

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

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.
1 Cor. 1:26-27



Faithful in hope: 25 years of priestly journey

■ P4



Hutan Percha chapel celebrates diamond jubilee

■ P8



You came when no one else did

■ P12



Love as the Samaritan did

VATICAN: Pope Leo XIV has called on people of faith and goodwill to rediscover a compassionate, hands-on love that does not pass by suffering but stops, listens and acts, as he unveiled his message for the 34th World Day of the Sick.

Titled “The compassion of the Samaritan: Loving by bearing another’s pain,” the message was released on January 20, ahead of the annual observance on Feb 11, the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes. The Day will be solemnly celebrated this year in Chiclayo, Peru.

Drawing inspiration from the parable of the Good Samaritan in the Gospel of Luke and Pope Francis’ 2020 encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* on human fraternity, Pope Leo invited the faithful to reflect anew on what it truly means to be a neighbour in a world marked by haste, indifference and isolation.

“The compassion of the Samaritan,” the Pope wrote, “is always relevant and essential for rediscovering the beauty of charity and the social dimension of compassion.” It helps direct attention to “the needy and all

those who suffer, especially the sick,” reminding Christians that love is not passive, but a decision to draw near.

In the parable, Jesus recounts how a man travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho was beaten by robbers and left for dead. While a priest and a Levite passed him by, a Samaritan stopped, bandaged his wounds and ensured his care. Reflecting on this scene, Pope Leo noted that the Samaritan did not merely see the wounded man but looked upon him “with an open and attentive gaze – the very gaze of Jesus – which led him to act.”

The Pope structured his message around what he described as the “gift of encounter” in three dimensions: the joy of offering closeness and presence; the shared mission of caring for the sick; and allowing love for God to drive our encounter with ourselves and our neighbour.

“Being a neighbour is not determined by physical or social proximity,” he stressed, “but by the decision to love.” For Christians, this means becoming neighbours to those who suffer, following the example of Christ himself, “the true divine Samaritan who drew near to a wounded humanity.”

While the message is traditionally ad-

ressed to healthcare professionals and pastoral workers, Cardinal Michael Czerny, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, said it is intentionally offered to everyone. “We’re one body, one humanity of brothers and sisters,” he said at a Vatican news conference. “When someone is sick and suffering, all the categories that tend to divide fade into insignificance.”

Pope Leo acknowledged that modern society is “immersed in a culture of speed, immediacy and haste,” one that often discourages stopping to notice the suffering around us. Yet it is precisely in this context, he observed, that compassion can become a source of joy and renewal. Compassion, he wrote, is a profound emotion that “springs from within and leads to a committed response to another’s suffering.”

Reflecting on his own experience as a missionary and bishop in Peru, the Pope shared that he has witnessed countless examples of Samaritan compassion in families, neighbours, healthcare workers and pastoral carers who quietly accompany the sick and vulnerable. By offering what they have, he said, they give compassion a social dimension that transcends mere individual effort.

For this reason, he recalled describing care for the sick in his Apostolic Exhortation *Dilexi Te* not simply as an important aspect of the Church’s mission, but as an authentic “ecclesial action.” Quoting Saint Cyprian, Pope Leo added that how a society treats its weakest members is a measure of its true health.

At the heart of the message lies the double commandment of love: love of God and love of neighbour. “To serve one’s neighbour is to love God through deeds,” the Pope wrote, insisting that genuine love for God is always made visible in concrete acts of care and solidarity.

Concluding his message, Pope Leo entrusted all who suffer to the intercession of Mary, Health of the Sick, and imparted his Apostolic Blessing to the sick, their families, healthcare workers, pastoral carers and all participating in the World Day of the Sick. He expressed the hope that Christian life, in every context, will reflect a truly fraternal and “Samaritan” spirit — one rooted in love that is willing to bear another’s pain.
Vatican News/CNS

To read the message in full, go to: <https://bit.ly/49TdUNs>

ESTABLISHED 1994

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

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



EDITOR
Patricia Pereira
editor1@herald.com.my



ASSISTANT EDITOR
Sandra Ann Inbaraj
sandra@herald.com.my



GRAPHIC DESIGNER
Amanda Mah
amanda@herald.com.my



SOCIAL MEDIA
Kevin Francis
kevin@herald.com.my



BAHASA MALAYSIA
Melania Liza Magnus
liza@herald.com.my



MANDARIN
Adelina Wong
yin4482@gmail.com



ADMIN ASSISTANT
Rachael Sharma
admin@herald.com.my

ADVERTISEMENT/SUBSCRIPTION
advertisement@herald.com.my

MEMORIAM
memoriam@herald.com.my

LETTERS
letterseditor@herald.com.my

Social Media

www.heraldmalaysia.com

[@heraldmalaysia](https://twitter.com/heraldmalaysia)

[heraldmalaysia](https://www.facebook.com/heraldmalaysia)
Herald Snapshot

[@heraldsnapshot](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...)

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

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

Staying, leaving, and the question of belonging

“Are you proud to be Malaysian?” It is a question that once invited an easy and confident reply. Today, it is asked more quietly, often with hesitation. Almost daily, there are reports of Malaysians, particularly the young, skilled, and educated, contemplating life abroad in search of stability, dignity, and hope for the future. Their departure should not be dismissed as disloyalty or a lack of patriotism. Rather, it should be understood as a sign of deeper unease about what it means to belong and to flourish in the country they still call home.

For many, migration is not a rejection of Malaysia. It is the result of accumulated frustrations that build over time: limited opportunities, rising living costs, stagnant wages, and a persistent sense of uncertainty about the future. Racism, whether overt or embedded within systems and structures, remains a lived reality for some, particularly when merit appears secondary to identity. Yet it is rarely the only factor. Economic pressures, policy inconsistency, political fatigue, and diminishing social mobility all contribute to a growing perception that the promise of progress is no longer assured.

When people leave under such conditions, it is often not ambition that drives them, but exhaustion. Many depart reluctantly, carrying with them affection for the country, its people, and its culture, along with a quiet hope that circumstances might one day allow them to return. Their leaving is less a rejection than a reluctant admission that staying has begun to exact too high a personal cost.

The effects of this outward movement are felt far beyond economics. The loss of skilled professionals weakens institutions, disrupts continuity, and slows national development. Yet the deeper cost is profoundly human. Elderly parents age alone, managing illness and frailty without the daily presence of their children. Grandchildren grow up across borders and time zones, knowing their grandparents through screens rather than shared routines. Festive seasons are marked by empty chairs, postponed reunions, and conversations filled with longing. Loneliness becomes a silent consequence of



migration — borne not only by those who leave, but also by those who remain behind.

Those who migrate often carry their own burdens. Alongside opportunity comes guilt — the sense of having chosen stability over presence, progress over proximity to loved ones. Many live with a constant tension between gratitude for new possibilities and grief for what has been left behind. Meanwhile, those who stay may wrestle with doubt, wondering whether loyalty will be rewarded or whether they too will eventually be forced to choose between belonging and flourishing.

Parishes experience this reality in tangible ways. Youth groups shrink. Choirs thin out. Long-standing ministries struggle as committed lay leaders relocate. Families gather for Mass carrying unspoken grief for loved ones far away. Increasingly, parishes also become places where elderly parents seek companionship and consolation as they wait, pray, and hope. In this sense, the Church in Malaysia encounters migration not as an abstract social issue, but as a daily pastoral reality that touches every level of parish life.

Yet the Church is also called to be a place of hope and belonging. She cannot replace the role of the state, but she has a distinct responsibility to accompany families affected by migration, to speak clearly against racism and exclusion, and to remind society that human dignity must always come before systems, policies, or politics. The Church is called to form consciences, to nurture solidarity across ethnic and generational lines, and to ensure that no one, especially the elderly and the vulnerable, is left invisible.

Pope Leo XIV has reminded the Church that “migrants can be privileged witnesses of hope,” revealing through their resilience a deep human longing for a future where life can flourish. His words invite a broader moral reflection. Migration is not merely a matter of numbers or economic necessity; it raises searching questions about justice, belonging, and the common good. When large numbers feel compelled to leave, society must ask what conditions are failing them.

To speak honestly about inequality, exclusion, or injustice is not to undermine the nation. It is an act of fidelity. Love of country does not mean denying its wounds or silencing difficult conversations. It means naming them with courage and compassion so that healing and renewal may begin.

Pride in Malaysia today may therefore sound quieter and more complex than in earlier generations. It may be marked by ambivalence, sorrow, and hope held in tension. It may take the form of a stubborn, enduring belief — that this country, with all its diversity and contradictions, can still become a place where no one feels compelled to leave in order to live with dignity, where elders are not left alone, and where belonging is shared rather than conditional.

The task before us is not to shame those who go, nor to romanticise endurance for those who stay. It is to build a Malaysia where staying is not an act of sacrifice alone, but a genuine choice rooted in trust. Only then might the question “Are you proud to be Malaysian?” once again be answered without hesitation — and without regret.

Sandra Ann

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings with Dr Steven Selvaraju

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

Readings: Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13 | 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 | Gospel: Matthew 5:1-12

SEEK HUMILITY

If there is one key theme that runs through the scripture readings this Sunday, it is the call for us to be **HUMBLE**.

The prophet Zephaniah speaks to the faithful ‘remnant’, that is, those who were in exile in foreign land. He reminds them to be humble by seeking refuge “in the name of the Lord”.

Seek integrity, seek humility...

St Paul reminds the Christians in Corinth that they should not lose sight of the reality that they are “nothing” in the eyes of the world but have been chosen by God to “shame the wise”.

“If anyone wants to boast, let him boast in the Lord.”

The Beatitudes in Matthew’s Gospel highlight the fact that each group of people who are declared ‘blessed’ by Jesus are those who realise their dependence on God and the inadequacy of their own efforts.

I WANT MORE!

The scripture readings lead us to think about our obsessions with titles and promotions, the constant desire for more material wealth or human power, the strong craving for success or the idea that we can only progress at the expense of others.

“Humility is recognising that it is precisely when I know myself to be most helpless, most unable to deal with my situation, most unable to change my own heart and the world, that I have to rely on the faithfulness of God alone” - Errol Lobo

Steven S

Bishops convene for plenary meeting in Johor

Richard Chia

PLENTONG, Johor: The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei (CBCMSB) held its biannual plenary meeting from January 5 to 8 at the MAJODI Centre.

In his address, Apostolic Nuncio to Malaysia, Archbishop Wojciech Zaluski, highlighted a letter from Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, marking the anniversary of the dedication of the Lateran Basilica on November 9. He urged bishops to commemorate the day in honour of all saints, blessed, and servants of God, and encouraged initiatives to remember these extraordinary disciples of Christ.

The 117th plenary meeting addressed several key matters, including preparations for the Malaysia Pastoral Convention (MPC) in Sibul, Sarawak, from Sept 9 to 13; the *Ad Limina* visit of the episcopal conference to the Vatican in May; the endorsement of two new episcopal regional commissions; and the formation of a regional team dedicated to safeguarding minors.

For the MPC, the Central Working

Committee (CWC), led by Msgr Peter Ng, presented the overall plan, detailing preparations through September 2026. The historic first-ever national pastoral convention will bring together 850 participants from all nine dioceses in Malaysia — three dioceses each from Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah, and Sarawak. The delegation will include 250 participants from each region, comprising clergy, religious, and laity, along with 50 invited guests and 50 volunteers.

The convention will focus on the theme: *Celebrating in a Spirit of Communion, Listening in a Spirit of Participation, and Walking in a Spirit of Mission*. It will also mark the culmination of the 16-month Journey of the Cross (*Perjalanan Salib*), which began in Kota Kinabalu from March 31 to April 6, 2025, during the Malaysia Catholic Youth Day.

In preparation, the CWC will distribute the prayer for the MPC, along with remote preparation booklets to all participants prior to their arrival in Sibul. Organisers emphasise that meaningful engagement requires careful preparation at all levels — by individual participants, parishes, and dioceses — to achieve the intended pastoral discernment and mission goals.



The conference also discussed the *Ad Limina* visit, last conducted in February 2018. Postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Pope Francis' health concerns, and his passing, the five-yearly visit is now scheduled for May 2026. The CBCMSB will join bishops from Pakistan, Laos, Bangladesh, and Myanmar for the Asian *Ad Limina* visits in May and June.

Two new regional groups were also endorsed: the Regional Commission for Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue and the Regional Commission for Evangelisation. Each commission will be led by a bishop as president, supported by a regional coordinator, and will coordinate closely with the offices of

the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) and the relevant dicasteries in Rome.

In collaboration with the Conference of Religious Major Superiors, the plenary also established a Regional Group for the Safeguarding and Protection of Minors. The group comprises one representative from each diocese and one major religious superior from each of the four regions — Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore, Sabah, and Sarawak. It will work closely with the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors to further develop the national safeguarding protocol in line with the Pontifical Commission's Universal Guidelines Framework on Safeguarding.

KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

February

- 5 **Thanksgiving service for 5th Bishop of the Diocese of West Malaysia**
- 6 **Installation Service for the 6th Bishop of the Diocese of West Malaysia**
- 8 **Feast of Infant Jesus – Chapel of Infant Jesus, Kuala Selangor**

PENANG DIOCESE

Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

February

- 1 **Feast of Infant Jesus – Chapel of Infant Jesus, Sg Pelek**
- 6 **Installation Service for the 6th Bishop of the Diocese of West Malaysia**

MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

February

- 2 **World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life – Church of St Mary, Ayer Salak**
- 8 **English and Tamil Mass – Church of Divine Mercy, Skudai**

Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #257

Welcome dear friends

Our diocese's pastoral focus for 2026 is *MJD — The Diocese that Walks Together*. It's a call to all parishes, BECs and ministries to live communion, participation and mission in everyday life in ordinary ways and to recognise the little signs of the above around us. We are the living and breathing Church in the marketplace, workplace and common place. See good. Touch lives.

Local Takes! Revolving Door Syndrome

- * Malaysia's passport is the second most powerful in South East Asia after Singapore's.
- * Reported that 61,000 Malaysians have renounced their citizenship, with roughly 57,000 (94 per cent) choosing Singapore as their new home, in the last five years.
- * Malaysia's unfair pay gaps, limited opportunities for advancement, rigid job structures, mismatched workers' skills, and its unattractive job market are reasons for the "fleeing top talents", says MEF.
- * The Malaysia My Second Home (MM2H) scheme generated nearly RM900 million in the year to June 2025, attracting retirees and globally mobile families chasing international school access and a second base to settle here.

The Church Reads Signs:

- * Holy Doors of Papal Basilicas are sealed until the next Jubilee.
- * At the January Consistory, cardinals chose Synodality and Mission as

themes for reflection.

- * *Pray With The Pope*, a new initiative that invites people around the world to pray for unity in a divided world, is here. Join the prayer chain.
- * Persecution of Christians and risks of suffering violence worldwide has risen by 8 million people compared to last year — reaching a record 388 million.
- * To a disappointed catechist, the Pope reminded that the sense of belonging is more important than numbers of people in church.
- * At the *Angelus*, the Pope said: God does not look at the world from afar. God descends and becomes present in human history, referring to the Lord's Baptism.

A Thought for The Week: Thinking about death.

Zilu said to Confucius: May I ask what you think about death? "You may ask, replied Confucius, but if you still don't understand life, why do you want to know about death. Leave thinking about death for when life is over."

Lesson from Confucius: Live in the here and now. Understand what's around you. Do not be preoccupied with what is beyond. Live well.

QnQ: Q asks: Why are many of us directionless?

A man without an altar is a man without direction.

- * The presence of an altar — a quiet, intentional space that holds meaning and anchors the soul. A man without that centre is just like a man standing at the crossroads of life, directionless in the fog of choice.

- * The altar is the place (physical or metaphorical) where you regularly return to remember what is sacred to you, what deserves your best energy, what you're willing to bow to, what you won't sell out. Without that deliberate returning point, life becomes a series of reactions, shiny distraction and, eventually, exhaustion without meaning.
- * When you look at your current days... is there anything, place, ritual, object, value, or memory that you consistently return to in order to remember who you are and what matters most?
- * Genesis 12:7-8 LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So, he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him. From there he went on towards the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.
- * Build the altar or become the wanderer.

