessons of the last century.

Highlighting new ethical dangers, Pope Leo XIV criticised the military use of artificial intelligence, warning that delegating life-and-death decisions to machines betrays human dignity and responsibility. While condemning the economic interests driving such developments, he stressed the need to awaken conscience and critical thought.

Drawing inspiration from St Francis of Assisi and *Fratelli Tutti*, the Pope called for a “disarming peace” rooted in evangelical humility. He pointed to the mystery of the Incarnation — God becoming a defenceless child — as the ultimate sign that goodness

itself disarms hearts and transforms societies.

Religions, he said, must resist the temptation to weaponise words, beliefs and identities. Condemning the misuse of faith to justify nationalism or violence, he urged believers to witness peace through prayer, dialogue and lives marked by mercy.

At the same time, Pope Leo XIV underscored the political responsibility of leaders to pursue diplomacy, mediation and international law. He warned against undermining treaties and supranational institutions, calling instead for renewed trust, sincere negotiations and faithful cooperation among nations.

Concluding, the Pope linked his appeal to the Jubilee of Hope, inviting all to a “disarmament of heart, mind and life”. Echoing the prophet Isaiah’s vision of swords beaten into ploughshares, he insisted that peace is not a utopian dream, but a demanding and attainable path for humanity today.

*Photo: Pope Leo XIV speaks to young adults aboard the “Bel Espoir” (Beautiful Hope) sailboat in the Ostia marina outside Rome October 17, 2025. In rotating crews of 25, young adults have been sailing around the Mediterranean to speak about peace with their peers.*

To read the message in full, go to: <https://shorturl.at/cINSX>

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**FROM THE EDITORIAL TEAM**

As 2025 draws to a close, we pause to look back on a year that has tested us, humbled us, and, in many ways, shown us the quiet strength of hope. This Jubilee Year of Hope has invited us to see beyond our immediate struggles, to notice the small yet powerful ways that life, faith, and community sustain us, even in moments of difficulty.

For many of us on the editorial team, this year has not been easy. We have faced the heartbreak of losing loved ones, wrestled with health challenges, and carried burdens that are often unseen. Yet through it all, hope has quietly remained. It has been our companion, reminding us that even in our weakest moments, we are not alone — that in every trial, there is a thread of light connecting us to something greater.

Hope, in its truest sense, is not wishful thinking. It is the courage to rise each day, to continue the work we are called to do — not because it is simple, but because it matters. In the stories we share, whether highlighting acts of charity, telling of communities caring for the vulnerable, or celebrating ordinary lives lived with extraordinary love, hope is the invisible thread that binds us together. It transforms news into meaning, words into encouragement, and stories into inspiration.

This year, we have witnessed hope in countless ways. Communities have rallied to care for the elderly, children have found opportunities in unexpected places, and parishes have extended hands to support those on the margins. Each story, unique in its details, carries the same message: human kindness and faith endure even when life is hard. Through these stories, we are reminded that our work is far more than reporting events — it is about



affirming dignity, honouring courage, and nurturing hope in the hearts of our readers.

As a paper of the community, we are deeply aware that our work exists because of you — our readers. Your support, encouragement, and engagement give meaning to every page. You inspire us to dig deeper, write with honesty, and celebrate the quiet heroism in everyday life. From the bottom of our hearts, we thank you.

Hope is often found in the quiet, everyday moments that might go unnoticed. It lives in the gentle care we offer to those around us, in the visit to a homebound parishioner, or in the thought and heart we put into sharing a story that truly matters. These small acts may never make headlines, yet they pulse at the very heart of our communities — the living essence of what we seek to honour, celebrate, and share.

As we step into 2026, let us carry this spirit of hope forward with renewed energy. Every story, every action, every word has the power

to uplift, console, and inspire. In a world filled with distraction and negativity, our role as a community paper becomes even more vital — to celebrate what is good, remind each other of the strength we hold, and encourage everyone to keep moving forward, even when the way seems uncertain.

As we mark the passing of another year, we pause to feel, to remember, and to give thanks. Hope has been with us in the quiet moments of grief, in the small acts of kindness that go unnoticed, in the courage it takes to keep going when the world feels heavy. To our readers, thank you for walking this journey with us — for reading, for sharing, for believing that goodness matters. May 2026 bring days filled with light in your hearts, warmth in your homes, and the kind of hope that whispers, even in the darkest moments: you are not alone.

From all of us here, we wish you a New Year overflowing with joy, peace, and hope.

## Walking in the footsteps of the Holy Family

The Feast of the Holy Family offers us a unique opportunity to reflect on the meaning of family, love, and faith. In today's readings, we are invited to see the family not simply as a social unit, but as a school of virtue, obedience, and God's providence. Each reading — Ecclesiasticus, Colossians, and Matthew — offers a facet of what it means to live faithfully as a family under God's care.

The first reading from Ecclesiasticus (3:2-6, 12-14) grounds our reflection in the importance of honouring those who care for us. "Whoever honours his father atones for sins, and preserves himself from them," the Scripture reminds us. There is a profound truth here: family is not just about blood relations but about the bonds of love and respect that shape us morally and spiritually. Ecclesiasticus calls us to a humble obedience and gratitude, recognising that the care and guidance of parents — and, by extension, all who nurture us — form the foundation for our life in God. This is mirrored perfectly in the Holy Family. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph exemplify a mutual respect, care, and devotion that create a safe and nurturing environment where faith can flourish.

St Paul's letter to the Colossians (3:12-21) expands this vision, giving practical guidance on how we live out these virtues within the family. Paul exhorts us to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving as the Lord forgives. Families, Paul reminds us, are not always easy; they are communities of growth where tensions arise, and yet, love and patience are the glue that binds them together. He addresses not only children and parents but also husbands and

wives, calling every family member to mutual respect and selfless love. In this, the Christian family becomes a domestic church — a living witness to God's presence, mercy, and grace.

Matthew's Gospel (2:13-15, 19-23) then gives us a narrative illustration of these virtues. Joseph's obedience to God's instructions in dreams is immediate and decisive: he takes Mary and Jesus to Egypt to protect the child from Herod's threat and later returns to Israel when God's will direct him. Here, the Holy Family models courage, trust, and submission to God's plan. Mary's quiet steadfastness and Joseph's protective care reveal that family life is not only about comfort or stability but also about making choices that safeguard love and faith in the face of uncertainty. Their journey was filled with fear, danger, and dislocation, yet their trust in God's providence guided them through these trials.

Together, these readings present a compelling vision of family life: a space of love, respect, and shared faith, anchored in God's providence. The Holy Family is our model not because they had an ideal or easy life, but because they faced life's uncertainties with courage, humility, and fidelity. Their story encourages us to recognise that the family is a crucible of virtue. It is here that patience, forgiveness, and compassion are learned. It is here that faith takes root, nurtured by daily acts of care and obedience.

In contemporary life, families face pressures that Joseph, Mary, and Jesus may never have imagined: long working hours, economic challenges, social distractions, and, sometimes emotional distance. Yet the call remains the same. We are called to cultivate the virtues of the Holy Family within our own homes. To

## Reflecting on our Sunday Readings with the Editor

### The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph (A)

*Readings: Ecclesiasticus 3:2-6, 12-14;*

*Colossians 3:12-21;*

*Gospel: Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23*

honour one another, to forgive quickly, to bear patiently with imperfections, and to place God at the centre of family life. Every act of love, no matter how small — listening, supporting, guiding, forgiving — is an echo of the Holy Family's example.

Finally, the Feast of the Holy Family invites us to extend this vision beyond our households. Every community, every parish, every society is strengthened when families live as domestic churches, teaching faith through example, nurturing virtue through care, and witnessing God's love through service. The Holy Family reminds us that the strength of the Church lies not only in grand gestures but in the quiet, daily fidelity of ordinary family life.

As we celebrate today, let us pray for families everywhere: that they may be places of safety, love, and spiritual growth. May parents and children, husbands and wives, caregivers and dependents, all imitate the humility, courage, and faith of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. May our homes reflect God's care, and may the virtues of compassion, patience, and forgiveness shine forth in every household, making each family a living witness of God's enduring love.

The Holy Family shows us that in love, obedience, and faithfulness, we find God's presence. Let us walk in their footsteps, trusting that God's providence guides our families through every trial and blessing alike.

# KL Archdiocesan Family Life Commission welcomes new core team

KUALA LUMPUR: The Archdiocesan Family Life Commission (AFLC) of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur successfully concluded a spiritual journey of Discernment and Election, appointing a new core team to lead the commission for the 2026–2027 term. The session, attended by 30 members, was held on December 6 at the Church of Christ the Light, Desa Jaya, and was focused on seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The gathering began with an opening prayer led by AFLC’s ecclesiastical assistant, Fr Peter Anthony. The current AFLC Chair Couple, Dato’ Dr Robert and Datin Dr Shelah Basker, warmly welcomed the attendees, expressing heartfelt gratitude for the “privilege and blessings” of their five years of service. They also acknowledged the unwavering support of the core team and coordinators, especially during the challenging years of the pandemic.

At the heart of the spiritual preparation for the election was Sr. Mary David, FdCC, who was invited to guide the discernment process, helping members seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Fr Andrew Kooi, also AFLC’s ecclesiastical assistant, reminded the



The newly elected AFLC Core Team with Fr Peter Anthony and Fr Andrew Kooi.

assembly of the growing family challenges in society and the urgent need for AFLC to rebuild core family values, encouraging all present to serve with “willing hearts.” Fr Peter further emphasised the importance of commitment to ensure AFLC’s ongoing relevance. Drawing from his experience at the World Meeting of Families (WMOF) in Rome in 2022, where he learnt about the four key themes: Family, Church, Society, and Ecology, which he subsequently proposed to Archbishop Julian Leow for implementation within the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.

Sr Mary David then guided the discern-

ment process, describing it as a spiritual preparation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. She began by posing a foundational question: “What is married life all about?” Through personal sharing, she explained that married life — and, by extension, their commitment to ministry — is about saying ‘Yes’ to God’s calling. The 45-minute session concluded with a period of prayer, affirming the importance of serving with willing hearts.

After the intensive discernment process, the election for the new core team took place. The priests and the election team meticulously guided the entire process,

which sought to discern and elect the Chair Couple, Assistant Chair Couple, Secretary Couple, and Finance Couple.

Following several prayerful rounds of voting, the newly formed AFLC core team was announced:

- **Chair Couple**  
Noel and Sharon Santiago
- **Assistant Chair Couple**  
Deva and Jackie Param
- **Secretary Couple**  
Egbert Adolf and Elena Woo
- **Finance Couple**  
Francis and Angeline Chang

The new leadership will assume their responsibilities for a one-term period, commencing January 1, 2026 until December 31, 2027. Noel and Sharon Santiago, the newly elected Chair Couple, offered thanks for the trust placed in them and the opportunity to serve, expressing their commitment to working closely with every team member to “continue the mission in building and strengthening family lives”.

The entire discernment and election process, firmly rooted in prayer and spiritual guidance, was brought to a close with a final prayer led by Fr Andrew.

**KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE**

**Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow**

**January 2026**

**1 Mass – Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, Cathedral of St John, KL**

**5-9 Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei and Conference of Religious Major Superiors, MAJODI Centre, Plentong**

**12-15 Clergy Annual Priest Assembly**

**16 Meeting – Archdiocesan Finance**

**22 Prayer Service – Week of Christian Unity**

**Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #254**

**Welcome dear friends**  
Christmas is here. As usual, the malls and shopping complexes are more ready than many of us. It’s not the first Christmas that’s of concern. It’s the second Coming, the rebirth in our lives, space and time — that’s important.  
The pilgrim Cross has arrived at the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Krubong. The *Salib* remains there till January 5, 2026.  
The MJD’s Closing of the Jubilee Year will take place at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart today, December 28 at 12.30pm.

“An elderly shoemaker named Martin is told in a dream that Jesus will visit him on Christmas Day. He spends the day watching the window. Instead of Jesus, he sees a cold street sweeper and invites him in for tea; a poor mother with a crying baby whom he feeds and gives a cloak to; and a hungry boy whom he helps. At the end of the day, Martin is disappointed until a voice reveals that every time he helped one of those people, he was actually welcoming Jesus.” *Leo Tolstoy*

**A thought for Christmas 2025: Are you looking for Him too?**  
Local Takes. Hopeful Signs.  
1. The PM says: Malaysia’s peace and prosperity can only be sustained through fair and inclusive policies that reject hatred and extremism, while embracing diversity as a national strength.  
2. Observers say: As in the previous year, the country’s political climate remained largely calm, with only a handful of domestic political episodes drawing public attention.  
3. The Government says: SARA is closing but alternative government cash and subsidy programmes are available to ease cost-of-living pressures.

4. The Malaysian Medical Association says: Mental health has become a “frontline challenge”, with one in three Malaysians succumbing to it from depression and workplace stress.  
5. The media says: Like Kuching and Penang, Sabah held its first-ever state-level Christmas celebration from December 16 to 19.

**Church In The World: Making a Difference:**  
1. Pope Leo’s *Dilexi Te* shared: Small gestures of affection: “No sign of affection, even the smallest, will ever be forgotten, especially if it is shown to those who are suffering, lonely or in need, as was the Lord at that time. (DT 4).  
2. The ‘Bible Brothers’ witness: 10 Arsenal players, including Madueke, Timber, Saka and Eze, have been building team unity and mental resilience with their Christian faith, prayer and Bible study.  
3. The Pope expressed: May Christmas and the “music be a dwelling place for the soul — an inner space where the heart can speak, drawing us closer to God and allowing our humanity to be ever more inspired by His love.”  
4. The Thai-Cambodian bishops have voiced their concern over the border conflicts that have displaced thousands.

**A Thought for The Week: Lost Contact Lens**  
A teenager lost a contact lens while playing basketball in his driveway. He searched for a few minutes, growing frustrated when he couldn’t find it, and eventually gave up. His mother, noticing his struggle, decided to look herself. Within moments, she located the lens.  
Surprised, the teenager asked, “I looked everywhere, how did you do that?” Her reply was simple yet profound: “We weren’t looking for the same thing. You were looking for a small piece of plastic. I, on the other hand, was looking for \$150.”  
*The lesson from the mother:* The focus is on value, not objects. Success isn’t always about working harder — it’s about working smarter. By looking at the bigger picture and prioritising value, challenges that seem impossible can suddenly become manageable.

