



## Consecrated life

# A constant presence

**VATICAN:** On February 2, the Church celebrated World Day for Consecrated Life, a time to honour men and women who dedicate their lives wholly to the Gospel, often amid trials and challenges. In a letter to consecrated persons worldwide, the heads of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life stressed that consecrated life is “a presence that remains”, especially in regions marked by conflict, violence, division, and instability.

Addressed to those “in every part of the world, in the places where you live and carry out your mission”, the letter begins with gratitude for the fidelity of consecrated men and women and the gift of life they offer —

“a life sometimes marked by trials, but always lived as a sign of hope.”

Reflecting on the past year, the heads of the Dicastery note the gift of travelling to meet “the faces of many consecrated persons called to share complex situations.” These include people living in areas affected by conflict, poverty, forced migration, minority status, and social or political instability. The letter highlights how such challenges reveal the enduring value of consecrated life: a steadfast presence alongside wounded peoples, in places where the Gospel is lived amid fragility and trial.

This presence, varies according to context. Yet it becomes especially vital where “the political and social situation tests trust and erodes hope.” In such circumstances, the faithful, humble, creative, and discreet presence of consecrated persons serves as a sign that God does not abandon His people.

“Evangelical ‘remaining’ is never immobility or resignation,” the Dicastery points out. It is active hope, generating attitudes

and gestures of peace — disarming words in moments of conflict, relationships that foster dialogue, and choices dedicated to protecting “the little ones.” Remaining in love is not merely a personal or communal act; it becomes a prophetic word for the Church and the world.

Different forms of consecrated life illuminate this call in unique ways. Apostolic life demonstrates “active closeness that supports wounded dignity”; contemplative life safeguards hope through intercession; secular institutes bear witness to the Gospel as discreet leaven in society and professional realms; *Ordo virginum* manifests gratuitousness and fidelity; and eremitic life recalls God’s primacy and the simplicity that disarms the heart. In each form, one clear prophecy emerges: “to remain with love, without abandoning, without remaining silent, making one’s life the Word for this time in history.”

The message also reflects on the demanding reality of peace, echoing Pope Leo XIV

that peace is not an abstract idea but a “daily journey” requiring listening, patience, dialogue, conversion of heart and mind, and refusal of the mentality of the strong prevailing over the weak. “Peace is not born from opposition,” the letter notes, “but from encounter, from shared responsibility.” When consecrated life chooses to remain close to those in need without turning to conflict, it becomes “an artisan of peace.”

Finally, the Dicastery calls on consecrated men and women to persevere in their mission, recalling the Jubilee of Consecrated Life in 2025. During that celebration, all who are consecrated were invited to become pilgrims of hope on the road to peace. They are exhorted to embody this evangelical style every day, “wherever dignity is wounded and faith is tested,” entrusted to the Lord as “a prophecy of presence and a seed of peace.”

The letter was signed by Dicastery’s Prefect, Sr Simona Brambilla; Pro-Prefect, Cardinal Ángel F. Card. Artime; and Secretary, Sr Tiziana Merletti. **Vatican News**

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

1 Cor. 2:1-2



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# What went viral wasn't the video

## — It was compassion

A short video recently went viral, showing a priest pausing Mass — the liturgy of the Eucharist — to console a weeping elderly man.

Captured during a livestream, the moment travelled far beyond the church walls, drawing millions of views and heartfelt reactions across social media. In a digital space often dominated by outrage, controversy and performance, this quiet act of compassion stopped people mid-scroll.

There was nothing dramatic about the scene. No speech, no staging, no attempt to “go viral.” The priest simply noticed grief and responded to it, choosing humanity over routine. Ironically, it was this very lack of spectacle that made the video resonate. In a world saturated with curated perfection and loud opinions, audiences recognised something rare: authenticity.

The response online has been telling. Comment sections — so often battlegrounds of division — were instead filled with words like “mercy,” “kindness,” and “this is what faith looks like.” Believers and non-believers alike found meaning in the gesture. For some, it reaffirmed what they hope religion stands for. For others, it challenged assumptions that faith is rigid, distant, or disconnected from real human pain. In just a few seconds of footage, a powerful narrative about religion and leadership was quietly reshaped.

The video also reveals a deeper truth about social media itself. Despite algorithms that reward shock and conflict, people still hunger for compassion. They still pause for moments

that mirror their own vulnerability. Virality, in this case, was not manufactured — it was earned through sincerity.

Perhaps the most important takeaway is not the number of views, but the reminder it offers. Social media did not create this moment; it merely amplified it. The priest was not performing for a camera but responding to a person in pain. In an age obsessed with being seen, this viral moment reminds us that the most powerful witness is simply to see others — and to respond with love.

For us as social media users, this moment offers a quiet but important reminder. The most meaningful content is often already happening around us, in real life, not in carefully crafted posts. Sometimes, the role we play online is not to create, but to notice and share moments of truth, compassion, and humanity as they unfold.

Authentic emotion speaks louder than crafted perfection. The video resonated because it was raw, unedited, and unfiltered. In a space filled with staged perfection, audiences are drawn to sincerity — real people showing real emotion.

It also shows the power of values over performance. When the content we share reflects what truly matters to us — whether faith, empathy, or simple kindness — it resonates more deeply than something designed solely to get likes or go viral. And sometimes, the simplest posts, even without words or commentary, allow the story to speak for itself.

Finally, it reminds us that behind every



view, like or share is a real person with their own struggles, hopes, and vulnerabilities. Moments of shared humanity connect us far more than clever captions or trending hashtags ever could. Virality, in this case, was not the goal — it was a by-product of truth and care.

As someone who manages HERALD's social media accounts, this moment offered a valuable lesson. Audiences are not merely looking for polished campaigns, trending formats, or perfectly worded captions. They are looking for truth. The most powerful content often emerges organically, rooted in lived values rather than strategy meetings. Social media managers do not need to manufacture emotion; they need to recognise and honour it when it appears.

And yes — if you would like to see more moments of faith in action, especially here in Malaysia, follow us on Facebook, Instagram and TikTok @heraldsnapshot. (A shameless plug, but a sincere one.)

*Kevin Francis*

## Faith that refuses to stay hidden

The readings today draw us into the heart of what authentic faith looks like; not as an abstract belief or a polished performance, but as a lived reality that leaves a mark on the world. Isaiah, Paul, and Matthew speak across centuries with a unified voice, reminding us that faith that does not move us outward, toward others, risks losing its flavour, its power, and its light.

The prophet Isaiah delivers a message that is both challenging and clarifying. He strips away any illusion that religious observance alone is enough. True worship, he insists, is inseparable from justice and compassion: “Share your bread with the hungry, shelter the oppressed and the homeless; clothe the naked when you see them.” For Isaiah, holiness is not confined to the sanctuary. It is revealed in the way we respond to human need. God is not impressed by rituals that ignore suffering. Instead, God delights in hearts and hands that open themselves to the poor, the forgotten, and the vulnerable.

The promise that follows is striking: “Then your light shall break forth like the dawn.” Light, in Isaiah's vision, is not something we manufacture through pious acts. It emerges naturally when we choose mercy over indifference and solidarity over comfort. When we loosen the bonds of injustice and refuse to turn our backs on those in need, the darkness does not stand a chance. Light appears, not as a spotlight on ourselves, but as a sign of God's presence moving through us.

This theme finds a surprising echo in St Paul's words to the Corinthians. Writing to a community impressed by eloquence, philosophy, and displays of intellectual brilliance, Paul makes a deliberate choice to

stand before them in weakness. He comes not with “sublimity of words or wisdom,” but with a simple proclamation of Christ crucified. His aim is clear: “that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.”

Paul reminds us that God's way of transforming the world rarely aligns with our expectations. Strength is revealed in vulnerability. Power is made perfect in weakness. The cross itself is the ultimate contradiction, an instrument of shame turned into a source of salvation. In choosing simplicity over spectacle, Paul ensures that the light people see is not his own brilliance, but God's grace at work within human fragility.

Together, Isaiah and Paul prepare us to hear Jesus' words in the Gospel with fresh ears. “You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world.” These are not compliments; they are responsibilities. Salt exists not for itself, but to preserve and give flavour. Light exists to be seen, to guide, to reveal what might otherwise remain hidden. Jesus does not say we should become salt and light; He declares that we already are. The question is whether we choose to live in a way that reflects that identity.

Salt that loses its taste becomes useless. Faith that remains private, comfortable, and detached from the struggles of others risks becoming bland; technically present, but lacking transformative power. Light hidden under a basket may still exist, but it fails in its purpose. A discipleship that avoids visibility, that fears standing out for the sake of the Gospel, dims the radiance God intends for the world.

Importantly, Jesus does not say, “Let your

## Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with Fr Ravi Alexander, OFM, Cap

### 5th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

Readings: Isaiah 58: 7-10;

1 Corinthians 2: 1-5;

Gospel: Matthew 5: 13-16

good deeds be seen so that you may be praised.” He says, “so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” True Christian witness always points beyond itself. Like Paul, we are not called to impress, but to reveal. Like Isaiah, we are not called to perform religion, but to exemplify compassion.

In a world marked by division, noise, and performative virtue, these readings offer a quieter, deeper challenge. They call us to a faith that is credible because it is consistent, visible because it is loving, and powerful because it is rooted in God rather than ego. They invite us to ask uncomfortable questions: Does my faith feed the hungry and lift the burdened? Does it bring light into dark places, or does it remain safely hidden? Does it rely on my own strength, or does it allow God's power to shine through my weakness?

To be salt and light is not about grand gestures or heroic acts. It is about daily choices — to notice, to care, to speak truth with humility, and to act with courage. When we do, something remarkable happens. As Isaiah promises, the light rises in the darkness. As Paul assures us, faith takes root in God's power. And as Jesus proclaims, the world catches a glimpse, not of us, but of the Father whose love transforms everything it touches.

# MJD forms first diocesan pastoral council

Fr Sixtus Pitah, OFM

KLUANG: More than 50 participants, including clergy, religious, and lay leaders, gathered at the Church of St Louis recently for the Diocesan Pastoral Council Assembly of the Malacca Johore Diocese (MJD). The day was marked by prayer, shared reflection, and a renewed commitment to walking together as Church.

Over 30 lay members from their parish pastoral councils joined 16 clergy, three religious sisters, and two seminarians for the assembly, which formally established MJD's first Diocesan Pastoral Council. The move follows the creation of Vicariate Pastoral Councils in Malacca, North Central Johore, and South Johore over the past year and aligns with the 2026 diocesan theme, *MJD: A Diocese that Walks Together*.

The day opened with Eucharistic adoration, grounding participants in an encounter with Jesus and setting the tone for faith-centred discernment.

In his opening remarks, MJD Pastoral Director Fr Dr Lawrence Ng thanked attendees for their dedication to parish and diocesan service. He reflected on the Final Document

of the Synod on Synodality, stressing that synodality is not just a concept but a way of being Church, calling for humility, listening, and shared responsibility.

During the Conversation in the Spirit, moderated by Sr Shanti Mariadass, FDCC, participants shared small-group reflections, revealing a common longing for a deeper encounter with the Lord, renewed prayer, and a stronger sense of calling to service. They acknowledged the need for the Church to adapt to a changing world while remaining true to its identity.

In a session on *Moving Forward as a Diocese*, Fr Lawrence highlighted Bishop Bernard Paul's motto, *Building the Kingdom of God Together*, and emphasised a synodal approach that avoids top-down leadership. Sharing a light-hearted anecdote about parishioners calling the priest when a toilet breaks down, he underscored a serious point: the Church grows when members take ownership together.

Fr Lawrence explained that the Diocesan Pastoral Council is a consultative body supporting pastoral planning, guided by synodality, co-responsibility, subsidiarity, communion, and mission. It empowers the laity and ensures their voices are heard.



Conversation in the Spirit during the Vicariate Pastoral Council meeting.

The newly formed core team was introduced:

- Francis Chua (chairperson, Malacca Vicariate Pastoral Council) – Chairperson
- Mark Anthony (chairperson, South Johore Vicariate Pastoral Council) – Vice Chairperson
- James Lee (chairperson, North Central Johore Vicariate Pastoral Council) – Secretary

Francis from the Church of St Mary Ayer Salak, acknowledged the challenges of leadership: "As much as I seek to fully understand what this post entails, I look forward to giving what I can."

Mark from the Church of the Divine Mercy, Skudai, described synodality as a learning journey and encouraged collaboration for the good of the diocese.

Bishop Bernard Paul framed the assembly within the upcoming Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026, highlighting the three pillars of synodality — communion, participation, and mission — and four interconnected focus areas: family, ecology, society, and the Church. Vicariate and Diocesan Pastoral Councils, he explained, strengthen synodality through communal discernment, helping the diocese move forward together under the Holy Spirit's guidance.

Participants were informed that the next Diocesan Pastoral Council Assembly will be on July 18, while the Diocesan Annual Pastoral Assembly, scheduled for November 24 – 26 at the MAJODI Centre, will gather all clergy and Parish Pastoral Council members — a first for the diocese.

## KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

### Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

#### February

**10-13 Meeting – Catechetical Leaders, Manila**

**14 Feast – Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Klang**

**20 Meeting – College of Consultors**

## PENANG DIOCESE

### Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

#### February

**14 Meeting and Mass with Auxiliaries of the Apostolate at 10.30am – Bishop's Residence, Penang**

**20 Mass – Mount Miriam Cancer Hospital & Launching of the Golden Jubilee Celebrations at 3.00pm**

## MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

### Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

#### February

**10-11 Clergy Monthly Recollection – MAJODI Centre**

## Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #258

**Welcome everyone,**

MJD's pastoral thrust began in 2016 with the *4Es (Encounter, Enlighten, Empower, Evangelise)*. The formula is Bible-based. Read Luke 4:18-19. It identifies the four essentials of discipleship.

It is a guiding tool for determining types of formations, and assessing levels of spiritual growth.

What is certain is that converts, catechism children, youth and young adults, church leaders, pastoral workers, parishes and ministries, must *begin with a personal encounter of the Living Christ*.

No events, readings, talks and programmes can touch us till one meets the Lord on their Emmaus Journey.

**Local Takes! A National Agenda without Fear or Favour.** Nazir Razak at *FMT*, said: Go back to post-1969 *PM2's methods and policies* (structured national consultation) to navigate in today's, increasingly divided and uncertain political and economic landscape.

The Unity Ministry has recognised Pandelega Rinong as top unity icon, and are looking at the Baba Nyonya and Chetti communities, agents of unity and national leaders as *possible unity icons*.

Police issued a strong warning on *illegal doxxing* which is the online sharing of personal data without consent.

Netizens note *MPs missing* at Parliament but active on social media.

Starting school at six, Year 4 and Form 3 assessments *disturb and divide parents*.

The PMX outlined supposedly *sweeping reforms across Malaysia's education system* — from preschool

to university — that spoke of language mastery, assessment reforms, school infrastructure, digital skills, and expanded access to higher education, to secure the nation's future and to be globally competitive.

**The Church Reads Signs:** *Zenit* reports: In an era of doom scrolling, young listeners are choosing hope and *Christian hip-hop artists* are addressing purpose, culture, faith and community impact.

Pope Leo to Neocatechumens and movements: Live your *spirituality without separating yourselves* from the rest of the ecclesial body.

Cardinal Kurt Koch on *Ecumenism*: Christians are celebrating the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity from Sunday, January 18, to Sunday, January 25. "Ecumenism is a tool of peace for the world".