The Spirit @ work: "I can do things you cannot, you can do things I cannot; together we can do great things."
Mother Teresa

Something to tickle you: "Mistakes are proof that you're trying, learning, and growing in life's endless classroom."

Bishop Bernard Paul



Marlina Sara Sylvester

BUKIT MERTAJAM: Twenty-five years ago, a young man answered God's call and dedicated his life to Christ and His Church. On January 19, at the Minor Basilica of St Anne, the Catholic

community joyfully celebrated the silver sacerdotal jubilee of Msgr Henry Rajoo with a thanksgiving Mass and dinner. The Mass was celebrated by Msgr Henry, with Cardinal Sebastian Francis and approximately 40 clergy concelebrating.

Msgr Henry was ordained on January 19, 2001, at his hometown parish, the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Kulim. His first pastoral assignment took him to the Church of St Louis, Taiping, before he was sent to Taiwan in September 2001, where he served

for two years. During his time abroad, he mastered Mandarin, earning him the affectionate title of "multilingual priest."

In his homily, Msgr Henry reflected on the theme he chose 25 years ago: "Be Faithful." He shared, "I said my YES to be faithful because I believe priesthood is my calling. I just wanted to be faithful in my calling. But 25 years later, I felt the theme 'Be Faithful' was hanging without purpose. So, as I celebrate my silver jubilee today, I add: 'Be Faithful in Hope.' Being faithful without hope felt very empty to me."

He continued, "Faithfulness has kept me going as a priest. It is choosing God and His Church above all. Hope, to me, is believing that God is working even in the unseen, the 'underground.' Hope is not my grip on God, but His grip on me. I am here today, not because of my strength, but because God is faithful. Let us be faithful in hope

together, for the One who called us is trustworthy."

The Mass included the presentation of a papal blessing by parishioners, Rodney and Christine, with Msgr Jude Miranda reading out the greetings to the faithful.

After Mass, nearly 800 guests gathered at Dewan St Anne for a festive dinner, organised by the Northern Deanery Chinese Language Apostolate Committee, which Msgr Henry serves as their spiritual advisor.

It was a day of profound joy and gratitude. Msgr Henry expressed heartfelt thanks to all who have accompanied him on his priestly journey and offered special appreciation to the committee for organising the Mass and celebration dinner.

Indeed, Msgr Henry's 25 years of faithful service remind us that priesthood is not just a vocation — it is a journey of hope, steadfastness, and trust in God's enduring faithfulness.



Parish Pastoral Assemblies

BUKIT MERTAJAM: The annual Parish Pastoral Assembly (PPA) held recently was a valuable opportunity for parish and ministry leaders to reflect on the past year and prayerfully plan for the year ahead. The assembly also provided space to consider how the parish can continue to grow and serve the community more faithfully.

Assistant parish priest, Fr Nelson Joseph, together with Deacon Lazarus Jonathan and Deacon Dave Kameron, attended the assembly. The PPA was chaired by Parish Pastoral Council chairman, Justin Gomez, beginning with a prayer and followed by a review from Deacon Lazarus, who also serves as Parish Administrator.

Minor Basilica of St Anne, BM

This year's assembly featured a special guest, Sr Margarete Sta Maria, FDCC, who spoke on *Synodality and MPC in the Light of the Parish*. Her reflections offered parish leaders valuable guidance on approaching challenges and fostering a more collaborative parish community.

The assembly continued with presentations from the Liturgical Ministry, outlining Masses and programmes planned for the year, helping parishioners stay informed and engaged. The Finance Ministry then provided an overview of parish expenditures in 2025 and shared the financial outlook for the year ahead.

Deacon Dave also presented tentative plans for the Feast of St Anne 2026, noting that some programmes are still under discussion with the parish priest, Cardinal Sebastian Francis. A committee will be formed soon, with confirmed programmes to be shared by March 2026.

Before concluding, participants gathered in groups of four for a short, prayerful sharing session, reflecting on synodality and discerning how the parish community can journey forward together. The assembly ended with tea and fellowship at the parish centre. **Marlina Sara Sylvester**



Attendees listening intently to one of the presentations.



Participants during the Conversation in the Spirit.

Church of St Francis of Assisi, Cheras

CHERAS: A total of 145 parishioners, including ministry leaders, gathered recently for the annual Parish Pastoral Assembly (PPA). The day began with breakfast, followed by Praise & Worship and an opening address by parish priest, Fr Paul Cheong, OFM, Cap.

Fr Paul emphasised the vision of building a Witnessing Church — one that radiates Christ's love and truth through both word and action. He highlighted the parish theme for 2026: *Building a Witnessing Church, Christ in Society*, focusing on living the Gospel, evangelisation, and social engagement. Strategies to engage all pa-

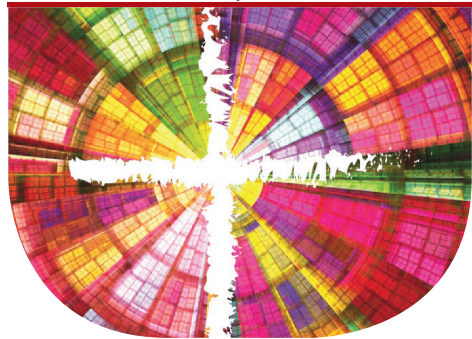
rishioners were framed around the four pillars of the Church: Rooted in Holiness, United in Communion, Active in Participation, and Sent on Mission.

The Parish Pastoral Council chairman, Danny Nesan, elaborated on the strategic Parish Plan, outlining programmes designed to bring this vision to life, including formations, workshops, Alpha, Parish Renewal Experiences, and outreach missions.

The assembly also included a spiritual conversation session, beginning with prayer and dividing participants into age-based groups to foster deeper engagement and

understanding. Questions were discussed in three rounds using the See-Judge-Act method: See with the eyes of Christ, Judge with the heart of Christ, and Act as Christ would. Two minutes of silent reflection preceded each question, allowing parishioners to collect their thoughts.

The PPA offered parishioners a valuable opportunity to reflect, share insights, and learn from both challenges and successes. Bringing together diverse age groups, ministries, and language communities, the assembly encouraged collaboration and highlighted how every member — young or old — plays an integral role in building Christ's Church. **Jaelyn Sharmelee**



Tianne Pereira

KUALA LUMPUR: On the evening of January 22, St Mary's Cathedral in Jalan Raja, was filled with something far more powerful than numbers alone, as nearly 200 Christians from various denominations gathered under one roof for a Prayer Service in conjunction with the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. There was a tangible sense that something sacred was unfolding, a quiet yet profound witness to what it truly means to be one Body in Christ.

Hosted this year by the Anglican Church, the service centred on this year's theme taken from Ephesians 4:4: *There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling.* Those words came alive not only through Scripture and prayer, but through the very presence of the faithful, where bishops, elders, pastors, leaders and the lay from different denominations sat side by side in shared worship, and where titles and denominations faded into the background that evening.

The Catholic community too was well represented with a large number who came to join the service, including Archbishop Julian Leow, Fr Gerard Theraviam, Fr Dominic Tan, Fr Andrew Manickam, OFM, Cap, Fr George Harrison, Deacons Anthony Robert and Philip Asirwalam, and several seminarians.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is traditionally observed from January 18 to 25, a period proposed in 1908 by Catholic priest Fr Paul Wattson. These dates symbolically bridge the Feast of the Confession of St Peter and the Conversion of St Paul, reminding Christians that unity is rooted in both faithfulness and transformation. That symbolism resonated strongly in the Malaysian context, where unity is not merely an ideal, but a daily lived reality.

In his homily, Bishop Dr Steven Abbarow of the Anglican Church stated that it was a true blessing to gather "in the name of



(photo/Steven Fung)

A beautiful witness of Christian unity

the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" as one family of God. Speaking with noticeable joy and warmth, he reflected that in Malaysia, unity is not an abstract concept but a daily challenge and with gentle humour remarked that Malaysian Christians often unite only when burial space runs out or when the Church feels threatened. Yet he cautioned that unity forged merely for survival or tolerance cannot sustain hope.

"What is unity based on?" he asked. His answer was clear: identity. Our shared Christian identity holds us together. The Nicene Creed, he said, is a beautiful expression of that unity, reminding us that the Gospel calls us to unity from within, not just as a public display, but as a lived reality. Differences, whether of language, culture, or tradition, should never lead to division. Quoting St Augustine, he reminded the congregation "In essentials, unity; in doubtful matters, liberty; in all things, charity." His words struck a chord as he offered a sobering reminder "Do not honour Christ in Church and ignore Him outside in the poor." The Church, he stressed, is truly the Church only when it exists for others.

Bishop Abbarow went on to emphasise that ecumenism from within shapes how the Church relates to the world. "If we walk to-

gether, we arrive together," he said. "When we stand together, we contribute to the moral fabric of the nation."

To me, perhaps one of the most moving moments of the evening was when voices from different traditions rose together in song. Hymns filled the cathedral, not as separate harmonies competing for space, but as one united act of praise. In those moments, walls dissolved, labels disappeared and it felt like hearts were lifted heavenward together. It was impossible not to feel that God Himself was delighting in His children gathered as one.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity continues to be a vital platform for dialogue, shared worship and collaboration among Christian communities in Malaysia. Since gaining momentum in 2016 through the initiative of Archbishop Julian Leow, with Fr Leonard Lexson and his team reaching out to the various church leaders, it has now grown into a powerful annual witness.

A particularly historic moment came in 2017, during the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, when St Andrew's Presbyterian Church hosted the service and Archbishop Julian Leow delivered the sermon. It marked the first time in 500 years that a Roman Catholic Archbishop had preached

in a Presbyterian church.

The 2025 prayer service, hosted at the Orthodox Syrian Cathedral, was also especially significant as it coincided with the 1700th anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea. That council was pivotal in defining the Nicene Creed, which has since become a foundational profession of faith shared across the Christian Churches.

When approached after the service Archbishop Julian offered a thoughtful and timely reflection. He reminded us that Christian unity should never be driven by fear or the need to rally only when facing a common threat. Rather, unity must flow from a genuine desire to build up the Body of Christ and to be a credible, living witness to Christ in the world. True unity, he emphasised, is not reactive but intentional, one that is rooted in love, shared mission, and a sincere commitment to walk together in faith for the sake of the Gospel.

As I left St Mary's Cathedral that evening, there was a quiet but enduring hope in the air. We are, indeed, different parts of the same Body of Christ. And when we pray together, walk together, and serve together, the world catches a glimpse of what Christ prayed for "that they may all be one... so that the world may believe."

Rawang churches unite in 'One Body, One Spirit' prayer service

RAWANG: In a display of inter-denominational harmony, the Church of St Jude hosted an ecumenical prayer service on January 21, marking the first time the parish has collaborated with various local Christian denominations for such an event.

Under the theme "One Body, One Spirit", the service was organised by the Christian Pastors Fellowship. While Rawang is home to more than 35 Christian denominations, the event brought together five local pastors and their respective congregations to pray for unity during the global Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

The evening began with a contemplative Taize prayer led by Bro David Naden, a second-year philosophy student. The atmosphere was set with the hymn "Father Make Us One", which parish priest Fr Simon Labrooy called an "apt way to begin".

During his opening exhortation, Fr Simon reminded the gathered faithful that unity is not just a concept to be discussed, but a reality to be lived.

"The Church invites us not merely to speak about unity, but to stand within it, to receive it again as God's gift, and to ask for the grace to live it more faithfully," Fr Simon said.

In a moving display of shared faith, priests and pastors lit individual candles from a central "Unity Candle," passing the flame to the entire congregation. Pastor Gabriel Paul of the Full Gospel Assembly (FGA) Rawang noted that the light represented Christ as a "constant reminder of our calling to unity".

The service continued with a scripture reading from Ephesians 4:1-6 by Pastor David Lee of City of Praise. In the subsequent sharing, Pastor Gabriel emphasised that in a "fractured world," the Christian community must prioritise love and forgiveness to remain a living sign of hope in

places of conflict.

Following the Lord's Prayer, sung in Bahasa Melayu, and a communal Sign of Peace, leaders reflected on the importance of physical gathering in an increasingly digital age.

Pastor Gabriel Paul, who serves the Tamil and Nepali congregations at FGA Rawang, observed that the physical presence of the younger generation was particularly significant.

"In today's world, where AI and virtual spaces seem to get in the way of real-world spiritual experiences, the younger generation may have felt a powerful force in the togetherness and kind handshakes with believers from other traditions," he said.

As the evening concluded with a fellowship meal, both Fr Simon and Pastor David Lee expressed hope that this service would be the first of many. Pastor David encouraged the youth to continue participating in inter-church events to strengthen the "unity in the Spirit".

The gathering served as a timely reminder that, despite fragmented opinions in the modern world, shared values and faith can still bring a community together as one. **Mercy Almeida Stellus**



Retreat inspires missionary disciples to facilitate with heart

Shivonne Prevena

KUALA LUMPUR: The Archdiocesan Mission of New Evangelisation for Christ (AMNEC) began the New Year with a prayerful and transformative retreat themed *Facilitating with the Heart* on January 18, gathering 22 missionary disciples from parishes across the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.

The retreat invited participants to move beyond techniques and methods, fostering a deeper understanding of facilitation as a sacred calling rooted in relationship, discernment, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

The day opened with Praise and Worship led by the Cornerstone Disciples under Terence Andrew, setting a reverent tone that centred hearts on God and created space for openness and attentiveness.

In his opening address, AMNEC coordinator Andrew Lim reminded participants that facilitation is “not just about skills, content, or methodology.” Instead, it is about who



Michael Xavier facilitating the AMNEC retreat.

you are becoming and how you walk with others. “Your role is not to change people,” he emphasised. “Let the Holy Spirit do that.” His words grounded participants in humility, prayer, and trust in God’s transforming grace.

Sessions were led by Michael Xavier, seasoned leadership trainer and evangelist, who

brought clarity and inspiration. He guided participants through facilitation rooted in active listening, storytelling, and Spirit-led engagement, highlighting the importance of creating both psychological and spiritual safety.

A particularly moving moment came during a reflection on the Gospel story of the

Road to Emmaus, where Michael highlighted how Jesus walked with the disciples, listened attentively, asked leading questions, and allowed their hearts to be opened. For participant Jane Maria, this was a “WOW moment,” realising that Jesus was facilitating rather than teaching.

The retreat concluded with reflection on prayer life, calling participants to become God-centred, Word-rooted, and Spirit-led as facilitators and disciples. Testimonies reflected the day’s impact: Cynthia Varghese felt “rejuvenated and filled with His love,” while Thomas Anastasius Patrick said, “The spirituality was really wonderful and took me really deep.”

The day ended with a powerful recommitment, as participants echoed together: “Brick by brick, I will build the Kingdom of God in the city of men!” Renewed in spirit and strengthened in purpose, the missionary disciples left, encouraged to facilitate with hearts anchored in faith, love, and total dependence on God.

St Jude’s leaders renew vision for 2026

RAWANG: The Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) of the Church of St Jude organised a retreat for 35 heads of various ministries on January 17. Guided by the theme, *You Will Be My Witnesses: From Listening to Leadership in the Spirit* (Acts 1:8), the session offered both a spiritual anchor and a strategic roadmap for the year ahead.

Parish priest Fr Simon Labrooy, serving as retreat master, opened the day by challenging conventional notions of leadership. He reminded participants that in the life of the Church, everything begins in prayer.

“Leadership in the Church does not begin with doing, but with listening,” Fr Simon emphasised. He highlighted that enduring ministry flows from trust in the Holy Spirit, rather than a desire for control or recognition.

This reflection set the tone for the parish’s 2026 theme: “All are welcome. Everybody belongs. Be the praying hands for one another.”

A central point of reflection was Albrecht Dürer’s famous artwork, “The Praying Hands.” Originally a study of his own brother’s hands, Dürer’s depiction later became known worldwide as a symbol of prayer. The image of scarred, hardworking hands served as a powerful metaphor for leadership.

The reflection highlighted three key pillars for leaders:

- **Sacrificial Identity:** Recognising that today’s leaders stand on the sacrifices of those who came before them.
- **Woundedness and Grace:** Accepting

that leadership is often marked by scars and humility rather than perfection.

- **Protectors of Culture:** Committing to ensure that the parish remains a “sanctuary for the searching” and a “home for the wounded.”