**QnQ: Q asks: Why do some insist on their solution being the only right way?**  
1. A monkey, as it was putting the fish safely up a tree, was saying: “Kindly let me help you or you’ll drown.” (Alan Watts)  
The deeper insight here is about close-mindedness: assuming that your map of reality is universal, and therefore your “help” is objectively beneficial.  
2. This happens constantly in human interactions: Leaders who impose solutions without truly understanding the client’s inner world. Friends who give unsolicited advice based on what they would need, not what the other person needs, etc.  
3. Watts’ profound truth is: True help requires deep listening and humility; the willingness to enter the other’s element, to understand their nature, rather than yanking them into yours.  
4. The road to harm is often paved with the sincere belief that “I know what’s best for you.”  
Am I helping or projecting? Beware of help that harms.  
**The Spirit @ work:** “The spiritual life does not remove us from the world but leads us deeper into it.” *Henri Nouwen*  
**Something to tickle you:** “The miracle is not that we do this work, but that we are happy to do it.” *Mother Theresa*

**Bishop Bernard Paul**

**MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE**

**Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul**

**January 2026**

**5-8 Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei and Conference of Religious Major Superiors, MAJODI Centre, Plentong**

**10 Vicariate Pastoral Council Assembly – Klauang**

**11 Masses in English and Tamil – Church of Divine Mercy, Skudai**

**19 Regional Superior of the Jesuits Canonical Visit to the Bishop**

# Faithful relive Bethlehem's Christmas story at Greccio Mass

Mario Richard Peter

CHERAS: For the very first time, the Greccio Mass was celebrated at the Church of St Francis of Assisi on December 13. The event was organised by the OFS (Order of Franciscans Secular) in Cheras.

'Greccio' is the name of a town in Italy where St Francis created the first Christmas crib in 1223. All the cribs we have in our homes and churches trace their origin to this historic event. It was this event that inspired the Greccio Mass, which incorporates elements from St Francis' first living Nativity scene in Greccio.

It is a storytelling Mass in which the person portraying St Francis of Assisi offers brief introductions to the various parts of the liturgy, helping the congregation understand the significance and meaning behind St Francis' creation of the first crèche. Through these introductions, we learn that Francis sought to rekindle the



The people coming forward to venerate Baby Jesus.

real-life circumstances of what took place 2,000 years ago in the manger at Bethlehem. He longed to relive the actual moments of Jesus' birth in the stable — to feel them deeply, and in doing so, the image of the Baby Jesus appeared during that celebration of the Christmas Midnight Mass in 1223.

In the 'Introductions,' the person portraying St Francis, explains how

we will welcome Jesus' coming during the Eucharistic Celebration. First, He is present among us in the Readings of the Mass — the Word of God. Next, He is present as the 'Word made Flesh'. Finally, He becomes God with us, the Emmanuel, who, in His humility, became Man.

During our Greccio Mass, animals were present at the crib and were given food during one part



All those involved in the Greccio Mass.

of the celebration. Their presence helped to recreate and relive the actual moments of the original event at Greccio.

In the celebration, Mary praises God in Heaven through the Magnificat. Afterwards, Francis greets her with the beautiful 'Salutations' he composed in her honour. At the end of the Mass, the congregation comes forward to

venerate the Baby Jesus in Mary's arms, with both Mary and Joseph standing before the altar.

Celebrating the Greccio Mass for the first time brought this significant event in the life of St Francis of Assisi to life, allowing participants to experience it meaningfully. This marks the beginning of what promises to be many more Greccio Masses in the future.



## Two parishes spread joy, share hope for 500 little ones

KUALA LUMPUR: The parish grounds of the Church of St Joseph (SJC), Sentul came alive with laughter on December 14. In a collaboration rooted in unity, SJC and the Church of the Risen Christ, Jalan Ipoh, hosted a joint children's Christmas party, bringing together children from diverse backgrounds for a day filled with joy, celebration, and hope with the theme *Spreading Joy, Sharing Hope — A Christmas for every child*.

Registration began at 9.00am, and by the time the programme officially commenced at 11.00am, more than 500 children — accompanied by their parents — had streamed into Dewan Msgr Anthony Thomas. The participants included children from the catechetical ministry, the Myanmar and Sri Lankan communities, as well as many underprivileged children from the Sentul area.

The celebration was declared open by parish priest, Fr Frederick Joseph.

The community also took a moment to honour Msgr James Gnanapiragasam, remembering him with affection and gratitude as he marked his 57th sacerdotal anniversary,

a milestone that reflects a lifetime of faithful service to the Church.

The programme unfolded with a lively blend of performances, interactive games, and festive entertainment that kept the children engaged from start to finish. This year's entertainment segment was especially vibrant, featuring performances by the Catechism children and youth in both English and Tamil, cultural presentations from the Sri Lankan community, and an energetic showcase by the KUBM group from the Church of the Risen Christ. Adding to the joy was a clown show that had children laughing, cheering, and fully immersed in the festive spirit. Volunteers moved with purpose and joy, ensuring that every child felt welcomed and included.

A spread of delicious food awaited the children and their parents, lovingly prepared and served by parish volunteers who worked tirelessly behind the scenes.

One of the most meaningful moments of the celebration was the gift distribution, where every child received a present thoughtfully selected for their age group. The joy on their faces captured the true essence

of Christmas giving.

But the moment that truly stole the show was the snow party. Children danced, played, and reached out to catch the snowflakes, creating a scene of pure magic. It was a moment that transcended age and background, a shared experience of wonder that brought the entire community together.

Behind this successful celebration stood a dedicated organising committee led by John Bosco Morais, supported by 13 committed members from both parishes. Their months of planning, coordination, and teamwork ensured that every detail was executed with care.

Their efforts were further strengthened by the unwavering support of the various parish ministries, communities and BECCOT who played a crucial role in raising funds through Sunday breakfast sales. The kindness and generosity of our parishioners made this celebration possible.

As the celebration drew to a close at 3.30pm, the smiles, laughter and excitement of the children served as a powerful reminder of what can be achieved when a community comes together with purpose and love.

## Sharing Christmas joy with children at St Aloysius, Mantin

MANTIN: The Society of St Vincent de Paul (SSVP) of the Church of St Aloysius, in collaboration with the Parish Integral Human Development ministry (PIHD) and the Ministry of Catechism, hosted its annual children's Christmas party, welcoming children from Kampung Belihoi and FiNS (Friends In Need) for a Christmas celebration.

The morning began with SSVP members ferrying the children to the church. Over 300 participants gathered in the festively decorated canteen, enjoying a warm and inviting atmosphere filled with Christmas cheer.

A generous spread of food awaited the children. SSVP members worked tirelessly to ensure that all children and guests were well-fed and cared for throughout the event.

The celebration was further enlivened with music, performances by children from Kampung Belihoi, Flores, and the catechism choir, and the presence of two Santas distributing sweets. Goodie bags

were given to every child.

A special highlight was the games organised by the catechists. Activities were conducted both in the field and at the House of Faith, allowing children from different communities to participate together. These games not only entertained the children but also fostered camaraderie, teamwork, and friendship among all participants. The children were visibly delighted.

Beyond the food, music, and games, the most meaningful part of the celebration was spending quality time with the FiNS children; building friendships, sharing smiles, and creating memories together. The simple act of being present and attentive to the children embodied the true spirit of Christmas: generosity, care, and love.

The children's Christmas party was a beautiful reminder that Christmas is best celebrated through unity, kindness, and heartfelt fellowship, especially with those in need. **Selva Manogary**



Santa playing a game with the children.

# Rain fails to dampen spirit at ACS Sibu Christmas parade

SIBU: Despite the steady rain, about 6,000 faithful gathered for the Association of Churches in Sarawak (ACS) Sibu Christmas Parade on December 13, bringing the message of hope to the community of Sibu.

Equipped with umbrellas, caps and raincoats, participants assembled at Dataran Tun Tuanku Bujang Phase 1, joyfully embracing the celebration under the theme *Jesus, Our Blessed Hope*. The rain did little to dampen the spirit of unity.

Organised by the ACS Sibu branch and hosted by the Roman Catholic Church, the two-kilometre parade wound through the town centre, featuring lively marching bands, creatively decorated floats and enthusiastic members from various churches.

Churches taking part included the Anglican Church, Borneo Evangelical Mission (BEM), Catholic Church, Methodist Church (Sarawak Chinese and Iban Annual

Conferences), YMCA Sibu, as well as several independent churches.

The programme opened with welcome remarks by Rev Msgr Michael Lee, vice-chairman of ACS Sibu, who gave thanks for the strong spirit of unity among the churches. He highlighted that the ACS Sibu Christmas Parade, now in its 54th year, remains the longest-running public Christmas witness in Sarawak.

“What started within church



One of the floats by the Catholic Church.

grounds has grown into a powerful procession uniting people of different generations and traditions. Tonight, we walk together in faith, proclaiming that Jesus Christ is our Blessed Hope,” he said.

An opening prayer by Venerable Archdeacon Jose Jol Endru, chairman of ACS Sibu and Vicar of St John’s Anglican Church, followed, together with a multilingual Praise and Worship session led by the English Prayer Group of the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart.

Bishop Joseph Hii of the Sibu later delivered a Christmas reflection, reminding the faithful that while many Sibu natives have carried hope beyond the town, those

who remain continue to be bearers of hope to their own community.

“For those who remain in Sibu, we continue to bring hope to the people of Sibu,” he shared.

At 6.50pm, the Unity Candle was lit by Bishop Joseph alongside Rev Lee, Pastor Yahya Ating (BEM), Dr Lau Hui Ming (SCAC Methodist Church), councillor Paul Teo, penghulu Ting Tien Huat and other distinguished guests.

By 7.00pm, the parade moved through the town centre, greeted by cheering spectators along the streets. Ten brightly lit floats, followed by stage performances filled the evening with colour, joy and a clear proclamation of hope shining brightly even in the rain.



Bishop Joseph Hii leading the lighting of the unity candle with other distinguished guests.

## Carolling the message of love to the community

PETALING JAYA: The Family Life Ministry Singers (FLMS) of the Church of St Ignatius went carolling to several meaningful places, each with its own story and purpose bringing the message of Christ’s hope, peace, and joy to those in need of comfort and companionship.

The outreach began in November with Asrama Cahaya Rumah Wanita Cacat Infant Jesus Convent, where carols were presented to the residents in a simple yet meaningful gathering. Following the singing,

the session was concluded with a light dance activity, lifting spirits and fostering a sense of joy among the participants. Lunch was sponsored for the residents, allowing everyone to sit together in fellowship, bringing smiles and a sense of celebration to the home.

The next visit took place at Selayang Hospital, focusing on the palliative ward and children’s ward where they provided moments of encouragement and comfort to patients and their families through a variety of songs. These were also

sung to the dedicated health care staff of the wards. Gifts were shared and presented to all the children in the ward.

On December 5, FLMS carollers visited the Alzheimer’s Disease Foundation Malaysia (ADFM). Here, they sang for the daycare clients and their caregivers. The foundation VIPs were also present, adding significance to the occasion. The carolling sessions featured a mix of traditional Christmas carols and contemporary holiday songs. Following the carolling, FLM sing-

ers joined the luncheon organised by the foundation. It was a touching gathering that highlighted the strength of community and the beauty of shared moments — even the smallest ones.

The outreach continued at the Little Sisters of the Poor (LSP), where the elderly were honoured with melodies of hope and gratitude; reminding them that they are cherished and embraced by love. The carollers were received warmly, and the visit served as a beautiful reminder of our Christian call to cherish and accompany the elderly with care and love. The day concluded with catered food, drinks, and kueh generously sponsored by a member of the FLMS. It was heartwarming to witness everyone, particularly the elderly, delighting in the occasion.

The final outreach was at the Assunta Hospital on Dec 7, where singers moved from ward to ward, bringing comfort and cheer through song. The patients and medical staff were touched by the presence of music during a season that often

carries mixed emotions for those in hospital care. It was indeed heartwarming to see both patients and their families joining in the singing.

These outreach visits were a reminder of our call to be instruments of Christ’s compassion. May the seeds of love planted during this Christmas season continue to grow in our community and beyond. In the spirit of giving, a portion of the proceeds obtained from FLMS commercial carolling gigs were donated to Rumah Cahaya, ADFM and LSP respectively. This initiative provided much-needed support to those in need during the holiday season, spreading a message of love and compassion.

These events left a meaningful impact, not only spreading joy and uplifting the spirits of attendees but also strengthening the bonds among the singers and the wider parish community. The success of this year’s carolling has set a high bar for future events, keeping the cherished tradition alive and growing. **Family Life Ministry Singers**



Family Life Ministry Singers spreading Christmas joy at Assunta Hospital, Petaling Jaya.

## Bringing Christmas cheer to hearts at St Anne’s Minor Basilica

BUKIT MERTAJAM: The Jubilee Christmas Cheers celebration, held on December 14, was a grace-filled and heartwarming gathering for St Vincent de Paul (SSVP) adoptees and their families, as well as homebound members of the Minor Basilica of St Anne, together with their caregivers and relatives. The event beautifully reflected the true spirit of Christmas — one of compassion, unity and Christian fellowship.

The celebration was marked by joy, laughter and meaningful en-

counters as children, the elderly and their families came together in an atmosphere of warmth and belonging. Carefully planned games brought smiles and delight to both the young and the old, while the distribution of donated gifts added to the festive cheer, ensuring everyone felt remembered and cherished during this blessed season.

Fr Nelson Joseph was present to administer the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick to homebound members who were able to attend. This sacred moment of-

ferred spiritual comfort, strength and hope, reminding all present of God’s abiding love, especially for those who are frail or suffering.

Sincere appreciation was extended to the SSVP chairperson and the dedicated Homebound Ministry team for their generosity and tireless efforts in organising this meaningful outreach. Through their care and commitment, the homebound were able to share in the joy of Christmas, bearing witness to faith in action and the Church’s mission of love and service.



