

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

For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it.
1 Cor. 3:9-10



Closing of the Jubilee Year in Malaysia

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The story of a growing Church

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Journeying together in Christ

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Let us build a Year of Peace

VATICAN: “Start today to disarm your hearts and embrace peace,” Pope Leo XIV urged the faithful in his first Angelus address of the new year, calling on the world to transform hope into action and make 2026 a year of reconciliation, mercy, and friendship among peoples.

Speaking to some 40,000 people gathered in Saint Peter's Square, the Holy Father reflected on the significance of January 1, observed for the past 58 years as the World Day of Peace at the wish of Pope Saint Paul VI. “Peace is unarmed and disarming, a gift of God's unconditional love, entrusted to our responsibility,” he said, stressing that true peace begins not only in nations scarred by conflict but also in families and communities where misunderstanding and pain linger. He called on Christians and all people of goodwill to make peace an active pursuit in the new year: “With Christ's grace, let us start today to build a year of peace by disarming our hearts and refraining from every form of violence.”

Reflecting on the recently concluded Jubilee Year, Pope Leo highlighted its lessons on hope and renewal. “The Jubilee has taught us how to cultivate hope for a new world,” he said, calling on the faithful to convert their hearts to God, “transforming wrongs into forgiveness, pain into consolation, and resolutions of virtue into good works.” The Pope urged believers to bring these lessons into daily life, turning small acts of kindness and mercy into a broader culture of reconciliation.

“Peace begins with each of us,” he added, emphasising that even small acts of mercy and kindness can ripple outwards to bring about reconciliation in society. He reminded the faithful that faith is not passive but active: it calls each person to make peace a daily commitment.

Pope Leo also highlighted efforts around the world to promote harmony. He praised the national march in Catania, Italy, held on New Year's Eve, as well as the upcoming march by members of the Community of Sant'Egidio, both aimed at fostering solidarity and dialogue. He greeted students and teachers from Richland, New Jersey,

underscoring the important role of young people in shaping a more peaceful and compassionate future.

Marking the Solemnity of Mary, the Most Holy Mother of God, and the 800th anniversary of St Francis of Assisi's death, Pope Leo reflected on the Incarnation and Christ's enduring love for humanity. “The Heart of Jesus beats for every man and woman, both the good and the wicked,” he said. “It beats for the righteous, to strengthen them in perseverance, and for the unrighteous, to guide them toward change and peace.”

He encouraged the faithful to look to Mary, the first to experience Christ's beating Heart, as a model of love, openness, and devotion. “The Incarnation shines forth in Mary and is reflected in every unborn child, revealing the divine image imprinted in our humanity,” he said, inviting all to adore this mystery and recognise God's closeness to every person, regardless of circumstance.

Closing his Angelus address, Pope Leo invoked St Francis' blessing from Scripture: “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift



up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.” He added his own wishes that Mary, Mother of God, “guide us on our journey in the new year,” calling on the faithful to embrace hope, mercy, and the transformative power of God's love throughout 2026.

As the world steps into a new year filled

with uncertainty and promise, Pope Leo's message is clear: peace is not a distant ideal, but a responsibility that begins in every heart. By turning toward God, practicing forgiveness, and nurturing hope, each person can become an instrument of peace — one family, one community, and one world at a time. **Agencies**



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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

The Malaysian Church reimaged

How do you envision the Church in Malaysia five or ten years from now? What is your hope-filled vision for the Church, and what meaningful changes do you long to see take root? These are not abstract or rhetorical questions. They are deeply pastoral, profoundly personal, and urgently relevant. They invite every baptised person to pause, reflect and take responsibility for the future of the Church we love.

This year, as part of our preparation for the Malaysia Pastoral Convention (MPC) in September 2026, *HERALD* will be posing these questions to the faithful. We do so not merely to gather opinions, but to spark prayerful discernment. The MPC marks a significant milestone in the life of the Church in our country. For the first time, it will bring together clergy, religious and laity from all dioceses — from Peninsular Malaysia as well as Sabah and Sarawak — into one shared space of listening, dialogue and collective visioning.

This moment is historic. As has been emphasised, from now on, Sabah and Sarawak will also participate in the discussions and discernment. This is more than an administrative inclusion. It is an ecclesial statement — that the Church in Malaysia is one body, rich in diversity, yet united in faith, mission and hope.

The MPC signals that the Malaysian Church is entering a new phase. It is a moment of maturity, one that recognises the need for deeper communion across geography, culture and lived realities. The experiences of indigenous communities, urban parishes,

rural missions, young families, migrants, and the elderly all deserve to be heard. Only when these voices come together can the Church truly discern where the Spirit is leading her.

The journey towards the MPC does not begin at the national level. It began locally. Each diocese was called to prepare through its own Diocesan Pastoral Assembly, focusing on four key areas: Family, Church, Ecology and Society. These themes were not chosen at random. They reflect the concrete challenges and opportunities facing the Church today — from strengthening family life and renewing parish communities, to responding to environmental concerns and engaging meaningfully with the wider society.

This diocesan preparation was not a mere formality. It was an integral part of the synodal journey. It was an invitation for the local churches to listen attentively to their people, to name their joys and struggles honestly, and to discern pastoral priorities prayerfully. In many ways, the quality of the MPC will depend on the depth and sincerity of this grassroots process.

Beginning this issue, *HERALD* will also take readers on a brief journey through history, tracing key moments in the life of the Church in Malaysia (see page 10). Why look back, some may ask, when we are being called to look forward? The answer is simple, yet profound. We look back not to dwell nostalgically on the past, but to understand who we are and how we arrived here.

History reminds us of the sacrifices made, the faith planted, and the struggles endured. It helps us see how far we have come — and

perhaps also where we may have stalled, grown complacent, or even regressed. Without this honest reflection, our plans for the future risk being shallow or disconnected from reality.

For our young people especially, knowing the story of the local Church is vital. It grounds their faith, fosters a sense of belonging, and helps them see that the Church is not an abstract institution, but a living community shaped by real people, real decisions and real faith. Understanding our foundations enables us to build responsibly for the future.

Ultimately, the MPC is not about producing documents or resolutions alone. It is about conversion — personal and communal. It is about becoming a more listening Church, a more compassionate Church, and a more missionary Church. It is about asking ourselves honestly: Are we truly walking together? Are we attentive to the cries of the poor, the young, the marginalised and the wounded? Are we courageous enough to change where change is needed?

As we journey towards the MPC, the questions posed at the beginning return to us with greater urgency. What kind of Church do we want to be in five or ten years? The answers will not come from a few leaders alone. They must rise from the prayer, participation and commitment of the whole People of God.

The future of the Church in Malaysia is being shaped now — in our listening, our remembering, and our willingness to walk together in faith.

Patricia Pereira

Baptised into belonging

This month, the Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Theme invites us to build trust through dialogue and faith within our families, recognising our homes as the 'first school of faith' (FD #35). This mirrors the Baptism of the Lord, where the Holy Trinity models the perfect family through love, open communication, and divine affirmation.

The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord serves as more than a historical commemoration of a ritual in the Jordan River; it is a spiritual blueprint for the "Domestic Church." When we examine the liturgical readings for this feast, we find a profound interplay between divine identity and human relationship. The baptism of Jesus is the moment the Trinity — the primordial Family — reveals itself to the world, offering a roadmap for how our own families can navigate the waters of life. By reflecting on the themes of affirmation, solidarity, and gentle service, we see that the family is not just a social unit, but a living font where the grace of the Jordan is meant to flow daily.

In the Gospel of Matthew, the heavens open not to provide a set of instructions, but to deliver a declaration of belonging: "This is my beloved Son." This is the cornerstone of a "baptismal family." Before Jesus has performed a single miracle or preached a single sermon, He is claimed by the Father. He is loved not for what He does, but for who He is.

For the modern family, this is a radical call to shift our focus from performance to presence. In a world that constantly evaluates children and parents based on

achievements, grades, and social status, the family is called to be the place where the "voice of the Father" is echoed. A baptismal family is one where identity is a gift, not an accomplishment. When a parent looks at a child and communicates, "You are my beloved," they are participating in the very life of the Trinity. This spiritual affirmation provides the psychological and spiritual armour a person needs to face the world. A family rooted in the Jordan is one where every member knows they belong, long before they ever succeed.

The Second Reading from the Acts of the Apostles describes Jesus being anointed with the Holy Spirit and power, subsequently "going about doing good." For a family, the "anointing" received at the font is not reserved for grand, cinematic moments of faith. Instead, it is a "domestic anointing" for the ordinary tasks of life.

The Holy Spirit, who descended like a dove, is often found in the quiet, reconciling moments of family life. It is the Spirit that provides the patience to listen after a long day, the humility to ask for forgiveness after a heated argument, and the strength to serve one another in the mundane rituals of the household. In Acts, Peter notes that God was "with Him." In a family living out its baptism, God is "with them" in the kitchen, at the bedside, and in the car. The power of the Spirit is manifested when the family treats the "ordinary" acts of service as sacred duties, recognising that in doing good for one another, they are fulfilling their baptismal calling.

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with Bro Isaac Alfred Simbun

The Baptism of the Lord (A)

Readings: Isaiah 42: 1-4, 6-7;
Acts of the Apostle 10:34-38;
Gospel: Matthew 3:13-17

The prophecy of Isaiah introduces the "Suffering Servant," who brings justice to the nations with startling gentleness: "A bruised reed he shall not break, and a smouldering wick he shall not quench." This provides a vital lesson for family dynamics. The home is the place where we are most vulnerable, and consequently, where we are most likely to be "bruised" by life's hardships or each other's tempers.

A family shaped by the Lord's Baptism practices 'gentle justice,' choosing to support rather than crush those who are struggling or exhausted. By prioritising mercy over being right and protecting the dignity of the weakest members, we live out the servant-heart of Christ. This ensures our home is a sanctuary where no one is broken by harshness, but instead, every flame of faith is fanned back to life.

The Baptism of the Lord connects our family tree to the heart of God, inviting every home to listen for His voice. When we see our families through this lens, daily chores become sacred acts, and our homes become a 'Domestic Church' where grace truly flows. By living out our baptism, we transform our families into a place where heaven is open, and God's love is made real in our daily lives.



DIocese OF PENANG
 PKK/BDN/2026/01/223

Notifications and Updates

'This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.' Matthew 3 : 17

Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Theme: Family - Building trust through shared prayer, regular dialogue, and faith expressed in daily actions. The home is the first school of faith. (FD#35)

1. Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2026

The theme of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity this year is, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling" (Ephesians 4:4).

Sharing the information received from the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity in reference to The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and throughout the year 2026. The respective materials in various languages, prepared in collaboration with The World Council of Churches and The Armenian Apostolic Church, are available on the website of the Dicastery: www.christianunity.va (<https://bit.ly/4qn1fJP>)

2. Sunday of the Word of God 2026, Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Instituted by Pope Francis to be celebrated on the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time every year since the year 2020, the Regional Biblical Commission will be sharing the link which includes materials in various languages prepared for the Sunday of the Word of God this year.

3. Public Profession of the Evangelical Counsels as a Diocesan Hermit

Following the Eremitic Life, Murnadevi Savaridas, taking on the name of Murna of the Eucharistic Bride of Christ, will make her Public Profession of the Evangelical Counsels as the third hermit of the Diocese of Penang on January 21, 2026 at 7.00pm at the Church of Sacred Heart, Kulim, Kedah.

4. Silver Sacerdotal Jubilee Celebration

With grateful hearts we celebrate 25 years of faithfulness in the Priestly Silver Jubilee of Msgr Henry Rajoo, parish priest of the Church of St Anthony, Nibong Tebal on January 19, 2026.

Continue to keep him in prayers as we

praise and thank God for the gift of priesthood.

5. Year 2026 Pastoral Assignment and Updates of Seminarians at the Major Seminaries

1) Ashley Stephen Chau

Theology Year 5, St Peter's College Major Seminary, Kuching.
 Retreat at Seven Fountains, Chiang Mai, from January 2 to February 4, 2026.

2) Patrick Hilary Sandnasamy

Theology Year 5, St Peter's College Major Seminary, Kuching.
 Retreat at Seven Fountains, Chiang Mai, from January 2 to February 4, 2026.

3) Melvin Dawson Michael Dass

Theology Year 4, St Peter's College Major Seminary, Kuching.
 Pastoral at Church of Nativity of The Blessed Virgin Mary, Butterworth, from January 7 to May 7, 2026.

4) Ron Fernandez Sandanasamy

Theology Year 4, St Peter's College Major Seminary, Kuching.
 Pastoral at Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit

Mertajam, from January 6 to May 6, 2026.

5) Leon James Gautier

Theology Year 3, St Peter's College Major Seminary, Kuching.
 Pastoral at Church of the Holy Name of Mary, Permatang Tinggi, from January 6 to May 6, 2026.

6) Dennis Raj Rasu

Theology Year 2, St Peter's College Major Seminary, Kuching.
 Pastoral at Church of St Anthony, Nibong Tebal, from January 3 to February 3, 2026.

7) Daniel Anthony Isak

Philosophy Year 2, Colledge General Major Seminary, Penang.
 Pastoral at Church of the Holy Name of Mary, Permatang Tinggi, from January 6 to February 6, 2026.

8) Vincent Yip Kar Chun

Philosophy Year 2, Colledge General Major Seminary, Penang.
 Pastoral at Church of Christ the King, Sungai Petani, from January 3 to February 3, 2026.

Sebastian Francis
Cardinal Sebastian Francis



KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

January

- 12-15 Clergy Annual Priest Assembly
- 16 Meeting – Archdiocesan Finance
- 22 Prayer Service – Week of Christian Unity



PENANG DIOCESE

Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

January

- 11 Parish Pastoral Assembly, Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam at 4.00pm
- 14 Meeting – Penang Diocesan Finance Team, Diocesan Office at 6.00pm
- 19 Meeting – Triumph Heart of Mary, Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam, 9.00am



MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

January

- 11 Masses in English and Tamil – Church of Divine Mercy, Skudai
- 19 Regional Superior of the Jesuits Canonical Visit to the Bishop
- 20-21 Monthly Clergy Recollection – MAJODI Centre

Another priestly calling from Inanam

INANAM, Kota Kinabalu: From the quiet village of Kg Bambangan has emerged another gift to the Church. Fr Canisius Benjamin becomes the fourth priestly son of the Church of St Catherine, Inanam, joining the ranks of his senior countrymen: Fr Erik Patrick Jerome of Kg Kiambalang, Fr Maxmilliano Hontor of Kg Inanam Laut, and Fr Leslie Joseph Bingkasan, SJ, of Kg Kionsom. His ordination on December 6, 2025, is not only a personal milestone but a testament to a parish and families that continue to nurture vocations.

Born on Dec 15, 1993 to Benjamin Santee and Scholastica Lim, Fr Canisius received his early education at SRJK (C) Cheng Hwa, Papar, before continuing his secondary studies at SMK Kolombong. Baptised into the Catholic faith a month after his birth, he grew up immersed in the life of the Church, guided by the faithful witness and active involvement of his parents and relatives. It was within this nurturing environment that the first stirrings of his vocation took root.

Remarkably, the seed of priesthood was planted when he was just 10 years old. "At that age, I told a friend of mine who was not a Catholic that I wished to become a priest," Fr Canisius recalled. What began as a child's simple aspiration gradually matured into a lifelong call.