Through this metaphor, leaders were encouraged to embrace both the challenges and responsibilities of guiding a community with prayerful dedication and compassion.

Fr Simon reminded the leaders that their identity as brothers and sisters in Christ, received through baptism, precedes any title or role they may hold.

The retreat employed the “Conversations in the Spirit” method, a process of deep listening and intentional silence, which allowed leaders to share their gifts and honestly address tensions within their ministries.

Spiritual reflection was paired with practical accountability. Participants were reminded that structures such as the PPC and Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) are not mere bureaucracy; they are “acts of care”, designed to protect leaders from burnout and ensure the parish mission of inclusion stays on course.

The day concluded with a poignant commitment ritual. Standing before the parish banner, the 35 leaders pledged to be instruments of welcome and mercy.

As the parish of St Jude moves into 2026, its leadership carries a clear mandate: to ensure that every individual who enters the parish feels seen, named, and truly belongs. **Mercy Almeida Stellus**



New curia marks milestone for Kuantan Legion

KUANTAN: The Kuantan Curia of the Legion of Mary was officially inaugurated on January 17 at the Church of St Thomas the Apostle, in accordance with the Constitution and traditions of the Legion, and under the authority of the Kuala Lumpur Regia.

This milestone marks the formal organisation of Legion of Mary activities in Kuantan through a duly constituted new curia (Lower Council). A certificate commemorating the establishment of the curia, officially named “Mother Undeified”, was presented by Regia president, Ignatius Wang from Kuala Lumpur to the Kuantan Legionaries. Witnessing this historic occasion were two other members of the Regia, the chairpersons of the Parish Pastoral and Coordinating Councils, and members from the three praesidia in Kuantan: “Morning Star” (English-speaking), “Mother Most Pure”, and “Mother Inviolate” (both Mandarin-speaking).

The growth and stability of these three praesidia warranted the creation of a curia to coordinate apostolic work more effectively. The new curia office bearers, elected from the three respective praesidia, are: President: Teresa Chia (Morning Star); Vice President: Joseph Lee (Mother Most

Pure); Secretary: Cecilia Ng (Morning Star) and Treasurer: Priscilla Yeo (Mother Inviolate).

The establishment of the curia was blessed by parish priest Fr George Packiasamy, whose pastoral guidance has been instrumental in nurturing the Legion of Mary within the parish. His blessings affirm the curia’s mission as an integral part of the parish’s evangelising and pastoral outreach.

The curia is tasked with coordinating and supervising the affiliated praesidia in Kuantan, promoting faithful adherence to the Legion of Mary handbook, strengthening spiritual formation among members, and supporting parish apostolic activities in collaboration with the clergy. This development represents an important step in deepening Marian devotion, fostering a structured lay apostolate, and providing a strong foundation for unity, accountability, and sustained missionary service in the spirit of the Legion of Mary.

Under the guidance of the Kuala Lumpur Regia and the blessings of Fr George, and under the maternal care of Our Blessed Lady, the members of the new curia look forward to continuing their faithful service to the Church through prayer, humility, and active apostolic work. **Francis Leong**



Holy Redeemer parish hosts free cancer screenings and talks

Emmanuel Jude

KLANG: A wellness-focused crowd gathered at the Church of the Holy Redeemer in Taman Berkeley for a community-driven Cancer Awareness Weekend, aimed at educating the parishioners about preventive care and early detection of common cancers. The full-day event, held on January 17 from 9.00am to 4.00pm, drew parishioners, families, and health-conscious persons to participate in a host of free health screenings and talks.

A series of free cancer screenings were offered throughout the day in the church hall, covering colorectal, breast and prostate cancer. Participants were seen queuing at screening booths staffed by medical volunteers, who guided them through risk assessments, provided information on screening methods, and offered preliminary checks designed to encourage early detection. Health workers emphasised that early



screening is critical in managing cancer outcomes, a message that resonated strongly with many attendees.

Complementing the screenings, the event featured expert talks on three major cancer types: colorectal, breast and prostate. Healthcare professionals shared insights on risk factors, warning

signs, lifestyle influences, and the importance of regular check-ups — particularly for adults aged 40 and above. The informative sessions were well attended, with audience members engaging speakers during Q&A sessions and collecting educational materials to take home.

Church leaders, including par-



ish volunteers, worked alongside health partners to organise the awareness weekend, reinforcing the role of community institutions in promoting public health. Attendees expressed appreciation for the church's effort in making essential health resources accessible to the wider community at no cost. The event concluded with a mes-

sage of hope and empowerment: that informed choices, community support and proactive healthcare can make a meaningful difference in the fight against cancer.

With this the Church of the Holy Redeemer aims to plan similar projects in the near future to create health awareness amongst parishioners of all ages.

From survival to revival

KUALA LUMPUR: For many of us walking the path as cancer survivors and members of Sisters in Christ, our journey is defined by two powerful words: survival and revival. As a Catholic support group for women, Sisters in Christ is dedicated to comforting the fainthearted and strengthening those in need. Rooted in faith and compassion, the group walks alongside women — especially cancer survivors — offering spiritual and emotional support through prayer, companionship, and shared experiences. Our hearts are deeply connected by grace, bound together by a strength that only God provides.

On January 17, we came together for a day of fellowship, reflection, and renewal. The morning began in the quiet air at the grotto of the

Church of St Anthony. As we recited the Rosary together, we rooted ourselves in faith, preparing for a deeply moving session led by Archbishop Julian Leow.

His message was a gentle yet powerful call to action: Revival is more than just surviving. It is about becoming a beacon of hope, transforming our fears into faith, and using the gift of our “second chance at life” to lift others. Archbishop Julian reminded us that true happiness is found in relationships, sharing a profound truth: Forgiveness is a one-way act of grace, but reconciliation is a journey that requires two hearts.

Guided by our motto from 1 Thessalonians 5:14, we were encouraged to “comfort the discouraged and help the weak.” This is our calling — to stand beside those whose



strength is fading. Being a survivor is not the end of our story; it is the beginning of a life lived freely and loved fully. We are called to build God's Kingdom today, for heaven does not start “someday” — it begins here and now.

The day was made even more special by the heartfelt testimonies of our fellow members Pauline, Mary, and Melissa. Their stories reminded us that God walks with us

daily — directly and through one another — in every valley and every victory.

We concluded our time with a simple lunch in the company of Archbishop Julian and Susan Thomas from the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development's Women Desk, accompanied by the sound of shared laughter. It was a day that reminded us who sustains us, who gives us breath, and who

calls us to revive not just ourselves, but the world around us.

If you are a cancer survivor seeking hope, support, and fellowship, we warmly invite you to join Sisters in Christ — a community where faith, friendship, and healing walk hand in hand. For more information, contact: Joyce Gayathree (016-6574146), Betty Gomes (012-3337443), or Stella Voon (016-2070939).

North West district leaders gather for Lenten preparation

RAWANG: The Church of St Jude became a hub of discernment and mission as 80 parishioners from across the North West District of the Kuala Lumpur Archdiocese gathered for the official Lenten Campaign

2026 Road Show on January 18.

Organised by the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development (AOHD), the event aimed to equip local leaders with the tools and vision for the upcoming Lenten sea-

son, under the unifying theme: *In the One, We Are One*.

The session opened with a prayer by PIHDM chairman Augustine Ratnasamy, followed by a presentation from Adeline James of AOHD,

who connected Scripture to social action. She reminded participants that the Lenten pillars of prayer (Mt 6:6), fasting (Mt 6:17), and almsgiving (Mt 6:2) are not mere rituals but pathways to personal and communal transformation.

“The desired outcome of these practices is conversion and renewal,” Adeline said, emphasising that 2026 will focus on Accessibility and Inclusion, particularly for the differently-abled and those with special needs.

Parishioners were also invited to take part in several major Archdiocesan initiatives, including:

- February 28: *Dining in the Dark* – Church of St Joseph, Sentul
- March 1: *Majlis Berbuka Puasa with parolees* – Hulu Selangor

District Parole Office

• March 15: *Stories in the Silence: Human Library* – Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Klang

The afternoon included a heartfelt appeal from Gnanadass Amaldass of the Prison Ministry, who called for more male volunteers to serve inmates. Participants also received a briefing from Dr Gary Liew on how AOHD funds are distributed to assist marginalised communities. During the Q&A session, Gary encouraged parishes to actively use social media to raise awareness and advocate for inclusion.

The road show concluded with a fellowship session, leaving North West District leaders with a clear mandate: to journey towards Easter, ensuring that no one is left behind. **Mercy Almeida Stellus**



Hutan Percha chapel celebrates diamond jubilee

Bernard Anthony

MELAKA: The Chapel of St Anthony in Hutan Percha celebrated its 60th anniversary on January 11, coinciding with the chapel's feast day. The chapel, perched on a gentle hill in this small town, is dedicated to St Anthony the Abbot (251–356 AD), the Egyptian hermit revered as the "Father of All Monks" for his role in shaping early Christian monasticism.

The triduum, from January 8–10, was preached by Fr Michael Goh from the Church of St Francis Xavier, Melaka, drawing up to 150 faithful on the final day. The feast day Mass on Sunday, Jan 11, was presided over by Fr Joseph Heng, chapel administrator and parish priest of the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe (OLOG), Krubong. Concelebrating were Fr Michael, assistant parish priest of OLOG, Fr Neville Arul Sinnappah and Fr Aaron Alammalay from Muar. Around 550 parishioners and pilgrims attended the bilingual Rosary and Thanksgiving Mass, which began at 2.30 pm.

A decorated statue of St Anthony the Abbot at the chapel entrance welcomed



Pilgrims venerating the statue of St Anthony the Abbot at the chapel entrance.

the faithful, who lit tea candles in honour of their patron saint. In his welcome, Fr Joseph highlighted St Anthony's life of prayer, fasting, and solitude as an example of saying "yes" to God, and invited all to lift their petitions and trust to Him.

The Gospel was proclaimed in English by

Fr Neville and in Mandarin by Fr Michael. In his homily on the theme, *When the Heart is Still, Everything Becomes Clear*, Fr Michael reflected on the importance of inner stillness in hearing God's voice amid the noise of modern life. Drawing on the Gospel of the Baptism of the Lord (John

1:29), he reminded the faithful that baptism is a continuing encounter with God, affirming, "You are My beloved child, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17).

After Mass, Fr Joseph thanked Fr Michael for preaching over the four-day triduum and acknowledged the contributions of Fr Neville and Fr Aaron. Love gifts were presented to Fr Michael and Fr Aaron by chapel chairperson Teng Cheng San, while two lay persons from Kuala Lumpur and Johor Bahru — who had brought numerous pilgrims to the chapel over the years — were given small metal crucifixes in appreciation of their dedication.

The 60th-anniversary cake was brought forward, and the assembly sang "Happy Anniversary" as Fr Joseph, Fr Neville, and Sr Mary Heng cut the cake, flanked by lay leaders and Fr Aaron. The celebrations concluded with a communal fellowship meal on the chapel grounds, strengthening bonds among parishioners and pilgrims while celebrating God's enduring faithfulness.

The parishioners left the celebration inspired by this spiritual milestone, reaffirming the chapel's role as a beacon of faith and hope in Hutan Percha.

Fundraiser launched for new St Anthony chapel

BESTARI JAYA, Selangor: On January 17 and 18, the fundraising committee and team from the Chapel of St Anthony, Coalfields, successfully held their first fundraising event at the compound of the Church of St Paul the Hermit. The initiative brought together dedicated volunteers from the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) of the Chapel of St Anthony, Coalfields, and St Philip Minh under the Church of Divine Mercy, Shah Alam.

The two-day campaign was organised to raise funds for the construction of a new St Anthony Chapel, a long-anticipated project currently in the planning stages. The event coincided with the feast day celebrations of the Church of St Paul the Hermit, adding a spirit of joy and communal celebration to the fundraising effort.

Fr James Gabriel, parish priest of St Paul the Hermit, was present throughout the event, offering his full support and encouragement. On the second day of the feast, he officiated the 'soft launch' of the fundraising campaign at the conclusion of Mass. This was followed by the introduction of the committee members and a blessing, witnessed by the entire congregation.

The fundraising drive yielded a substantial collection, providing a strong and encouraging start to the campaign. Beyond its financial success, the event became a meaningful expression of faith, fellowship, and unity, reflecting the strength of a community working together towards a shared vision.

Equally inspiring was the teamwork behind the scenes. Volunteers served tirelessly to ensure the smooth running of the event, while parishioners and visitors responded generously through their participation and contributions. The occasion served as a powerful reminder that a church is not merely a physical structure, but a living community bound by faith, love, and common purpose.

The fundraising event stands as a testament to the strength of the parish community and its collective commitment to serve with generosity and dedication. It will be remembered not only for its success, but also for the joy, unity, and hope it inspired in the journey of building God's sanctuary. As Scripture reminds us, "Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain" (Psalm 127:1). **Patrick Dianand**



A volunteer explaining about the parish's fundraising initiative.

CIC catechists reaffirm mission



Catechists renewing their commitment to serve in faith formation.

PENANG: The Catechetical Ministry of the Church of the Immaculate Conception (CIC), comprising the Catechism programme, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), and the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS), recently renewed its commitment to the vital mission of faith formation within the parish.

The recommitment ceremony brought together catechists, facilitators, and coordinators who serve across different age groups and stages of faith, united by a common call to hand on the faith of the Church with fidelity, love, and zeal. Through their pledge, members reaffirmed their dedication to serve as witnesses of Christ, nurturing faith through teaching, accompaniment, and personal example.

The Catechism programme continues to play a foundational role in guiding children and young people to know, love, and live their Catholic faith. The RCIA team remains committed to accompanying adults discerning or preparing for entry into the

Catholic Church, offering a journey rooted in prayer, Scripture, and communal support. Meanwhile, the CGS ministry, grounded in the Montessori approach, gently leads children into a deeper relationship with God through Scripture, liturgy, and contemplative wonder.

This collective recommitment reflects CIC Penang's ongoing emphasis on holistic catechesis, recognising that faith formation is a lifelong journey that involves the entire parish community. The renewed pledge also serves as a reminder that catechesis is not merely the transmission of knowledge, but the formation of disciples who encounter Christ and live out the Gospel in daily life.

As the Catechetical Ministry embarks on another year of service, the parish entrusts all catechists and learners to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, praying that their efforts may continue to bear fruit in building a vibrant, faith-filled community rooted in Christ and His Church. **Nicholas Khor**

St Carlo Acutis statue a symbol of hope

MYITKYINA: In the midst of a difficult civil conflict, Myanmar's local Catholic Church has offered a symbol of hope and light for the thousands of young people living there.

A statue of the Italian saint-in-sneakers, St Carlo Acutis, has been erected at the Cathedral of St Columbanus in the Diocese of Myitkyina, which is the capital of the Kachin State.

According to the Vatican's *Fides* news agency, this inauguration was the first of its kind in Myanmar and was held on the tenth anniversary of the priesthood and first anniversary of the episcopal ordination of the Bishop of the Diocese, John La Sam.

One of the diocesan priests explained the motive behind this his-

torical moment. The goal of the statue, Fr John Aung Htoi said, is that St Carlo Acutis can teach young people "how to bear witness to the faith in their lives, even in times of trial, especially during this difficult time the nation is experiencing."

The statue is meant to serve as a reminder and inspiration for young people on how to live their faith in Myanmar through a proper use of the internet and social media.

As St Carlo is the patron of the internet, Fr Htoi described him as an example for young people in the country who "must navigate and survive this crisis affecting a country torn apart by civil war."

He recounted how they face "social and moral threats," such as violence, crime, drugs, erosion of the

family unit, and social media without legal protection.

It is in this context that these young people turn to the Catholic Church and its teachings with solid foundations, which encourage them to base their lives on Christ.

To help them, Fr Htoi noted, dioceses around the country organise youth camps, faith formation programmes, and educational programmes as means of accompanying young people on their journey.

"Young people in Myanmar today need understanding, guidance, and trust," the diocesan priest stressed. On the other hand, they must also take responsibility for their actions. Fr Htoi explained, "young people are a vital resource for the future, and therefore we



Bishop John Mung-ngawn La Sam of Myanmar's Myitkyina Diocese blesses the statue of Saint Carlo Acutis. (Photo/Radio Veritas Asia)

must take care of them."