*Vatican News reports:* Tensions between the US and Europe. Violence continues in Gaza, West Bank, Iran, Yemen, Ukraine and Somalia. Floods devastate Mozambique.

Pope Leo on the 60th World Day of Social Communications: Technological innovation, particularly artificial intelligence, must *serve the human person* rather than replacing or diminishing human dignity.

**A Thought for The Week: The Missing Brick.** When Paolo and his wife were travelling, their secretary faxed them: 'There's one glass brick missing for the work on the kitchen renovation. I'm sending you the original plan with the plan the builder has come up with to compensate for it.'

His wife's design had harmonious lines of bricks with an opening for ventilation, while the plans to resolve the problem of the missing brick was a real jigsaw puzzle defying aesthetics.

The wife replied: 'just buy another brick'. And so, they did and thus, stuck to the original design.

*The lesson from Paolo:* How often the lack of one brick, distorts the original plan of our lives.

**QnQ: Q asks: Why are people cynical? Why do they mock life?** The world is full of people suffering from the effects of their own un-lived life. They become bitter, critical or rigid, not because the world is cruel to them, but because they have betrayed their own inner possibilities.

The artist who never makes art becomes cynical about those who do.

The lover who never risks loving mocks romance.

The thinker who never commits to a philosophy sneers at belief itself.

Yet all of them suffer, because deep down they know: the life they mock is the life they were meant to live. *Carl Jung*

**The Spirit @ work:** Mission without communion becomes activism. Communion without mission becomes comfort. True discipleship holds both together

**Something to tickle you:** "Let us be grateful to people who make us happy; they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom." *Marcel Proust*

**Bishop Bernard Paul**



# Synodal conversion sets

For the Malacca Johore Diocese (MJD), the year 2025 was marked by a deepening of synodal conversion, laying the pastoral foundations for 2026. The diocese recognised that synodality — both in relationships and processes — takes time to take

root and become an integral part of diocesan life.

The conversion of relationships called clergy, religious, and laity to relate with mutual respect, recognising the shared call of baptism. The conversion of processes focused on inclusive, participa-

tory decision-making, especially through structures such as vicariate and diocesan pastoral councils. Synodality, as defined by the 2024 Synod on Synodality Final Document, is not just “walking together” but a journey of listening, discernment, and shared responsibility un-

der the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

To facilitate this, the diocese launched the Training of Trainers programme, later named Synodal Exercises (SE), to empower leaders in the practice of synodality. These steps included the formation of Vicariate Pastoral Councils and the Diocesan Pastoral Council. The clergy also deepened their understanding through the Annual Clergy Discernment assemblies, held in November 2025 and January 2026.



## Annual Clergy Discernment 2025

### Moving towards a spirituality of synodality

The MJD clergy held their Annual Clergy Discernment in two parts. The first session took place from November 11–13, 2025 at Good Shepherd Seminary, Melaka, while the second and concluding session was held at MAJODI from January 20–21, 2026.

A total of 38 clergy from the diocese, including Bishop Bernard Paul and the deacons, gathered in Melaka for the first part of the discernment. Fr Dr Clarence Devadass was invited to animate the first two days under the theme *Towards a Spirituality of Synodality*, during which he presented three key sessions.

#### Towards a spirituality of synodality

The first session, *Synodality: Is this the way forward?* invited clergy to acknowledge the mixed emotions surrounding synodality — hope, curiosity, fear, resistance, and even apathy. Synodality can feel unsettling, as it calls the Church to move beyond familiar patterns of thinking and acting. Drawing from the Second Vatican Council, the session reaffirmed that synodality is intrinsic to the Church’s way of listening, discerning, and responding to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

The second session, *The Spirituality of Synodality*, emphasised that synodality is not merely a concept or structure, but a way of life. Inner conversion, rooted in baptism

and nourished by the Eucharist, was highlighted as essential. Dispositions such as humility, patience, openness, forgiveness, and reconciliation were identified as foundational, with synodality becoming credible only when it shapes relationships, prayer, and habits of listening in daily Church life.

The third session, *Synodality: Readiness and Implementation*, focused on how synodality can be lived concretely in diocesan and parish communities. Baptism was affirmed as the basis of shared dignity and responsibility, calling for greater lay participation, clearer recognition of women’s contributions, and stronger transparency and accountability. Pastoral councils, assemblies, and a culture of listening were identified as key structures to support this process. Clericalism was named as a significant obstacle, while formation and accompaniment were highlighted as essential for moving forward.

#### Gratitude for mission

During the discernment, the clergy concelebrated Mass on the morning of the second day at the newly renovated Church of St Francis Xavier, Melaka. Celebrated by Fr Clarence, the Mass held special significance as the church — one of the oldest in the country — had been closed for over a year for repair and restoration. The parish priest shared that the restoration aimed to return the

church to its original beauty. The occasion fostered a renewed sense of gratitude and missionary zeal among the clergy.

#### Reporting on the pastoral state of parishes

Following the sessions, parish priests presented reports on the current pastoral realities of the parishes they serve. The sharing was marked by openness and honesty, highlighting joys, challenges, and limitations. The reports also revealed the diversity of parish contexts across the diocese.

Some parishes serve large communities of postgraduate students, while others face demographic challenges. The Malacca Vicariate noted an ageing population and fewer active parishioners, with the parish of Our Lady of Guadalupe being a notable exception. Many Melaka parishes also experience a significant influx of tourists on weekends. Similar patterns were observed in the North Central Vicariate, where many young people migrate to other states or cities for employment. The South Johore Vicariate was described as more vibrant, though weekday participation is affected by parishioners’ work commitments in Singapore or Kuala Lumpur.

#### Conversation in the Spirit

The sessions and parish reports were followed by Conversation in the Spirit. Clergy reflected on several guiding questions:

- What do I feel towards synodality, and why?
- How can I infuse a spirituality of synodality into my ministry and mission?
- In what concrete ways can we begin implementing synodality in our diocese?

A final question for discernment, following a review of the 2022 MJD Final Synod Report, asked: “What is the Holy Spirit saying to us about the needs of the diocese?”

There were no rushed conclusions or quick solutions. Instead, the discernment was intentionally left open to be continued during the second part at MAJODI, allowing time for prayerful reflection and deeper assimilation before its conclusion in January 2026.

## Pastoral Statement 2026

Synodality is the way the Malacca Johore Diocese lives and understands itself as Church, shaped by humility, shared limitations, patient listening, and trust in the Holy Spirit who leads us.

#### Our Feelings: Towards a Synodal Diocese and Church

This way of being Church begins with honest recognition of our realities. There is hope and a desire to walk together, alongside fear, uncertainty, and awareness of our limitations. These limitations are not failures, but remind us that no one walks alone, and that the Church journeys best when responsibility is shared.

#### Synodality: A Spirituality and Way of Being Church Adopted

Synodality for us is a spirituality, not a destination or goal to be achieved. It asks for time, patience, openness, understanding, and trust, allowing space for the Holy Spirit to guide the Church through listening, discernment, and responsible decision-making. We move at the pace of the Holy Spirit, not driven by urgency, programmes, or quick results.

#### Our Decision: Implementing Synodality

Walking together means listening before deciding, discerning together while accepting responsibility, and placing relationships before efficiency. Clergy and laity participate according to real capacity and ability, offering what each is able to give and serve, recognising that the Holy Spirit works through the whole People of God.

We take responsibility in planting the seeds of synodality as expressed in the final document while acknowledging with awareness that this is a process of synodal conversion that takes time and care.

#### Moving Forward Together: Listening to the Holy Spirit

In choosing synodality as our way forward, we commit ourselves to a shared mission, lived contextually within our parish communities and ministries, grounded in faith, sustained by prayer, and shaped by the real needs of the people entrusted to us. This is how we continue our journey, trusting not in our own completeness, but in the Spirit who leads the Church.



# pastoral orientation for MJD

## Promoting Mission

### Explorations, Mission and Synod Assembly

The January 2026 Clergy Recollection brought to a close the discernment process that began in November 2025. Held under the theme “Explorations,” the gathering focused on orientations towards mission, integrating personal growth, synodal life, and pastoral responsibility.

#### Explorations of self

The first day was animated by Daryl Tan, who invited the clergy to reflect on how they approach ministry and mission. Using the Big Five personality framework, participants explored their dominant personality traits and how these may influence leadership style, relationships, decision-making, and pastoral engagement. The exercise was not intended to label or evaluate, but to foster greater self-awareness, helping clergy recognise personal strengths, limitations, and areas for growth in service of mission and synodal life.

Daryl followed up with further sessions

focusing on growth in self-awareness and maturity. Rather than seeking to change personality, the emphasis was on recognising how personal tendencies can either support or hinder ministry. Attention was given to managing strengths and limitations more consciously, particularly in relationships, leadership, communication, and pastoral decision-making. These sessions encouraged the integration of personal development with spiritual and pastoral responsibility, so that ministry may flow from a more grounded and intentional self-understanding in service of mission.

#### Orientations towards mission

The second day began with reflections by Fr Dr Lawrence Ng, drawing from the Asian Mission Congress to provide a clear mission-centred orientation as the diocese looks ahead. The central reminder was clear: mission is not a department of Church life, but flows from baptism itself.

We do not add mission to what we do; we are missionary by identity.

While acknowledging real challenges such as fatigue, health concerns, and the burdens carried by clergy, the reflection cautioned against romanticising exhaustion or settling into a mode of maintenance. Tiredness in ministry, it was noted, calls for wiser and more life-giving pathways, not a retreat from missionary purpose.

A guiding image came from the Gospel line cited in the FABC document, “and they went by a different way” (Mt 2:12). Like the Magi, the Church is invited to return to ordinary responsibilities, but along new routes shaped by discernment. Synodality was proposed as this path, characterised by communion, participation, and mission. Communion affirms the equal dignity of all the baptised and resists exclusivity. Participation challenges clericalism and calls leadership to be exercised as service. Mission turns the Church outward, away from

self-referential concerns, towards society, the poor, and the care of creation.

Discernment, therefore, must remain grounded in real human and social realities, listening attentively to where the Holy Spirit is already at work. The call for the year ahead was steady rather than anxious: to deepen roots in prayer and communion, while widening the tent through patient listening and trust in the Holy Spirit, so that the Gospel may become truly life-giving for the people and for our common home.

#### Fruits of the ACD discernment

The clergy then reviewed the fruits of the discernment that began in Melaka. Three key developments were identified:

- 2026 MJD Pastoral Kit;
- Pastoral Statement 2026 articulated by the clergy, and
- First Malacca Johore Annual Pastoral Assembly, shaped explicitly by synodal principles.

## Pastoral thrust, pastoral kit and annual pastoral assembly

The Malacca Johore Diocese (MJD) Pastoral Kit 2026 was launched during the January Clergy Discernment as a concrete follow-up to the discernment process that began in November 2025. Serving as a common reference for clergy, pastoral leaders, and ministries, the kit outlines the diocese’s pastoral direction, synodal priorities, and shared processes that will guide diocesan life throughout 2026. It situates MJD within its ongoing journey toward the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 (MPC2026) and beyond, providing orientation and coherence for pastoral planning across parishes, vicariates, and diocesan structures.

#### Pastoral Kit 2026

At the Annual Clergy Discernment, Bishop Bernard Paul outlined the diocese’s continuing pastoral direction. The 2026 theme, *MJD: Diocese that Walks Together*, centres on the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 (MPC2026) and the ongoing journey of becoming a synodal diocese. Synodality is framed not as an abstract concept, but as a lived way of being Church, expressed through communion, participation, and mission.

Bishop Bernard explained these three movements: Communion reflects togetherness rooted in baptism, affirming the equal dignity of all the baptised. Participation refers to sharing time, gifts, responsibilities, and charisms according to vocation and ca-



capacity. Mission entails being sent to gather, exercising mercy and compassion, and offering healing and reconciliation in the realities of society. These are summed up simply in the diocesan articulation: Togetherness (Communion), Together (Participation), To Gather (Mission).

This pastoral direction continues MJD’s journey toward synodality, aligned with the call of the Universal Church. Synodality is understood as a process in which decisions emerge through discernment marked by listening. As far as possible, this process is practised at every level of parish, ministry, and diocesan life.

#### Synodal Conversion

Within this framework, 2026 is designated as a year of ongoing synodal conversion. This conversion extends beyond structures or programmes, touching relationships, processes, and bonds across diocesan life. Synodality

becomes visible in how the Church relates, decides, and journeys together.

The Final Document of the Synod on Synodality identifies three interrelated movements of conversion:

**Conversion of Relationships:** Moving away from isolation or siloed work in parishes and ministries toward collaboration. Clergy, religious, and laity are called to relate with mutual respect and shared responsibility, grounded in their common baptismal identity.

**Conversion of Processes:** Ensuring that planning, decision-making, and pastoral action are guided by the Holy Spirit, rooted in listening, dialogue, and communal discernment rather than efficiency or unilateral decisions.

**Conversion of Bonds:** Strengthening connections across ministries, offices, parishes, and vicariates so that they become sources of vitality, trust, and communion, rather than fragmentation or division.

Together, these movements show how the diocese grows in synodality through concrete practice rather than intention alone.

#### A shared pastoral discernment

As part of relational and procedural conversion, 2026 will see a widened and shared pastoral discernment. For the first time, pastoral ministries, diocesan offices, clergy, and collaborators will participate in a coordinated rhythm of assemblies and discernment gatherings, all leading towards a common diocesan discernment.

Key participatory bodies will hold assemblies throughout the year, including:

- Vicariate and Diocesan Pastoral Council Assemblies
- Council of Pastoral Services Assemblies
- Social Mission Assembly
- Clergy Pastoral Assembly

Each body contributes to discernment from its own pastoral experience. These gatherings are interconnected, preparing the ground for the Malacca Johore Diocese Annual Pastoral Assembly (MJD-APA) scheduled for November 24 to 26, which will unite all clergy and Parish Pastoral Council members. This shared assembly embodies the diocese’s commitment to listening, discerning, and walking together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

#### Walking together as a diocese

Vicariate and diocesan pastoral assemblies are not merely administrative; they are spaces where listening is practised, perspectives are shared, and pastoral realities are brought into dialogue with the wider life of the diocese. Through these structures, synodality gradually becomes a habitual way of proceeding rather than an occasional method.

In 2026, pastoral planning will move forward with clarity of direction, deliberately marked by synodality. The diocese advances not by accelerating programmes, but by deepening relationships, refining processes, and strengthening bonds. This orientation shapes MJD as a Church that listens attentively, decides responsibly, and walks faithfully together toward MPC2026 and the ongoing mission entrusted to her.



# Archdiocesan BEC coordinators trained to facilitate CIS

Bob Ho

PETALING JAYA: Starting February, Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) will engage in Conversation in the Spirit (CIS) during their monthly reflections and faith-sharing, focusing on listening with the heart and speaking from the heart.

To prepare, the Archdiocesan Basic Ecclesial Community Animating Team (ABECAT) held a half-day facilitation skills training on January 24 at the Church of St Ignatius. Thirty-seven leaders from BEC Coordinating Teams (BECCOT) and BEC Animating Teams (BECAT) attended to better understand and guide these conversations.

ABECAT chairperson, Rita Krishnan, emphasised the importance of invoking the Holy Spirit to “open our hearts so that we can listen with our hearts and speak from the heart.”

The Synodal Church Final Document defines conversing in the Spirit as sharing in the light of faith and seeking God’s will in an evangelical environment where the unmistakable voice of the Holy Spirit can be heard.