Throughout his youth, Fr Canisius was deeply involved in parish life, serving as a choir member, in youth ministry, and as a



warden. These ministries became more than acts of service; they were spaces of discernment where his love for God and the Church was shaped and tested. His participation in a three-day vocation seminar in Bundu Tuhan proved pivotal, marking the moment when his vocation journey began in earnest.

In 2015, he entered the formation house as an aspirant, embarking on a decade-long journey marked by prayer, study, pastoral exposure, and personal growth. Along the way, he was formed through various assignments and ministries, each stage refining his understanding of what it means to offer one's life in service to God's people. On June 25, 2025, he was ordained to the Order of Deacons — the final step before priesthood — sealing his commitment with a definitive "yes."

Choosing the theme "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Cor 12:9), Fr Canisius expresses a deep awareness that his vocation is sustained not by his own strength, but by God's abiding grace. "My strength alone is insufficient to live out this sacred calling. It has been God's grace which enables me to respond to His call," he shared humbly.

At the conclusion of the ordination Mass, Archbishop John Wong announced that Fr Canisius will take up his first priestly assignment at the parish of Stella Maris, Tanjung Aru, effective January 1, 2026. As he begins this new chapter of ministry, his journey stands as a quiet yet powerful reminder that God continues to call, and that faithful families and vibrant parish communities remain fertile ground for vocations to flourish.





Closing of the Jubilee

Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur

On the Feast of the Epiphany, January 6, 2026, Pope Leo solemnly closed the Holy Door of St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican, formally concluding the Holy Year 2025, which was opened by Pope Francis on Christmas Eve 2024. While the Holy Year ended globally on Epiphany, diocesan and local Jubilee celebrations concluded earlier, on December 28, 2025.

In this round-up, we highlight how the Jubilee Year of Hope was solemnly closed across the archdioceses and dioceses in Malaysia, marking a shared moment of thanksgiving, reflection, and renewed commitment to live as pilgrims of hope.

Diocese of Penang

Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang, presided over the Eucharistic Mass celebrating the closing of the Jubilee Year of Hope at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit. The Mass was concelebrated by Fr Raymond Raj, parish priest, Fr Joachim Robert, Fr Rudolf de Acquaviva, CSE, and Fr Francis Anthony, with Deacon Andrew Loh assisting, bringing together the clergy and faithful in a solemn celebration of gratitude, reflection, and renewed commitment to live out the message of hope.

In a wholesome homily, Cardinal Sebastian began by bestowing credit on, and rendering heartfelt thanks to "the one person who stirred up the world-wide church proclaiming, 'I want a church on the move'.... Our beloved Holy Father, Pope Francis, who initiated The Jubilee Year of Hope." The cardinal reinforced the meaning and need of being pilgrims of hope in a world of uncertainties. Filled with a hope of divine origin, we are called to make a pilgrimage — real or virtual, outward or inward, leading to an inner movement of spiritual transformation. A time set aside to deliberate and celebrate the goodness and the primacy of God in our lives. "A time of reflection, gratitude, anticipation, and renewed commitment despite the challenges faced and looking forward with eager hearts to the journey that lies ahead."

The prelate accentuated the nuances of holy hope, "... not simply wishful thinking but a divine virtue rooted in the promise of

"The story of Jesus is ready to be told in new ways through our churches, communities, and pilgrimages," said Archbishop Julian Leow during the closing Mass of the Jubilee Year 2025 — Pilgrim of Hope at the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist. The Mass drew clergy, religious, and parishioners from across the archdiocese, celebrating a year marked by renewal, reconciliation, and a deepened relationship with God.

Concelebrating with Archbishop Julian was the apostolic nuncio, Archbishop Wojciech Zaluski, Archbishop Emeritus Murphy Pakiam, eleven clergy and assisted by the two new deacons.

In his homily, Archbishop Julian emphasised the call for the faithful to live as agents of hope, sharing simple acts of love in their homes, parishes, and communities. He reminded the



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congregation that amidst global catastrophes and human suffering — including the struggles of migrants and refugees — Christ calls His followers to bear hope, especially to the marginalised, differently-abled, and vulnerable. "Our permanent home is in heaven," he said, "and we are called to bring Christ's light to a world in



The Mass celebrating the closing of the Jubilee Year of Hope was held at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Penang.

Christ." A hope that sustains us by inspiring, and empowering us with faith, love and compassion to persevere through trials in life. (See CCC#1817-1821.) Shared stories and testimonies reflect "transformation, resilience and renewed faith..." signifying that hope does not disappoint. With hope alive in our hearts, we become hope-givers to others even in the darkest of



Cardinal Sebastian Francis reinforced the meaning and need of being pilgrims of hope in a world of uncertainties.

times. Each hope-filled prayer and compassionate endeavour gets woven into "a tapestry of faith that strengthens us all."

The closure of the designated year does not imply that we can now simply rest on our laurels. Divine hope urges us "...to renew our faith to journey ahead towards the Malaysian Pastoral Convention 2026 to be held in Sibul, Sarawak." Here's where people with a shared purpose and vision for the future of our church will embark on "A sacred journey of discernment and collaboration ... I discern how the Holy Spirit is leading us more effectively especially in times of rapid change and challenge. A time to dream together dreams rooted in faith and hope for the (collective) church in Sabah, Sarawak, and Semenanjung, united to the Universal Church, vibrant, inclusive, bridge-building and committed to proclaiming the Gospel with renewed vigour."

Cardinal Sebastian closed with an inspiring, allegorical, hope-sprouting story of a farmer planting seed despite being uncertain of the outcome. Alexander Pope's "Hope springs eternal in the human breast ..." sprang to my mind, underscoring the substantive homily. The cardinal blessed our personal crosses and crucifixes to reignite divine hope from within. **Lucille Dass**



The Mass drew clergy, religious, and parishioners from across the archdiocese, celebrating a year marked by renewal, reconciliation, and a deepened relationship with God.

need of hope."

The Jubilee Year invited all to walk together as one Church, receiving God's mercy, seeking reconciliation, rebuilding trust, and paying special attention to the voiceless. Archbishop Julian urged the faithful to continue serving their families and communities with love, compassion, and stewardship, making hope visible through concrete actions.

Concluding the Mass, the archbishop reminded everyone that hope is not merely a concept but a way of living, rooted in a personal relationship with Jesus. "Our pilgrimage on earth is a daily journey responding to God's call, advancing towards a world of peace, justice, and love," he said, sending forth the faithful as pilgrims of hope into the coming year. **Kristen Priya Krishnan**

Diocese of Malacca Johore

Bishop Bernard Paul called on the faithful to continue living as "Pilgrims of Hope" as the Jubilee Year of Hope drew to a close with a solemn Mass at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, Johor Bahru. Reflecting on the journey of the Holy Family, he invited the congregation to remember the graces of the Jubilee, be inspired by its message, and live its spirit in daily life.

In his homily, Bishop Bernard recalled that the Jubilee theme, Pilgrims of Hope, chosen by Pope Francis, was meant to speak to a world burdened by war, climate crisis, and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Anchored in the words of St Paul, "Hope does not disappoint" (Romans 5:5), the Jubilee reminded the faithful that Christian hope flows from God's love poured into human hearts through the Holy Spirit.

He reflected on the pilgrimages undertaken during the Jubilee, both to Rome and to diocesan pilgrimage centres, noting that these journeys reminded believers that life itself is a pilgrimage towards God. Christians, he said, are not tourists but pilgrims — people who walk with purpose, trust, and a vision of God's Kingdom.

Bishop Bernard highlighted hope as a theological virtue rather than mere optimism, describing it as an antidote to despair, social division, and the relentless pace of modern life. Drawing from Pope Francis' teachings, he noted that patience is the "daughter of hope," calling the faithful to rediscover trust in God's promises and a healthier relationship with time.

The bishop also pointed to tangible signs of hope emphasised during the Jubilee, including persistent calls for peace in conflict zones such as Ukraine and the Holy Land, mercy shown to prisoners, care for



Bishop Bernard echoed the journey of the Holy Family, encouraging the faithful to remember the Jubilee, be inspired by it, and live its spirit, carrying hope forward into the life of the Church and the world.

the elderly, sick, and migrants, and appeals for social and ecological justice, particularly towards poorer nations.

Reflecting on the Jubilee as a moment of grace, Bishop Bernard highlighted the renewed emphasis on the sacraments, especially reconciliation and the Eucharist, as well as the strengthening of ecclesial unity. He noted that pilgrimages and acts of mercy at both global and local levels had deepened communal bonds and renewed the Church's sense of mission. The faithful were also encouraged to pursue holiness, with the lives of the saints — especially Saint Carlo Acutis — offered as models for today's generation.

As the Jubilee Year concludes in dioceses worldwide, Bishop Bernard reminded the faithful that its spirit must continue. He urged them to keep the flame of hope alive through fidelity in daily life — by walking towards God, standing with the weak and vulnerable, and looking ahead with hope to future milestones in the life of the Church.

Concluding his homily, Bishop Bernard echoed the journey of the Holy Family, encouraging the faithful to remember the Jubilee, be inspired by it, and live its spirit, carrying hope forward into the life of the Church and the world.

Year of Hope

Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu

The Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu concluded its Jubilee Year of Hope with a solemn closing Mass at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, gathering clergy, parish leaders, and faithful from across the archdiocese. The celebration marked the culmination of a year dedicated to prayer, pilgrimage, and spiritual reflection.

Presiding over the Mass,

Archbishop John Wong led a moving Eucharistic celebration that united the archdiocese as a pilgrim people of hope. The solemn procession and liturgy reflected a year-long journey of faith, compassion, and renewal.

In his homily, Archbishop John invited the faithful to reflect on the graces received during the Jubilee Year and to carry these blessings into the year ahead.

“The Jubilee Year of Hope is closed, but the hope still continues. Our faith leads us to be hopeful,” he said, urging families to emulate the Holy Family of Nazareth through compassion, kindness, humility, and patience. “The Feast of the Holy Family is a time to remember with joy and hope Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, and the love that bound them together so perfectly,” said the prelate.



The solemn procession and liturgy reflects a year-long journey of faith, compassion, and renewal.

The Mass included a special blessing, recalling the spiritual graces experienced throughout the Jubilee, particularly through the five pilgrimage sites dedicated to the year. Archbishop John reflected on the transformative power of pilgrimage, prayer, and the sacraments.

“Through pilgrimage, prayer, and sacraments, we have encountered divine mercy. The Lord has filled us with His grace, and throughout this year, we have entered fully into the mystery of Christ in faith, hope, and love,” he said. **Kojuna Davis**

Diocese of Keningau



Bishop Cornelius encourages the faithful to carry three key commitments into the future: to protect family life in all its forms and seasons as a sacred gift, to practice hope daily — even when it is costly — and to keep Christ at the centre, for He is our hope yesterday, today, and forever.

Bishop Cornelius Piong officially closed the Jubilee Year of Hope in the Diocese of Keningau, urging the faithful to continue witnessing hope in their daily lives. The celebration began with a personal pilgrimage, followed by Mass at the Church of St Peter in Bundu, Kuala Penyu.

In his homily, Bishop Cornelius emphasised that the close of the Jubilee does not mark the end of the journey. “We will remain pilgrims of hope,” he said, reminding the faithful that the conclusion of the Jubilee should inspire renewed commitment to evangelisation and service rather than signal a pause in the Church’s mission.

“As we now close this Jubilee Year, the Church asks an important question: What happens to hope when the Holy Door is closed?”

he said. “The answer is simple and demanding: Hope does not end; it is entrusted. It is entrusted to families who pray together, even briefly, to those who forgive within their homes, who remain faithful in difficulty, who welcome life, and who care for the elderly and the vulnerable. The Jubilee ends not with an ending, but with a sending.”

Bishop Cornelius encouraged the faithful to carry three key commitments into the future: to protect family life in all its forms and seasons as a sacred gift, to practice hope daily — even when it is costly — and to keep Christ at the centre, for He is our hope yesterday, today, and forever. “May the Holy Family of Nazareth walk with every family in our diocese,” he concluded.

The Diocese of Sandakan concluded its Jubilee Year of Hope with a solemn closing Mass at the Cathedral of St Mary, led by Bishop Julius Dusin Gitom. The celebration coincided with the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph and brought together priests, seminarians, and parishioners from local and out-station communities.

Throughout the Jubilee Year, the faithful were invited to deepen their spiritual lives through catechesis, prayer, indulgences, and pilgrimages. The Cathedral of St Mary, designated as the diocesan pilgrimage site, became a centre of spiritual renewal, reconciliation, and encounters with God’s mercy. Over 3,000 pilgrims visited from the Arch/Dioceses of Kota Kinabalu, Keningau, and Sandakan, as well as from Kuala Lumpur, Australia, and Germany.

Diocese of Sandakan

Many undertook a prayerful walk from the Church of St Joseph to the cathedral, including a climb up Marian Mount (Rosary Corridor), symbolizing a journey of faith, sacrifice, and hope.

In his homily, Bishop Julius reflected on the Holy Family as a model of Christian living. He highlighted how Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, though ordinary, were chosen by God to fulfill His plan, living in obedience and trust even amid displacement and uncertainty. Bishop Julius reminded families to embrace their imperfections, cultivate prayer within the home, and build sacred spaces rooted in faith, love, and trust.

He further urged the faithful to extend hope beyond their families, reaching out to the poor, immigrants, the homeless, and the lonely. “By emulating the Holy Family, we are called to become

bearers of hope through compassion, faith, and service,” he said. “Like Joseph’s courage and Mary’s steadfast faith, we are invited to trust God even when the future is unclear, confident that He is walking with us and guiding our steps.” **Evelyn Jock**



Bishop Julius further urges the faithful to extend hope beyond their families, reaching out to the poor, immigrants, the homeless, and the lonely.



Diocese of Miri



“Christ is our anchor, our foundation, and our lifeline,” said Bishop Richard Ng as he addressed the faithful during the solemn Closing Mass of the Jubilee Year of Hope at the Cathedral of St Joseph in Miri. “Whatever challenges we face, we are called to keep hope alive. God’s heart is always open, and there is always room for sinners to return to Him.”

Reflecting on the Holy

Family, Bishop Richard emphasised that Christmas is more than a celebration or tradition. “The birth of Christ is a call to the transformation of hearts and lives. Jesus comes not only to bring comfort but to offer peace rooted in faith, trust, and obedience to God,” he said.

He highlighted that true Christian peace does not depend on wealth, success, or the absence of problems, but on living in right

relationship with God and one another. The bishop encouraged the faithful to examine their lives, particularly within families and communities, and to practice humility, forgiveness, and love.

Bishop Richard also reminded the congregation that Christmas calls believers to be a sign of hope to others through generosity, compassion, and service to the poor, the sick, and the marginalised. Faith, he said, must be ex-

pressed through concrete actions, not merely words or rituals.

Concluding his homily, the bishop urged the faithful to carry the light of Christ beyond Christmas Day, allowing the joy of the Nativity to guide their daily lives and to renew their hope and commitment to walk with Christ throughout the coming year.

See more on back page.

Kg Gumut community celebrates feast of the Holy Family

Bernard Anthony

KALUMPANG, Hulu Selangor: The migrant community of the Chapel of the Holy Family (Capel Keluarga Kudus) in Kg Gumut came together on December 28, 2025, to celebrate the feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, a model of love, faith, and obedience. In this humble chapel, the faithful gathered to honour God and seek His blessings for their families, reflecting on the values exemplified by the Holy Family.