Across Myanmar — especially where the conflict and violence are ongoing — young people make up a deeply vulnerable part of the popula-

tion. Many are homeless, orphaned, or without families able to safeguard them, leaving them at risk of becoming a "lost generation." **Vatican News**

Church clears historical record on Vietnamese martyr

HANOI: The Vatican has set July 2 for the beatification of Fr Francis Xavier Truong Buu Diep, a Vietnamese priest killed in 1946, ending decades of uncertainty over the circumstances of his death.

Bishop Peter Le Tan Loi of Can Tho announced that Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle will preside at the ceremony at Tac Say Pilgrimage Center, where Diep's remains are enshrined. Pope Leo XIV formal-

ly approved the beatification.

For years, many believed Diep had been killed by communist forces, reflecting Vietnam's turbulent history. A diocesan investigation conducted from 2011 to 2017 and approved by the Vatican found otherwise: Diep was killed by two Japanese deserters seeking revenge after Japan's World War II defeat. Witnesses described how he was seized, taken to a pond,

and beheaded — a death rooted in hatred for his faith, not politics.

Born in 1897, Diep served the poor in the Mekong Delta and was renowned for his tireless pastoral care. He defended vulnerable communities during the First Indochina War and maintained cordial relations with people of all faiths and political affiliations.

Devotion to Diep remains strong. Every year, tens of thousands of pilgrims visit Tac Say on the anniversary of his death, bringing offerings and praying for favours, including healing, family reconciliation, and relief from hardship.

"This is a special gift from God," Bishop Loi said. "Diep's faithful witness and self-sacrificing service inspire all Catholics to follow Christ courageously."

The beatification not only honours a revered pastor but also corrects historical misconceptions, emphasising his martyrdom and pastoral legacy for generations of Vietnamese Catholics and the diaspora. **NCR**



A wooden statue depicting Fr Francis Xavier Truong Buu Diep stands at the Tac Say Pilgrimage Center. (ucanews.com)

Vatican employees report distrust and mistreatment

VATICAN: Lay employees of the Holy See say they feel undervalued, overlooked, and often mistreated, according to a new survey conducted by the Vatican Lay Employees Association (ADLV).

The poll, carried out from December 15, 2025, to Jan 7, is being described by the ADLV as the first representative survey of Vatican staff. About 250 people responded, roughly 80 per cent of whom are members of the association. With the Holy See employing around 4,200 workers, the ADLV called the sample "limited but significant."

Key findings paint a stark picture: 73.9 per cent of respondents said there is a clear distance between employees and leadership, while just 12.8 per cent said they were satisfied. Over 71 per cent reported that superiors are not chosen through transparent criteria, and 26

per cent said they cannot maintain honest dialogue with managers.

Employees also cited professional under-appreciation, with around 75 per cent saying human resources are poorly positioned or motivated, and that initiative, merit, or seniority go unrewarded. More than 56 per cent reported humiliating or unjust treatment by superiors, and 73.4 per cent said favouritism and unequal treatment are common.

Career progression remains a major concern: 73 per cent felt advancement is blocked, citing the suspension of a biennial wage step in 2021 that had previously contributed to pensions and benefits. Labour reforms over the past decade were largely seen as ineffective, with 68 per cent saying restrictions increased and 79 per cent reporting insufficient investment in training.

The survey also highlighted strong support for the ADLV as a

representative body. Over 71 per cent said they would turn to the association in workplace disputes, compared with only 10 per cent who would approach the Vatican labour tribunal (ULSA). Nearly 75 per cent identified direct dialogue with leadership as the most effective solution.

Respondents suggested urgent reforms, including transparency, respect for rights, and more formal mechanisms for worker representation. The ADLV noted some early positive signs under Pope Leo XIV, including quick action on labour cases, the authorisation of a bonus previously removed, and an openness to dialogue.

The association contacted the Secretariat for the Economy, which oversees Vatican Human Resources, but had not received a response by the time of publication. **EWTN News**

Bishop of Bogor resigns amid allegations

JAKARTA: Indonesian Bishop Paskalis Bruno Syukur of Bogor, *pic*, 63, a Franciscan who previously declined to become a cardinal, has resigned amid allegations of mismanagement in his diocese.



Syukur announced his resignation to the diocesan curia council on January 19, which the Vatican subsequently accepted, according to diocesan sources. Bishop Christophorus Tri Harsono of Purwokerto has been appointed apostolic administrator until a new bishop is named.

In a statement, Syukur said he resigned "not with a sense of loss but with freedom of heart," describing it not as a "human and worldly defeat." He emphasised that his decision was motivated by love for the "brotherhood and unity of the Church, especially in the Diocese of Bogor."

The resignation followed an investigation by a Vatican-appointed team led by Holy Cross Bishop Antonius Subianto Bunjamin of Bandung, president of the Indonesian Bishops' Conference, into several allegations against Syukur. Bishop Bunjamin did not respond to requests for comment.

In December, two diocesan priests — Bogor Diocesan Major Seminary rector Fr Yosep Sirilus Natet and staff member Fr Yoseph Kristinus Guntur — publicly accused Syukur of authoritarianism, abuse of power, financial mismanagement, and allowing personal relationships to influence diocesan policies.

The priests specifically cited Syukur's takeover of a hospital from the Franciscan Sisters of Sukabumi (SFS) and its transfer to lay management, describing it as an "expulsion" of the sisters and an abuse of authority. They also questioned his secret replacement of diocesan curia officials in December, alleging it lacked a spirit of synodality. While these decisions were later reversed following Vatican involvement, they reportedly caused division among clergy and contributed to Syukur becoming largely unpopular.

Syukur defended his actions as intended "out of love for the Church and to avoid further confusion," describing them as part of his "moral responsibility." Regarding the hospital, he said it was "a reorganisation effort for the sake of a healthier mission," not an attempt to expel the sisters. He denied allegations of financial crisis or personal misuse of diocesan funds, calling such claims "baseless," and dismissed accusations of inappropriate personal relationships as "based on professionalism for the advancement of the diocese."

On conflicts within the curia, Syukur reflected, "Leadership is often a lonely path." He also revealed that in 2024, he was asked to decline a cardinalship due to accusations of mishandling sexual abuse cases. He said he had properly addressed two cases in his diocese, ensuring the perpetrators were imprisoned. A Church source told *UCA News* that Syukur visited the Vatican early last month to explain the accusations against him.

Born on the Catholic-majority island of Flores, Syukur served twice as Franciscan provincial of Indonesia from 2001 and was appointed bishop of Bogor in 2013. From 2021 to 2025, he served as secretary general of the National Bishops' Conference. He was named a cardinal by Pope Francis on Oct 6, 2024, but declined the appointment. **ucanews.com**



The growth of the Church amid migration and change

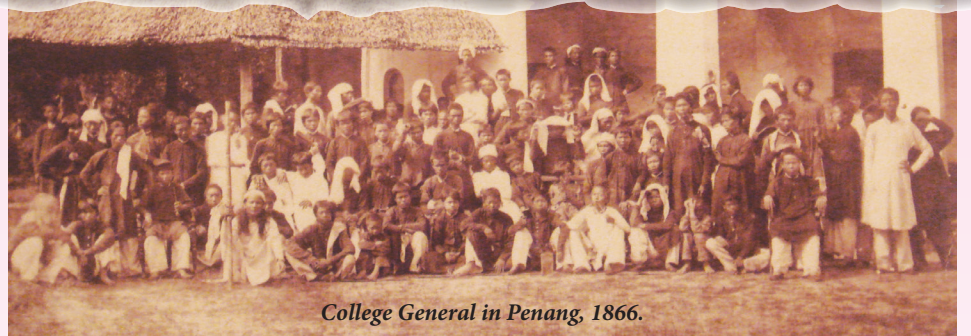
This is the fourth article in a continuing series that reflects on the stories, people, and pivotal moments in the journey of the Catholic Church in Malaysia. In the previous instalment, we explored the imprint of British influence in Malaya and the early roots of Christian missionary activity in Borneo.

Richard Chia

The journey of the Catholic Church in Malaysia is a story of faith, resilience, and adaptation across centuries. At the heart of priestly formation in the region stands the College General Seminary, a centre of formation for priests from across Asia, founded in 1665 in Ayutthaya, Siam. Over the course of 360 years, its story unfolded across borders and cultures, as the seminary was relocated several times — from Ayutthaya to Chanthaburi in Siam, then to Hon Dat in Vietnam, and later to Pondicherry in southern India — before finding a more permanent home in Pulau Tikus, Penang, in 1809. Even then, the journey was not yet complete. In 1984, the seminary moved once more, settling into its present location in Tanjung Bungah, Penang, where it

continues to shape future generations of clergy.

Founded by the Fathers of the Paris Foreign Missions Society (MEP), College General has formed hundreds, if not thousands, of young men in their vocation to the priesthood. From its halls emerged generations of local clergy who would help sustain and strengthen the Church across Asia. Between 1860 and 1960, it welcomed 1,379 candidates from across the continent — including China, Burma (Myanmar), Vietnam, South Korea, Japan, Laos, India, Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Borneo, and Malaya. Of these, 751 were ordained as priests. Many of those who did not proceed to ordination nonetheless returned to serve their local Churches as catechists, putting to fruitful use the formation and knowledge they had received at the College General.



College General in Penang, 1866.

Over the decades, the seminary became a crossroads for young men from across the region, shaping clergy and lay leaders who would sustain the Church in their homelands. Eventually, the landscape of priestly formation began to change. Responding to Pope Pius XI's call for each bishop to establish local seminaries, Thailand and Singapore gradually began training their own seminarians. By the 1980s, College General had become almost exclusively a home for Malaysian candidates, continuing its centuries-long mission of forming priests and nurturing the Catholic Church in Malaysia.

across the peninsula.

The growth of the Church in Malaya was closely linked to the waves of migration and the colonial history of the peninsula. Chinese immigration began in 1819, as workers arrived to meet the demand for labour in tin mines and plantations. Many came initially for trade and economic opportunities, with no intention of settling permanently. Over time, they forged ties with British and European traders, and some embraced Christianity, planting seeds of faith that would grow in local communities.

Indian migration followed, formalised in 1872, as labour was needed for rubber plantations, municipal services, public works, railroads, and road construction. Rubber planting, introduced in the 1870s, became a major industry by 1917, further increasing the demand for workers from the Tamil regions of South India. Many Indian immigrants arrived as Christians, contributing to the spiritual and cultural tapestry of Malaya.

The end of World War II brought great changes to the region. In 1946, the British dissolved their colony: Malacca and Penang became part of the new Malayan Union, while Singapore was made a separate Crown Colony. Two years later, the Malayan Union was replaced by the Federation of Malaya, which would later expand in 1963, joining with North Borneo, Sarawak, and Singapore to form the enlarged Federation of Malaysia. These political shifts shaped not only the nation but also the communities that the Church served, creating new opportunities and challenges for its mission.

Period of British Malaya

The Church's story in Malaya unfolded alongside the region's own historical transformations. In 1909, the King of Siam transferred administrative suzerainty — the authority over foreign policy and defence, while allowing local self-governance — over Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, and Terengganu to the British. These states became known as the Unfederated Malay States. Together with the Federated Malay States (Selangor, Perak, Negeri Sembilan, and Pahang) and the Straits Settlements, the entire peninsula came under British control.

Under colonial rule, Malaya prospered as one of the British Empire's most lucrative territories, first as the world's leading producer of tin and later as a major supplier of rubber. This economic growth brought not only trade and industry but also new opportunities for missionary work, as churches and schools expanded to serve the growing communities



Foundation of the Seminary of Saint Joseph in Ayutthaya, Siam, in 1665

Increase in Catholic Population

Between 1842 and 1961, annual reports from the Bishops and the Paris Foreign Missions (MEP) highlighted a remarkable surge in conversions and baptisms in Malaya and Singapore. A key factor in this growth was the arrival of the La Salle Brothers and the Infant Jesus Sisters in 1852, invited by Bishop Jean-Baptiste Boucho, then Vicar Apostolic of Malacca-Singapore.

These missionaries came with a clear mission: to lay a strong foundation of education and faith among the people. Their work inspired other religious communities to follow, establishing hospitals, orphanages, and a network of Catholic institutions that would serve the community for generations.

Yet, with the growing number of converts came new challenges. The Church faced a shortage of clergy, religious personnel, and catechists, while financial resources were stretched to fund schools, churches, and the salaries of full-time catechists. The diversity of languages and dialects added another layer of complexity, as missionaries sought to reach every ethnic group. Many French missionaries, for instance, had to learn local languages in addition to English, striving to communicate

effectively and nurture the faith of the new and growing Catholic communities.

Early years of the Diocese of Malacca

With the re-establishment of the Diocese of Malacca in 1888, encompassing both Malaya and Singapore, Bishop Edward Gasnier, MEP, was appointed its first bishop. He made Singapore his residence and elevated the Church of the Good Shepherd to cathedral status — a role it still holds today, as the mother church of the Archdiocese of Singapore.

After Bishop Gasnier's death in 1896, Fr René-Michel-Marie Fée, MEP, was chosen and ordained as the next bishop. Bishop Fée devoted much of his energy to promoting both religion and education across the Diocese of Malacca. After his passing in 1904, Fr Marie Luc Alphonse Emile Barillon, MEP — then teaching at the MEP seminaries in Paris — was nominated and ordained bishop. He received his episcopal ordination in Paris before arriving in Singapore in November of that year to continue the work of his predecessors.

By 1911, an official census recorded the population of Malaya and Singapore at two million, of whom 32,000 were Catholics.



The La Salle Brothers at St Xavier's Institution, Penang

Notably, many of these new converts were Chinese immigrants, reflecting the growing influence of the Church among diverse communities.

The outbreak of World War I brought new challenges. The diocese faced a shortage of French missionary priests, leaving those present overworked and stretched thin. Yet even amid these difficulties, the Church saw hope: between 1922 and 1926, the first five local priests were ordained — Fr Stephen Lee, Fr Michael Seet, Fr Rudolf de Souza, Fr Lionel Cordeiro, and Fr Finian de Silva — signalling the rise of homegrown clergy.

In 1934, Fr Adrien-Pierre Devaux was



IJ Sisters in Malaya

ordained the next Bishop of Malacca. By 1937, he was supported by 18 diocesan priests, assisting in pastoral care across the diocese. The outbreak of World War II, however, brought new trials: priests and religious who were British subjects were interned, disrupting the Church's work and testing the resilience of the Catholic community.

● To be continued

This series is not intended as an academic or historical study, nor does it attempt to provide an exhaustive account of events, but rather, offers a narrative reflection on the Church's lived experience.

Pope's prayer intention for February

The Gospel in the waiting room

Emeritus Prof Christopher Ng

Years ago, while working in an oncology department, I often passed a waiting area where adult patients sat alongside small children. Some swung their legs restlessly. Some clutched toys. Some read comics. Others leaned silently into their parents' arms or stared into space, lost in thought.

One day, a young boy caught my attention. He sat very still beside his mother, his head covered with a cap, an indication of loss of hair after treatment. His mother's arm encircled him gently. I offered him a smile as I walked by, but he did not respond.

Half an hour later, I passed the same area again. He remained in the same seat, in the same quiet posture. This time, I stopped. I smiled again and softly asked his name. There was no reply. I waited.

Then, slowly, a small smile appeared. In a soft voice, he said, "Sir, my name is Alex."

His mother looked up and shared that Alex had been worried about losing his hair and missing out on playing with his friends. Kneeling to meet him at eye level, I gently reassured him: his hair would grow back and this difficult time would not last forever. He listened quietly, kept smiling and, in that brief encounter, something profound

Where compassion becomes Church



(Freepik/Faturip)

unfolded — a simple act of presence became a moment of grace.

It was only a brief encounter. And yet something magical had happened: someone spoke with the child, accompanied the mother — a real human presence.

Looking at Alex, I felt as though I were gazing upon Christ Himself — vulnerable, silent and waiting to be loved. In his suffering and stillness, the Gospel comes

alive: Christ is present in those who endure quietly, in those who rely on our gentle accompaniment.

This is the reality Pope Leo XIV invites us to hold in prayer this February: "Let us pray that children suffering from incurable diseases and their families receive the necessary medical care and support, never losing strength and hope."

