

The Publisher, Editor and staff of HERALD wish all our readers a Happy Chinese New Year.

There will be no issue on February 22, 2026. Our next issue will be on March 1, 2026.

TERHAD

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Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.
1 Cor. 2:6-7



Choirs in ArchKL celebrate sacred music

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Exploring living synodality in parish ministries

■ P6



A heart fully for God Sr Murna embraces life as diocesan hermit

■ P12

Religious ignorance on the rise

ROME: Cardinal Kevin Farrell has called on local Churches worldwide to prioritise the basic Christian formation of lay people, warning that many today do not know Jesus Christ and that faith is too often assumed rather than nurtured.

Opening the third plenary assembly of the Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life on February 4, the Cardinal, who is the Prefect for the Dicastery, said there is an urgent need for a “formation of the heart” to address what he described as an alarming rise in religious ignorance. The assembly was held from Feb 4 to 6 at the Jesuit General Curia in Rome.

Cardinal Farrell stressed that Christian life begins with a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, an encounter that transforms the heart, renews one’s way of thinking and reshapes daily life. He underlined that the challenges facing the Church cannot be resolved by changing structures or altering Catholic doctrine and moral teaching, noting that such measures will not bring people back to Mass, generate vocations or re-engage young people.

Instead, he said, every local Church, diocese and parish must provide ongoing and accessible paths of evangelisation and catechesis. These should include the initial proclamation of the faith, Christian initiation, formation in faith and accompaniment in spiritual growth.

Referring to Pope Leo’s Apostolic Letter *Drawing New Maps of Hope*, Cardinal Far-

rell recalled that authentic Christian formation must embrace the whole person — spiritual, intellectual, emotional, social and physical. He encouraged a kerygmatic and lively catechesis rooted in sacramental life, liturgy and prayer, as well as reflection on Scripture, dialogue, fraternity, service, charity and missionary outreach.



The Cardinal highlighted the importance of collaboration among all components of the Church, including clergy, lay people, families, consecrated persons, ecclesial movements, youth groups and parish structures. He also acknowledged the growing role of digital platforms, calling for the effective use of online

formation and “web apostles.”

Particular emphasis was placed on the formation and accompaniment of families and spouses. Drawing on insights from bishops during ad limina visits, Cardinal Farrell noted a strong need to support families in married spirituality, family prayer and the transmission of faith to children. He encouraged formation programmes led by married couples who can accompany others through the witness of their own lives, especially younger couples and those facing difficulties.

Summarising the Dicastery’s vision, the Cardinal said that in many ecclesial contexts, faith is not being generated but presumed. Christian formation, he stressed, must lead people into a living relationship with God and Christ, fostering a mature and committed Christian life within the Church.

He also called on Episcopal Conferences to make a genuine commitment to formation by identifying clear criteria and guidelines that local Churches can adapt to their pastoral realities.

Turning to the World Meetings organised by the Dicastery — including World Youth Day, the World Meeting of Families and the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly — Cardinal Farrell acknowledged profound global changes, such as increased mobility, cultural diversity, religious indifference and a renewed spiritual search among younger generations.

In response, he urged greater pastoral creativity and expressed hope that these gatherings would become “authentic experiences of encounter with Jesus Christ,” capable of touching hearts, transmitting grace and leaving a lasting impact on people’s lives. **Vatican News**



Prayer for the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 (MPC2026)

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

Guide us as we prepare for
the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026.
Teach us to listen deeply,
to discern faithfully,
and to trust where You are leading us.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

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

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Respecting one another's boundaries

Defining boundaries as a child and learning while growing up is a skill that develops over time. It's not about being rude or disobedient; it's about learning what feels safe, respectful, and healthy for us. If something makes us uncomfortable, confused, scared, or pressured, that's a signal a boundary is needed.

Growing up, my parents taught me about boundaries before I even knew the word for them. They would often remind me over and over again – “Don't let people climb over your head” – a familiar mantra that many of us grew up hearing. I didn't fully understand what it meant back then, but I just knew that I was allowed to say ‘no’ following my parents' script.

I still remember when I was a school-going child, I often struggled to understand what is ‘mine’ and what is ‘yours’. I would give away my good colour pencils or exchange them for broken ones from my classmates without thinking twice. It somehow felt good to make my friends happy. That happy moment didn't last long, especially because once I got home, I had to endure my mum's high-pitched tune.

Setting personal healthy boundaries in alignment with Church teachings begins with understanding that boundaries are not acts of selfishness, but expressions of wisdom, dignity, and love. Many Christian traditions teach that every person is created in the image of God, which means our bodies, emotions, time, and spiritual lives are valuable and worthy of care. Healthy boundaries help us respect the worth God has given us while continuing to live a loving relationship with others.

For a long time, I believed that being kind and faithful meant always saying ‘yes’, being available, and placing others' needs before our own. When I reflected on my past, I realised that not setting personal boundaries once gave me a strange sense of comfort. Always

trying to accommodate and constantly seeking approval felt good – I was liked, appreciated, and warmth met me wherever I walked. That feeling of being needed and valued made me believe that sacrificing my own needs was a small price to pay. But over time, the constant giving without limits began to question my worth. I had neglected my own well-being and even my spiritual health. It was through prayer and reflection that I began to understand God's guidance, and I learned that true service comes from a heart that is rested, grounded, and guided by God.

Life's twists and turns, guided by God's hand, have taught me to see their meaning in new insights and guiding me closer to His purpose.

While selflessness is an important value in the Church, constant self-sacrifice without discernment can lead to exhaustion, resentment, and emotional harm. Church teachings remind us that love must be rooted in truth, and truth includes acknowledging our limits. By setting boundaries, we are able to show up for others with sincerity rather than obligation. Discernment plays a key role in boundary-setting. Through prayer, reflection, and guidance from Scripture, individuals can learn to recognise what is healthy and what is harmful.

Boundaries help us avoid situations that lead us into sin, unhealthy relationships, or emotional distress. Jesus Himself modelled boundaries — He often withdrew from the crowds to pray, rested when needed, and did not allow Himself to be controlled by the expectations of others. Reflection on His life gives us the assurance that taking time for rest, silence, and self-care is not a sign of weak faith, but an act of trust in God. This shows that setting limits is compatible with faith and obedience to God.

Just as we are called to care for our own hearts and souls through healthy boundaries, we are equally called to honour the boundaries

of others within the Church community. Each person's comfort, space, and pace are unique gifts from God, and recognising them is an expression of love, empathy, and respect. Being faithful does not mean pressuring others to act, pray, or give beyond what they can, nor assuming that everyone shares our level of energy, time, or readiness. By listening attentively, observing sensitivity, and practising patience, we allow each person to grow in faith at their own pace. Clearly expressing one's limits — with kindness, humility, and without anger or guilt — fosters honesty, integrity, and healthier relationships.

Respecting boundaries in Church life — whether in conversation, ministry, or fellowship — mirrors Christ's gentleness and ensures that respect does not become submission to harm, control, or abuse. Boundaries also help guard against unhealthy authority or manipulation. While the Church teaches reverence for leaders, family, and community, it upholds justice and human dignity. Seeking counsel from trusted spiritual leaders or mentors can help navigate difficult situations where boundaries feel challenging to assert, allowing genuine community to flourish through mutual care and the honouring of God's image in every individual.

Ultimately, setting personal healthy boundaries in alignment with Church teachings is about balance. It is about living faithfully, loving generously, and protecting the life and purpose God has entrusted to us. When rooted in prayer, guided by Scripture, and practised with compassion, boundaries become not barriers to love, but pathways to healthier, God-honouring relationships.

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. (Proverbs 4:23)

Rachael Sharma

The choice that leads to life

In the movie, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, the quest was on for the Holy Grail. There were two groups of people — one led by Indiana Jones and another by the antagonists Walter and Elsa, who wanted it for sinister gains. Their search led them to a temple in the ancient city of Petra, where they found a cave filled with chalices and cups of different sizes and materials, guarded by a Knight Templar. Both parties were told to choose wisely — one choice would bring life and the other death.

The antagonist named Walter deferred to his expert Elsa to choose the Grail. After looking around, she chose a gold chalice gilded with precious stones and Walter remarked that it was a chalice fit for a king. He used it to drink and eventually disintegrated. Indiana, however, chose a simple wooden cup and that gave him life. The Knight told him that he had chosen wisely.

Indiana's choice was guided by his knowledge that, during the time of Jesus, a simple cup would have been the one used in the Last Supper, since all of them were common folk and would not have been able to afford such an expensive chalice. That is the wisdom that does not come from the world. After all, the adage of “not all that glitters is gold” usually holds true.

This is exactly what St Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians — that they have a wisdom to offer to those who have reached maturity, not a philosophy of our age but the hidden wisdom of God. Maturity here refers not to the accumulation of knowledge but to the realisation that only in God can we truly

live and breathe. This is something that can never be obtained through study but only by prayer.

This is precisely the wisdom that we need to choose between life and death. The first reading from Ecclesiasticus tells us that the Lord has set before us fire and water, life and death. Fire is necessary for warmth and cooking, but it can also lead to arson. Similarly, water is necessary for life but too much water can lead to water poisoning. Within these choices of life and death, we still need to make more choices. But one thing is clear, whatever we like will be given to us by God. This is why we should not blame God for whatever happens in our lives because our consequences are a result of the choices that we make.

How then, do we make wiser choices in our lives? The Responsorial Psalm tells us that “they are happy who follow God's law...they are happy who do His will.” In the Gospel, Jesus tells us that He came to complete the law and it would not disappear until its purpose is achieved. What is the purpose of the law, then? We know that laws are necessary everywhere to govern and regulate our lives. This is societal law. The law of the Lord helps us to live a life that is pleasing to God and most importantly, to lead us to eternal life. This is emphasised by Jesus when He said that if our virtue goes no deeper than that of the scribes and the Pharisees, we would never get into the kingdom of heaven.

We can find much wisdom in the teachings of Jesus; He does not simply state the letter

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with Fr Philip Tay, OCD

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

Readings: *Ecclesiasticus 15: 15-20;*

1 Corinthians 2: 6-10;

Gospel: Matthew 5: 17-37

of the law, He elaborates and focuses on the spirit of the law. For every law that He states, He gives a broader interpretation of how the law should be lived out. A person who keeps these laws and guides others to follow will be considered great in the kingdom of heaven. In a nutshell, all these laws and teachings of Jesus should lead us to the kingdom of God and help us to realise that we are just pilgrims journeying towards God. These are things that “no eye has seen, no ear has heard, things beyond the mind of men.”

Ultimately, the ball lies in our court. Whether we listen and follow the ways of the world or the wisdom of God, one thing is clear — our choices will either bring consequences or blessings. We need to take responsibility for our actions and not pin it on God. If we listen to the world, then we will become like those in the world. Even though we live in the world, we should never be part of the world. When we choose to listen to the Word of the Lord, we will naturally follow the path that leads to God. As the Gospel Acclamation tells us — the Lord has the message of eternal life. In the end, that is all that matters.

IMPORTANT DATES

February 18: Ash Wednesday
February 22 : 1st Sunday of Lent



MPC2026: Listening, Discernment, Mission

KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

February & March

- 20 Meeting – College of Consultors
- 24-25 Clergy Monthly Recollection
- 1/3 Rite of Election at 3.00pm – Cathedral of St John the Evangelist, KL

PENANG DIOCESE

Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

February

- 20 Mass at Mount Miriam Cancer Hospital & Launching of the Golden Jubilee Celebrations at 3.00pm
- 21 Rite of Election for Penang Island & Northern Deanery at 3.00pm – Church of Immaculate Conception, Penang
- 22 Rite of Election for Perak Deanery at 5.00pm – Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Silibin
- 24 Meeting – Council of Priests (COP) at 10.00am, Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam
- 24-25 Clergy Monthly Recollection – Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam
- 25 Ordination of Anthony Michael and Isaac Alfred Simbun to the Permanent Diaconate – Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam
- 26 Meeting – Curia at 10.00am, Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam

MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

February & March

- 23 Mass – College General, Penang
- 28 RCIA Catechumenal Recollection – MAJODI Centre
- 1/3 Rite of Election – Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, Johor Bahru

The Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 (MPC2026) will take place from September 9 to 13, 2026 in Sibu, bringing together about 800 clergy, religious, and lay faithful from Sabah, Sarawak, and Semenanjung. It is the first national pastoral convention of the Catholic Church in Malaysia.

What is MPC2026?

MPC2026 is not a conference or a meeting to make decisions. It is a space for the Church in Malaysia to come together, listen, and discern how we are called to live and serve as one Church today. It gathers the fruits of what has already been reflected on at parish, diocesan, and regional levels and brings them into a shared national listening.

What is the goal of MPC2026?

The goal is not to produce policies or fixed programmes. The goal is to discern pastoral pathways that can guide the Church in Malaysia as we continue our mission. These pathways offer orientation

and direction, not instructions imposed on every diocese. Each local Church remains responsible for further discernment and application according to its own context.

What will we do at MPC2026?

At MPC2026, the following will take place:

1. We gather as the Catholic Church of Malaysia, recognising our diversity in cultures, pastoral realities, and lived faith experiences. We come as one Church with shared but differentiated responsibilities as bishops, clergy, religious, and laity, walking together in the light of the Lord.

2. We listen to how the Holy Spirit is at work in our Church. Rather than sharing reports or achievements, we share faith experiences and discern God's presence in them. This listening is prayerful, open, and attentive to how God may be working differently in each of us.

3. The journey of MPC2026 bears fruit through:

a. A pastoral word from the bishops, offering a shared vision for the Church in Malaysia.


b. Pastoral pathways emerge from all our communal discernment. These pathways are entrusted to each diocese to be discerned and lived according to its own context.

What does MPC2026 mean for the Church in Malaysia?


MPC2026 reminds us that faith is not lived in isolation. It calls us to see ourselves as one People of God journeying together, with different experiences but a shared mission. It invites the whole Church to grow in communion, participation, and mission, trusting that the Holy Spirit continues to guide us beyond the Convention itself.

MPC2026 is therefore not an end point, but a moment along a longer journey of listening, discernment, and walking together as the Catholic Church in Malaysia.





Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #260



Welcome dear friends,

The World Day for Consecrated Life concluded recently, with the Pope's message: Consecrated Life, Prophetic Witness of Presence in a Wounded World. Interestingly, His Holiness invited the 'called' to be a prophecy of presence and seed of peace.

Lately, the daily Gospel readings had the theme of seeds, applied for the kingdom of God, the sown word, grain of wheat, evil and today, it's for peace. Seed symbolises humble beginnings, the potential within, the multiplying harvest or the arms-wide and sky-reaching tree shelter.

At my 10th anniversary as bishop, a friend said that I had planted three seeds: the seed of order, the seed of ownership and the seed of empowerment in the diocese. Never stop sowing the seed of goodness.

Local Takes! React first! No researched action.

Never think through consequences: march against illegal temples; shout down the studies on KL mayor elections; a 10,000 year old fossil of a porcupine, embedded in a cave wall at Gua Matsoorat, Ipoh goes missing; watchdog-less government agencies; unilateral conversion laws in seven states; worsening cases of stunting among children; rising global living, health care costs and medical inflation; and nearly 74 per cent of active EPF contributors have less than RM100,000 in their accounts upon retirement — a sum that will last just over five years for a single person or only three to four years for a couple.