The Mass was celebrated by chapel administrator Fr Vincent Paul, also the parish priest of the Church of the Holy Redeemer in Tanjung Malim, Perak. He was assisted by Bro Issac Alfred Simbun, a Sabahan who has been based in Tanjung Malim since October 2025.

Fr Vincent warmly welcomed participants from Kg Gumut, Seremban, Kuala Lumpur, Sg Bil, and Tanjung Malim, and blessed the congregation with holy water.

In his sharing, Bro Issac spoke about the

meaning of family, inviting reflection on both domestic and extended family relationships. He encouraged the congregation to learn from the Holy Family, a model of selfless love: a family gives, nurtures, and cares for one another, just as Jesus gave His life for all.

Bro Issac emphasised that all are chil-

dren of God, and that children are a gift from Him. He encouraged children to listen to and respect their parents, not merely because of age but for their guidance and wisdom. Parents, in turn, are called to nurture their children in faith, strengthen relationships, and avoid fostering resentment. Key virtues for family life,

he stressed, include communication, patience, humility, respect, and above all, love. "Without love, a family cannot flourish," he said. He concluded by praying that the Holy Family, patron of the chapel, would bless every family present.

In his address after Mass, Fr Vincent reminded the faithful that while living as a family is possible for all, living as a holy family is a greater challenge. He highlighted that true family goes beyond mere cohabitation, urging everyone to model their lives on the love and holiness of the Holy Family.

The celebration continued with a simple lunch fellowship prepared by the migrant families, allowing participants to share in community and joy. Though modest, the feast was both meaningful and solemn.

Since 2023, Fr Vincent has been providing pastoral care to the migrant community in Kalumpang, Selangor. The Chapel of the Holy Family, under the Tanjung Malim parish, holds Mass in Bahasa Malaysia every Friday.



Faithful gather to venerate relic of St John the Evangelist

KUALA LUMPUR: In conjunction with the Feast of St John the Evangelist on December 27, 2025, parishioners from across the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur gathered at the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist to venerate the saint's relic.

The celebration began with an Opening Mass at 10.00am, attended by parishioners from across the archdiocese. The Mass was presided over by Archbishop Julian Leow and concelebrated by the clergy of the cathedral — Fr Gerard Theraviam, Fr Ferdinand Magimay, and Fr Robert Kham together with Fr Clarence Devadass.

The relic is a fragment of the bone of St John the Evangelist. Traditionally regarded as the "Beloved Disciple" of Jesus, St John is revered for the depth of his theological insight and for embodying love, loyalty and faithful friendship. He is commonly symbolised by the eagle, the chalice and the scroll, and is venerated as the patron saint of love, loyalty, friendship and authors. Each year, the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist — Kuala Lumpur's Roman



Catholic mother church — honours its patron saint through this annual celebration

It is a long-standing Catholic practice, when

consecrating a church, to embed relics of saints in the altar. This practice serves as a tangible sign of God's presence and sanctifies the space. While Catholics venerate relics, they do not worship them; the honour is directed to God, acknowledging the saint's holiness and their closeness to heaven. Miraculous healings or extraordinary events are understood as the work of God, using the relic as a channel or focus. Scripture provides a biblical precedent for this, as in Acts 19:11-12, where God performed extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were brought to the sick, who were then healed and freed from evil spirits.

Saints play a central role in Catholic life. They serve as role models of faith, intercessors who pray to God on behalf of others, and patrons for specific needs. Their lives demonstrate that holiness is attainable for anyone who says "yes" to God in daily life, even amid struggles like doubt or temptation. Saints are honoured and venerated, not worshipped, as heroes in heaven who inspire and guide the faithful on

Earth, forming part of the Communion of Saints.

In his homily, Archbishop Julian highlighted that the exposition of St John's relic makes the saint's witness visible and tangible, inspiring faith and providing a focal point for prayer. "Through the saints, we are led to God," he said. "They remind us that the Church is called to be a living, missionary presence in the world, touching hearts, transforming lives, and encountering Christ's presence in daily life."

As the Mass ended, Archbishop Julian expressed gratitude to the faithful for their presence and encouraged continued prayers to the saints for intercession, noting that they are close to God and desire to help. He also exhorted the congregation to emulate St John the Evangelist, "a beacon of righteousness in a world filled with darkness, walking by faith and not by sight."

The event concluded with a fellowship, providing attendees with the opportunity to connect, share experiences, and foster a spirit of community. **Kristen Priya Krishnan**

Krubong parish honours Our Lady of Guadalupe

KRUBONG, Melaka: The Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe is a vibrant celebration honouring the beloved patroness of Mexico. Every year, thousands of parishioners and pilgrims gather at the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Krubong, to honour the Virgin Mary, seeking her intercession and blessings.

The recent feast was held from December 10 to 12, 2025, featuring testimonies and reflections by renowned speaker Martin Jalleh.

On December 13, the 8.00pm feast day Mass was preceded by the Rosary at 7.30pm along with a short video presentation on the apparition of Our Lady to St Juan Diego and the history of the Church, including the rebuilding of the present church beside the remnants of the 400-year-old ruined chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe. At the Mass, Martin Jalleh reflected on *Mary, Mother and Model of Hope*.

The Mass was celebrated by parish priest Fr Joseph Heng and concelebrated by Fr Neville Arul Sinnappah and Fr Michael Goh, with

around 1,600 faithful in attendance.

In his welcome, Fr Joseph expressed gratitude to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of Hope, who said "Yes" to God. "Today, as we celebrate our parish feast day, we too are called to say 'Yes' to the Lord," he said. Speaking briefly in Mandarin and Bahasa Malaysia, Fr Joseph highlighted Mary as the supreme witness to hope. He reminded the faithful that God gives the spirit of fortitude, might, and power — not of fear — and invited all to focus on Him during this great feast.

In his sharing, Martin Jalleh emphasised that God is the source of lasting hope and encouraged the faithful to be people of hope in a world often shadowed by fear and despair. Quoting Pope Francis, Martin reminded everyone that Mary never lost hope and urged parents to do the same with their children, as God created them in hope. He reassured those troubled or burdened: "Do not be afraid. Mary understands your challenges and intercedes for you, as Jesus consoles us through His Mother.



Put God first, and He will bless you."

After Mass and the presentation of a gift to Martin, Fr Joseph introduced Fr Michael Goh from the Church of St Francis Xavier (SFX), Melaka, and warmly welcomed pilgrims from SFX, the Church of St Theresa, Masai, as well as from Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, and Johor Bahru. All were then invited to a communal dinner in the parish grounds and hall, enhanced by hymns performed by the choir and a blessing of the food by Fr Joseph.

A short procession took place during the recessional, with clergy and the assembly

moving to the front left of the Church to honour the statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Fr Joseph offered incense on behalf of the faithful, entrusting their prayers into the loving care of the Blessed Mother.

The feast highlighted the deep unity and sense of belonging among parishioners, many of whom contributed to the preparations with joy and dedication. As the community continues to walk together in faith, they are called to live in hope, serve in love, and be instruments of God's light to those living in despair and darkness. **Bernard Anthony**

Shining Christ's light in life's darkest corners

KUALA LUMPUR: During the second week of December, several Catholic priests from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, together with dedicated volunteers from the Archdiocesan Catholic Prison Ministry (ACPM), embarked on Christmas pastoral visits to eleven central prisons across Terengganu, Pahang, Selangor, and Negeri Sembilan. These visits form part of the Church's ongoing mission to bring hope, faith, and compassion to incarcerated individuals, known as 'prospects', as well as to their families.

During these visits, priests and volunteers warmly shared the Word of God, offered counselling and spiritual support, and celebrated the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation. For over forty years, ACPM has faithfully journeyed alongside prospects, supporting their personal growth and restoring their dignity. This includes providing financial aid to selected prospects pursuing higher education, helping prepare them for reintegration into society with renewed hope and purpose.

The ministry also extends heartfelt

care to the families of prospects, many of whom quietly shoulder emotional, social, and financial burdens. Initiatives such as the *Jalinan-Kasih* (Bonds of Love) Programme and other outreach efforts offer these families a nurturing faith community, where they can share their struggles, receive encouragement, and be assured that they are not forgotten.

As part of the jubilee focus on incarcerated persons, Catholics nationwide joined in prayer on Sunday, December 14 at 3.00pm. Families and individuals lit candles in their



homes and recited the Divine Mercy Chaplet, praying for prospects, those recently released, their families, victims of crime, and prison authorities and staff. This collective act of prayer stood as a powerful testament to compassion, reconciliation,

and solidarity, affirming that God's mercy reaches even the darkest and most forgotten corners of our world.

The ministry expresses sincere gratitude to the priests, volunteers, and parishioners whose generosity and dedication sustain this vital work. Through their steadfast service, the Church continues to bear witness to the everlasting hope and boundless mercy of God.

As we begin a new year, let us continue to keep all prospects, their families, prison authorities, and those serving in this ministry in our hearts and prayers. May we remain attentive to the call to serve, steadfast in prayer, and bearers of hope — testifying to the healing and redeeming love of Christ for every person, regardless of circumstance.



SMC plants trees of memory, roots of tomorrow

IPOH: The Creation Justice Ministry of the Church of St Michael (SMC), through the Regenerate: Urban Forestry programme, recently organised a tree-planting initiative in conjunction with the parish's 135th anniversary.

As a living tribute to 135 years of faith, hope and loving service to the community, 135 trees will be planted around the church compound. Parishioners came together to plant the first two trees, marking the beginning of a journey that links past, present and future through care for God's creation.

The morning unfolded in a spirit of joy as participants took turns placing soil around the young saplings. There was a quiet sense of pride in knowing that these small acts of care

would one day grow into a lasting gift for future generations. Planting a tree is a powerful act of stewardship — one that helps protect creation and nurtures a cleaner, healthier environment.

The first tree was planted by Fr Aloysius Tan, parish priest of SMC, together with representatives of the senior parishioners, in gratitude for those who have faithfully served the Church over the decades. The second tree was planted by Fr Aloysius with the youth, symbolising hope and the promise of the Church's future.

What made the experience especially meaningful was the coming together of parishioners of all ages. It was a gentle yet profound reminder that when hearts and hands unite, even the smallest actions can make



a significant difference — sowing seeds of hope for a more sustainable, just and compassionate world.

The memories of that day continue to echo the ecological vision of Pope Francis, particularly through his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, which calls the faithful to ecological conversion and a renewed moral responsibility towards creation.

The Asoka trees were thoughtfully chosen for their symbolism of strength, peace and long life. As they take root and grow, they will not only beautify the church grounds but also stand as a living reminder for the community to remain firmly rooted in Christ, the source of all life.

Katelynn and Kayley Low



Light always returns after darkness

PORT DICKSON: In the aftermath of tropical storm Senyar in late November 2025, which left parts of the Church of the Immaculate Conception (CICPD) affected and the community adjusting to unexpected challenges, the parish came together for a simple 'Breakfast with Santa' fundraising event.

The event reflected both the current circumstances of the church and the desire to focus on fundraising and fellowship rather than festivity. Families gathered over a small-scale breakfast sale, activities, and children's smiles brightened the atmosphere as Santa made his appearance as a joyful symbol pointing beyond himself.

Within the church setting, Santa was used as a teaching tool. Historically, Santa was inspired by St Nicholas, a 4th-century Christian bishop known for his generosity, compassion, and care for children. These were values that reflected Christ's character, not ones that competed with it. The message was gently but firmly shared that Christmas began and ended with Jesus Christ — His birth, His love, and His gift of salvation.

The Church carried the responsibility to clearly say, "Santa is fun, but Jesus is Lord." When this was stated openly, children were not misled; they were grounded. **Susan Teng Yee Ling**



When community becomes family

SEREMBAN: The Women's Ministry of the Church of the Visitation brought the spirit of Christmas beyond parish walls when it organised a Christmas gathering with the Orang Asli community at Kampung Sebir Labu, Seremban, last month.

According to its coordinator,

Gloria Jay, the gathering was organised to foster fellowship and to share the joy, hope, and warmth of Christmas with the community.

The programme began with an opening prayer. Laughter and excitement soon filled the grounds as children took part in recreational activities, including a friendly foot-

ball game that drew cheers from both young and old. This was followed by a communal breakfast, where participants gathered not just to share a meal, but to share stories and companionship.

As the celebration continued, the message of Christmas came alive through joyful carolling and a series

of interactive activities. Children and adults alike joined in building a Christmas tree together, dancing to festive tunes, and participating in freeze dance, creating moments of shared joy and spontaneous laughter.

Beyond a mere celebration, this gathering became a living ex-

pression of love and community, strengthening bonds, affirming dignity, and reflecting the Church's mission to reach out in love. In sharing the joy of Christmas, the Women's Ministry not only celebrated the birth of Christ but also made His presence felt in the hearts of the community.

KUALA LUMPUR: It began quietly, with a simple message of care posted in the Encountering Grace in Grief (EGG) WhatsApp group chat in early December: Hope all of you are being gentle with yourselves as the festive season draws near.

I replied almost instinctively: I have decided not to put up any Christmas deco in the house, only lighting the Advent candle for weeks 1, 2, 3, and 4. I find the journey surreal for now.

On its own, the exchange seemed unremarkable. Yet for those of us who had met during the Encountering Grace in Grief retreat by Maranatha House of Prayer in October 2025, affectionately calling ourselves “EGGies”, these brief messages became a way of accompanying one another through a season that often intensifies the ache of absence. As Christmas approached, we began gently encouraging one

another with words of warmth, solidarity, and quiet understanding.

It was in this spirit that Fr Hung Pham, SJ, who has been journeying with us since the EGG retreat, stepped forward with a generous proposal. He suggested an online Zoom gathering to offer support during the holidays. The session, aptly titled *Holding the Space*, was organised with the help of our tireless and generous coordinators. They spread the word about the session and drew together volunteers from within the EGG community and beyond, each offering their time and presence so that others might be accompanied with care.

The preparation itself bore witness to quiet acts of generosity. Fr Hung had invited his friend from the United States to assist with the

Zoom organisation. Despite the significant time difference, she joined us faithfully at what was 3.30am her time, so that participants gathering at 7.30pm across Asia could be supported seamlessly throughout the evening.

It was also a quiet marvel of our digital age. Fr Hung joined us from South Africa, while nearly eighty participants logged in from around the world, from Australia, the United States, and Cameroon. Closer to home, we had participants from Vietnam, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, and of course, Malaysia. Just one week after that initial message in the chat, we gathered online to hold space for one another in hopeful love and support, and to share our grief and our hope in the resurrection.

Holding the Space

Caritas outreach brings joy to Orang Asli community

KAMPAR: During Advent last month, Caritas Church of the Holy Name of Mary, Permatang Tinggi, embarked on an inspiring outreach to the Orang Asli community in Kampar, Perak. Gifts generously donated by parishioners became tangible expressions of the joy of the Lord, shared with those in need.

This initiative was more than a seasonal charity effort — it was an act of solidarity rooted in discernment and action. After assessing the needs of Kampung Batu Berangkai, the parish Caritas team chose to support approximately 700 villagers, embracing the call to stand with the marginalised.

In the first week of Advent, the team launched a parish-wide donation drive. An awareness video played after every Mass, drawing inspiration from the rejection of Mary and Joseph by the innkeepers. It encouraged parishioners to console the Infant Jesus by offering gifts to the least of His brothers and sisters.