During a BEC gathering, members break into smaller groups for three rounds of conversation. In each round, members share for two minutes on a given focus, followed by one minute of reflection on what they heard. Round 1, the “I” perspective, is for



Fr Mitchel Joseph stressing the crucial role of BECs in strengthening the future of the Church.

individual sharing. Round 2, the “You and I” perspective, identifies common ground among participants. Round 3, the “We” perspective, allows the group to reach a consensus.

The smaller groups then reconvene as a whole BEC to share their consensus and identify a simple *Move to Action* — a concrete step to help God’s Word take root in daily life. Rita stressed that anyone could lead the conversation when guided by the Holy Spirit.

ABECAT ecclesiastical assistant, Fr

Mitchel Joseph, highlighted the vital role of BECs in fostering relationships to strengthen the Church’s future. He said, “Our Church grows as a participatory and consultative body that listens from the ground upwards, because the people are the Church and everyone has a voice.”

Fr Mitchel noted that this process begins in the BECs. “We walk together, striving for conversions of relationships because we all belong to the body of Christ. When BECs adopt a mindset of multidirectional relationships, our Church will grow.”

Addressing concerns about low turnout at BEC gatherings, he encouraged leaders, “Do not be discouraged by numbers. If we stay focused on the conversion of relationships, BECs will not — and cannot — collapse.” For members who are distant or disengaged, he urged a proactive approach: “Reach out to them for healing, just as Jesus reached out to the leper who sought healing” (Mark 1:40–42).

The training also allowed leaders to experience Conversation in the Spirit first-hand, breaking into nine groups of five to practice and present group consensus. The leaders will next gather at the Archdiocesan BECCOT-BECAT Assembly on March 14.

According to the Final Document, *Conversation in the Spirit*, while not without limitations, is a tool that enables discernment of “what the Spirit is saying to the Churches” (Rev 2:7). Its practice has inspired joy, awe and gratitude and has become a path of renewal, transforming individuals, groups and the Church.

The term “conversation” here signifies more than mere dialogue. It interweaves thought and feeling to create a shared, vital space. Conversion occurs within this exchange — an anthropological reality reflected in communities worldwide, where people gather in solidarity to address matters crucial to the life of the community. Grace brings this human experience to fruition.



## TENDER NOTICE

Church of St Francis Xavier, Petaling Jaya

The Church of St Francis Xavier (SFX), Petaling Jaya, invites **qualified and experienced contractors** to participate in a Tender Exercise for the **renovation and upgrading of the Xavier Hall Institute (XHI)** on a **turnkey / lump sum basis**.

The project includes structural repairs, roofing replacement, M&E upgrades, interior reconfiguration, green building features, drainage works, and related refurbishment as detailed in the tender documents.

### Eligibility:

CIDB registered contractors with proven experience in refurbishment or institutional building projects.

**Tender Fee:** RM 100.00 (non refundable).

Tender documents will be issued upon registration and payment.

### Submission:

Completed tenders must be submitted in accordance with the instructions provided. Late or incomplete submissions will not be considered.

### Site Visit:

A mandatory site briefing will be held for all registered tenderers. The Church reserves the right to accept or reject any tender and is not bound to award to the lowest bidder.

### Registration & Enquiries:

Tender Secretariat  
Church of St Francis Xavier, Petaling Jaya  
Email: [reception@sfx.com.my](mailto:reception@sfx.com.my)  
Phone: 012 3211776 (WhatsApp only)

Tender Dates: Tenders will be ready for collection by 8th February 2026 and tender submission date will be 24th February 3 pm.

## Blood donation drive at Nilai parish

NILAI: The community of the Church of St Theresa (CSTN) turned an ‘ordinary Sunday’ into an extraordinary act of giving when 45 people stepped forward to donate blood at the CSTN cafeteria, in a drive organised by the Parish Integral Human Development Ministry (PIHDM) recently.

For many, it was their first time. From young adults to seniors, parishioners and friends from different backgrounds formed a steady line — each one answering a need that is often unseen, but always urgent: the need for safe, reliable blood supply for patients undergoing surgery, treatment, or emergency care.

Supporting the drive was the blood donation team from the Kuala Pilah General Hospital, Negeri Sembilan, who facilitated registration, screening, and collection, ensuring the process was safe, orderly, and welcoming for both seasoned donors and newcomers.

The turnout reflected the diversity of the CSTN family and the wider community — people of different ages and walks of life coming together under one purpose.

Among the donors was seminarian Edmund Low, whose presence added to the spirit of solidarity that marked the day. His participation, alongside donors, underscored a shared message: service is not reserved for the “experienced” or the “brave” — it is often embraced step-by-step, as people choose to show up.

First-time donors, in particular, brought a distinct energy to the drive: a mix of nerves and determination, supported by friendly reassurance from parish peers and medical staff.



Some members of the parish community who came forward to donate blood.

While blood donation drives are often described as public health initiatives, PIHDM approached this one as a community practice — an opportunity for parish life to extend beyond the walls of worship into the everyday realities of human need.

In that sense, the drive carried forward Sunday’s response in a practical and powerful way. “Here I am” was not just spoken; it was enacted. And “I come to do Your will” was not confined to words, but translated into a gift that sustains life. **Aileen Anthony**

# CDM parishioners begin journey rooted in mercy, renewed in mission

Sharon Chandra

PENANG: “Relax, reset, and re-boot.” These encouraging words were offered by parish priest Fr Michael Raymond, OFM Cap, to 54 participants as they began their weekend retreat at Stella Maris.

Core ministry leaders and parishioners of the Church of Divine Mercy (CDM), ranging from young adults to those in their 70s, came together, representing a cross-section of the parish. A sense of anticipation filled the air as participants prepared to rediscover the joy of their calling: *Rooted in mercy, renewed in mission.*

Over the course of the beachside retreat, laughter, fellowship, deep sharing and meaningful dialogue marked the group’s time together, as participants reconnected with one another and with their faith.

Day one focused on an inward journey, centring on “discipleship.”



Leaders participating in an activity with parish priest, Fr Michael Raymond OFM Cap, looking on.

Participants were encouraged to root their identity firmly in Christ. Fr Michael highlighted the need for balance between “being” and “doing,” stressing that all action should flow from a deep sense of being anchored in the Lord. One participant summed up the session: “Being a disciple means sitting at the foot of

Christ. It’s a good way to start 2026 by looking at ourselves first before reaching out to others. We shouldn’t remain stagnant; seekers must keep growing.”

One of the most engaging sessions focused on rediscovering the charisms God has given each person. Fr Michael highlighted that

there are many charisms — 24 in total — including administration, creative communication, hospitality, teaching, leadership, healing, wisdom, evangelism and encouragement. He noted that charisms allow us to achieve and contribute beyond our natural abilities, always with an other-centred focus for the good of others.

Later, presenter Carmelita Dass shared her personal faith journey with remarkable vulnerability. She spoke candidly about early stumbles and a reluctance to fully surrender to God’s will. Yet, as she immersed herself in Scripture and intentionally lived out God’s purpose, she discovered her true calling and her identity in Christ. Her story and steadfast faith inspired many participants.

The retreat also offered participants time between sessions to mingle, rebuild friendships, enjoy quiet reflection, take walks and pray — allowing space to internalise the

discussions of the day.

On day two, the focus shifted to Mission and Vision, challenging participants to step beyond their comfort zones. During small group breakouts, the Conversation in the Spirit method was used. Groups were first tasked with crafting a mutually agreed-upon Vision statement for the parish, followed by a Mission statement, which they then presented to the larger group for reflection and discussion.

Dora Thuy Anh, 26, a young Vietnamese parishioner, shared her faith journey. “Before, when faced with challenges, the old me would have asked, ‘Why me?’ But the new me doesn’t ask... I can accept.” She added that she was delighted to be part of the parish retreat and particularly appreciated seeing so many differently-abled parishioners actively participating. Two visually challenged youth also joined in the two-day retreat.

## St Anthony’s parish charts new initiatives for 2026

KUALA LUMPUR: The Church of St Anthony held its Parish Pastoral Assembly (PPA) on January 25, gathering 85 participants for a day dedicated to prayer, reflection, and planning the parish’s mission in the year ahead. The event brought together parish ministry members and Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC) coordinators, who engaged in meaningful dialogue about faith, community, and the future direction of the parish.

The assembly began with prayer and Scripture reflection led by Melissa Chiew. Participants were invited to reflect on the question: “How have I grown spiritually in the past year?” This moment of quiet introspection encouraged attendees to pause and consider their personal journeys of faith, while also recognising the collective mission of the parish community. The prayerful start set a contemplative tone, reminding everyone that the work of the parish must always be rooted in spiritual growth and reliance on

God’s guidance.

Thnen, Gregory Pravin, a member of the Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Team, delivered a presentation on the overall direction of the Church in Malaysia. He highlighted preparations for the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026, scheduled for September, and explained how local parish initiatives contribute to the broader vision of the Church nationwide. His presentation provided valuable context, situating the parish’s efforts within the larger ecclesial movement and encouraging participants to see their work as part of a united mission across Malaysia.

After a short break, participants engaged in small group discussions using the “Conversation in the Spirit” method. Each group focused on one of four key areas identified as priorities: family, church, society, and ecology. The guiding question was: “What concrete steps can we take as a parish to further grow in these areas?” This approach encouraged deep listening, discernment,

and collaborative dialogue, ensuring that every voice was heard and valued.

The discussions yielded several practical and forward-looking initiatives. Among them were the creation of support structures for individuals and families facing difficulties, such as counselling services and community support groups. Another group suggested exploring the use of solar energy to reduce the parish’s environmental footprint, reflecting a growing awareness of ecological responsibility. Participants also emphasised the importance of inter-faith dialogue, proposing outreach to neighbouring religious communities to organise common activities that foster mutual understanding and unity. Other suggestions included strengthening parish ministries, enhancing catechetical programmes, and expanding outreach efforts to serve the wider society.

The assembly also addressed matters of parish administration. Maria Scholastica, from the Parish Finance



Fr Michel Dass, assistant parish priest of the Church of St Anthony, observes the discussions.

Committee, presented the audited accounts for 2024. Her report underscored the parish’s commitment to transparency, accountability, and responsible stewardship of resources. By openly sharing the financial status of the parish, the committee reinforced trust and encouraged continued support from parishioners.

The day concluded with an address by parish priest Fr Dr Clarence Devadass who reminded

participants to keep Jesus Christ at the centre of all parish activities. He urged everyone to work together in a spirit of love, saying, “Love that forgives, love that unites, and love that serves must be the foundation of our parish life.” His words served as both encouragement and challenge, calling the community to embody the Gospel in practical ways and to remain steadfast in their mission of service.

## Commitment ceremony highlights catechism orientation



Students painting their palms to print on paper symbolising their commitment.

AYER ITAM, Penang: The Risen Christ Catholic Church welcomed about 30 catechism students and their parents to its catechism student orientation in early January, heralding the start of an exciting new catechetical year.

The session began with an opening address by Friar Crispus Mosinoh, OFM, the parish priest, who shared words of encouragement and appreciation for the parents, students, and catechists. He gently reminded parents that they are the primary catechists of their children, with the parish catechists walking alongside them in support, and highlighted the importance of working together as a faith community.

Following this, Mary, the head of catechism, presented the catechetical roadmap for the year. She outlined the objectives, key activities, and expectations for students and parents, highlighting the importance of collaboration between families and the parish in guiding children to grow closer to God.

Parents were then given a tour of the facilities, including the newly launched “The Oak Tree” room as well as the classrooms used for sessions. This provided parents with a better understanding of the learning environment prepared for their children.

The orientation also offered an opportunity for parents and students to

meet the catechists, fostering a sense of familiarity and partnership as they embark on the year ahead together.

A meaningful highlight of the programme was the Commitment ceremony, during which the students expressed their dedication to their faith journey. Each student printed their hand on a large piece of paper, symbolising their commitment to strive to deepen their relationship with God through classes and parish activities.

The orientation concluded on a joyful and hopeful note, with parents, students, and catechists united in their shared mission of faith formation for the coming year. **Ezekiel Vincent**



Edwin Damien Tan

KUALA LUMPUR: The Catholic Lawyers Society (CLS) of Kuala Lumpur celebrated their 32nd Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit, commonly referred to as the “Red Mass,” on January 24, at the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist.

The Eucharistic celebration, held annually in January, saw the presence of CLS members and other practitioners of the legal profession, chambering students, legal professionals, judicial members, lecturers, family, friends, and the Catholic faithful from all over. An estimated 95 members of the legal fraternity joyfully shared in this celebration.

The principal celebrant was Cardinal Sebastian Francis, joined by concelebrants Archbishop Julian Leow, ecclesiastical assistant to the CLS, Fr Gregory Chan and the cathedral’s parish priest, Fr Gerard Theraviam.

In his homily, the Cardinal shared three key messages, beginning with the “red” of the Red Mass, which represents both the blood of martyrs and the Holy Spirit — a meaning he received from the late Cardinal

# Let the Holy Spirit advocate through you



Members of the legal fraternity at the Red Mass.

Soter Fernandez and Pope Francis. Cardinal Sebastian reminded lawyers that the Holy Spirit is our advocate and encouraged everyone to “leave the upper room” this Pentecost, bringing the Spirit’s presence into the world.

The second set of messages highlighted the legacy of Pope Francis, particularly his emphasis on universality — not uniformity, but a vision of unity in diversity and equality. Cardinal Sebastian explained that this vision is rooted in the Trinity, where *Dilexi te* (“for I have loved you”) is closely linked to justice. Promoting unity, embracing diversity, ensuring equality, and protecting the poor are all expressions of justice that embody the *Dilexi te* message.

The prelate then shared the third set of messages, drawing on the example of contemporary saints such

as St Carlo, and Malaysian-affiliated saints like St Francis Xavier, who were visionaries and dreamers. He urged members of the legal fraternity, as they *turun padang*, to also be visionaries and dreamers, cultivating a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit, trusting that God will bring their dreams and visions to fulfilment in His time.

Cardinal Sebastian concluded with a final message, urging the legal fraternity to welcome the Holy Spirit — the Spirit of Truth, who knows all things — and to earnestly pray, *Maranatha: Come, Spirit, come*.

At the conclusion of Mass, CLS President Kevin De Rozario thanked the celebrants and all members of the faithful who participated in the celebration. He then reflected on *Dilexi te*, highlighting that as judges, lawyers, and officers of the court,

we are accountable not only to the law and society, but also to God. He emphasised that justice must go beyond mere technical compliance or procedural correctness, serving to uphold the rule of law and protect against oppression and abuse. He also spoke on the complementary relationship between justice and mercy.

He concluded his speech by emphasising that the law is neither an instrument of exclusion nor of cruelty. Serving the most vulnerable is not optional but central to the vocation of a Catholic lawyer. Mercy, he noted, does not weaken justice — it perfects it: justice without mercy becomes oppression, and mercy without justice is without truth.

Archbishop Julian then shared a few closing words, noting that the concept of “truth” can be elusive, and that lawyers will often face

challenging debates about how to balance mercy, compassion and the pursuit of truth. He reminded the legal fraternity that in navigating this difficult balancing act, the Holy Spirit will be their guide. Reflecting on the question “What would Jesus do?” can help in decision-making, enabling them to seek that perfect balance with the Spirit’s guidance.