The Church Reads Signs: Remember, Recall and Re-live

Survivors of Auschwitz, during the anniversary commemoration said: "Memory must not turn into a ritual or a 'lesson to be checked off'."

"Let memory not be a burden. Let it become a light that will guide us in the darkness."

"Memory and experience are "treasures" and "signposts" in a time when the global order is fracturing.

Remember the escalating violence in South Sudan; more than 450,000 children risking acute malnutrition; unending strikes and amounting casualties in the Gaza;

Remember! The Thai bishops said: that the faithful have a vital role to play as a "moral force" and "social conscience" in safeguarding a truthful and just electoral process.

Remember! The US bishops described the Minneapolis tensions as unacceptable, that difficulties, problems and contradictions must be resolved in other ways.

Remembering Pope Leo, who insisted that living the Beatitudes can bring us happiness, bring light to the world's shadows, and renew our hearts.

A Thought for The Week: At the front of the cathedral

He was feeling very lonely when he left Mass at St Patrick's Cathedral right in the heart of New York.

Suddenly, he was approached by a Brazilian. "I very much need to talk to you," the Brazilian said. The church-goer was so enthused by this meeting that he began to talk about everything that was important to him. He spoke of magic, God's blessings, and love.

The Brazilian listened to everything in silence, thanked him and went away. Instead of feeling happy, the Catholic felt lonelier than before. He had just realised that in his enthusiasm, he had not paid any attention to what that Brazilian wanted.

The lesson from the church-goer: "I want to hear you. Talk to me". As the saying goes: his words were tossed to the wind. The universe wanted to hear what the Brazilian had to say.

QnQ: Q asks: What makes one fearful or unafraid?

"The truth is that frightened people will never turn the world, because they use too much energy to protect themselves. It is the vocation of the baptised, the known and named and unafraid, to make the world whole:

- *The unafraid are open to the neighbour, while the frightened are defending themselves from the neighbour.
- *The unafraid are generous in the community, while the frightened, in their anxiety, must keep and store and accumulate, to make themselves safe.
- *The unafraid commit acts of compassion and mercy, while the frightened do not notice those in need.
- *The unafraid are committed to justice for the weak and the poor, while the frightened see them only as threats.
- *The unafraid pray in the morning, care through the day, and rejoice at night in thanks and praise, while the frightened are endlessly restless and dissatisfied. So dear people, each of you: Do not fear! I have called you by name; you are mine! *Walter Brueggemann, "A Way Other than Our Own"*

The Spirit @ work: "To accomplish anything you must first have a mission, a goal, a hope, a vision." *Rick Warren*

Something to tickle you: "The invariable mark of wisdom is to see the miraculous in the common." *Ralph Waldo Emerson*



Bishop Bernard Paul

Choirs in ArchKL celebrate sacred music

Sandra Ann Inbaraj

CHERAS: For the first time, nearly 600 choir members and musicians from diverse language groups and parishes under the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur gathered at the Church of St Francis of Assisi (SFA) for a landmark programme, “Celebration of Choirs” themed *Sacred Music – The Church’s Journey Through the Ages*.

Held over two half-days on January 23 – 24, the programme was organised by the Archdiocesan Liturgy Commission (ALC) in collaboration with three language apostolates: the Archdiocesan Chinese Apostolate Committee (ACLAC), the Archdiocesan Tamil Apostolate Committee (ATLAC), and the Archdiocesan Bahasa Malaysia Apostolate (ABMA).

Participants were guided by speakers Fr Leonard Lexson, Fr Dominic Tan (English), Fr John Yoew (Mandarin), Fr Gnana Selvam Berentis (Tamil), and Spencer Klumai (BM), exploring the rich heritage of Church music from Gregorian chant to contemporary compositions.

In his keynote, delivered in English and translated into three other languages, Fr Leonard emphasised that “Music in the liturgy is not mere ornamentation; it is a means by which our identity as the Body of Christ is renewed.” He explained that sacred music draws the faithful into participa-



Some of the participants during one of the workshops in English.

tion in the Paschal Mystery, leaving participants deeply moved: “We shape devotional prayers, but the prayers of the Mass shape us.”

Practical workshops in all four languages focused on vocal techniques, choir formation, posture, and diaphragmatic breathing, with participants reminded that choir ministry is about being “ministers of prayer”, not stage performers.

Fr Dominic further highlighted that choirs are called to “sing the Mass”, allowing the liturgy to be fully expressed through song. Sacred music must be holy, beautiful, solemn, and rooted in Church heritage, while choir members must serve with unity, har-

mony, and deep spiritual preparation. Choirs were encouraged to follow the General Instruction of the Roman Missal and use the 3rd edition of *Sing Your Praise to God*.

On the second day, Fr Leonard highlighted the Psalms — 150 Hebrew songs spanning Israel’s history. Integral to worship, Psalms serve as the prayer-book of the Bible, bridging the First Reading and Gospel, inviting meditation, and guiding the assembly deeper into Christ’s prayer. Psalmists, like choir members, proclaim the Word with clarity, reverence, and humility.

The programme culminated in a one-hour multilingual liturgical session, featuring Tamil, English, Mandarin, and BM choirs

singing together. Hymns such as *Priestly People*, *A Call to Christian Unity*, and *Holy God, We Praise Thy Name* were rendered in four languages, with refrains sung together and verses in different tongues — a powerful testament to unity in diversity.

Over the two enriching days, participants rediscovered the beauty and heritage of sacred music and its vital role in the liturgy. More than improving their singing, they experienced growth in unity, formation, and ministry — learning to serve and glorify God with ‘one voice in harmony.’

As a concrete fruit of the gathering, Fr Leonard launched an “Entrance Hymn Composition” initiative, inviting choir groups to create new liturgical entrance hymns for a special programme in July 2026. Plans were also announced to form an archdiocesan choir to serve at major events, with members challenged by Archbishop Julian Leow to sing in three or four languages as a sign of unity and missionary witness.

The archbishop’s presence on the final day brought encouragement and inspiration as he expressed gratitude for the participants’ dedication, challenged them to serve with humility and unity, and concluded with a final blessing. The programme reaffirmed that choir members are bridges uniting God and His people, where diverse voices become one song of praise, giving the Church a foretaste of the heavenly liturgy.



The Mandarin-speaking participants.



Fr Gnana Selvam Berentis giving the session in Tamil.



Some of the BM-speaking participants during their workshop.

Formation for SAC’s liturgical ministers

KUALA LUMPUR: The Church of St Anthony organised a formation for its lectors and commentators recently, led by parish priest Fr Dr Clarence Devadass. Nearly 60 participants gathered to deepen their understanding of their sacred ministries and to renew their commitment to proclaiming God’s Word with reverence and faithfulness.

The session began with the topic *The Role and Spirituality of a Lector and Commentator*. Fr Clarence explained the importance of the lector’s role during the celebration of Holy Mass. When Sacred Scripture is proclaimed, it is not merely a text being read; it is God Himself speaking to His people.

He highlighted the difference between simply reading and prayerfully proclaiming Scripture. Without faith, words remain on the page, but when proclaimed with

reverence, God speaks directly to the hearts of the faithful. This ministry requires intentional preparation: lectors are encouraged to pray with the Scriptures, reflect on their meaning, and allow the Word to transform their own lives.

Proclaiming the Word is a sacred act of evangelisation. When delivered with faith, humility, and purity of heart, the Word comes alive — touching souls, strengthening faith, and nurturing the bonds of the community. Lectors are called to embrace this privilege with gratitude and responsibility, becoming instruments through whom Christ invites the faithful into encounter. Through clear, prayerful, and reverent proclamation, hearts are opened to attentiveness, reflection, and genuine response. In this way, the ‘lector serves as a sacred bridge between God and His people’.

Regarding the role of a commen-



Fr Clarence Devadass conducting the formation session for lectors and commentators of the Church of St Anthony.

tator, Fr Clarence explained that the ‘commentator’ quietly prepares hearts for prayer, using calm, well-timed words that help the assembly enter the sacred celebration. The commentator guides the faithful toward deeper participation without drawing attention from the mystery being celebrated. Their voice becomes a humble instrument, leading quietly toward Christ.

Participants were invited into dialogue, raising questions about the

tone of proclamation, passages that need not be proclaimed, gestures at the ambo, dress code, and other practical aspects of the ministry. This spirit of open sharing enriched the formation, allowing clarity and deeper understanding to emerge. Fr Clarence reminded participants that reverence is expressed not only in the act of proclamation but also in personal conduct and appearance. As bearers of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, our outward behaviour

should reflect the inner holiness we seek to cultivate. Dressing with modesty and dignity for the liturgy becomes a visible, prayerful expression of reverence for God’s presence and love for the Church.

The formation deepened participants’ understanding of the sacred duties of lectors, commentators, and other liturgical ministers, inspiring them to serve with reverence and faithfulness. **Tina Patricia Bernard**

Celebrating consecrated life

KAJANG: Around 50 religious and some laity gathered for a one-day recollection on January 31 at the Church of the Holy Family, in conjunction with the Archdiocesan celebration of the World Day for Consecrated Life. The day concluded with the Eucharistic celebration presided over by Archbishop Julian Leow.

Both the greying generation of nuns and young, enthusiastic Sisters — many from East Malaysia — were present. Contrary to claims of decline, religious life shone with quiet confidence and joy. A number of religious priests were also in attendance.

Friar Derrick Yap, OFM, facilitated the recollection themed *Blessed and SENT*. After some light-hearted exchanges to energise the Saturday afternoon crowd, Friar Derrick asked participants to reflect on a central question: “Who is the new poor?” He challenged both religious and laity to recognise and respond to the needs of those living in new forms of poverty, guided by compassion and attentive care.

Friar Derrick’s reflections drew on

Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur



The religious with lighted candles during the Eucharistic Celebration. (Holy Family Kajang facebook)

two papal encyclicals — *Dilexit nos* (He loved us) by Pope Francis, and *Dilexi te* (I have loved you), begun by Pope Francis and completed by Pope Leo XIV. He emphasised that these encyclicals express God’s profound love, particularly through the Sacred Heart of Jesus, calling believers to respond through worship, contemplation, and

compassionate action.

Drawing on St Francis of Assisi’s question, “Who are you, my God, and who am I?”, Friar Derrick highlighted the importance of grounding one’s life in prayer and reflection, especially in a rapidly changing modern world. Referencing Pope Francis’ critique of “liquid modernity,” i.e., a sociological concept

developed by Zygmunt Bauman to describe the fluid and rapidly changing nature of modern society, the friar warned that contemporary society’s focus on consumption and instant gratification can erode inner life, leaving little space for contemplation or spiritual growth. He encouraged participants to create “a crib in our hearts” to welcome Jesus and nurture intimacy, hospitality, and spiritual identity.

Friar Derrick also cited St Bonaventure, urging the faithful to seek “not light, but raging fire,” transforming knowledge of faith into love and ongoing formation of the heart. He invoked the message of Jesus to St Margaret Mary Alacoque, expressing the Sacred Heart’s desire for love and reparation, and stressed that Christ’s love calls the faithful to serve the poor.

Highlighting the example of mendicant orders such as the Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, and Carmelites, Friar Derrick reminded participants that these communities embrace poverty alongside the marginalised, living out a prophetic witness

reminiscent of the first Christians (Acts 4:32). He also reflected on Jesus’ itinerant life as a *Tekton* — a craftsman without land or wealth — showing solidarity with the poor and marginalised.

“By ministering to the poorest,” he said, “the Church proclaims the Kingdom of God among the most vulnerable, remaining faithful to Christ’s call to love where He is most disfigured.”

The day concluded with Mass celebrated by Archbishop Julian, who reflected on the challenges of understanding religious vocations in a secular world. He recalled advice from the late Cardinal Soter Fernandez: “No one is worthy” of the responsibilities of Church leadership, but reliance on God’s grace transforms human weakness into service.

Archbishop Julian praised the diverse religious orders in the archdiocese, noting their enduring contributions — from educating the young in mission schools to caring for the elderly, the marginalised, and the sick — demonstrating the Church’s living witness in society.

Diocese of Malacca Johore



The religious processing in with Bishop Bernard Paul during their celebration.

AYER SALAK, Melaka: The Malacca Johore Diocese (MJD) celebrated the World Day for Consecrated Life on February 2, coinciding with the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, which commemorates Christ as the Light of the World through the blessing and lighting of candles. The day honours men and women who have dedicated their lives to God through religious vows, reflecting Christ’s light to all.

The diocesan celebration took place at the 140-year-old Church of St Mary in Ayer Salak. The day began with a short formation session led by Sr Shanti Mariadass, FdCC at the parish house. The prayers and blessing of candles by Rt Rev Bernard Paul, Bishop of the Malacca Johore, took place before the 11.15am Mass

at the chapel’s frontage, with some 40 consecrated men and women gathered, each holding a candle. The bishop sprinkled the candles with holy water before leading the procession into the chapel, with all participants carrying lighted candles — symbolising Christ, the Light of the World, entering the temple and human history to dispel the darkness of sin.

In his opening remarks, Bishop Bernard encouraged the faithful to recognise their roles and shine amidst the darkness around them. In his homily, he spoke on the “Prophecy of Presence,” highlighting how consecrated life remains faithful even when dignity is wounded and faith is tested. He drew parallels to Simeon and Anna, who, in prayerful presence, lived faithfully among the

people, proclaiming God’s truth.

Addressing the congregation, including the handful of laity present, Bishop Bernard said consecrated life calls for communion and accompaniment. He cited the dicastery’s theme for this year, *Consecrated Persons: Prophetic Witnesses of Presence in a Wounded World*, noting that living this presence today faces many challenges: societal fragility, pressures on religious minorities, loneliness, polarisation, poverty, migration, inequality, and widespread violence.

“To be present takes many forms,” he said. “Even as a minority, consecrated persons — and faithful laity — are called to act, witness hope, and be women and men of peace. Active hope generates gestures of reconciliation, dialogue with other religions and cultures, and protection for the vulnerable.”

Bishop Bernard also emphasised the seed-like nature of consecrated life: “Remaining is like a seed that accepts death so that life may flourish. Let your apostolic life show closeness; your contemplative life safeguard hope with faith; your secular institutes bear witness discreetly; and other forms manifest God’s primacy. Be a prophecy of presence and a seed of peace wherever you are sent.”

He concluded by urging the consecrated men and women to bear joyful witness in all circumstances, doing everything for God’s glory.

Diocese of Sibiu



Bishop Joseph Hii with the religious in Sibiu.

SIBU: The Church commemorates the Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple, when Mary and Joseph, in obedience and humility, entrusted Him completely to God. In this mystery, Christ is revealed as the Light of the World, bringing hope, guidance, and salvation to all nations.

In the light of this celebration, the faithful are reminded of their call to offer their lives to the Lord with trust and faith, allowing His light to guide their daily journey.

In this spirit of thanksgiving and dedication, the community of the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart gathered on February 2 to celebrate the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord and the 30th World Day for Consecrated Life. United as one family of faith, prayers were offered in thanksgiving for Christ, the

Light of the Nations, and especially for those who have responded to God’s call through the vocation of consecrated life.