The response was overwhelming. In less than three weeks, parishioners contributed two wheelchairs, 39 sets of school uniforms, and essential items for 100 families. While modest in quantity, these gifts carried love for Jesus and a sincere desire to share His joy with the Orang Asli.

The outreach took place during the third week of Advent. Together with Caritas Church of the Sacred Heart, Kampar, ministry leaders and parishioners visited Kampung Batu Berangkai. Tok Batin Encik Yusri

welcomed the group and arranged a traditional tarian sewang dance performed by the village children. Carols were sung, and a shared meal strengthened bonds of friendship and mutual respect.

Yusri shared the history and challenges of the Semai community, now a diverse group due to intermarriages with other Orang Asli groups and wider Malaysian society. Traditionally farmers, many now work in public and private sectors, while some continue agriculture and handicrafts. Yusri highlighted the importance of empowering youth, women, and the sick, and defending ancestral land from encroachment.

The Orang Asli are among Malaysia’s most marginalised communities, vulnerable to poverty, climate crises, and loss of land. When forests are cleared, homes and livelihoods are threatened, making solidarity and support all the more vital.

Through this outreach, the Orang Asli were central. The Church’s mission is to walk alongside the poor, safeguard their dignity, and proclaim justice through both action and prayer.

In serving the least of our brothers and sisters, parishioners encounter the Sacred Heart of Jesus, who calls them His own. We warmly invite everyone to serve in the parish Caritas, bringing the light of the Gospel to the peripheries and encountering Christ in the faces of the marginalised.



Welcoming the light of hope at CIC, Penang

Nicholas Khor

PENANG: The Church of the Immaculate Conception (CIC) marked its jubilee on December 21, 2025, under the theme *Welcoming the Light of Hope*, in line with the Jubilee Year of Hope proclaimed by the Universal Church. The celebration invited the faithful to live as “Pilgrims of Hope,” embracing renewal, mercy, and faith amid contemporary challenges.

The jubilee honoured four key groups within the parish — the elderly, children, families, and friends in need — through prayer, reflection, and symbolic gestures, underscoring that hope is nurtured and shared within the Body of Christ.

Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang, led the celebrations, accompanied by Bishop Emeritus Antony Selvanayagam, CIC parish priest and assistant parish priest Msgr Jude Miranda, Fr Oliver Tham, and Fr Joachim Robert from College General Major Seminary. Dignitaries included Parish Pastoral Council Chairperson Datin Dr Annie Foo, Member of Parliament YB Syerleena Abdul Rashid, Deputy Chief Minister II YB Jagdeep Singh Deo, and State Assemblyman YB Joshua Woo Sze Zeng.

In his homily, Cardinal Sebastian reflected on the distinction between the order of the flesh and the order of the Spirit in Jesus Christ. While Jesus is a descendant of King David according to the flesh, He is proclaimed Son of God through the Holy Spirit. “Saint Joseph’s response to Mary’s pregnancy is a timeless example of obedience and faith, guided by the Spirit rather than human reasoning,” he said.

The cardinal emphasised that hope is not mere optimism but a gift of the Holy Spirit, insepara-

ble from faith and love. Christians are called to courageously witness Christ across cultures, while the sick and homebound participate through prayer and spiritual communion. He concluded with the Maranatha prayer, deepening the Advent spirit as Christmas approached.

Intercessions during the Prayer of the Faithful invoked blessings for the Diocese of Penang, Malaysia, Asia, and the Universal Church. Special prayers were offered for families, children, the elderly, the sick, those facing financial hardship, and for healing in broken relationships.

A gift exchange organised according to the different age groups reflected the Christmas spirit of generosity. Parishioners aged 70 and

to discern how we choose to live now, shaping the path of our journey home to God.

Following the reflection, participants were placed in small breakout rooms, each with a volunteer facilitator. In these intimate spaces, stories were shared with honesty, vulnerability, and reverence. After just over an hour, the groups returned to the main session, where facilitators offered brief reflections capturing the heart of their group’s sharing.

The evening concluded with a question-and-answer session, during which Fr Hung responded thoughtfully to participants’ spiritual questions. This was followed by Billy Joel’s *Lullaby* (Goodnight, My Angel), before a closing prayer gently brought the gathering to rest.

In holding space for grief together, we found ourselves held as well, by community, by faith, and by a quiet but enduring hope. **Agnes Ong**



able from faith and love. Christians are called to courageously witness Christ across cultures, while the sick and homebound participate through prayer and spiritual communion. He concluded with the Maranatha prayer, deepening the Advent spirit as Christmas approached.

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A gift exchange organised according to the different age groups reflected the Christmas spirit of generosity. Parishioners aged 70 and

above received a symbolic umbrella, representing protection and their role as pillars of faith. Memorial prayers were also offered for departed loved ones, whose names were inscribed in the ‘Book of Victory’.

The celebration was enriched by a children’s nativity presentation, a Christmas cantata, and carols by candlelight, joyfully proclaiming the mystery of Christ’s birth. The celebrations continued outdoors with food stalls, children’s activities, and cultural performances, reflecting the parish’s diversity.

The jubilee concluded with prayers of gratitude, leaving the faithful renewed in hope, united in love, and ready to welcome Christ anew at Christmas.

A Jubilee for the history books

VATICAN: When Pope Francis proclaimed the Jubilee Year of Hope in his papal bull *Spes Non Confundit (Hope Does Not Disappoint)*, he placed hope at the heart of the Church's response to a world marked by war, uncertainty and suffering. His words — describing hope as the deep human desire for good despite an unknown future — would take on an unexpected and poignant meaning in the year that followed.

By early 2024, concern over the Pope's health was already growing. A persistent flu, reduced mobility and his reliance on a cane and wheelchair raised questions about whether he could fully participate in the demanding Jubilee programme. Despite these challenges, many still hoped he would be present for key events. That hope was shattered in February when his condition worsened. On April 21, just one day after delivering what would be his final Easter Sunday *urbi et orbi* blessing, Pope Francis died.

His death sent shockwaves through the Church. Archbishop Rino Fisichella, pro-prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelisation and chief organiser of the Jubilee, said it "created a silence that was felt in the streets of Rome and the world, as well as in every Christian community." Speaking to *OSV*

News in a December 2025 email interview, he reflected that the period of mourning gave the Jubilee motto deeper meaning. "The faithful understood that Christian hope is not a sentiment, but a promise," he said, recalling pilgrims crossing the Holy Door with tears but renewed inner strength. He stressed that hope ultimately points to eternal life, fulfilled in Christ's resurrection — the core message of the Jubilee.

The Pope's death also marked a rare moment in Church history. The last time a pope died and a successor was elected during a Jubilee Year was in 1700. Archbishop Fisichella acknowledged that the interregnum brought "objective difficulties," while Alessandro Gisotti, deputy editorial director of Vatican Media, noted that the Jubilee had already been subdued by the pope's illness and hospitalisation. Still, both emphasised that the Jubilee continued. "The machine did not stop," Archbishop Fisichella said.

Rather than halting the Holy Year, the death of Pope Francis and the election of Pope Leo XIV reshaped it. Gisotti observed that the transition, in some ways, renewed interest and attendance. Pope Leo accepted the demanding Jubilee calendar without hesitation and chose to maintain all planned commitments, provid-



Pope Leo XIV waves to the crowd from the popemobile as he departs after celebrating a Mass concluding the Jubilee of Youth in Rome's Tor Vergata neighborhood August 3, 2025. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)

ing stability and continuity. That continuity was reflected in the strong turnout of pilgrims, most notably during the Jubilee of Youth in Rome, which drew an estimated one million young people.

Among them was 17-year-old Joey Pfeiffer from Miami, who said encountering peers living their faith helped him build a foundation of belief. Others, like Elias Rosado from New Jersey, who led a youth group with his wife, described the Jubilee as a reminder that personal suffering and faith journeys are not walked

alone.

Archbishop Fisichella said these experiences reflected the Jubilee's deeper fruit: a Church unafraid to translate faith into concrete acts of mercy. Pope Francis opened the Holy Door in December 2024; its closing was carried out by Pope Leo XIV. For Archbishop Fisichella, that unfinished gesture was symbolic. "The mission of the Church never closes," he said, urging believers to return home as "Pilgrims of Hope," bringing hope, peace and daily witness into their communities. **OSV News**

Church leaders welcome Indian state's anti-hate speech law

BENGALURU: Church leaders and rights advocates have welcomed India's first state-level anti-hate speech law passed in Karnataka, saying it will help curb rising hate crimes and inflammatory rhetoric targeting religious minorities, including Christians.

"This is a good move in a civilised society," said Archbishop Peter Machado of Bengaluru. "It will help prevent some people from creating disharmony and misunderstandings that cause problems in neighbourhoods."

The Congress Party-led Karnataka state government passed the Karnataka Hate Speech and Hate Crime (Prevention) Bill, 2025, on December 18, 2025, amid strong opposition from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, which alleged the law was intended to stifle dissent.

The bill seeks to curb the "dissemination, publication or promotion of hate speech and crimes," prescribes punishment for offenders, and provides for compensation to victims.

Those convicted of hate speech could face up to seven years in prison and a fine of up to 50,000 rupees (about RM2,255). Repeat offenders could be sentenced to two to seven years in jail and fined up to 100,000 rupees



This file photo shows Indian Youth Congress activists shouting slogans against Home Minister Amit Shah and other pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders — Kapil Mishra, Anurag Thakur and Parvesh Verma — for making hate speeches in India's capital, near the parliament in New Delhi on March 2, 2020.

(about RM4,510).

Machado, however, said the new law should not be used "against those who oppose or legitimately criticise those in power."

Overall, it is "very much needed in our times, when religious minorities are unnecessarily harassed on trivial issues," the archbishop said.

The legislation also empowers designated officials to order online platforms and websites

to block or remove content deemed likely to trigger hate crimes.

The bill has been sent to the state governor, Thawar Chand Gehlot, for assent before it becomes law.

Catholic legislator Ivan D'Souza from Bengaluru said the law aims to rein in fundamentalist forces.

"Hate speeches have been promoting enmity

and even inciting violence on the grounds of religion, caste and gender. This law strengthens existing legal provisions," he said.

John Dayal, senior journalist and spokesman of the All India Catholic Union, said the bill is intended to penalise incitement that often leads to violence. However, he warned of possible misuse.

"Like earlier laws, this too could be tweaked by malevolent political forces if they come to power, and turned against the very groups it seeks to protect," he said.

Dayal described the "normalising of hate" as deeply troubling, noting that minorities, especially Muslims, are often demonised during election periods.

Jesuit social activist Fr Louis Prakash said for the pro-Hindu BJP, "hate crimes have become an electoral weapon" and the law would be "a deterrent" to its cadres and their allies.

Rights activist Jesuit Fr Cedric Prakash echoed the view, saying hate speech has become "the new normal" for extremist groups that target the Muslim, Christian, and Sikh minorities.

"There has been little accountability for hate mongering in India. This law is much needed," he said. **ucanews.com**



Aftermath of Cyclone Ditwah in Sri Lanka (file photo)

COLOMBO: More than a month after Cyclone Ditwah devastated Sri Lanka, over a million people still require urgent help, as inundations and prolonged rain continue to aggravate the situation.

The cyclone struck the country's eastern coast on 28 November, causing 643 deaths and 183 people missing.

As of today, the UN warns that about 1.8 million Sri Lankans are still dealing with the

consequences of the disaster, with two-thirds of them in need of humanitarian assistance, including nearly half a million children.

Local authorities and relief workers confirmed widespread destruction across all nine provinces, with significant disruption to public services and increased risks for the most vulnerable.

In addition, about 30 per cent of families are reportedly reducing their food intake as hunger

Help still needed after Sri Lanka cyclone

looms.

According to recent World Bank estimates, property damage could reach nearly \$4.1 billion (RM5.6 billion) — around 4 per cent of the country's GDP.

Yet, post-disaster recovery and needs are expected to be much higher.

As reported by the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), serious shortcomings in child protection, education, and nutrition are becoming evident. There are also difficulties in using water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services.

Numerous children are still displaced in temporary shelters or are living with host families, where they lack adequate lighting, privacy and hygiene.

Education has been heavily affected. Over a thousand schools and six universities were damaged, while around 500 schools are currently being used as accommodation centres.

Recently, students have been transferred from damaged schools to nearby active establishments. Still, humanitarian organisations

point out that modular classrooms will be needed in different parts of the country to minimise disruption to the educational system.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) calculates that nearly 300,000 people are currently unable to live in their own properties. Some of them are hosted by locals, while others are taking shelter in schools, places of worship and temporary dormitories.

Sri Lanka received considerable emergency provisions from several global players, such as China, the US and the EU. Those same institutions promised funding to support the recovery process.

Following a request by the Sri Lankan government, UN agencies and humanitarian partners launched a Humanitarian Priorities Plan this month, seeking \$35.3 million (RM143 million) to provide relief to those in greatest need.

Humanitarian agencies stress that without sufficient financial backing and constant support, the road to recovery will be long. **Vatican News**



The story of a growing Church

This article is the first in a series that seeks to capture the stories, people and moments that have shaped the journey of the Catholic Church in Malaysia. It reflects on the challenges and achievements, the pains and joys encountered along the way, as the Church journeys towards its first Malaysia Pastoral Convention from September 9-13, 2026. 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.

Richard Chia

For many in Malaysia, Christianity is often perceived as a “white man’s religion,” despite the fact that Jesus was Asian — born and raised in what is today known as West Asia, in places such as Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth. This perception largely stems from the way Christianity was first introduced to this region, arriving alongside European colonial powers, particularly the Portuguese, in the 16th century.



“Portrait of Afonso de Albuquerque, Viceroy of Portuguese India” (after 1545), by unknown artist. National Museum of Ancient Art, Lisbon.

Malaysian schools at the time taught that the Portuguese arrived in Malacca in 1511 under the leadership of Alfonso D’Albuquerque, the second Portuguese Governor (or Viceroy) of Portugal’s Asian Empire. Having recently seized the island of Goa in India, Albuquerque set his sights on Malacca and captured it after a month-long siege.

Albuquerque, commanding a fleet of nineteen ships carrying 800 Portuguese and 600 Indian troops, successfully captured Malacca on August 24, 1511. The Malay rulers and their forces were no match for the superior firepower of the Portuguese, and were unable to mount an effective resistance.

Albuquerque’s aim was to control the key nodes of the Muslim trading network that funnelled Asian spices to Europe. Accompanying his fleet were eight Catholic chaplains — seven serving as general confessors for the soldiers, and one serving as Albuquerque’s personal chaplain.



The Conquest of Malacca, 1511, by Ernesto Condeixa. Study for the artwork in the Military Museum, Lisbon.

In the 16th century, Portugal was engaged in fierce competition with neighbouring Spain to dominate global trade and commerce. Both nations possessed advanced navigational skills and formidable firepower, and both were staunchly Roman Catholic. Catholicism served as a cornerstone of national unity and imperial identity, and their monarchs leveraged military power not only to expand their empires but also to promote religious conformity in the territories they colonised.

History records that the two empires effectively divided the world between them: Spain claimed the sea routes to the Phil-



The Conquest of Malacca, 1511, by Ernesto Condeixa. Study for the artwork in the Military Museum, Lisbon.

ippines and the Americas, while Portugal established its dominion over Africa, India, and Southeast Asia.