Some of the attendees participating in one of the games.

# Cardinal Sebastian offers comfort to juvenile inmates

Chan Lilian

SUNGAI PETANI: Cardinal Sebastian Francis celebrated the Jubilee of Prisoners at the Sungai Petani Juvenile Prison on December 14, spending time with 45 inmates, most of whom were young offenders aged between 15 and 19 years. The two-hour programme brought together prison authorities, Cardinal Sebastian, and nine faith sharers from the Penang Diocesan Prison Ministry (PDDM) in a spirit of hope, reflection, and encouragement.

The programme commenced with the singing of *Negaraku*, followed by an opening address by the Deputy Director of the Sungai Petani Juvenile Prison PP Zaini bin Ahmad. In his remarks, he reminded the inmates that their detention was “not a punishment, but a time for correction,” highlighting the prison’s



Cardinal Sebastian meeting with some inmates at the Sg Petani Juvenile Prison.

commitment to rehabilitation through continued education and structured programmes for young offenders.

In his address, Cardinal Sebastian offered words of comfort and reassurance to the inmates, noting the

significance of the day as it coincided with the Christmas season and the Jubilee Year of Hope for Prisoners. “Today is a special day. We are celebrating Christmas and also the Jubilee Year of Hope for Prisoners. This same Jubilee celebration is

taking place in prisons all over the world. We come to remind you that God loves everyone and to encourage you to have hope. Hope does not disappoint,” he said.

The official Jubilee Year song was played, after which the inmates were invited to pause in silence to remember their families and fellow prisoners. In a solemn and prayerful moment, all stood with hands clasped.

PDDM presented handmade herbal soaps and reading glasses to the prison. A PDDM faith sharer reminded the inmates that they were not alone, assuring them that many communities and churches were praying for them. The faith sharer also informed that similar Christmas celebrations were being held in prisons throughout Penang, Kedah, Perak, Perlis, and indeed across Malaysia.

Faith sharers from PDDM visit the ten prisons within the Penang

Diocese weekly, bringing the Good News, accompanying inmates, and offering encouragement in response to Cardinal Sebastian’s call to be Pilgrims of Hope, spreading hope and joy to those on the margins. Cardinal Sebastian had pointed out that the Prison Ministry is a unique ministry where volunteers have to ‘turun padang’ to reach out to the prisoners.

The atmosphere brightened during the carolling session, as the young inmates joined in clapping and singing Christmas carols in Bahasa Malaysia and English. The celebration concluded with a festive meal enjoyed by all.

Cardinal Sebastian ended the visit by personally blessing each inmate, taking time to speak with and listen to the young men, offering them words of hope and affirmation for the journey ahead.



RAWANG: Seven riders from the newly formed St Jude Bikers Club of the Church of St Jude completed their inaugural two-day, 772-kilometre motorcycle pilgrimage, putting both faith and endurance to the test in celebration of the Pilgrimage Year of Hope.

The challenging journey, which began on December 12, was as spiritually enriching as it was physically demanding, taking the group to all five designated pilgrimage churches in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.

The pilgrimage kicked off at 6.30am with a Mass celebrated by parish priest Fr Simon Labrooy, who blessed both the riders and their motorcycles for a safe journey, while well-wishing parishioners looked on.

On the first day, the group visited three pilgrimage centres in the Klang Valley: Church of Jesus Caritas, Kepong, Cathedral of St John the Evangelist, Bukit Nanas and Church of St Francis of Assisi, Cheras. After lunch, they took the East Coast Highway to reach the Church of St Thomas the Apostle in Kuantan.

The second day posed the greatest physical and mental challenge. Setting off at 9.00am, the riders faced continuous heavy rain that delayed their arrival in Port Dickson. Opting for the federal route via Kuantan, Gambang, Muadzam Shah, and Kuala Pilah, the six-hour journey was completed with steadfast conviction and faith.

Rider Peter Savirimuthu reflected



on how their spiritual commitment carried them through the harsh weather. “I have been on many rides, but this one was truly different. Visiting each church and praying along the way was incredibly uplifting. Especially before we reached the fifth church, the rain was relentless. Yet our determination to finish — and the assurance that ‘hope does not disappoint’ — kept us going.”

The riders drew strength from their faith, holding onto the words of Scripture: “But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isaiah 40:31).

The journey was both a deeply spiritual and joy-filled adventure. The riders set aside time for prayer, including quiet moments before the tabernacle and reciting the Rosary at each stop.

Another rider, Ravindren Nicholas,

shared the personal impact of the journey: “The ride was calm and meaningful. With every mile, I felt more at peace and my thoughts clearer. Each church had its own rich history, and I learned something new at every stop... I returned tired, but my heart felt light, full of gratitude, and my faith has grown deeper.”

The St Jude Bikers Club members expressed heartfelt thanks for the warm hospitality they received at each parish, specifically acknowledging the parish priests of the five churches for hosting them with “so much love and care.”

The riders returned safely to the Church of St Jude on the evening of Dec 13. This challenging inaugural ride marks a milestone for the newly formed club, highlighting a meaningful blend of fellowship, faith, and shared passion during the Pilgrimage Year of Hope. **Augustus Anand Pathinathan**



## I See Hope: Children bring Scripture to life at SMC

IPOH: The English catechetical ministry of the Church of St Michael (SMC) held its annual mini performance on December 7, centred on the inspiring theme *I See Hope*. Months of careful preparation culminated in a meaningful and vibrant presentation by the children, from preschoolers to secondary-level students.

The event began with an opening speech by the parish priest, Fr Aloysius Tan, who welcomed parents and parishioners. He expressed his gratitude for their continued support of the catechetical ministry and encouraged them to keep nurturing their children’s love for Scripture and faith formation. Before the performance commenced, Fr Konstend Gnanapragasam presented certificates of achievement to students who had achieved excellent attendance (two days absent/100 per cent) throughout the year.

The first segment brought to life scenes from the Acts of the Apostles, written by Luke to Theophilus. The play opened with the Ascension (Acts 1:1–14), inviting the audience to reflect on what happened after Easter and Jesus’ return to the Father.

The second act shifted to the Gospels of Luke and Matthew, where the children re-enacted the beloved story of the Nativity. Clad in colourful and carefully prepared costumes, they brought to life the humble beginnings of Jesus’ birth, filling the parish hall with joy and wonder. Their outstanding performance reflected not only their talent but also their dedication and understanding of the Gospel message.

To bring the entire performance to a warm and joyful close, the Preschool, Year 1, and Year 2 children gathered just below the stage to sing the Christmas classic *Mary’s Boy Child*.

Alongside the performance, attendees enjoyed a mini exhibition showcasing creative materials and projects produced by the children throughout the year. The display highlighted their learning, creativity, and growing knowledge of Scripture.

Appreciation was also extended to all the catechists in making the entire programme and performance possible. Their commitment to nurturing the children’s faith and growth remains an invaluable blessing to the parish community. **Jennifer Alberto**

# Parish Pastoral Assemblies in ArchKL

## Church of St Thomas the Apostle

KUANTAN: The parish community of the Church of St Thomas the Apostle held its Parish Recollection Day and Parish Pastoral Assembly on December 13. The programme was attended by approximately 52 parish leaders and members from various ministries.

This gathering was truly special, as the Parish of St Thomas was honoured to be named one of the Jubilee Pilgrim centres of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur for the Jubilee Year 2025. The event provided the community with an opportunity to pause, reflect, discern, share, and renew its commitment as the Jubilee Year draws to a close.

The day began at 9.00am with the Church Prayer — *Lauds* — grounding participants in communal prayer and setting a contemplative tone for the sessions that followed. The recollection was led by parish priest, Fr George Packiasamy, who delivered three key sessions centred on the Jubilee Year and the parish's growth.

In the first session, Fr George explored the biblical and pastoral roots of the Jubilee, emphasising that it is a sacred period of grace, reconciliation, restoration, and renewed hope. He reminded participants that the Jubilee is more than a series of events or celebrations; it is a profound call

to conversion, mercy, and mission.

During the second session, participants engaged in deeper reflection on the Jubilee Year Prayer, guided to see it not merely as words to recite, but as a spiritual compass calling the faithful to trust in God. Small group discussions allowed participants to connect the Jubilee call with their personal faith journeys and parish responsibilities, fostering sharing and communal discernment.

After lunch, Fr George guided the participants in the third session, reflecting on what it means to be a synodal Church — one that walks together, listens attentively, and discerns prayerfully. The session emphasised collaboration, mutual respect, and shared responsibility within parish life, encouraging participants to translate the Jubilee spirit into concrete actions.

The recollection concluded with a Holy Hour before the Blessed Sacrament, followed by the recitation of the Divine Mercy Chaplet, entrusting the parish, its ministries, and its ongoing pastoral journey to the mercy and guidance of the Lord.

It was a grace-filled experience that strengthened bonds among participants and renewed their commitment to live the Jubilee Year of Hope — not only during this sacred year but beyond it — as a faithful, listening, and missionary parish community.



## Church of St Jude



RAWANG: Approximately 150 parishioners from the Church of St Jude participated in the Parish Pastoral Assembly (PPA) focused on collective discernment and spiritual listening. Organised by the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC), the assembly shifted the focus from traditional planning to seeking God's will through the Conversations in the Spirit.

The assembly opened with PPC chairman, Augustus Anand Pathinathan, summarising the 2024 PPA findings centred on the Four Pillars: Family, Society, Ecology, and the Church. "The path forward is tough," Anand noted, "but there is nothing impossible if we put our heads together."

The main focus was set by parish priest, Fr Simon Labrooy, who introduced the theme of Conversation in the Spirit — a method rooted in listening and discernment, ensuring the parish's future direction is guided by the Holy Spirit rather than the loudest voices. A twenty-minute period of silent Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament prepared participants to receive the promptings of the Holy

Spirit before beginning three rounds of discussion.

Parishioners shared openly, honestly, and with clarity, embodying the essence of a synodal parish — leadership that listens and a people who participate. The key findings focused on strengthening the community's witness and outreach, identifying three critical areas for the path ahead:

- Empowering the Next Generation – Recognising that young people are called to serve now, not tomorrow.
- Reaching the Marginalised and Disengaged – Understanding that a synodal parish must always move toward the marginalised, where God awaits.
- Strengthening Formation and Witness – Emphasising that to truly be witnesses, the faithful must be well-formed in their faith.

The assembly demonstrated the parish's commitment to becoming "the People of God: humble in service, bold in faith, generous in love, joyful in witness, and united in the grace of the Spirit." **Mercy Stellus Almeida**

## Church of the Good Shepherd

KUALA LUMPUR: Fifteen ministry leaders from the Parish Coordinating Council of the Church of the Good Shepherd (GSC), Setapak, gathered on December 6 to reflect, discern and affirm the Parish Pastoral Plan for 2026 using the R.O.P.E.S. method — Review & Relate, Overview, Presentation, Exercise and Summary.

Parish priest, Fr Mitchel Joseph, explained the significance of the R.O.P.E.S. methodology and its fresh approach in fostering creativity in pastoral planning. He emphasised the importance of remaining focused and faithfully implementing the Parish Pastoral Plan 2026 in

the spirit of communion, participation and mission.

Session facilitator Rita Krishnan reminded participants of the "fruits" gathered during the Parish Pastoral Assembly on November 15, 2025, which highlighted four key pastoral counsels — Family, Church, Ecology and Society — and underscored the lived realities faced by parishioners.

At the start of the session, Rita invited participants into discernment with a Scripture reflection titled *The Trap of Loving the Creature and Forgetting the Creator*. Through the R.O.P.E.S. process, participants made meaningful discoveries and

shared unique phrases that captured their insights. Discussions deepened as challenging concerns were addressed in a respectful and composed manner, even amid differing viewpoints. The "fruits" of the R.O.P.E.S. methodology helped participants identify concrete action plans to shape the Parish Pastoral Plan for 2026.

During the presentation of findings, participants acknowledged the many 'traps' they had fallen into as leaders — particularly becoming overly task-oriented while neglecting the feelings and emotions of those they serve. They also recognised moments when they failed to acknowledge the work of God's unseen hand in their mission. The

use of media as a pastoral tool to reach parishioners of all ages and language groups emerged as a key focus of discussion. Participants further agreed on the need for a shift in mindset among catechists and a review of their engagement with parents.

The session concluded with the rollout of a Parish Plan Pathway for 2026, outlining key milestones for the coming twelve months. Fr Mitchel wrapped up the gathering by underscoring the importance of adopting new methodologies, such as R.O.P.E.S., to remain relevant and responsive to contemporary Church challenges, and expressed his gratitude to the participants for their dedication and commitment.



KUALA LUMPUR: The Parish Pastoral Assembly (PPA) at the Chapel of Kristus Aman was independently organised by the community under the guidance of Fr William Michael and the Kristus Aman Parish Council (KAPC).

The assembly saw enthusiastic participation, with parishioners sharing their experiences, hopes, and concerns for the continued growth of the community. Participants actively engaged in the Conversations in the Spirit, offering valuable insights and constructive feedback during group discussions to help chart a clearer pastoral direction.

About 90 participants were divided into 14 groups comprising the priest, ministry leaders, BEC leaders, and youth members.

The session began with an opening address by the KAPC chairman Demetrius Ravi, who encouraged participants to fully engage in the

## Chapel of Kristus Aman



discernment process guided by the Holy Spirit in the synodal journey of the community. He then led the community in prayer and handed over to Rita Krishnan who was invited to help facilitate the PPA.

Participants reflected on several

key questions during the session. They considered how the findings presentation affected them personally, exploring their feelings and initial reflections. As they listened to others in the group, they reflected on whether new perspectives or

deeper insights emerged, and what inner movements, questions, or reflections arose within them. They also contemplated their own parish journey and, after hearing one another, identified any insights, significant points, or movements that were emerging from the collective sharing.

Through open sharing and reflection, the groups presented meaningful observations and areas for improvement, helping the council gain a deeper understanding of the community's needs in building a Christ-centred parish.

Fr William in his concluding address then summarised the collective findings, highlighting two main themes: Formation, Youth and BECs. He noted that just as BEC awareness was emphasised in October, the coming year would focus on increasing awareness of the various ministries operating in the parish.