The celebration continued with the Eucharist and fellowship, strengthening communion within the parish. It was further marked by a significant symbolic moment when Bishop Joseph Hii handed over the Key of the Tabernacle to the new Rector, Fr Joseph Sebastian, entrusting him with the sacred responsibility of shepherding the parish.

As the parish joyfully welcomed Fr Joseph Sebastian, prayers were offered that the Lord would guide and sustain him with wisdom, courage, and grace, so that under his pastoral care, the light of Christ may continue to shine brightly in the community.

Diocese of Sandakan

TAWAU: The Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (FSIC) are the sole religious congregation in the Diocese of Sandakan, with communities in Sandakan, Lahad Datu, and Tawau. To mark the World Day for Consecrated Life, a Eucharistic celebration was held at the Convent of St Clare, Tawau, led

by Fr Raymond Lee.

In his homily, Fr Raymond expressed gratitude and respect for the religious, urging the congregation to continue supporting and praying for them. He also encouraged all, especially those in consecrated life, to view their daily lives as a sacrifice that is constantly renewed.

This annual celebration serves as

a reminder that faith is not merely an act of service, but a calling to bring the Lord Jesus Christ to the world through simplicity, sacrifice, and love.

The following day, the religious community held a Study Day led by Sr Rose Ginibun, FSIC, reflecting on the meaning and significance of a life of consecrated service within the Church and the wider world.



Fr Raymond Lee with the Fransiscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception.

Exploring living synodality in parish ministries

Karen-Ann Theseira

JOHOR BAHRU: A Training of Trainers (TOT) workshop titled *Doing God's Will Together: Living Synodality in Our Church and Diocese* was held at Pusat Kasih Caritas recently. The workshop, facilitated by Fr Paul Dass, SJ, brought together participants from various ministries across the South Johor Vicariate, Labis, and Melaka to reflect on making synodality a practical part of parish ministry and communal life.

The session opened with a Gospel reading from Mark 2:13–17. Fr Paul encouraged participants to follow Jesus in going to the margins, reminding them that staying at the centre may blind us to the needs of those at the periphery. He challenged attendees to reflect on whether they are too often “sitting at the centre” and with whom they are sharing the table. Participants were invited to consider personal change, including mindset, company, lifestyle, and perspective, to better serve God and community.

Highlighting the universal call to synodality, Fr Paul referenced Pope Leo XIV's May 10, 2025, address to the cardinals, emphasising “growth in collegiality and synodality” and the “loving care for the least and rejected.”



A participant sharing her thoughts while her group members listen attentively.

Bishop Bernard Paul encouraged participants to foster communion in diversity, actively participate in doing good, and align their mission with “what the Spirit is saying to the churches.” Drawing on the Prayer to the Holy Spirit (*Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*), the assembly prayed for Communion, Participation, and Mission in union with the Father and the Son.

Guided by this prayer, participants then explored four key themes: Family, Society, Ecology, and Church — topics deemed essential for unifying the work of all arch/dioceses in Malaysia, ultimately preparing

for a cohesive national gathering of the local Church at the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026.

Fr Paul explained that the term “Family” refers to those on the margins — the excluded, the marginalised, and those on the periphery. Society, he said, should be viewed through the lens of refugees, migrants, and the displaced, while Ecology calls attention to how climate change disproportionately affects the vulnerable and poor. He reminded participants that the Church is the “WE,” not a passive observer; as Church, we must actively engage with, and inquire into, Family, Society,

and Ecology. In this way, “the Church is the subject, not the object, of the inquiry.”

Participants from Caritas POHD and SSVP, Creation Justice Commission (CJC), Arubumi, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHC), Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC), young adults, catechists, language and culture council, lectors, volunteers, and invitees formed groups to apply the Synodal Method: Experience, Understanding, Discernment, and Action.

The workshop provided participants the opportunity to hear the struggles of others in ministry while sharing their own, exchanging practical solutions, and offering words of encouragement. Thought-provoking questions guided reflection and prayer: Are we moving? Are we growing? Do our decisions deepen our faith, hope, and love?

In his book *Synodal Exercises*, Fr Paul writes: “...a journey together with others in faith to constitute the Church as the Body of Christ, a sacrament reaching the margins and peripheries...so that those outside can be on the inside, the disengaged re-engaged, and the disempowered re-empowered ... effecting Communion, Participation, and Mission, strengthening our journey as a synodal diocese, Church, and local Church.”

INE regroups for renewal, mission

KUALA LUMPUR: The Institute for New Evangelisation (INE) concluded its three-day ‘Regrouping Session’ from January 30 to February 1 under the theme *The New Evangelisation Mandate: Rejuvenation of INE for Peoples to Encounter Jesus*. The gathering marked a significant moment of prayerful discernment, renewal of mission, and leadership transition as INE charts its course for the coming years.

Established on Jan 1, 2018, INE was founded to serve the Church's call to renewed evangelisation. Under the visionary leadership of its founding chairman, Simon Wong, the institute laid strong foundations for evangelisation and leadership formation. In 2021, Michael Xavier took over as chairman, guiding INE through a period of consolidation and growth. As of Feb 1, 2026, INE enters a

new chapter with Sr Margarete Sta Maria, FdCC as chairperson, supported by Simon Wong as vice chairperson.

The regrouping session gathered clergy, religious, and lay leaders engaged in evangelisation ministries at parish, diocesan, and commission levels, including core team leaders since inception, former programme organisers and facilitators, and leaders from New Evangelisation commissions, language apostolates, and ministries across the three dioceses. Bishop Bernard Paul, bishop-in-charge of INE, presided over the programme and guided participants through prayer, reflection, and communal discernment.

The session opened with praise and worship, contemplative prayer, and silence, grounding the entire programme in attentiveness to the Holy Spirit. Over the following days, partici-



pants engaged in structured group dialogues, reflecting on current evangelisation challenges and discerning how INE can better support leaders in helping others encounter Christ.

A highlight was the reflection on the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences *10 Fundamental Dimensions of the New Evangelisation*, situating INE's mission within the broader vision of the Church in Asia. Using the method of Conversation in the Spirit, participants discerned future priorities with

a focus on in-depth spirituality, leadership formation, accompaniment, and missionary discipleship.

The regrouping session concluded with Mass and the commissioning of the newly elected leadership. As INE moves forward, this time of prayer and discernment reaffirms its commitment to serving the Church through renewed evangelisation and collaborative ministry nationwide. **Juanita Chin and Carmelita Xavier**

JCC marks Discipleship Programme graduation

KUALA LUMPUR: The Discipleship Programme graduation, held on February 1 at the Church of Jesus Caritas, Kepong (JCC), marked a joyous and grace-filled moment for the parish. Participants from the English- and Mandarin-speaking groups completed a transformative journey of faith formation, prayer, and discipleship, reflecting a deeper commitment to living as missionary disciples in daily life.

Over the course of the programme, participants engaged in Scripture reflection,

guided prayer, and small-group sharing. More than a programme of study, this formation provided space for a personal encounter with Christ, inviting participants to reflect honestly on their lives, deepen their prayer life, and respond generously to God's call. Many shared that the experience strengthened their faith, renewed their sense of purpose, and helped them integrate Gospel values into their family, work, and parish life.

A highlight of the graduation was the sharing of personal testimonies. Over the past few

weeks, following weekend Masses, several participants came forward to share with the parish community how the programme had impacted their spiritual journey. Their heartfelt reflections offered parishioners insight into the lived experience of discipleship and inspired others to consider joining future batches of the programme.

The programme also highlighted vocational callings nurtured within the parish. Facilitator Genevieve, who guided the recently concluded batch, is currently in formation to become a religious sister in Taiwan. Her witness and dedication served as an example of responding to God's call with courage and faithfulness, and she encouraged participants to remain open in discerning their own paths of service and prayer.

A distinctive feature of the programme was its bilingual accessibility, with English and Mandarin groups journeying in parallel. This allowed participants from different language backgrounds to receive formation while sharing a unified vision of discipleship. The programme beautifully reflected the diversity of

the local Church, showing that unity in faith and mission transcends language and culture.

During the graduation, parish priest, Fr Simon Lau, warmly affirmed the graduates and strongly encouraged parishioners to join the Discipleship Programme. In a recent reflection, he reminded the community that “everyone needs a sense of purpose, but for Christians, purpose must lead to mission.” He emphasised that every baptised Catholic is called to continual growth in faith, and that discipleship is a lifelong journey of conversion, service, and witness.

Looking ahead, the next batch of the Discipleship Programme at JCC will begin at the end of February, welcoming parishioners eager to deepen their faith and grow as intentional disciples of Christ. As the graduates step forward, the Church gives thanks for their journey and prays that they may continue to live out their baptismal calling with love, humility, and joy.

Parishioners who wish to join this next intake may contact Catherine at 010-766 2057. **Peter Yong**



“Rebuild My Church”: Franciscan Jubilee Year launched at SFA

Sandra Ann Inbaraj

CHERAS: A call to obedience, simplicity, humility and total reliance on God defined the triple celebration held at the Church of St Francis of Assisi (SFA), February 2. It marked the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, the World Day for Consecrated Life, and the official launching of the Franciscan Jubilee Year.

The Mass was presided over by Archbishop Julian Leow. Concelebrating were Custos, Fr Gilbert James OFM Cap, parish priest, Fr Paul Cheong OFM Cap, and Fr David Reegon OFM Cap.

Reflecting on the readings, Archbishop Julian drew attention to the humility of Jesus and Mary

who, though sinless, freely subjected themselves to the Law of Moses. Jesus, the Son of God, was presented in the Temple, and Mary underwent the ritual of purification after childbirth — not out of necessity, but out of obedience and faithfulness to God’s law.

“Jesus could have said, ‘I am God, I am sinless, I do not need purification or suffering,’” he reflected. “Yet in both of them we see obedience, humility, and faithfulness — living as good Jews, fully subject to the law.”

He highlighted the offering of two pigeons, the sacrifice of the poor, as a sign of the Holy Family’s poverty and simplicity, reminding the faithful that all they possess is not personal achieve-

ment, but God’s gift.

“Nothing we have can be attributed to ourselves,” he emphasised. “It is God who gives, God who provides, and God who sustains.”

Linking this spirit of simplicity to the wider Church, the archbishop noted that following the Jubilee of Hope, Pope Leo XIV has now proclaimed the Franciscan Jubilee Year, calling the Church to a renewed Franciscan spirit — a life detached from power, wealth, status and ego, and rooted instead in humility, poverty of spirit, and total dependence on God.

Like St Francis of Assisi, who was called to “rebuild My Church,” the faithful are invited not merely to turn away from sin, but also from attachments to riches, power and human opinion, and to return to the Gospel as the foundation of Christian life.

The celebration also coincided with the World Day for Consecrated Life, during which special prayers were offered for religious men and women who live the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. These vows were presented as prophetic signs to the Church, reminding all the faithful that this world is not our permanent home.

Archbishop Julian reflected that hell is not merely a place, but the absence of God, and that God does not send anyone there — rather, it



The relic of St Francis of Assisi, San Damiano cross and the Franciscan seven decade rosary on display.

is the result of human choices to live separated from Him.

“The decisions we make today determine where we end up tomorrow,” he said. “To refuse reconciliation, forgiveness and communion with God is to choose separation from Him.”

At the conclusion of Mass, Archbishop Julian and Fr Paul unveiled two banners to officially open the Franciscan Jubilee Year at SFA.

Following this, Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) chairperson Danny Nesan presented the parish’s year-long Franciscan initiatives, which include:

- Pilgrimages focused on Franciscan spirituality
- Weekly spotlight on a Franciscan saint
- Lent: Franciscan Way of the Cross
- 45-minute sessions on Franciscan spirituality by Fr Paul Cheong OFM Cap
- Canticle of the Creatures outdoor prayer experience
- Mandarin showcase on St Francis (June)
- Feast of St Francis – nine-day novena centred on Franciscan

spirituality

- Musical on the life of St Francis of Assisi (October)
- Greccio Mass

In his address, Fr Paul shared his pastoral desire for parishioners to grow deeper in spirituality rather than becoming activity-driven. He cautioned against vainglory, ego-centred faith, and spiritual fragmentation, urging the community to return to the essentials of Christian discipleship.

“St Francis calls us back to the basics — back to the Gospel,” he said. “It is not about doing many activities, but about conversion of heart.”

He noted that the Franciscan Jubilee Year at SFA is guided by the theme *Rebuild My Church: From Gospel to Life*, anchored in the pillars of *Holiness, Participation, Communion and Mission*.

The celebration concluded with a prayer that this Year of Grace will lead the parish community into deeper spirituality, authentic conversion, and faithful service — living the Franciscan charism not merely through programmes, but through transformed lives rooted in the Gospel.



Archbishop Julian Leow and Fr Paul Cheong OFM Cap unveiling the banners.



DIOCESE OF PENANG
PKK/BDN/2026/02/224

Notifications and Updates

God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law. Gal 4: 4-5

1. Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes and World Day of the Sick

Marking the 34th World Day of the Sick on February 11, 2026, Pope Leo XIV, in his message titled *The compassion of the Samaritan: loving by bearing another’s pain*, calls on believers to oppose the “culture of discard” by offering concrete, loving, and compassionate care to the sick, the elderly, and the lonely. (<https://bit.ly/4khCYT9>)

2. College General Major Seminary Reopens

College General Major Seminary will resume its new Academic Year 2022 on February 21, 2026. Let us pray for all candidates and formators as they return and for those newly embarking on this journey of discernment.

3. Penang Diocesan Lenten Campaign 2026, Hope in Action

The 2026 theme for the Lenten Campaign is Hope in Action. All Lenten Campaign kit and digital resources will be accessible on the Caritas Penang website soon. I wish you a blessed preparation and journey of Lent 2026. (<https://caritaspenang.com/>)

4. Ash Wednesday, Beginning of the Season of Lent

The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei have issued a Pastoral Statement for dispensation from fasting and abstinence on Ash Wednesday this year, which falls on the second day of the Lunar New Year. (<https://bit.ly/4kfOSg8>)

5. Lunar New Year message for 2026, year of the Horse

As I take this opportunity to wish each one of you a Blessed and Glorious New Year, I wish to share with you a reflection prepared by Fr Stephen Chin in English and Mandarin, explaining on the Year of the Horse. (<https://bit.ly/4c9cz7J>)

6. Community of the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (FSIC)

Sr M. Tauria Taurin, FSIC has been transferred to Penang Diocese to be part of the FSIC community here together with Sr M. Lucynia Jeprin, FSIC. As a team, they will participate in the mission of the local church in the Diocese of Penang and assist in pastoral work, mainly among the Bahasa Malaysia speaking people of Sabah and Sarawak presently working and residing in the five states of the Diocese of Penang.

7. Head of Penang Diocesan Bahasa Apostolate

Sr M. Lucynia Jeprin, FSIC has been appointed as the Head of Bahasa Apostolate replacing Sr M. Florence Nemesius FSIC with effect from January 2026. We thank Sr M. Florence Nemesius for having graciously heading this apostolate for the Diocese of Penang and wish her God’s blessings in her new mission. As a team, Sr M. Lucynia Jeprin and Sr M. Tauria Taurin and will continue their mission in this apostolate. We thank them for their dedication and commitment to this apostolate.