The archbishop also expressed his gratitude to the lawyers in attendance and encouraged them to contribute to society in their own unique ways, especially in serving the voiceless and vulnerable. He reminded all present that they are loved by God first and foremost, and that this love should inspire them to share compassion and care with others, particularly the last, the lost, the least, and the lonely.

This annual Votive Mass was coordinated and led by members of the CLS. The CLS hopes that all its members will continue to support the Society’s important causes, programmes and initiatives, and warmly invites new members to join in and support these efforts.

The Red Mass concluded with a group photo at the cathedral chancel, bringing together all the lawyers and celebrants, before everyone enjoyed a warm fellowship meal.

A big thank you from the CLS to all who joined us — we look forward to seeing you at our future events!

## CPFA volunteers gear up for impactful Prison Ministry

KAJANG: As 2026 unfolds, the Catholic Prison Fellowship of Association (CPFA) is ready to bring faith, hope and compassion to prisoners and their families, building on the strong foundation laid during its 2025 Induction Training Programme. This six-day formation journey prepared 43 new volunteers with the knowledge, values and resilience needed to serve effectively within Malaysia’s prison system.

Held over three weekends between July and September last year, the training combined spiritual for-

mation, practical skills, and ethical guidance to equip volunteers for meaningful engagement.

The programme began with sessions on foundational understanding and professional conduct. CPFA president, Gnadass Amaldass, introduced volunteers to the organisation’s vision, mission and structure, including permit applications and sub-committee roles. Perzeus James guided participants on professional boundaries, confidentiality and prison protocols. Senior volunteers Benedict Savarimuthu, Sandra and Nicholas Jacob explored

*Sharing the Gospel*, Women’s Prison Ministry and pro-bono financial services, providing a holistic view of ministry opportunities.

Midway through the training, volunteers deepened their spiritual and moral formation. Dr Grace Annammal drew inspiration from the lives of saints such as Sts Peter and Paul, connecting their lessons to contemporary ministry. CPFA secretary, Jocyelina Geraldine, explained constitutional and regulatory requirements, while Gnadass highlighted the importance of empathy in engaging prisoners. CPFA vice president, Audrey Freeman, inspired volunteers with her session, *Love Without Bars*, emphasising that spiritual readiness and compassion are central to their work. Personal testimonies, including Tommy Voon’s moving account of a death-

row prisoner encounter, reinforced the transformative power of prison ministry.

The final days focused on practical skills and readiness for ministry. Dr Flora Anthonisamy and Dr George Decruz trained volunteers on prison protocols, communication strategies, structured sharing techniques and the use of reflective materials.

Perzeus concluded with a session on spiritual warfare, equipping volunteers to navigate challenges with resilience and faith. Guest speakers Eric and Thomas from Malaysian Care shared insights from prison visits and halfway homes, while Dr Gary Liew, AOHD director, delivered a talk, *Seek Ye First*, on servant leadership and putting faith into action.

The programme concluded with

words of encouragement from the CPFA core team and a group photo to mark the induction of the new volunteers. Following the training, the volunteers have already participated in a half-day exposure programme at halfway homes in the Klang Valley, gaining first-hand experience of post-prison reintegration and putting their formation into practice. With permits now being processed, they are fully prepared to begin prison visits in 2026.

Looking ahead, CPFA’s new volunteers are poised to bring compassion, faith and practical support to the prison community. With thorough preparation, ongoing mentoring and a focus on holistic care, the fellowship is ready to make a meaningful difference this year — embodying hope, restoration and service in every visit.

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# Vatican cautions online theological claims

VATICAN: The Vatican's doctrine chief warned that blogs and online commentators increasingly claim a theological authority they do not possess, narrowing the Church's ability to holistically engage faith and reality.

Opening the plenary assembly of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith on January 27, Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernández (*pic*), dicastery prefect, said theologians risk "losing the breath of our perspective" when their work becomes narrowly focused on isolated topics.

"But the issue is even more serious since today, on any blog, anyone — even without having studied much theology — can express his or her opinion and condemn others

as if speaking *ex cathedra*," or with infallibility, he said.

Fernández framed the problem as a failure to recognise the limits of human knowledge.

"The more science and technology advance, the more we must keep alive the awareness of our limits and our need for God, so as not to fall into a terrible deception," he said. Fernández, who has often been a target of Catholic blogs since his appointment as prefect in 2023, urged dicastery members to acknowledge those limits, invoke God's guidance in illuminating them and remain open to the perspectives of others.

The cardinal cited Pope Leo XIV's October homily for the Jubi-

lee of Synodal Teams and Participatory Bodies, in which the pope called for "a Church that does not close in on itself, but remains attentive to God so that it can similarly listen to everyone."

Several Catholic blogs have been sharply critical of synodality, the shift toward a more participatory and listening Church championed by Pope Francis, often arguing that it risks drifting from Catholic doctrine and blurring distinctions between clergy and laity in Church decision-making.

Fernández's call for the dicastery members to "reflect, think, and analyse reality, but while also listening to others" echoed the language of synodality promoted by the pope.



Pope Leo XIV, who promoted synodality as a diocesan bishop in Peru and later participated in the Synod of Bishops on synodality as a Vatican official, has continued his predecessor's focus on pushing for a more participatory Church.

And that direction appears to have broad support among the world's cardinals.

At an extraordinary consistory convened by Pope Leo in early

January, the 170 participating cardinals selected synodality as one of the priorities to be developed during the first two years of his pontificate. They also chose to focus on the Church's mission in light of Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, sidelining discussion of curial reform and the liturgy in a move criticised by traditionalist Catholic blogs. **Justin McLellan, NCR**

## Filipino bishops urged to confront corruption, rights abuses

MANILA: Leading human rights activists in the Philippines have urged Catholic Church leaders to confront political corruption and human rights abuses as they prepare for possible dialogue with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

The calls followed remarks by Archbishop Gilbert Garcera of Lipa, newly elected president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), who said on January 26 that the bishops were "open to dialogue" with the president.

Garcera, 66, assumed office on December 1, 2025, succeeding Cardinal Pablo Virgilio David, and presided over the CBCP's 131st plenary assembly in Manila. Speaking to the media for the first time as conference president, he said the bishops were willing to



The Philippines bishops are seen at a function during their 131st plenary assembly from January 23-26, 2026 in Manila. (*ucanews.com*)

discuss "anything that would be good, especially for the Filipino people," without outlining specific agenda items.

Former lawmaker and rights ac-

tivist, Neri Colmenares, urged the bishops to press Marcos on banning political dynasties, which he said enable corruption and the concentration of wealth. He also

called for freedom of information legislation and reforms to make the national budget more transparent and accountable.

In a country where Catholics make up about 80 percent of the population, the Church plays a crucial role in defending people's rights, Colmenares said. "When people are oppressed, the Church is oppressed," he said on Jan 27.

Renato Reyes, president of the activist group Bayan, said any dialogue should focus on corruption, peace, and genuine economic development, warning against allowing talks to be used "to escape accountability" or "whitewash" alleged abuses. He added that bishops should consult widely before engaging the president.

Kiko Aquino Dee, co-convenor of Tindig Pilipinas, said the bishops

should prioritise combating corruption and addressing hunger and malnutrition, while also calling for a Truth Commission to investigate killings linked to the war on drugs under former president Rodrigo Duterte. Former CBCP president Cardinal David had made a similar appeal to Marcos in late 2025.

Dee also urged the Church to help the nation reckon with the legacy of the Marcos dictatorship, which, according to Amnesty International, saw thousands killed and tens of thousands imprisoned, alongside the large-scale theft of public funds.

While the Church is "one voice among many" in a democracy, Dee said, it remains "a loud voice" with both the right and responsibility to speak on issues of national importance. **ucanews.com**

## Priesthood is service, not status

INDONESIA: The Archbishop of Medan warned newly ordained Capuchin priests against clericalism during an ordination Mass in Berastagi, North Sumatra, Indonesia, urging them to understand priesthood as service rather than status.

Archbishop Kornelius Sipayung (*pic*) ordained the priests during a solemn Eucharistic celebration at St Francis of Assisi Church in Sempajaya, Berastagi Parish, a two-hour drive from the capital of North Sumatra, on January 24.

The ordination drew a large gathering of clergy, religious, lay faithful, and representatives of local government.

In his homily, Archbishop Kornelius cautioned against clericalism, which he described as a distorted understanding of ordination as a rise in rank or power.

"When ordination is seen as status, a priest may feel superior and resistant to correction. Ordination is not meant to exalt oneself, but to follow Christ who washed feet and gave His life," he said.

He warned that clericalism of-

ten enters subtly through comfort, privileges, and everyday choices that distance priests from authentic service. He also cautioned against the temptation of power and popularity, particularly in the era of social media.

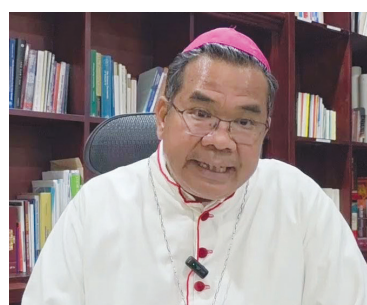
"Popularity becomes dangerous when it replaces Christ as the source of a priest's identity," he said.

The prelate emphasised that the faithful belong to God and must never become objects of control or manipulation.

"A true shepherd remains with the people because he loves them. This is the test of priesthood today: remaining faithful when ministry becomes heavy and the cross is truly felt," he said.

Archbishop Kornelius said the Church's joy lies not simply in an increase in priestly numbers, but in the free and conscious self-offering of those ordained.

"Today the Church rejoices not because the number of priests increases, but because eight men stand here, offering their lives to serve," he said.



He stressed that priestly ministry must flow from a deep interior spiritual life, citing St. Paul's exhortation to the elders of Ephesus.

"The order is crucial: first take care of yourselves, then care for the flock. A shepherd who neglects his own life will, sooner or later, wound the flock," he warned.

As a fellow Capuchin Franciscan, the archbishop underscored that priesthood is not a position of privilege but a vocation of humble service. He said Capuchin priests are called to embody the spirituality of St Francis of Assisi through simplicity of life, closeness to the people, and solidarity with the poor and marginalised.

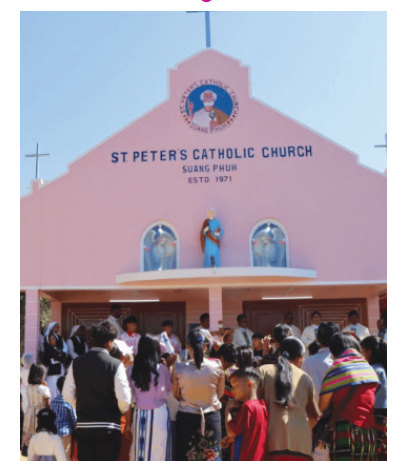
"A Capuchin priest must live simply, walk with the people, and become a bearer of peace," he said. **LICAS News**

## Last Catholic village in Manipur marks 50 years

MANIPUR: The Catholic community of Suangphu Village, along the Indo-Myanmar border and regarded as the last Catholic village in Manipur, marked 50 years of faith with the dedication of the newly built St. Peter Catholic Church on January 27. The celebration carried the theme: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5).

The dedication ceremony and Holy Eucharist were presided over by Fr Paul Ngaoni, Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Imphal, and celebrated by eight priests from India and Myanmar. Religious sisters and hundreds of faithful from both countries, particularly from Cikha Parish in Myanmar, joined the event, highlighting a cross-border bond of faith.

In his homily, Fr Ngaoni reminded the community that through Baptism, every Christian becomes a temple of God and a dwelling of the Holy Spirit. He called the jubilee a celebration of God's faithfulness and urged the faithful to live in uni-



ty, witnessing the Gospel through their daily lives.

For nearly five decades, the villagers had dreamed of having their own church — a dream realised this year. Administratively, St Peter Catholic Church now comes under St Mary's Behiang Mission Centre, entrusted to the MCBS Fathers since 2025.

The village has produced three religious vocations, reflecting the community's spiritual fruits. **RVA**



# From arrival to autonomy

*This is the fifth article in our series on the Catholic Church in Malaysia.*

*In this instalment, we take a moment to recap the key stories, people, and milestones covered in the previous four articles.*

## Richard Chia

### Christianity arrives in Malacca

Christianity first touched Malaysian shores in 1511, arriving with the Portuguese fleet that captured Malacca. Among the sailors were eight Catholic chaplains, entrusted with the souls of Portuguese settlers and officials. Their mission soon stretched beyond their own people. As Gujarati, Chinese, and Hindu merchants arrived seeking fortune, the chaplains quietly planted seeds of faith in a bustling, multicultural port.

### Dark days under the Dutch

The 17th century brought hardship. Dutch forces banned Catholic worship, destroyed churches, and forbade gatherings. The once-vibrant community shrank, and missionary work ground to a near halt. Faith survived, quietly, under the radar, waiting for a new dawn.

### A new dawn in Penang

That dawn came with the British in 1786. Penang became a hub for immigrants, offering fertile ground for the Church. By 1841, the Apostolic Vicariate of Malaya was established under the French Missions Étrangères de Paris (MEP), marking a new chapter of organised mission work.

### Borneo: A mission takes root

Farther east, Rajah James Brooke invited missionaries to Borneo in the 1840s to help develop the land and engage local communities. Early French efforts struggled against isolation and hardship, and were eventually abandoned. In 1880, Rome entrusted the mission to the Mill Hill Missionary Fathers. Fr Thomas Jackson, second Prefect Apostolic, arrived with Frs Aloysius Goossens, Edmund Dunn, and Daniel Kilty. Resources were scarce, but European support enabled schools and orphan care.

Arriving in Kuching in 1881, the missionaries were warmly received by Rajah Charles Brooke, who granted ten acres for mission work and directed their focus to Upper Sarawak and Rejang. With temporary lodging in a government bungalow, they quickly ventured into the interior, laying the foundations of the Church's future.

### Steady growth under Dunn

Leadership passed to Fr Edmund Dunn in 1897. A seasoned missionary, he toured stations, assessed needs, and delegated finances to focus on pastoral expansion. Borneo was divided into four quadrants — Sarawak, Baram-Labuan, Rejang, and North Borneo. Growth was steady: Rejang expanded with the Sibu mission and out-



*The Church of St Peter is the oldest active Roman Catholic church in Malaysia constructed in 1710 by Portuguese residents during the Dutch era of occupation of Malacca.*

reach to Chinese immigrants, while North Borneo engaged Kadazan communities, establishing strong foundations for decades to come.

### From peril to perseverance

Meanwhile, in Malaya, the Diocese of Malacca, re-established in 1888 under Monsignor Edward Gasnier, MEP, grew steadily. The Church faced its ultimate trial during World War II and the Japanese occupation, when churches closed, clergy

were viewed with suspicion, and schools and hospitals operated under strict control. Yet faith endured.

By 1954, the diocese had blossomed into a vibrant archdiocese with 44 local priests, 60 MEP missionaries, six Jesuits, six Redemptorists, and a Catholic population of around 105,000. From eight chaplains in Malacca to a Church spanning Malaya and Borneo, the journey had been long and challenging — but marked by unflinching courage, hope, and lasting devotion.