He further stressed that formation is essential across all ministries and proposed organising a three-day formation retreat for all ministry members to help deepen understanding of the PPA findings and provide clarity for the community's mission.

Fr William also announced that the Senior Citizens Ministry will be revived, with a special Mass dedicated to senior parishioners scheduled for the following week.

Addressing the youth, Fr William expressed his desire for fuller participation and encouraged them to build stronger bonds within the community. He shared his intention to foster greater youth involvement, including the possibility of appointing a full-time youth worker to support their formation and engagement in parish life.

The assembly concluded with a strengthened sense of direction and renewed vision for the year ahead.

## Signs and Wonders workshop inspires sign language interpreters

KUALA LUMPUR: A new collaboration between the Catholic Ministry for the Deaf (CMfD), under the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development (AOHD), and Deaf and Terp Corporation in Manila, Philippines, is set to energise and strengthen the ministry. Formalised on October 16, the partnership launched the *Signs and Wonders: Catholic Sign Language Interpreter Workshop Series*, aimed at enhancing both the technical skills and spiritual formation of Catholic Sign Language and Deaf Interpreters.

Held online via Zoom from Oct 17 to Nov 29, the series brought together 18 committed participants. The workshops were led by Deaf and Terp experts Naty Natividad, Bayani Generoso, Michael Autencio, and Jojo Mahinan, who shared their knowledge and passion. The programme combined practical interpreting techniques with spiritual formation, strengthening the skills and faith of Catholic Church BIM Interpreters (*Jurubahasa Isyarat Malaysia*).

The series emphasised that interpreters are more than translators — they are bridges, enabling the Deaf to encounter Christ and participate fully in Church life. While many assume that providing an interpreter or



simply allowing Deaf individuals to attend Mass ensures accessibility, the sessions highlighted that true inclusion requires more. Deaf Catholics should be able to pray, respond, reflect, and engage fully, reminding the wider congregation that the Body of Christ is incomplete when any member is left at the margins.

Interpreters explored the interplay of

culture, language, and faith, learning that Scripture interpreting requires clarity, reverence, and careful message analysis. The goal is not word-for-word translation, but conveying the fullness of the liturgy so that Deaf members can truly experience God's presence. Challenges such as limited theological vocabulary and the scarcity of Catholic-specific signs were addressed.

As Michael Autencio noted, authentic theological signs develop as Deaf individuals engage meaningfully with the Mass, reflecting a true understanding of Christ and the liturgy.

Participants left inspired to continue serving the Deaf community with renewed dedication. Genevieve Yap said she “truly enjoyed every session,” gaining insights that challenged her to go beyond mere interpreting so that Deaf Catholics may encounter Christ in their heart language, BIM. Interpreters from the Church of St Michael, Ipoh — Alina Sng, Reuben Francis, and Jennifer Alberto — described the experience as “a privilege” and “truly eye-opening,” highlighting the facilitators’ patience and passion.

Fr Michael Chua, CMfD’s ecclesiastical assistant and a participant, expressed hope that this would mark the beginning of further collaborations with the Philippines, benefiting interpreters and enhancing their skills. The series also created a platform for BIM Interpreters from Kuala Lumpur, Penang, and Ipoh to connect, share experiences, and support one another.

The workshop concluded with an online graduation ceremony on December 5.

# Legionaries urged to serve with humility

SIBU: Bishop Joseph Hii, *pic*, urged members of the Legion of Mary to serve the community with humility.

Speaking at the 70th Anniversary celebration of the Legion of Mary in SibU on December 14 at Kingwood Hotel, Bishop

Joseph reminded members that as the movement grows, so should their humility. “As we grow, now in our 70th year, let us be reminded that the greater we are and the more members we have, we must continue to serve with humility. We can fall because of our pride,” he said.

He expressed gratitude for the Legion’s presence in the Diocese of SibU, now the largest movement in the diocese, and highlighted its expansion to the Iban and Melanau communities. He praised the current leadership for recognising the need to include native communities, particularly in rural areas, noting that young members “are very strong and are the future of the Legion of Mary.”

Bishop Joseph also reflected on the Legion’s origin, inspired by the Holy Spirit and founded by Frank Duff in Dublin in 1921, long before the Second Vatican Council. “The Legion of Mary is a movement that is filled with the Holy Spirit, and without the Holy Spirit, we cannot do it,” he said, urging members to prioritise their service for the glory of the Church, the



## St Jude’s Legion of Mary celebrates unity in diversity

RAWANG: The Church of St Jude hosted its Annual General Reunion (AGR) on December 13, in a joint celebration organised by the Mandarin Curia of St Jude, Mother of Grace.

About 100 Legionaries of Mary from Curia Bestari Jaya and Curia St Jude attended, representing the Mandarin, English, Tamil, and the newly established Bahasa Malaysia praesidia. The gathering was a vibrant celebration of faith, unity, and diversity, reflecting the richness of the parish community.

The highlight of the event was the solemn Legion promise taken by 12 new members of the Bahasa Malaysia Legion, Bonda Rahmat Ilahi—a historic milestone for the Legion in Rawang. Each praesidium also

presented performances, showcasing their talents and strengthening bonds across language and culture.

In his address, Regia President Ignatius Wang congratulated the parish for achieving what he described as “a full set”—the completeness of having all language praesidia represented in one church. He reminded Legionaries of their vocation to save souls and encouraged them to reach out to their communities, especially through Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC) gatherings.

“Look out for the lukewarm, the lapsed Catholic, the old and lonely, and care for them,” he urged.

Ignatius also highlighted the Legion’s guiding themes — *Unity and Love* for 2025



Legion, and ultimately, God.

Fr Philip Hu, spiritual director of the SibU Comitium, encouraged legionaries to continue praying for the beatification of Frank Duff, whose dedication inspired the global spread of the Legion. He noted that members’ active participation in parish life — including visiting families and the sick — has brought hope to the community. “Let us take this opportunity to renew our legionary promise and commitment so that we may

continue to work for God in the spirit of Mary,” he said.

More than 1,000 members attended the celebration, which included entertainment and recognition of two members for their 70 years of service. Also present were Peter Jong, treasurer and correspondent of Singapore Senatus, and Philip Kong, President of Good Counsel Comitium. A thanksgiving Mass was held earlier at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart.



and *Salt and Light* for 2026 — encouraging members to embody these values in their apostolic mission.

The celebration not only marked the growth of the Legion in Rawang but also reaffirmed its mission of evangelisation and

service. With the inclusion of the Bahasa Malaysia praesidium and the promises of new members, the Legion of Mary in St Jude now stands as a living witness to unity in diversity, ready to serve every corner of the parish community.

# Christmas lights honour Bondi shooting victims

SYDNEY: Three days after the tragic Bondi Beach mass shooting, the local community transformed one of their annual Christmas traditions into a service of remembrance.

Each year, St Mary's Cathedral lights up with religious images, drawing thousands for a joyful celebration. This year, the light show became a memorial. Archbishop Anthony Fisher said that the gathering was an opportunity to pray and rededicate themselves to cre-

ating "a peaceful society where everybody's respected and loved."

Jewish rabbis, leaders from other religions, the Prime Minister, the premier of New South Wales, and members of the public attended. Fifteen candles — one for each victim — were lit, with representatives from Hindu, Jewish, and Muslim communities participating. The site has become a spontaneous memorial, flooded with millions of flowers, while the light show's climax featured a menorah

with the Jewish phrase, "May their memory be a blessing."

Archbishop Fisher noted the attack follows two years of local tensions linked to global conflicts, which have revealed anti-semitic sentiment. He stressed the Church's duty — especially as the Catholic Church marks 50 years since *Nostra Aetate* — to teach love, respect, and civil discourse, warning against rhetoric that provokes violence.

While the shooting targeted the



(Giovanni Portelli Photography/Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney)

Jewish community, Archbishop Fisher emphasised that the entire city is traumatised. Mass shootings are rare in Australia, and many assumed they were safe. The Church is offering emotional support, counselling, and assistance through schools and social services to help the community heal.

Despite the tragedy, the Christmas light show and memorial brought hope. Around half a million people of different faiths gathered, demonstrating unity, respect, and the enduring role of St Mary's Cathedral as a place where people of all religions come together. **Vatican News**



(Unsplash/Mauro Lima)

## Walk to church, keep cell phone away

ALAPPUZHA: A Catholic bishop in Kerala, southern India, has urged his faithful to adopt an environmentally responsible lifestyle, including walking to parish churches and observing a weekly one-hour mobile phone fast.

"Care for the Earth is a moral and spiritual responsibility," said Bishop James Anaparambil of Alleppey in his Christmas message. He encouraged reducing carbon footprints and actively protecting nature, noting the diocese's plan to minimise emissions ahead of

its platinum jubilee in 2026. A diocesan Green Mission Council has already begun coordinating eco-friendly initiatives.

Bishop Anaparambil, *pic*, 63, urged families to care for the Earth while attending to their spiritual well-being. He advised walking or cycling to churches and other public places whenever possible, using public transport, and



planting saplings to mark birthdays, anniversaries, and personal milestones.

He called on the faithful to join Church, government, and NGO-led conservation initiatives, dispose of plastic responsibly, and keep churches, cemeteries, and homes plastic-free. The use of plastic and thermocol for decorations was discouraged, and attention was drawn to reducing noise pollution during festivals and events.

On lifestyle habits, the bishop urged limiting fast food and junk

food, choosing reusable gifts, and reducing excessive mobile phone use. He suggested switching off phones for at least one hour a week to spend time with family or engage socially.

The message also highlighted concern for the poor and sick, encouraging visits and assistance, and called for abstinence from alcohol and intoxicants, linking personal discipline and social responsibility to care for creation. George Kommattam, **Matters India**

## Three-hundred-year-old pulpit collapses

MANILA: A 300-year-old pulpit, considered a national cultural treasure in the Philippines, collapsed in a church south of Manila two weeks before Christmas.

The collapse of the centuries-old pulpit was confirmed by the parish, Our Lady of the Assumption in Maragondon, Cavite province, in a Facebook post on December 15. The incident took place on Dec 12, the parish said.

An investigation by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), which oversees heritage structures, revealed that

the collapse was caused by an "internal structural failure" involving the pulpit's tornavoz or sound bar.

The Parish of Our Lady of the Assumption is one of the most popular churches in the Diocese of Imus in Cavite, where Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, now a pro-prefect at the Dicastery for Evangelization, was once the local ordinary.

The parish said that "all the fragments of the pulpit have been carefully collected and are currently ensured and monitored in the parish baptistry." The NCCA

said that immediate action was needed even as the pulpit's recovered wooden panels were in good condition.

"We ask for your continued prayers. We assure you that we will do everything in accordance with the highest conservation standards to restore our historic pulpit to its former glory," the parish said.

The Maragondon church was first built by the Jesuits in 1618 and was demolished in the mid-1640s to prevent it from being used by Dutch invaders. It was rebuilt in wood in 1650, and then reconstructed as a stone church in 1714. It was declared a national cultural treasure in 2001.

"This honour, bestowed in 2001, recognises the church not only as a place of worship but also as a priceless symbol of our rich heritage, Spanish colonial architecture, and deep-rooted faith," said the local government of Maragondon in a Facebook post on July 31, the 24th anniversary of its declaration as a national cultural treasure.

"Built in the 18th century, the church stands as one of the few remaining examples of Baroque architecture in Cavite, featuring intricately carved wooden retablos, coral stone walls, and a unique pulpit — all testaments to the craftsmanship and devotion of generations past," the local government added.

The law requires such treasures to be protected by the state through the National Museum of the Philippines. **CruX**



(CruX/Parroquia de Nuestra Señora de la Asuncion de Maragondon/Facebook)



Distribution of basic food packages to the people of Aek Maranti Hamlet, Central Tapanuli.

## Caritas mobilises relief for thousands in Sumatra

JAKARTA: Caritas Indonesia, working with diocesan networks, volunteers, and local partners, has been providing urgent humanitarian assistance to communities affected by flash floods, landslides, and extreme weather across Sumatra. At press time, relief efforts were ongoing in the Diocese of Sibolga, Diocese of Padang, and Archdiocese of Medan, with coordinated operations through parishes, priests, and sisters.

In Sibolga Diocese, an Integrated Evacuation Post in Dusun Kebun Pisang is sheltering 691 survivors in 100 shelters, offering food, health services, and psychosocial support, particularly for children traumatised by the disaster. Caritas volunteers also run public kitchens and health posts, serving thousands of meals and providing medical care to hundreds of residents.

Caritas Padang Diocese continues aid distribution and medical services in South Siberut, Padang City,

and surrounding areas, assisting over 1,600 people through emergency supplies, public kitchens, and health services.

In Medan Archdiocese, Caritas Indonesia is partnering with Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) to support flood survivors in multiple parishes, distributing food, hygiene kits, and health services to thousands. Shelters accommodate over 1,200 families, while aid packages and medical support reach affected communities across North Sumatra.

Fr Fredy Rante Taruk, Executive Director of Caritas Indonesia, emphasised the ongoing collaboration with local authorities, volunteers, and humanitarian partners to ensure coordinated aid, strengthen community resilience, and provide hope for affected families. Caritas Indonesia also expressed gratitude for the support of international and local partners, including the Holy See and Caritas Friends, which bolsters the relief efforts across Sumatra.

# Building bridges across faiths

The Archdiocesan Office for Human Development (AOHD) organised a series of interfaith trips recently aimed at strengthening relationships, deepening mutual understanding, and exploring new avenues for collaboration towards addressing the humanitarian needs of our local communities. The journey, which started in Taiwan, began as a mission trip under AOHD, where participants had the opportunity to learn from Tzu Chi in areas of caring for the environment and cultivating values of compassion and gratitude. A group of 16 embarked on this trip of learning which also comprised of core members of the Archdiocesan Creation Justice Ministry, Dr Bill Lay from Caritas Hong Kong and Archbishop Julian Leow.

