

HERALD

The Catholic Weekly

Mission Statement

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.

TERHAD

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Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes, To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.
1 Cor. 1:1-2



Parit Buntar church consecrated, community rejoices

■ P5



Bringing hope to the table

■ P6



It is but my duty
The priesthood of Fr Cosmas Lee

■ P12



A collaborative papacy begins

VATICAN: Pope Leo XIV has launched his pontificate with a decisive call for shared leadership, signalling a new style of governance marked by dialogue, collegiality, and closer collaboration with the College of Cardinals.

At an extraordinary consistory held January 7-8, he appealed for the cardinals' support in shaping the Church's pastoral direction and announced structured, annual meetings, a move widely seen as resetting the relationship between the Pope and his closest advisers.

The rare gathering brought 170 cardinals from around the world to Rome for two days of intensive discussions across three working sessions. Participants were asked not to speak publicly to encourage open and candid exchanges.

"I feel, I experience the need to be able to count on you," Pope Leo told the cardinals

at the conclusion of the first session. "It is important that we work together, that we discern together, that we seek what the Spirit is asking of us."

Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said the Pope plans another two-day consistory near the feast of Sts Peter and Paul on June 29, after which annual sessions of three to four days will become a regular feature of his pontificate.

The extraordinary consistory, convened just one day after the conclusion of the 2025 Holy Year initiated by Pope Francis, was interpreted as a symbolic transition from the Jubilee to a more defined phase of pastoral direction and governance. Pope Leo's emphasis on collegiality marks a noticeable shift from the approach of his predecessor, who relied heavily on a small advisory council known as the C9. During pre-conclave meetings, several cardinals had expressed frustration over limited consultation.

British Cardinal Timothy Radcliffe, who delivered the opening meditation, said Pope Leo was elected in part "to bring in the people who had been alienated." Radcliffe cau-

tioned against ideological rivalry, warning that "if the boat of Peter is filled with disciples who quarrel, we shall be of no use to the Holy Father."

Much of the consistory's work took place in small roundtable groups, with pre-assigned presidents and secretaries. Following discussions, selected cardinals offered brief three-minute interventions, with additional time for reflections.

By a wide margin, the cardinals chose to focus on two themes: the Church's mission through the lens of *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis' 2013 apostolic exhortation, and the ongoing process of synodality. Other topics — including reform of the Roman Curia under *Praedicate Evangelium* and the liturgy — received less attention, dashing expectations among some traditionalist Catholics that the pre-Vatican II Latin Mass would dominate.

The second day was devoted to identifying practical priorities for the Pope and Curia over the next one to two years. Cardinal Stephen Brislin noted that while *Evangelii Gaudium* was influential at its release, it has "faded a little into the background." "The

cardinals felt it was important to return to that document, to ensure it is made known, that seminarians are formed by it, and that its call to evangelisation is reignited," he said.

Cardinal Pablo Virgilio David of Kalookan, Philippines, added that *Evangelii Gaudium* calls the Church to engage with social and political realities, and that synodality ensures the wider Church is heard. "The ordained do not have a monopoly of acting in persona Christi," he said.

Addressing concerns that synodality could cause doctrinal confusion, Brislin said the cardinals acknowledged the need for further clarification. "We need to work on that, and that will happen," he said.

Presiding at Mass on the final day, Pope Leo described the consistory as a "prophetic pause" in a frenetic world — a moment to stop, pray, and listen together to discern God's will rather than advance personal agendas. "Our college," he said, "is not called primarily to be a mere group of experts, but a community of faith."

Concluding the sessions, the Pope thanked the cardinals and asked for their ongoing support, emphasising that synodality and mission are inseparable. "The Church exists to proclaim the Gospel," he said. "This consistory is a sign of the Church's living journey, guided by the Holy Spirit, rooted in unity, and open to new paths for today and tomorrow." **Agencies**



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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Beyond our differences

The annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, celebrated from January 18 to 25, reminds us that the Christian faith is meant to be lived together, not in isolation. This year's theme, taken from Ephesians 4:4, declares: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling." These words invite us to reflect on the truth that, despite differences in tradition, liturgy, or governance, all Christians are united in one Spirit and one hope: the call to live in Christ and bear witness to His love in the world.

Unity, however, is not automatic; it is a journey. It requires humility, patience, and above all, a willingness to listen. In Malaysia, a country with diverse cultures, languages, and Christian denominations, this journey is especially meaningful. Our communities — whether Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox — are called to recognise that our differences are not barriers to unity but opportunities to learn from one another. Each tradition can offer unique insights and ways to serve God and neighbour, enriching the whole body of Christ.

Ephesians reminds us that there is one body and one Spirit. The imagery of the body is striking: each Christian, each congregation, and each denomination is a part of a larger whole. When one part suffers, the whole suffers; when one part rejoices, the whole rejoices. In the Malaysian Church, this means our witness is stronger when we collaborate in social outreach, interfaith dialogue, and evangelisation. Initiatives such as joint charitable projects,

youth gatherings, or prayer services across denominations are small but powerful steps toward living the unity Christ desires. They remind us that unity is not about uniformity; it is about communion, dialogue, and shared mission.

This call to unity connects closely with the Synodal journey in the universal Church. Pope Francis emphasised that the Synod is about walking together — "synodality" — listening to one another, discerning the Spirit's guidance, and discerning together the path forward. Just as the Synod invites the Church to reflect on how all voices can be heard, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity challenges us to practise the same openness with our Christian brothers and sisters. In Malaysia, where Catholic parishes often work alongside other Christian communities, synodality can be lived out concretely: by listening to the experiences of other denominations, learning from their approaches to ministry, and seeking common ways to serve society.

Unity also begins with each of us. We are called to examine our own attitudes: are we open to dialogue? Do pride, suspicion, or past disagreements harden our hearts? Christ calls us to be instruments of reconciliation, bridging gaps where misunderstandings or historical tensions may remain. Prayer is key. During this Week of Prayer, we are invited to pray not only for formal unity among denominations but also for the healing of divisions in our communities, families, and even within ourselves. Prayer strengthens the bonds of charity and opens our hearts to

the Spirit's guidance.

Moreover, unity is a witness to the world. In a society that often celebrates individuality and division, Christians united in spirit and purpose become a visible sign of hope. In Malaysia, where multi-religious harmony is part of daily life, our unity as Christians can model cooperation, respect, and dialogue across religious and cultural lines. It proclaims that the love of Christ transcends differences, inviting all to participate in God's plan.

Yet, unity is not passive. It requires active engagement, courageous dialogue, and shared commitment to mission. Like the body described in Ephesians, every part has a role. Some bring theological insight, others pastoral experience; some excel in social outreach, others in liturgical formation. When we offer our gifts without seeking to dominate, the one body of Christ becomes alive, vibrant, and responsive to the needs of the world.

As we celebrate the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, may we embrace the call to be one body in Christ. Let us listen attentively, act collaboratively, and pray fervently. May our Malaysian Church, in its diversity, become a model of synodal unity — a community where dialogue, charity, and hope guide our steps together. In doing so, we bear witness to the promise of Ephesians: one Spirit, one hope, and one calling, lived fully in the unity of God's love.

Patricia Pereira

Chosen, Sent, Revealed

The Scriptures today draw us into a deep contemplation of identity and mission — who we are in God's eyes, and what it means to be sent for the sake of others. Isaiah, Paul, and John the Baptist each speak from different moments in salvation history, yet their voices converge on a single truth: God chooses, forms, and sends, not for self-glory, but for the life of the world.

In the passage from Isaiah, the servant hears God say, "You are My servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." These words are not spoken after success or achievement, but at the very beginning of the servant's mission. Before any visible fruit, before recognition or affirmation, God already claims the servant as His own. The servant's identity is rooted not in what he does, but in who he belongs to.

Yet Isaiah does not shy away from the tension that accompanies this calling. The servant later confesses to feelings of weariness and apparent failure — labouring in vain, spending strength for nothing. How familiar this sounds. Many of us know what it is to try to live faithfully, to serve generously, yet feel unseen, unappreciated, or ineffective. Isaiah reminds us that God's measure of fruitfulness is very different from our own. What appears small or fruitless in human eyes may be precisely the soil in which God's larger plan is taking root.

God then expands the horizon of the servant's mission: it is "too little" to restore Israel alone; the servant is also called to be "a light to the nations." God's salvation, Isaiah insists, is never meant to be contained or restricted. It spills outward, crossing

boundaries, cultures, and expectations. The servant is formed not just for a chosen few, but for the whole world.

This sense of being chosen and sent finds a personal echo in Paul's opening words to the Corinthians. Paul introduces himself simply as "called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God." There is no self-promotion here, no claim of personal merit. Paul understands his vocation as pure gift. His authority does not come from his past achievements — or even from his dramatic conversion — but from God's initiative.

Paul addresses the Corinthians as those "called to be holy." Holiness, in Paul's understanding, is not reserved for a spiritual elite. It is the shared calling of all who belong to Christ. To be holy is not to withdraw from the world, but to live within it as people shaped by grace and peace. These two words — grace and peace — frame Paul's greeting and quietly summarise the Christian life: grace as God's unearned love, and peace as the wholeness that flows from living in that love.

The Gospel brings us to John the Baptist, a figure who embodies humility and clarity of purpose. John could have claimed a central role in the unfolding story of salvation. Crowds came to him. People listened. Questions were asked. Yet John consistently points away from himself: "There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

John's greatness lies precisely in this ability to step aside. He understands that his mission is not to draw attention to himself, but to reveal Christ. His testimony is rooted not in theory or speculation, but in

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with the Editor

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

Readings: Isaiah 49: 3, 5-6;

1 Corinthians 1:1-3;

Gospel: John 1:29-34

experience: he has seen the Spirit descend and remain upon Jesus. What John offers is not explanation, but witness. He tells what he has seen, and allows others to encounter Jesus for themselves.

Together, these readings challenge us to reconsider how we understand our own calling. Like the servant in Isaiah, we are known and formed by God before we are productive or successful. Like Paul, we are called not by our own qualifications, but by God's grace. Like John the Baptist, we are invited to be witnesses — not the centre of the story, but signposts pointing to Christ.

In a world obsessed with visibility, achievement, and recognition, today's Scriptures offer a countercultural vision of discipleship. Our task is not to impress, but to be faithful. Not to control outcomes, but to trust God's unfolding plan. Not to cling to the spotlight, but to reflect the light of Christ.

Ultimately, the question these readings leave us with is simple yet demanding: Can we allow God to be glorified through us, even when the path is hidden, the results uncertain, and the credit goes elsewhere? If we can, then, like the servant, the apostle, and the witness, our lives too will become a light — quiet, steady, and radiant — for the salvation of the world.