The Holy Father reminds the Church

that these lives — often hidden in the background of parish life — call us to a deeper pastoral response. Where the word "incurable" may seem like a door closing, the Church is called to open another door wider: a door of accompaniment, compassion, and hope.

In a reflection published in *HERALD* in November 2024, Fr Fabian Dicom reminded us that behind every prayer intention are real faces, real families and real pain. Speaking of parents who have lost children, he reflected on a grief that does not simply fade with time and on a love that endures when words fall silent. He called the Church to a compassion that does not rush to explain suffering, but learns to dwell within it, to accompany it patiently and to bear witness to God's presence in the midst of sorrow.

This same message of hope shines through in this February prayer intention. Whether families are mourning a child who has passed, or sitting anxiously beside one undergoing treatment, the call is the same: to be a Church that walks with them, loves with them and hopes with them. In accompanying the vulnerable, in sharing their silent burdens, we encounter Christ Himself — present, tender, and faithful to those who suffer.

From a waiting room to the heart of the Gospel

A hospital waiting area may seem far removed from the Gospel. Yet in reality, it is precisely here that the mystery of the Incarnation continues to unfold.

The Gospels reveal a Christ drawn to the sick, the fragile and especially to children. When others tried to shield Him from interruption, He rebuked them: "Let the children come to Me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs" (Mk 10:14). He did not bless them from a distance; He took them into His arms.

In their fragility, patience and quiet courage, these little ones embody what the Church has always discerned at the heart of holiness — the smallest saints.

Fr Ron Rolheiser, reflecting in *Giving Birth Through Death* (1992), offers a profound insight from the illness and passing of his sister. Her condition reduced her to childlike dependence. Initially, he admits, this filled him with anger and confusion. Yet, he soon recognised a deeper truth: "She was about to be reborn. How fitting that she should again be a baby!" Her dying became a hidden labour — a passage rather than an ending. "She was both giving birth and being born," he writes.

There is a similar mystery in the lives of children facing serious or incurable diseases. They teach not through action but through being. Their dependence draws love from us. Their vulnerability slows us down. Their smallness reveals what truly matters. And yet, none of this happens in isolation. Just as Christ's love is never solitary, these children and their families rely on a network of care — the quiet presence of parents, the attentive hands of nurses, the counsel of doctors and the prayers of the parish community.

The Holy Father's February prayer intention calls us precisely here: beyond the question of cure, into the human and spiritual work of care. Medicine treats disease, but the Lord heals our souls.

The Compassion of the Samaritan

This intention finds resonance in Pope Leo XIV's Message for the World Day of the Sick (February 11, 2026), themed *The compassion of the Samaritan: loving by bearing another's pain*. Compassion, the Holy Father reminds us, is participatory. The Samaritan does not erase suffering. He allows the wounded body of another to interrupt his journey, moved by love.

For families of children with incurable diseases, this image is deeply consoling. Their lives are shaped not by dramatic moments, but by long hours of waiting, treatment, exhaustion and quiet endurance. Hope is sustained by human closeness: the nurse who attends to small discomforts, the doctor who explains patiently, the parents who pray silently, the parish that remembers and supports. In short, hope flourishes in the presence of a support system — a visible sign of God's love working through others.

Pope Leo XIV reminds us that care for the sick is a true ecclesial action. The Church becomes herself when she draws near the wounded. When medical care is joined by palliative support, pastoral care and a community of solidarity, the Gospel is alive — not merely preached, but embodied.

The Malaysian reality

Malaysia is home to approximately nine million children under 18, nearly a quarter of the nation. Among them are many suffering from incurable diseases: childhood cancers, rare genetic conditions and chronic illnesses. We are blessed with expanding paediatric services, committed healthcare professionals and institutions labouring daily in paediatric oncology, chronic care and palliative medicine. Yet there is an acute shortage of paediatric subspecialists, particularly in palliative care. Geographic and socio-economic disparities persist. Families endure long hospital stays, financial strain, emotional exhaustion and the silent anxiety of an uncertain future.

In this context, the presence of a support system — extended family, parish, healthcare teams, volunteers — is not a luxury but a necessity. Each hand that holds, each prayer that rises, each gesture of care, participates in the mission of Christ's love.

Living the intention

Here, the Church's role is a sacred and tender calling. Parishes that remember these

families, communities that gently accompany them and clergy, faithful, healthcare workers and volunteers who choose to sit in silence, to listen without rushing and to remain — all become living expressions of God's compassion. Often, what is most needed is not a cure, but a faithful presence: one that speaks quietly to the heart and reassures, "You are not alone. I am with you."

When Pope Leo prays that these children and families may "never lose strength and hope," he points to a hope born of love and strengthened by support. This hope is nurtured when someone pauses in a corridor, kneels to a child's eye level, holds a feeble hand, or prays beside a hospital bed. Christian hope does not deny suffering; it embraces it, trusting that Christ is already present, revealing Himself in every act of tenderness, every quiet smile, every intention to notice, to stop and to love.

Now, whenever I pass through a waiting area, I think of Alex. I do not know what became of him. But I carry him in my prayers, along with children across the world living with incurable illnesses. I pray that whenever we meet them — in hospitals, in parishes, in families, or in memory — we may recognise them as small saints entrusted to the contemplative and compassionate heart of the Church and surrounded by the loving presence of a support system that makes Christ visible in the world.

Christopher Ng Kwan Hoong, an Emeritus Professor at Universiti Malaya, is active in Catholic ministry and evangelisation through media. He contributes regularly to Catholic publications and forums, using media and public engagement to explore faith and the Church's mission in contemporary society.



(Unsplash/National Cancer Institute)

You came when no one else did

Chan Lilian

The Gospel call to visit those who are imprisoned continues to bear fruit through the Prison Ministry, which brings hope, courage and spiritual renewal to prisoners facing the most difficult circumstances, including those on death row.

Fr Arulnathan Joseph, who has made regular visits to prisons in Penang, emphasised that prison ministry is deeply rooted in the teachings of Christ. “Jesus Himself tells us in the Gospel to visit those in prison,” he said. “Many prisoners are in deep sadness and feel neglected. Our visits assure them that God has not abandoned them. They receive support, hope and courage.”

One such prisoner is AJ, 52, who has been incarcerated since 2008 and spent 18 years under Section 39B for drug trafficking. Convicted in 2010 and placed on death row, AJ recalled a period of profound despair, particularly in 2014 when there were no Catholic pastoral visits. “I was very lost and afraid of the

uncertainties,” he shared.

Through the efforts of his family and the Church, pastoral care eventually reached him. His cousin in Mantin, Negeri Sembilan, sought assistance from Fr George Harrison, a visiting priest to Kajang Prison. With the support of Fr Martin Arlando (then parish priest of the Church of Divine Mercy, Sungai Ara), and lay volunteers, AJ began receiving regular spiritual accompaniment. He was also able to participate in Easter and Christmas Masses celebrated in prison.

Despite the burden of a death sentence, AJ said he did not blame others for his situation. Acknowledging that he had taken a wrong path, he accepted responsibility for his actions and entrusted his life to God through daily prayer. “Hope is in the heart,” he said. “God kept me strong and healthy. I never lost hope.”

At the time of his remand, AJ’s wife was seven months pregnant with their third child. Today, he gives thanks that all three sons have grown into responsible young men, with the two elder sons having graduated from university and the



youngest excelling academically. With two more years remaining before his release, AJ believes that God’s mercy has sustained him throughout his long incarceration. “Once you have tasted God’s mercy, you stop asking and begin praising Him,” he said.

Another prisoner, known as AA, now 59, entered prison at the age of 42. He admitted that his crime was committed during a moment of uncontrolled anger and intoxication, and he accepted the seriousness of his offence under Section 302 (murder). Initially facing the possibility of a death sentence, he turned to prayer and sought consolation from Fr Arul.

Speaking softly in Bahasa Malaysia, he recalled, “In May 2004, I was summoned to go to the Kuala Lumpur court. I thought that was the end. I pleaded with Jesus for help. I also spoke to Fr Arul who encouraged me to trust in God’s mercy and to hold on firmly to Christ.”

Instead of the death penalty, he was sentenced to 33 years’ imprisonment and later returned to Jawi Prison in Penang.

In 2024, AA received news that renewed his hope — the prospect of eventual release following the enactment of the Abolition of Mandatory Death Penalty Act 2023 by the Malaysian Parliament in April 2023. For him, this was a powerful reminder that God’s grace continues to work even in the darkest places.

Daily prayer and Scripture became central to his life, leading to a profound inner transformation. His family noticed the transformation, describing him as “a new person.” For the past eleven years, weekly pastoral visits by clergy and faith sharers from the Penang Diocesan Prison Ministry (PDPM) have strengthened his faith and sustained his spiritual journey.

“I never let go of the Bible. I read it every day,” AA said as he held his Bible close. “When I am released in five years’ time, I want to tell others to be good people and not go to prison. I want to tell them about Jesus.”

Fr Arul noted that these testimonies reveal the quiet yet powerful impact of prison ministry. “When we bring Christ into prison, lives are changed,” he said. “The prisoners discover that God walks with them, even on death row.”

The Penang Diocesan Prison Ministry (PDPM) comprises 25 priests and deacons serving across four states within the Diocese of Penang. Together with PDPM faith sharers, they visit inmates in 10 prisons on a weekly basis.

Those who feel called to serve in this ministry may note that the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, the Diocese of Malacca Johore, and the Diocese of Penang each have active prison ministry teams. Contact details are available on their respective diocesan websites.



Stranger Things star reveals the faith behind his strength

For millions of fans around the world, *Stranger Things* wasn’t just a show — it was a journey watched over nearly a decade. The actors who played the brave kids of Hawkins grew up on screen, and as the series concluded its final season this January, attention naturally turned to how they’ve navigated life beyond the Upside Down.

Amid the curiosity, one star’s story stands out not for stardom or red carpets, but for a quieter kind of courage: a deepening, intentional faith. Caleb McLaughlin, now 24, became a household name as Lucas Sinclair. But away from the cameras, he credits his spiritual life — not Hollywood success — as the anchor that kept him grounded through his rise to fame and the emotional demands of public life.

As he shared on the Popcrushed podcast, it wasn’t until recently that his relationship with Christ took on a new depth.

Faith as a foundation — even in the spotlight

Growing up with a father who is a pastor,

McLaughlin says faith has been part of his life for as long as he can remember, but his experience of it changed in 2025. As he put it: “It’s just always been a part of me, but it’s always a different level to me [now].”

He explained that it’s easy in life to get swept up in what he called the “world” — busyness, distractions, and surface-level routines — so the decision to pray more intentionally was a turning point. In his own words, there were moments where prayer shrank to something done before sleep, and then moments where he realised, he needed more: “... like, wait, I need to pray and talk to God and ground [myself].” Stepping back from the noise — including social media — and spending more time in church with his family wasn’t a retreat, he says, but a refreshing return to what really matters.

The lifestyle of spiritual grounding

What McLaughlin describes resonates far beyond celebrity culture. In an age where validation often comes from likes, followers, and external success, retreating into prayer and stillness feels

countercultural. But it’s precisely this intentional slowing down, this turning inward, that many people are discovering as truly life-giving.

The actor also shared how he did something very impressive in today’s society: “I deleted Instagram and got off social media and just started grounding myself a little bit more and talking to God more, and it’s been really replenishing.”

It’s a choice that many of us can aspire to on a smaller scale — whether it’s silencing notifications at dinner, taking a day off screens, or choosing Sunday as a day of rest over endless scrolling.”

And he doesn’t frame this as a fleeting trend or a phase. For him, it’s the very foundation on which he can count on day or night. In a world that values momentum and achievement, it’s a powerful reminder that identity and equilibrium come not from applause, but from rootedness.

A lifestyle worth celebrating

What makes McLaughlin’s testimony especially meaningful — and refreshing — is that it isn’t about perfection or



piety. It’s about intentional presence. It’s about choosing stillness when noise is easier, choosing prayer when distraction beckons, choosing inner peace over outer validation.

It’s a posture that invites young and old alike to consider what truly steadies the heart. For *Stranger Things* fans — many of whom are young adults themselves — McLaughlin’s journey offers a kind of heroism that doesn’t depend on beating supernatural foes, but on real-world courage: the courage to pause, to pray, and to ground oneself in something that lasts.

In a culture that often celebrates success without substance, his story is a gentle, inspiring testimony that faith — lived quietly, honestly, and consistently — can be a source of strength that far outshines any screen role or headline.

Cerith Gardiner/Anna Ashkova, Aleteia

For quite some time in my life, and partly due to the influence of the “holy people” who taught me about God, spiritual life and growth was a very serious and stressful endeavour! It was a real struggle! It was something I achieved by the “sweat of my brow”.

Furthermore, I got stuck in the rites, rituals, rules and regimented disciplines of the Church and could not go beyond them to a personal, deep, real and life-giving relationship with God.

Then it happened, albeit in a very gradual process. I encountered the epiphany of a humorous God. Or as someone put it very aptly, it was “a profoundly transformative, often surreal experience where the overwhelming majesty of the divine is coupled with a sense of playful irony, joy, or cosmic mischief.”

Another beautiful quote by an unknown author sums up this experience so well: It is a moment where the “seriousness” of faith is broken by the realisation that God holds a perspective far lighter, more profound, and perhaps more surprising than human, rigid dogma.

I learned to be relaxed in the presence of God and to relish my friendship with Him. He has a great and exceptional sense of humour. He enjoys banter, irony, and joy! Made in His image and likeness, my human creativity and humour is but a reflection of my Creator!

I discovered that apart from our daily experiences of Him, God is clever, coy, creatively witty and He likes to have fun.



God's So Funny

Martin Jalleh

He delights in surprises, irony — even sarcasm — and is ultimately driven by joy, the joy of the Holy Spirit.

At times, I could imagine Him laughing at our overly serious and strenuous efforts on our journey to holiness and especially our perceptions and mind-sets of who He really is, which are mainly influenced and determined by our past human experiences and the perceived faith handed down to us.

Discovering that God has a great sense of humour made me stop taking myself too seriously. It gave me the “grace” to laugh at my very own fears, faults, failures and flawed self-conceptions and that of God. Unsuccessful and unexpected outcomes were often met with laughter and a deep realisation that all things work for good when we follow His wit and His ways!

A humorous example

Some of my funny moments with God have been in the area of my prayer life. Like many Catholics, I struggled in my desire for a daily and deeper connection with God. Coming from a background of set prayers, rote prayers and memorised prayers, I grew up believing that I need endless words in my communication with God.

The time came when I became bored

Being holistically holy and humorous

and frustrated by my fixed prayers, one-sided chatter and endless monologue with God. But there were times when I was amused when I felt Him nudging me to “Shut up”. Just Be. Still.

In His own subtle sense of humour, God drew my increasing attention to the daily relationship of my dad and mum in their old age. After a long day of doing their own favourite things, mum would cook and they would have dinner together, after which they would sit together on the settee next to each other.

My dad was quite deaf by then, so he hardly watched TV. Mum had poor eyesight and she eventually stopped reading the newspaper. They would just sit in silence, close, next to each other and enjoy the intimacy of just BEING together...and would fall asleep!

Looking back, I now laugh at myself and how I foolishly thought that prayer is something that I have to DO or SAY but it's all about just BEING with God.

One last example before I end. Just sitting before the Lord without saying or doing anything can be quite a challenge. There is a tendency to fall asleep — and feel guilty after that (we have fallen asleep)! And frequent guilt does not help us in having a healthy prayer life!

Here again, God, in His own humorous way, had a lesson for me through the late La Salle Brother Vincent Cockery who

retired in the La Salle Centre in Ipoh, when I was working as a programme coordinator.

For quite some time, I noticed that Bro Vincent had a very interesting daily schedule. He would arise very early for his morning prayer. After lunch, he would go to the chapel and have his Holy Hour. But I observed that he would fall asleep during most of that hour.

One day I plucked up courage and spoke to him about his “unholy” habit of falling asleep during that sacred hour. His response to me was profoundly hilarious: “Yes, Martin, I know I often fall asleep during that blessed Hour. But you must understand. I only told the Lord that I will BE with Him for an hour, I did not specify awake or asleep!”