## Learning compassion in action

In Taiwan, we visited Tzu Chi facilities which focused on education, health care, communications and the environment. During our meeting with Dharma Master Cheng Yen and our witnessing of the Commissioning of Tzu Chi's Pure Practitioners and ordination of Jing Si Tea ceremony, we were deeply moved by the Buddhist emphasis on compassion-in-action — a reminder that sincere service is a universal language shared across all faiths. It was deeply moving to have familial dialogue with the people of an organisation that has felt like family over the many years of collaboration, working hand-in-hand in the service of humanity.

The journey continued to Abu Dhabi, UAE, with a different delegation of 25 individuals from various backgrounds, including the AOHD Team, CREST, Muslim Council of Elders, Tzu Chi and representing the Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur was Fr Xavier Andrew, the ecclesiastical assistant to the Archdiocesan Ministry of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (AMEIA). This leg of the journey was almost a year in the making; it was a journey of faith, friendship and understanding. This initiative invites the various organisations in the delegation to celebrate unity of diverse religious communities and reaffirms our shared commitment to peace, dialogue and humanity.

## A mission rooted in encounter

Abu Dhabi combined cultural immersion, dialogue sessions, and visits to significant religious and historical sites. The trip, as part of an ongoing effort to build bridges between communities locally and abroad, saw the interfaith delegation which comprised of delegates from Malaysia, Taiwan, Sweden and USA, make a visit to the Apostolic Vicariate of Southern Arabia to share experiences of dialogue, charity and cooperation. They had the opportunity to meet with Fr Stefano



## From East Asia to the Middle East

Luca, OFM Cap, PhD, who is the director of the Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue Office of the Apostolic Vicariate of Southern Arabia (IFEDO-AVOSA) and the Chief Religious Leader of the St Francis Church in the Abrahamic Family House (AFH) of Abu Dhabi.

H.E. Bishop Paolo Martinelli, OFM Cap, welcomed the group and highlighted the importance of working together to build a more fraternal world. During the meeting, we had the opportunity to present the works of our respective organisations, and both sides enthusiastically shared their commitment to dialogue, friendship and cooperation among people of different faiths, a shared effort to make the world a better place for all.

Bishop Paolo emphasised the “good example religions can give when they work together for a more human and fraternal society”. He described the Catholic Church in the Gulf as a ‘Church of migrants’ made up of people from all over the world, speaking many languages and coming from different cultures, yet called to be one community that walks together with people from other denominations and religions. The bishop also shared personal experiences of encounters with leaders of other faiths and recalled the milestone Document of Human Fraternity.

“This encounter is meant to enhance dialogue and better understanding between different religions and cultures while strengthening relationships and cooperation towards better serving our communities. In AOHD, our works are imbued with Catholic Social Teaching, which teaches us about solidarity. We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, or ideological differences. We are our brothers and sisters’ keepers, wherever they may be. Loving our neighbour has global dimensions in a shrinking world,” explained Dr Gary Liew, director of AOHD.

He added that Bishop Paolo shared a simple yet profound reflection that those who have issues with people of other faiths is a direct reflection of their own relationship with God.



Interfaith Delegation at the Mary The Mother of Jesus Mosque in Abu Dhabi, UAE.

## The Abrahamic family house: A living symbol

The delegation then had the opportunity to visit the Abrahamic Family House (AFH). Situated on Saadiyat Island, the Abrahamic Family House is a ground breaking interfaith complex featuring a mosque, church and synagogue side by side. Inspired by the shared values of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, it promotes dialogue, understanding and coexistence. The specially arranged visit did not just give us access to areas that were reserved for VIPs but it gave a real insight to the beauty of coexistence, to see the genuine friendship between the priest, imam and rabbi as they welcomed us and took the time to share insights to each place of worship was truly inspiring and heartwarming. “Coming to Abu Dhabi was a great reminder for me about how peace loving and embracing Islam inherently is. Especially the visit to the Abrahamic Family House made a deep impression, the great effort to show the three Abrahamic religions side by side, each with their own unique symbols and customs, but with a deep sense of unity between them,” said Johan Alwall, Tzu Chi’s Project Manager based in Taiwan.

## Encounters with religious leaders

Other unique places of visit were to the BAPS Hindu Mandir, the Mary Mother of Jesus Mosque, St Joseph’s Cathedral, even a courtesy visit to the Malaysian Ambassador in Abu Dhabi. Two major moments in Abu Dhabi were the meeting with H.E. Judge Mohamed Abdelsalam and H.E. Sheikh Abdullah bin Bayyah.

We met with Judge Mohamed Abdelsalam who is the Secretary-General of the Muslim Council of Elders and played a pivotal role in drafting the Document on Human Fraternity, co-signed by the late Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar in 2018. The meeting on one hand was an opportunity to share views and areas of further growth and cooperation but on a deeper level to truly understand the humanity in others. A very touching moment was when the Judge shared that he had met Pope Francis 17 times and regarded him with the same love and respect as the Grand Imam. It was equally moving when the AOHD director had shared that when they had planned this trip, it was intended to lead up to meeting with the late pontiff and they

were hoping he would have gotten a lot better by the time this trip took place. He added, “we miss him very much and he is very much alive in the spirit of this journey of fraternal friendship”.

“True interfaith connection begins when we stop trying to defend our differences and start recognising the shared humanity that makes honest dialogue possible,” said Ustaz Dr Mohamad Razif bin Mohd Fuad who accompanied the delegation from Malaysia.

The meeting with Sheikh Abdullah bin Bayyah came equally as a blessing for the delegation. He is a prominent Islamic scholar from Mauritania, known for his moderate approach and promotion of universal peace. He is highly respected by various segments of society for his contributions in the fields of jurisprudence, *usul fiqh*, and peace, leading the UAE Fatwa Council and the Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace. At 90 years old, he is a key figure in interfaith dialogue and efforts to counter extremism, respected for his relevant thinking and work championing tolerance and harmonious coexistence. The delegation was fortunate to be invited to his personal residence where he opened his home with warm hospitality hosting the delegation. The Sheikh gave us a considerable amount of time where everyone spoke freely on topics of mutual understanding and peace. We had learned so much from this humble encounter of exchange, especially on what the Sheikh spoke on with regards to joyful coexistence.

## A sacred conclusion

The journey in Abu Dhabi concluded with a visit to the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, one of the world’s largest and most beautiful mosques. The Grand Mosque, which was visited by the late Pope Francis when he was in Abu Dhabi, boasts an impressive 82 domes, 1,000 columns and the world’s largest hand-knotted carpet. The mosque can accommodate over 40,000 worshippers and is open to visitors of all faiths, showcasing UAE’s values of openness, beauty and unity. The delegation’s itinerary in Abu Dhabi ultimately reflected the mission of journeying together as one, with stops that highlighted both the diversity and shared values of the region’s faith traditions and the universal call of human fraternity.

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Delegation with the Interfaith and Ecumenical Dialogue Office of the Apostolic Vicariate of Southern Arabia (IFEDO – AVOSA), at the Church of St Theresa, Abu Dhabi.

# The gift of vulnerability

A recent tragedy shattered me completely. My friend's son — who was also my own son's classmate — passed away unexpectedly in a road accident. He was so young. I broke down immediately, but my thoughts soon turned to my friend, the boy's mother. I cannot begin to imagine her unbearable pain.

Fear and anxiety crept in, paralysing me. How was I going to face her? What could I possibly say to comfort her? I know if I were in her shoes, nothing anyone uttered could help. Yet, I knew in my heart I must be there.

When I saw the body of this young, handsome man who used to play, laugh, and study with my son, tears streamed down my cheeks. The pain was immense. I went to my friend, held her, and said nothing. She sat, and I knelt and bowed, laying my face on her hands and kissing them softly. Still, no words were exchanged. Yet, in that silence, I spoke volumes.

I am sharing this because it stirred a deep, raw vulnerability in me. I understand how frightening it is to face someone else's profound suffering, especially when we cannot relate to it in a familiar or comfortable way. My wish not to confront my friend — because I didn't know how — is perhaps akin to the discomfort we feel when visiting a family member living with

dementia. We recoil from what makes us uncomfortable.

But what if we accept our weakness and face it with compassion? This acceptance can be profoundly healing for all of us. Not the kind of healing that removes the disease, but the kind that awakens the heart to love.

This approach is inspired by Fr Henri J.M. Nouwen, who spent the last 10 years of his life as a caregiver in a L'Arche community (a community for people with disabilities). His experience that transformed him, helped me to view my own human brokenness not as a



## Dancing with Dementia

DR CECILIA CHAN

liability, but as the path through which I could connect deeply with the suffering of others. This is where genuine healing and hope can be offered.

This belief inspires a work ethic rooted in authenticity and empathy, shifting the focus from cure to care. True care involves being present with someone, rather than attempting to fix or mould them into the person we prefer them to be. This means confronting my own discomfort instead of

running away. It reminds me of our shared humanity; we all possess the capacity for

both light and shadow. Perhaps this honest realisation of human sameness is what could help us open our hearts to each other.

Our presence can be truly healing when we are willing to be present in spite of the discomfort. This shared experience can be a source of healing for us all.

I recently saw this power demonstrated with a person diagnosed with Alzheimer's. While the diagnosis and adaptation were enormously challenging for his family, they came together as a community to provide a network of support for both him and his spouse, his primary care partner. Surrounded by this safe network, he transformed from being disoriented and anxious to becoming calm, connected, and at peace.

We, as a community, play a vital role. We can be the bridge that heals people instead of isolating and segregating them.

As we ponder this during the Advent season, we are reminded: "To care means first of all to be present to someone... Most of all we need to be people who are present, truly present, to each other." — Henri Nouwen

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



## A year-end reflection on inclusion, gratitude and hope

The International Day of Persons with Disabilities, observed worldwide and in Malaysia on December 3, coincided with the start of Advent. As we approach the end of the year, this offers a fitting moment to pause and reflect on how we, as a Church and as a society, welcome, value, and walk together with persons of all abilities.

This year, in conjunction with *Hari OKU Kebangsaan 2025* (National Day for Persons with Disabilities), the Minister of Women, Family and Community Development, Datuk Seri Nancy Shukri, issued a nationwide call emphasising the rights, empowerment, and dignity of persons with disabilities. While such calls are often framed within national policy and social responsibility, they resonate deeply with the Church's own mission of care, compassion, and community. They remind us that inclusion is not confined to legislation or advocacy campaigns, but lived daily in the spaces where people gather, worship, and belong.

While the disability community continues to face many unmet needs, it is important to pause and acknowledge — with gratitude — the strides made by parishes across Malaysia towards greater inclusion. Much has already been written about why inclusion matters in the Church.

Yet,



## Inclusion Matters

Desiree Kaur

before turning our attention to what more can be done, we must first recognise and affirm what is already taking place — often quietly, faithfully, and without fanfare.

Across Malaysia, some parishes have taken meaningful steps, both big and small, to ensure that individuals of all abilities feel welcome. Some have made physical adjustments to ensure access, whether through ramps, seating arrangements, or more thoughtful use of space. Others

have fostered a culture of patience and understanding, especially when children struggle to remain still or quiet during Mass. These gestures may seem ordinary, but for families who have felt judged or unwelcome elsewhere, they can be deeply transformative.

There are catechists who adapt lessons creatively, recognising that learning does not look the same for every child. There are parish staff who take time to listen rather than dismiss concerns, and volunteers who step in gently to support rather than correct. Some fellow parishioners choose kindness over complaint, offering a smile instead of a disapproving glance. These acts may not always be labelled as "inclusive initiatives," yet they are lived expressions of care, respect, and hospitality — the foundations of any truly welcoming community.

Inclusion does not

always begin with programmes or policies. More often, it begins with attitude — with a conscious decision to welcome rather than question, to accompany rather than correct, to see the person before the behaviour. These everyday choices shape the culture of a parish far more powerfully than any checklist or guideline. They deserve recognition and gratitude, for they reflect a Church that is learning, slowly and sincerely, to love more deeply.

At the same time, International Day of Persons with Disabilities reminds us that inclusion is not a destination we arrive at, but a journey we continue to walk. Despite progress, many individuals and families still find themselves at the margins of parish life. Some long to participate more fully but remain unsure whether they are truly welcome. Others attend regularly, yet feel unseen socially or unsupported spiritually. For families caring for persons with disabilities, the effort required simply to show up can be immense, and without understanding or encouragement, that effort can become unsustainable.

Looking ahead, there are key areas where parishes can continue to grow in ways that are practical, compassionate, and achievable.

**Deepening awareness** is an important starting point. Many disabilities are invisible, and differences in behaviour are often misunderstood. Greater awareness of neurodiversity and hidden disabilities can help parish communities respond with understanding rather than judgment, curiosity rather than criticism.

**Offering flexibility in worship spaces** is another meaningful step. People pray, move, and engage differently. Creating environments that allow for movement, quieter areas, or alternative forms of participation helps ensure that worship remains accessible without losing its reverence.

**Inviting participation rather than perfection** can also transform parish life. Persons with disabilities have gifts to offer,

even if those gifts do not fit conventional expectations. When ministries become places of encouragement rather than performance, more people are empowered to serve in ways that are meaningful to them.

**Walking alongside families** is equally vital. Inclusion supports not just individuals, but entire households. Simple gestures of understanding, flexible expectations, and genuine accompaniment can ease the isolation that many families quietly carry.

None of this requires perfection or specialised expertise. It requires openness, humility, and a willingness to learn together. Inclusion is not about having all the answers, but about being present, attentive, and responsive to the needs of those in our midst.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ at Christmas, we are reminded that this season is, at its heart, a celebration of life. It is a time when vulnerability, dependence, and humility are honoured rather than hidden. In celebrating Christmas, we are called to celebrate all life — in every form, with every ability, and at every stage.

The Church is already a place where many find welcome, comfort, and belonging. As we close this year and step into the hope of a new one, may we continue to build communities where that welcome grows ever wider. May our parishes remain places where every life is valued, every person belongs, and every ability has a place in the shared story of faith, hope, and love.

*Desiree's advocacy for all abilities began in 2017 after her son Haans was diagnosed with autism. Frustrated by the lack of accessible information, she took the initiative to educate herself, earning a Master's in Special Education. A former PR practitioner, she went on to establish Project Haans, a website supporting Malaysia's special needs community. She also co-hosts the Kita Family podcast with four other mothers of neurodivergent children.*



• Continued from page 10

The final leg of the journey brought the delegation to Rome, where interfaith engagement gave way to a deeply ecclesial and spiritual experience. The delegation participated in the Jubilee of the Poor, with Mass celebrated by the Holy Father at St Peter's Basilica.