8. Head of Penang Diocesan Family Life Ministry

Bart Cheah and Angelina Tan have been appointed Head of the Penang Diocesan Family Life Ministry replacing Deacon Lazarus Jonathan, effective January 11, 2026, Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. We thank Deacon Lazarus for his dedicated and committed services in this ministry, and welcome Bart and Angie with gratitude for their generous availability in accepting this new role and mission.

9. Appointment as Parish Priest, Church of Risen Christ, Air Itam, Penang

I am pleased to inform that Fr Crispus Mosinoh OFM has been appointed parish priest of the Parish of Risen Christ, Air Itam

effective January 1, 2026. We wish him the very best and continue to keep him in prayer as he embarks on this new mission, strengthened by the Holy Spirit. I take this opportunity to also thank Fr Esmond Chua OFM for his service and dedication as parish priest during his term at the parish.

10. Head of Penang Diocese Creation Justice Commission

Isaac Alfred Simbun has been appointed Head of Penang Diocese Creation Justice Commission effective February 1, 2026 and will work in close collaborate with all the parishes of the diocese. We thank him for his openness and dedication in embracing this mission.

11. Ordination of Anthony Michael and Alfred Simbin to the Permanent Diaconate

The two candidates for Permanent Diaconate, Anthony Michael, currently in formation at Church of St Anthony, Teluk Intan, Perak and Isaac Alfred Simbun, currently in formation at Church of the Most Holy Redeemer, Tanjung Malim, Perak will be ordained to the Permanent Diaconate on February 25, 2026 at 7.00pm, at the Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam. Kindly keep them in your prayers.

Sebastian Francis
Cardinal Sebastian Francis

Two decades of shepherding with love

BUTTERWORTH: The congregations of the Churches of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Sts Chastan & Imbert, along with the faithful from other parishes, recently gathered to celebrate a remarkable milestone — the 20 years of devoted service of their parish priest, Fr Dominic Santhiyagu, joined by Frs Francis Andrew and Michael Teng, OFM Cap, who also marked their 20th sacerdotal anniversary. Each priest took a heartfelt moment to thank God and the community for walking alongside them throughout their vocation.

During his homily, Fr Francis Andrew invited the congregation to reflect deeply: How do we respond to God's call? Do we trustingly surrender to His will, or do we hesitate, following our own plans? He reminded everyone that each of us is called in our own way. While



The jubilarians: Frs Michael Teng OFM Cap, Dominic Santhiyagu and Francis Andrew

priestly life comes with its unique challenges, he reflected, parental vocation too carries immense responsibility — providing for one's family, nurturing children, and guiding them in faith and virtue. Some respond to God's call with

trust and courage; others delay or resist.

Fr Francis also spoke earnestly about unity within the Church. He observed that while many gather for worship, divisions can remain — people forming their own groups

and rarely reaching out to others. Even during simple moments like shared refreshments, the tendency to remain in factions prevails. True unity, he emphasised, is essential for reflecting the love and mission of Christ. The people of God are called

to be of one mind and heart, working together to faithfully live out Christ's mission in the world.

After Mass, all were invited to share a meal with the priests, celebrating this special priestly anniversary together. During lunch, a video tribute honouring Fr Dominic and his fellow priests was played, highlighting their journey of service. Fr Dominic expressed his gratitude to everyone who had walked alongside him, saying, "I thank God for the gift of priesthood, for the blessing of family, and for the parishioners who have shared this journey with me."

The celebration concluded with joyful moments at the photo booth, as congregants gathered to capture memories with Fr Dominic. The day ended on a note of warmth, gratitude, and shared thanksgiving, a true testament to a life devoted to God and His people. NBVM/SCIC.org

Hundreds celebrate Feast of the Holy Infant Jesus in Sg Pelek

SUNGAI PELEK, Sepang: Hundreds of pilgrims from parishes across the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur joined the local Catholic community at the Chapel of the Holy Infant Jesus from January 30 to February 1 to celebrate the feast of the Holy Infant Jesus.

Cardinal Sebastian Francis was the main celebrant and preacher for the triduum, with chapel administrator Fr Edwin Peter, serving as concelebrant. This year's feast was themed *Infant Jesus, God's Gift of Love for All*.

The triduum opened on January 30 with Mass concelebrated by Fr Xavier Andrew from Seremban and Fr Albet Arockiasamy from Tampin. The faithful gathered in prayer and gratitude, concluding the day with Adoration and special prayers for children who are ill.

Children played a central role on Day Two. Before the Morning Mass for children, many participated in activities organised by the parish

catechetical ministry. The chapel also unveiled the "Pope St John Paul II Children's Corner", which was blessed by Cardinal Sebastian. This section features a relic of the saint and excerpts from his 1994 letter to children.

Catechism children from the parish and the Church of St Theresa, Nilai, took part in the celebration. Over 400 children and adults attended, including a busload of pilgrims from the Church of St John Vianney, Tampin. Among the clergy present were Archbishop Emeritus Murphy Pakiam, Fr Andrew Manickam OFM Cap, Fr Christopher W. Soosaipillai, and visiting priest, Fr Sebastian.

After Mass, Cardinal Sebastian released white doves on the chapel grounds, symbolising peace, hope, purity, and the Holy Spirit. The evening continued with the blessing of candles, a special blessing of children, and a candlelight procession around the carpark, led by a decorat-

ed statue of the Holy Infant Jesus on a hand-carried palanquin. Children carried colourful battery-operated candles, creating a joyful and prayerful atmosphere.

The triduum culminated on Sunday, Feb 1, traditionally celebrated alongside the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. Cardinal Sebastian led the blessing of candles, followed by a candlelight procession. In his homily, he reflected on the lives of Joseph and Mary, urging the faithful to Live, Bless, and Surrender — embracing both joy and sorrow, trusting God's plan, and entrusting their lives to Him.

After Mass, Cardinal Sebastian thanked parents for their dedication in nurturing their children. Chapel chairperson, Reagan Savarimuthu praised God for the good weather, thanked Cardinal Sebastian for his presence, and acknowledged Fr Edwin, the parish, sponsors, donors, and everyone involved in the



Cardinal Sebastian Francis blessing the children.

triduum. A token of appreciation was presented to Cardinal Sebastian by a young teenager and a parishioner with a disability.

Fr Edwin expressed his gratitude to Cardinal Sebastian for accompanying the Catholic community over the past three days, for sharing the love of the Holy Infant Jesus with all, and for his special concern for children. The cardinal later blessed the children present.

Fr Edwin also thanked the parish Women's Ministry for preparing goody bags for the children and in-

ited everyone to a fellowship lunch held on the chapel grounds.

A new fresco depicting the Presentation of the Lord, created by Julie Cheong from the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Port Dickson, has been permanently installed in the chapel.

Before leaving, many pilgrims and parishioners spent quiet moments in prayer at the Shrine of the Holy Infant Jesus, carrying home the gift of His presence and a renewed spirit of faith, hope, and spiritual blessings.

Bernard Anthony

Exploring the science behind coconut cultivation

BAGAN DATUK, Perak: Thirty-nine participants from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur recently visited the Kuala Perak Plantation in Bagan Datuk to deepen their understanding of coconut cultivation.

The visit was part of an ongoing series of Educational Ecological sessions organised by the Archdiocesan Creation Justice Ministry (CJM) and was held at the National Land Finance Co-operative Society (NLFCS) site. NLFCS manages 19 strategically located estates across Malaysia, covering over 35,000 acres, all sustainably operated.

During the session, participants were introduced to the cultivation processes of coconut, cocoa, and oil palm. They also toured the



An officer explaining the cultivation processes of coconuts, cocoa and oil palm.

plantation's Research and Development Centre, where palm seeds undergo a meticulous preparation process. Seeds are first sorted by size, then subjected to cold treatment for three months and heat treatment for 42 days, followed by

soaking in water for 14 days before germination begins. The entire process takes a minimum of 100 days, with seedlings monitored daily until they are ready for planting. This detailed walkthrough offered participants valuable insight into the

intensive care required to cultivate healthy crops.

Videos demonstrating the manual pollination of coconut flowers were also shared. This process aims to produce better-quality seed-nuts, with a focus on high bunch yield, slower height increment, and tolerance to Ganoderma disease.

At the nursery, participants took in the vast open landscape under clear blue skies, where saplings were neatly arranged according to size, age, and variety. Of particular interest were the highly sought-after MATAF F1 saplings, a cross between the Malayan Dwarf (MRD/MYD) and the Tagnanan variety from the Philippines, which are often fully booked months in advance.

The visit concluded on a delight-

ful note with participants enjoying fresh tender coconuts, followed by a thoughtfully prepared meal and coconut jelly.

The KL Archdiocesan CJM expressed its deep appreciation to NLFCS for their warm hospitality and guidance throughout the session. Special thanks were extended to Datuk Sahadevan Baliah, Managing Director of NLFCS; Kamalanathan, Senior Manager at the site; Kalai Mugilan, Head of Research and Development; and Dr Arokiaraj for their support.

Participants left the plantation with a renewed sense of awe and appreciation for the effort involved in cultivating the coconut tree — an invaluable resource that provides so much to daily life.

Pope renews call to protect children

VATICAN: Pope Leo XIV has renewed the Church's urgent call to place children at the centre of global concern, warning that despite international commitments, the situation facing millions of children worldwide remains deeply troubling.

Addressing members of the *From Crisis to Care: Catholic Action for Children Organising Committee* at the Vatican on February 5, the Pope said little progress has been made in protecting children from danger, poverty, abuse and neglect.

"It is of deep concern to learn of the lack of progress in protecting children from danger," he said, noting that conditions for children and young people have not improved over the past year.

The audience followed up

on work begun at last year's International Summit on Children's Rights, convened in response to Pope Francis' call to safeguard the rights, dignity and well-being of children. The initiative, co-sponsored by Holy See institutions and religious unions, involves religious congregations, lay experts and the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors.

Active across five continents, the initiative works directly with children and families and aims to develop a public action plan to support Church leaders and partners in ensuring that every child grows up in a safe and nurturing family environment.

Pope Leo described the situation of many children as a global

tragedy, saying those whom Jesus welcomed are often deprived of basic necessities and opportunities to realise their God-given potential. Many, he said, continue to suffer extreme poverty, abuse, forced displacement and lack of education, often while being separated from their families.

Questioning whether global priorities have shifted away from the most vulnerable, the Pope asked whether commitments to sustainable development have been sidelined as children continue to suffer.

Recalling Pope Francis' teaching, he reaffirmed the central role of the family, stressing a child's right to receive love from both a mother and a father as essential for integral and harmonious development.



Pope Leo XIV greets a child dressed in liturgical vestments inside St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican August 20, 2025, after his weekly general audience. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

Turning to the Committee's work, Pope Leo highlighted two priorities: speaking on behalf of children who have no voice, and addressing their "transversal needs" through holistic care. He called for greater collaboration within Church structures to ensure attention to children's physical, psychological and spiritual well-being, and urged the development of concrete action

plans with the support of relevant Church bodies.

Above all, he emphasised the importance of listening to children themselves, recalling a message from last year's Summit: *Together with you, we want to cleanse the world of bad things, colour it with friendship and respect, and help you build a beautiful future for everyone.* **Vatican News**

Chinese Catholics do charity work for Lunar New Year

BEIJING: As people in China prepare to mark the Lunar New Year in the second half of February, Catholics in various parts of the country have engaged in charity work to support the poor and needy as part of the celebrations.

For nearly a month now, Catholic communities in mainland China have been carrying out pastoral activities and charitable initiatives traditionally linked to the Lunar New Year. The activities seek to focus on charity and mercy to care for the most vulnerable people in the communities.

This year, the Lunar New Year is designated as the Year of the Horse, begins on Feb 17 and ends on Feb 27.

In Nanjing, the capital of eastern Jiangsu province, the Catholic charitable foundation, Nanjing Ark, has a grassroots charity initiative to provide "a warm winter" for people in need and with disabilities, such as blind children, former leprosy patients, and elderly people suffering from various illnesses.

In collaboration with civil organisations and entities, the foundation has donated 20,000 yuan (approx. RM11,400) to support families

with sick children facing hardship.

Furthermore, the volunteers from the charity have distributed 40 eye care kits to teenagers as part of the "Luminous Childhood" initiative, in partnership with an eye hospital. They also visited the Municipal Centre for the Prevention of Occupational Diseases, expanding assistance to patients cured of leprosy, and delivered 50 new quilts to needy elderly people in the area.

In the Apostolic Prefecture of Lindong (Bayannur), Inner Mongolia, the Dengkou community promoted various awareness and support activities for elderly people living alone and students facing difficulties in honour of the Lunar New Year.

The Sacred Heart of Charity Association of the Diocese of Meizhou, inspired by the words and teachings of Jesus, is promoting solidarity campaigns for people in need.

The Taihu community in Wuxi City also carried out an initiative to support adults with autism, visiting a rehabilitation centre to help overcome loneliness and allow everyone to feel included in the festive atmosphere shared by families. **ucanews.com**



Vietnamese Church grapples with vocation paradox



Eleven new Jesuit priests in Vietnam pose for a photo following their ordination on December 3, 2022. (ucanews/Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific)

HANOI: While much of the global Church faces a sharp decline in vocations, the Catholic Church in Vietnam is confronting a different challenge — how to turn its growing number of priests into missionaries rather than primarily parish-based ministers.

In January, Vietnam welcomed 76 new transitional deacons from five dioceses and one religious order, most of whom are expected to be ordained priests within a year. The country, home to 27 dioceses and 83 male religious congregations, is often described as the Asian Church's "vocation basket," with 11 major seminaries producing hundreds of priests annually.

With an estimated 6,000 priests and 31,000 religious men and women serving about seven million Catholics, the numbers are striking. Church observers, however, warn that behind the impressive statistics lies a growing imbalance between clerical presence and missionary outreach.

In major cities, two or three priests often serve a single parish, where ministry focuses on administration, sacramental services, large-scale celebrations and church construction projects. By contrast, in the Central Highlands and northwestern regions, many ethnic minority communities wait months for Mass, relying on priests who must travel long distances across difficult terrain to

reach remote chapels.

Senior clergy note that this uneven distribution points to a deeper issue of priestly identity. Many younger priests, raised in relatively comfortable urban settings, struggle with the physical and emotional demands of mission territories. Assignments to remote areas are sometimes perceived not as part of priestly vocation, but as a form of hardship or even punishment.

Cultural factors also play a role. Traditional Vietnamese reverence for priests as *thầy cả*—or "great masters"—can unintentionally foster a focus on status and security rather than missionary service, reinforcing a preference for stable parish life.

As a result, Church leaders acknowledge a visible lack of engagement with non-Christians. While parish activities remain strong, outreach beyond the Catholic community is limited, leaving the Church less prepared to address social realities such as declining religious practice among youth, family breakdown and addiction.

Structural constraints further complicate the situation. Priests who express a desire to serve on the margins often face diocesan limitations, unclear mission pathways and insufficient financial

support, making sustained missionary deployment difficult.