When Albuquerque arrived in Malacca, he did so under the banner of the Military Crusading Order of Christ. Among his eight chaplains were one Dominican priest, six Franciscan priests, and his personal chaplain.

While religion was invoked to justify their actions, military and economic priorities often took precedence. Whenever religious goals conflicted with political or commercial interests, it was the latter that usually prevailed.

It is important to remember that the clergy who arrived in Malacca in the 16th century were primarily there to minister to the Portuguese fleet and their administrators. To the local Malays, the religious and political interests of the colonisers appeared inseparable. Yet, on closer examination, distinctions did exist even within the colonising fleet and among the trading communities they engaged with.

First, although Portugal was a Catholic nation, not all of its soldiers adhered to the faith, and the Indian troops accompanying the fleet were likewise not uniformly Catholic. Second, most of the trading communities in Malacca — Gujarati traders, Chinese and Hindu merchants — were primarily there for business. Some converted to Catholicism, often as a means of gaining favour or securing trade with the Portuguese. In the early 16th century, politics, economics, society, and religion were deeply intertwined in Malaya, and by the middle of the century, a significant number had embraced the Catholic faith.

As Christianity took root in Malacca, churches sprang up and more missionary priests arrived. Hospitals and schools were established, not primarily for the local population, but to serve the growing num-



Statue of St Francis Xavier in Malacca.

ber of converts who had come to trade and do business with the colonisers. Converts from the Muslim faith were few, largely because conversion was not permitted, and those who did convert often did so out of necessity — for survival, trade, or job security. The majority of new converts were traders, merchants, labourers, or slaves who had arrived from other regions.

When Francis Xavier arrived in Malacca in 1545, he found the city in a state of spiritual decline. Observing the widespread neglect of the faith among those who were nominally Catholic, he immediately recognised the need to establish a school. By that time, the Portuguese had been in Malacca for more than thirty years.

St Paul’s College in Malacca, believed to be the first school in what is now Malaysia, was founded by Francis Xavier in 1548. It is widely regarded as the forerunner of Christian schools in Malaysia.

In the decades that followed, Francis Xavier called for numerous clergy and religious brothers from Goa, effectively making Malacca his base as he undertook apostolic journeys to the islands of Indonesia, Japan, and even attempted China, though he was unable to enter.

In total, Francis Xavier made five trips to Malacca. During his final visit in July 1552, the city was struck by a devastating plague. Hospitals and the Jesuit residence quickly filled to capacity, prompting him to convert many inoperative ships into emergency hospitals. Francis Xavier passed away on December 3, 1553, leaving behind a great legacy of mission and service.

By the end of the 16th century, Malacca was home to an estimated 6,400 Christians, mostly converts of Chinese and Indian descent. Thanks to the rapid progress of missionary work by various religious orders, Malacca was established as a Suffragan See under the Diocese of Goa in 1557. This Suffragan See encompassed a vast region, including Burma, Siam, China, Malaya, and the Indonesian Archipelago, with a total Christian population of approximately 500,000.

Next: Into the 17th and 18th century

Pope's prayer intention for January

Letting God's Word shape our journey

The Pope's prayer intention for this month, invites us to return to something both deeply familiar and often neglected: praying with the Word of God. Not merely reading it, not just quoting it, but allowing the Word to pray us into life, into hope, and into mission. It is a simple invitation, yet a demanding one, because the Word of God is never neutral. Once welcomed, it unsettles, challenges, heals, and sends us forth.

For clergy, religious and laity alike, this intention touches a shared human and spiritual reality: we all hunger. Not only for food or success or security, but for meaning, direction and hope — especially in a world marked by constant noise, distraction and quiet fatigue. In Malaysia, where faith is lived within a multi-religious, multicultural and sometimes cautious social context, the Word of God can easily become functional rather than formative: readings for Mass, texts for catechism, references for meetings or homilies. The Pope reminds us that the Word is meant to be nourishment — something taken in daily, slowly and prayerfully — so that our lives, and the life of the Church, may be sustained.

The Word as daily bread

The image of nourishment is deeply biblical. We do not eat once and expect to be full forever. In the same way, praying with Scripture is not an occasional spiritual exercise reserved for Advent, Lent or retreats. It is daily bread. For priests and deacons, there is a real temptation of “professional familiarity” — handling Scripture constantly while rarely allowing it to handle us. Religious, despite structured prayer lives, may still find the Word squeezed by apostolic busyness. Lay people, juggling work, family and social commitments, often feel that time simply slips away.

Yet the Word of God was first proclaimed not to those with leisure and quiet, but to fishermen, farmers, mothers, widows and labourers — people whose lives were already full. The question, then, is not whether we have time, but whether we recognise our hunger.

In the Malaysian context, where many Catholics live their faith quietly as a minority — in offices, schools, hospitals, plantations or *kampungs* — the Word becomes a quiet source of strength. A short Gospel passage prayed over before

Prayer with the Word of God.
Let us pray that praying with the Word of God be nourishment for our lives and a source of hope in our communities, helping us to build a more fraternal and missionary Church.



leaving home, a Psalm revisited during a commute, a verse whispered in moments of anxiety — these are not insignificant gestures. They are acts of trust that God's voice still speaks into ordinary life.

From information to transformation

Praying with the Word is different from studying it. Both are important, but prayer moves us from information to transformation. Scripture is not meant only to be understood; it is meant to be encountered. When prayed with openness, the Word reveals not only who God is, but who we are becoming — and sometimes, who we are resisting becoming.

This is especially crucial for those entrusted with leadership and ministry. In a Church journeying towards deeper synodality, Scripture must remain our common reference point. Without it, dialogue risks becoming ideological or managerial. With it, listening becomes prayerful discernment, and decision-making becomes an act of faith.

For religious communities, praying with the Word renews charism and mission, preventing apostolates from becoming mere projects and vows from becoming routine. For the laity, it bridges the often-lamented gap between Sunday worship and weekday living. The Word proclaimed on Sunday must find flesh on

Monday — in boardrooms, classrooms, homes, and high-rise flats.

A source of hope in our communities

The Pope also prays that the Word of God may be a source of hope in our communities. Hope, however, is not naïve optimism. It does not deny struggle or difficulty. Rather, it trusts that God remains present and active even when circumstances appear discouraging.

Many communities in Malaysia carry quiet burdens: economic pressures, concerns over education and employment, migration, family fragmentation, intergenerational misunderstandings, and anxieties about the future of faith among the young. Some parishes experience fatigue, relying on the same faithful few to sustain ministries.

The Word of God speaks directly into these realities. It reminds us that God often works through what is small and hidden. It reassures us that faithfulness matters more than numbers, and perseverance more than visibility. When parishioners gather around Scripture — in Basic Ecclesial Communities, Bible-sharing groups, youth fellowships or family prayer — something changes. People discover that their struggles are named in the Word, their questions echoed, and their hope gently rekindled.

In a Church that prays in many languages — Bahasa Malaysia, English, Mandarin, Tamil and indigenous tongues — the Word becomes a powerful sign of unity in diversity. God speaks to His people in voices they recognise, affirming that no culture or community is excluded from His saving plan.

Building a fraternal and missionary Church

The Pope links praying with the Word to building a Church that is both fraternal and missionary. These two dimensions are inseparable. A Church that listens deeply to the Word learns to listen to one another. A Church nourished by Scripture cannot remain inward-looking.

Fraternity begins when the Word challenges our assumptions, softens our judgments and widens our hearts. Scripture continually reminds us that the poor, the migrant, the elderly, the young, the difficult neighbour and the person who thinks differently are never outside God's concern. In Malaysia's plural society, praying with the Word forms us to be bridges rather than walls, witnesses rather than adversaries.

Mission, too, flows naturally from prayer. When the Word truly takes root, it shapes our choices, our speech and our public witness. Evangelisation then becomes less about programmes and more about presence — integrity at work, compassion in discourse, courage in defending human dignity, and humility in sharing faith when invited.

A simple but deliberate step forward

This intention is ultimately a call to choose. Choose to slow down in a culture that prizes speed. Choose to listen in a world full of voices. Choose to let God speak before we speak about Him.

Perhaps the invitation for this new year is not to add something complicated to already busy schedules, but to reclaim something essential. Five intentional minutes with the day's Gospel. One verse carried in the heart throughout the day. Families reading Sunday's readings together before Mass. Parishes encouraging Bible-sharing not as an “extra activity” but as a way of living faith together.

For clergy and religious, it may mean returning to Scripture not first as preachers, teachers or leaders, but as disciples who still need to be shaped and converted. For lay people, it may mean trusting that God's Word truly belongs in the midst of ordinary life — at the kitchen table, in traffic jams, during moments of fear or decision-making.

Letting the Word lead us

Ultimately, praying with the Word requires humility: the courage to let Scripture read us. We often approach the Bible seeking comfort or answers. Yet the Word also asks questions, exposes complacency and calls us beyond familiar routines. This vulnerability is not a weakness; it is the soil where genuine renewal begins.

As we begin the new year, the Pope's intention invites each of us — clergy, religious and laity — to place the Word of God once more at the centre of our lives and our communities. Not as decoration or obligation, but as nourishment and hope. If we allow it, the Word will sustain us, disturb us and send us forth. It will shape our parishes into communities of listening, our families into schools of faith, and our Church in Malaysia into a people who walk gently yet confidently with God. And in doing so, it will help us become the Church the Pope envisions — fraternal in spirit, missionary in action, and firmly rooted in the living Word of God.



Stephanie Cheong

PENANG: Many who walk along the service road leading to the Church of St Francis Xavier, Penang Road, may glance curiously at the green-hued building on the right and wonder about its purpose. A closer look reveals a modest yet striking sign on its gate: a stylised cross and an open Bible set against the rising sun, bearing the words MASC – Monsignor Aloysius Spirituality Centre. It is a quiet invitation to pause, to enter, and to encounter God.

On December 13, 2025 the Rite of Blessing of MASC was held, graced by Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang, together with priests, board members and invited guests. In his opening address, Fr Edmund Woon, parish priest of City Parish and overseer of the centre, traced the long and meaningful journey of the building, once home to the Penang Road Convent established by the French nuns of the Holy Infant Jesus (IJ) Order. When the convent closed down many years later, the space served many purposes over the decades — from learning centres and colleges to a retreat house, a feeding centre for the homeless and urban poor, and eventually the Penang Diocesan Pastoral Institute (PDPI). On June 7, 2014, it was officially opened and blessed as the Catholic Pastoral Centre.

In 2024, the building entered a new chapter of its life, reborn as the Msgr Aloysius Spirituality Centre (MASC). Today, it offers dormitories and rooms accommodating up to 65 guests, a meeting hall, prayer room and seminar spaces — all designed to serve retreats, conferences, youth camps and programmes centred on Christian spirituality. The centre also houses shared offices and ministries, including Lighthouse, Pembela Wanita, the Penang Diocesan New Evangelisation Commission, Healing and Deliverance, Shekinah Glory, and others. While a love offering is requested to help with maintenance, the centre's true gift lies in its atmosphere: a rare oasis of quiet and welcome in the midst of the city's bustling Heritage Zone.

That sense of hospitality did not come easily. Chan Lilian, who was invited by Fr Edmund to take on the role of administrator, admitted she was initially hesitant. Yet a retreat experience in Chiang Mai helped her discern the call. The task that followed was not without trials — from clearing and cleaning neglected spaces to unexpected encounters with snakes, monkeys, civet cats and bats. Slowly, with perseverance and the generosity of many benefactors, MASC took root.

Today, its doors are open to all. Guided by the vision of Revelation 7:9, MASC embraces inclusivity and diversity, welcoming Catholic and Christian groups from near and far, migrant communities and the Orang Asli. It is a place where differences converge in



A sacred pause in the city

MASC carries forward Msgr Aloysius' legacy



Cardinal Sebastian Francis flanked by Fr Joachim Robert and Fr Edmund Woon with the religious sisters and other stakeholders.

prayer and shared faith.

In his blessing, Cardinal Sebastian offered words that stirred hearts. He reminded those present that all true spirituality is centred on the Holy Spirit. MASC, he said, is called to be “a heart within the city's heritage” — a sacred space in the marketplace. Even amid the distractions of urban life, it stands as a refuge for those who might otherwise be forgotten: the wounded along the streets, the silent dead in the neighbouring cemetery, the IJ sisters, nearby missions and worshippers at the Church of St Francis Xavier. Quoting Scripture, he assured that in this place, the weary would hear again the Lord's promise: “Be still and know that I am God” (Ps 46:10) and “Come to me, all you who labour, and I will give you rest” (Mt 11:28). He expressed heartfelt gratitude to the City Parish for having MASC under its wings.

The Rite of Blessing continued with readings from Psalm 62 and Matthew 11:28–30, followed by prayers of intercession and the blessing of the entire

building by Cardinal Sebastian, Frs Edmund Woon and Joachim Roberts and Deacon Andrew Loh. Fellowship continued over a shared meal — a fitting sign of community and joy.

Many may wonder why the Centre bears the name Msgr Aloysius. It is an honour richly deserved. Msgr Ignatius John Aloysius, the first Vicar General of the Diocese of Penang, devoted more than six decades to pastoral service in Malaysia and Singapore. Bishop Emeritus Antony Selvanayagam once described him as “a down-to-earth human person, touched by God's Spirit... a man of God and a man for others.”

His stature was recognised internationally when, in 1978, Pope Paul VI named him the first Malaysian Honorary Prelate, granting the title Monsignor. In 1983, Pope John Paul II bestowed on Msgr. Aloysius the highest honour awarded to a priest, the ‘Supernumerary Apostolic Protonotary’. Apart from being the first Vicar General and Vicar Capitular of the Diocese of Penang, he was also made an Honorary Member of

the MEP Society, Paris. Msgr Aloysius, with pastoral foresight, had established several places of worship, including the Church of St John Britto, Sungai Pinang, Chapel of St Mary, Gottlieb Road and the St Joseph Chapel, Hong Seng Estate. All these places of worship are in Penang.

Besides being a caring and guiding shepherd to his parishioners, he was a father to the orphans and underprivileged boys at St Joseph's Home, founded as St Joseph's Orphanage in 1865 by Fr François Xavier Hab, a French missionary. The Home still stands within the same compound shared with MASC.

Msgr Aloysius dedicated specific days to house visits, catechesis, and care for the sick. He made sure that the children who did not go to Catholic schools attended Catechism classes on Saturdays. Wednesdays was the day devoted to the sick and Msgr would go to the wards and homes bringing the Holy Eucharist and comforting them. He had a deep heart for the poor, working closely with the Society of St Vincent de Paul.

Despite not having the opportunity for further studies or formal specialisation, Msgr Aloysius was a deeply learned man, well-versed in Church teachings and affairs, with a particular interest and expertise in matrimonial jurisprudence.

Those who knew him remember not only his achievements, but his love. Fr Francis Anthony recalled Msgr's counsel to young clergy: no matter how busy parish life becomes, make time for one another — for love is the greatest of all. His nephew, R. Dominic Louis, expressed joy that MASC now bears his name, believing Msgr would be happiest knowing that people of all ages come there to pray, learn and find rest.