There is no doubt, until this day, that those who know Bro Vincent Cockery very well still talk of him as a very humorous man. I think it's because he spent his whole life BEING with our humorous God.

May you continue to enjoy a humorous relationship with God, because God's so funny!

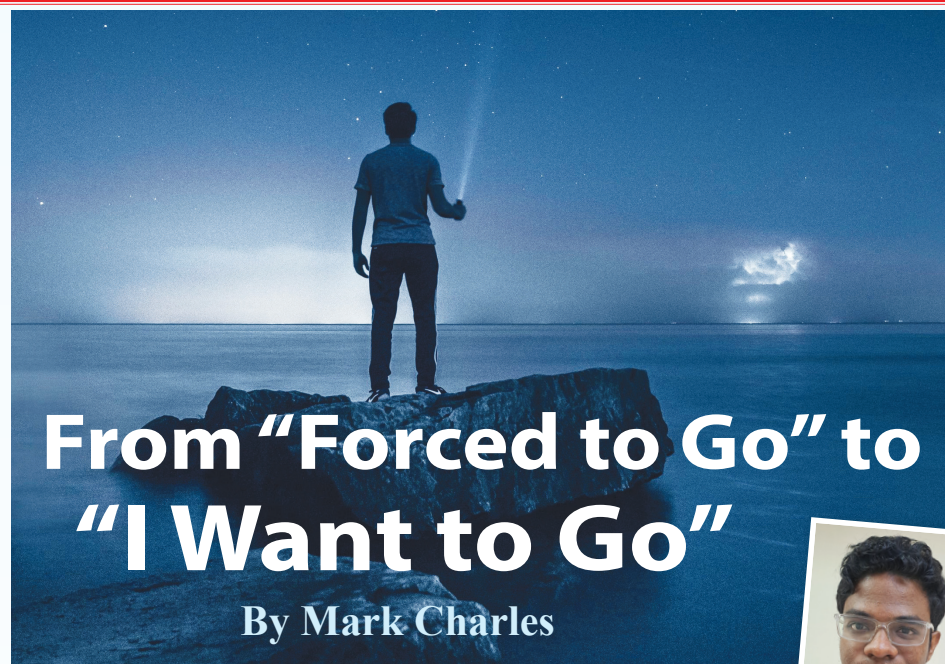
Martin describes himself as what many have described him: “An Excellent, Exciting, Enlightening, Engaging, Empowering and Exceptionally-humorous speaker and motivator.”

BE OUR GUEST

The childhood of a Christian begins when we are born, when we are baptised. We are far too young to know what's happening, or to understand the significance of that moment. Nonetheless, we are welcomed into God's family. Children are brought to church with their parents; perhaps they attend catechism class, or participate in a church event or two. However, many children grow up feeling forced to attend church. I have to admit, at times I felt that way too. So, when I was whisked away to boarding school at the tender young age of 13, I faced a whole new set of challenges.

Separated from my parents, my siblings and even my home parish, it was a rather daunting experience at first. New friends and interesting subjects kept my mind busy. Living without my family for the first time was a tough learning curve. As I adjusted to the new environment, my faith wasn't always the first thing on my mind. When I returned home for the holidays, I could attend church with my family — but back at school, I wasn't even watching the online Masses every week. It's no surprise that I felt more distant from my faith.

Then a senior of mine approached me. He let me know that he'd been organising weekly trips to a nearby church, complete with bus transportation there and back. Initially, I was hesitant. I didn't want to wake up earlier on a Sunday. My parents weren't there, so no one would be forcing me to go. But I figured that God has done so much for me, and giving Him some of my time each week was the least I could do. Admittedly, it was still done out of a sense of obligation. There were some weeks when I felt tired, or I had a competition, or I just didn't want to attend — I



thought of all sorts of excuses to tell God.

By this point, however, I'd matured a little. You may have heard that prayer is a conversation with God. Those words took on new meaning for me. I'd always imagined prayer as a rather solemn, formal affair; the only times I prayed as a kid were to thank God for something or ask Him for something. Then I reconsidered that line, about prayer being a conversation, and I tried saying a prayer just to tell God about all the little things that happened in my day. It was then that I began to truly develop a personal connection with Him. It was then that I stopped attending Mass out of obligation, and started doing it out of love.

Of course, there's more to the story. I made many new friends at boarding school, including some fellow Christians who would also take the bus to church with me. They turned out to be positive

influences in my life, and that sense of camaraderie definitely helped me along the way. A year later, my senior who was handling the transport graduated, and he passed the duty on to me. Soon, I was collecting the names of those who were taking the bus, acting as liaison between the students and the church. I remember feeling a sense of satisfaction, knowing that I was carrying out my responsibility.

Another big part of it all was the independence. As kids and especially as teenagers, we often dread being told to do something by our parents. To this day, I silently sigh a little whenever I hear my name being called around the house. It might be time-consuming or tedious or just plain boring. When it's done, perhaps we're annoyed, or we just want to get

back to our phones and laptops. However, when we do something that we chose to do, it stops feeling like a task. I myself can attest to this; simple things like washing the dishes feel much better when I'm doing it on my own, compared to having my parents tell me to do it. In the end, I felt like a responsible and helpful person. I felt good about myself.

The same thing applies to our faith. When we're brought to church, it can feel like a chore. Like something routine. But in a situation where I had to make the choice myself, I felt like I was doing the right thing. I was making good use of my free will. After my experience at boarding school, I wonder if perhaps that's what the Christian youth need to deepen their faith. The chance to make a choice. I understand that many parents can feel scared; what if their children don't want to go to church? But we each need to build our own personal relationship with Jesus. He can be a friend, a source of comfort, a light in the darkness. He wants to have that personal relationship with us too, and many of us young people fail to realise that because we're still thinking of church as “something parents drag us to”.

As I grew up, made my own choices and connected with God, church stopped being something my parents dragged me to. I ended up going to church of my own volition, because I wanted to be close to God. Ultimately, I learnt the importance of having a personal connection with the Father.

Mark is a bright and enthusiastic 17-year-old who recently graduated from boarding school. He is currently gaining valuable experience through an immersion programme with HERALD.





Fr Ron Rolheiser

Myrrh, the unwanted gift

In the Gospels we find the story of the three Magi, coming from the East and laying their gifts at the crib of the newborn Jesus. The gifts were not practical: baby food, diapers, blankets. They were symbolic. What do they symbolise?

At one level, they symbolise, as we have been classically taught: *kingship*, *divinity*, and *humanity*. But there are other levels of meaning as well. *Gold* can be seen as a gift that resources the young child for the things he will need in life; *Frankincense* can be seen as honouring the unique dignity of his person; and *Myrrh* can be seen as reminding him that he will die one day.

Now, these are three gifts which every parent needs to give a child, namely, resources for the things the child needs in order to grow: a pride in the child that honours his or her dignity; and a reminder (in whatever form this might take) which makes and keeps the child aware that one day he or she will die. These are the gifts from the Magi: we are resourced, we are honoured, and we are reminded that one day we will die.

As children, we yearn for the first two gifts, the gold and the frankincense, but we resist the last gift, the myrrh, a reminder that we are mortal, a reminder we don't want but very much need.

Growing up, my father and mother gave me these three gifts: *gold*, the resources I needed to live and grow, *frankincense*, a sense of my unique dignity, and *myrrh*, a sense that someday I will die, that this life isn't all there is, that youth and health don't

last forever, and that my life decisions need always to be made against that horizon.

Growing up, I always resisted that last gift. I didn't want to look at dead bodies at wakes or at funerals, and all talk of the fragility of life sent me scurrying from the room. I didn't want to see or hear anything about death. For me, this was morbid talk which blocked out sunshine and drained oxygen from a room.

But my parents, in all the good things they gave me and my siblings, never let us evade the myrrh. In all seasons, there were reminders of our mortality, of the fact that life was fragile and that death eventually awaited us. My father and mother weren't cruel, sadistic, or particularly pessimistic; they just kept this awareness always in front of us, reminding us of what was real. All the while, I longed for Disneyland.

Perhaps in some of this they were not just influenced by their faith, but also from the

Germanic culture from which they came, the culture that gave us Grimm's Fairy Tales, that had a particular stoicism regarding death, and one which believed that adults weren't doing children a favour by shielding them from the darker aspects of life. But, in the end, this particular gift did come from their faith and was healthy and very much needed.

For all my resistance and attempts to evade this gift, it slipped through and slipped through so powerfully that I can in all honesty say that all the major decisions in my life have been made against its horizon. I would never have entered a religious community and become a priest, except for what this gift kept me always aware. I would not have persevered in my religious vows, except for this gift. Who would want to live the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, if there were no awareness of the reality of our mortality? Indeed, in any

walk of life, who would have the strength to be faithful if there weren't an awareness of this bigger horizon?

As a child I wasn't grateful for my parents (and the Catholic culture they lived in) for never letting me forget that I was mortal, for symbolically bringing myrrh to my crib. But I look back now and realise that this was one of the greatest gifts they gave me – a gift I didn't want but desperately needed.

I remember a particularly dark period in my childhood, the summer and fall when I was thirteen. In the space of five months, three young people I knew, two neighbours and a classmate, all died suddenly – two in accidents and one by suicide. Each of these deaths which took a young healthy person out of life was an assault on my youthful energies and dreams, all of which were predicated in walking in light, in sunshine, in health, in youth, and in a world where death wasn't real. For six months I struggled with denial, in a painful and isolated teenage loneliness, trying to make peace with the brute fact of death. And that struggle branded my soul at a depth I still feel today. That summer I was, again, given the gift of myrrh, the blessing that comes from making peace with your own mortality.

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



Reflecting on the PMP theme - February

Church: Conversion of relationships through fostering inclusivity

The Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral (PMP) theme for the month of February invites us to turn our attention to the Church itself, not as a building or institution, but as a living communion of people called to conversion of relationships. With the sub-theme of *Fostering Inclusivity and the pastoral pathway of practising inclusivity through concrete gestures and honouring the dignity of all* (FD #117), we are challenged to examine how we relate to one another in our parishes, neighbourhoods, and society at large.

St Paul's words in Romans 12:4-5 provide a guiding framework: "For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." The diversity of gifts, experiences, and backgrounds in the Church is not a barrier but a sign of richness. In the Malaysian context, with its multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious composition, this diversity calls for intentional efforts to foster inclusivity, so that all may feel welcomed, valued, and empowered to participate fully in parish life.

Conversion of relationships begins with honest self-reflection: How do we perceive and engage with those who are different from us – culturally, linguistically, socially, or even economically? In our parishes, it is easy to gather with familiar faces, to

stay within comfort zones, and to focus only on people who mirror our own experiences. Yet Christ calls us beyond familiarity, inviting us into spaces that may initially feel uncomfortable or unfamiliar. Inclusivity begins with openness, humility, and the willingness to listen deeply.

Fostering inclusivity is not merely an abstract ideal; it must be expressed in concrete, daily gestures. Practising inclusivity and honouring the dignity of all requires action that embodies Gospel love. Simple, intentional acts can make a profound difference: welcoming newcomers in their own language, inviting differently-abled parishioners to take active roles in liturgy, visiting the elderly or homebound, or celebrating diverse cultural expressions within parish events. These gestures do more than include; they affirm the inherent dignity and gifts of each member, creating a sense of belonging that mirrors the unity of Christ's body.

Inclusivity also calls for attentiveness and shared learning. Parish communities can create spaces for dialogue where members listen to one another's experiences and perspectives, especially those from marginalised or underrepresented groups – migrant workers, refugees, the differently-abled, and the elderly. Participating in joint initiatives with multi-ethnic neighbourhoods or interfaith community projects also provides opportunities to

practise mutual respect and solidarity. Such actions make visible the truth that the Church is not a closed circle but a living, active body engaged in the wider society.

At the heart of fostering inclusivity is the recognition of the dignity of every person. Every individual bears the image of God and has a unique role within the Church. Honouring this dignity means advocating for social justice, providing pastoral care accessible to all socio-economic groups, and ensuring that parish ministries offer meaningful participation for every age, ability, and background. Conversion of relationships requires not only welcoming diversity but actively empowering every member to contribute their gifts. In doing so, the parish becomes a witness to society that the Kingdom of God is built on justice, compassion, and unity.

Romans 12:4-5 reminds us that the Church is interconnected: each member's strength, insight, and effort support the life of the whole body. In practical terms, youth bring creativity and energy, the elderly share wisdom and experience, and migrants enrich the community with cultural depth and resilience. Inclusivity is therefore a shared responsibility, requiring collaboration among parish leaders, catechists, and every member of the faithful. It is also expressed in cooperation beyond the parish – through dialogue and joint initiatives with other faith groups and civil society organisations – strengthening

the Church's witness of love and justice in the broader community.

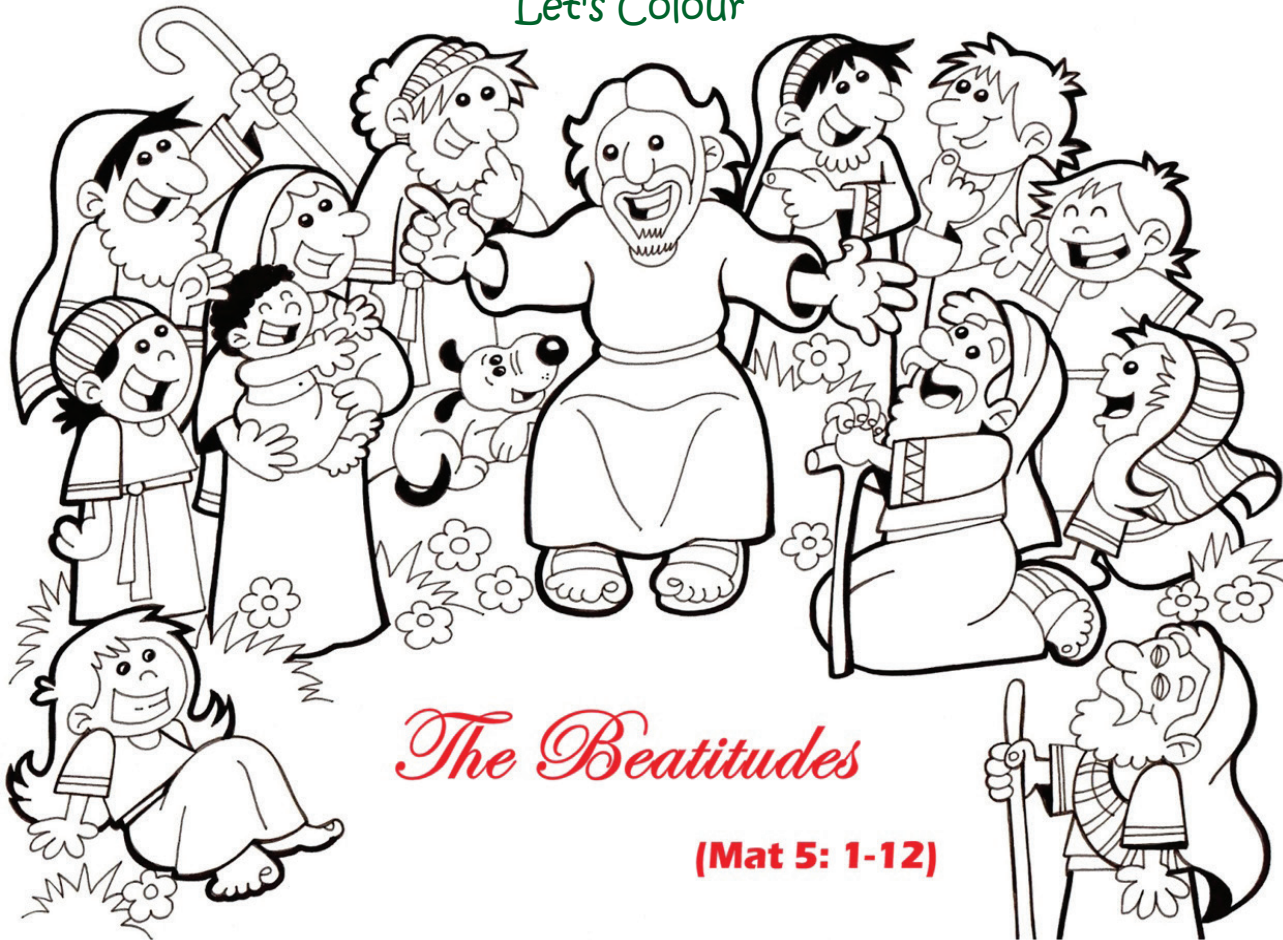
Conversion of relationships is not a one-time event but a continual journey. In our multi-ethnic and plural society, it requires deliberate effort to break down barriers, engage in concrete acts of welcome, and honour the inherent dignity of each person. Every gesture of inclusivity, every act of listening, and every encounter across differences nurtures unity and builds a Church that reflects the body of Christ in its fullness.