Breakdown of AOHD's 2024 Lenten Campaign expenditure

Archdiocesan Lenten Campaign Collection Account
Statement of Accounts for the period from 01/07/2024 to 30/06/2025

<u>Donation</u>	<u>Amount (RM)</u>	
Lenten Campaign Collections 2024	1,049,825.99	
Expenditure		
Admin-Office	168,943.08	13%
Orang Asli	242,000.00	19%
Creation Justice Ministry (CJM)	39,087.80	3%
Women Ministry	34,631.97	3%
Catholic Ministry of the Deaf (CMfD)	23,669.68	2%
Special Needs Learning Center (SNLC)	173,446.39	13%
Ministry of The Poor	233,884.02	18%
Prison Ministry	20,753.93	2%
St Vincent (SSVP)	40,000.00	3%
Formation/Retreat/Summit	188,957.34	14%
Missions/Road Show/PIHD/Caritas	101,397.67	8%
Social Comms	17,403.00	1%
Lenten Campaign Expenses	<u>16,555.20</u>	1%
Total Expenditure	1,300,730.08	100%

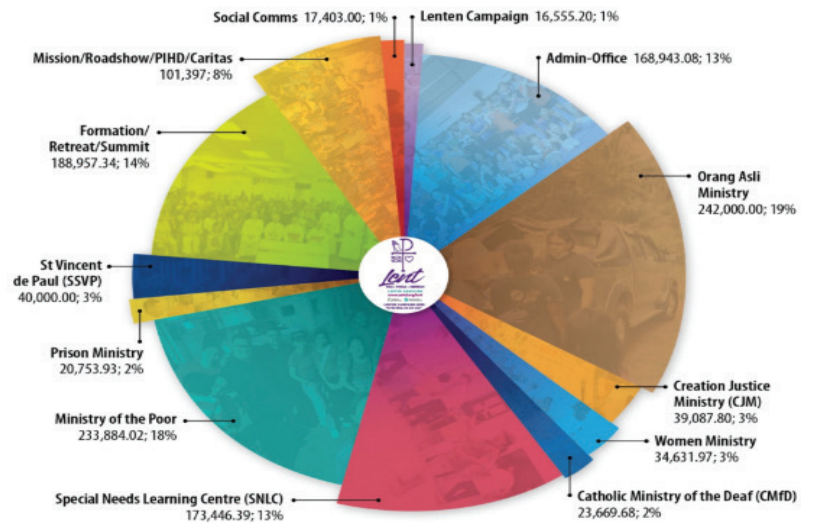
KUALA LUMPUR: The Archdiocesan Office for Human Development (AOHD) has released its statement of accounts for the 2024 Lenten Campaign (July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025). The amount collected was RM1.049 million.

The total expenditure was RM1.3 million. Among the ministries which received funding were the Orang Asli (19 per cent),

Ministry of the Poor (18 per cent), Special Needs Learning Centre (13 per cent).

The Creation Justice ministry, Women's ministry and Society of St Vincent De Paul each received three per cent while the Catholic Ministry of the Deaf and Prison Ministry each received two per cent.

The deficit is covered by non-Lenten Campaign collection.



KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

January

- 22 Week of Christian Unity Prayer Service
- 24 Catholic Lawyers Red Mass – Cathedral of St John, KL

PENANG DIOCESE

Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

January

- 19 Meeting with Triumph Heart of Mary at 9.00am – Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam
- 19 Meeting with Family Life Ministry at 11.00am – Minor Basilica of St Anne, BM
- 19 25th Priestly Anniversary of Msgr Henry Rajoo at 6.00pm – Minor Basilica of St Anne, BM
- 20 Council of Priests (COP) Meeting at 10.00am – Minor Basilica of St Anne, BM
- 20-21 Clergy Monthly Recollection – Minor Basilica of St Anne, BM
- 21 Public Profession of the Evangelical Counsels at 7.00pm – Church of Sacred Heart, Kulim

MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

January

- 19 Regional Superior of the Jesuits Canonical Visit to the Bishop
- 20-21 Monthly Clergy Recollection – MAJODI Centre
- 22 MJD Seminarians meet up with the Bishop – MAJODI Centre

Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #255

Welcome dear friends,
 Entering into New Year 2026, with thanksgiving, expectations, resolutions and challenges. Pope Leo XIV emphasised peace, the rejection of violence, and the building of universal friendship as key Christian attitudes. He urged believers to “disarm” their hearts and commit to a life of non-violence. He emphasised that Christian hope is a decision to act, not an evasion of suffering. The Pilgrim Cross will be at the Church of St Philip, Segamat until February 7.

Local Takes! Going Forward or Backwards? What awaits us? Rising cost of living, tightened digital security, stricter law enforcement on littering, spitting in public places and road enforcement and the beginning of the 13th Malaysia Plan.

Other changes to be expected: the return of school sessions to January, boosting tourism with VMY2026, the second phase of salary adjustments for civil servants, and RM100 SARA continued.

What’s happening? The Sabah polls had just finished. Followed by fiery reactions to recognising UEC, appointment of two Chinese ministers and pet-friendly Klang Valley Megamall prompted calls for boycotts.

Australia became the first country to ban social media for children under 16.

A woman swapped overconsumption for minimalism or frugal living, a strategy for financial freedom and wealth-building for the young.

The Church Reads the Signs: “On earth, there is no room for God if there is no room for the human person. To refuse one is to refuse the other,” said Pope Leo

at Christmas Eve Mass to 6,000 inside the basilica.

Barna Research, on the state of the Church: millennials and Gen Z are driving resurgence in church attendance, with growing spiritual interest, rising faith activity and commitments to Jesus.

Locally, we are preparing for synodality, celebrating our unity in diversity and addressing key contemporary issues like family, church, ecology and society. The *Perjalanan Salib* continues till MPC2026. The social media ministry in parishes and dioceses, with the young influencers, are telling the faith and mission stories.

A Thought for The Week: A New Flower Shop

The woman was strolling through a shopping mall when she noticed a poster announcing a new flower shop. When she went in, she got a shock; she saw no vases, no arrangements, and it was God in person who stood behind the counter. “You can ask for whatever you want,” said God. “I want to be happy. I want peace, money, the capacity to be understood. I want to go to heaven when I die. And I want all this to be granted to my friends too.” God opened a few pots that were on the shelf behind Him, removed some grains from inside, and handed them to the woman. “Here you have the seeds,” He said. “Begin to plant them, because here we don’t sell the fruits.

A lesson from God: No ready-mades. No instants. Only seeds for the sowing are provided in life.

QnQ: Q asks: What does it mean to leave a legacy? Andre Rieu, a noted conductor & violinist, did not thank the Academy. He did not reminisce about his

Johann Strauss Orchestra or his record-breaking concerts in Maastricht. Instead, Rieu looked straight into the audience of wealth and influence and declared: “We sit here surrounded by diamonds and symphonic glory while the world outside is falling apart. If your music can heal millions and you choose not to use it for those who have no voice, then you are not creating harmony — you are creating noise.”

The room fell into complete silence. Industry executives and invited guests sat motionless, struck by the weight of his words. He continued, unwavering: “If you have more than you need, it no longer belongs only to you. Your responsibility is to lift up those who are still beneath you.”

And he did not stop at words. That very night, Rieu announced that all profits from his archived albums and future touring revenues — estimated at 160 million USD — will be donated to fund music education for underprivileged children, global humanitarian aid, and healthcare initiatives.

His message was unmistakable: “Legacy is not built on the standing ovations you receive. It is built on what you give back.” In an era when celebrities are often dismissed as out of touch, André Rieu delivered a powerful reminder to the world: True impact is not created by applause, but by easing the suffering of others.

The Spirit @ work: “In each of us, there is another whom we do not know.” *Carl Jung*

Something to tickle you: “Happy people build their inner world; unhappy people blame their outer world.” *Dalai Lama*

Bernard Paul
Bishop Bernard Paul

Holy Family Kajang marks 125 years of faith

KAJANG: The Church of the Holy Family (HFK) marks a significant milestone this year, celebrating 125 years since the dedication of its first church in 1901 and 25 years of the Millennium Church consecrated in 2001. More than a commemorative event, the Jubilee Year is an invitation to spiritual renewal, calling parishioners and pilgrims to journey in faith, remember God's providence, and encounter His grace anew.

The Jubilee celebrations were solemnly launched on December 27, 2025 at the Sunset Mass, led by HFK parish priest Fr Michael Chua, together with assistant priests Fr Bonaventure Rayappan and Fr Philip Chua. The Mass was presided over by Archbishop Julian Leow, who once served as parish priest at HFK. Also present were Archbishop Wojciech Zaluski, Apostolic Nuncio to

Malaysia, and former parish priests Fr Surain Duraj Raj and Fr George Harrison.

Central to the Jubilee is the granting of a plenary indulgence by the Apostolic Penitentiary on behalf of the Holy Father. From Dec 28, 2025 to Dec 27, 2026, the faithful may obtain this indulgence by making a pilgrimage to the Church of the Holy Family and participating devoutly in Jubilee liturgies and activities or spending time in prayer and reflection, concluding with the Lord's Prayer, the Profession of Faith and invocations to the Holy Family.

This indulgence offers the complete remission of temporal punishment due to sin and may be applied to oneself or offered for the souls in Purgatory, provided the usual conditions are fulfilled with sincere detachment from sin.

As part of the Jubilee, pilgrims

are invited to embark on a guided Pilgrimage Walk through HFK's sacred and historical spaces. The journey includes the old church and post-war structures, the Heritage Centre, community halls, the grotto and Shrine of St Joseph, and the Millennium Church interior, where the Holy Family Triptych reflects Gospel life and family virtues. Pilgrims are also invited to venerate the relics of Sts Louis and Zélie Martin, patrons of family and marriage.

Each station offers Scripture reflection and prayer, drawing pilgrims into the parish's rich spiritual legacy. A photo booth set against the old church façade allows visitors to mark their Jubilee pilgrimage with a cherished keepsake.

The roots of HFK trace back to the late 19th century, when Catholics in Kajang were served



from St John's parish in Kuala Lumpur. With the growth of settlements, Bishop René Fee of Malacca entrusted Fr François Terrien, MEP, with establishing a local mission. Land generously donated by Towkay Goh Ah Ngee enabled the building of a chapel, school and Catholic centre.

The foundation stone was laid on March 19, 1900 and on Feb 24, 1901, Bishop Fee consecrated the first Church of the Holy Family. Within its first year, the parish grew from 12 to 150 Catholics, laying a strong foundation of sacramental and community life.

Reflecting on the Jubilee, Fr Michael Chua shared, "In our desolation, we remember God's compassion. In our struggles, may He renew our vigour. Together, under the protection of the Holy Family, we surrender our plans and dreams to Him."

The parish endured severe trials during World War II, when Japanese air raids damaged the church and school. Remarkably,

the stained-glass panels of the Holy Family survived, becoming a lasting sign of God's protection. In 1955, a new church was consecrated by Bishop Dominic Vendargon, later the first Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur.

By the 1990s, the growing Catholic population necessitated a larger place of worship. The Millennium Church was opened in 2001 and consecrated by Archbishop Anthony Soter Fernandez. Today, it stands as the largest parish church in Peninsular Malaysia, incorporating treasured elements from the parish's earliest days.

"Come, join us, and experience 125 years of faith in motion," said Fr Michael. "Let the Holy Family guide you in prayer, hope and service."

For pilgrimage schedules and bookings, visit the HFK parish website <https://www.hfckajang.org.my/> or Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/HolyFamilyKajang>



Risen Christ parish bids farewell to Friar Esmond

PENANG: Parishioners of the Church of the Risen Christ marked New Year's Eve with a prayerful celebration that included Eucharistic Adoration, a Thanksgiving Mass, and a farewell for their parish priest, Friar Esmond Chua, OFM, who has served the parish since 2023.

The evening began with Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, led by Friar Esmond,

featuring periods of silent reflection alongside Scripture readings and litanies of adoration, mercy, thanksgiving, trust and supplication. This was followed by a Thanksgiving Mass, with Friar Esmond as main celebrant, and Fr Michael Raymond, OFM Cap, Friar Crispus Mosinoh, OFM, and Friar Cosmas Francis, OFM, concelebrating.

In his homily, Friar Esmond re-

flected on the transition into the new year, calling on the faithful to "pause, praise and press on" as they move from 2025 into 2026. He encouraged parishioners to reflect on God's presence and faithfulness before looking ahead.

Referencing the First Reading from 1 Kings 8:55-61, he highlighted King Solomon's blessing of the people and his emphasis on God's unfailing faithfulness. The Responsorial Psalm from 1 Chronicles 29:10-12 reinforced this theme, proclaiming God's greatness and sovereignty over all creation. In the Gospel reading from Luke 17:11-19, Friar Esmond drew attention to the healing of the ten lepers, noting that only one returned to give thanks to Jesus, underscoring the importance of gratitude in the life of faith.