Such a life of faith and service finds a fitting legacy in a centre dedicated to spirituality. Though Msgr Aloysius passed away more than 30 years ago at the age of 91, he remains close in spirit. Before his death on Ash Wednesday, February 16, 1994, he left these words: “Blessed are those who welcome me with a smile... When I pass the threshold of eternity, I will remember them to the Lord.”

Today, MASC stands as that smile — a place of welcome, rest and encounter with God — carrying forward the heart of a shepherd who loved deeply and served faithfully.

For those seeking a welcoming space for prayer, reflection or spiritual programmes, enquiries may be directed to:

MASC Penang

52L, Penang Road, 10000 Penang

Email: mascpenang@gmail.com

Phone: 017-335 3253



Church attire in a casual age

Dressing for church has long been more than a matter of fashion; it is a public sign of reverence. In earlier years, a Sunday wardrobe carried a certain ritual gravity: the quieting of street noise, the donning of attire that signals, at the door, “I am entering a holy space.” As congregations have grown more casual, that instinct has often given way to convenience — sometimes at odds with the solemnity that public worship requires.

This shift matters, especially for those who serve in visible liturgical roles as lectors, commentators, and cantors. These ministries are not merely functional; they are acts of worship. How one appears in the sanctuary communicates something about the Word proclaimed, the psalms sung, and the assembly gathered to listen for God’s voice. While casual attire is not inherently irreverent, and worshippers come from diverse backgrounds, the balance between personal expression and sacred decorum remains delicate.

Reverence, however, cannot be reduced to a private feeling. It must be visible, audible, and shared — beginning with the first impression within the sanctuary. When a lector approaches the lectern in attire that distracts rather than draws focus — whether through overly casual clothing, revealing cuts, or distressed styles — the effect is not merely aesthetic. It risks diverting attention from the sacred text itself. The psalms repeatedly call us to awe,

holiness, and adoration. In this sense, dress becomes a small but telling sign of how seriously we regard the proclamation of God’s Word.

Reverence is not about rigid rules or constant solemnity. It is about intention: the intention to honour the space, the community, and the message entrusted to those who minister publicly. The sanctuary is not a backstage area; it is the place where the Word enters the public square. The Mass is not a performance but an encounter. Clothing should support, not undermine, that reality.

Attire that is overly tight, revealing, or attention-grabbing can pull focus away from the text, the melody, and the gravity of the moment. By contrast, clothing that is clean, modest, and neat sends a clear signal: we have come to bear witness to something greater than ourselves. There is also a pastoral dimension. Many enter the church carrying burdens, doubts, or fragile faith. A visibly lax approach to reverence — even unconsciously — can suggest that seriousness is optional, that comfort or personal style outweighs the sacred purpose of the gathering.

This is not an accusation but a concern. When Scripture is proclaimed and psalms are sung, the congregation instinctively reads the room for cues about meaning and weight. Lectors and cantors carry the Word toward the community; their appearance should assist, not hinder, that delivery. Modesty, in this context, is not about fear or policing bodies, but about acknowledging the dignity of the

sacred act.

Modest dress need not be severe or antiquated. It simply calls for clothing that is appropriate to a liturgical setting — avoiding slogans, excessively casual materials, or styles that draw the eye away from the task at hand. The sanctuary itself, with its microphones, music stands, and architectural lines, calls for a certain stillness. Thoughtful attire helps preserve the focus that sacred texts and chant require.

This moment invites leadership and gentle guidance. Church communities can frame expectations around dress as stewardship: stewardship of the liturgy, the psalms, and the Word of God. Clear, kind communication — through bulletins or pastoral reminders — can offer practical guidelines without shaming or gatekeeping. A simple reminder that the sanctuary is a sacred space, paired with suggested attire for liturgical ministers, affirms both the dignity of the role and the diversity of those who serve.

At its heart, this conversation must be theological. Worship that honours God begins in the heart and is reflected outwardly. When we dress with care, we affirm that the sacred is not casual, the Word is not entertainment, and our gathering is a foretaste of a greater communion. The goal is not perfection, but presence — people who, in voice and bearing, signal their readiness to serve something that transcends fashion.

Practical considerations also matter. Lectors and cantors benefit from clothing

...The Church Mouse

that allows for ease of movement, steady posture, and clear proclamation — without constant adjustment or distraction. Footwear should support confident, graceful movement within the sanctuary. Such details, while small, help ministers serve with calm focus and dignity.

In short, dressing up for church is not about antiquated rules or fashion policing; it is about honouring the sanctuary, the Word, and the people gathered to hear. It is about showing, in concrete form, that we believe the holy is real, that the psalms deserve a sacred cadence, and that those who step into the sanctuary to proclaim God’s Word do so with a readiness that words alone cannot convey. Let reverence be the defining thread — the quiet discipline that invites awe, steadies voice, and draws the faithful into an encounter with the living God. If we can recapture that posture, the rest — whether casual or formal in dress — will begin to align with the deeper aim: to worship in spirit and in truth, with dignity, and with the quiet joy of offering nothing less than our best to God.



The question that begins the New Year: Who am I becoming?

The start of a new year often feels familiar. We think about what we want to improve, what we should fix, and what we hope will finally fall into place. We speak easily about plans and resolutions, about doing better, trying harder, and being more disciplined.

I have entered many new years this way myself. Quietly carrying expectations, telling myself that this year will be different. Yet more often than not, I realise that while I am busy planning what I want to do, I rarely pause long enough to ask something deeper.

Not what do I want to achieve, but who am I becoming.

When progress feels hollow

Modern life has taught us to measure growth by output. We feel useful when we are productive. We feel successful when we are busy. Even rest is often justified only if it helps us perform better later. Without realising it, we begin to believe that our worth is tied to how much we do.

The Catholic tradition gently but firmly challenges this way of thinking. Our dignity does not come from what we produce, but from who we are. Created in the image and likeness of God, we are already valued before we achieve anything at all.

This tension becomes clearer the longer we sit with it. It is possible to be doing well on the outside and still feel unsettled within. To be efficient, organised, and capable, yet inwardly impatient, distracted, or restless in ways that no amount of productivity can fix. When that happens, progress begins to

feel hollow, and success no longer satisfies in the way we expected it to.

Conversion, not optimisation

The Church does not speak about growth primarily in terms of self-improvement. She speaks about conversion. Conversion is not about becoming more impressive or more accomplished. It is about becoming more truthful before God.

This kind of growth is quieter and more demanding. It requires us to look honestly at the habits of the heart we often overlook. Pride hidden behind competence. Impatience disguised as efficiency. Self reliance that slowly replaces trust in God.

If I am honest, I find it easier to improve my routines than to allow my heart to be examined. It is easier to plan than to surrender, easier to stay busy than to sit with discomfort. Yet the life of faith keeps drawing us back to this deeper work, because without it, change remains superficial.

Becoming through grace

The faith of the Church reminds us that holiness is not achieved through effort alone. It is the work of grace, slowly shaping us as we cooperate with it. Growth happens not through dramatic breakthroughs, but through daily choices that often go unnoticed.

Choosing patience instead of irritation. Choosing charity instead of judgment.



Encountering Faith

THOMSON EMMANUEL

Choosing faithfulness when no one sees and no one affirms. These moments feel small, even insignificant, yet this is precisely how virtue is formed.

At the beginning of a new year, it is tempting to chase visible results. But God is not in a hurry. He is patient, attentive, and deeply interested in who we are becoming beneath the surface of our achievements.

In the life of the Church, Mary stands quietly at the centre of this understanding,

especially as we begin the year with the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. She did not rush ahead of God’s plan, nor did she measure her life by visible success. She listened, pondered, and allowed grace to unfold slowly within her. Her holiness was shaped not by control or certainty, but by trust and availability. In her, we see that becoming is not about doing more for God, but about allowing God to do His work within us, often in ways that remain hidden for a long time.

Living the question

Faith, then, is not meant to sit alongside our lives as an add-on. It is meant to shape how we live, how we respond, and how we treat others when no one is watching.

This reminds me of one of my favourite maxims: *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi* (as we pray, so we believe, and so we live). Over time, what we pray forms what we believe, and what we believe

quietly shapes how we live, often long before we consciously decide to act.

This is not abstract theology. It reveals itself in very ordinary moments. In how we speak when we are tired. In how we respond when we are misunderstood. In whether our faith softens us or quietly hardens us over time.

The question of who we are becoming surfaces most clearly here, not in our resolutions, but in these unguarded moments when our hearts are least defended.

A New Year invitation

As this new year begins, perhaps the invitation is to pause before setting goals. To sit with a quieter, more demanding question. Not what do I want to accomplish this year, but who do I want to become through it.

Do I want to become more patient? More compassionate? More rooted in faith? More attentive to God and to others?

These desires do not compete with ambition or responsibility. They give them meaning.

Because at the end of the year, when achievements fade and plans change, what remains is the person we have become. And faith, patiently lived, ensures that this becoming is not accidental, but guided by love.

Thomson Emmanuel Wong is from the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Klang. He enjoys exploring the depth, beauty, and meaning of the Catholic faith, inviting readers to discover its richness with fresh eyes and a deeper appreciation.



Fr Ron Rolheiser

The best books that found me in 2025

St. Augustine famously said: *Concerning taste there can be no dispute*. So, with no promise that these books will do for you what they did for me, these are the books that spoke to me most deeply this past year.

Within the area of popular spirituality ...

Tomas Halik: *The Afternoon of Christianity, The Courage to Change*. Halik is one of the major voices in Christian spirituality today, and this book won't disappoint.

Serene Jones: *Call It Grace – Finding Meaning in a Fractured World*. President of Union Theological in New York, Jones gives an autobiographical account of her journey in life and in grace. A worthwhile read.

Jeffrey Munroe: *Reading Buechner, Exploring the Work of a Master Memoirist, Novelist, Theologian, and Preacher*. The best introduction to the work of Frederick Buechner that we have. Perhaps my favourite book of the year.

Richard Rohr: *The Tears of Things, Prophetic Wisdom for an Age of Outrage*. Rohr at his finest. A book that will stretch you in a healthy way. Among his many challenges:

The saints and mystics who weep before the cross are first of all weeping universal tears for the suffering world.

In our weakness we deserve tears more than hatred, fixing, or denial.

The language of a prophet changes from anger at sin to pity over suffering and woundedness. Anger doesn't allow us to make big switches, tears do.

Robert Ellsberg, Editor: *Dorothy Day, On Pilgrimage, The Seventies*. Dorothy Day's letters from the nineteen seventies. Just a very good read.

Jim Wallis: *The False White Gospel, Rejecting Christian Nationalism, Reclaiming True Faith, and Refounding Democracy*. Jim Wallis is the Dorothy Day of our generation. This book is a strong challenge to take Jesus more seriously, and at times more literally.

- God is personal but never private.

- Who is my neighbour must extend beyond who receives official documentation. Your neighbour, as Jesus defines this, is often outside your comfort zone. Jesus says 'Love your neighbour as yourself' no exceptions!

- We are dangerously close to expanding ideologies that don't regard "others" as belonging. Go back to where you came from! The idea that people different from you are not your neighbours and you don't have to love them, and you have permission to hate them. Excluding and attacking those who are different, rejecting outcasts and the outsiders, puts you at odds with Jesus.

Joseph F. Kelly: *The Origins of Christmas*. Kelly, a serious academic, traces out (in a very readable language) how we are to understand the Christmas stories in the Gospels.

Robert Wicks: *The Art of Kindness*. I endorsed this book on its cover with these words: "Robert Wicks has a unique, gifted

spiritual vocabulary. Very few writers have his ability to weave together the special and the common, the academic and the street, and the depth of spiritual insight with robust common sense." This book displays all that, complete with a healthy colouring of humour. He opens the book with this quote, 'when a flower doesn't bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower'. That's the umbrella under which he writes his stories.

A couple of academic books ...

William T. Cavanaugh: *The Uses of Idolatry*. A critical insight into the interplay between our culture and our faith. Cavanaugh argues that we aren't, as Charles Taylor suggests, disenchanted vis-à-vis the transcendent. Rather, we are re-enchanted with other gods. An important academic read.

Charles Taylor: *Cosmic Connections – Poetry in an Age of Disenchantment*. Spoiler alert, this book is highly academic, immensely dense, and more than six hundred pages, but Taylor is one of the prominent philosophers of our generation and in this book (somewhere jammed among all those pages) are dozens of brilliant insights. For example, on the value of poetry:

- Philosophy cannot afford to ignore poetic insight.

- Poetry can be a way of re-enchanting the world.

- Poetry is the translation of insight into subtler languages.

- And poetry is emotion recollected in tranquillity.

Among novels ...

Jane Urquhart: *In Winter I Get Up at Night*. Sadly, this past year I didn't read many novels as I was focused on non-fiction. I am kicking myself for that since fiction offers insights that non-fiction doesn't. This Urquhart novel was the only novel that stood out for me. Set in Saskatchewan, it's a slow-moving story, but it features Urquhart's (always) brilliant prose. Read it for its prose, even if the story doesn't catch your fancy.

And one wildcard ...

Margaret Atwood: *A Book of Lives – A Memoir of Sort*. This book fits no genre but is, as the Latin phrase goes, sui generis, a species all its own. This is not so much an autobiography as it is Atwood simply reminiscing about her life, from childhood until today. It's six hundred pages, but once you begin, like an addiction, you just keep turning page after page. Light, insightful, humorous, heavy. Atwood is a great writer.

Happy reading, of these books or others.

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

Reflecting on the PMP theme - January

Family: The first school of trust and conversion

At the beginning of a new year, the Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral theme invites us to return to something both familiar and fragile — the FAMILY. With the focus on the *Conversion of Relationships and the pastoral pathway of Building Trust*, the Church reminds us that renewal does not begin in programmes or structures alone, but in relationships that are healed, deepened, and transformed by Christ. At the heart of this journey stands the family, the "first school of faith" (Final Document #35), where trust is either patiently formed or painfully broken, and where faith is first learned not through words alone, but through daily actions.

St Paul's exhortation in Colossians 3:15–16 offers a powerful framework for this reflection: "Let the peace of Christ control your hearts... Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Peace, the Word, gratitude, and mutual teaching are not abstract ideals; they are the building blocks of trust within families and, by extension, within the Church and society.

In the Malaysian context, families today navigate complex realities. Our homes are shaped by cultural diversity, intergenerational households, mixed languages, and increasingly, mixed religious experiences. While these can be sources of richness, they also present challenges. Differences in values between generations, long working hours, financial pressures, digital distractions, and the quiet erosion of meaningful conversation have left many families while living under one roof, yet emotionally distant. Trust, once assumed, must now be intentionally rebuilt.

The pastoral call to conversion of relationships begins with recognising that trust is not automatic. It grows where there is presence, listening, and consistency. In families, trust is built when parents pray with their children — even briefly — and not only for them. It is nurtured when spouses learn to listen without defensiveness, when forgiveness is offered before resentment hardens, and when faith is expressed not only at Sunday Mass but in patience, kindness, and integrity throughout the week.

St Paul urges us to let "the peace of Christ control our hearts." Peace here does not mean the absence of conflict, but the presence of Christ at the centre. Families that place Christ at the centre — through shared prayer, Scripture, and honest dialogue — allow His peace to guide difficult conversations and heal wounded relationships. In this way, the home becomes not a perfect space, but a sacred one, where grace is at work amid human weakness.