We visited several churches along the way — some grand, others humble — and each offered a different glimpse of the universal Church. In one small chapel, we watched an elderly woman pray the Rosary with such tenderness that it felt like stepping into a living icon of faith. In another parish, young people led worship with an energy that reminded us of the Church's vibrant future. These spaces, though different in architecture and culture, shared the same heartbeat: a community gathered around Christ. Dr Yoong Sao Chin, executive director of CREST Malaysia shared, "truly an amazing journey through different faith and ending in resting places of the Apostles and martyrs of church history. A poignant challenge for present-day believers in Christ." Besides visiting churches and making a pilgrimage to the four Holy Doors, the delegation had meetings with the different Vatican dicasteries.

The first was with the Dicastery for the Service of Charity, where the delegation was greeted by the Cardinal Prefect, H.E. Konrad Krajewski. We got to see firsthand the clinics for the homeless which was set up by the late pontiff and was just recently visited by the current pope a couple of days before our visit.

The much-anticipated meeting was with the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development where the Malaysian Ambassador to the Holy See was also in attendance. Sr Alessandra Smerilli, F.M.A., secretary to the dicastery representing the Cardinal Prefect, was present throughout the exchange session. Many areas were explored in terms of cooperation in the fields of migration, ecology and disaster management.

The meeting with the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue was unique as it started with first meeting the Cardinal Prefect, H.E. George J. Koovakad, before adjourning to the dicastery for a visit, followed by the dialogue session at the Malaysian Embassy. The meeting and exchange were a chance to speak freely, not just on our aspirations but relating it to the current situation in Malaysia with its multi-ethnic makeup. The sentiments that were floated in Abu Dhabi were still very much stirring in our hearts as there was a call to go beyond mere surface dialogue when it comes to interfaith meetings and sessions. "The future of interfaith collaboration depends on tangible actions beyond just dialogue," one delegate noted. This journey, as one delegation across 3 continents comprised of different individuals and backgrounds, is a testament of faith in action, to journeying as a synodal Church that goes beyond its boundaries of comfort and really reaches out to meet their neighbours at their humanity.

#### Faith in the everyday

Beyond formal sessions, the delegation encountered faith expressed in daily life. In the form of the Sant'Egidio Community. Sant'Egidio is a Christian community born after the Second Vatican Council and has three fundamental focuses - Prayer, Poor and Peace. The Community pays attention to the periphery and peripheral people, gathering men and women of all ages and conditions, united by fraternal ties through the listening of the Gospel and the voluntary and free commitment for the poor and peace.

# From interfaith dialogue to a pilgrimage of encounter



Pope Leo XIV learning sign language from a representative from Catholic Ministry for the Deaf (CMfD).

The delegation observed their language school, where they help migrants and refugees from all over learn the local language and culture in a comprehensive way. We visited their thrift shops and met community members whose stories reflected resilience and hope. Beyond the presentation of their history and humanitarian work, the Community of Sant'Egidio, which is currently active in 73 countries, constantly strives to bring people together towards the call for Peace. Just the week prior, held at Rome's Colosseum, Pope Leo XIV joined religious leaders from around the world for the Community of Sant'Egidio's annual Meeting for Peace, calling for an end to war and a renewed commitment to reconciliation and prayer.

One moment that stood out for many was the dinner at Trattoria de Gli Amici, a quaint restaurant which is operated by the Community with people who are differently abled and on the spectrum. This is where the group witnessed dignity and friendship shine beyond words. For several delegates, it served as a reminder that spiritual enlightenment often emerges from ordinary people and ordinary places. To cap the evening, the delegation was invited to join in the Community's evening prayers which is held daily at 8.00pm in various churches across Rome, as well as around the world. At the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere, the delegates came together as one community to pray for peace and those living on the fringes of society.

#### The Vicar of Christ

The highlight for many in the delegation was the meeting with His Holiness, Pope Leo XIV

which came as a surprise to many, at how present he was throughout our audience with him. The Pope was formally introduced to the delegates with much excitement as he acknowledged the delegation's dynamics of different faiths, race and nationalities. As the Holy Father took the time to listen intently, we exchanged a handful of gifts, which included traditional Batik from Malaysia and a *Bahasa Isyarat* Malaysia (Malaysian Sign Language) book. The Pope was delighted to meet the two deaf representatives from the Catholic Ministry for the Deaf (CMfD) as he learned how to sign 'I Love You'. The delegates from Tzu Chi presented the Heart Lamp of the Sutra of Infinite Meaning to the Holy Father as they shared the origins of Tzu Chi, the humanitarian work they do and the meaning behind the lamp.

When the director of AOHD asked the Holy Father what his message to Malaysia is, Pope Leo XIV replied, "To build bridges with all people and to continue to give witness to the whole world that peace is possible, even with peoples of different religions, of different lands, that we all be peace builders to the world."

Our audience with Pope Leo XIV offered a moment of profound encouragement, as he emphasized the Church's ongoing commitment to dialogue, compassion, and shared responsibility for the common good.

#### A journey that continues at home

As the delegation returned home, the delegates emphasised that the trip was not an endpoint but a catalyst. Many expressed a renewed commitment to strengthening interfaith relationships within their own communities and to applying the insights

gained during the journey.

Sis Yeo Kar Peng, a commissioner of Tzu Chi Malaysia, shared: "Love, peace and harmony echoed through every meeting I attended, from Abu Dhabi to Rome. These were not just words, but commitments translated into action. I was deeply moved by the Abrahamic Family House in Abu Dhabi, where a synagogue, a Catholic church and a mosque stand side by side as a living symbol of fraternity and tolerance. In the Vatican, the medical centre within the grounds of the Papal Basilica of St Peter impressed me as it affirms human dignity and compassion. In Rome, the Scuola di Lingua e Cultura Italiana della Comunità di Sant'Egidio, a free and inclusive language school, left a lasting impression through its openness, welcoming migrants and refugees without discrimination.

The more I listened and reflected, the more convinced I became that religious teachings, despite their different names, share the same purpose: to inspire love, truth, gratitude, patience, tolerance, compassion, kindness and wisdom in daily life. This shared calling unites our religions in a common mission for peace and harmony.

These experiences convinced me that interfaith dialogue is not merely important but essential. It draws people closer, nurtures brotherhood and builds sincere friendships. Peace is possible if we truly believe in it and commit to overcoming division together."

For Catholic participants, the experience was a reminder of the Church's mission to be a sign of unity and hope, especially as the Jubilee Year of Hope draws to a close. The journey underscored that dialogue is not merely an event but a way of life — one that begins with listening and is sustained by genuine friendship.

Travel has a way of slowing the heart just enough for God's whispers to be heard. On this journey, that truth emerged through unexpected encounters, quiet chapels, and the gentle hospitality of people whose lives briefly intersected with ours. What began as a simple trip became, in many ways, a pilgrimage — not to a single holy site, but to the sacredness found in ordinary places and people.

Among the most moving moments were encounters with individuals whose stories held both struggle and hope. A shared meal, a smile across a language barrier, or the simple kindness of strangers echoed Pope Francis' call to build a "culture of encounter," where Christ is recognised in every person. These moments were not dramatic, but deeply human, revealing God's quiet presence.

As we returned home, three themes surfaced in our reflections: gratitude for the journey and warm hospitality received; humility in recognising how much we can learn from the faith of others; and mission — a renewed awareness that our calling as Catholics extends beyond parish boundaries into everyday life.

Travel may not change the world, but it can change the traveller — and sometimes that is where renewal begins. We returned home carrying not souvenirs, but stories: reminders that God is always at work, often quietly, through ordinary people. In the end, the journey was less about the places visited than the graces received in our various encounters along the way.



On the pilgrims walk towards the Holy Doors of St Peter's Basilica (Via Della Conciliazione - the road to reconciliation)

Back in the years of old, there would be sounds of Christmas carols at residential neighbourhoods, at shopping malls and even in hotels, as early as 1st week of December. Many Christian groups would send their youth and choir groups to bring the joy of Christmas to society at large. Carolling practices started as early as the beginning of November and would intensify towards the last weeks leading to Christmas.

Fast forward to 21st century Malaysia, there is a distinct absence of these carollers in public. Except for a few groups performing at scheduled timeslots at shopping malls, or within closed doors in privately owned premises, the sounds and joy of Christmas carolling is mostly absent in Malaysia. In its place, we now hear the sounds of commercial Christmas. Songs and albums sung by popular western singers, or re-recordings by newer artistes to appeal to this generation of youth.

As a youth in the 1970s, I used to enjoy going house-to-house with the church choir group, wishing all the uncles and aunties a very merry Christmas. We would gather in church around 6.00pm, hop onto a small bus or van, wear our red hats, ties or scarves, white shirts and carry on board whatever musical instruments we had (tambourine, guitar,



## Reminiscing Church

RICHARD CHIA

# Silent nights before Christmas

triangle, flute, etc). We even took along a portable piano. Each night we would cover twelve to fifteen houses, singing with the neighbours gathering outside. Usually, there would be light snacks and drinks, and off we went to the next house.

Our numbers would increase as we went from house to house, as the host resident would inevitably join in. Plus, there would be a small convoy of cars following, parents who were drivers for the night. By the time we finished our last house, our shirts would be soaking wet with sweat and our voices almost hoarse. But laughter, fun and fellowship would keep us going. Those were the days when there were less or no restrictions for house-to-house carolling.

These days, going house-to-house carolling is a challenge. There is a need to apply for police permits, residents in guarded and gated communities would need approval, condominium security is strict on unannounced visitors and walking the neighbourhood streets may invoke barking dogs and residents' complaint.

Another distinct change for the weeks leading to Christmas is the absence of much Christmas activities and events before Christmas day. Ever since the Church clarified that Christmas celebration and events should only be carried out during the liturgical season of Christmas (from Dec 25 until the feast of the Epiphany) and not the 40 days before Christmas, which is the liturgical season of Advent.

Catholic teachings say that Advent

is the time of waiting, waiting for the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. As such, we are urged to refrain from any form of Christmas celebration, any form of joyful activities and spend time in contemplation and reflection as we await the coming of baby Jesus.

Carolling, if done, must be the singing of Advent hymns. Hymns that welcome the coming of the child Jesus. Favourite classics like *Angels we have heard on high; Away in a Manger; O Come Divine Messiah* and many more remain popular hymns. For many Catholics born in the previous millennium, we may hum and sing these hymns from memory.

Today's commercialised Christmas is filled with jingle bells, snowflakes, reindeer, winter wonderland, Santa Claus, presents, gift-giving, parties and holidays. This is how many celebrate Christmas today. Christ and Mass are removed from this liturgical event.

This year, the Catholic Church's Jubilee Year 2025 is a special Holy Year with the theme "Pilgrims of Hope," running from December 24, 2024, to January 6, 2026. It is appropriate that I review all that has occurred in Malaysia in the past twelve months.

The opening of the three Holy Doors in Rome heralded the start of the worldwide Jubilee year celebration. Each diocese in Malaysia had also designated specific churches as pilgrimage sites visited by hundreds, if not thousands, of pilgrims coming from far and near. The *Perjalanan Salib* (Journey of the Cross), launched during the Malaysia Catholic Youth Day (MCYD 2025) in Kota Kinabalu,

saw the gathering of thousands of young people for a week of prayer, fun and fellowship.

At the recent The Great Pilgrimage of Hope event, organised by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) Office of Evangelisation, held in Penang, where more than 900 participants from 32 countries, comprising cardinals, bishops, clergy, religious and laity, the participants were urged to become storytellers, whispering the Gospel and walking a different way, like the Magi who visited baby Jesus.

As 2025 draws to a close, do not allow this year to become another "same old, same old" year as before. Let this be a spiritual reawakening for everyone. For all the spiritual indulgences received during the pilgrimage year, and the blessings received, we look forward to a spirit-filled 2026.

A song that aptly sums up the spirit of Christmas is by Jimmy and Carol Owens, titled "Christmas Isn't Christmas", and it goes like this:

*Christmas isn't Christmas  
till it happens in your heart.  
Somewhere, deep inside you,  
is where Christmas really starts.  
So, give your heart to Jesus,  
you'll discover when you do.  
That it's Christmas,  
really Christmas for you.*

**Richard Chia** shares his experiences on the journey of the Church in Malaysia in the past forty years, its challenges and achievements as it moves towards synodality.

Our parishes and homes during Christmas would have had the crib, a tender reminder of hospitality, welcome, and the human responsibility to make space for God and for one another. But what if we dared to see ourselves as innkeepers? Each of us holds the keys with the choice to welcome or to turn away.

The question is not only whether we make room for Christ in our hearts, but whether we make room for Him in others, especially those with silent struggles or those who may never enter our pews. To be an innkeeper is to see the manger in Bethlehem as a mirror for today, asking whether our lives, homes, and parishes are places where Christ is truly welcomed.

### When we feel displaced ourselves

Many of us know the quiet ache of feeling out of place, stepping back from ministry, weighed down by work, family, or health, or simply feeling invisible in the parish. Some wonder where their calling to serve truly is or if their gifts are valued. In such moments, it is easy to believe we are not needed. Yet the Gospel reminds us that God has a mission for each of us. The innkeeper in Bethlehem may not have realised his role, but even his refusal set the stage for the manger.

When we feel displaced, God is weaving our lives into His plan. Our mission may lie beyond church walls, but it is no less vital. The call to be an innkeeper often begins when we feel forgotten. In emptiness, Christ reminds us, the door we hold is not only for

## Each of us is an innkeeper

ourselves, but for others. Our own displacement can become the very place where we learn to welcome those who feel the same.

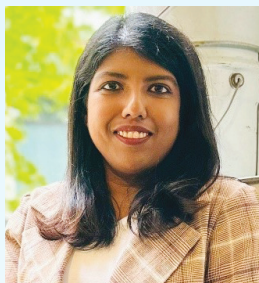
### Looking beyond the intra

Too often, our gaze remains fixed inward. We worry about parish committees, liturgical schedules, who is serving where, and whether ministries are functioning smoothly. While important, they are not the whole mission. The danger is that we become so absorbed in the internal life of the church, that we forget the outward call to bring Christ to the world.