Following the Mass, Parish Pastoral Council chairperson Nicholas Chin paid tribute to Friar Esmond's leadership, describing him as a warm and dedicated pastor who played a key role in reviving parish ministries. He noted Friar Esmond's emphasis on serving with zeal and humility, often reminding parishioners that



Friar Esmond receiving a souvenir from Nicholas Chin, the PPC chairman.

Church service is voluntary and rooted in faith, not obligation.

During his nearly three-year tenure, Friar Esmond was actively involved in several parish development projects, including the construction of Our Lady's Grotto, St Joseph's Centre, Fr Peter Shyu Hall, the installation of solar panels, and The Oak Tree, a special room for catechism children.

In his farewell remarks, Friar Esmond expressed gratitude for the strong support he received from parishioners and thanked his

fellow friars for their prayers and assistance.

Friar Esmond will assume his new role as parish priest of St Mary of the Angels Church in Singapore. Friar Crispus Mosinoh will continue as parish priest of the Church of the Risen Christ, assisted by Friar Cosmas Francis, with Friar John Soh appointed as pastoral assistant.

The celebration concluded with a parish dinner and a countdown to welcome the New Year 2026. **Stephanie Cheong**

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Parit Buntar church consecrated, community rejoices

Michael Yip

PARIT BUNTAR, Perak: The Church of Our Lady of Good Health in Parit Buntar marked a historic milestone on January 1, 2026 with the Solemn Rite of Consecration and a Thanksgiving Mass, celebrating the completion of its reconstruction and its official reopening. The sacred rite was presided over by Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang, who consecrated the newly rebuilt church as a dwelling place of God among His people.

Over 2,000 faithful attended the celebration, joined by clergy, deacons, religious sisters and guests from various denominations and faiths. The turnout reflected the community's deep love for the church, creating an evening of unity, reverence, and joy.

Constructed at a cost of approximately RM4 million, the rebuilt church is a dignified and prayerful space. Its main entrance features a finely carved wooden relief of the Wedding at Cana, symbolising transformation and abundance through God's grace. Above it, a prominent stained-glass image of Our Lady of Good Health captures the light in vivid colours, drawing the gaze heavenward even before entering.

Behind the altar stands a large statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary, with the Crucifix suspended above, forming the sanctuary's visual and spiritual focal point. Along the nave, ten stained-glass panels enrich the space: five on the left depicting the life, miracles, and apparitions of Jesus, and five on the right illustrating Marian apparitions and miracles. Statues of saints throughout the church add to its atmosphere of devotion and prayer.

The official opening began promptly at 5.30pm with the ribbon-cutting, unveiling of a commemorative plaque, and the rite of knocking at the door. Cardinal Sebastian then led the faithful inside, symbolising the church's formal



opening and entry into full liturgical life.

During the Thanksgiving Mass, the Rite of Consecration was carried out in full. The cardinal blessed and sprinkled holy water throughout the church and on the congregation, anointed the altar, pillars, and tabernacle with sacred chrism, and offered incense. The altar was then cleansed, clothed with a white cloth, adorned with flowers, and illuminated with candles, signifying it was ready for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

A deeply symbolic moment came with the placement of relics beneath the altar. Those of St Mother Teresa of Calcutta and St Devasahayam Pillai were enshrined on either side, representing continuity in faith and witness. St Mother Teresa is remembered for her selfless service to the poorest and most abandoned, while St Devasahayam Pillai, the first lay martyr of India, bore courageous witness to Christ amid persecution.

In his homily, Cardinal Sebastian reflected on Saint Paul's words, reminding the faithful that the human person is composed of spirit, soul, and body, with the Holy Spirit dwelling within. Citing a Tamil proverb — "The beau-

ty of the heart is reflected on the face" — he spoke of inner beauty revealed through words, actions, and service. He also drew a parallel between the church's visible beauty — its architecture, stained glass, and furnishings — and its unseen foundations, stressing that external beauty depends on a strong spiritual foundation. Quoting the Gospel of Matthew, he reminded the congregation that what is made by human hands will pass away, but God's Word endures forever.

Parish priest, Fr Martin Arlando, described the day as a defining moment for the parish, marking the dedication of a sacred space where the faithful can worship, seek healing, and grow in faith. He expressed gratitude to God and to parishioners, benefactors, builders, and volunteers whose sacrifices made the project possible.

Reflecting on the church reconstruction, Fr Martin recalled that when he succeeded Fr Anthony Pillai in 2023, discussions to renovate or rebuild were already underway. The ageing church had long suffered from flooding and structural issues. Parish Pastoral Council chairman Manuel Winson had brought

these concerns to the bishop, who advised a careful evaluation of the plans.

Fr Martin candidly shared that one of his first tasks was reviewing parish finances, only to realise funds were insufficient. Undeterred, he convened meetings to explore additional resources and, with diocesan approval, reached out to personal networks for voluntary professional support.

At a critical stage, parishioner John CK Lim stepped forward, offering architectural guidance and assembling a voluntary team of experts across architecture, engineering, MEP, and cost management to assist with design and planning. His contribution reduced costs and ensured smooth progress. In a moving tribute, John was called to the altar and honoured through a traditional Indian ceremony, with a ceremonial shawl draped over him as a symbol of the parish's deep respect and gratitude.

Fr Martin emphasised that the church's completion was the fruit of collective effort, thanking parishioners for their generosity, perseverance, and sacrifices. He also acknowledged Manuel Winson for his leadership in fundraising and coordination, and Meleena Jane Winson for her pivotal role in organising the major celebration.

In a deeply personal moment, Fr Martin spoke of his late father, whose encouragement sustained him throughout the construction period. The parish later presented him with a surprise gift — a model statue of his father — moving both priest and congregation to tears.

The celebration concluded with a Marian tribute by young girls portraying various apparitions, followed by the sealing of a time capsule containing parish records and messages for future generations, to be opened on January 1, 2050. A festive reception afterwards brought the historic and joyful occasion to a fitting close.

Letters to Editor

Dear Editor,

As Chinese New Year approaches, it has become customary in many local Catholic churches to include prayers for ancestors during the Mass to celebrate CNY. For many cradle Catholics, this may feel like a natural and even comforting integration of culture and faith. For converts like myself, however, it raises questions that are neither academic nor trivial.

As a Taoist convert to Catholicism, I remember being taught during my RCIA formation that certain ancestral rites and prac-

tices were incompatible with the Catholic faith and therefore had to be relinquished. Taking this guidance seriously, I explained to my non-Catholic family that I could no longer participate in such practices, even though they were deeply woven into our cultural and familial life. This was not an easy conversation, nor an easy sacrifice, but it was one I made in obedience and sincerity.

Today, when I see elements associated with ancestor veneration being incorporated into the Church's liturgy, I find myself unsettled. The discomfort does not stem from a rejection of culture, but from a sense of confu-

sion. What I was once taught to set aside now appears, at least outwardly, to be embraced. This leaves converts in a difficult position, caught between fidelity to what we were taught and the lived reality of parish practice.

The issue here is not whether the Church may legitimately pray for the dead — this is, after all, a core Catholic belief — but whether sufficient care has been taken to explain the distinction between Christian prayer for ancestors and religious rites that imply worship. Without clear catechesis, what is meant to be pastoral sensitivity can unintentionally become a source of scandal or misunderstand-

ing, especially for converts and their families.

Perhaps this moment invites the Church to listen more attentively to the voices of converts, who often stand at the crossroads of faith and culture. Clear teaching, careful language, and consistent practice are essential — not only to preserve doctrinal integrity, but also to help believers explain their faith with confidence, credibility, and peace.

In matters of faith and culture, ambiguity may be well-intentioned, but clarity remains an act of charity.

Jesslyn Tan
Kuala Lumpur



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The Editor, HERALD, 5 Jalan Robertson, 50150 KL | Please include your name and address. Letters without name and address will not be entertained.

Elvina Fernandez

KUALA LUMPUR: On January 1, the Church of St Anthony opened its doors and hearts to begin the new year in a spirit of compassion and fellowship. *Through the Bringing Hope to the Table* project, parishioners welcomed 150 guests — friends from the streets and those in need — to a sit-down meal that was more than just food. It was a celebration of dignity, joy, and belonging, a living witness to the love of Christ shared at the start of a new year.

The initiative was organised in collaboration with Samaritan Home, located directly opposite the church. Its mission of care for the marginalised found a natural partner in the parish community. Together, they created a space where hope could be tasted, heard, and felt.

Members of various parish ministries, joined by families and friends, served hot meals and drinks. Yet the true gift of the day went beyond food. Parishioners offered their presence, listening, conversing, and sharing stories with guests. They embodied the Gospel call to see Christ in every person — not simply serving meals, but sitting with guests, offering companionship, and sharing hope.

By hearing their stories and understanding their struggles, parishioners discerned ways to provide assistance beyond the meal itself. This pastoral attentiveness ensured the event was not mere charity, but a genuine encounter of solidarity and care.

The atmosphere was warm and welcoming. Tables were set not merely for nourishment but for fellowship. Guests were greeted with smiles, treated with respect, and engaged in joyful conversation. Parishioners rotated



through tables, sharing meals and conversations, giving many guests a rare moment of being truly seen and valued — a reminder that they are part of a larger family of faith.

The event was rooted in Scripture: “For I was hungry and you gave Me food, I was thirsty and you gave Me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed Me” (Matthew 25:35). These words were not just read but lived in the parish hall, where the boundaries between host and guest dissolved into shared humanity.

Each plate of food, each cup of tea, and each conversation became a sign of God’s love, transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary. Parish priest Fr Dr Clarence Devadass reflected the significance of the day,

“This project is not only about feeding the hungry; it is about restoring dignity, building relationships, and reminding us that Christ is present at every table. When we sit together, listen, and share, we discover that hope is not an abstract idea — it is something we can taste, touch, and live.”

Parishioner Aloysius shared a moving encounter. “I saw a man who had only one leg and a worn-out shoe, using a prosthetic to walk. Our parish priest didn’t hesitate to give him a pair of his own shoes. In a time when we complain and run after shoe brands, here was a man who came without a leg and when we served him, the first thing he did was ask if we had eaten. That moment humbled me.

Gratitude and care often come from those who have the least, reminding me what truly matters.”

The day also became a place of unexpected grace. One parishioner reunited with long-lost relatives, who now rely on soup kitchens like Samaritan Home. These tender reunions highlighted that hardship does not erase family ties, and that the Church can serve as a bridge back to belonging. In moments of embrace and recognition, hope was rekindled not only through food but through restored relationships.

As guests departed, each received a care pack prepared by the Parish Integral Human Development Ministry (PIHDM), containing essentials such as a toothbrush, toothpaste, soap, a comb, and a towel. Parishioner Marvin Domenic recalled a touching moment. “A child who came with her mother, got excited to see a comb in the care pack and asked for another. It reminded me how the simplest things can feel like a luxury and how small acts of kindness truly matter.”

The partnership with Samaritan Home was central to the event’s success. By working together, the parish and the Home demonstrated how collaboration strengthens the mission of the Church and extends its reach beyond parish walls. This partnership ensured the initiative was not a one-off gesture but part of a sustained commitment to those on the margins, showing that hope is nurtured through consistent care and solidarity.

As the parishioners of St Anthony look ahead to 2026, the *Bringing Hope to the Table* project stands as a powerful reminder: every table can be a place of compassion, every meal a sign of God’s love, and every encounter a step toward a brighter tomorrow.

A celebration of love

PETALING JAYA: True to the spirit of the Feast of the Holy Family, the Church of the Assumption celebrated its Family Day on December 28, 2025.

The grounds of the church and the Family House were abuzz with activity, ringed by stalls and booths offering a variety of food, games, and fun-filled attractions. Themed *A Celebration of Love*, Family Day 2025 featured a magic show, DJ and live music, a photo booth, bingo, carnival games, a water fight experience, a scavenger hunt with prizes, and even a petting zoo.