Attention has also turned to priestly formation. Critics say the standard ten-year formation programme, while academically rigorous, places insufficient emphasis on missionary spirituality, inculturation and engagement with the poor. Seminary internships are often conducted in stable parishes rather than in marginalised or remote communities.

Vietnam's bishops have designated 2026 as the year of "Every Christian as a Missionary Disciple," signalling a renewed push for missionary conversion. Church leaders say the initiative offers an opportunity to re-centre priestly life on being "sent" rather than settled, and to encourage dioceses to share clergy with underserved regions at home and abroad, including neighbouring countries.

They also stress that a missionary Church cannot rely on clergy alone. Priests, they say, must form and empower lay Catholics to witness to the faith in workplaces, culture, education and digital spaces.

Observers note that the vitality of the Vietnamese Church will ultimately be measured not by the number of ordinations, but by its willingness to bring the Gospel beyond parish boundaries to those on the margins. **ucanews.com**



The local Church takes root

Richard Chia

In 1955, the Diocese of Malacca was restructured into the Metropolitan Archdiocese of Malacca-Singapore, giving rise to two new suffragan sees: the Diocese of Kuala Lumpur and the Diocese of Penang. This restructuring marked a pivotal moment, signalling a period of growth and renewed energy for the Church in Malaysia.

Diocese of Kuala Lumpur: Bishop Dominic Vendargon

The first suffragan, the Diocese of Kuala Lumpur, was entrusted to Bishop Dominic Vendargon, who oversaw a vast territory spanning four states on the Peninsular —

Selangor (then including Kuala Lumpur as part of the state), Negeri Sembilan, Pahang, and Terengganu. His ordination took place in the old Church of St John, which was elevated to cathedral status for the occasion. At the start of his ministry, Bishop Vendargon led 22 priests in caring for some 29,000 Catholics across 11 parishes, laying the foundations for a Church poised to grow in both reach and impact.

Faced with the challenge of ministering to a dispersed and rapidly expanding Catholic population, Bishop Vendargon set about strengthening the Church's presence across the region. He established new parishes in emerging townships, built churches to serve local communities, and invited several religious orders into the diocese to bolster education, pastoral care, and social



This is the sixth article in our series tracing the journey of the Catholic Church in Malaysia — a story shaped by faith, dedication, and remarkable individuals. In the previous instalment, we saw how the Diocese of Malacca was restructured to serve a growing Catholic population, setting the stage for a historic milestone: the ordination of Malaysia's first local bishops, Bishop Dominic Vendargon and Bishop Francis Chan. Their appointments marked the beginning of a chapter where the Church became truly local, led by shepherds who understood the hopes and challenges of the faithful.

outreach. His approach combined strategic planning with genuine pastoral concern, ensuring that growth was accompanied by care for the spiritual and social needs of the faithful.

In 1962, Bishop Vendargon's leadership and insight were recognised on the international stage when he was invited to participate in the Second Vatican Council as a Council Father, contributing to discussions that would shape the global Church. Six years later, in 1968, his contributions to both Church and nation were further acknowledged when the Yang di-Pertuan Agung bestowed upon him the title *Panglima Setia Mahkota*, granting him the honourable title of 'Tan Sri'. Bishop Vendargon's tenure was thus marked not only by expansion and development but also by a vision of a Church deeply connected to its people and to the wider Malaysian society.

Diocese of Penang: Bishop Francis Chan

The second suffragan, the Diocese of Penang, was entrusted to Bishop Francis Chan whose leadership spanned the five northern states of the Peninsular: Penang, Perlis, Perak, Kedah, and Kelantan. He elevated the old Church of the Assumption to cathedral status, establishing it as the heart

of the diocese. With 36 priests under his care, Bishop Chan ministered to some 36,000 Catholics across 21 parishes, ensuring that the faithful in even the most remote corners of the region received pastoral attention.

A Singaporean by birth, Bishop Chan, *pic*, was affectionately known as "The Singing Bishop" for his musical talent, often leading congregations in song during Mass at the Cathedral of the Assumption. His love for music was matched by his commitment to fostering unity, as he actively supported the Council of Christian Churches and promoted ecumenical dialogue.

In 1963, his ministry was challenged by a cancer diagnosis that eventually caused blindness in one eye, yet he continued his work with determination until his passing in 1967. Like his counterpart Bishop Vendargon, he served as a Council Father at the Second Vatican Council, lending his voice and vision to the discussions that would shape the modern Church. Bishop Chan's legacy endures in the warmth of



his pastoral care, his love for music, and his dedication to the Church and the wider community.

Archdiocese of Malacca-Singapore: Archbishop Michel Olcomendy

The remaining two states of the Peninsular — Malacca and Johore — together with Singapore, remained under the leadership of Archbishop Michel Olcomendy, the Metropolitan Archbishop of Malacca-Singapore. With 38 priests ministering to some 46,000 Catholics across 19 parishes, he bore the responsibility of shepherding a diverse and growing flock during a period of significant change.

Archbishop Olcomendy's tenure coincided with the transformative era of the Second Vatican Council, and he played a crucial role in guiding both the Malaysian and Singaporean Churches through the implementation of its reforms. From introducing new liturgical practices to fostering greater participation among the laity, he sought to help communities embrace the Council's vision of a Church that was more engaged, inclusive, and attentive to the needs of its faithful. His leadership required not only administrative skill but also pastoral sensitivity, as he navigated the challenges of change while maintaining the spiritual foundation of the local Church.

Archbishop Olcomendy oversaw the big changes occurring in the Malaysian and Singapore Churches in their implementation of the new ways of being church brought about by the Second Vatican Council.



From prefectures to vicariates

The Church in Sarawak

After the Apostolic Prefecture of Labuan and Borneo was divided in 1927, the newly formed Apostolic Prefecture of Sarawak remained under Monsignor Edmund Dunn, *pic*, MHM, while the Apostolic Prefecture of North Borneo was entrusted to Msgr August Wachter, MHM.



Even with a lighter workload, Msgr Dunn did not slow down. In the latter half of 1927, he divided the Sibu Mission in two: Fr Vincent Halder, an Austrian Mill Hill missionary, was placed in charge of the existing Sibu Mission, while the other half was established as a new mission at Binatang (now Bintangor) under Fr Leonard Van der Bergh, MHM. His

efforts reflected a commitment not only to organisational efficiency but also to ensuring pastoral care reached every corner of the region.

Msgr Dunn passed away in 1933 and was succeeded by Fr Aloysius Hopfgartner, MHM, whose tenure would be marked by formidable challenges. The global slump in trade forced tens of thousands of Chinese traders to leave Sarawak, and his leadership later endured the hardships of the Japanese occupation of Malaya. Yet through these trials, Msgr Hopfgartner remained steadfast in his mission to guide the local Church through turbulent times.

In 1949, following Msgr Hopfgartner's death, Fr Jan Vos, MHM, was appointed Apostolic Prefect, taking up the mantle of rebuilding and nurturing the Catholic community in Sarawak, continuing the legacy of resilience and dedication set by his predecessors.

The Church in North Borneo

The appointment of Msgr August Wachter, MHM, *pic*, as Prefect of North Borneo was no easy task. The prefecture was impoverished and lacked the resources enjoyed by its neighbour in Sarawak. There were no farms or plantations, and the only local income came from the modest surplus of two schools — St Mary's School in Sandakan and Sacred Heart School in Kota Kinabalu.



Determined to stabilise the fledgling prefecture, Msgr Wachter negotiated with the Apostolic Prefecture of Sarawak for assistance. Ownership of the Labuan estates was transferred, along with a cash grant, providing temporary relief for the struggling mission. Yet the challenges were far from over. Between 1927 and 1939, twenty-one priests and four religious brothers arrived from Mill Hill in London, enabling the establishment of mission stations at Kudat and Tuaran in 1930, and at Keningau and Kuala Belait in 1936. Existing stations in Kota Kinabalu, Penampang, and Papar were expanded, creating a stronger foundation for the growing Catholic community.

Though Msgr Wachter did not speak any Chinese dialect, he dedicated himself to

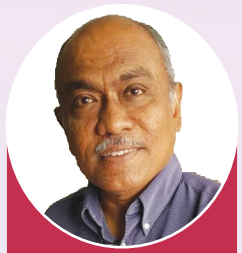
ministering among Chinese immigrants in the region. In 1929, he requested support from the Vicar Apostolic of Hong Kong, who sent Fr Joseph Shek. Together, they organised training programmes for Chinese catechists and explored outreach in Kudat, along the Kota Kinabalu-Tuaran road, and in the Shantung settlement near Kota Kinabalu, demonstrating a commitment to pastoral care across cultures.

The Japanese occupation brought further trials. Msgr Wachter, along with many priests and religious, was imprisoned. After the war, when he was unable to return, Fr Arnold Verhoeven, MHM, took over the prefecture until Msgr James Buis was appointed Apostolic Prefect in 1947.

In 1950, recognising the growth and potential of the region, Msgr Jan Vos of Sarawak met with Msgr Buis to petition Propaganda Fide in Rome to elevate the two Apostolic Prefectures to Vicariates. On February 14, 1952, Pope Pius XII officially promoted Sarawak to the Apostolic Vicariate of Kuching, led by Bishop Jan Vos, and North Borneo to the Apostolic Vicariate of Jesselton, led by Bishop James Buis — marking the beginning of a new era for the Church in Borneo, built on perseverance, vision, and unwavering dedication.

Next: Beginnings of the Catholic Bishops' Conference

The Elect of God



Echoing the Faith

Dr Steven Selvaraju

In the previous article, I examined the shape and structure of the RCIA, starting with the Period of Evangelisation and Precatechumenate, and followed by the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens and Period of Catechumenate. In this article, I will discuss the Rite of Election and the Period of Purification and Enlightenment.

Why is the Rite of Election celebrated?

The Rite of Election is the second step in the process of Christian initiation of adults. This liturgical rite is very significant, both for the catechumens and for the Catholic community, for three reasons.

- It marks the catechumens' desire to receive the Sacraments of Initiation by signing or enrolling their name into the 'Book of the Elect'. This is why the rite is also known as the "Enrolment of Names". It also indicates the catechumens' commitment to enter into the next period of the RCIA, namely, the Period of Purification and Enlightenment. For her part, the Church judges and affirms the readiness of the catechumens to receive the Sacraments.
- While the other liturgical rites of the RCIA are usually presided by the parish priest, the main presider for the Rite of Election is the diocesan bishop. By participating in the rite, the catechumens come into personal contact with their bishop and understand that, he too, has an important role in the initiation process.
- Usually held at the Cathedral, the mother church of the diocese, it allows the catechumens from a particular parish to come into contact with catechumens and community members from other parishes who also gather there for the celebration. It helps them experience what it means to be part of a larger church.

What does the term 'election' mean?

The term 'election', which is founded on the biblical concept of 'election', forms the very basis of the Rite of Election. In the Old Testament, the idea of 'election' was important to the people of Israel. They were conscious that they were specially chosen by God to be His own people from among all the nations in the world. In the New Testament, Jesus is portrayed as the 'elect' (or chosen one) of God and the Church as the 'elect' of Christ. At the Rite of Election, the entire Church rejoices with the catechumens in knowing that they have been specially called and chosen by God who loves them dearly.

What happens at the Rite of Election?

Usually, the rite is celebrated on the first Sunday of the Season of Lent. The rite itself takes place during Mass, after the homily. However, it can also be celebrated



At the Rite of Election, the diocesan bishop ratifies the names of the catechumens which are enrolled in the Book of the Elect.

outside the Mass.

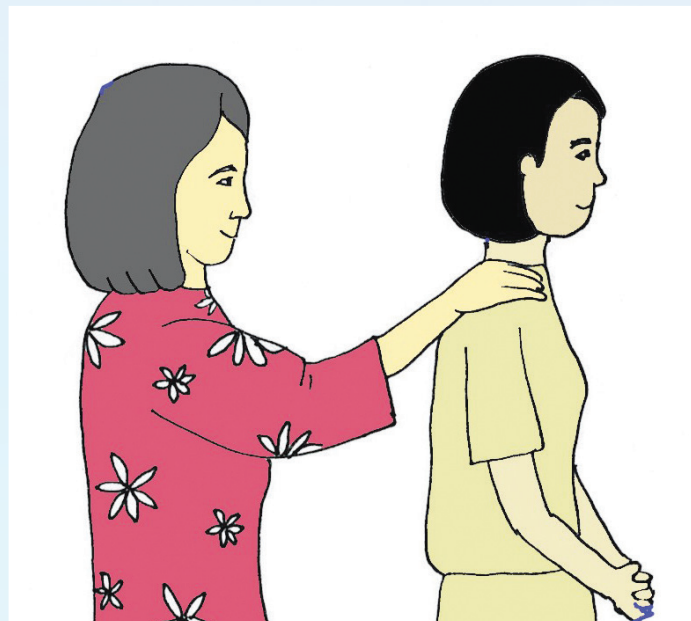
Basically, during the rite, the catechumens are presented to the bishop together with their godparents. The bishop questions the godparents concerning the catechumens' suitability for Baptism. After the godparents affirm the suitability of the catechumens, the assembly too is asked to do the same. Then, the bishop ratifies the catechumens' election in the name of the Church. From this time onwards, the person is called the 'elect' (or chosen). The rite comes to a conclusion with a prayer said by the bishop over the elect, who then dismisses them (RCIA, 129-137). By this, the catechumens enter the third period of preparation, that is, the Period of Enlightenment and Illumination.

What happens during the Period of Purification and Illumination?

At this time, the elect undergoes a period of intense spiritual preparation. Since the period coincides with the Season of Lent, together with the baptised members of the community, the elect are helped to experience the Lenten journey through the practice of prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

During the period, there are two liturgical rites that publicly mark the progress of the elect in their faith journey.

- The rite of Scrutiny, which assists the elect in their progress towards final purification before Baptism.
- The rite of Presentation which encourages them to progress further in the journey towards faith in Christ.



In the rite of Scrutiny, the godparent assists the elect in his or her progress towards final preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation.

What is a Scrutiny?

A Scrutiny is a rite that, consisting of intercessions, prayers of exorcism, and dismissal of the elect from the liturgical assembly, is "meant to uncover, then heal all that is weak, defective or sinful in the hearts of the elect; to bring out, then strengthen all that is upright, strong and good" (RCIA, 141). Basically, it serves to help the elect to express their preparedness to receive the Sacraments of Initiation (RCIA, 141-146).

How is the Scrutiny celebrated?

In all, there are three scrutinies, each celebrated on the third, fourth and fifth Sunday of Lent respectively. Each rite takes place after the homily when the elect, together with their godparents, come forward before the presider, usually the priest. The rite itself is made up of two main parts, that is, the prayers of intercession and exorcisms for the elect.