Fratelli Tutti reminds us that the family is where we first learn to relate to others, to respect differences, and to trust (FD #35). If trust is not formed at home, it becomes difficult to build it in parish communities, workplaces, or society at large. A Church that desires synodality — walking together — must therefore invest deeply in strengthening families as places of encounter, reconciliation, and faith formation.

The pastoral pathway of building trust through shared prayer, regular dialogue, and faith expressed in daily actions challenges us to move beyond idealised images of family life. Shared prayer may begin with something



as simple as grace before meals or a short Scripture verse at night. Regular dialogue requires courage — to speak truthfully, to listen humbly, and to create safe spaces where every voice, including that of children and the elderly, is respected. Faith expressed in daily actions means that love is shown not only in grand gestures, but in consistency: keeping promises, showing up, apologising when wrong, and choosing compassion over convenience.

In a plural and sometimes polarised society like ours, families rooted in trust become powerful witnesses. When Christian families live out forgiveness, hospitality, and solidarity, they offer a quiet yet compelling testimony to the Gospel. They become small but significant

signs of hope — domestic churches that radiate Christ's peace into neighbourhoods, parishes, and the wider nation.

As we reflect on the theme of Family this January, we are invited to ask ourselves difficult but necessary questions: How is trust lived in our homes? Where has it been broken, and where does conversion need to begin? Do our families reflect the peace of Christ, or merely coexist under the same roof?

The conversion of relationships begins not elsewhere, but at home. When the Word of Christ truly dwells richly in our families, trust is restored, faith is deepened, and the Church in Malaysia is quietly renewed — one household at a time.

LITTLE CATHOLIC'S CORNER

Dear Children,

A sacrament is a means by which God gives us grace in our soul.

When we are baptised, water is poured on our head as a sign of the sin being washed out of our soul.

Baptism takes away

Original Sin which comes to us from Adam and Eve.

That is why even babies need to get baptised - because of Original Sin.

Baptism also gives us the grace we need to live a good Christian life.

Baptism gives us grace when we need it.

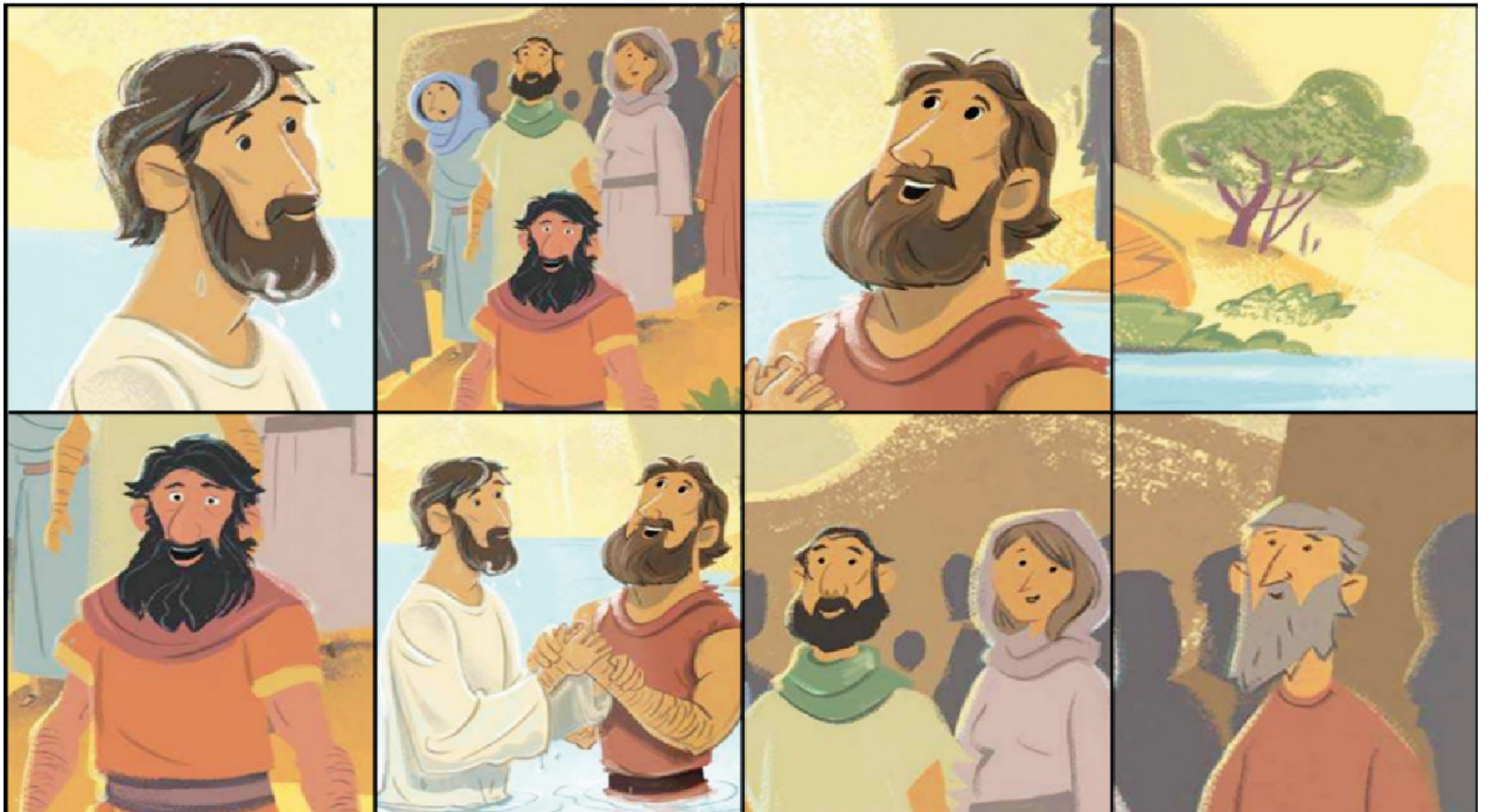
Why do you think Jesus got baptised, since He didn't have original sin or any 1 sin? Jesus didn't need to be rid of any sins; He was baptised to give us an example.

Love
Aunty Eliz



Jesus' Baptism Match Game

If you want to play this game, you need two copies of HERALD (ask your parent to get one more copy of HERALD). Cut out the cards along the black lines. Mix up the cards and lay them out face down in rows. Turn over any two cards at a time. If the pictures match, remove them from the table. This counts as one set. If you make a match, you may take another turn. If they do not match, turn them back over and let the next person try. The person with the most sets wins!



What is the first sacrament in the Catholic Church? Decipher the code in the picture to get the answer.

Hand icon T Water drop icon A

Smiley face icon S

Cross icon P

Flower icon M

Clock icon B

Hand icon R

Smiley face icon I

Flower icon

.....

Clock icon Water drop icon Cross icon Hand icon R icon Smiley face icon Flower icon



What did Saint John the Baptist see that showed him that Jesus was the Son of God? Connect the dots to find out!

YOUTH

JOURNEYING TOGETHER IN CHRIST



PENANG: The Penang Diocesan Youth Network (PDYN) brought together 60 youth leaders from parishes, campuses, and ecclesial movements across the diocese last month. The three-day, two-night gathering took place at the Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam with the theme: *A Synodal Community: Journey Together as a Body of Christ*.

The council was honoured to welcome Francisco Overee and Karen Chan from the Diocese of Malacca Johore Youth Ministry as speakers. They shared their pastoral experiences and faith reflections with the young leaders.

The programme focused on key issues facing the Church today, with particular emphasis on the spirit of communion. Participants were also introduced to the concept of “Conversations in the Spirit,” helping them better understand its importance in the life of the Church. Through various interactive approaches — including experiential activities and small-group

sharing — participants gained deeper insights into communion and the role of the Holy Spirit in discernment and decision-making.

Rather than adopting a traditional lecture-based format, the council emphasised participation, dialogue, and practical engagement. The speakers used sincere, courageous, and inspiring methods to guide participants in reflecting on real-life situations, enabling participants from diverse backgrounds and experiences to actively engage and learn from one another.

In addition, they were divided into small groups to apply the GOST and SMART planning frameworks:

- GOST: Goal, Objective, Strategy, Tactics
- SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time-bound

These discussions highlighted the creativity and willingness of young people to think beyond traditional boundaries, offering fresh perspectives and new possibilities for youth ministry within the Church.

On the second evening, there was time for

praise and worship, Eucharistic Adoration, and Confession. Participants experienced the real and living presence of Jesus Christ through prayer and sacred music. The atmosphere was solemn and peaceful, reflecting the deep desire of the young people to draw closer to the Lord, especially during the season of Advent.

Several priests were present to offer the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This was greatly cherished by participants as a valuable spiritual opportunity. At the same time, five caregivers who spoke different languages were made available, providing a safe and respectful space for participants to share their struggles and burdens, receive accompaniment, and find inner peace. The evening concluded in a calm and serene environment.

The council concluded on the final day with Mass, presided over by Fr Simon, the priest in charge of youth and campus ministry for the diocese of Penang. Through his humorous yet relatable homily, Fr Simon helped participants gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of the Mass and the call to mission.

Before the final blessing, four participants shared their reflections and experiences from the council, expressing a renewed awareness of the importance of using the gifts God has bestowed upon them in service to the Church and its ministries. Fr Simon then imparted a special blessing and formally commissioned the leaders to return to their parishes, campuses, and ministries to continue bearing witness to Christ with a prayer of commitment.

The council provided meaningful learning and reflection for parish youth leaders, campus student leaders, and young ecclesial movement leaders, equipping them to bring what they had gained back to their respective pastoral settings.

PDYN extends its heartfelt gratitude to all priests, speakers, parents, and every member of the organising committee — both on stage and behind the scenes — whose dedication and support made the PDYN council a success.

May God continue to guide the young people of the Diocese of Penang as they journey together in communion and grow in Christ’s mission.

Determination helps youth overcome disability

NEW DELHI: When Smiley says, “The Lord broke me first, and then He made me a masterpiece,” it is not a poetic flourish. It is a life summary.

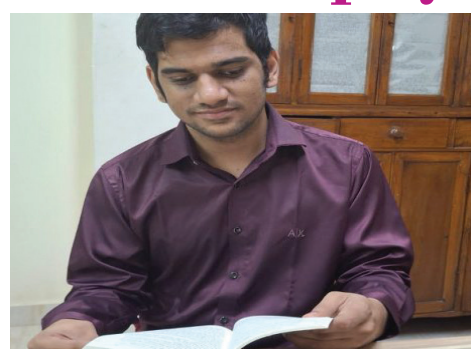
At just six months old, Smiley’s life was altered forever when he slipped from the arms of a maid and suffered a severe head injury. The fall damaged his nerves and paralysed the right side of his body. What followed were years of pain, uncertainty and multiple surgeries — the first when he was only seven — and a future many assumed would be limited by disability.

Yet today, at 30, Smiley sits before the world not as a victim of circumstance, but as a quiet warrior. He is educated, employed, deeply rooted in faith, and disarmingly joyful. His life, he says with a gentle smile, is nothing short of a miracle.

“My life has not been easy,” he admits. “But if you have Jesus as your master, you have nothing to worry about. I never felt abandoned.”

Doctors warned his mother that the injury was dangerously close to the brain and that surgery could permanently affect his nerves. And it did. Smiley’s right side never fully recovered. He cannot do strenuous work and must rely on his left hand for most tasks. But through it all, he believes one thing with unshakable conviction: God wanted him to live.

That belief was nurtured by a mother whose cour-



age matched her son’s resilience. Determined that Smiley would not be defined by his disability, she carried him from school to school, seeking admission. Each time, she was gently turned away and advised to enrol him in a special school. She refused to give up.

Her perseverance was rewarded. One school that had initially rejected Smiley later reconsidered. He was finally allowed to sit in a classroom alongside other children. “That moment gave me immense joy and self-esteem,” Smiley recalls. “From then on, I never looked back.”

He completed his schooling, earned a bachelor’s degree, and later pursued a course in Travel and Tourism. Against all expectations, he now works on-

line for a British railway company — from home, on his own terms, with dignity.

Faith, however, has been the true anchor of his life.

Smiley admits to moments of frustration, especially when his efforts are misunderstood. “Whatever work I do, I give my hundred percent,” he says. “When that is not recognised, it hurts.” In those moments, he retreats into silence, prayer, and tears. Instead of venting to people, he turns to Mary. “I tell her, ‘Be a mother to me.’ She understands.”

Friendship, too, has played a vital role in his journey. He believes in “quality, not quantity,” surrounding himself with a few who truly understand and accept him. He cannot walk alone, but he does not use a walking stick. “My friends are my legs,” he says simply. Still, he is quick to add, “My best friend is Jesus. He never leaves me — in joy or in difficulty.”

Finding employment was another leap of faith. After graduation, many doubted he would ever get a job. Smiley disagreed. “Trying is my part,” he told them. “Giving the job is the Lord’s part.”

With his cousin’s help, he attended an interview with a British company. He prayed beforehand, surrendering the outcome entirely to God. Toward the end of the interview, the manager asked him one unexpected question: “Do you believe in Jesus?”

“Yes,” Smiley replied without hesitation.

Minutes later, he was selected.

But perhaps the most defining moment of his faith came in December 2011, after his final surgery. Bedridden and in intense pain, Smiley lay listening to Christmas carols drifting through the streets. His heart ached to celebrate Christmas in church, but his body could not respond. His mother, helpless, could only watch.

Then, one day, something extraordinary happened.

“In that helplessness, I suddenly stood up,” he recalls. “The pain was gone. It was as if someone held my hand and said, ‘Smiley, stand up.’”

He stood. He walked. He never used physical support again.

That Christmas, he went to church.

Today, Smiley’s message to those discouraged by life’s setbacks is simple and sincere: “Do your best. Never give up. Leave the rest to God. Once you allow God into your life, He will never leave you.”

Born into a close-knit family — a businessman father, a homemaker mother, an elder brother and a married sister — Smiley remains the youngest, but his life speaks with the wisdom of one who has suffered, trusted, and endured.

Broken? Yes. But becoming — every day — a masterpiece. **Matters India**

Catholic youth begin synodal journey to tackle commuter safety

PHILIPPINES: The student-led project emerged as the top-funded proposal during MISSION POSSIBLE Philippines, a youth-focused program that challenges students to develop practical responses to social issues raised by the Synod on Synodality, including education, social justice, community development, and environmental concerns.

“Receiving this funding is both a blessing and a burden. A blessing to be shared and a burden to be carried,” said Gab Ecijan, one of the student hackers behind PASAHero.

“Nevertheless, being granted this funding marks a significant milestone for our team, as it enables us to further our advocacy of empowering commuters to feel safe and empowered,” she added.

MISSION POSSIBLE Philippines was co-hosted by Assumption Antipolo and LiCAS News and held in a hackathon format that brings together students, mentors, and coaches for a weekend of collaborative problem-solving.

Participants from twelve schools across the Philippines worked in teams as “hackers,” designing projects rooted in real-world concerns identified through the synodal process. The pitch for the PASAHero Movement proposed a peer-to-peer community-based network using a cost-effective “SafetyPin” device that commuters can use to alert others when they feel unsafe during their journey on the country’s public transport system.

Student hacker Lexi Boquer said moving from concept to implementation brings both pressure and motivation.

“I’m quite nervous since there will surely be challenges and difficulties in bringing our plan to life, along with the pressure in ensuring that we do our best to deliver what we pitched,” Boquer said.

“Regardless, remembering our purpose — to make a safer and a more inclusive commuter space fuels a flame of excitement,” she added.