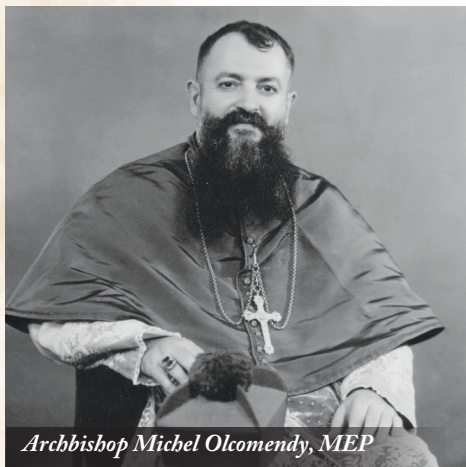
## Post-war renewal and the first local bishops

After the turmoil of the war, the Catholic Church in Malaya entered a new chapter in the 1950s under the leadership of Bishop Michel Olcomendy, MEP, who became the fifth bishop of Malacca in 1947. Born and ordained in France on May 29, 1926, Fr Olcomendy journeyed to Malaya that September, stepping into a parish in Kuala Lumpur serving predominantly Tamil-speaking Catholics. Determined to connect with his flock, he quickly began learning both English and Tamil, showing from the start his

dedication to ministry through understanding and communication.

After a decade of service in Malaya, he was assigned to the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes in Singapore. There, his fluency in Tamil allowed him to reach Tamil-speaking Catholics in the city and across the rubber plantations of Johore. His devotion and leadership did not go unnoticed, and in 1937 he was appointed Vicar-General of the Diocese of Malacca. Following the death of Bishop Adrien Devals, MEP, in 1945, Fr Olcomendy was consecrated Bishop of Malacca in 1947 at the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd in Singapore.

Bishop Olcomendy's vision went beyond pastoral care. He played a vital role in social development and nation-building, fostering communities of faith and service. In 1953, when the Diocese of Malacca was elevated to an archdiocese, he became Archbishop Olcomendy. He invited several religious orders to extend their mission to Singapore, including the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM), the Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood (FMDM), the Marist Brothers, the Franciscan Friars, and the Fathers of the Sacred Heart.



*Archbishop Michel Olcomendy, MEP*



*Archbishop Michel Olcomendy, MEP with the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM) at the opening of the Maris Stella Vocation School, Singapore. (photo/Catholic News SG)*



*Bishop Dominic Vendargon after his consecration on August 21, 1955.*

He also encouraged the growth of lay movements and community organisations. Under his guidance, the Society of St Vincent de Paul (SVDP) flourished, along with guilds for Catholic teachers, nurses, and doctors. Youth movements such as the Catholic Young Men's Association (YMCA), Young Christian Students (YCS), and Young Christian Workers (YCW), as well as the Legion of Mary, took root and strengthened the Church's presence among families and young people.

The rapid growth of the Catholic population soon made it clear that one bishop could no longer oversee the entire diocese. In February 1955, the Archdiocese of Malacca was restructured into three sees: the Metropolitan Archdiocese of Malacca-Singapore, where Archbishop Olcomendy remained; the Suffragan See of Penang, led by Bishop Francis Chan, *pic*; and the Suffragan See of Kuala Lumpur, under Bishop Dominic Vendargon.

For the first time in Malaysian Church history, local bishops were appointed by

Pope Pius XII. Bishop Dominic Vendargon, ordained in 1934 after training at St Francis Xavier's Seminary in Singapore and College General in Penang, and Bishop Francis Chan, ordained in 1939 after studying at College General and serving in both Malaya and Singapore, represented a new era of local leadership.

Both bishops played key roles on the global stage, participating as Council Fathers in the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). Their contributions laid the foundation for much of the Church's life today: promoting active lay participation, fostering Christian unity, engaging in interfaith dialogue, and strengthening the Church's presence in society. The appointment of these local leaders marked a turning point — a moment when the Malaysian Church truly came into its own, rooted in both faith and local identity.

### Next: The Church in Peninsular Malaysia

*This series is not intended as an academic or historical study, nor does it attempt to provide an exhaustive account of events, but rather offers a narrative reflection on the Church's lived experience. All historical information in this series has been taken from various sources.*

# Rediscovering the relevance of BECs

Alice Tan

The article *From church doors to open hearts* by Fr Dr Clarence Devadass (HERALD, January 16), helped me ponder over the importance of BECs, at least in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, if not the Malaysian Church. There seems to be more focus on activities in parish centres than BECs these days. Rapid urbanisation and ageing populations, especially in cities, could augur a revival and growth of BECs, making our parishes into “communion of communities,” as stated in the 2025-2026 Vision and Mission Statement of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.

The building of a sense of belonging to a caring parish community and being actively engaged in building a better society could be effectively carried out by BECs.

## Building relationships among BEC members

BEC members could meet for weekly online reflection and Rosary sessions beyond the monthly in-person prayer and reflection gatherings. They could take the seniors and the elderly for meal outings in small groups. They could also do personal home visits to the homebound. These activities need not be organised events by BEC coordinators but simple and spontaneous, like what ordinary families do.

The BEC is seen and experienced as one big family where building authentic, loving relationships is key. BECs could welcome those who seek to belong to the parish community. BEC members generally live within walking distance from one another in residential areas of landed homes or apartment or condominium complexes. This makes it easier for home visits or meal outings for chit chats. These are informal interactions beyond the monthly gatherings and other organised BEC activities.

## BEC members doing mission together

Jesus, in His public ministry, showed people the way to build a better world for all and therein lies the salvation of humanity. He reached out to the poor and the marginalised in healing and teaching ... His call to love people as He has loved, unconditionally, fulfilled the



St John BEC SS2, Church of St Francis Xavier, Petaling Jaya

teachings of the prophets and He lived His teachings in total obedience to His Father, which led to the triumph of the Cross.

As Christians then, we are called to walk in the footsteps of Jesus in bringing about change for the better in society. Based on the prevailing situation in the nation, two important aspects of continuing the work of Jesus are that of being peacemakers in building friendships, and uplifting the poor, the elderly, the vulnerable, migrants and refugees.

BEC members could build friendships with fellow Malaysians who live in the same neighbourhood to foster mutual understanding and respect and hence strengthen the fragile bonds unity. One among various ways of doing so is to be actively engaged in helping to make their neighbourhoods liveable, sustainable and climate resilient. People get to know one another better by working together for the common good.

Many parishes are already organised in their outreach to poor families, migrants and refugees. BECs could lend their presence in visits to homes for the elderly. The populations in cities of the Klang Valley are ageing and care for the elderly has become an important area of concern.

## BEC members growing in faith together

In essence, BEC members grow in friendship with one another and with fellow Malaysians in their neighbourhood and reach out to those in need, like the elderly in care homes, and hence grow in personal relationship with

Jesus as He walks alongside them, guiding them with His love and His grace. Building friendships with neighbours and caring for the needy are tough calls but doable by the grace of God. Praying together for guidance, wisdom and strength and perseverance would bring the members closer together and to God.

Furthermore, reaching out to the needy and seeing their resilience and trust in God helps us grow in faith as we are reminded in *Dilexite* that we are evangelised by the poor. The poor helps us grow in holiness, in personal relationship with God in Jesus.

## Vision and Mission statement of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur

In the Vision and Mission Statement of the KL Archdiocese published in the official Catholic Directory 2025-2026, BECs are key in carrying out the Mission of the Archdiocese.

### Our Vision

*to be rooted in the Communion of the Trinity and among ourselves to be in Solidarity with the whole human family and creation. The Vision leads us to live out our vocation at the service of the Kingdom of God.*

### Our Mission

*to Witness to Christ through Basic Ecclesial Communities and transform our parishes into a “communion of communities” to Proclaim the Kingdom of God through Dialogue with cultures, religions and the poor. For us, this means journeying together towards ‘A New Way of Being Church’.*

## The apparent lack of focus given to the growth of BECs

It appears that emphasis is given to growing ministries at parish centres rather than facilitating the growth of BECs in the residential neighbourhoods of the parishes of the archdiocese. According to the concept of the parish being a “communion of communities”, there is collaboration between the various ministries coordinated from the parish centre with the BECs at the base. Certainly, the younger members of BECs could participate in the various parish ministries based at the parish centres. The parish ministries could provide the formation to BEC members for the work at the grassroots that could more effectively be carried out by BEC members like building friendships to foster unity and social cohesion.

A member of the National Unity Advisory Council of the National Unity Ministry highlighted the lack of communication and listening skills as major barriers to unity. Formation in these areas could be given to BEC members by the parish ministry concerned. A collaboration with the National Unity Ministry would facilitate the process.

While waiting for programmes to be set up, BEC members could be encouraged to be active members of their Residents’ Association, *Kawasan Rukun Tetangga*, Joint Management Body etc. BEC members need to move out of themselves to make a difference in the world around them. (ref: ‘Unity crucial for social cohesion’, *The Star* <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2026/01/02/unity-crucial-for-social-cohesion>)

The building of BECs began in 1976, almost 50 years ago. BEC coordinators are faith community leaders, the ‘bridge’ between the priests and the parish centre, with the laity at the base or grassroots. They need continual formation. Leaders who are ageing need to have successors. If BECs are seen as fundamental and essential for the laity in communitarian living, growth in faith together and carrying out the mission of fostering unity and social cohesion and uplifting the poor and those at the peripheries, then structures for their sustenance and growth need to be maintained as the change of parish priests takes place every few years.

## The relevance of BECs in attaining objectives of the *Perjalanan Salib*

The BECs are relevant to the objectives of the *Perjalanan Salib* which began in April 2025 and will culminate with the Malaysia Pastoral Convention in September 2026.

The following text was shared with the BEC coordinators of a parish:

“The *Perjalanan Salib* embodies the call to accompaniment that begins at the grassroots. The *Salib* does not remain fixed in one place; it journeys to the faithful, reaching out especially to those on the peripheries. The hope is that communities with greater access and stronger foundations will walk with the *Salib*, journeying alongside others - listening authentically, and celebrating together. This way, the *Perjalanan Salib* becomes a living sign of communion, participation, and mission.”

The journey of the *Salib* translated to the level of a parish could look like this; the journey does not only take place symbolically in the one week that the *Salib* is in the parish but is lived in the months and years afterwards in realising the vision and mission of the parish, the archdiocese and the Malaysian Church.

The *Perjalanan Salib*, which begins at

the grassroots (the BECs), is a call for the accompaniment of the young and the able among the BEC members to walk together with the very young and the elderly, and with those in the peripheries which include the differently abled, the poor, the migrants and the refugees, who are Catholics, living in the parish territory “in communion, participation and mission”.

The fundamental mission of the BECs, mission being an outward movement of interaction, engagement and collaboration with fellow Malaysians in one’s neighbourhood, city, state and nation, is to build the nation for a better future for all.

It’s a journey which moves from the BECs as grassroots to the larger Society for the common good. It’s a journey together undertaken by everyone, every member of the BECs, as even the elderly who are homebound can participate by praying. The very young could be educated on what their uncles and aunties are doing and why they are putting in these efforts.

Jesus walks with the parish in the *Perjalanan Salib*, from the grassroots of the parish to the grassroots of society, to bring about change for the better for all. When

the change takes place at the grassroots, the government and lawmakers will also change and put the *rakyat* and the nation first in representing the *rakyat*, enacting laws in the state assemblies or parliament and in governing the states and the nation.

The cities of the Klang Valley are highly urbanised and I think that BECs are important for communitarian living and growth in faith and service for the nation and the world which are suffering in so many ways. It is hard work building BECs as we have a demographic mix of individuals and families, not like-minded individuals as in specific parish ministries but they are real life communities which help people grow to become more loving and caring that others can see Jesus in them. As people age and live out their lives in their residential neighbourhoods, these are the spaces where they could still make a difference for a better world.

I remember that Fr Clarence mentioned BECs and Basic Human Communities (BHCs) in the regional report presented during the dialogue of the representatives of the regional bishops’ conferences with the Holy Father Pope Leo XIV at the Vatican late



(Church of St Aloysius, Mantin facebook)

last year. Pope Leo has had experience with BECs as a young missionary priest in Peru. That is a plus for BECs.

Alice is a parishioner of the Church of St Francis Xavier, Petaling Jaya.

Christopher Kushi

On January 18, the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Butterworth, hosted a gathering to celebrate the life of Sr Colette Selvam IJ, affectionately remembered as the “Mother Teresa of Mak Mandin.” The event brought the community together to honour her life of steadfast faith and deep impact on countless lives.

The initiative was led by Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang, who highlighted Sr Colette’s lasting influence within the Diocese of Penang. Recalling her from his days as a young priest in Seremban, when he gave talks on human formation to her students, Cardinal Sebastian described her as “baptised in the Holy Spirit.” He encouraged sharing her story widely, saying, “As Asians, being storytellers, we must tell her story to our people.”

The gathering brought together fellow IJ sisters — Sr Gertrude Tan, Sr Amy Sam, Sr Marie Angele Phang, Sr Rita Lim — along with past volunteers, former students, and many others eager to hear and share her legacy. The atmosphere was one of inspiration and remembrance, filled with personal stories and testimonies of a life lived fully for God and neighbour.

Sr Colette was called home to the Lord on November 19, 2025, at the age of 86. For 64 years, she dedicated herself as an Infant Jesus Sister, touching lives through 23 years in convent schools and another 25 years serving young minds in Church institutions. Her ministry extended beyond classrooms to Montfort Boys’ Town Shah Alam, Montfort Youth Centre Melaka, St Joseph’s Home Penang, and the IJ Learning Centre Mak



## Where others feared, she ministered

Mandin.

Guided by the charism of the Infant Jesus Sisters — which emphasises holistic education, social outreach to vulnerable communities, and spiritual accompaniment — Sr Colette embodied these values in all her work. Blessed Nicolas Barré, the founder, said, “Whatever happens, be always at peace and trust in God. It will be done to you according to your Faith, your Hope and your Love, and even beyond that.” Sr Colette lived this teaching fully, most notably when she opened the IJ Learning Centre in the Mak Mandin squatter settlement in 1991, a community then marked by despair, gangsterism, and social challenges.

Starting with a humble makeshift centre, she created a safe space for learning amidst adversity. By 1992, the centre moved to a rented premise, and in 1995, the IJ Sisters purchased a double-storey house to fully establish the learning and tuition centre for the children of Mak Mandin.

Sr Theresa Chua, IJ Provincial

of Malaysia, highlighted that Sr Colette’s life and work reflected Christ’s presence among the poor and young. Sr Amy Sam remembered her as gentle, nurturing, and always ready to advise and affirm the novice IJ Sisters. She also had a love for music, which she shared generously.

The children she ministered to came from economically challenged backgrounds, needing not just education but personal encouragement. Former students Daniel Kalichandran and S. Kalaivani

shared moving testimonies of how Sr Colette’s guidance instilled a love for learning, confidence, and the courage to pursue their dreams. Daniel, nurtured from infancy to adulthood, and Kalaivani, who calls Sr Colette her Godmother, represent the hundreds she “mothered” over the years — around 500 children in total. Through her gifts in education, music, and care, she inspired them to realise their potential.

Other tributes included a video message from Elizabeth Davidson, a

former Australian volunteer teacher, showcasing the centre filled with children at play and learning. Hilary Manecksha, Ruth Paul, Anita Pragasam, Jusentha Joseph, and others shared personal memories of working with Sr Colette, reflecting on the challenges, faith, and trust in God that guided their ministry.

Sr Gertrude Tan acknowledged the retired teachers from Butterworth and Penang who assisted Sr Colette, including Anne Marie and husband Eric Yap, Rachel Hong (Headmistress of Convent Secondary Butterworth), Mrs Thangam (Headmistress of Convent Primary), and the late Mrs Angela and husband John Thong (Supervisor of Convent Secondary). Their dedication complemented Sr Colette’s ministry and strengthened the impact on countless students.