As we reflect on this month's PMP theme, we are invited to ask: How does our parish truly welcome and value everyone? How do our actions honour the dignity of the marginalised? Are we attentive to voices that have been overlooked? Inclusivity is lived not in programmes alone but in daily gestures of openness, respect, and care. By practising these concrete expressions of love, the Church in Peninsular Malaysia can grow as a communion where each member is indispensable, each contribution valued, and all are united in Christ.

In embracing this call to foster inclusivity, the Church models for society the transformative power of relationships rooted in the Gospel. It reminds us that diversity is not an obstacle to unity but a gift to be cherished, guiding us toward a Church that truly exemplifies the words of Romans 12:4-5: many members, one body, walking together in faith, hope, and love.

LITTLE CATHOLIC'S CORNER

Let's Colour



The Beatitudes

(Mat 5: 1-12)

Dear children,

In today's Gospel Jesus teaches the eight beatitudes.

Beatitude means happiness.

Here are some ideas on how to live the beatitudes:

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

If you share your nice things and don't let it be the most important thing in your life, then you will be happy.

2. Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.

If you are sad now, remember that in Heaven there will be no more suffering.

3. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.

Don't be selfish or pushy about things. God will make sure you get everything you need!

4. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.

If you try to do what is right, then God will make the right things happen.

5. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

If you forgive other people when they hurt you, then God will forgive you when you are sorry for your sins against Him.

6. Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.

If God is the centre of your life, then your heart is pure and ready to see Him in Heaven when you die.

7. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

God loves peace and loves it when we try to avoid getting into fights.

8. Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

If you suffer for the truth, God will give you a joyful reward!

Love
Aunty Eliz

FILL IN THE BLANKS

Blessed are the in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of

.....

Blessed are those who ,
for they will be

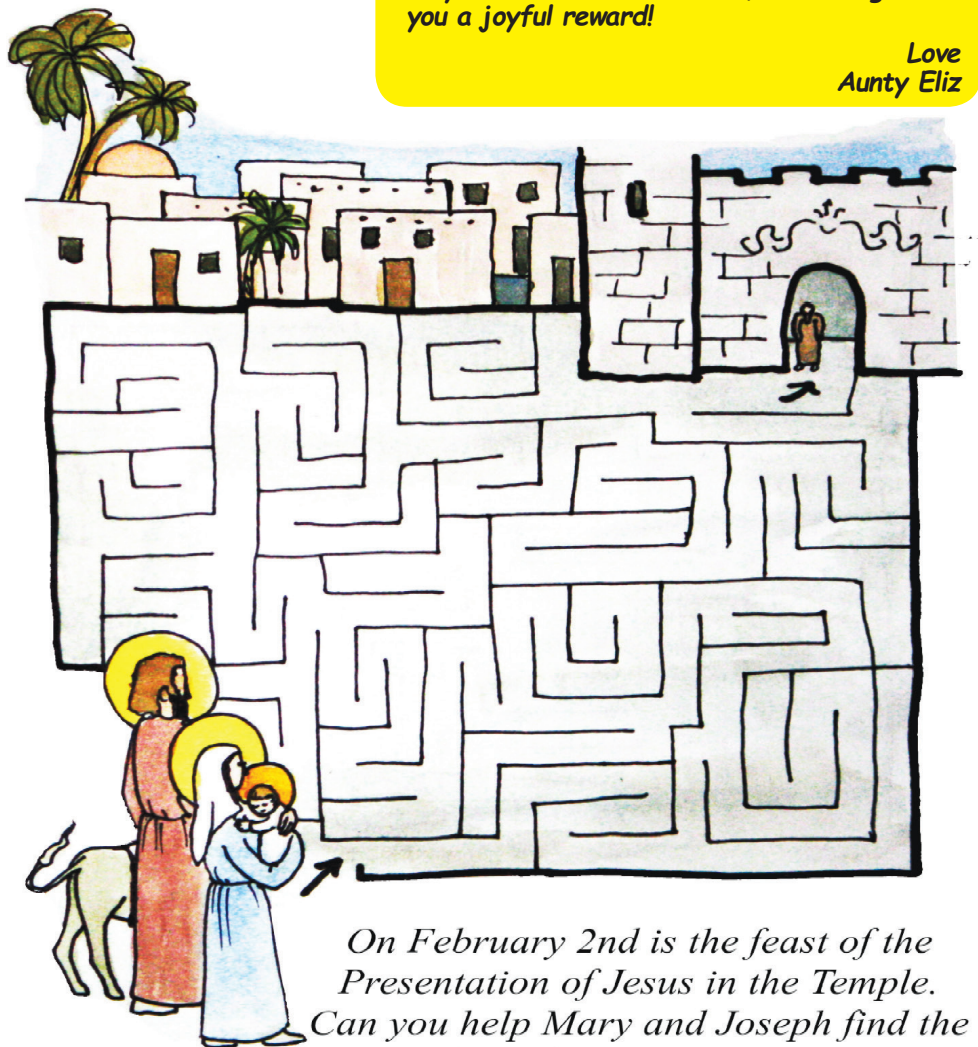
Blessed are the,
for they will the

.....

Blessed are those who ,
and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

(Mat 5: 3-6)

mourn	poor	comforted	hunger
heaven	meek	earth	inherit



On February 2nd is the feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. Can you help Mary and Joseph find the way through Jerusalem to present Baby Jesus in the Temple?

YOOUTH

SÃO PAULO – A priest who became famous for inviting people to pray the rosary at 4.00am was Brazil's most watched streamer in 2025, surpassing gamers and sports commentators.

According to Stream Charts, which collects data from the most popular streaming platforms, Fr Gilson Pupo Azevedo, a member of the Carmelite Messengers of the Holy Spirit who is best known in Brazil as Frei (Friar) Gilson, had his videos watched for over 153 million hours last year.

The second most watched streamer in Brazil was Alexandre Gaules Barbosa, who covers Counter-Strike tournaments, with 95 million hours watched. Evangelical Bishop Bruno Leonardo, in third place, had nearly 68 million hours of videos watched in 2025.

Thirty-nine-year-old Gilson is also a singer and leads a ministry called Som do Monte (Sound of the Mountain). His fame has been growing in the South American nation over the past few years, especially through his promotion of the so-called St Michael's Lent, a 40-day devotion that ends on Sept 29, the archangel's feast day, and involves fasting and praying the rosary.

In 2024, Gilson attracted 700,000 people to wake up and pray the rosary with him on YouTube at 4.00am. In 2025, that number exceeded one million.

Unlike other widely known Brazilian priests, Gilson doesn't look like a TV star. He is always seen wearing his friar's brown habit and with a shaved head. He also doesn't try to sound like a generic spiritual guru to please everyone. On the contrary, he is well known for his frank Catholic preaching.

He told *Crux* that his success is not the result of any marketing strategy.

"On my part, there was never any planning in that regard. I never sat down with a team to define social media growth strategies, nor were there any financial investments aimed at that. We never worried about paying to reach a certain number of people," Gilson said.

On the contrary, he added he has always believed that he will reach exactly those whom God wants him to reach.

"For this reason, I attribute this entire journey not to any human strategy, because it simply didn't exist — and to say otherwise would be untrue — but to a simple, genuine, and faithful evangelisation. There has always been, however, a constant and daily presence in people's lives," Gilson said.

According to Bishop Devair Araújo da

Brazil's Top Streamer in 2025



was a Catholic Priest

Fonseca of the Diocese of Piracicaba, who has been following Gilson's work for the past few years, a combination of prayer and an invitation to conversion is the key to the friar's enormous success.

"Gilson and other famous Catholic influencers, like Sr Maria Raquel of the Hesus Institute [Gilson's frequent collaborator], have a ministry of prayer that reaches people's hearts. They don't shy away from talking about sins, errors, and lies, and so they call people to reflect on their lives and change," da Fonseca told *Crux*.

The result, the bishop added, is that people seek the path of conversion. During confession, he often hears people say that they examine their conscience after watching one of Gilson's livestreams.

"People who haven't been confirmed yet come to us, as well as people in irregular marital situations," da Fonseca said.

As his fame grew, Gilson was invited to give interviews to some of Brazil's leading podcasters, reaching diverse audiences. But his mes-

sage hasn't changed, said Guto Azevedo, a podcaster and creator of the Catholic podcast Santo Flow.

"He gave me a four-hour interview. For more than 70 percent of that time, he spoke directly about Holy Scripture and the Magisterium," Azevedo told *Crux*.

Azevedo believes that Gilson's experience with music and his innovative approach to evangelization are behind his success.

"He has a very clear evangelization strategy. He teaches what the Church teaches. That's the main element," he said.

Analyzing Gilson's YouTube videos, Azevedo confirmed that most of the video thumbnails are directly related to biblical themes.

Azevedo said that most parishes realized the importance of an online presence during the COVID-19 pandemic, although most of them only livestream Masses and post pictures of events on social media.

"Digital communications must be planned and managed by a parish like any other activ-

ity," he argued.

He also believes there should be more sharing of best practices in Church communications.

"We have to learn from each other," Azevedo said.

Santo Flow has been rapidly growing. It is the most visited Catholic podcast in Brazil, with 640,000 YouTube subscribers. One of Santo Flow's strategies is to release up to 15 clips of interviews daily, often with attention-grabbing content.

"Younger generations expect content to reach them through short clips," Azevedo said.

Gilson's videos — which are only available on YouTube, where he has 8.7 million subscribers — tend to be long, often over an hour and a half. But he also posts short clips with rapid reflections.

"I think consistency and truth have led many to find in our content a place where they can listen to God, recover inwardly, and nourish their souls," said Gilson. **Crux**

Seoul Archdiocese launches

nationwide pilgrimage of WYD symbols



SEOUL: The Archdiocese of Seoul formally launches a nationwide pilgrimage of the World Youth Day (WYD) Symbols, with the blessing of 15 logo sculptures at Myeongdong Cathedral.

Each of the 15 sculptures represents one of Korea's dioceses and bears its diocesan name, marking the start of the domestic pilgrimage of the WYD Seoul 2027 Symbols following their return to Korea in December 2025.

The WYD Cross and the Icon of Our Lady, Salus Populi Romani, had travelled throughout 2025 on an international pilgrimage across nine countries, including Rome, during the Jubilee for Youth, carrying the prayers and hopes of young people from one country to another.

Archbishop Peter Soon-taick Chung presided over the blessing rite on January 20, and described the sculptures as a visible reminder of shared mission and grace as preparations for World Youth Day continue.

"The sculpture bearing the name of each diocese will remind everyone preparing for this event of their calling and the graces they have received," Archbishop Chung said.

He urged the faithful to dedicate themselves fully to preparations for "a festival of youth that will warmly welcome young people from all

over the world," and prayed that those who see the sculptures may grow ever more in the likeness of the Son.

Reflecting World Youth Day's emphasis on ecological responsibility, the sculptures were produced using honeycomb board, a fully recyclable paper-based material.

The design was created by youth volunteer Jung-hoon Cho. While dimensions vary slightly by diocese, each sculpture measures about 1,500 millimetres wide and 800 millimetres high.

WYD Seoul 2027 logo sculptures bearing the names of Korea's 15 dioceses are displayed ahead of their distribution for the nationwide pilgrimage of the World Youth Day symbols. Photo:

The 15 sculptures will be distributed to dioceses nationwide and will accompany diocesan and parish events during the pilgrimage, serving as a sign of unity and communion within the Church in Korea.

The nationwide pilgrimage of the WYD Cross and Marian Icon is set to begin Jan 21 in the Diocese of Wonju. The Symbols will visit all 15 dioceses before returning to the Archdiocese of Seoul in June 2027. **Vatican News**

A priest behind a DJ deck in a packed nightclub? For some, it's inspiring. For others, confusing — even troubling. Either way, Padre Guilherme Peixoto is impossible to ignore.

Known globally as Padre Guilherme, the Portuguese priest recently performed an electronic music set at AHM nightclub in Beirut, Lebanon — just one night after a legal complaint was filed to stop the show. The petition, signed by a group that included clergy, argued that a priest DJ-ing in a nightclub undermined Church values. A judge dismissed the complaint, allowing the concert to go ahead.

What made the moment even more striking was what Padre Guilherme had been doing just hours earlier.

That same day, he was at the University of the Holy Spirit of Kaslik, north of Beirut, celebrating Mass alongside a Lebanese priest before a large congregation of students and families. Speaking before the liturgy, he explained why music — even electronic dance music — is part of his mission.

"The Psalm asks us to praise the Lord with all instruments," he said. "So now you have this new instrument — electronic music."

From the altar to the DJ booth

That night, around 2,000 people packed into the nightclub. As agreed beforehand, Padre Guilherme did not wear clerical attire, and no religious symbols were displayed at the venue. His two-and-a-half-hour set featured pulsating bass, electronic rhythms, and visual projections of white doves and images of Pope St John Paul II. At one point, he

PADRE GUILHERME THE DJ PRIEST

WHO'S MAKING PEOPLE TALK

dedicated a song to Lebanon and waved the Lebanese flag, drawing loud cheers from the crowd.

Born in Guimarães in northern Portugal in 1974, Padre Guilherme was ordained in 1999 and serves in the Archdiocese of Braga. Alongside parish ministry, he has worked as a military chaplain, including deployments to Kosovo and Afghanistan. It was during a mission in Afghanistan in 2010, while organising morale-boosting events for soldiers, that he first began DJ-ing.

What started as a simple way to connect with people gradually became something bigger. After returning to Portugal, he trained professionally and began hosting DJ events to raise funds for parish projects.

During the COVID-19 lockdowns, his weekly online DJ sessions — blending electronic beats with spiritual and folk elements — attracted a massive global audience.

In 2023, he burst onto the international stage after performing at World Youth Day in Lisbon, shortly before a papal liturgy. Clips of the priest-DJ went viral, turning him into a global Catholic sensation. Today, he has millions of followers online and performs across Europe, Latin America, and beyond.

Evangelisation — but how far?

Padre Guilherme has been clear about one thing: his music does not belong in the Mass.

"It's not music to play in church," he told Irish broadcaster RTÉ. "It's music to bring

the Church outside the church."

That message resonates with many young Catholics who believe the Church must meet people where they are — including in spaces shaped by music, art, and digital culture. After all, the Church has a long history of using culture as a bridge for evangelisation.

Lebanon, with its long Christian heritage and large youth population, seemed like a natural stop on his tour. Christians make up about a third of the country's population, the highest proportion in the Middle East. In recent years, however, the nation has also faced political instability, economic hardship, and fears of renewed conflict. Calls for peace and coexistence — especially among young people — carry deep meaning.

That message was central to Padre Guilherme's performance.

"When you look at the dance floor, you see respect," he said. "People of different races and clothes dancing together. If this is possible here, why can't we live like that in the world?"

A divided response

Still, not everyone was convinced.

Reactions on social media were sharply divided. Some criticised the performance as turning faith into entertainment and blurring the line between the sacred and the secular. Others praised the priest for finding a language young people understand and for bringing a message of peace into an unlikely space.

The controversy raises important questions — especially for young Catholics.

Is every space suitable for evangelisation? Does a priest's presence in a nightclub help people encounter Christ, or does it risk con-

fusing what the priesthood represents?

Nightclub culture is not neutral. It often carries associations with excess, anonymity, and escapism — values that do not always sit comfortably with the Christian vision of human dignity. Even when events are well managed, the setting itself sends a message.

In Beirut, the condition that Padre Guilherme appear without clerical dress was particularly telling. He was allowed to perform — but only if he did not look like a priest. That raises a deeper question: should priestly identity be hidden to enter certain spaces, or should it remain visible, even when uncomfortable?