Another team member, Ianne Ladores, described a similar mix of excitement and anxiety as the project moves toward rollout.

“After receiving the funding, I felt a mix of excitement and anxiousness because having the product become real is really just amazing but a bit pressuring,” Ladores said. “Sev-



Participants of the MISSION POSSIBLE Youth Social Hackathon listen as a coach facilitates a reflection session at Assumption Antipolo on October 25, 2025. (LiCAS News/Mark Saludes)

eral people have said that they would really want to use our product and that makes me even more motivated.”

School officials said the initiative provides students with a rare opportunity to translate ideas into concrete social action.

“Exciting and daunting all at once,” said Ms Grace Magtaas, school director of Assumption Antipolo. She added that MISSION POSSIBLE Philippines “gave our students a rare chance to turn bold ideas into real change. We can’t wait to roll out the PASAHero Movement.”

Organisers emphasised that the seed

funding of 200,000PHP (RM 13,796.97) marks an early step in a longer process of accompaniment and implementation.

“The hackathon weekend was a very exciting and inspiring start, but it is only the beginning of the journey for our student hackers,” said Ms. June Nattha Nuchsuwan, MISSION POSSIBLE project lead at LiCAS News.

“We look forward very much to see them make real differences to their community and make a better world possible in their own very unique and special ways,” she added. **Peter Monthienvichienchai, LiCAS News**



WYD Cross begins Korean pilgrimage

SEOUL, Korea: ‘During its pilgrimage in Asia, this cross has given many people love and peace, consolation and hope, shining the true light. Now, through the pilgrimage to Seoul, we ask the Lord that the true light of Christ may spread widely in Seoul and throughout the world, so that the love, mercy and consolation of Christ may reach all humanity.’

With these words, the organising committee of World Youth Day Seoul 2027 gave thanks for the arrival of the World Youth Day Cross and the Marian icon - gifted by St John Paul II to young people - at the Chapel of the Holy Family in Myeongdong Cathedral, on 20 December last. The celebration marked the beginning of the Korean stage of the World Youth Day symbols pilgrimage following their journey across Asia.

During the celebration, 60 participants formed a ‘community rosary,’ becoming the beads of the rosary themselves, and offered this prayer in remembrance of their brothers and sisters who are suffering in various parts of the world for different reasons. The participants prayed for those who suffer from poverty, war, the climate crisis and ethnic conflicts, and for those who, immersed in the values of the world, have forgotten the love of Christ.

The pilgrimage of the WYD symbols in the Korean Church will begin in January 2026 in the Archdiocese of Seoul, pass through dioceses throughout the country, and conclude in May 2027 in the Diocese of Jeonju.

AsiaNews



Indigenous youth filmmakers shine at Namuncurá short film festival

KEP, Cambodia: Indigenous youth filmmakers from Cambodia and across Asia took centrestage at the Second Namuncurá Short Film Festival, held in Kep in late December.

Organised with the support of ROOTS Asia and the Salesian Region EAO for Social Communication, the festival featured short films from Cambodia, East Timor, India, and Papua New Guinea, Agenzia iNfo

Salesiana reported.

Organisers said the initiative reflects the mission of Don Bosco Cambodia to accompany rural youth and Indigenous communities by providing communication and creative tools that allow them to tell their own stories.

Top awards went to The Three Temples by Cambodian director Rith Soton, The Weaving of Identity by East Timorese filmmaker Dersiana da Cruz, and Ri Shongkun Shongnia by Indian director Khraw Kupar Kharrsyntiew.

Special mentions were given to Hope for Madang Lagoon by Dominic Pieng Jr. and Ceferino Namuncurá - Documentary by Cambodian filmmaker Rochom Lvan, films that organisers said express hope rooted in ancestral territories.

Festival organisers said the initiative aligns with the Salesian theme *Anchored in Hope*. Through its technical school in Kep, Don Bosco Cambodia has focused on education, vocational training, and youth empowerment as concrete expressions of that vision.

They also cited Pope Francis’ Jubilee message, which emphasised how the wisdom of Indigenous

peoples enriches the wider human family.

Fr Samnang Albeiro Rodas, director of Don Bosco Kep, said the next edition of the festival will be linked to the Second Media Communication Seminar for Asian Indigenous Leaders, scheduled for February 2026.

The seminar will focus on film and documentary production aimed at strengthening Indigenous leaders’ capacity to promote their languages, cultures, and territories.

“It’s not just about making films,” Fr Albeiro Rodas said. “It’s about building a synodal community where indigenous voices are heard, valued, and anchored in hope.”

With support from the Salesian Delegation of Cambodia, the Don Bosco Green Alliance, and international partners, organisers said Don Bosco Kep continues to serve as a point of reference for rural youth and Indigenous communities.

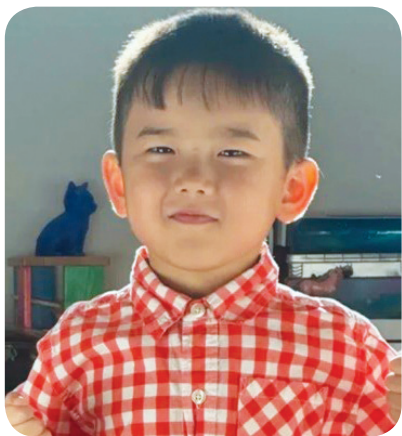
As the year closed, the festival highlighted hope not merely as a theme, but as a lived reality expressed through Indigenous voices grounded in ancestral wisdom and open to the future. **LiCAS.news**



Indigenous youth participants during the Second Namuncurá Short Film Festival in Kep, Cambodia. Photo by Don Bosco Kep

Our hearts are broken, but he is home

NEW YORK: The new year began with a profound mix of grief and hope for Catholic speaker Paul Kim and his family. His 5-year-old son, Micah, passed away on December 31, 2025 after more than a week on life support following a rare and severe case of influenza that led to sepsis, seizures, and internal bleeding.



of Venerable Fulton Sheen. Yet, the moment of returning home without their son was deeply painful. "Coming back to a home where Micah is not running around, laughing, and screaming as he usually is... it was heart-wrenching," Paul said.

Paul, who shares his Catholic faith with a global audience, shared the news in an emotional video to his followers on January 1. "After fighting 11 long, hard days, [Micah] went home to the house of our Father," he said. "We are so proud of him. This has been the hardest thing my family and I have ever gone through, and it continues to be."

Micah's health emergency began on Dec 21, when he was rushed to the hospital after severe complications arose. Emergency chest surgery two days later stabilised his heart, and doctors gradually reduced life support as his lungs slowly improved. But an MRI later revealed severe brain damage, and physicians concluded there was no medical possibility of recovery.

Through the ordeal, Paul turned to faith and prayer, sharing the journey with followers around the world. Over two weeks, his social media posts and videos were viewed more than 50 million times, with people from all seven continents offering prayers for Micah and his family. Paul expressed profound gratitude: "Your prayers for Micah were answered, but in a different way than we had hoped. God healed him and welcomed him into eternal life. He is where we all want to be."

Amid the sorrow, moments of grace emerged. In the hospital, Paul had the opportunity to baptise a two-week-old infant whose parents had not yet done so. "God is already using him in miraculous ways," Paul reflected, speaking of his son's life and impact even in death.

The family even celebrated Christmas Mass together in Micah's hospital room. Paul described the experience as both heavy and uplifting: "This has undeniably been the heaviest cross my wife and I have carried. I have never felt so crushed and helpless, but I have also never felt so strong and upheld by God's grace."

Messages of support poured in from all corners of the Catholic world — from cardinals and bishops to priests, deacons, Catholic media personalities, and even celebrities such as singer Gwen Stefani, all lifting the family in prayer. Paul had prayed the Divine Mercy Chaplet live with followers during the ordeal, and the family had asked for a miracle through the intercession

shared. "He has already been very busy, as I see the Lord using him to bring millions of people closer to God."

A GoFundMe campaign was also established to help the family manage mounting medical costs, though Paul emphasises that faith and prayer remain their anchor. "Please pray for my family and me as we learn how to live by faith and not by sight," he said, a reminder that even in loss, God's love continues to shine. **Agencies**



Top: Micah Kim
Bottom: Paul Kim and Family (Paul Kim/Instagram)

MEMORIAM

For enquiries, please contact:
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Tel: 03-2026 8291

In Loving Memory



MDM. S. SUSY NATHAN

Born: 10-08-1930
Departed: 14-01-14

Fondly missed by children, grandchildren and loved ones.

*Your presence we miss,
Your memories we treasure,
Loving you always,
Forgetting you never.*

*"The Lord is my shepherd,
there is nothing
I shall want."*

IN LOVING MEMORY OF

22nd Year Anniversary 1st Year Anniversary



AROKIASAMY ANTHONY AMMA
S/O MARIAPPU D/O ANTHONY

Born in Heaven
09th Feb 2003

Born in Heaven
09th Jan 2025

"Remain Faithful even to the point of death,
and I will give you the Crown of Life."
(Revelations 2:10)

Our hearts will forever love and cherish both of you.
Deeply missed and lovingly remembered by all
Children, GrandChildren and all loved ones.
(Batu Arang, Rawang)

Eighteenth Anniversary In Loving Memory of



CHARLES DE SILVA
called home to be
with the Lord on
11 January 2008

*Eighteen years
have passed
since you left us,
leaving behind your
sweet thoughts
and memories.
You may no longer
be here but your
memory will always
be with us to love
and cherish each and
every day.*

Dearly missed by
loving wife, children
and spouse,
grandchildren and
great-grandchildren.

Rest in Peace



Victoria Alexis
Ratnam
25 June 1971 –
6 Jan 1995
31st Anniversary

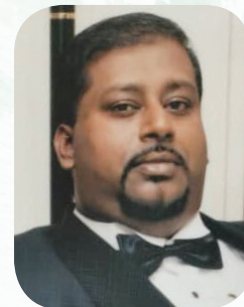


Beatrice Patrick
Ratnam
14 Jan 1937 –
31 Mar 2020
6th Anniversary



John Ratnam
23 June 1925 –
29 October 2025

5th Anniversary In Loving Memory of



Gary Reginald Gomez
April 16, 1972 – January 11, 2021

My refuge, my fortress, my God in whom I trust!
(Psalm 91:2)

Always remembered and loved by
your wife, son, relatives and friends.

NOTICE

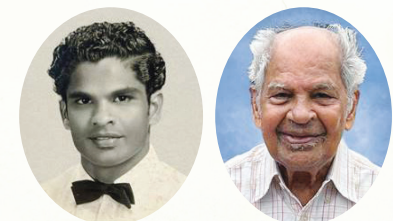
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1st Anniversary In Loving Memory of



Vincent Mariasoosay (M. Vincent)
King George VI General Service, Jasa Pahlawan Negara
8th November 1932 - 10 January 2025

A year ago, we lost someone irreplaceable - a devoted husband,
and a guiding light as a father and grandfather.
We find ourselves reaching out for your hand,
or waiting to hear your voice,
for your absence still feels unreal today.
Though you are no longer here with us,
we carry your love in every step we take,
and the memories we made will never fade away.
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Keep journeying in hope

KUCHING: The Archdiocese of Kuching brought the Jubilee Year of Hope to a close on December 28, 2025, with the evening Mass for the Feast of the Holy Family at St Joseph's Cathedral. The celebration featured the recessional carrying of the Jubilee Year cross, a symbol of the year-long journey of faith, perseverance, and hope that has inspired the local Catholic community.

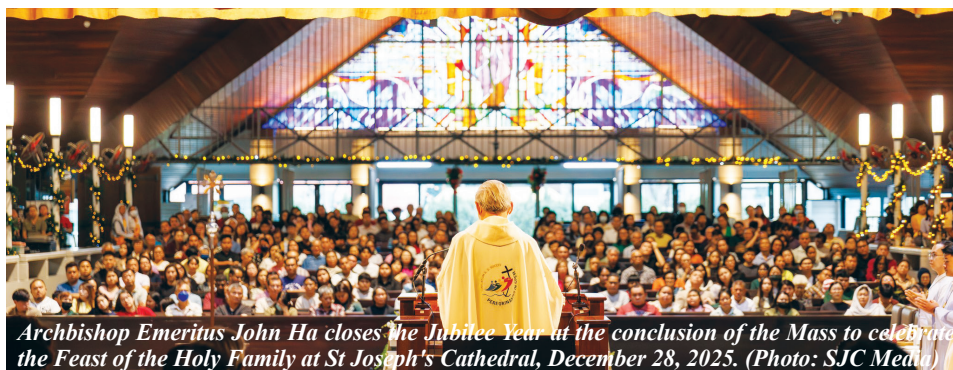
Presiding over the Mass, Archbishop Emeritus John Ha reflected on the Holy Family's flight to Egypt to protect the infant Jesus from King Herod. Despite the dangers and challenges, Joseph trusted that "God was there to protect him and his family," a testament to a pilgrimage of hope.

"Hope sustains us today," Archbishop Emeritus John said. "The Jubilee has reminded us repeatedly that we are pilgrims of hope, journeying through life with faith,

even amid uncertainty." He drew parallels with God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land, underscoring that our earthly pilgrimage points toward God's kingdom in heaven.

Highlighting Pope Francis' message during the Jubilee, the archbishop emeritus encouraged the faithful to persevere in their personal struggles and to embrace the journey with trust. "God is with us, not to take away our problems, but to see us through them," he said.

He urged the community to follow the example of the Holy Family: trusting God, listening to His voice, and moving forward with hope, even when life's path is difficult. The Mass closed not just a year of celebration, but a reminder to continue living as pilgrims of hope, guided by faith, courage, and trust in the Lord. **Today's Catholic**



Archbishop Emeritus John Ha closes the Jubilee Year at the conclusion of the Mass to celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family at St Joseph's Cathedral, December 28, 2025. (Photo: SJC Media)

Sibu diocese ends jubilee, begins new pastoral focus

SUNGAI MERAH, Sibu: Bishop Joseph Hii led the diocesan-level closing of the Jubilee Year of Hope at the Church of St Teresa on January 1, 2026. The Mass, which coincided with the New Year and the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, also marked the launch of the Diocesan Year of Man and Holy Matrimony, calling the faithful to focus on family, relationships, and living Christ's love in daily life throughout the year.

Faithful from across the diocese gathered in thanksgiving and hope, witnessing the close of the Jubilee Year and the beginning of a new pastoral journey together.

In his homily, Bishop Joseph reminded the faithful that the closing of the Jubilee does not signal the end of our pilgrimage.

"Our life on earth," he said, "is a journey toward our true homeland. We are pilgrims." He encouraged everyone to continue this daily pilgrimage, allowing each encounter and moment of work to become an opportunity to bear the light of Christ, turning ordinary life into a witness of faith, hope, and love.

On this Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, Bishop Joseph also called the faithful to emulate Our Blessed Mother, becoming instruments of Christ's peace in our families, communities, and the wider world.

After the Mass, representatives from parishes across the Diocese of Sibu received the prayer card for the Diocesan Year of Man and Holy Matrimony, titled "Oneness



in God's Creation." This symbolic gesture reaffirmed a shared commitment to live out this pastoral focus throughout the year.

The celebration marked not only the conclusion of the Jubilee Year but also a renewed call for the faithful to continue walking together as Pilgrims of Hope, carrying Christ's light and peace into every aspect of daily life. **Social Communication Team, Sibu**



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