In closing, organisers Anil Netto and Joe Pragasam reminded attendees that the truest way to honour Sr Colette’s legacy is to continue seeing Jesus in “the lost, the last, the least, and the little,” living out the compassion and care that defined her life.



## Choir of young people with Down’s syndrome inspires

WASHINGTON: As the National Anthem rang out on January 23 across the National Mall at the 2026 March for Life, a choir from Friends of Club 21 took the stage, offering a witness that went beyond music. Composed of individuals with Down’s syndrome, ages 13 to 42, the choir’s performance drew cheers from thousands of marchers, setting the tone for a day dedicated to the dignity of every human life.

The group performed a piece they had spent weeks preparing, their voices rising confidently before a crowd advocating for the unborn. For the performers, it was

both a celebration of hard work and a moment to be seen and heard.

“It’s really exciting,” said Garrett Colmer, one of the performers. “We love being here.” He added that he looked forward to touring the Washington Monument and performing again at the Rose Dinner Gala that evening.

Friends of Club 21, based in Colorado Springs, Colorado, was founded in 2014 as an extension of Club 21, a South African school providing education, therapy, and creative outlets for children with Down’s syndrome. Its first event in Colorado was a simple Christmas pageant designed to raise

awareness for the school overseas.

“Performing together was such a meaningful time,” executive director Jared Anderson recalled. “We came back wondering how to tell that story more fully. That’s when we started Friends of Club 21 — 11 years ago.”

The programme quickly grew as more families sought to participate and students wanted more opportunities to perform. Over time, the choir became a central feature, offering students a chance to rehearse, perform, and build confidence throughout the year.

“These performances were highlights for the students,”

Anderson said. “Many have been on the sidelines in life, but this was their moment to shine.”

The choir reflects the broader mission of Friends of Club 21, which also launched an Arts Academy to provide students with ongoing creative formation and a sense of purpose rooted in community. “We created a rhythm — practise, build, perform — that strengthened this community,” Anderson explained.

Beyond the students, the choir has had a noticeable impact on audiences. Anderson recalls how early shows sometimes left people unsure how to respond. Over the years, however, he has seen walls come down. “People realised they just wanted to cheer the choir on. There was a recognition of their gifts, their joy, their life,” he said.

The organisation also nurtures deeper connections, celebrating relationships among students. “This year, we highlighted Chandler, 27, and his relationship with Cory, another young woman with Down’s syndrome,” Anderson shared. “Seeing their families witness their love and commitment was remarkable.”

Through the choir and Arts Academy, students develop collaboration, confidence, and public presentation skills. Perhaps

most importantly, they experience belonging. “The community focuses on the individual,” Anderson said. “You can feel the family bonds and support. It shapes each person in a unique way.”

Friends of Club 21 also supports families facing a prenatal Down’s syndrome diagnosis, often a moment filled with fear and uncertainty. “Parents tell me, ‘This is the club I never thought I wanted to be a part of,’” Anderson said. “But once they join, they realise life looks different than imagined — and they wouldn’t change it for the world.”

From a small holiday pageant to a national stage, Friends of Club 21 continues to empower students with Down’s syndrome through music, arts, and community. “There’s so much fear at the start about the future,” Anderson said. “Being part of this choir shows families and students the value of every life.”

Jeanne Chicon, whose daughter Nicole is a choir member, said she had tears in her eyes watching the group at sound check. “They’re such a beautiful gift from God,” she said. “Each of them is special, gives so much of themselves, and has such a strong appreciation of life.”

Register



The choir of Friends of Club 21 performs in the organisation’s annual Christmas show. (NCR Photo/ Courtesy of Friends of Club 21)

# A pickleball lesson in faith

Pickleball is having a moment. It's in social media reels, weekend conversations and suddenly, courts are appearing in places that used to be perfectly good parking lots. It's the sport everyone seems to be playing or, at the very least, talking about. According to my husband, though, pickleball is "a game for people who are or were unathletic." Naturally, that sealed my disinterest.

I had no desire to try it. Not because I looked down on it, but because I assumed I'd just be great at it. I've always been good at sports and so pickleball felt...unnecessary.

But recently, wanting to give our four-year-old a chance to try something new (and adorable), we decided to head to the court and "just give it a shot." Omg. I was wrong. So



## A Blessed Life

Tianne Pereira

very, very wrong.

Those first few minutes? Imagine a confused flamingo on roller skates flapping, misjudging distances, wildly optimistic about hand-eye coordination that simply wasn't there. I missed the ball entirely. When I did hit the ball, it flew majestically into the wrong court, out of the court or nowhere near where I intended. I even served confidently and incorrectly. It was dangerously close to

embarrassing. To make matters worse, I was losing badly. And not just to anyone but to my husband.

There is something uniquely humbling about being outplayed by the person who once called the sport "a game for the unathletic." Every missed shot felt louder. Every point he won felt like it came with invisible commentary. I wasn't just learning a new game, I was learning how to lose publicly, visibly and without a graceful exit.

Pickleball, it turns out, is not as easy as it looks. It does require patience and a willingness to start again after every missed shot. After a while, once my ego took a seat on the bench, I began to get a grip of it. I wasn't great. I wasn't impressive. But it was fun enough. And more importantly, I was learning.

Later that night, as I sat with my gratitude journal, my thoughts drifted back to the game. And then as these things often do, they drifted deeper. I wondered if my faith life looked a little like my first pickleball session. I do things for the Church. I serve. I show up. I know the "rules." But am I actually connected? Or am I swinging confidently, convinced I'm doing it right, while missing the mark entirely?

Could I think I'm serving God well, while actually serving out of habit, obligation or self-interest? Could I believe I'm in the right court, while the ball — my intention, my heart — is landing somewhere else entirely?

Pickleball taught me something uncomfortable: trying hard doesn't mean much if you don't actually know what you're doing. Confidence alone won't carry you very far either, especially if you refuse to be taught. The game only started to make sense when I slowed down, paid attention, made small adjustments and accepted that I was still learning. And my faith is no different.

I can do all the right movements, attend Mass, volunteer, lead ministries and still be missing the point if my heart isn't aligned. Spiritual life isn't about looking like I know what I am doing. It's about being teachable. About letting God correct my stance, my grip, my direction.

And then there were the moments I tripped, literally and figuratively. A stumble here, a misstep there because I

overreached or rushed. But the beauty of the game is that you don't stay down. You pick yourself up, dust yourself off, laugh a little and step back into position for the next point. I guess faith is like that too. We fall. We mess up. We miss obvious shots we should have made. But the spiritual life was never meant to be lived perfectly; it was meant to be lived faithfully. God doesn't expect us to stay down in our failures; He invites us to stand up again, shake off the dust, and return to the game with a little more humility and a little more trust.

And just like pickleball, faith isn't mastered in one session. You don't suddenly "arrive." You return to the court again and again, sometimes clumsy, sometimes frustrated, often humbled but always invited to try once more.

So, I write this to remind myself and anyone who needs to hear it, God isn't sitting there keeping score the way we do. He's not waiting for perfect shots or flawless plays. He just wants us to keep showing up, stay in the game and be willing to learn...even if we miss a few balls along the way.

*Tianne identifies first as a Catholic daughter, sister, wife and mother. From years in the media industry, she eventually started and continues to run her own businesses while teaching part-time. She has been actively serving in church for as far back as she can remember and is involved in various charities.*

Once thought Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden as God's ultimate punishment for disobeying Him.

Today, I see their being exiled as God's great act of mercy. It was a gift to them in their fallen state. It was Plan B and part of God's salvific plan for mankind.

Let's go through Genesis again. Yes, we know we are not to take the creation stories literally. However, Genesis is God's story about His love for us. That's why the story matters.

So, God created the heavens and the earth. Then He created man from dust and breathed life into him. Then God created a beautiful garden for man to live in.

<sup>16</sup> And the LORD God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; <sup>17</sup> but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.' (Genesis 2:16-17)

God even created a companion for Adam, so that he wouldn't be lonely! All was well until the serpent came along and suggested to Eve that she had everything to gain from eating the forbidden fruit, and that God was lying about it being poisonous unto death. Basically, God said she wouldn't just get a stomach ache, she would die if she ate it.

<sup>1</sup>...He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden"?' <sup>2</sup> The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; <sup>3</sup> but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die."' <sup>4</sup> But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die; <sup>5</sup> for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' Despite being able to repeat God's

## Plot twists in Eden

warning in full — that she would die if she ate it — Eve chose to trust the serpent because, not only was the fruit pretty, it would make her wise.

Eve took a bite and then gave it to Adam. The effect was immediate because at once, they realised their own nakedness. When confronted by God, Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent.

But no matter who you blame, the wages of sin are suffering and death. Today, serpents crawl on their bellies, women suffer at childbirth, and men have to toil till death. All will die — just as God had warned.

If you thought things couldn't get any worse, God apparently thought otherwise — and He stopped Adam and Eve from making things worse for themselves. This is the clincher.

<sup>22</sup> Then the LORD God said, 'See, the man has become like one of us,



## Connecting the Dots

Ann Teoh

knowing good and evil; and now, **he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever**' — <sup>23</sup> therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. <sup>24</sup> He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden He placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way

to the tree of life.

Why would it be so terrible for Adam and Eve to live forever?

It actually wouldn't be if they were in the state of innocence, but they were in the state of sin. To live forever in that wretched state would mean eternal suffering. To prevent that, God sent them out of Eden.

The exile was not punishment; it was

damage control. It was mercy. God still wanted to give Adam and Eve — and all of us — eternal life. God loved Adam and Eve even after they sinned. Genesis is the beginning of 'God loves us while we are sinners' story.

We know the rest. After the Fall, God sent His only Son to pay for their sins and ours. Through Christ, we will enjoy eternal life, not in wretchedness, but in perfect happiness.

It's easy to judge Adam and Eve as foolish but if we are honest, we aren't different — perhaps because we are their descendants.

God commands us to do good and avoid evil. He even identified certain actions as poisonous to our souls.

Still, we prefer to trust others (including our ego) who tell us that some actions are not sinful, or some sins are not that "serious", or small sins do not nail Jesus to the cross.

We sometimes blame others when we fail — from the devil (he's real, by the way) to the wife (or husband) and the mother-in-law. We even blame the weather.

We gossip with glee about the colleague (or priest) and then blame his 'bad behaviour' for our sin. We shout 'Idiot!' — sometimes not just in our head — if someone honks at us, or if the driver in front fumbles. All pride, little patience.

When we convince ourselves that sins are not poisonous, we are just like Adam and Eve. We don't take God seriously.

Yet, in this exile — amid the mess we create ourselves — God offers Plan C, also known as the Sacrament of Reconciliation. By the way, Confession is available not just during Advent and Lent.

*Ann lives in Petaling Jaya. She believes we will see God's lacework of truth, beauty and goodness when we connect the dots He gives us.*





Fr Leonard Lexson

# BECs: Where community meets Christ

It will be 50 years this year that the Roman Catholic Church in Malaysia opted for the building of Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), especially in Peninsula Malaysia. Just two weeks ago, the Church of the Assumption in Petaling Jaya had a half-day of recollection on the relevance of BECs today.

Over 40+ members, representing the seven zones (25 BECs), engaged in a conversation about the synodal journey that began 50 years ago with BECs. All agreed that it has been a rollercoaster ride and continues to remain so. While there are those within the Church circle who opine that BEC is like whipping a dead horse, there is a ray of hope to suggest that God is not done with us. God has kept us going to the outer limits of uncertainty and discomfort to purify our motives to walk humbly, act justly and love tenderly in the building of BECs.

Fifty years on and BEC is still an unfamiliar and unsettling language in the Catholic circle. While those who continue to support the call of the Roman Catholic Church in Malaysia to meet at least once a month, there are others who distance themselves from being part of an Ecclesial community. It is unfamiliar and unsettling because it challenges our disposition that is deeply embedded in a certain rhythm and cycle in our everyday life. To put faith into action in our BECs demands that every member disrupt that very rhythm, but there are those who are not willing to take that leap of faith.

Has the Paschal Mystery been displaced in the vicissitudes of our everyday life that participating in the BEC becomes an added burden of sorts? The call of Our Lord Jesus Christ to “take up your cross” “... courage it is “I ... “Come follow Me,” seems to evoke a nonchalant response. We can be living in that same BEC for many years and yet we do not know who our fellow brothers and sisters are. Sometimes, we come to discover someone living in the neighbourhood when he or she passes away and the whispers of the who, when, what and how of that person echo from one end of the neighbourhood to the other.

The length and breadth of those who do not participate in their BECs include those who actively serve at the parish and arch/diocesan level. While it is commendable that they offer their services at this level, one cannot help but question why they refrain from being part of a BEC. Baring all the inevitable reasons for non-involvement, across the board, the responsibility of participating in the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ in our BECs is the responsibility of every baptised and confirmed Catholic.

It is ironic to think that one who serves/ ministers with great zeal at a parish/ ministry of their choice cannot find it in

their heart to delight in the BEC where they live. Sometimes, I wonder if this is our feel-good channel check list, that is, serving my own needs; fulfilling our own desires; that what I am doing is more important and productive than “wasting time” with my BEC. Are we willing to “let go and let God” take charge and with courage “waste time” on this “hard road?”



Enter by the narrow gate, since the road that leads to destruction is wide and spacious, and many take it; but it is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life, and only a few find it. Matthew 7:13-14

To delight in the Lord is to delight in building His kingdom where we are planted and together extend the joy of the Gospel to all others. The early Church made this happen as reflected in the Acts of the Apostles 2: 42-47. We, as members of the Body of Christ and children of the light, are called to mirror the Kingdom of God realities in our BECs.

Our goal is not about the things of the earth but truly that of heaven. This does not mean that we neglect the here and now of life; on the contrary, we must come to the aid of our brothers and sisters in both their spiritual and bodily necessities. The Catechism of the Catholic Church renders it as spiritual and corporal works

of mercy.

The corporal works of mercy are: Feed the hungry; Give drink to the thirsty; Clothe the naked; Shelter the homeless; Care for the sick; Visit the imprisoned; Bury the dead.

The spiritual works of mercy are: Instruct the ignorant; Counsel the doubtful; Admonish sinners; Bear wrongs patiently; Forgive offences willingly; Comfort the afflicted; Pray for the living and the dead.

From those on the peripheries to the inner circle of our Church’s life, together we need to heed the prophetic call to “bloom where we are planted” while we continue to serve with the choices we have made in God’s plan. Each time we choose to go above and beyond our comfort zone, we are participating in a walk of humility. Our preconceptions are purified and, in the process, we begin to see endless possibilities when we carry our cross and follow Jesus the Good Shepherd.

The truth is, we cannot do without BECs, for the heart of BEC is rooted in a Trinitarian God Who is a community of three persons.

*Fr Leonard serves as parish priest of the Church of the Assumption, Petaling Jaya and guides the Archdiocesan Liturgy Ministry in his role as ecclesiastical assistant. He is also the chairperson of the Liturgical Music Committee of the Episcopal Regional Commission for Liturgy for Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei.*



Fr Ron Rolheiser

# The meek are no longer inheriting the earth

It is becoming ever more acceptable today, whether in politics or in general discourse, to speak of brute human strength, force, and power as being the forces we need to guide our lives. Indeed, empathy is now sometimes named explicitly as a weakness.

It is one thing for people to say that strength, force, and power, are in fact, what govern the world, but it is dangerously wrong to try to throw a Christian cloak over this. In brief, this is the antithesis of Jesus, as the Gospels make clear.