From 1.00 pm onwards, parishioners and visitors flocked to sample favourites such as freshly-grilled *satay*, fragrant *briyani*, and thosai straight from the griddle. Crowd-pleasers like curry puffs, samosas, and an assortment of *nyonya kueh* were also available at stalls run by the parish’s various BECs.

Hot coffee and tea provided the perfect accompaniment to the main meals, while chilled drinks, mango juice, and *ice kacang* refreshed participants as they joined in the games. All items were purchased using to-

kens obtained through donations, making everything accessible and family-friendly.

The main stage was the centre of entertainment, with parishioner Lawrence Anthony, aka DJ Lollipop, spinning upbeat tunes. The stage hosted the magic show, live musical performances, and a special performance by parish priest Fr Leonard Lexson, who delighted the crowd with a few songs before leading everyone in a sing-along to *Take me home, Country Road*.

Behind the scenes, months of planning by the Family Day committee, BECs, and parish ministries ensured the event’s success. Banners went up as early as November, but preparation began long before, with extensive discussions and feedback from parish groups to incorporate a wide range of ideas.

Fr Leonard closed the day with a prayer, reflecting the joy in the hearts of all present. Indeed, Family Day 2025 was a love-filled, festive celebration, a perfect way for the parish family to gather in Christmas tide and enjoy the blessings of community, faith, and fellowship. **Majella Gomes**



SEGAMAT, Johor: For the Malacca Johore Diocese, the *Perjalanan Salib* began its journey at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Johor Bahru on April 11, 2025, making its way through nine churches along the route:

- Church of St Louis, Kluang
- Church of St Mary, Ayer Salak
- Church of the Holy Spirit, Jasin
- Church of St Andrew, Muar
- Church of Christ the King, Kulai
- Church of Divine Mercy, Skudai
- Church of St Henry, Batu Pahat
- Church of St Theresa, Melaka
- Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Krubong

This year, the *Salib* arrived at the Church of St Philip, Segamat, on January 3 at 12.30pm, carried with devotion by around 50 parishioners and youth from the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Krubong, Melaka. The procession began at the parish’s MEP hall, where the *Salib* was carefully assembled before making its way to the church. At the entrance, it was warmly welcomed by Jacob Isaac, chairman of the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC), his deputy Benedict Pang, fellow PPC members, and eager parishioners.

Adding colour and joy to the solemn occasion, the Iban community performed a traditional dance, their vibrant movements echoing the deep faith and cultural richness of the region. Fr Paul Wong, the parish priest, and Fr Adrian Francis, the assistant



priest, greeted the procession at the church entrance, guiding it into the sanctuary.

Inside the church, the *Salib* took its place before the altar, where it was blessed and prayers were offered by the faithful. It will remain in the parish until February 7, giving parishioners and all Basic Ecclesial Communities a special opportunity to pray, reflect, and grow in faith before it continues its journey to the Church of the Holy Family in Ulu Tiram.

The *Perjalanan Salib* is more than a journey of wood and hands — it is a journey of hearts, bringing together communities, generations, and cultures in shared devotion. Each step along the way reminds the faithful that the Cross is not only a symbol of Christ’s sacrifice but also a living bond that unites the Church in prayer, hope, and love. **Richard Joseph**



Embracing the New Year with Mary's "Yes"

Bernard Anthony

BAHAU, Negeri Sembilan: The faithful of Bahau were invited to begin the New Year 2026 inspired by Mary's courageous "Yes" to God — a model of surrender, trust, and hope.

On the morning of January 1, the modest Chapel of Mary, Mother of God overflowed with parishioners and pilgrims from near and far, gathered to celebrate the chapel's feast day, the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, with a focus on joy, peace, and renewal.

Fr Chin Sin Wee, OCD, from Seremban, served as the celebrant, accompanied by chapel administrator Fr Albet Arockiasamy as concelebrant. The faithful prayed the Rosary together before the

Mass, setting the tone for a spiritually enriching start to the year.

In his homily, delivered in English and briefly in Mandarin, Fr Chin reminded the congregation that the dawn of a new year is also a time to reflect on the greatest gift humanity has received: Jesus Christ, the newborn Saviour. "Jesus came not for one family, but for all families, bringing spiritual life and salvation," he said. He encouraged the faithful to reflect on the past year — on their spiritual growth, their failures, and their efforts to build a closer relationship with God. "Have you detached from pride and worldly things to draw nearer to the Lord?" he asked.

Fr Chin emphasised that true freedom and peace come from walking with Christ. He high-

lighted Mary as the perfect guide: "Mary held all good in her heart" (Luke 2:19). She is the first pilgrim of hope, receiving Christ and wholly consecrating herself to God. Now in heaven, Mary continues to accompany her Son — and us — as our spiritual mother. Through her, we are reminded that we are never orphaned, even in the loss of our earthly parents.

Fr Albet translated parts of the homily into Bahasa Malaysia and Tamil, adding that Jesus, as Emmanuel, is "God with us." He reminded the faithful that Mary, called Mother of God, brings us closer to Him and calls us to peace. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God," he said. The day also coincided with the 59th World Day



of Peace, underscoring the call to live in harmony with God and one another.

Following Mass, Michael Chew, the chapel advisor, expressed gratitude to everyone who came to celebrate and pray at the chapel, and gave thanks to Fr Chin and Fr Albet for their inspiring homily and beautiful Mass. Appreciation was also extended to those who assisted with the liturgy, prepared the feast, and sponsored the meal.

Tokens of appreciation were presented by Anthony Lim, the chapel chairperson, to the clergy,

altar servers, organist, and projectionist. Fr Chin, in turn, thanked Fr Albet for the invitation to begin the new year at the chapel. Fr Albet then led the blessing of the food, wishing everyone a blessed feast day.

The celebrations concluded with a luncheon fellowship on the chapel grounds, where parishioners and pilgrims shared a meal, exchanged New Year greetings, and strengthened the bonds of community. It was a joyful start to 2026, rooted in prayer, hope, and the loving guidance of Mary, Mother of God.

CIC welcomes relic of St Carlo Acutis

PENANG: The Church of the Immaculate Conception (CIC), warmly welcomed a profound gift to its spiritual family — a first-class relic of St Carlo Acutis, brought home by parish priest, Msgr Jude Miranda.

This sacred relic was reverently presented for veneration during the Christmas Masses, offering parishioners a unique chance to encounter the life and witness of a young saint whose love for the Holy Eucharist continues to inspire hearts across the world.

With St Carlo Acutis' relic now joining the parish's treasured collection, CIC's spiritual heritage grows ever richer. Among the relics already venerated are those of St Anthony of Padua, St Thérèse



of Lisieux, St Francis Xavier, St Maria Goretti, St Jacques Chastan, St Faustina Kowalska, St Paul of the Cross, St Gabriel of Our Lady of Sorrows, Pope St John Paul II, and St Thomas Aquinas — a gal-

lery of saints whose lives illuminate the path to holiness.

St Carlo Acutis (1991–2006), canonised in 2025, is remembered for his deep devotion to the Eucharist, which he called his "highway to heaven." In a short life marked by faith, charity, and creative evangelisation through digital media, he reminds us all — especially young people — that sanctity is not distant or unattainable. It can flourish in ordinary life when lived with love and joy.

The faithful are invited to venerate this relic and seek the intercession of St Carlo Acutis, allowing his example of joyful discipleship and Eucharistic devotion to ignite their own journey of faith. **Nicholas Khor**



KULIM: The Senior Citizens of the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus welcomed the Christmas and New Year season with a heartwarming gathering filled with joy, fellowship, and thanksgiving.

In her opening address, chairperson Mary Anne Loh reflected on the past 15 years, highlighting the remarkable dedication of nearly 90 senior members who have actively participated in both indoor and outdoor parish activities. She reminded everyone that the day's celebration was especially meaningful as it honoured elderly parents and senior members of the parish community, celebrating



Festive cheer for Kulim parish seniors

their lifelong contributions and enduring spirit.

The festivities began with an opening prayer led by parish priest, Fr Desmond Jansen, who set a prayerful and joyful tone

for the gathering. He expressed his gratitude to the committee for their tireless efforts, acknowledging how their dedication ensured the event's success.

Among those present were

Gabriel Tan (81) and his wife Agnes Teh (80), whose presence symbolised the enduring strength and camaraderie of the parish's senior community. The event was thoughtfully organised by the

Sacred Heart Senior Citizen Core Team, whose commitment made the celebration truly memorable.

Games and activities added laughter and cheer, with winners receiving gifts presented by Fr Desmond as tokens of recognition and encouragement. Fellowship refreshments followed, allowing participants to mingle, share stories, and enjoy the company of friends old and new.

The gathering concluded on a joyful note, with all attendees returning home with hearts full of happiness, gratitude, and the warm reminder that the spirit of community and celebration transcends age. **John Kuppasawary**



Plentong community shines in spirit of generosity

JOHOR: The Church of St Joseph, Plentong came alive as parishioners, families, and volunteers gathered for a heartwarming charity bazaar organised by Caritas POHD and the Creation Justice Ministry recently.

The event was a true celebration of community, compassion, and unity. Tables overflowed with donated clothes, household items, toys, and books — each item a testament to the caring hearts of those who contributed. Beyond the tangible donations, the bazaar radiated a deeper spirit: that of

selfless service and shared joy.

The success of the event was further strengthened by the dedication of the trilingual youth group, whose tireless efforts ensured everything ran seamlessly. Their energy and commitment highlighted the importance of intergenerational collaboration in building a community of love and service.

This bazaar was a living witness to the power of collective effort and the blessings that flow when a community works together in faith and generosity.

PHOENIX: A proposed law in Arizona could see priests facing felony charges if they fail to break the seal of confession after learning of child abuse during the sacrament.

The measure, HB 2039, was introduced in December 2025 by state Rep Anastasia Travers. It is awaiting action in the state House after Travers prefiled it on Dec 4.

The bill would amend the state code to require priests to report abuse learned during confession if they have “reasonable suspicion to believe that the abuse is ongoing, will continue, or may be a threat to other minors.”

Failure to report a “reportable

Priests at risk of felony under Arizona law

offense” could lead to class 6 felony charges under the bill. Those charges in Arizona can lead to up to \$150,000 (approx. RM610,000) in fines and up to two years of imprisonment.

Travers did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the bill and why she proposed it.

She previously filed a similar bill in 2023.

Lawmakers in multiple US states in recent years have moved to require priests to violate the seal of confession as part of mandatory reporting laws.

One such law in Washington state suffered a dramatic defeat in July

2025 after a federal court blocked the measure on First Amendment grounds. The rule had drawn rebuke from the US bishops, the White House, Orthodox church leaders, and other advocates. The state backed off the law in October 2025.

Similar measures in Delaware, Vermont, Wisconsin, and Montana

have been proposed over the past few years, though none have come to pass. One such law was also proposed in Hungary in October 2025. In 2019, California lawmakers proposed and then backed off of a similar bill.

Priests are bound to never divulge what they hear in confession on pain of excommunication. Multiple priests in Church history have been martyred after they were executed for refusing to break that seal.

Church canon law dictates that it is “absolutely forbidden for a confessor to betray in any way a penitent in words or in any manner and for any reason.” CNA

Greenland Catholics seek peace amid tensions

NUUK, Greenland: The Trump administration’s stated plans to acquire Greenland — either through purchase or military means — are causing concern, even fear, among residents, but also a “quiet strength,” said the island’s only Catholic parish priest.

“People talk about it in shops, at work, and even after Mass,” said Fr Tomaž Majcen, a Conventual Franciscan and pastor of Christ the King Church in Greenland’s capital, Nuuk.

Fr Majcen, a Slovenian-born priest, and two fellow Franciscans make up the Conventual Franciscan Mission in Denmark, part of the Province of St Jerome in Croatia. In 2023, at the request of Bishop Czeslaw Kozon of Copenhagen, the three took over pastoral care of Greenland’s roughly 500 Catholics.