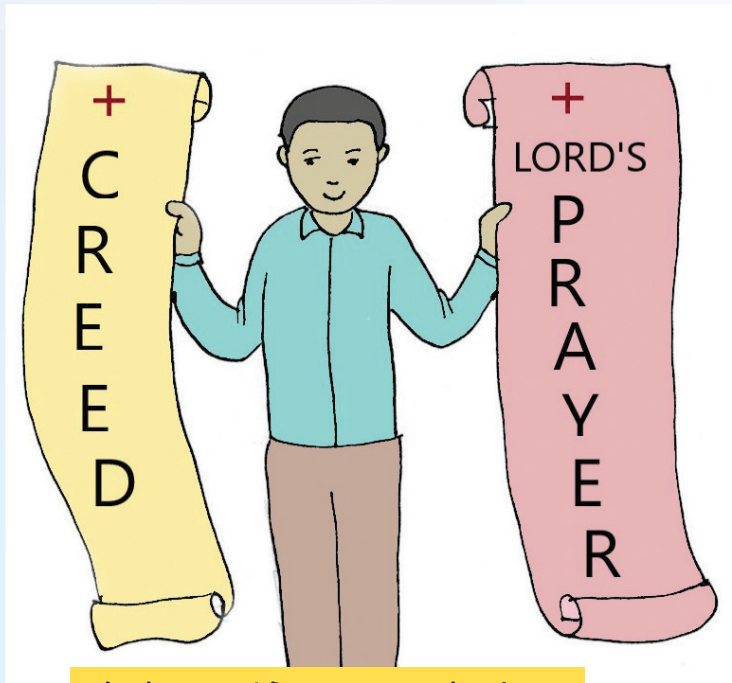
- The focus of the prayers of intercession is on the deliverance of the elect from sin, and expresses the concern of the entire community for them.
- This is followed by an exorcism led by the presider. It is composed of three parts. The first is

a prayer addressed to God, the Father and invokes God's power to heal and protect the elect. Secondly, the presider lays hands on the elect and thirdly, a prayer addressed to Christ is said. After the rite, the elect is usually dismissed from the assembly.

Why are the scrutinies celebrated?

Liturgically, scrutinies are not to be viewed as a kind of interrogation regarding the sincerity or worthiness of the elect to receive the sacraments. Instead, these rites are considered public prayers to God by the Christian community on behalf of the elect. Similarly, exorcisms are not to be seen as a means to rid the devil from the elect but as a way of emphasising the faith of the Church in the power of Christ over evil.

In receiving the power of God and supported by the prayers of the assembly, it is the elect who is called to make a sincere scrutiny of his or her own life. It is an act of surrendering oneself completely to Jesus. Therefore, the celebration of the scrutinies serves to proclaim the loving power of God to help the elect overcome the evil that exists in their lives and in the world.



In the rite of Presentation, the elect receives the Creed and the Lord's Prayer from the Church.

What are Presentations?

The Presentation is a special liturgical rite usually held on the third and fifth weeks of Lent. However, it can also be celebrated immediately after the scrutiny, especially on the Third and Fifth Sunday of Lent. On the Third Sunday of Lent, the elect are presented with the Creed (either the Nicene or Apostles' Creed) and on the Fifth Sunday of Lent, the "Lord's Prayer" (Our Father) is presented to them. Through the Presentations, the elect receive formally and solemnly the Creed and the Lord's Prayer from the Church. At this point, the elect are ready for the Sacraments of Initiation at the upcoming Easter Vigil.

Conclusion

It can be seen that the journey an adult person takes to become a Catholic can be quite demanding and intense. It is because the aim of the entire RCIA process is to lead him or her to an experience of sincere conversion to Christ and an adherence to His Gospel. The Church for her part, wants to ensure that the one preparing for Baptism is fully aware of the commitment required on his or her part as to what it means to be a true disciple of Christ and a member of the Catholic Church.

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

[The illustrations are by Dr Steven Selvaraju]

A heart fully for God

Sr Murna embraces life as diocesan hermit



Christopher Kushi

KEDAH: The faithful of the Diocese of Penang recently gathered at the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Kulim to witness a momentous and prayerful occasion: the Rite of Public Profession of the Evangelical Counsels by Murnadevi Savaridas, who took the name Sr Murna of the Eucharistic Bride of Christ upon her profession as a Diocesan Hermit. The ceremony brought the local community together in a spirit of reverence and celebration, marking a significant and deeply meaningful step in her lifelong journey of faith and devotion.

The Mass on January 21, was presided over by Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang, and concelebrated by Msgr Henry Rajoo, Fr Desmond Jansen, the parish priest, and Fr Edmund Woon, the Bishop's Delegate for the Vocation of Hermits. Deacon Dave Kameron assisted in the liturgy, while several other clergy from the diocese joined in concelebration, lending their support and presence to this solemn and joyous occasion.

Choosing this unique form of consecrated life, Sr Murna has devoted herself entirely to the praise of God and the salvation of the world. The Bishop of Penang received her public profession of the Evangelical Counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Sr Murna will now live a life of assiduous prayer, penance, and silence, withdrawn from the world, following an approved personal plan of life as a diocesan hermit under the guidance of the bishop.

The liturgy was rich in symbolism. The Responsorial Psalm proclaimed, "My soul is thirsting for You, O Lord my God" — a fitting prayer for one dedicating her life to solitude, prayer, and union with Christ. The Gospel reading from John 21:15-17



Sr Murna of the Eucharistic Bride of Christ signing the Profession of Vows as Cardinal Sebastian looks on.

recalled Jesus' words to Simon Peter: "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?"

In his homily, Cardinal Sebastian reflected deeply on the significance of this question, emphasising on the word "more." He reminded the faithful that Jesus' question to Peter resonates in the heart of every disciple. The vocation of a diocesan hermit embodies this "more" — a love that prioritises God above all else: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Cardinal Sebastian noted that this "more" transcends psychology, sociology, science, technology, social media, and even AI algorithms; it is beyond human opinion or influence. For Sr Murna, her profession is her wholehearted "Yes" to loving Christ above all else.

With this profession, Sr Murna becomes the third hermit in the Diocese of Penang, following the late Sr Mary of the Will of Jesus and Sr Maryanne of the Cross. Cardinal Sebastian offered an analogy to illustrate the role of diocesan hermits: "Diocesan hermits are like the little toes of the human body — small but essential for balance in walking."

Sr Murna expressed heartfelt gratitude to her father, Savaridas Rajindran, and lovingly remembered her late mother, Agnes Paul Christy Michael, who nurtured

her gift of faith from childhood. She recalled holding a crucifix at age six whenever she felt afraid and experiencing the loving presence of Jesus in the Eucharist at her First Holy Communion. She also thanked Cardinal Sebastian, her family, clergy, religious mentors, and the faith community whose prayers and witness have blessed her vocation journey.

Her faith journey began 27 years ago, inspired by Hosea 3:3: "Many days you shall wait for Me, I in turn will wait for you." Guided by Sr Mary of the Cross and the late Sr Maryanne of the Will of Jesus, Sr Murna embraced her vocation after decades of discernment and preparation.

Reflecting on her life as a hermit, Sr Murna shared: "Though I pray in solitude, I am praying in solidarity with the Church and in communion with the angels and saints. I rely on St Paul's words to the Ephesians 6:11: 'Put on the Armour of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil.' I do this through frequent participation in the Holy Eucharist, time in prayer with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, reflection on the Scriptures, and daily devotion to the Holy Rosary. Please continue to pray for me, and I will keep all of you in my prayers. God bless."

Fr Desmond highlighted the joy of the day, noting a beautiful symmetry in parish history: 25 years earlier, Msgr Henry Rajoo, a son of the parish, was ordained to the priesthood; now a daughter of the parish, Sr Murna, has been consecrated as a hermit. "Thank you, Sr Murna, for saying yes to Jesus." Her vocation will bring special blessings to the parish, and a petition box will be placed at the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Kulim, allowing the faithful and pilgrims to entrust their intentions for her prayer.

The ceremony concluded with the traditional 'Leave Taking.' Sr Margarete Sta Maria FdCC placed a crown of flowers on Sr Murna's head, and Cardinal Sebastian handed her the pilgrim staff. Cardinal Sebastian and Sr Maryanne of the Cross accompanied her down the aisle to the church entrance, where she immediately took leave — symbolising her new life of solitude and prayer. Sr Murna of the Eucharistic Bride of Christ now withdraws from the world, yet remains profoundly united with the Church.

The unique vocation of diocesan hermits

A diocesan hermit is a Catholic layperson or cleric who, under the local bishop's direction, makes public vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience to live a consecrated, solitary life dedicated to prayer and penance for the Church, similar to the ancient desert fathers/mothers in the early history of the Church, but officially recognised by the Church under Canon Law (Canon 603). They live a life of "silence of solitude," providing for their own needs and adhering to a personal "rule of life" approved by their bishop, offering a unique path for those called to intense prayer outside traditional religious orders.

Key characteristics:

- **Public Vows:** They publicly profess the evangelical counsels (poverty, chastity, obedience) to their diocesan bishop, not a religious superior.
- **Under Bishop's Direction:** They live under the authority and guidance of their local bishop, who receives their vows and approves their "rule of life."
- **Solitary & Contemplative:** The life is marked by solitude, intense prayer, and penance, seeking deep union with God, though they may live in a small, loose community (*lavra*) with other hermits.
- **Self-Sufficient:** Some may work (like a part-time librarian) or do some home-based industries like baking, sewing or gardening to support themselves, unlike members of religious orders. Sometimes the bishop supports them financially, too.
- **Canonical Recognition:** This status, formalised by Vatican II, distinguishes them from unofficial hermits and integrates them into the Church's consecrated life.

In essence, a diocesan hermit is a dedicated, vowed solitary for God within the local diocese, answering a direct call to a hidden, prayerful life for the good of the Church, distinct from members of established religious orders.



Cardinal Sebastian invoking the solemn blessing on Sr Murna.



Lent: The grace to forgive

Even as the Chinese Year of the Snake slithers away, giving way to the gallop of the Year of the Horse – amid the deafening sounds of firecrackers, lion dances, and celebration – there is a sacred pause in the life of the Church. It is a pregnant pause, marked not by noise but by silence. Into this stillness comes the dawn of Lent, beginning with Ash Wednesday on February 18: a season that gently invites us to slow down, to listen, and to allow God to search the depths of our hearts.

Lent is not merely a time of giving things up; it is a time of letting things go. Among the most difficult – and the most necessary – of these, is forgiveness. Not only seeking forgiveness for ourselves, but asking God for the grace to forgive those who have hurt us.

Many of us arrive at Lent carrying more than we realise. We bear memories that still ache, conversations that never found closure, and betrayals that quietly reshaped us. These unhealed places become hidden burdens – baggage from the past that follows us into the present. Over time, what began as a wound can begin to shape how we see the world. Without noticing, we may find ourselves formed by unforgiveness, held fast not by visible chains, but by pain we have learned to guard.

For some, the ones who wounded us are no longer present. They may be long dead and gone, beyond any possibility of apology or repair. And yet, in our thoughts, they remain strangely alive. We replay old scenes, rehearse old grievances, and cling to resentment with a tenacity that only feeds the unforgiving spirit. In doing so, we allow

the past to speak too loudly into the present, granting it an authority it no longer deserves. The offender may be gone, but the wound remains sustained – less by justice than by memory left unhealed.

Unforgiveness often disguises itself as strength. We convince ourselves that holding on keeps us safe, that remembering prevents further harm. Yet slowly, almost imperceptibly, it hardens the heart and narrows the soul. It ties us to moments from which God longs to redeem. Lent offers us another way – not denial or repression, but release.

At the centre of this season stands the Cross. From it, Jesus speaks words that continue to astonish: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” Spoken in the midst of profound suffering, these words are neither sentimental nor passive. They are a prayer born of compassion – a recognition of humanity’s brokenness and of our frequent blindness to the harm we cause.

Jesus does not minimise injustice. He does not deny the reality of pain. Rather, He refuses to allow suffering to become the final authority over His heart. In that prayer, He entrusts judgment to the Father and chooses mercy at the very moment when vengeance might seem justified. This is forgiveness not as emotion, but as surrender – placing even the deepest wounds into God’s hands.

To the world, this appears foolish. The Cross confounds those who equate power with control and victory with dominance. Why forgive when you have been wronged? Why love when love has been rejected?

Why surrender when retaliation is possible? Yet this seeming folly stands at the heart of our faith. What appears weak becomes the very means through which God restores the world.

This paradox teaches us that unforgiveness does not protect us – it imprisons us. It binds us to people and moments that may no longer even exist, and worse, to purported wrongs which may be nothing more than a figment of our imagination, and to versions of ourselves shaped by unresolved pain. Forgiveness, though costly, opens a door. It does not erase memory or excuse wrongdoing, but it loosens the grip the past holds over the present. It allows the wounded heart to breathe again.

This call to reconciliation is not optional. Jesus is strikingly clear: “If you are offering your gift at the altar and you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar. Go; first be reconciled and then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:24). Before ritual, before sacrifice, before even the most sincere acts of devotion, Christ places the work of reconciliation. Our worship, He teaches us, remains incomplete when our hearts are divided.

And yet, Lent does not end in darkness. The death on the Cross is not the final word. Paradoxically, it is this very surrender that makes possible the triumph of the Resurrection.

The Resurrection proclaims that forgiveness is never wasted – that love poured out, even when it appears unanswered, is gathered up by God and

transformed. The risen Christ still bears His scars, but they no longer wound Him. They testify that suffering has been overcome and that death itself has been defeated.

This is the hope Lent places before us: that what has broken us need not define us; that the burdens we have carried for years – including resentments we have nursed long after the offender has vanished from our lives – can finally be laid down. Freedom is possible – not because forgetting is easy, but because resurrection is real.

Forgiveness is often a journey rather than a single moment. It may begin as a prayer whispered through clenched teeth, repeated again and again. But it is a journey in which God walks with us. This Lenten season invites us to step toward that grace – to trust that Jesus, who rose from the dead, can also bring new life to hearts long weighed down by the past.

Lent, indeed, is a time to forgive. And in forgiving, we discover that we, too, are being healed. Before we enter the confessional to ask pardon for our sins this Lent, let us pause and ask whether we have forgiven those who have hurt us, whether living or long dead.

Susai describes himself as neither an accomplished nor a regular writer, but someone who occasionally puts his thoughts to paper, thinking aloud as it were.



Thinking Aloud

Susai Anthony Muthu

Two more days to the Chinese New Year and three more days to Lent. Once again, our calendars conspire to place firecrackers beside ashes, reunion dinners beside fasting guidelines.

For Catholics in Malaysia, this is hardly unfamiliar. Over countless years, we have learned to live with this overlap – one season deeply cultural, the other profoundly spiritual – each making claims on our time, emotions, and finances.

It is almost expected that our bishops will grant a dispensation from fasting on Ash Wednesday when these two important seasons coincide. This pastoral sensitivity is not a dilution of discipline but a recognition of lived reality.

Faith is not practised in isolation. It is lived in homes, among relatives, across dining tables laden with symbolic dishes and unspoken expectations. Our Church understands this.

Yet Lent does not disappear simply because pineapple tarts are plentiful. Its quiet insistence remains: “Return to Me with all your heart, with fasting” (Joel 2:12). And perhaps this tension between feasting and fasting offers us more than inconvenience. It offers us clarity – especially when viewed through the lens of faith and finance.