Here’s how the Gospels define strength and weakness.

For centuries the chosen people, feeling oppressed, longed and prayed for a Messiah from God who would come brandishing intimidating muscle, would vanquish their enemies, bring them prosperity, and bind them together in community by a strength, force, and power that was superhuman. But that’s not what they got.

Against every one of their expectations, when their hopes and prayers were finally answered, their longed-for Messiah appeared, not as a superhuman, but as a helpless baby unable to feed himself, helpless to nurture himself into adulthood.

Granted, as an adult He performed miracles and sometimes displayed a strength and power that was supernatural. However, the power He displayed in His miracles was never political, militaristic, or physically intimidating. His miracles were

always displays of God’s compassion and fidelity.

There’s an interesting play of words in the Gospels when they speak of “power” or “authority”. They use three different Greek words: Sometimes they refer to power as *Energia* – the type of power a star athlete can bring to a playing field; and sometimes power is referred to as *Dynamis* – the type of power a rock star can bring to a stage. However, whenever the Gospels refer to Jesus as powerful or as having authority, they never use these words. Instead, they use the word *Exousia* (for which we have no English equivalent), though we do have a concept of it.

*Exousia* is the paradoxical power a baby brings into a room. On the surface, it looks like powerlessness, but ultimately, it’s the greatest power of all – vulnerability, the moral power to create intimacy.

Simply put, if you put three people into a room: an athlete in the prime of his physical prowess, a rock star who can electrify a stadium with energy, and a baby. Who ultimately has the most power? Jesus answers that.

We see this clearly in the manner of His death. As He hangs on the cross, suffering and humiliated, He is being taunted, *if You are the son of God, come down off that cross! If You have divine power, show it!* Jesus doesn’t take the bait. Instead of demonstrating the kind of power we like to

believe God should be using, Jesus instead resorts to another power, a higher one. In His powerlessness, He gives over His spirit in love and empathy and, in that, shows us the place where intimacy is born.

Moreover, Jesus could not be clearer in his teaching. As He makes clear in the Sermon on the Mount (perhaps the greatest moral code ever written) human strength, force, and power are not what bring about the kingdom. What creates community and intimacy among us?

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

*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*

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

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

*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*

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

*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5, 3-11)*

Unfortunately, today in our politics and in our civil discourse (which sadly often lacks civility) people are increasingly putting

their faith in brute human power – political power, economic power, military power, social media power, historical privilege. These, as many politicians now claim, are what’s real. They decide things in the world. It’s the strong, the powerful, and the rich who will inherit the good things of this earth. Those who are poor in spirit, who mourn, who are meek, who are merciful, and who are persecuted, will miss out on life. And, undergirding this is the belief that empathy is a weakness.

What’s to be said in the face of this? What should be the Christian response?

Since the beginning of human life on this planet, brute strength and power have always made themselves felt and have often been a dominant force in shaping history. The meek haven’t always inherited the earth (at least not this earth). And, today, the meek are being threatened from all sides. However, whatever its political or economic expediency, this kind of raw strength and power may not cloak itself with Jesus and the Gospels. It is the antithesis of Jesus and the Gospels.

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

# LITTLE CATHOLIC'S CORNER



Dear children,

Have you ever tasted food that wasn't salty enough? It can taste pretty bland. But do you notice when food has the right amount of salt?

Usually, we don't think about it. The right amount of salt will make the food taste really good.

Jesus wants us to be like the "salt" in the world, with the goodness and truth that He gives us.

Jesus also says that we are the light of the world. Can you imagine a completely dark world: no sun or lights or anything? It would be pretty scary.

You'd never know what was happening or where you were going.

That's what the world can be like for people who don't have the light of God's truth.

It's our job to bring the truth to the world so that everyone can see that God loves them.

We have to bring God's light everywhere we go. But we must be gentle with people who don't understand the truth.

Otherwise, it would be like shining a light in someone's eyes, and they wouldn't be able to see anything. We need to start out — like little candles, lighting the way so that people can follow us toward God.

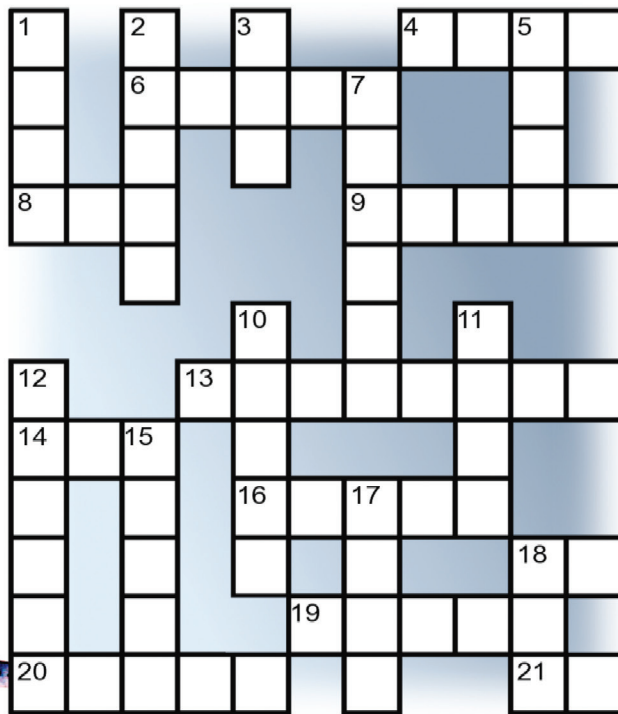
Love  
Aunty Elizabeth

You are the salt of the earth (Mat 5:13)

Let's Colour



## Salt and Light Crossword Puzzle



Use the words at the bottom to fill the blanks. Then you can put them in the puzzle.  
A=across  
D=down

2D \_\_\_\_\_ 5D \_\_\_\_\_ to his disciples: "You are the  
11D of the \_\_\_\_\_ 6A But if salt \_\_\_\_\_ 15D its  
20A with what can it be seasoned? It is no  
longer \_\_\_\_\_ 17D for anything but \_\_\_\_\_ 21A be thrown out  
and trampled underfoot. \_\_\_\_\_ 8A \_\_\_\_\_ 3D the light of  
the \_\_\_\_\_ 10D A \_\_\_\_\_ 1D set on a \_\_\_\_\_ 13A  
cannot be \_\_\_\_\_ 7D Nor do they light a lamp and  
then put it under a bushel \_\_\_\_\_ 12D; it is \_\_\_\_\_ 18D  
on a lampstand, where it gives \_\_\_\_\_ 16A to \_\_\_\_\_ 14A  
in the \_\_\_\_\_ 19A Just \_\_\_\_\_ 18A your light \_\_\_\_\_ 4A  
shine before others, that they may see your good  
\_\_\_\_\_ 9A and glorify your heavenly Father."

MUST JESUS MOUNTAIN CITY LIGHT  
SAID DEEDS BASKET EARTH WORLD  
GOOD HOUSE HIDDEN YOU SET ALL  
SALT TASTE LOSES ARE SO TO

Fill in the blanks

When I \_\_\_\_\_ to you, I did not come with \_\_\_\_\_ or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the \_\_\_\_\_ about God. For I \_\_\_\_\_ to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him \_\_\_\_\_. I came to you in \_\_\_\_\_ with great \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. My \_\_\_\_\_ and my \_\_\_\_\_ were not with \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ words, but with a \_\_\_\_\_ of the Spirit's power, so that your \_\_\_\_\_ might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's \_\_\_\_\_.



(1 Corinthians 2:1-5)

testimony demonstration weakness trembling  
crucified power preaching message eloquence  
persuasive resolved came fear faith wise

# YOUTH

# I am here to do Your will



## Seminar inspires priestly vocations

Robert Lee

**KOTA KINABALU:** The Bundu Tuhan Retreat Centre (BTRC) hosted the seminar *Call to Become a Diocesan Priest*, themed *I am here to do Your will* (Psalm 40), from January 16 to 18. The gathering drew 226 participants, including the Archbishop of Kota Kinabalu, five priests, a deacon, 30 seminarians, and seven aspirants. Of these, 182 took part in the seminar sessions, comprising 103 participants from the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu,

63 from the Diocese of Keningau and 16 from the Diocese of Sandakan.

During the opening Mass, Archbishop John Wong invited the participants to embrace God and to give themselves the opportunity to respond generously to His call in service in the Kingdom of God. He emphasised the importance of not delaying one's response, as God continually calls each person in their daily life. He also encouraged participants to reflect and contemplate throughout the sessions so as to discern God's call clearly, without being distracted by worldly influences, while reminding them of the ongoing shortage of priests in every diocese.

Reflecting on the Gospel passage of the paralytic brought to Jesus by his four friends,

participants were reminded of the values of perseverance, sacrifice, and mutual support. Despite numerous obstacles, the friends persisted until the paralytic was presented before Jesus. This Gospel story challenged participants to remain attentive to God's call in their personal lives and to allow themselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit.

This year, Fr Gilbert Marcus succeeded Fr Isidore Gilbert as the formator at the aspirancy formation house. Other priests present at the seminar included Fr Mattheus Luta (Rector IY), Fr Abel Madisang, Fr Roney Peter Mailap, and Fr Stanley William Matakim. In his sharing, Fr Gilbert explained that the word "vocation" comes from the Latin *vocare*, meaning "to call," and described the call as dynamic — much like the waves of the sea that continuously come and go.

Fr Stanley further highlighted that ministry, both within and beyond the Church, requires active listening and the ability to guide people with love. Following the interview and discussion session, Fr Gilbert announced that 13 participants will enter the aspirancy formation house: seven from the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu, five from the Diocese of Keningau, and one from the Diocese of Miri. Additionally, two participants from the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu will begin the Initiation Year (IY) at St Peter's College, Kuching.

In closing, seminarian Majoery Simon, the head organiser, expressed his heartfelt gratitude to all who contributed to the success of the seminar, especially the priests, St Pius X Bundu Tuhan parish, and the entire BTRC staff. May God continue to bless everyone involved.



(pic/Peter Monthienvichienchai)

THAILAND: Catholic school students in Thailand marked National Teachers' Day by turning a commemorative concert into an act of solidarity, raising more than 500,000 Thai baht (RM62,730.00) to support schools for the blind.

The fundraising concert, titled *Pay It Forward*, was held on January 16 at the Suryadhep Music Auditorium of Rangsit University in northern Bangkok, coinciding with National Teachers' Day and the 62nd anniversary of the founding of Sarasas — one of the country's largest network of private Catholic schools.

Organisers said the event was staged as a tribute to Queen Sirikit, the Queen Mother, widely honoured as the "mother teacher of the nation," who died on Oct 24, 2025, at the age of 93.

Students from more than 40 schools nationwide spearheaded the effort, performing alongside teachers as part of the Sarasas Affiliated Chorus, Sarasas Cantabile Chorus, and Sarasas Jazz Band. Proceeds of more than 500,000 Baht from the concert were donated to five schools for the blind.

Archbishop Francis Xavier Vira Arpondratana of Bangkok, the guest of

## Thai Catholic students turn Teachers' Day concert into aid for blind learners

honour at the event, highlighted the formative dimension of student involvement.

"The children who are involved in this event are not just learning and collaborating, but also dedicating themselves for others," the archbishop said. "This plants the seed of love and spirit of service, which are the roots of a society of love and peace. I share a reflection that in giving, however small, when you give with your heart that is full of love, the result can be great indeed."

School officials described the initiative as an expression of the holistic formation promoted across the network, articulated through the so-called "5 Wises": Habitual Wise, Body Wise, Visual Wise, Digital Wise, and Music Wise.

Beyond musical training, the schools emphasise practices aimed at concentration and interior discipline, including the continued use of calligraphy exercises for all students as part of classroom learning.

Organisers said the initiative reflects what they described as the spirit of *Dilexi Te* in action, translating formation rooted in love and responsibility into concrete service for others, particularly the most vulnerable.

Pisut Yongkamol, director of Sarasas Ektra School, credited the success of the event to collective participation and generosity.

"Today's event and smooth running was only possible because of the combined power of giving," he said. "I hope the light of teachers will shine into your hearts and will provide inspirations for all of us to bring this light, to 'pay it forward', to others so that we can go on to indefinitely create good and beauty together."

Founded and owned by a lay Catholic family, the school group serves around 70,000 students nationwide and is widely recognised for its campuses marked by distinctive terracotta domes. **Peter Monthienvichienchai, LiCAS News**

# Serve one another in love

## Rediscovering vocation as a call beyond self

KANOWIT, Sarawak: From January 16 to 18, the Church of St Francis Xavier was transformed into a sacred space of encounter, discernment, and grace as eighteen young adults gathered for the Diocese of Sibú's Vocation Promotion Camp 4.0. Anchored in St Paul's exhortation, "Serve one another in love" (Galatians 5:13), the camp invited participants to rediscover vocation not as a project of self-realisation, but as a lifelong response of self-giving shaped by love and communion.

The camp was organised by the seminarians of the Diocese of Sibú — Bros Charles Boromeo, Stephen Suhaili, Nathaniel Ezabel and Zulio — under the close accompaniment of Fr Johanaz Ling, the Vocation Director. Fr Johanaz journeyed attentively with the participants throughout all three days, embodying the Church's pastoral commitment to walk patiently and faithfully with young people as they listen for God's call in the concrete realities of their lives.

The Opening Mass on Friday evening was presided over by Bishop Joseph Hii, whose homily provided a profound theological horizon for the entire camp. Reflecting on the dignity of the human person, the bishop reminded the faithful that each individual is created "unique and different," fashioned in the image and likeness of God, and thus endowed with an irreducible worth as the crown of creation.

Yet this uniqueness, Bishop Joseph cautioned, carries an inherent spiritual tension. When misunderstood, it can subtly degenerate into selfishness and self-preoccupation, even within one's pursuit of God, whereby spiritual experiences are sought primarily for personal consolation or gain. Authentic Christian discipleship, however, resists such inwardness. It is fundamentally oriented outward, toward communion and service.

"We are created unique and different from others," Bishop Joseph emphasised, "so that we may help others recognise their own



uniqueness." In this light, vocation is not self-referential but relational. It is the concrete form one's love takes in service to others, making visible the grace of God at work in the world.

This vision was further illuminated through the Gospel of the day (Mark 2:1-12), the account of the paralytic lowered through the roof by four friends. Bishop Joseph invited the congregation to contemplate not only the healing of the paralysed man, but the quiet heroism of those who carried him, their faith, perseverance and willingness to bear another's burden. Like the four friends, Christians are called to bring others to Jesus, sometimes through visible action, often through hidden sacrifice.

Vocation, the bishop noted, is precisely this distinctive manner in which one is entrusted with the lives of others and called to mediate God's healing presence. It is a path that demands trust, trust that God works through

obedience and surrender, even when the way forward is uncertain or countercultural.

In a compelling contrast, Bishop Joseph turned to the First Reading from 1 Samuel 8:4-7, 10-22, where the Israelites demand a king. Their insistence revealed a deeper resistance to divine providence: a desire to secure their future on their own terms rather than entrust it to God. This, the bishop suggested, mirrors a recurring temptation in vocational discernment, the urge to control one's destiny instead of allowing oneself to be led by God's wisdom.

Over the course of the three-day programme, these scriptural and theological insights were deepened through communal prayer, Eucharistic celebrations, personal reflection and formative input sessions. The participants, 18 in total, comprising 5 women and 13 men — were accompanied not only by the diocesan seminarians and Fr Johanaz, but also by religious sisters from the Putri Karmel congregation and the Sisters of St Francis of

Sarawak (SSFS). Their presence bore eloquent witness to consecrated life lived in fidelity, joy, and generous service.