“Most Greenlanders feel strongly about who they are and about their right to decide their own future,”



Fr Tomaž Majcen poses for a photograph with the faithful after a church service. (Fr Tomaž Majcen facebook)

Fr Majcen said in an email to *OSV News* on January 6. “The fact that such a large majority does not want to become part of the United States says a lot.”

Trump’s long-signalled interest in Greenland as a “national security priority” was formally confirmed

by White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt, who said on Jan 6 that “a range of options” — including the use of the US military — is being considered.

The statement followed a joint declaration by Denmark, France, Italy, Poland, Spain, and the United

Kingdom affirming that “security in the Arctic must be achieved collectively” and that “Greenland belongs to its people,” with only Denmark and Greenland having the right to decide on matters concerning them.

Greenland, home to about 56,000 people — most of them Inuit — has been semiautonomous since 1979. Denmark oversees foreign and defence policy, but Greenland governs most domestic affairs. The 2009 Self-Government Act also gives Greenlanders the right to declare independence, though economic dependence on Danish subsidies complicates that goal.

Fr Majcen said the situation underscores the Church’s pastoral mission. “People are worried, but they are also very clear: this is our land, our culture, our home,” he said.

“As a priest, I see how political uncertainty affects people’s hearts. It creates anxiety about identity and

the future of children and families,” he added. “Our pastoral work today includes listening, comforting, and helping people name their fears.”

He emphasised the Church’s role as a place of peace. “The Church must be a place of peace. We must stand for human dignity, for the rights of the Inuit people, and for dialogue instead of threats. Above all, we pray for wisdom for leaders, for peace between nations, and for the strength of our community.”

Fr Majcen called on the faithful to embrace their calling as peacemakers. “We are all God’s children, and our true strength comes from compassion and working together for the common good,” he said.

He also invited people to pray for respect for sovereignty and to care for creation. “Our Arctic environment is one of God’s most breathtaking but vulnerable masterpieces. Let us cherish it and protect it.” *OSV News*

Controversial ‘Last Supper’ withdrawn from India’s top exhibition

KERALA: Catholics have welcomed the withdrawal of a controversial Last Supper painting from an exhibition in India’s southern state of Kerala, which is billed as South Asia’s longest-running art biennale.

The painting, *Supper at a Nunnery* replaces Jesus and His disciples with a naked Mata Hari — the Dutch courtesan convicted of being a spy for Germany during World War I — surrounded by nuns moments before her execution.

It is the work of Tom Vattakuzhy, a Kerala-born and Qatar-based artist.

Catholic groups objected to its display at the 6th Kochi-Muziris Biennale, a collective of artists hosting India’s largest global art event, which is underway in Kochi from

December 12, 2025, to March 31, 2026.

The Kochi Biennale Foundation, which organises the event, said in a Jan 4 statement that “the curator and the artist” have decided to withdraw the painting, “respecting public sentiments and in the interest of the common good.”

The foundation, “which has always stood for artistic and curatorial freedom, respects their decision,” the statement added.

The decision was welcomed by Fr Tom Olikkarott, the public relations officer of the Eastern Rite Syro-Malabar Church based in Kerala.

“We see a rising trend of targeting Christians to defame them through such distorted forms of artworks,” said Fr Olikkarott.

Unlike Leonardo da Vinci’s

iconic painting of the Last Supper, Vattakuzhy’s painting not only distorted the original work but also misrepresented it, the priest noted.

“We cannot approve perverted forms of art as they give a wrong message to society. Such acts cannot be justified,” he added.

The Syro-Malabar Church, in a statement, had slammed the painting as a “distorted depiction of the Last Supper, which is a holy symbol of the Christian faith.”

The statement wondered whether the painting’s selection for the exhibition “was done intentionally to insult the Christian faith.”

Vattakuzhy defended his painting, saying it “was not intended to offend anyone.” He told the media that interpreting it strictly through a religious lens “is meaningless,” explaining that he aimed to portray Mata Hari as a misunderstood figure and a scapegoat of World War I.

“She fell victim to the patriarchal injustices of her time,” Vattakuzhy said, adding that he approached the subject with compassion, seeking to evoke emotions like love and mercy in the artwork.

“Whatever his intentions, Catholics cannot accept the painting,” said Cheriyan Joseph, a Catholic leader in Kerala. *ucanews.com*



Dilbert creator turns to Christianity

WASHINGTON: Scott Adams, 68, *pic*, the creator of the long-running comic strip *Dilbert*, has announced he plans to convert to Christianity amid his battle with terminal cancer. Diagnosed with prostate cancer in May 2025, Adams’ illness has spread to his bones, leaving him paralysed below the waist, and he is also suffering from heart failure.

Once critical of organised religion and sceptical of faith, Adams shared his decision on the January 1 episode of his podcast *Real Coffee with Scott Adams*. “I’ve not been a believer, but I have respect for any Christian who goes out of their way to try to convert me,” he said. “It is my plan to convert. I still have time, but you’re never too late.”

Adams cited Pascal’s Wager, the 17th-century philosophical argument that choosing to believe in God carries little risk but potentially eternal reward. He explained, “If it turns out there’s nothing there, I’ve lost nothing... If it turns out there is something there and the Christian model is the closest to it, I win.”

Dominican theologian Fr Thomas Petri called the announce-



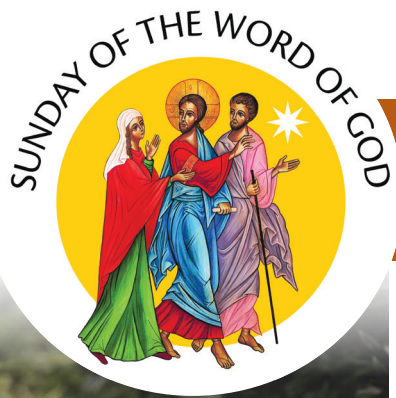
ment “very good news,” noting that faith need not be perfect to be received by God. “As we approach death, we become more focused on ultimate questions,” he said. “Trusting in God opens us to the possibility that death is not an end but an avenue to something greater.”

Jimmy Akin, senior apologist at *Catholic Answers*, also welcomed Adams’ decision, highlighting how confronting mortality can make people open to faith. “God has many ways of drawing people to Himself,” Akin said. “As Jesus taught, it is never too late in this life for a person to turn to God.”

For Adams, the move reflects both personal reflection and a respect for the faith of those around him — a final, contemplative step amid life’s fragility and uncertainty. CNA

Sunday of the Word of God

The word of Christ dwells among you



The biblical theme chosen for the seventh Sunday of the Word of God celebrated on January 25, is drawn from St Paul's Letter to the Colossians: "The word of Christ dwells among you" (Col 3:16). The Apostle's exhortation goes beyond a call to listen to or study Scripture; it invites believers to allow the Word to dwell within them, taking root and shaping their thoughts, desires, and witness in daily life. In this way, the Word of Christ becomes a sure criterion that unifies the Christian community and renders its mission fruitful.

After the Holy Year, this theme remains a precious inheritance for the Church, reminding all that genuine renewal is born from attentive and docile listening to the Gospel. To welcome the Word means allowing oneself to be guided by Christ, who gives life and hope and continues to illuminate the course of history through the lives of His disciples. When space is given to the Word, it dwells in the heart like a seed that, in time, bears fruit, leading believers not only to personal transformation but also to proclamation, for "from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks" (Mt 12:34).

Significantly, this year's celebration coincides with the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul and the conclusion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The Word that once struck Paul's heart on the road to Damascus trans-

formed him into a tireless evangeliser. Today, the Church is once again called to ensure that this same Word reaches the ends of the earth, dwelling among us and renewing the lives of all peoples.



1. Preparing for the Sunday of the Word of God

To actively experience the Sunday of the Word of God it is important that preparations extend from the spiritual level (personal and community prayer) to the material level (adequate planning).

Indeed, fostering an encounter with God in His Word requires adequate spiritual preparation, calling for openness of heart for those to whom the Word will be proclaimed. Accordingly, preparations for planning the initiative call for starting with individual and communal prayer.

Suggestions:

- A week before the Sunday of the Word of God, include an intention dedicated to this goal in the prayer of the faithful.
- Provide a time of Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the community, offered for the celebration of the Sunday of the Word of God.
- Have moments of Biblical Catechesis.

2. Living out the Sunday of the Word of God

Celebrate this Sunday's Mass in a solemn way. In fact, the most favourable place of encounter between the Christian community and the Word of God is the Eucharistic celebration. The Apostolic Letter *Aperuit illis*, No 3, outlines some suggestions:

- It will be important that the sacred text can be enthroned in the Eucharistic celebration so that the normative value that the Word of God possesses is made evident to the assembly.
- On this Sunday, especially, it will be helpful to highlight its proclamation and adapt the homily to emphasise the service that is rendered to the Word of the Lord.
- On this Sunday, the Bishops could celebrate the rite of institution of the Ministry of Catechists and also Lectors, to recall the importance of the proclamation of the Word of God in the liturgy.
- The parish priests could find ways of distributing the Bible, or one of its books, to the whole assembly so as to bring out the importance of continuing

Pastoral Proposals



the daily reading, and deepening prayer with Sacred Scripture, with a special emphasis on *lectio divina*.

- Make special reference in the Prayer of the Faithful to Christian unity, since celebrating the Sunday of the Word of God expresses ecumenical significance.

3. Throughout the whole year

It is important to remember that the carrying out of the programme is not the ultimate purpose of this Sunday. Rather, we need to foster an ongoing personal and community encounter with the Word of God. We know well that listening, sharing, living and proclaiming the Word of God is not a one-day

task, but a task to undertake for our whole life. It might help to promote various Bible initiatives throughout the year and provide an opportunity for ongoing formation of the faithful.

● Formation for Lectors

It is essential that church communities engage in training the faithful who carry out the task of lectors in Liturgical Celebrations, so that they may be true proclaimers of the Word with adequate preparation, as is now customary for acolytes or extraordinary ministers of Communion.

- **Carrying the Word "in your pocket"** Cultivate the habit of always carrying

a small Gospel in your pocket or bag, so that you can read it during the day. There are different editions of the New Testament or the Gospels — handy, pocket-sized books that easily fit in our bags or backpacks and that we can always keep with us.

● Carrying the Word in your cellphone

One can easily have the Bible in their cell phone to consult it at any time. There are different apps and web sites in different languages, not only with the Bible but also with the Holy Mass readings for each day, pages where to read or listen to the Word of God, pages with commentaries and reflections of the same. One can also use notifications as a reminder to have a moment a day to encounter God's Word so that it accompanies us wherever we go.

● Bible Group

A group could be organised in the church community, on a weekly or monthly basis, that organises formative or cultural moments of in-depth study of Sacred Scripture, and community *Lectio divina* moments. The meetings should be adapted according to the characteristics of the group (age group, spiritual maturity, etc.).

● Meditated Rosary

Another source for praying with Scripture is the variety of traditional Catholic prayers, such as the Rosary. It is an evangelical prayer with a distinct Christological orientation, defined by St John Paul II as a "compendium of the Gospel". In fact, it has an essentially contemplative character, since it leads us into the meditation of the mysteries of the Lord's life, accompanied by the one who was closest to the Lord. To give biblical foundation and greater depth to the meditation, it is helpful if the announcement of the mystery is followed by the proclamation of a corresponding biblical passage. It is appropriate that after the announcing of the mystery and the proclamation of the Word, one should pause for a suitable period of time to fix one's gaze on the meditated mystery, before beginning the vocal prayer.



(Keningau Diocese facebook)



Faith in the face of change

This is the second in a series exploring the stories, people, and moments that have shaped the Catholic Church in Malaysia. In the previous article, we traced the Church's first footsteps on these shores, arriving with the Portuguese fleet. The capture of Malacca marked the start of a new era — not only of colonial ambition, but of faith taking root. Accompanying the conquerors were missionary priests, whose devotion and courage sowed seeds of a Church that, centuries later, continues to flourish, quietly shaping lives and communities in ways both seen and unseen.