January has barely settled into routine. Work resumes, schools are back in session, and traffic has reclaimed its familiar authority over our mornings.

In many households, including ours, examination results have ushered in another season of discernment: conversations about tertiary education, career pathways, locations, and costs. Dreams are inspiring; fee structures are sobering.

Add Chinese New Year into the mix, and budgeting becomes more than a spreadsheet exercise. New clothes, gifts, travel, hosting – all meaningful, all costly. It is easy to justify



Faith and Finance

Hazel Ong-Archibald

Balancing the feast and the fast

overspending in the name of tradition or generosity, only to enter Lent burdened not just by ashes, but by bank balances and credit card statements.

Scripture grounds us gently but firmly: “Which of you wishing to construct a tower does not first sit down and calculate the cost?” (Luke 14:28). Budgeting, then, is not a lack of faith. It is an act of

stewardship.

In Malaysia, festive spending creeps up quietly. A visit to the bakery for “just a few” pineapple tarts and other cookies turns into at least RM120. New Year outfits for growing children and adults would total another few hundred ringgits. Then there are toll charges, petrol, and festive groceries, adding up faster than expected.

The financial “hack” here is simple but countercultural: decide your spending ceiling before emotions get involved. Set a realistic Chinese New Year budget based on current cash flow, not last year’s photos or other people’s celebrations.

Red packets deserve their own discernment. Giving *angpows* is a beautiful expression of blessing, not a competition. A modest amount given sincerely honours both culture and conscience. As St Paul reminds us, “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7) – not a pressured one.

For families navigating education planning, this season also invites us to distinguish between celebration spending and future provisioning. A festive purchase brings joy for a moment; education funding shapes decades. If resources are limited – and for most families, they are – choosing prudence is not being miserly. It is being responsible. Lent’s call to simplicity can help us say no

without guilt.

One Lenten financial discipline worth embracing is fasting from impulsive spending. Delay non-essential purchases by 24 or 48 hours. Often, the desire passes. What remains is clarity – and savings.

Another quietly effective practice is reviewing subscriptions during Lent. Streaming services, food delivery memberships, unused apps – many Malaysian households spend hundreds of ringgit monthly without noticing. Cancelling even one or two creates breathing room for more meaningful priorities.

Almsgiving, of course, is not optional. Lent reminds us that what we save through restraint is not solely for ourselves. “Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none” (Luke 3:11). In a season that highlights abundance, intentional generosity becomes a powerful witness – whether through parish outreach, quiet assistance to family members, or charitable giving within one’s means.

I recently revisited the very first piece I wrote for this column and realised how familiar the concerns felt. Different year, different circumstances, yet the same balancing act between provision and trust, planning and surrender. Financial anxiety has a way of repeating itself unless faith is allowed to interrupt the cycle.

Truly, without the Blessed Trinity, my sanity would be at stake. The Father reminds us that provision ultimately comes from Him. The Son teaches us that life is not all about possessions. The Spirit grants us wisdom and self-control.

Perhaps this annual collision of Chinese New Year and Lent is not an inconvenience but an invitation. An invitation to practise moderation without joylessness, generosity without recklessness, and faith without denial

of reality.

As we enter a season marked by red and purple, may our budgets reflect our values, our spending reveal our priorities, and our sacrifices create space – not only in our wallets, but in our hearts – for God.

For “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given unto you” (Matthew 6:33). Faith and finance, when rightly ordered, are not rivals. They are companions on the same journey.

CNY and Lent takeaways:

- Set a festive spending ceiling early – before emotions, relatives, and promotions get involved.
- Budget *angpows* intentionally, not competitively. Blessings are not measured in denominations.
- Differentiate joy spending from future provisioning – especially education and long-term goals.
- Fast from impulse purchases during Lent; delay often reveals what you truly don’t need.
- Review and cancel unused subscriptions – a modern form of financial fasting.
- Practise intentional almsgiving with what you save, however modest the amount.
- Let faith guide financial decisions, not fear or social pressure.

Hazel is a Licensed Financial Planner with over two decades of experience in investment, insurance, and estate planning. Since year 2000, she has been guiding individuals and families towards financial stability. Hazel is passionate about integrating Catholic values into personal finance, helping others achieve their financial goals while living a life of generosity and trust in God’s providence.



Fr Dr Clarence Devadass

Is synodality dead or just beginning?

After the extraordinary intensity of the Synod on Synodality between 2021 and 2024, a natural question has emerged in many church conversations: Is synodality over? It is true that the Jubilee Year of Hope, with its powerful symbolism and pastoral energy has, in some ways, overshadowed the synodal process. Public attention shifted, headlines quieted. The sense of urgency that marked the two synodal sessions in Rome seemed harder to locate.

And yet, to ask whether synodality is dead is to misunderstand what has actually happened. Synodality has not ended; it has changed phase. What we are experiencing now is not decline but transition, from discernment to implementation, from conversation to conversion, from event to way of life.

The years 2021 to 2024 were necessarily intense. The Church entered a global process of listening unprecedented in scale. Parish halls, diocesan assemblies, religious communities, universities, and online platforms became spaces where people spoke honestly, sometimes painfully, about faith, belonging, authority, exclusion, mission, and hope. The two sessions of the Synod on Synodality gathered those voices not to produce quick solutions, but to model a different way of being Church, one marked by prayerful listening, mutual respect, and shared responsibility.

Intensity, however, is not meant to be permanent. A Church that lived forever in synodal event mode would burn

out. The quieter period we are now entering does not signal retreat; it signals rooting. What was heard must now be embodied. What was named must now be practised. Implementation is always less dramatic than debate, but it is far more demanding.

The Jubilee Year of Hope that followed immediately was neither a competition nor a distraction for synodality. In fact, hope is one of the synod's deepest fruits – a continuation. The synodal process insisted that hope is not naive optimism or institutional self-protection. It is a theological virtue grounded in trust that the Holy Spirit truly works through the whole People of God. A Church that listens is a Church that hopes. A Church that walks together is a Church that refuses resignation.

If synodality now feels less visible, it may be because it is being asked to do what truly matters: shape ordinary ecclesial life. That is far harder than drafting documents or holding assemblies. It requires bishops to exercise authority differently, not less authority but authority that is relational and transparent. It requires priests to see consultation not as a threat but as enrichment. It requires lay people to move from being heard to being genuinely responsible. It requires structures that make participation real rather than symbolic.

This is precisely why the Church cannot go backwards. The conversations of the synod raised expectations, not of instant reform but of genuine change in culture. People spoke honestly about clericalism,

about the marginalisation of women, about the distance between Church leadership and lived reality, about the wounds carried by those who feel unseen or unheard. To pretend those voices can now be politely archived would not simply be disappointing; it would be a betrayal of the very discernment the Church undertook.

The synodal documents repeatedly stress that synodality is not a project with an end date. It is a style, a spirituality, a set of practices – a way of life. Implementation, therefore, is not about mechanically applying conclusions from Rome. It is about asking, at every level of the Church: How do we decide? How do we listen? How do we include? How do we hold one another accountable? These questions are not abstract. They touch parish councils, diocesan priorities, formation programmes, pastoral planning, and even the way conflict is handled.

There is also a temptation to measure success only by visible structural change. Structures matter, but synodality begins at a deeper level. It requires conversion of imagination, moving from a Church that acts for people to a Church that walks with them. That conversion is slow. It unfolds unevenly. It will meet resistance, fatigue, and fear. None of that means synodality has failed; it means it is real.

The quieter tone of the post-synodal period may actually protect synodality from becoming ideology. When synodality is reduced to slogans or factions, either championed uncritically

or dismissed cynically, it loses its ecclesial grounding. Implementation invites patience, discernment, and humility. It forces local churches to take responsibility rather than wait for instructions from above. In that sense, the true test of synodality is happening now, far from the synod hall.

The Jubilee Year of Hope served as a lens rather than a distraction. Hope, after all, is sustained not by grand gestures but by fidelity in ordinary time. A synodal Church is one that believes the Spirit is still speaking, through parish meetings that feel messy, through disagreements that demand charity, through shared prayer that reshapes priorities. Hope trusts that these small, often invisible practices matter.

So, is synodality dead? No. It is vulnerable, which is something very different. It can be neglected. It can be reduced to rhetoric. It can be quietly reversed by habits of control or indifference. But it can also take root slowly and irreversibly if we, as Church, choose courage over comfort.

The synod called the Church to action, not applause. We have listened. Now we must live differently. Going backwards may feel easier, but it is no longer honest. The path ahead is less intense, less dramatic, and far more demanding. That is not the end of synodality. It is just beginning!

Fr Clarence serves as the parish priest of the Church of St Anthony and is also the Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.



Fr Ron Rolheiser

John Allen RIP

The renowned anthropologist Mircea Eliade once issued this warning: *No community should botch its deaths.* He's right. Death washes clean and only after someone is gone can we fully drink in the gift that he or she was for us and the world.

On January 22, the Christian community, and the Catholic Church in particular, lost someone who had been a gift to us for a long time. John Allen, the editor-in-chief of *Crux*, died in Rome at the age of 61. He had been battling cancer since 2022.

John Allen was one of the most prominent (and important) English journalists commenting on religious issues, particularly on ecclesial issues and the shifting demographics of religion in the world. He worked out of Rome as a Vatican correspondent and out of the USA as editor-in-chief of a news site that helped keep us abreast of what was happening religiously in the world.

A number of things made John stand out as a journalist. He had a talent for having his finger on the pulse of things, not just in what was happening in the churches, but also what (in his words) were the megatrends in the world. For those of us who didn't have time to scan the news every day and read the numerous articles in religious magazines and websites – well we could read John Allen.

But, even more important than his talent for having his finger on the pulse of things,

was his always fair-minded, balanced commentary. John Allen did not fall into either of the current ecclesial categories of liberal or conservative. He was both, and neither. He was comfortable in both liberal and conservative gatherings, comfortable with Popes John Paul II and Benedict and with Francis and Leo. He had devotees and critics on both sides of the ecclesial spectrum. That speaks well of him. If I may use a time-worn cliché, he was too conservative for some liberals and too liberal for some conservatives. He didn't have a full home with either of them, even as he was at home with both. Moreover, he was never accused of being unfair, even by those who disagreed with him.

Then, beyond the journalist, there was John Allen the man, the friend, the one who forever brought lightness, warmth and humour into the circle. I was privileged to get to know him (and his favourite restaurants) during my years on our General Council in Rome. He befriended our Oblate community and we befriended him. Our friendship continued after my return to Canada and the USA and John accepted invitations to speak at various symposia and conferences at our school and at other Oblate sponsored events.

And he was always memorable, not just for his solid content, but also for his colour and humour. He would introduce himself to the audience by sharing that he came

from Hill City, Kansas, where, in his words, "there is no hill, and sure as hell no city!" The local bar there, he said, had a sign in the men's restroom: *Please don't gut your ducks in the sink!* He carried that earthiness into his presentations and no one ever left wondering what exactly he was talking about. He didn't only bring balance and fairness, he also brought colour, humour, and wit.

John carried that into his life in general: insight, balance, and colour. My image of John is this: a cigarette in hand, a drink in front of him, sitting with a group who are holding forth on every kind of issue, with John providing colourful banter along with keen insights from his wide world experience. I remember a story he shared at just this kind of gathering, about how he was with his family inside a mall in Minneapolis when his phone rang. He looked at the number and then told his family he needed to step outside to take this call. It was Pope Benedict. How do you tell your family in a shopping mall in Minneapolis that you just had a phone call from the pope?

As Eliade says, no community should botch its deaths. In his discourse at the Last Supper in John's Gospel, Jesus repeatedly tells His disciples that they will only be able to receive His spirit after He dies. Like Eliade, He is warning them not to botch His death. They didn't.



After His death, His first disciples, for all their misunderstanding and infidelities while He was alive, didn't botch His death. In the light of His death, they were able to grasp, fully for the first time, His person and His message.

We lost a giant in John Allen and we shouldn't botch his death.

We need to drink in his spirit so that, among other things, we might be more fair-minded, not fall into any one-sided ecclesial ideology, and always bring warmth and wit into a room.

John Allen, RIP, you were always the good Hill City man who was far too sensible to ever gut your ducks in the sink.

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

LITTLE CATHOLIC'S CORNER

Dear children,

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus was talking about the laws of God.

Some people thought that He would take away the old law that God had given the Jews. But Jesus said that He didn't

come to take away the law. He came to fulfil the law.

The old laws tell us the things that we shouldn't do, like worship false gods or kill people or steal.

Jesus is telling us that just obeying the commandments isn't enough. He wants us to

do everything out of love. If you really love a person then of course you won't kill them! But He says you shouldn't get angry at them either. You wouldn't steal from someone you love - but wouldn't you want to be generous to them too?

Jesus says that the Ten

Commandments are very important, but we have to do more than just obey them. We need to love!

Till we meet again next time. Be good, okay?

Love
Aunty Eliz



Cut the tiles along lines, shuffle the tiles, reassemble them to make the phrase.

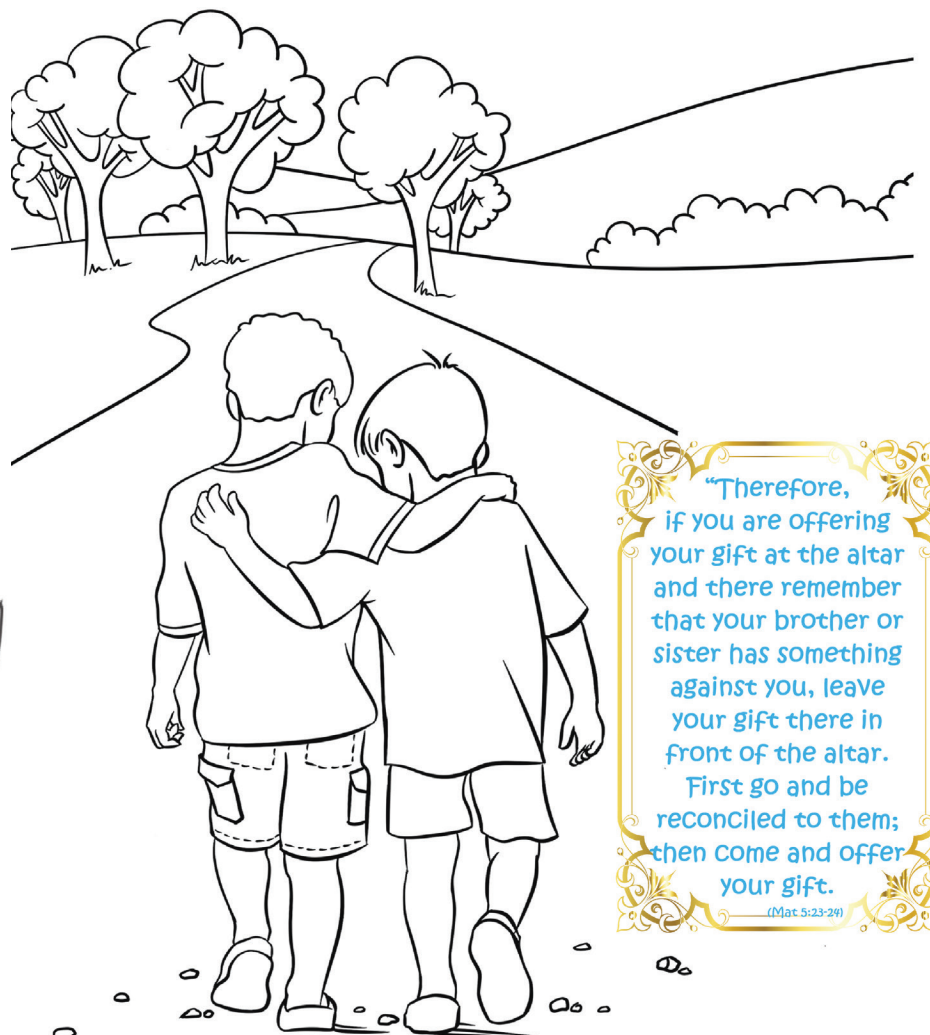
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Moses Tells the Israelites to Follow God's Laws True or False

How much do you know about God's commandments for the Israelites? See if you know which of these are true and which are false:

- Moses only taught some of the people of Israel that they had to obey the commandments that God gave them. True or false?
- The people had to obey God's laws if they wanted to live in the land that He was giving them. True or false?
- Moses said that they were not allowed to add to God's law, nor take away from it. True or false?
- If the people obeyed God's commandments then all the other nations would see that they were wise. True or false?
- The laws that God gave the people of Israel were unfair. True or false?
- God gave His people laws because He cared for them and wanted what was best for them. True or false?
- We should obey God's commandments because they tell us how to live well. True or false?