Our real mission is not only to polish pews or perfect programmes, but to carry Christ's love to those who cannot come to church, who are struggling in silence, belong to other faiths yet share the same human hunger for dignity, food, shelter, and hope. The innkeeper's mission is not only to welcome those who knock, but to go out and find those who cannot even reach the door. As innkeepers, we are called to see beyond the parish bulletin and into the lives of those who may never read it, yet long for the same love of Christ.

### Synodality: A call to the margins

The ongoing journey of synodality in the Church challenges us to broaden



## Catholic Digest

ELVINA FERNANDEZ

our vision. Pope Francis reminds us that the Church is called to walk together, listening to all voices, especially those on the margins. This means that our communities must go beyond internal concerns and embrace those who are often forgotten, the migrants who leave everything behind in search of safety, refugees who carry trauma and uncertainty, indigenous peoples whose cultures and lands are threatened, and

the poor who struggle daily for food or shelter.

To be an innkeeper in the spirit of synodality is to recognize that Christ comes disguised in their faces, and our mission is incomplete if we remain comfortable within church walls while others remain outside, unheard and unseen.

### The innkeeper's mission today

The true calling to live as innkeepers today means to be attentive to the hidden struggles within our parish. Are we aware of families who are unable to afford white communion outfits, parents struggling to buy monthly groceries, children lacking school supplies or uniforms, and households without festive clothing for special seasons? In these moments, the

innkeeper's heart is revealed through compassion, generosity, and a readiness to make space for others.

At the same time, simple acts of service, supporting the marginalized, extending Christ's joy beyond parish walls, is a way of opening the door of the inn, proclaiming: "There is room here for you. You are not forgotten. Christ's love is for you."

A mission of love that travels

The innkeeper's mission does not wait for others to knock, but goes out to meet them. This is the heart of the Incarnation: God did not wait for humanity to climb to heaven, but came down to dwell among us. When we carry Christ's love to those who cannot reach the inn, we embody that same movement. In welcoming others, we find belonging; in serving, we discover our mission; and when we open the door, we realise Christ has already been waiting there.

Each of us is an innkeeper, entrusted with a mission larger than any single ministry. God calls us to look beyond the intra, to see the faces of those outside, and to bring His love to them. Synodality reminds us that the Church is not complete until it walks with those on the margins. They are not guests at the door, but Christ Himself, seeking shelter in our hearts.

**Elvina Fernandez** is passionate about connecting scripture with contemporary realities. Through her writing, she seeks to inspire belonging, empower the community, and make faith accessible in everyday life.



Fr Ron Rolheiser

# Who would have thought it?

Once had the privilege of visiting the Holy Land. It's a strangely different place. Soaked in history, in struggle, in religion, in blood. Virtually every inch of its soil has been soaked in blood, including the blood of Jesus. History leaps out at you from every stone.

Ancient things come to the surface there and mix with the things of today. When you stand in its sacred spots, you begin to understand why Moses was told to take his shoes off and why, through the centuries, so many wars have been fought over this small strip of desert. Aply named the *Holy Land*, I walked its ground, barefoot in soul.

Of all the things I saw there, including the tomb of Jesus, few touched me as deeply as did the Church of the Visitation. It stands in sharp contrast to most of the other churches there that mark the key events in Jesus' life.

Unlike most of the other churches, the Church of the Visitation is a very modest building. You don't see any gold or marble. Its wooden walls and oak ceiling are plain and mostly bare. However, on the front wall, behind the altar, there is a painting that depicts the scene of the Visitation, and it was this painting that struck me deeply.

It's a picture of two peasant women, Mary and Elizabeth, both pregnant, greeting each other. Everything about it sug-

gests smallness, littleness, obscurity, dust, small town, insignificance.

You see two plain looking women, standing in the dust of an unknown village. Nothing suggests that either of them, or anything they are doing or carrying, is out of the ordinary or of any significance. Yet, and this is the genius of the painting, all that littleness, obscurity, seeming barrenness, and small-town insignificance makes you automatically ask the question: *Who would have thought it?* Who would ever have imagined that these two women, in this obscure town, in this obscure place, in this obscure time, were carrying inside of them something that would radically and forever change the whole world?

*Who would have thought it?* Yes. Who would have thought that what these obscure peasant women were gestating and carrying inside of them would one day change history more than any army, philosopher, artist, emperor, king, queen, or superstar ever would?

Inside them, they were gestating Jesus and John the Baptist, the Christ and the prophet who would announce Him. These two births changed the world so radically that today we even measure time by the event of those births. We live in the year 2025 after that event.

There's a lesson here: Never underrate, in terms of world impact, someone living

in obscurity who is pregnant with promise. Never underestimate the impact in history of silent, hidden gestation. How can any of us have any real significance in our world when we live in obscurity, unknown, hidden away, unable to do big acts that shape history?

We can take a lesson from Mary and Elizabeth. We can become pregnant with promise, with hope, with the Holy Spirit and then, hidden from the world, gestate that into real flesh, our own. We too can reshape history.

If we can grasp this, there will be more peace in our lives because some of the restless fires inside us will torment us less. In brief, there's a perpetual dissatisfaction inside us that can only be stilled by accepting something we might term the *martyrdom of obscurity*, that is, the self-sacrifice of accepting a life in which we will never have adequate, satisfactory self-expression. That acceptance can help still that pressure inside us which pushes us to be known, to make a difference, to make our lives count in terms of the big picture.

We all know the feeling of sitting inside of our own lives and feeling unknown, small time, undistinguished, and frustrated because our riches are unknown to others. We have so much to give to the world, but the world doesn't know us. We yearn to do great things, important things, things that

affect the world beyond the boundaries of the small towns we live in (even when we are living in large cities).

What can help bring some peace is the image expressed in that painting in the Church of the Visitation, namely, that what ultimately changes the world is what we give birth to when, in the obscurity and dust of our small towns and in the frustration of lives that forever seem too small for us, we become pregnant with hope and, after a silent gestation process, one not advertised or known to the world, we bring that hope to full term.

When I was teaching at Newman Theological College in Edmonton, our president then was a Holy Cross priest who brought us some Maritime colour. When surprised by something, he would exclaim: "Who would have thunk it?"

Yes, two pregnant women, two thousand years ago, of no status, isolated, standing in the dust, forever changing the world? *Who would have thunk it?*

**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](http://www.ronrolheiser.com)

## SOCIAL JUSTICE



### Making a Difference Tony Magliano

## A Christmas miracle – when enemies became brothers

As the first Christmas of World War I approached, Pope Benedict XV on December 7, 1914, asked the leaders of all warring governments to agree to an official ceasefire. He begged "that the guns may fall silent at least upon the night the angels sang."

Sadly, his plea was ignored by government leaders. But remarkably, many of the soldiers in the trenches declared their own unofficial truce.

On Christmas Eve of 1914, German troops in Ypres, Belgium put candles around their trenches and sang Christmas carols. When opposing British troops heard the Germans singing, they responded with Christmas carolling of their own.

Artillery throughout the region fell silent.

Then a remarkable scene occurred. German and British soldiers climbed out of their trenches and ventured unarmed into the highly dangerous "No Man's Land" to exchange gifts of food and drink, as well as souvenir hats and buttons.

The truce also allowed opposing sides to retrieve their dead and participate in joint services.

A firsthand account of this inspiring Christmas truce was given by Bruce Bairnsfather, who fought with a British machine gun unit. He wrote: "I wouldn't have missed that unique and weird Christmas Day for anything. ... I spotted a German officer, some sort of lieutenant I should think, and being a bit of a collector, I intimated to

him that I had taken a fancy to some of his buttons. ... I brought out my wire clippers and, with a few deft snips, removed a couple of his buttons and put them in my pocket. I then gave him two of mine in exchange."

Reportedly, as many as 100,000 British and German troops along much of the Western Front – a line of trenches stretching from the North Sea to the Swiss frontier with France – stopped fighting and engaged in similar acts of human kindness.

What an incredibly inspiring Christmas story! Nothing short of a miracle – when enemies became brothers!

But as is often the case, the "leaders" got in the way. High-ranking officers ordered all such truces to stop – and to start killing again.

The political, cultural, military, media and economic forces for war have long been extremely powerful. And in recent decades their power has become almost invincible.

Our culture praises warriors. Our entertainment industry inspires a sick delight in war. With patriotic platitudes, politicians send our young men and women off to battle – to kill and be killed – while weapon producing corporations like Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Northrop Grumman, RTX Corporation, BAE Systems, and General Dynamics get rich from war and war preparation (see: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/11/30/top-global-arms-producers-revenues-surged-as-major-wars-rage-sipri-report>).



On Christmas day 1914, spontaneous truces were agreed between Allied and German troops (The Bridgeman Art Library)

In the midst of all of this evil, clergy remain mostly silent, and countless Christians in the pews appear indifferent. Instead, we need to awaken our baptismal calling to prophetically denounce evil!

Well thank God not everyone follows the constant drumbeat to war. In fact, some who were once a part of the war-machine are now committed to dismantling it. The organisation Veterans for Peace ([www.veteransforpeace.org](http://www.veteransforpeace.org)) is an excellent example.

These former warriors, now converts to nonviolence, have a prophetic message for all who support war: "Our collective experience tells us wars are easy to start and hard to stop and that those hurt are

predominantly the innocent."

The mass murder of war is right out of hell!

But Christmas is a time to think of heaven touching earth; a season to joyfully recall the Prince of Peace coming among us.

It's a time to climb out of our trenches to grasp the hands of our enemies, and seriously reflect upon the message of angels who call each of us to build peace on earth and good will towards all.

**Tony Magliano** is an internationally syndicated Catholic social justice and peace columnist. He is available to speak at diocesan or parish gatherings. Tony can be reached at [tmag6@comcast.net](mailto:tmag6@comcast.net).

# Little Catholics' corner

Can you help the Holy Family find their way to Egypt and then to Nazareth?



Hello children,

When we talk about the Holy Family we are talking about Jesus and His mother, Mary, and His foster-father, Saint Joseph.

Mary became the mother of Jesus when she was betrothed (formally engaged) to St Joseph, Jesus' real father was God the Father Himself.

So, St Joseph acted as the Father of Jesus on earth.

St Joseph was a carpenter and worked hard to provide for his family.

Mary loved Jesus and Joseph and cooked and cleaned for them. When Jesus was old



enough, St Joseph trained Him to be a carpenter as well. Because they all loved each other with generosity and selflessness, they were really the happiest and holiest family that ever lived.

We can imitate the Holy Family by loving our parents and siblings and putting others before ourselves. What can you do today to make your family happier and holier?

In a few days, we will be celebrating the new year 2026. I would like to wish you and your family, Happy New Year!

Love  
Aunty Eliz

## Holy Family Word-Find



L G O D S E L F L E S S  
O M H V J E F A E J A C  
C O O P E R A T I O N A  
H T L C S L M H S S H R  
I H Y H U E I E H E L P  
L E O O S A L R A P O E  
D R T M A R Y H R H V N  
H O M E H N J A E E E T  
F A I T H R O P E A C E  
F O S T E R Y P P O O R  
P E R F E C T Y C A R E

See if you can find all these words about the Holy Family in the puzzle!

Use the leftover letters to fill in the blanks at the end!

- |             |        |          |
|-------------|--------|----------|
| CARE        | GOD    | LOVE     |
| CARPENTER   | HAPPY  | MOTHER   |
| CHILD       | HELP   | MARY     |
| COOPERATION | HOLY   | PEACE    |
| FAITH       | HOME   | PERFECT  |
| FAMILY      | JESUS  | POOR     |
| FATHER      | JOSEPH | SELFLESS |
| FOSTER      | JOY    | SHARE    |
|             | LEARN  |          |

The best way to be like the Holy Family:

\_\_\_\_\_!



Mary,



Under what title do we honour Our Lady on January 1st?  
Use the code to find out!

D E F G H M O R T  
\* \* \* \* \* \* \*

Answer: the Mother of God.



**SEREMBAN:** Slightly over 100 youth from parishes across the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur recently gathered at the Church of the Visitation for a faith-filled programme celebrating unity, hope, and the vital role of young people in the Church.

The event began with registration, followed by an uplifting Praise and Worship session that brought together youth from all language groups in a spirit of joy and fellowship.

This was followed by a talk by Fr Michel Dass, who reflected on the Jubilee of Hope. He reminded the youth that they are never alone on their journey of faith and that true hope never disappoints. Fr Michel encouraged everyone to be people of hope, hopeful enough to walk together, support one another, and trust that God accompanies us through every season of life.

Just before Mass, participants took part in a Rosary Walk, offering their prayers as a community and entrusting their lives, vocations, and hopes to Our Blessed Mother. This moment of prayerful reflection prepared hearts for the Eucharistic Celebration that followed.

The Eucharistic Celebration was celebrated by Fr Michel, with Fr Xavier Andrew, Fr Christopher Soosaipillai, Fr Christopher Loh, OCD, and Fr Chin Sin Wee, OCD concelebrating. In his inspiring homily, Fr Michel reminded the parish community that youth are a precious gift from God, deserving of our full love, trust, and acceptance. He gently urged everyone to see young people for who they truly are, rather than judging them by their clothing, appearance, or how well they seem to “fit in.” What matters most, he emphasised, is the heart — a heart that is curious, eager to learn, and growing in faith.



Fr Michel spoke passionately about the importance of giving young people the space to serve and learn. Too often, adults say, “They don’t know enough,” or “They’re not ready.” Yet he challenged the community to reflect: how can young people ever grow if they are never given a chance? When youth are allowed to participate, to try, and even to make mistakes, their unique talents, gifts, and God-given creativity begin to shine.

He encouraged the Church to welcome young people just as they are, creating a space where they truly feel at home. Fr Michel also reminded everyone that no honest work is small or unworthy. Whether one becomes a professional, a priest, or even a lorry driver, every vocation is valuable and dignified. The true measure of life, he said, lies not in titles or social comparisons, but in the sincerity, effort, and faith with which one lives.