Richard Chia

In 1557, Malacca was raised to the status of a Suffragan See under the Metropolitan Archdiocese of Goa, India. [A suffragan see is a diocese led by its own bishop, yet still part of a larger ecclesiastical province under a metropolitan archbishop.] At the heart of this new diocese was Fr Jorge de Santa Luzia, a Dominican priest from Portugal, ordained as its first bishop. The Suffragan See of Malacca spanned a vast and diverse region, reaching Burma, Siam, China, Malaya, and the Indonesian Archipelago. Bishop Jorge devoted himself to strengthening the missionary presence on the islands of Flores and Timor, where the Dominican Fathers were recorded as bringing some five thousand souls to the Catholic faith. Serving faithfully until his resignation around 1578, Bishop Jorge left a lasting legacy — a vision of faith that took root across Southeast Asia and planted the foundations of a Church that would endure for centuries.

By January 1576, with the establishment of the new Diocese of Macau, the territories of China and Japan were transferred out of the Suffragan See of Malacca. Later, in 1669, Siam was elevated to an Apostolic Vicariate, gaining its independence from Malacca as well. Over time, these changes significantly reduced both the size and the jurisdiction of the Suffragan See of Malacca, marking a gradual narrowing of its once vast influence across Southeast Asia.

17th Century: The decline of Portuguese influence in Malacca

By the early 17th century, Portuguese power in Southeast Asia was waning. The kingdom was caught in wars with Spain, beset by internal political struggles, and reeling from the devastating earthquake in Lisbon that drained much of its national resources. Its once-prosperous colonies in Asia grew vulnerable, and control of the lucrative trade routes fell into the hands of the rising Dutch, a new maritime power asserting its dominance across the region.

In 1604, Monsignor Christovao de Sae Lisboa, a Dominican priest, was appointed by Pope Clement VIII as bishop of the Suffragan See of Malacca. Yet, his leadership was soon overshadowed by the turbulence of the times. The Dutch attacked Malacca, destroying churches and chapels, testing the endurance of the Catholic community. In response, King Philip III of Portugal ordered the rebuilding of the churches and ensured resources were provided for the clergy, a testament to the determination to keep the faith alive.

Three and a half decades later, in 1640, the Dutch laid siege and finally captured Malacca. The Portuguese bishops were forced to leave, taking refuge in Timor or Flores in Indonesia. Of the three thousand Catholics who survived the conquest, half — including members of the clergy — were deported. Only 1,603 Catholics of Portuguese and Eurasian descent remained, clinging to their faith under increasingly oppressive conditions.

From the very first year of Dutch rule, Catholic worship was strictly prohibited. Churches were burned or repurposed as barracks, including the Church at St Paul's Hill, which was converted to Dutch Presbyterianism. Laws forbade Catholics from attending public Mass, gathering for religious meetings, or even listening to sermons. Orders were issued to deport anyone who refused to renounce their faith, while chapels that had been rebuilt were torn down or converted to other uses.

Yet amid persecution, the spirit of the Church endured. Clergy risked their lives to celebrate Mass in secret, and lay movements quietly sustained the faithful, ensuring that the flame of devotion was not extinguished. The Suffragan See of Malacca survived as an institution, though its bishops now resided far from the city, in Flores and Timor, guiding a scattered flock and keeping the vision of the Church alive in Southeast Asia.

18th Century: The dawn of English influence

By the early 18th century, Dutch hostility



Malacca in 1550-1563 (From Portuguese sources)



Image from History of the Dutch in Malaysia by Dennis De Witt

towards Catholicism persisted, though enforcement of the ban on Catholic services had begun to weaken. Malacca had lost much of its strategic appeal, as the Dutch had shifted their economic centre to Batavia (modern-day Jakarta). Without government support, the Catholic community in Malacca remained poor, yet resilient. Its focus had shifted from missionary outreach to the quiet task of rebuilding itself, and conversions, if any, were few.

The Dutch East India Company, founded in 1602, had long supplanted Portuguese trade dominance, operating as the world's first multinational corporation with a monopoly across Asia. By 1799, however, the company slid into bankruptcy, opening the door for the English to gain commercial control in the Malay Peninsula. The British East India Company took over the cloth-producing regions and opium trade, while English maritime technology proved superior to that of the Dutch.

In 1786, the British formally established control over Penang in the name of King George III. Captain Francis Light, representing the Company, negotiated the territory from the Sultan of Kedah in exchange

for protection. Penang (then Prince of Wales Island) became the first British settlement in Southeast Asia and the new regional hub, while Malacca receded from British interest.

Amid these geopolitical shifts, the Church in Malaya was undergoing its own administrative transformation. In 1838, the Suffragan See of Malacca, established centuries earlier, was formally dissolved by Pope Gregory XVI, with Malacca and Singapore placed under the jurisdiction of the Vicariate of Siam. This marked a pivotal moment in the Catholic Church's history in Southeast Asia, as the care of the Malayan faithful was entrusted to the Vicar Apostolic of Siam.

Just a few years later, in 1841, Pope Gregory XVI created the Vicariate Apostolic of Malaya as an independent mission, placing it under the care of the Missions Étrangères de Paris (MEP) Fathers from France. With this, the era of Portuguese missionaries came to a close, giving way to a new chapter led by French missionaries — ensuring that the Church in Malaya would continue to endure, adapt, and grow despite centuries of change.

Next: 19th Century: The Church in Malaya under British influence

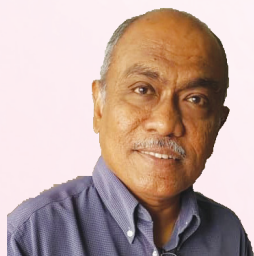


Image from 'History of the Dutch in Malaya'



Painting showing Francis Light (standing on the right) proclaiming the possession of Penang Island and naming it 'Prince of Wales Island' after hoisting the Union Jack flag, on August 11, 1786. Pic credits: Rebecca Lee & Augustin (1987) The Penang Treasury.

The shape and structure of the RCIA



Echoing the Faith

DR STEVEN SELVARAJU

How is the RCIA carried out?

The RCIA is an initiation process that is carried out through four PERIODS of time and three liturgical STEPS which are linked to one another. These periods and steps serve as key moments that mark the spiritual journey and growth experienced by the individual seeking entrance into the Church.

- The four periods of time are: Evangelisation and Precatechumenate, the Catechumenate, Enlightenment and Purification and Mystagogy.
- The three liturgical steps are: Acceptance into the Order of the Catechumens, Rite of Election and Reception of the Sacraments of Initiation.



During the Period of Evangelisation and Precatechumenate, the inquirer raises questions about Christ and the Church.

What happens in the Period of Evangelisation and Precatechumenate?

The person interested in the Catholic faith is invited to attend informal gatherings for a number of weeks at the parish. At this time, the individual is called an 'inquirer' since he or she has come to question and find out more about Jesus and the Catholic Faith. The focus here is to introduce the inquirer to the life and message of Jesus and help him or her experience initial faith and conversion to Christ, as well as, come into first contact with the Christian community. The role of the community is to listen and respond to the inquirer's questions and concerns in the light of the Gospel of Christ and the teachings of the Church.

What happens if the individual wishes to take the next step?

When the times comes for the enquirer to make a commitment to become a member of the Church, he or she is invited to participate in the first liturgical step, that is, the Rite of Acceptance into Order of Catechumens. However, before he or she is accepted into the Order of Catechumens, the Church will demand certain prerequisites from the inquirer. He or she must show evidence of the initial faith and conversion to Christ and the intention to change his or her life so as to enter into relationship with God in Christ.

Consequently, there must also be evidence of a start to the practice of calling upon God in prayer, a sense of the Church, and some experience of the Christian community

through contact with the parish priest and with of the community (RCIA, n. 42). In general, the inquirer must express a sincere desire to follow Christ and His teachings and to live as a member of the Church. At this time too, some members of the community will come forward to serve as "sponsors" to the inquirers. The sponsor will accompany the inquirer with prayers, advice and support.

What happens at the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens?



At the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens, the inquirer publicly expresses his or her intention in becoming a Catholic before the community.

At the celebration of the Rite, the person publicly expresses his or her intention to become a Catholic before the Christian community. The Church, on her part, accepts the individual as someone wishing to become her member and accepts him/her as a candidate for initiation. The Rite itself consists three parts. Firstly, the person is presented to the community as someone seeking entrance into the Church. Secondly, he or she joins the community in listening to the proclamation of the Sacred Scriptures and the homily at Mass. Thirdly, the person is dismissed from the assembly after the homily. However, it is also usual for him or her to be invited by the priest to remain with the community for the rest of the Mass.

After the Rite of Acceptance, the person, now known as a 'catechumen', enters into the next period, that is, the Period of the Catechumenate. According to the RCIA, "... the Church embraces the catechumens as its own with a mother's love and concern" (RCIA, 47). The catechumens are considered as part of the Church. They are encouraged to take part in the celebrations of the word during Mass and to receive blessings. When two catechumens marry or when a catechumen marries an unbaptised person, the appropriate rite is used. One who dies during the catechumenate receives a Christian burial (RCIA, 47).

What happens during the Period of the Catechumenate?

The second period in the RCIA takes place over an extended period of time, usually about five months. The aim here is for the catechumen to mature in his or her relationship with Christ and become familiar with the Catholic faith. Also, the catechumen gradually inserts him or herself into the Christian community. The Church, on her part, welcomes, encourages and supports the catechumen with catechesis, a sense of community and the appropriate liturgical celebrations and prayers.

At the same time, the catechumen is encouraged to become involved in a parish ministry-group or Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC).

Involvement a ministry-group or BEC provides the catechumen the opportunity to understand what it means to be a Christian witness and to serve others (RCIA, 75-77). In this way, the catechumen is guided progressively

on a spiritual journey toward greater conversion, deeper faith in God and commitment to Christ and the Church.

What kind of catechesis is provided?

The parish priest appoints certain members of the community to serve as catechists (also known as RCIA facilitators). They will have the main responsibility in ensuring that the catechumen is formed in the knowledge of the Faith. Commonly, catechesis takes place in the parish once a week. Catechesis provided to the

catechumen has to be holistic and systematic in nature. Its aim is to help the catechumen have an appropriate knowledge of the Church and her teachings and come to a greater understanding and appreciation of the Bible. Basically, the Period of the Catechumenate will help the catechumen know the faith, to celebrate and live it and to serve others.

What are the liturgical rites celebrated during this period?

The catechumens will be required to participate in several rites. Among the rites are:

- The celebration of the minor exorcism which is to encourage the catechumen to repent or ask for forgiveness from God for his or her sins and to renounce any false worship or anything that is incompatible with the Christian faith (RCIA, 90-93).
- The impartation of blessings which is to encourage, support and inspire the catechumen in his or her faith and commitment to Christ (RCIA, 95-96).
- The anointing of the catechumen with oil which reminds him or her of the need to depend on God's help and strength (RCIA, 78-89).

What happens at the end of the Period of Catechumenate?

Upon completing the Period of the Catechumenate, those wishing to receive the Sacraments of Initiation are invited to 'hand in' their names in order to affirm their decision to become Catholics. By now, the person must also have a real desire for the sacraments and want to belong to the Church (RCIA, 120). Again, the Church will evaluate the readiness of the catechumen — his or her degree of conversion, maturity of faith, growth in charity, understanding of Christian teachings and practice (RCIA, 121-122). After which, the catechumen will be invited to participate in the next liturgical step, namely, the Rite of Election.



An essential element in the Period of the Catechumenate is the transmission of the knowledge of the Catholic Faith to the catechumens by means of catechesis.

Conclusion

Due to space limitations, I have so far only examined the first two periods and first liturgical step of the RCIA. In the next article, I will discuss the Rite of Election and the Period of Purification and Enlightenment.