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8



"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift."
(Mat. 5:23-24)

YOUTH

Mary, our companion in missionary discipleship



KLANG: The OLL Klang Youth Rally 2026 brought together young people from different backgrounds for a meaningful day of prayer, reflection, and fellowship. Guided by the theme *Mary, Our Companion in Missionary Discipleship*, the rally helped youth and young adults discover how Mary walks with us as we grow in faith and learn to say “yes” to God. This year, the rally was joyfully collaborated with ASAYO KL, strengthening the spirit of unity and shared mission among young people.

The youth rally was officiated by parish priest, Fr Gregory Chan and assistant priest,



Fr Gnana Selvam Berentis, marking a joyful beginning to the day. From the early morning, participants arrived with excitement and open hearts. Everyone gathered as one Church, united in praise and prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to guide the day.

All sessions were led by Fr Michel Dass, who guided participants through one continuous journey. He shared about Mary’s “Yes”



and how she trusted God step by step, even when she did not understand everything. Youth were encouraged to trust God in their own lives, especially when facing doubts, fear, or confusion.

Fr Michel reminded everyone that discipleship is not about being perfect, but about being faithful. Jesus welcomes sinners, heals the broken and walks with those who struggle. Participants were invited to be honest with God, stop pretending and bring their real selves before Him. The sessions also reminded participants that every disciple is called to be a missionary. Like Mary who went out to serve others, young people are called to share God’s love in simple ways — at home, in school, at work, and in the parish.

A special highlight was the arrival of Archbishop Julian Leow, who addressed the participants. He encouraged them to stay close to Jesus, love the Church, and become joyful witnesses of the Gospel. He reminded them that young people are not only the future of the Church, but the Church of today.

The Taizé Prayer, Eucharistic Adoration, and Confession were powerful moments of silence and prayer. Many experienced God’s healing and peace as they spent time before

the Blessed Sacrament and received the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The youth rally was concluded with Holy Mass animated by the youths, a joyful celebration of faith and unity.

The rally ended with a clear message: the journey does not stop here. Participants were sent out with renewed hearts:

- To walk with Mary
- To trust God step by step
- To be honest and real
- To live as missionary disciples in daily life

With Mary as our companion, the youth of OLL Klang move forward with hope, courage, and joy — ready to say their own “Yes” to God.

Testimonials:

“This youth rally reminded me that every step I take is important to God. Through the talks, worship, and time spent together, I was encouraged to trust God more in my daily life. It was not just an event, but a meaningful experience that helped me reflect on my personal walk with God and how He guides me each day. I realised that even when I feel unsure or weak, God is still working within me. This rally strengthened my faith and gave me courage to move forward with greater confidence. It was a good and meaningful experience that renewed my heart and brought me closer to God” *Talez-Tamil Youth Rep OLLYM*

“This year’s youth rally was extraordinary, just like in previous years. I believe we have been strengthened, refreshed, and reminded that God is real and is working in our lives as young people of faith. It also opened my eyes to continue walking with hope towards one common purpose” - *Ivy Robert, KUBM Youth Rep OLLYM*



HOW FAITH KEPT A BOY SWIMMING TO SAVE HIS FAMILY'S LIVES

As his family drifted 8.5 miles offshore, a 13-year-old boy began a 2.5 mile swim he wasn't sure he would survive.

When Austin Appelbee finally reached shore after four hours in the open sea, he did not think of himself as a hero. "I didn't think I was a hero — I just did what I did," he later told the *BBC*. But what he did, and how he endured it, has offered many a rare glimpse of faith lived under pressure.

What began as a family afternoon paddleboarding in the shallow waters off Quindalup, in Western Australia, unravelled with frightening speed. The wind rose, the water pulled harder than expected, and soon Austin, his mother Joanne, and his younger siblings Beau and Grace were drifting further and further from shore. With no oars, no engine, and the light beginning to fade, Joanne made an agonising decision: She sent her eldest child to try to reach help.

Austin swam four kilometres (around 2.5 miles) alternating between freestyle,

breaststroke, and backstroke. For nearly four hours he navigated massive waves heading closer to shore.

At first, he took a kayak — but it was damaged and taking on water. When it finally flipped for good, he clung to it, realising the situation had turned serious. "It was getting dangerous now — I had been out for a couple of hours," he recalled. Eventually, he began the long swim toward land.

The teen started out wearing a life jacket. But halfway through the ordeal, battling waves and exhaustion, he made another difficult decision: He took it off. The buoyancy, he realised, was slowing him down. It was a moment that required not recklessness, but judgment — weighing risk against necessity, choosing the only way forward he could see.

For the rest of the dangerous swim, what sustained him was not strength alone. "Throughout the next two hours, it was prayer, Christian songs and happy thoughts which kept me going," he told

the *BBC*. Frightened and exhausted, he focused on the people he loved — his mother, his brother and sister — and on small, joyful memories that anchored him to life. Among them, disarmingly, was Thomas the Tank Engine.

Later, in an interview with *7 News Australia*, Austin spoke even more plainly about the role of faith:

"I don't think it was me who did it — it was God the whole time," he said. "I kept praying and praying, and I said to God, 'I'll get baptized, I'll get baptised.'"

He explained that after his ordeal, he then went to church on Sunday.

Ordinary faith carried into extraordinary circumstances

There is something deeply Christian in this story — not because it is dramatic, but because it is ordinary faith carried into extraordinary circumstances. Prayer here is not polished or performative; it is instinctive. Songs are not sung for an audience, but to keep fear at bay. Even the promise



of baptism emerges not as a theological statement, but as a child's honest reaching toward God in a moment of need.

When Austin collapsed on shore, called for help, and then passed out, he still did not know whether his family was alive. Hours later, after a major rescue operation, they were found — cold, exhausted, but safe, having drifted nearly 14 kilometres (almost nine miles) out to sea.

In the end, Austin returned to school on crutches, sore and shaken, still insisting he was no hero. Yet his story reminds us of something quietly profound: that courage often looks like persistence, faith often sounds like a song half-remembered, and God's presence is sometimes felt most clearly in the simple resolve to keep swimming — one stroke, one prayer, one hopeful thought at a time. **Aleteia**

INDONESIA: Gentle melodies filled St Paul's Hall at Bintaro Jaya's St Maria Regina Parish in South Tangerang City, Indonesia, on Saturday afternoon, January 17, as the community welcomed the new year through music and song rather than resolutions alone.

The concert, *Persembahan Syukur* (A Thanksgiving Offering), featured children, teenagers, and young people of the parish, who used sacred music to express faith and strengthen communal bonds.

The programme brought together four performing groups: the SanMaRe Children Youth Orchestra (SCYO), the SanMaRe Children and Youth Choir (SCYC), the OMK Choir "Laudate Dominum," and children's and youth choirs from the parish's various communities.

Throughout the performance, music became more than something to be heard. For both performers and the congregation, it was experienced as a shared prayer that bound the parish community together.

A total of 25 young musicians, led by conductor Alfa Prabahandarya, joined 47 SCYC children accompanied by Caecilia Hesti, Gitaditya Witono, and Cyprianus Dony.

They performed alongside the Choir of Region 6 and the SanMaRe OMK Choir, creating a unified and resonant harmony.

The collaboration reflected a spirit of togetherness across generations within the parish.

Organising Committee chair Aloysius Ari Satrio described the concert as a convergence of talent and faith.

"This is who we are. We present this concert as an expression of gratitude. The songs are lightly arranged, familiar to the ear, and meant to be enjoyed together," he said.

He added that Santa Maria Regina parish holds significant musical potential that has developed quietly over time, and that the concert provided a space to bring these gifts together in a single celebration of faith.

Singing as prayer

In his opening remarks, the parish priest of Bintaro Jaya, Fr Bernardus Hardijantan Dermawan, Pr., emphasised the spiritual meaning of music in the Church.

"*Bene cantat, bis orat* — to sing well is to



Music as prayer draws generations together at Catholic parish in Indonesia

pray twice. This offering of thanksgiving is the prayer of the children, the young people, and the entire community of Bintaro Jaya parish," he said.

He stressed that the concert was not simply a display of talent, but an expression of gratitude for life and a call to glorify God together as one community.

Enthusiastic participation of the faithful

Around 260 parishioners filled St Paul's Hall, following each performance with enthusi-

asm, from the orchestra to solo singers such as Asri Rosari, Devina Anglingdarma, Friska Magdalena Simarmata, Brigita Grace Simon, Faustina Maureen Elena, and Herve Pierre Sidarta.

Applause throughout the afternoon signalled not only appreciation, but active participation in a living celebration of faith.

The programme concluded with a surprise appearance by Fr Camelus Delellis da Cunha, Pr., who joined Grace in inviting the congregation to sing hymns from *Puji dan Syukur*.

The moment transformed the concert hall into a warm and joyful space of communal prayer.

Music unites the faithful

For Dyah Ayu Wulandari, a companion to the children, the concert showed that gratitude need not be expressed in many words. "Through the voices of children and young people offered sincerely, the faithful are reminded that gratitude is born from open hearts and lives surrendered to God," she said.

Beyond the performances, parishioners also shared fellowship through SanMaRe's MSMEs (micro, small, and medium enterprises), which served a variety of food and drinks, another expression of the parish's spirit of service and solidarity.

The concert was made possible with the support of several sponsors, including Bank BPR Universal, Mentari Intercultural School, and Warung Chef Kim, underscoring how sacred art is sustained through networks of cooperation.

While the *Persembahan Syukur* concert has ended, its resonance is expected to endure. Through music and song, the faithful of Santa Maria Regina parish in Bintaro Jaya were reminded of art's power to unite, nurture joy, and strengthen communion, as they continue walking together in prayer and service. **LICAS News**



Adult members of Santa Maria Regina (SanMaRe) Parish in Bintaro Jaya pose on stage after their performance during the *Persembahan Syukur* concert. (LiCAS News photo/SCYO SanMaRe Concert Committee)

Pope's Lenten, Easter schedule



VATICAN: Pope Leo XIV will visit five Roman parishes during Lent, participate in the Lenten Spiritual Exercises with the Roman Curia, and preside over the Easter liturgies in St Peter's Basilica and St John Lateran.

The pastoral visits, scheduled from February 15 to March 15, will focus largely on parishes in the outskirts of Rome, beginning at Our Lady Queen of Peace in Ostia Lido on Feb 15 and continuing at the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Castro Pretorio on Feb 22. Further visits are planned for the Ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ in Alessandrino on March 1, Our Lady of the Presentation in Torrecchia on March 8, and the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Ponte Mammolo on March 15.

Lent will begin on Feb 18 with Mass at the Basilica of St Sabina, preceded by the traditional Statio and penitential procession from St Anselm. Pope Leo will then join the Roman Curia for the Lenten Spiritual Exercises from Feb 22 to 27.

Holy Week will open with Palm Sunday Mass in St Peter's Square on March 29. The Easter Triduum begins on Holy Thursday, April 2, followed by the Celebration of the Passion and the Way of the Cross on Good Friday. The Easter Vigil will be celebrated on April 4, concluding with Easter Sunday Mass in St Peter's Square and the *Urbi et Orbi* blessing. **Vatican News**

2026 PILGRIMAGES

13D TURKIYE - 7 CHURCHES

ISTANBUL - ADANA - CAPPADOCIA - DERBE - KONYA - COLOSSAE - LAODICEA - PUMUKKALE - EPHEBUS - KUSADASI - IZMIR - PERGAMUM - BURSA - ISTANBUL

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20 SEP TBA

04 OCT TBA

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16D MARIAN SHRINES

ROME - PARIS - NEVER - ROCAMADOUR - LOURDES - LOYOLA - LIMPIAS - SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA - FATIMA - LISBON

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筹款活动 为我建造一座圣所 (出谷纪 25:8)

我们正踏上一段重要的信仰旅程，在柔佛州乌鲁地南 (Ulu Tiram) 兴建一座美丽而温馨的一圣家堂 (Holy Family Church)。这座新教堂将成为我们团体世代代的信仰基石。您的慷慨奉献，将让这个梦想成真。



新教堂

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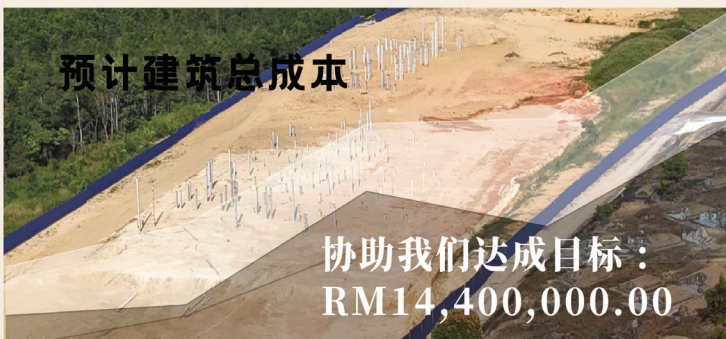
目前的教堂



我们的教会团体充满活力并持续成长，汇聚四种语言，大家同心合意，怀着共同的信仰。然而，现有的教堂位于河边及学校附近，已无法满足实际需求。水灾问题、活动时间冲突以及停车位不足，限制了我们的全面服务教会的能力。

我们期盼兴建一座全新的教堂 — 一个温馨迎人，拥有充足的停车位、供教理课程使用的教室，以及可容纳日益增长教友的宽敞教堂。这是一次为未来投资、建立信仰长久基业的契机。您的捐献，将帮助我们实现这一愿景。

预计建筑总成本



协助我们达成目标：
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莱恩神父 Fr. Ryan Innas
建堂项目主席

为未来奠基 共建希望

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李福泉神父 Fr. Martinian Lee
建堂项目副主席