Turning to parents, Fr Michel spoke with great tenderness about the pressures often placed on children. Many parents push their children toward certain courses or careers simply because “someone else’s child is doing it.” He reminded the congregation



that every journey has its own pace and purpose. Priestly formation may take eight years, a university degree several years, and a diploma a shorter period—yet each path is meaningful, and no journey should be seen as lesser than another.

He encouraged parents to trust their children, guiding them with love while giving them the freedom to discover their own calling. When young people are nurtured with

trust, encouragement, and patience instead of pressure or comparison, they flourish in ways beyond what we could ever imagine.

Fr Michel’s message was simple yet powerful: when we choose love over judgment, encouragement over criticism, and trust over fear, the Church becomes a true home — a place where youths can grow in faith, embrace their gifts, and walk confidently on the path God has prepared for them.



## Alpha ignites faith and fellowship at St Theresa Chapel

**PAHANG:** From December 6-7, St Theresa Chapel in Gambang became a place of renewed encounter and joyful discovery as parishioners gathered for a two-day Alpha programme, an initiative designed to help participants explore the foundations of the Christian faith through conversation, reflection, and community.

A total of 37 parishioners participated with four facilitators from Alpha KL who guided the sessions throughout the weekend. The majority of the participants were young adults from Sabah and Sarawak, aged 17 and above. Most attendees came from the BM apostolate and Catholic Student Varsity Fellowship of Universiti Malaysia Pahang Al-Sultan Abdullah, making the programme a meaningful space for them to deepen their relationship with Christ.

Over the course of two days, participants engaged in inspiring talks and small-group sharing, which encouraged them to dialogue about life, faith, and the person of Jesus Christ.

The welcoming atmosphere of Alpha allowed many to speak freely, ask questions, and rediscover the beauty of Christian fel-

lowship. Some participants shared their testimonies on how this programme has changed them and ignited the Holy Spirit in them.

*“This Alpha has changed me by learning from the experience sharing during group discussion, and now I know that God does love us so much.” – Testimonial 1*

*“What touched me the most throughout this programme was the praying-over session, where my group members prayed for me even though we were strangers, but they were willing to pray for me” – Testimonial 2*

The organising team ensured that the environment remained warm and communal, with shared meals and moments of fellowship creating deeper bonds among participants. The gentle presence of the Holy Spirit could be felt throughout the programme, touching lives in profound ways.

At the end of the programme, Mass was celebrated by Fr George Packiasamy, marking a grace-filled conclusion to the spiritual journey shared by all. The Eucharist served as a moment of thanksgiving, unity, and renewal, sending participants forth with strengthened hearts and renewed purpose.

# Live-in programme strengthens vocations and parish bonds

INDONESIA: The St Ignatius Krapyak parish recently welcomed 24 seminarians from St Paul Major Seminary in Yogyakarta's Kentungan for a three-day live-in programme that brought the seminarians closer to parish life while enriching the community.

Each seminarian stayed with a host family in one of the parish's 24 neighbourhood communities, allowing them to experience daily parish life firsthand. During their stay, they led two family-focused community sessions and joined a variety of parish activities, including visits to families and the elderly, youth ministry events, children's catechesis, teenage catechetical groups and preparations for first communicants.

While the programme initially faced some hesitation over hosting seminarians overnight, careful planning and clear communication from the organising committee helped ensure smooth operations. Host families reported enriching and meaningful interactions, describing the experience as affirming and spiritually uplifting.

Placement of the seminarians was carefully considered, taking into account their interests, home parishes, and the specific conditions of each community. This thoughtful approach helped create a focused and meaningful experience for both the seminarians and the parishioners. Many families expressed joy in welcoming the seminarians and noticed a renewed spiritual energy with-



Seminarians from St. Paul Major Seminary in Yogyakarta pose with parish leaders and host families during their send-off gathering at St. Ignatius Krapyak Parish in Semarang following a three-day live-in program. (LiCAS News/Elisa Rinihapsari)

in their communities.

At the conclusion of the programme, parishioners expressed hope that these seminarians would one day serve as priests committed to their future communities. The Vocation Promotion Team also started forming a small group for children interested in exploring a religious vocation.

Overall, the live-in programme successfully strengthened vocations, fostered community ties, and reinvigorated parish life at the grassroots level. Both the seminarians and parishioners left with memories of shared joy, spiritual growth, and a renewed sense of belonging. Many have expressed hope that the programme will continue in the future, extending its benefits to even more members of the parish community. **Elisa Rinihapsari, LiCAS News**



Seminarians join parish children and volunteers in outdoor games and formation activities during the live-in program's community outing in Semarang. (LiCAS News/Elisa Rinihapsari)

## Jwala Youth Fest 2025 Draws 800 Catholic Youth to Srikakulam



SRIKAKULAM, Telegana: About 800 Catholic youth from dioceses across the Telugu-speaking States participated in Jwala Youth Fest 2025, organised by the Telugu Catholic Bishops' Conference (TCBC) Commission for Youth from December 11-14 at the Mariagiri

Shrine in the Diocese of Srikakulam.

The three-day regional event combined Youth Jubilee celebrations, the 67th Regional Youth Elections, and a Sports and Cultural Festival, aimed at promoting youth leadership and coordinated pastoral action



(Communio facebook)

within the Church. The fest was held under the leadership of Bishop Rayarala Vijaya Kumar, PIME, Chairman of the TCBC Commission for Youth.

Bishop Pili Antony Das, Coadjutor Bishop of Nellore, and Dr Anand Andrew, Professor

at St John's Regional Seminary, Hyderabad, attended as special guests for the sports events, addressing participants on discipline, teamwork and leadership.

The Regional Youth Elections enabled representatives from various dioceses to elect new youth leaders through a democratic process, while the sports and cultural events provided structured platforms for participation and inter-diocesan interaction.

Youth Directors and volunteers coordinated the programme, and the TCBC Commission for Youth acknowledged the cooperation of the Bishops of the Telugu States in organising the gathering.

Jwala Youth Fest 2025 marked one of the largest recent regional youth gatherings of the Catholic Church in the Telugu region, reinforcing institutional coordination and youth participation at the regional level. **Manisha Sharon, Catholic Connect**



# Remembering my mentor, Maureen Selvaratnam

I write this not just as an activist, but as one of the many lives profoundly shaped by the fearless spirit and boundless compassion of Maureen Selvaratnam (81). She was the light that guided me from being a “village girl” to a lifelong organiser, mobiliser, and advocate for justice. She was one of my most potential-realising mentors.

### The spark of aspiration

I met Maureen during my early days of secondary education. At the time, I was a student at Methodist Girls’ School (MGS), Ipoh. I was a home-ly girl who kept mostly to myself, my studies, and my family. Maureen, was a teacher who had a vocal, confident nature. She entered my life through my school friends who were church goers.

From a young age, Maureen consistently discussed the principles of social justice, discrimination, and exploitation. She was incredibly humble, and deeply imbued with humanity and love for people, regardless of race or religion.

Her liberation theology was her profound ability to analyse the situations of inequality and exploitation. Her analysis ignited my mind and heart to fight for the rights of the common people.

### A mentor who crossed boundaries

Maureen never let physical or personal barriers stand in the way. I was born with eight siblings, six of whom were males. My mother adored her boys. Despite the tough time I had meeting her due to house chores, she would come to my home. She would sit with me, help in house chores and for hours we would discuss about organising workers and the root cause of poverty. This was the essence of Maureen: relentless commitment.

I was raised Hindu, and my family held great suspicion that I might be converted if I attended meetings at the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes. But Maureen never talked about Christianity; she talked to me about Liberation Theology focused on exploitation and organising workers and community. She never hesitated to tell me I should go to the temple. She respected my identity while broadening my world.



### Action and advocacy: The fruits of mentorship

Maureen was my shield and my strength. When I attended late meetings, and my mother would close the door to the house, Maureen was there for me to hold her hands for strength the next day.

At the age of 19, she supported me to attend the Young Christian Workers (YCW) international meeting of workers in Hong Kong. My family saw this as a taboo — a woman going to meetings abroad — but Maureen carefully handled my parents and convinced them to say yes. This single act paved the way to my destiny.

### The legacy we continue

Through Maureen’s tireless mentorship, YCW meetings, National Committee meetings, and organising workers became a normal part of life. Maureen was a strength to many YCW members, not just myself.

Her well-lived life with her kind husband, Patrick, remains a living testament to a marriage built on partnership and shared values. Her children, Joseph Roy, Jeffri, Juliana, and Jason, in one way or another, continue her dedication to human rights causes.

Maureen, 2025 has been a year of reflection, where I lost two of the mentors who shaped where I am now. You are finally resting in power, dear Maureen but, the struggle continues.

*Those who do not move, do not notice their chains.* — Rosa Luxemburg

Maureen Selvaratnam never stood still, and because of her, neither will I. **M. Saras PSM**

## MEMORIAM

For enquiries, please contact:  
Email: [memoriam@herald.com.my](mailto:memoriam@herald.com.my)  
Tel: 03-2026 8291

### In Ever Loving Memory of Joseph Fernandez 30.12.1949 – 31.12.2017



*Eight 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.*

*His jokes and antics still bring a smile to each one of us in a special way when we reminisce of him.*

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

Missed by Iyfin, Ivanna and Justine.

### 14th 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.

### 60th Anniversary In Loving Memory of



### Joe Brigget

Date of Birth: 11th April 1959  
Eternal Rest: 2nd January 1966

*“I thank my God every time I remember you.”  
(Philippians 1:3)*

Forever cherished by Family.

### In Loving Memory of Our Parents 25th Anniversary 40th Anniversary



**Arokiasamy s/o  
Antonysamy**  
Departed: 1.1.2001

**Philomena  
Swaminathan**  
Departed: 28.3.1985

*Their life, a beautiful memory,  
Their absence - a silent grief,  
Gone from our sight, but never from our hearts.*

Deeply missed and remembered by family members.

## NOTICE

**The cost for placing a memoriam is RM150 per column.**

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### 10th anniversary In Loving Memory of



**Pauline Malathi Roch**  
(13th October 1971 – 30th December 2015)

*“What we have once enjoyed we can never lose; all that we love deeply becomes a part of us.”*



### 1st Year Memorial Mdm Marevin Dass 11.04.1951 – 03.01.2025



*For as long as there are memories of you, you will always live on in our hearts. May your soul rest in eternal peace. Deeply missed and fondly cherished by family, relatives and friends.*

*Please join our family in celebrating the 1st Year Memorial Mass and fellowship on Saturday at 6.30pm on the 27th December 2025 at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Johor Bahru.*

### 15th Anniversary In Loving Memory of



**EDMUND  
THANGAPRAGASAM**  
Departed: 5th Jan 2011

*Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord. Ps. 23:6*

Forever missed by  
Wife: Mdm Soosammah  
Children and loved ones.

### 2nd Anniversary In Loving Memory of



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

*Two years on, and you remain part of every memory, every conversation, and every prayer.*

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

*This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life.*

Psalm 119:50

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# Historic presence of PM and DPM highlights unity at CFM Christmas

KUALA LUMPUR: For the first time in the history of the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM), both the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister attended the 2025 Christmas High Tea reception, marking a significant moment in the federation's engagement with national leaders.

Deputy Prime Minister YAB Datuk Amar Haji Fadillah bin Haji Yusof, who was the guest of honour, reminded Malaysians that national unity is nurtured through shared experiences and dialogue. Addressing more than 300 guests, including heads of churches within the CFM, ambassadors, lawmakers, church leaders and members, he said unity is built "not only in Parliament or policy rooms, but at shared tables, in shared conversations, and in shared celebrations like this one."

Concluding his address, Datuk Amar Haji Fadillah extended Christmas and New Year greetings to Malaysian Christians and encouraged all Malaysians to "hope in God, hope in one another, and hope in the future of our beloved Malaysia."

His remarks responded in part to the welcome address by the President of the Council of Churches of Malaysia (CCM), Bishop Datuk Danald Jute of the Anglican



(Council of Churches Malaysia facebook)

Diocese of Kuching. Bishop Danald emphasised that Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ and His message of love, hope, peace and respect, values which he said resonate deeply with Malaysia's identity of unity and harmony. He also urged the government not to view Christians or Christian institutions with suspicion, stressing that Christian symbols such as the Cross represent faith and service, not confrontation.

The Catholic Church, which is part of the CFM, was represented at the reception by Archbishop Julian Leow of Kuala Lumpur.

Prime Minister YAB Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim joined the celebration immediately after arriving from Langkawi. In his Christmas message, he called on Malaysians to be grateful, noting that despite the nation's racial and religious diversity, Malaysia remains among the most peaceful countries in the world. He cautioned against

both the "tyranny of the majority" and the "tyranny of the minority," underscoring that the country must be anchored in fairness and justice to succeed.

The annual Christmas reception is organised by the Christian Federation of Malaysia and was hosted this year by the Council of Churches of Malaysia, one of CFM's three component bodies. The federation represents approximately 95 per cent of the Christian population in Malaysia.



## Dispensation from fasting and abstinence on Ash Wednesday



(Unsplash/Thays Orrico)

Dear People of God,

Next year, the celebration of the second day of Chinese New Year falls on Ash Wednesday, February 18, 2026, being a day of fast and abstinence.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, in consultation with the Episcopal Regional Liturgy Commission of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei hereby gives dispensation from fast and abstinence on Ash Wednesday, February 18, 2026. However, the tradition of celebrating the liturgy of Ash Wednesday on that day is to

be maintained with the imposition of ashes.

All Catholic faithful are encouraged to perform their fast and abstinence on another day during Lent except on Good Friday, which is already a day of fast and abstinence.

Wishing you the Lord's abundant blessings.

*William Cardinal Goh*  
**His Eminence William Cardinal Goh**  
President  
Episcopal Regional Liturgy Commission

December 18, 2025

# MERRY Christmas & Happy New Year 2026

Your journey with us makes every season special!

2026 DEPARTURES		
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12D EL CAMINO WALK : PORTUGUESE ROUTE	10D ITALY : FRANCISCAN SITES & WONDERS	10D 7N MEDJUGORJE PILGRIMAGE
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