[The illustrations are by Dr Steven Selvaraju]

Joseph Tek Choon Yee

When my family and I moved from Sandakan to Kota Kinabalu, the Church of St Simon in Likas became our first parish for practical reasons. The Mass times worked. The language was familiar. Even the garden invited lingering. Only gradually, and almost without our noticing, did it become home.

At the centre of that quiet transition was Fr Cosmas Lee, then Rector of the parish: steady, familiar, unhurried, and quietly present.

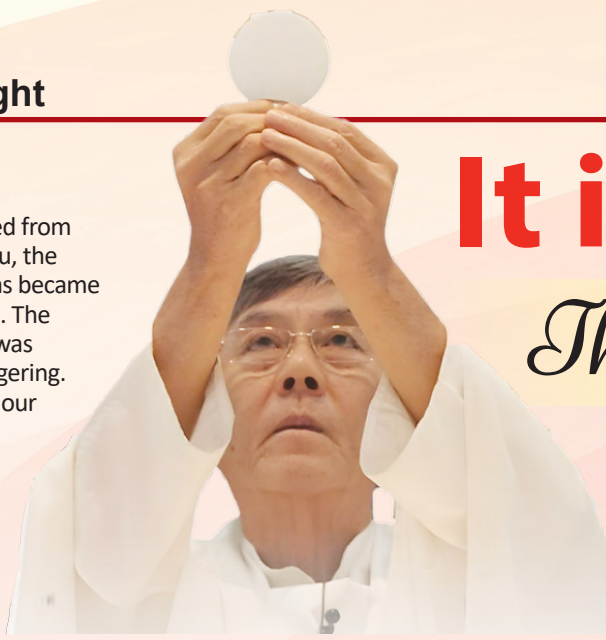
My children took to him immediately, which I later learned was no small endorsement. They listened to his homilies because he never spoke down to them. His preaching was thoughtful, layered, sometimes cutting but never cruel. He trusted even the young to think, wrestle, and grow. In a Church often anxious to simplify, he believed that faith could withstand complexity.

We grew closer in an unexpected way when we invited Fr Albert Musinguzi from Uganda to Sabah during a month-long sabbatical. Watching the two priests together was quietly delightful. They discovered shared roots in Rome and deeper affinities: a love for the liturgy, a respect for history, and an instinct to remember martyrs — whether in Uganda or North Borneo. Their conversations drifted easily across continents and centuries, as though geography were merely a footnote to faith.

What drew me most to Fr Cosmas, however, was not only the priest, but the reader and the writer. He loved books, ideas, and history enough to rescue them from forgetfulness. His 2025 book, *Ultimate Sacrifice*, is the fruit of fifteen years of painstaking research into the wartime deaths of Catholic missionaries in North Borneo.

To my surprise, he also took an interest in my own tentative writing, encouraging me to contribute to *Catholic Sabah* and *HERALD*. His editorial feedback was characteristically concise. "Joe," he once said, "your writing is laced with *bunga-bunga*." I chose to hear it as a smile disguised as a sentence — a reminder that clarity matters as much as colour, and that there is always room to grow.

As he stepped into retirement, I promised myself I would write this story — not as publicity, nor merely as biography, but as tribute and gratitude: a witness to priesthood as a lifelong vocation, offered in thanksgiving to God for the gift of Fr



Cosmas Lee.

And so, over a cup of *kopi-O*, we sat down recently to talk — to listen, to reflect, and to fine-tune this story together. There will be time, I hope, for a fuller and unabridged telling of his life when his golden jubilee arrives. For now, this is the story.

Priest with a different charisma

There are priests whose service is measured in concrete and steel — funds raised, buildings constructed, halls extended. There are others remembered for programmes — committees formed, initiatives launched, calendars filled.

And then there are priests whose deepest work resists measurement. They leave behind people — steadied, reconciled, quietly strengthened in faith. Their influence is traced not in structures completed, but in consciences formed and communities that learn how to remain together.

Fr Cosmas embodies all these dimensions of priestly service. Yet it is this last, quieter legacy — the shaping of people — that speaks most enduringly of his vocation.

On a Sunday evening in Likas on December 28, 2025, parishioners gathered for a farewell and welcoming dinner. There were speeches, a cake, choir performances, and a video montage marking nearly five decades of priesthood. Beneath the warmth and applause, however, lay a deeper recognition: a priest defined not by visibility or volume, but by presence, was stepping aside.

When Fr Cosmas rose to speak, he offered no catalogue of achievements. The old instincts of visibility had long fallen away. What remained was presence — and a single line, delivered without flourish or defence: "It is but my duty."

In an age restless for recognition, it was a quietly disarming sentence. For Fr Cosmas, duty was never a lesser calling, but love without drama, service without self-

It is but my duty

The priesthood of Fr Cosmas Lee

reference. For those who had prayed with him, questioned him, and grown under his care, the words rang true. That, perhaps, was his particular charisma.

Roots: Family before parish

Cosmas Lee Khod Min was born on May 31, 1950 in Kota Kinabalu — then Jesselton — to Francis Lee Yit Khee and Francesca Wong Yu Moi. He was the eldest of eleven children: nine boys and two girls. It struck me that the Lee household could, quite fittingly, field a full football team and still have substitutes to spare.

In families of that size, leadership is not negotiated; it is lived. Responsibility is learned not through instruction but through daily life — through chores done without being asked, quarrels mediated before tempers flared, and the unspoken expectation that the eldest would hold things together.

Long before Fr Cosmas encountered seminary corridors or theological treatises, he had already been apprenticed into a form of priesthood at home — shaped by responsibility, patience, and the quiet burden of being first.

Years later, preaching on the Feast of the Holy Family, he would return to this origin with characteristic candour. "I'm the eldest of eleven children," he told his parishioners matter-of-factly. "I spent a lot of time with the priests at Sacred Heart. They were such wonderful fathers."

Those priests awakened something deeper

than admiration. They helped him see fatherhood not merely as a biological role, but as vocation — a way of being present, steady, and available. "I wanted to be the father not of just one family," he said, "but of many families. It all started in the family."

That understanding — priesthood as fatherhood — would quietly shape his ministry for decades.

From performance to presence

At 17, Fr Cosmas left Sabah for St Francis Xavier's Minor Seminary in Singapore. From there, his formation took him to Rome, London, and beyond. He studied philosophy at the Pontifical Urbaniana University, trained with the Missionary Institute in Mill Hill, and completed his theological studies in Louvain.

Rome sharpened the intellect. London exposed the wounds of the world. Missionary formation taught him that faith, if it is to remain credible, must always be incarnated.

Ordained a priest on December 27, 1976, he began his ministry with the energy and idealism of youth. Looking back, he admits with gentle humour that young priests can be tempted to measure holiness by busyness. "When we were young," he once said, "we liked to *temberang*." How many Masses ... How many outstations ... How full the diary ...

It was not arrogance he was confessing, but immaturity — the subtle desire to perform holiness rather than inhabit it.



St Simon, Likas: The gift of a small parish

In 2008, Fr Cosmas was appointed Rector of the Church of St Simon, Likas — a small parish that would become the longest and final chapter of his active ministry.

No outstations. One language. A compact, know-your-neighbour community. And something increasingly rare in modern ministry: space. "For the first time in my life," he reflected, "I could focus on the inner self instead of performance."

The parish grew quietly. A chapel took shape. Stained glass caught the light. Wood found its place in altar and pews. Nothing extravagant. Nothing hurried. What emerged was not scale, but quality — the slow fruit of patience and care.

At St Simon's, Fr Cosmas learned and taught that presence outlasts performance, and that a small parish, tended well, can become a spacious place for the soul.

Remembering so it is not lost

Even as retirement approached, Fr Cosmas turned again to history. His book *Ultimate Sacrifice* recounts the forgotten

deaths of Catholic missionaries in North Borneo during World War II. Written not for prestige but for conscience, it reflects his conviction that remembrance itself is pastoral care.

For Fr Cosmas, faith without memory is fragile. To remember the dead is to strengthen the living.

Duty, quietly lived

As he approached retirement, Fr Cosmas

spoke plainly about ageing. "I'm getting old. Pray for me," he once told his parishioners. "I don't want to become a grumpy old man — a monster of a pastor!" The congregation laughed, not because it was merely funny, but because it was recognisably human.

Canon Law requires a parish priest to submit his resignation at 75. Fr Cosmas chose to step aside earlier. Not from fear, but from fidelity. "If I cannot give my all," he said simply, "it would be unfair to the

parish."

On Dec 27, 2025, the Church marked 49 years of his priesthood. As we move into 2026, the count becomes fifty.

Fifty years — more than 18,000 days — of saying yes:

- Yes, to service shaped by doubt and grace,
- Yes, to people's contradictions and confessions,
- Yes, to God, even in seasons of silence.

If there is one phrase that gathers his life into a single line, it is not a slogan polished for anniversaries, but a disposition lived daily: "It is but my duty."

For Fr Cosmas, duty was never cold obligation. It was love without drama. Faithfulness practised quietly. Presence chosen over performance.

And in doing so, he has left behind something far more enduring than buildings or programmes. He has left behind people — steadied, reconciled, and quietly strengthened.

This article has been edited for length. The full version is available at: <https://url-shortener.me/6NYK>



Mak Mandin's light: Where there was despair, Sr Colette brought hope

"Yes, she's our godmother – known as the Mother Teresa of Mak Mandin – yes, it's really true."

Those were the words of S. Kalaivani, a student who learnt the "three Rs" – and values at the Infant Jesus Learning Centre in Butterworth run by the late Sr Colette Selvam in the 1990s and 2000s. Now 35, Kalaivani divides her time between running her small florist business, parenting a newborn and caring for her mother in poor health.

Cardinal Sebastian Francis had earlier urged young people at a confirmation Mass in Butterworth to live up to the preferential option for the poor and be inspired by the "Mother Teresa of Mak Mandin".

This Sunday morning (January 18), Kalaivani and others are gathering at the Butterworth church to celebrate Sr Colette's legacy at a remembrance event the cardinal had mooted.

Back in the 1990s, I had never heard of this Infant Jesus sister. Although I had just got involved in an NGO, I was working in finance at a manufacturing company in Mak Mandin, one of Malaysia's oldest industrial areas. There, my life was immersed in the corporate world of maximising profits and shareholder returns while reducing costs.

Yet something was missing. One Sunday after Mass, I heard of an Infant Jesus sister working in Mak Mandin, in the very area where my workplace was.

Curious, I sought out the centre, and eventually found it in a rented double-storey house in a housing estate, just 1km from my workplace. An epiphany of sorts, minus the star above. This was the beginning of a radical counter-cultural exposure for me and others associated with the centre.

Sr Colette introduced me to the children at the learning centre and their nearby *kampung* – a settlement of shabby wooden

houses, where hopelessness and despair hung in the air, the rudimentary drainage clogged with sewerage and stagnant water. A squalid village, the System had forgotten.

The breadwinners here were mostly lowly paid workers at factories nearby.

It was my first vivid glimpse of the stark contrast between the profits-and-growth-driven corporate world and its hidden underbelly.

All along I had heard of poverty, but actually visiting the *kampung* people's homes and seeing how they lived left an indelible impression. The paltry wages the breadwinners received left them with little savings. Meals? Rice, dhal and little more. Single mothers had to leave their young children home alone when they left for work. When the rains hammered the zinc roofs, water trickled into their houses on stilts. A rat even bit a young boy.

This was the world Sr Colette entered – "a calling within a calling" to leave the familiar surroundings of Convent school life on Penang Island and venture into the unknown.

Back then, the Infant Jesus Sisters were already reflecting on the future of their schools. Were they really reaching out to poor children in today's Malaysia?

Inspired by IJ founder Nicholas Barré and more recently, St Mother Teresa, Sr Colette decided to return to the roots of the IJ calling – to serve young children who had lost all hope amid miserable surroundings.