A conversation worth having

None of this denies Padre Guilherme's sincerity or missionary intention. Nor does it suggest that priests should withdraw from modern culture. Priests are human too — with talents, creativity, and a desire to connect.

But the debate surrounding the DJ priest reminds us that evangelisation is not only about going out — it is also about being recognisable when we arrive.

For young Catholics, Padre Guilherme's story is an invitation to reflect:

- How do we bring Christ into today's world without losing clarity about who we are?
- How do we engage culture without being absorbed by it?

The Church does not grow by copying the world, but by offering something different — meaningful, challenging, and full of hope.

And navigating that tension is a task every generation must learn to face. **Adapted from international media reports**



OMPH celebrates Sacrament of Confirmation

IPOH: On January 18, the Church of Our Mother of Perpetual Help (OMPH) joyfully celebrated the Sacrament of Confirmation, during which 19 young parishioners were sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In his homily, Fr Patrick Massang, CSsR, highlighted the vital role of the Holy Spirit in the life of every Christian. Addressing the confirmands directly, he reminded them that Confirmation is not a graduation ceremony marking the end of catechism, but rather a commissioning by the Church for mission and evangelisation.

"Confirmation," he explained, "is like a springboard that launches you into active Christian life and ministry, equipping you with the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit for this purpose."

Fr Patrick also stressed the importance of ongoing prayerful support from the parish



community, families, godparents, and sponsors, reminding all present that nurturing faith is a shared responsibility.

The Eucharistic celebration was presided over by Fr Joseph Stephen, CSsR, who expressed his heartfelt gratitude to the catechists and all those who have journeyed

faithfully with the youth, guiding them and supporting their growth in faith.

The celebration concluded with a spirit of thanksgiving and hope, as the newly confirmed were encouraged to live out their faith boldly as witnesses of Christ in the world. **Joachims Anthony**



Remembering Dr Florence John

A life dedicated to dialogue and compassion

KUALA LUMPUR: Parishioners of the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, together with friends from many faith traditions, gathered in gratitude and sorrow to bid farewell to Anthony Florence Selina @ Dr Florence John, who passed away peacefully after an illness on January 18, at the age of 63.

Fondly known as Dr Florence, she was a deeply committed lay leader whose life of service bore quiet yet enduring fruit in the areas of interreligious dialogue, ecumenism, women's empowerment, and parish life. Until the end of 2024, she served with dedication as coordinator of the Parish Ministry of Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Affairs (PMEIA), guiding the parish under the leadership of two parish priests.

Throughout her tenure, Dr Florence worked tirelessly to build bridges of understanding and goodwill among people of different faiths. She organised and collaborated with various religious groups to host interfaith initiatives, including Inter-Religious Harmony dinner meets, Interfaith buka puasa gatherings, programmes for World Interfaith Harmony Week, and numerous talks and dialogue sessions. At these events, she shared the Catholic and Christian faith with clarity, respect, and warmth, fostering meaningful connections and mutual understanding.

Many of these initiatives took place within the Titiwangsa constituency, home to the parish church and the Chapel of Our Lady of Good Health, Kg Pandan. Dr Florence cultivated a strong working relationship with the local Member of Parliament, YB Datuk Seri Johari Abdul Ghani, and collaborated with Yayasan Bena Nusa to organise the annual PMEIA Christmas "Gift of Love" outreach, bringing joy, hope, and a sense of community to countless residents. She also served as one of the chairpersons for the Interfaith Committee of Bahagian Titiwangsa, WPKL, further cementing her role as a bridge-builder across faiths.

Beyond interreligious engagement, Dr Florence was equally devoted to ecumenism, co-organising parish-level gatherings with other Christian denominations to strengthen unity among believers in Christ.

Her lifelong commitment to service extended far beyond parish boundaries. In recognition of her work, Dr Florence was among women from 24 countries to receive the World Women's Day Achiever Award 2020, presented in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, in conjunction with International Women's Day. Selected from 75 nominees in Malaysia, she highlighted her work in advancing women's welfare and entrepreneurship as a means to strengthen families, communities, and national development, expressing heartfelt gratitude to all who had supported her mission.



Dr Florence John (middle) was among women from 24 countries to receive the World Women's Day Achiever Award in 2020. (Filepic)

Dr Florence's journey in community service began remarkably early. At the age of nine, she accompanied one of the nuns, as a young crusader, visiting hospital patients with no family or visitors. By 18, she was serving independently and later partnered with women from Hindu Sangam to provide dignified burials for those who passed away at Kuala Lumpur Hospital without family. "We arranged to bury the dead according to their religious customs," she shared, noting that these efforts were funded personally by the volunteers.

Her compassion extended to numerous non-governmental organisations, where she counselled women facing crises, referred them to appropriate agencies such as the Welfare Department, SOCSO, and Pusat Serenti, assisted with legal documentation, and even supported sex workers on behalf of the Ministry of Health — always with dignity, respect, and care.

Those who knew her remember Dr Florence as humble, warm, and cheerful, with a genuine curiosity and empathy for others. In 2022, she led PMEIA members on a study visit to the Putrajaya Mosque for dialogue with the Muslim community, and also facilitated visits to the Gurdwara Sahib, mosque, and Hindu temple in Kg Pandan, promoting openness, learning, and mutual respect.

In addition to her parish involvement, Dr Florence had served as coordinator of the Myanmar Community Learning Centre in Kuala Lumpur, reflecting her commitment to education and the empowerment of the marginalised. Even after stepping down as PMEIA Coordinator in December 2024, she remained actively engaged in parish life, always ready to serve where she was needed.



Filepic of Dr Florence John standing next to YB Datuk Seri Haji Johari Bin Abdul Ghani with the PMEIA members of the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and 300 families from his constituency.

MEMORIAM

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



Love's Enduring Gift - Remembrance
**6th YEAR IN LOVING
MEMORY OF OUR BELOVED
MR I. KULANDAISAMY**
25.12.1938 - 25.1.2020

The years may pass, but our love for you Appa remains timeless. Six years without your smile, your voice, and your wisdom, yet you walk beside us every day. "May the winds of love blow softly and whisper for you to hear, that we will always love you and forever keep you near." Rest in peace, dearest Appa, knowing you are profoundly missed and eternally loved."

**DEEPLY MISSED AND LOVINGLY REMEMBERED
BY YOUR BELOVED FAMILY
IN OUR HEARTS FOREVER
REST IN PEACE WITH CHRIST**

*6th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of*



Alicia Lai Keow Moy
(07.09.1941 – 03.02.2020)

*Deeply missed and
remembered by
family members.*

**20th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of our Beloved Mama**



*Those we love
don't go away
They walk
beside us everyday
Unseen, unheard
but always near
Still loved, still missed,
and very dear.*

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

Always loved
and remembered by:
Children, sons-in-law,
daughter-in-law,
grandchildren,
great-grandchildren and
a host of relatives
and friends.

Rosa Pereira (Dass)
Called to rest:
28-01-2006

**25th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of**



Henry Pereira
Departed: 1-2-2001

*May the road rise up
to meet you, may the wind
be always at your back,
may warm rains
fall softly upon your fields,
and until we meet again,
may God hold you
in the palm of His hand.*

Deeply loved and missed by
wife Lucy Pereira,
children and all loved ones.

**40 DAYS PRAYERS
IN LOVING MEMORY OF**



DAVIS KUMAR
25 JUNE 1970 - 30 DECEMBER 2025

*"In My Father's house are many rooms... I go to prepare a place
for you." - John 14:2*

DEAR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Please Join us for the 40th Day Memorial Mass
Date : 07th February 2026, Saturday at 6:00 pm
St. Louis Church, Taiping

Followed by Thanksgiving Dinner at our Residence
At 7:30 pm
No : 103, Lorong 1, Taman Kami C, Aulong,
34000 Taiping, Perak

PLEASE TREAT THIS AS A PERSONAL INVITATION FROM
Mary, Mark, Matthew, Joshua and Family

RSVP BY 30 JAN 2026 - MARY (016-5969720)

NOTICE

The cost for
placing a
memoriam
is RM150 per
column.

For enquiries,
please contact us:

Tel/WhatsApp:
03-2026 8291

Email: memoriam@herald.com.my

1st Year Death Anniversary



Please join us for
the 1st Year Death Anniversary Memorial Prayer
which will be held at:

86, Kg Alor Semadom, 05250 Alor Setar, Kedah

Saturday 7th Feb 2026 12.00 pm

A beautiful soul, forever dwelling in our hearts.

Mary, Companion on Our Journey of MISSIONARY DISCIPLESHIP

FEAST OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES, KLANG

6 - 15 February, 2026

MARY SET OUT AND TRAVELLED IN HASTE (LUKE 1:39)

YOUTH RALLY
Date: 31 Jan (Sat)
Venue: Auditorium - 3rd Floor
Time: 8:30am - 4:30pm followed by Mass at 6:00pm

EXPOSITION OF THE HOLY RELICS
7 Feb (Sat) - 6:00pm - 8:00pm
8 Feb (Sun) - 8:00am - 4:00pm
Venue: Community Hall

ANOINTING OF THE SICK WITH MASS
World day of the Sick
Date: 11 Feb (Wed)
Time: 10:00am

CONFESSION
Available 30 minutes before Mass
OR
By appointment, please contact the Parish Office

RETREAT
- Penyembuhan Luka Batin
- Healing Rally
By the Putri Karmel Sisters

ADORATION ROOM
Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament
- Prayer, Reflection, and Meditation
Venue: Bernadette 1

LOURDES WASH
Daily after mass. All pilgrims are to bring their own towels

FORMATION
By Rev. Fr. Antony Prabhu CSSR Singapore
- On the Boat, Together
- The Church Is Home
- Forming a people of Missionary Discipleship
- The Miraculous Icon of Mary

SONGS OF ST BERNADETTE PLAY
Date: 11 Feb (Wed) - after Evening Mass
Venue: Wisma Lourdes

FIESTA LOURDES
Date: 14 Feb (Sat) - after Grand Mass Procession
Venue: Wisma Lourdes

THEME: Mary, Companion on Our Journey of Missionary Discipleship
 MARY SET OUT AND TRAVELLED IN HASTE (LUKE 1:39)

கருப்பொருள்: மரியா, நமது மறைப்பரப்பு சீடத்துவத்தின் துணையாளர்
 மரியா புறப்பட்டு யூதேய மலைநாட்டிலுள்ள ஓர் ஊருக்கு விரைந்து சென்றார் (லூக் 1:39)

Tema: Maria, teman dalam perjalanan kita sebagai murid misionari
 Maria pun berangkat, dan pergi dengan segera (Lukas 1:39)

主題: 瑪利亞，陪伴我們走向福傳門徒旅程
 瑪利亞起身，急速往山區去 (路加福音 1:39)

6 FEB-FRI	7 FEB-SAT	8 FEB-SUN	9 FEB-MON	10 FEB-TUE
<p>6:30AM Mass (E) 7:00AM Rosary & Novena</p> <p>7:00PM Rosary 7:30PM Adoration & Novena</p> <p>8:00PM Mass (Multilingual)</p> <p>SUB-THEME: Mary, Mother of Faith மரியா, நம்பிக்கையின் தாய் Maria, Bunda Iman 瑪利亞, 信德之母</p>	<p>6:30AM Mass (E) 7:00AM Rosary & Novena</p> <p>9:00AM Holy Hour for children 10:00AM Mass for children</p> <p>5:00PM OLPH Novena & Benediction 6:00PM Mass (E)</p> <p>SUB-THEME: Mary, Our Mother of Listening and Discernment மரியா, கேட்கும் மற்றும் பகுத்தறிய உதவும் நமது தாய் Maria, Bunda Pendengaran dan Kebijaksanaan 瑪利亞, 我們聆聽與辨別之母</p>	<p>6:00AM Rosary & Novena 6:30AM Mass (E)</p> <p>7:20AM Rosary & Novena 8:00AM Mass (E)</p> <p>9:20AM Rosary & Novena 10:00AM Mass (T)</p> <p>12:00PM Rosary & Novena 12:30PM Mass (BM)</p> <p>2:30PM Rosary & Novena 3:00PM Mass (Myanmar)</p> <p>5:20PM Rosary & Novena 6:00PM Mass (E)</p> <p>SUB-THEME: Mary, Model of Hope and Trust in God's Promises மரியா, கடவுளுடைய வாக்களிப்பில் நம்பிக்கை வைக்கும் முன்மாதிரி Maria, Teladan Harapan dan Kepercayaan kepada Janji Tuhan 瑪利亞, 信賴天主許諾的希望典範</p>	<p>6:30AM Mass (E) 7:00AM Rosary & Novena</p> <p>7:00PM Rosary 7:30PM Adoration & Novena</p> <p>8:00PM Mass (Multilingual)</p> <p>SUB-THEME: Mary, Servant of the Word Made Flesh மரியா, வார்த்தை மனுவருவெடுத்தலின் பணியாளி Maria, Hamba Sabda yang Menjelma Menjadi Manusia 瑪利亞, 使聖言成肉身的婢女</p>	<p>6:30AM Mass (E) 7:00AM Rosary & Novena</p> <p>7:00PM Rosary 7:30PM Adoration & Novena</p> <p>8:00PM Mass (Multilingual)</p> <p>SUB-THEME: Mary, Mother of the Poor and Guardian of Creation மரியா, ஏழைகளின் தாய் மற்றும் படைப்புகளின் காவலி Maria, Bunda Orang Miskin dan Penjaga Ciptaan 瑪利亞, 貧者之母和受造界的守護者</p>
11 FEB-WED	12 FEB-THU	13 FEB-FRI	14 FEB-SAT	15 FEB-SUN
<p>9:00AM Rosary 9:30AM Adoration & Novena</p> <p>10:00AM Mass (Multilingual) - Anointing of the Sick</p> <p>7:00PM Rosary 7:30PM Adoration & Novena</p> <p>8:00PM Mass (Multilingual)</p> <p>SUB-THEME: Mary, Star of the Journeying Church (World Day of the Sick) மரியா பயணிக்கும் திரு அவையின் விண்மீன் (உலக நோயாளிகளின் தினம்) Maria, Bintang Gereja yang Berziarah (Hari Orang Sakit Sedunia) 瑪利亞, 旅途教會之星 (世界病人日)</p>	<p>6:30AM Mass (E) 7:00AM Rosary & Novena</p> <p>7:00PM Rosary 7:30PM Adoration & Novena</p> <p>8:00PM Mass (Multilingual)</p> <p>SUB-THEME: Mary, Teacher of Unity and Communion மரியா ஒன்றிப்பு மற்றும் ஒற்றுமையின் போதகர் Maria, Guru Kesatuan dan Komuni 瑪利亞, 共融與合一之導師</p>	<p>6:30AM Mass (E) 7:00AM Rosary & Novena</p> <p>7:00PM Rosary 7:30PM Adoration & Novena</p> <p>8:00PM Mass (Multilingual)</p> <p>SUB-THEME: Mary, Guide of Families in Faith மரியா, நம்பிக்கையில் குடும்பங்களின் வழிகாட்டி Maria, Pembimbing Keluarga dalam Iman 瑪利亞, 家庭信德之引導者</p>	<p>09:30AM Rosary & Novena 10:00AM Mass for Public Servants (BM)</p> <p>5:00PM Rosary 5:30PM Adoration & Novena</p> <p>6:00PM Mass followed by Procession & Benediction (Multilingual)</p> <p>SUB-THEME: Mary, Mother of Missionary Disciples மரியா, மறைப்பரப்பு சீடத்துவத்தின் தாய் Maria, Bunda Para Murid Misionari 瑪利亞, 福傳門徒之母</p>	<p>6:00AM Rosary & Novena 6:30AM Mass (E)</p> <p>7:20AM Rosary & Novena 8:00AM Mass (E)</p> <p>9:20AM Rosary & Novena 10:00AM Mass (T)</p> <p>12:00PM Rosary & Novena 12:30PM Mass (BM)</p> <p>2:30PM Rosary & Novena 3:00PM Mass (Mandarin)</p> <p>5:20PM Rosary & Novena 6:00PM Mass (E)</p> <p>SUB-THEME: Mary, Mother of Missionary Disciples மரியா, மறைப்பரப்பு சீடத்துவத்தின் தாய் Maria, Bunda Para Murid Misionari 瑪利亞, 福傳門徒之母</p>