Further sessions were delivered by the Mill Hill Missionaries seminarians, Fr Raphael Samosir, OFM, Cap and Msgr Michael Lee, the Vicar General of the Diocese of Sibú. Through their reflections, participants encountered the richness and diversity of vocations within the Church, all united by a single mission: to serve God's people and to build up the Body of Christ.

The camp was graciously hosted by the parish of St Francis Xavier, Kanowit, under the pastoral care of Fr George Omuto, MHM. His generous hospitality in providing accommodation and facilities fostered an atmosphere of welcome, fraternity, and ecclesial communion.

As the camp drew to its conclusion, participants articulated a renewed desire to deepen their relationship with God and a more mature understanding of vocation as a response shaped by trust, availability and love. The experience reaffirmed that vocation is never a purely private endeavour, but an ecclesial gift, discerned within the Church and lived for the good of others.

In a world increasingly marked by individualism and self-determination, the Vocation Promotion Camp in Kanowit offered a quiet yet compelling witness to the truth proclaimed by St Paul: "Serve one another in love." It is within this self-giving love that vocation finds its deepest meaning and through which the Church continues to discern hope for her future.



Religious Life & Priesthood by Fr Raphael Samosir and Br Francis, MHM



Religious Life Vocation By Putri Karmel and SSFS



# Filipino student from Catholic school wins top prize in US Science Olympiad

HOUSTON, Texas: A Filipino student from a Catholic school in Oriental Mindoro has brought pride to the Philippines after winning the highest honour in a prestigious international science competition held in the United States.

Warren Wade Casuga, a native of Calapan City and a student of Holy Infant Academy (HIA), was named Absolute Winner — the overall first-place award — in the Natural Science category of the 7th Copernicus Olympiad, held in Houston, Texas, from January 21 to 25, 2026. He also received a Gold Award in the competition. The awarding ceremony took place on 26 Jan.

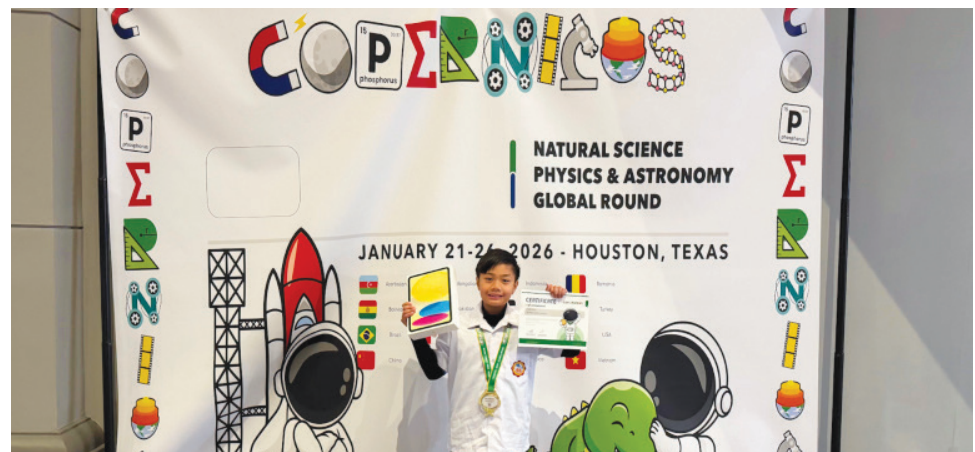
Regarded as one of the most demanding and prestigious science olympiads in the United States, the Copernicus Olympiad brings together outstanding young scientists from around the world. Casuga outperformed competitors from 16 countries, including the

United States, Brazil, Vietnam, China, Taiwan, Azerbaijan, Bolivia, Indonesia, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Mexico, Mongolia, Peru, Romania, and Turkey.

Casuga's achievement underscores the academic excellence and global competitiveness of Filipino students, particularly those educated in faith-based institutions that promote both intellectual rigour and character formation.

Founded in 1937 by the Holy Spirit Sisters, Holy Infant Academy was established to support the evangelising mission of the local Church. In 1997, ownership of the school was transferred to the Apostolic Vicariate of Calapan, with its management entrusted to a team of lay administrators in the spirit of lay empowerment.

Holy Infant Academy remains committed to the holistic formation of its students, according to principal Alona Cueto. She empha-



Filipino Catholic student Warren Wade Casuga was named Absolute Winner in the Natural Science category of the 7th Copernicus Olympiad held in Houston, Texas, USA.

sised that the school places equal importance on academic excellence and character formation, both in school and at home, while working closely with parents to ensure shared values and goals. Cueto added that the achievements of students are rooted in the inspiration and strong support of the entire

school community and their families. Educators and supporters say Casuga's success is a testament to years of discipline, perseverance, and faith-filled education — serving as an inspiration to young Filipinos aspiring to excel and serve on the global stage. **RVA**

# St Joseph's Church, Sentul loses its historian

KUALA LUMPUR: The Church of St Joseph Sentul lost a tireless and faithful parishioner in the person of Louis Kanoo. His name was synonymous with the Finance Committee which he headed for many years. He died from cancer on January 22 at the age of 87.

An indefatigable lay activist, Louis served as catechetical coordinator, Parish Council Chairperson, started the St Joseph's Kindergarten, with his wife Mary Kanoo in Marriage Encounter groups, and as counsellor for couples (Family Life Ministry). They also saw to the proper care of the sanctuary.

His firm and principled ways was belied by the humility of his bearing. Louis worked in the Survey Department until he retired at the age of 55. A passion for mathematics led him to give tuition to students who discovered that his patience and understanding enabled them to grasp the subject which was critical to helping them acquire tertiary qualifications. Louis delighted when his former students went on to do well in life. He tutored into his 80s, his many students grateful simply for the excellence of his methods.

Louis was regarded as the church's inhouse historian as he could recollect, both by memory and documents, events that reached back to the time of Fr Ernest Belet, (MEP), the first resident parish priest in the late 1940s. He knew all the priests and their contributions over the years. He was advisor to committees that produced jubilee magazines, tracing the history of the church, correcting errors



Louis Kanoo

with his insistence on getting the facts right. The historian had the precision of the mathematician.

Kanoo together with wife Mary served St Joseph's for many years and was considered a trusted and reliable man, buttressed by his immense faith in God. His humble demeanour rendered endearing his insistence on principle. For that he was much loved and respected.

He served many priests from the MEP Fathers like Fr Gilbert Griffon, Fr Peter Bretaudeau as well as local priests Fr Swaminathan Savery, Fr Amalanathan, Fr Benedict Savarimuthu, Fr Edward Soosay, Fr Stanislaus Soosaimariam, Fr Ferdinand Magimay, Fr George

Packiasamy and Fr Frederick Joseph just to name a few.

He served longest during the tenure of Msgr Anthony Thomas who was parish priest for a total of twenty two years, an unusually long span owed no doubt to the dedication and efficacy of the presbyter.

Louis' gentle smile drew people to take him into confidence.

Losing his younger daughter Natalie Nesam, to terminal illness in 2021 and his wife years earlier must have been heartbreaking for Louis but his immense faith saw him soldier on.

Datin Dr Lina Lohshini, his elder daughter, Dato Christopher Raj and Adrian Nair, his sons-in-law, as well as grandchildren, Elijah and twins Elisha Grace and Elena Grace whom he doted gave him strength and courage.

Blessed with green fingers, he tended his beautiful garden of potted plants which he was proud of and daily spent time nurturing it. He even painstakingly made his own compost.

Such was the faith of the man who through it all remained dedicated to serving his God. He never let the many obstacles and downsides break his spirit. All in he would have served more than 60 years at St Joseph's. He was a tower of rectitude on financial issues.

A good long life ended on January 22, 2026, after a sudden diagnosis of end stage cancer but there will be no end to the memories he has left.

Rest in Peace, Mr Louis Kanoo. **Neubert Ambrose**

## Little Flower Congregation mourns death of its first bishop

NEW DELHI: Bishop Emeritus Dominic Kokkat, the first prelate from the Little Flower Congregation, passed away on January 25 at the age of 93, leaving behind a legacy of faith, compassion, and missionary zeal. He died at Fatima Hospital, the very hospital he founded in Gorakhpur in 1995, where he had been admitted on Dec 14 with fever, cough, and breathing difficulties.

"Detailed medical evaluation revealed a severe lung infection, along with effects on the heart and kidneys," Bishop Mathew Nellikunnel of Gorakhpur wrote to the faithful. Bishop Kokkat received intensive care for more than a month, and on Dec 21, he was administered the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.

Fr Jojo Varakulayil, current superior general of the Little Flower Congregation, reflected on Bishop Kokkat's life, noting that, like their patron St Therèse of the Child Jesus, he "believed that holiness is found not in extraordinary deeds, but in doing ordinary things with extraordinary love." His episcopal ministry, Fr Jojo said, was "a living commentary on the Little Way: patient listening, hidden sacrifices, gentle words, and a heart totally abandoned to Divine Providence."

Fr Mathew Kumpuckal, former superior general, expressed gratitude on behalf of the Church in India: Bishop Kokkat's pastoral zeal and missionary vision continue to inspire clergy and laity to serve the poor and forgotten. Installed as the first prelate of Gorakhpur on Oct 4, 1984, Bishop Kokkat began a vibrant ministry

in one of India's most challenging mission territories.

"His leadership was deeply missionary in spirit, fostering outreach in remote villages, establishing clinics, schools, and service centres to bring hope and dignity to the marginalised," Fr Kumpuckal said. Under his guidance, the Gorakhpur Eparchy grew into a network of parishes, mission stations, healthcare facilities, and educational programmes, embodying the Church's commitment to holistic evangelisation.

Bishop Kokkat also founded the Little Sisters of St Therèse, a women's congregation dedicated to strengthening local missionary and pastoral outreach among women and children. His devotion to St Therèse inspired countless priests, including Fr Kumpuckal, shaping their seminary formation and priestly lives.

Born on Feb 23, 1932, in Vaikom, Kerala, Bishop Kokkat joined the Little Flower Congregation in 1953. He completed his major seminary formation and theological studies at the Papal Seminary in Kandy, Sri Lanka, and in Pune, and was ordained a priest on Oct 4, 1960. He also served as associate deputy secretary general of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India for four years from 1978.

Bishop Kokkat retired in 2006, but his legacy of quiet devotion, missionary courage, and love for the poor continues to shine as a beacon for all who seek to serve God and neighbour with extraordinary love in ordinary lives. **Matters India**



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## Archbishop Coakley calls for holy hour for peace amid tensions in the US

OKLAHOMA: Archbishop Paul Coakley of Oklahoma City, president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), has called on Catholics across the nation to observe a Holy Hour for Peace as a spiritual response to growing violence, fear, and polarisation in the country.

The appeal comes amid escalating social unrest, including widespread arrests by immigration enforcement officers and the killing of protesters and detainees in recent incidents. Archbishop Coakley described these events as tragic signs of a deeper crisis in respect for human dignity.

"Your faith matters. Your prayers matter. Your acts of love and works of justice matter," he said. "The current climate of fear and polarization, which thrives when human dignity is disregarded, does not meet the standard set by Christ in the Gospel."

In his reflection, he acknowledged the sense of powerlessness many feel in the face of violence and injustice, but stressed that Christian witness expressed through mercy, justice, and peaceful action remains a powerful force for healing and social renewal.

He invited bishops and priests across the United States to offer a Holy Hour for Peace, calling for prayers for reconciliation where there is division, justice where fundamental rights are violated, and consolation for those overwhelmed by fear, grief, or loss. Catholics were encouraged to participate in parishes, chapels, or in personal prayer, entrusting the nation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

"May this Holy Hour be a moment of renewal for our hearts and for our nation," he said, urging the faithful to become instruments of Christ's peace and witnesses to the inherent dignity of every human person. **ICN**

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## Balance truth and charity

VATICAN: Pope Leo XIV called on the prelate auditors of the Tribunal of the Roman Rota to “safeguard the truth with rigour but without rigidity, and to exercise charity without omission” during the inauguration of the tribunal’s Judicial Year on January 26.

The Roman Rota, the Holy See’s appellate court, safeguards rights within the Church and provides guidance to lower tribunals. Its judges, selected by the Pope for their competence and experience, also adjudicate cases such as marriage nullity, dispensations, and sacred ordination issues.

Addressing the auditors, Pope Leo thanked them for their service, highlighting the biblical principle of *Veritatem facientes in caritate* (The truth in love, Eph 4:15) as central to their mission. He emphasised that truth and charity are not opposing forces but complementary virtues rooted in God, who is “Love and Truth.”

“Excessive identification with the circum-



**Pope Leo XIV meets officials of the Tribunal of Roman Rota for the inauguration of their judicial year, January 26, 2026. (Vatican Media)**

stances of the faithful may risk relativising the truth,” the Pope warned, noting that misguided compassion could undermine the rigour of judicial decisions, particularly in matrimonial nullity cases. Conversely, “a cold and detached affirmation of the truth” may neglect love, mercy, and respect for persons. The Pope also underscored the importance

of careful discernment in the shorter diocesan process for declaring matrimonial nullity. He stressed that even when grounds appear manifest, the process must confirm the truth through rigorous investigation. Judges must maintain fidelity to the Church’s canon law while ensuring equitable treatment in all proceedings.

Pope Leo reminded the auditors that the judicial process itself is a tool for discovering truth and justice, not merely a procedural formality. “Failure to observe these basic principles of justice constitutes a serious injury to the juridical dimension of ecclesial communion,” he said.

Praying for divine guidance, the Pope entrusted the work of the Roman Rota to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, calling her *Speculum iustitiae*, the perfect model of truth in charity. **Vatican News**



## RM10mil boost for mission schools’ STEM education

KUCHING: The Sarawak government has increased its allocation to the Unit for Other Religions (Unifor) by RM10 million, bringing the total to RM120 million this year, with the additional funds earmarked for mission schools to strengthen science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education.

According to a report published in *The Star* on January 28, Deputy Premier Datuk Douglas Uggah Embas said the RM10 million would be used to help mission schools upgrade teaching and learning facilities, including the purchase of smart boards and other related equipment, rather than for construction projects.

“We will discuss with the schools on how best to utilise the RM10 million for STEM purposes,” he said during the presentation of Unifor funds to houses of worship on Jan 27.

The Minister noted that Sarawak will begin offering free tertiary education at state-owned universities this year, and stressed the

importance of ensuring that students from mission schools are adequately prepared to pursue relevant courses.

During the event, RM13.63 million was handed over for 71 projects, marking the final phase of Unifor’s fund disbursement for 2025.

He added that the allocation for non-Muslim houses of worship would remain at RM90 million this year, and urged applicants to submit their funding requests by the end of February to speed up processing. Cheques are expected to be issued by June.

Datuk Douglas also reminded recipients to adhere to approved project plans and to submit progress reports, noting that 285 out of 309 projects funded by Unifor last year had yet to submit their reports.

“Some may have only recently received their funds, but we are monitoring the situation,” he said, adding that Unifor would not entertain new applications from houses of worship that fail to submit reports for previous projects.



**Deputy Premier Datuk Douglas Uggah (centre) handing over Unifor funds to Deputy Premier Datuk Dr Sim Kui Hian on behalf of houses of worship in his constituency. (The Star/Zulazhar Sheblee)**

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