Perhaps Thomas Merton in *New Seeds of Contemplation* (1962) explains best the impetus for her move from the comfortably enthroned 'official' Jesus to the hidden

suffering Jesus: "Be poor, go down into the far end of society, take the last place among men, live with those who are despised, love other men and serve them instead of making them serve you."

Sr Colette started making daily trips on the ferry and bus to Mak Mandin on mainland Penang to set up a makeshift learning centre. Eventually, the IJs bought a double-storey house for the learning centre.

Here, Sr Colette not only lifted up problems in prayer but used her talents in education and music to uplift the children. A gentle person afflicted with asthma, she was not the bravest person. But the Spirit guided her in this village where hidden dangers lurked.

If you think your personal problems are overwhelming, imagine carrying the burdens and sorrows of a village. Domestic abuse, poverty, child neglect, alcoholism, drug addiction... the community, especially the women, poured out their hearts to her. Once, she felt compelled to confront a resident whom she had heard was involved in domestic abuse.

Just as Barré had roped in women to help out, Sr Colette drew volunteer tutors, local and foreign, to the learning centre. The children may have been left behind in school, but at the centre, they chattered excitedly, their faces bright, eager for attention. Nobody left class hungry. This was their haven, their safe house, away from the troubles at school and at home.

It would be lovely to say the children grew up into 'successful' young adults. But it is hard to shake off the impact of poor living conditions when young impressionable

minds are moulded. The education they received was basic, perhaps enough to give them a decent shot at life?

What the children did get was a second chance... and something priceless. The knowledge that, even though the world seemed to have abandoned them, their schools given up on them, someone cared. Sr Colette and her team shone a light into their lives, like the star above the manger.

For me, it was the first time I had seen someone actually living the Gospel values in a marginalised community. The preferential option for the poor, until then an abstract concept, came alive.

Sr Colette didn't preach. Her quiet actions spoke volumes, showing the people that there is a God who cares – just like Sr Bertha Antoni did at Selayang.

Today, the IJs continue to reflect on their future. At Bukit Nanas, Sr Theresa Chua, Sr Stephanie Samy and others in the provincial team have to grapple with the 50-odd mission schools that are still under the IJs, even though they follow a government curriculum. No easy feat, that.

Last year, Sr Celina Wong, who discerned her vocation during a stint with Sr Colette in Mak Mandin, was elected to the general council of the global IJs. She and two other sisters teach kindergarten and provide tuition to children in communities in Sabah. Other IJ sisters work in Batu Arang, Bukit Beruntung, Desa Mentari, Bukit Mertajam and Kepong. Sr Rosalind Tan keeps an eye on the IJ retirement home in Cheras.

The IJ family have done incredible work in taking Barre's mission forward in challenging times. Long may that work continue.

Anil is a freelance writer and activist based in Penang. He believes we are all called to build the kingdom of God in this world.



Sunday Observer

Anil Netto

My dog. This boy has my heart in his paws. He scampered into our lives in December 2019, and we named him 'Dasher' – a nod to one of Santa's cheeky reindeer.

He was a weird looking pup. 750g on my kitchen scale.

Extremely skinny, with a shock of wiry white hair and the largest pair of ears I had ever seen on a little dog! I expected a roly-poly bundle of fluff to tumble out of the dog carrier. What I got was a scrawny creature with patchy fur and the most terrified expression on his face. The moment I scooped him up, he snuggled into my neck and slept soundly for 45 minutes. Awww... The pet cab ride over to our place must have been so stressful on him. But the poor little guy was home now. And I had been promoted to 'Mumma'.

Over the next few weeks and months, I learnt to become a dog mum. I learnt how to potty train him, how to cook for and feed him, how to bathe and groom him, how to teach him a few commands and how to share my life with him. Isn't that what all dog parents expect to learn? Absolutely. But over the past 5 years, he has taught me so much more – about God.

Stay

Psalm 37:7 advises, "Be still in the presence of the LORD, and wait patiently for Him to act." (NLT)

Dasher has taught me how to be still. He can sit and wait at my feet very patiently for the next command or his next treat. No



Yours 'faith'fully
Georgina Fernandez

Lessons from my dog

barking, nudging or whining. He's content to wait, knowing that I haven't forgotten him. He's patient, trusting that I know when the right time is for what is to come next.

His patience has taught me a key lesson concerning my relationship with God. I've always been restless. My late mum dubbed me a fidget because I could never sit still for too long.

And that occasionally, to my detriment, is reflected in my prayer life. Sitting at His feet, being attentive and waiting for His timing seems interminable sometimes. My mind wanders, my thoughts travel and in minutes I'm far away. Waiting on God in prayer has been hard for me but I'm learning how to now. There was a time I made a huge mistake embarking on a friendship without waiting for His direction. The result was catastrophic. I should never have gotten into it. And in the end, I lost not just a friend but a sum of money as well.

I constantly remind myself not to get ahead of His prompting and gentle guidance. To Sit. Stay. Wait. As I get older, I'm learning to wait on Him more. To be more patient and less of a fidget. And to do life His way.

Leave it

Leviticus 19:18 says, "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against a fellow Israelite, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the LORD." (NLT)

One day, my husband John and I came home from grocery shopping only to find that Dasher had ripped apart a brand new pack of face masks. The living room was covered in shredded black non-woven fabric. Seeing the mess, my temper rose and I scolded him. As I went off on him, he continued looking at me with sad puppy eyes, tongue lolling out. I walked away toward the kitchen and came back later, still fuming at the mess. As I sat down on the sofa, I felt a soft lick on my toes. There he was, looking up adoringly at me with his tail wagging. Wait, didn't he grudge me for scolding him? No. He left the grudge where it ought to be left. Out of his relationship with Mumma.

The book of Leviticus clearly instructs us not to hold grudges. We are not just to forgive one another but as Christians we are called to have compassion and reflect the character of Jesus by being merciful and kind. I think about the mask incident from time to time. Yes, it's entirely possible for someone you love to anger you occasionally. But God's word has taught me that holding grudges leaves no room to hold love. You can nurture your anger, but you lose the person in the bargain. What is more important?

Give

1 Chronicles 29:14 – "Everything we have has come from You, and we give You only what You first gave us!" (NLT)

Dasher loves bringing me his toys. Sometimes it's his Ducky and sometimes it's his Wabbit. But most often it's his most prized possession – his Bear-Bear. And it always makes me smile. Dogs do this, you know. Behavioural experts say that it's a sign of love and trust. They are sharing with you what's precious to them, in essence saying, 'I love and trust you. You are valuable to me.'

Isn't that how we should show our appreciation to God? 1 Chronicles 29:14 offers us a deep, humbling insight into being a good steward of everything The Lord has blessed us with. It demonstrates that everything we have has been given to us by Him, and when we offer back to Him everything, He gave us, we acknowledge how incapable we are on our own. It fosters a deeper reliance on Him, teaching us humility and gratitude. What are you offering back to Him today?

I could write a book on how many godly lessons my little furball has taught me. Lessons on how to live in the moment, how to gloss over pain and retain joy, how not to sweat the small stuff and plenty more. But that's a story for another day.

Georgina is a writer, home chef, wife and doggy mama. She is of Indian origin and has lived in Tanzania, Muscat, Mumbai and is now based in Kuala Lumpur. She is an ex-advertising creative director turned Home Chef and is the co-owner of Five & Two Fine Foods, with her husband, John. In her spare time, she loves to travel, play the keyboard and craft.





Fr Dr Clarence Devadass

From Church doors to open hearts

In a world that moves too fast and often feels deeply fragmented, the parish remains one of the few spaces where people still gather not for profit, performance, or popularity, but for belonging. For many, it is one of the last places where their name is known, their absence is noticed, and their presence matters. At its best, a parish is far more than a building where sacraments are celebrated. It is a living, breathing community where faith takes flesh not only in rituals, but in relationships. Yet for too many today, walking through parish doors can feel uncertain. *Will I be seen? Will I be welcomed? Will I belong?* The invitation before us is both simple and profound: our parishes are called to become true communities of care, warmth, welcome, and healing.

Being welcoming is not just about friendly smiles at the church entrance, though those matter more than we sometimes realise. True welcome is a posture of the heart. A welcoming parish understands that every person who enters carries a story, sometimes joyful, often painful, always sacred. The single parent juggling responsibilities, the elderly widow who feels forgotten, the teenager quietly searching for meaning, the person returning after years away from the Church, all come not as problems to be solved, but as gifts to be received. Christian hospitality is not an extra or a courtesy. It is at the heart of the Gospel itself. Jesus welcomed people before they had it all together. He met the Samaritan woman at the well, shared a meal with Zacchaeus, and drew close to those on the margins. Welcome came first. Transformation followed.

A truly welcoming parish also learns to speak the gentle language of inclusion. This means paying attention to those who often feel invisible, people with disabilities, migrants, the poor, those living with mental health challenges, or those who feel judged because their lives do not fit tidy categories. When parish communities take the time to listen, really listen, they send a powerful message: *You matter. You belong.*

Sometimes, this message is communicated not through grand programmes, but through simple, human moments. A few years ago, a man shared how he had returned to church after a long absence, quietly slipping into a back pew, hoping not to be noticed. During the Sign of Peace, the woman next to him turned, looked him in the eye, smiled warmly, and said, "Peace be with you. I am glad you are here." It lasted only a few seconds, but he later said it brought him to tears. He had not realised how invisible he had felt until that moment of recognition. That small gesture, nothing planned, nothing formal, became the reason he came back the following Sunday.

Often, hospitality begins just like that. A warm smile offered to the unfamiliar person seated next to you in church, a brief self-introduction after Mass, or a moment of genuine eye contact can gently break the ice of being strangers. Even exchanging the Sign of Peace with intention, not hurriedly or distractedly, is a quiet but powerful acknowledgment that we are not alone, that we belong to one another. In those moments, we proclaim without words that we are truly one Body in Christ. These

seemingly ordinary acts of kindness can become extraordinary channels of grace, especially for someone who has walked into church feeling unsure or unseen.

At the centre of parish life must also be healing. Many people come to church not because life is going well, but because it is not. They come carrying grief, disappointment, doubt, or quiet exhaustion. The parish is called to be a field hospital of the soul, a place where brokenness is not hidden or hurried away but gently held. Healing does not happen only through formal programmes or ministries, important as those are. It happens through presence, someone who notices when you are missing, someone who asks how you are and waits for the real answer, someone who sits with you and prays when words fall short.

Our liturgical life can be a powerful source of this healing when it is celebrated with care and warmth. A parish that prays well teaches people how to breathe again, how to trust again, how to hope again. Music that lifts weary hearts, preaching that connects faith to everyday struggles, and moments of silence that allow God to speak all create space for renewal. Healing also deepens when parishes do not shy away from pain, but acknowledge loss, crisis, and injustice honestly, choosing compassion over easy answers.

Yet welcome and healing cannot endure without participation. A parish where everything is done for the people, but nothing with them, will eventually feel distant and tired. Participation is not about filling volunteer slots. It is about shared responsibility for the mission. Every baptised person has gifts meant

to be shared. When these gifts are overlooked, the community weakens. When they are invited and encouraged, the parish comes alive.

Participatory parishes trust that the Holy Spirit is at work in everyone. They create space for lay voices in decision making, recognise young people not only as the Church of tomorrow but of today, and see ministries as opportunities for growth rather than burdens carried by a few. Participation also means formation, walking with people as they grow as disciples and witnesses in their homes, workplaces, and neighbourhoods.

Becoming a community of care is not a programme to be launched overnight. It is a way of life to be cultivated patiently. It asks for humility, courage, and ongoing conversion. It may require letting go of "the way things have always been done" to make room for new, creative expressions of community. Above all, it means choosing relationship over routine, mercy over rigidity, and mission over mere maintenance.

The parish of the future, and the parish of the Gospel, is one where people can say with confidence: *Here, I am known. Here, I am healed. Here, I have a place.* When parishes live this vision, they become more than structures and institutions. They become signs of God's gentle and faithful care in a wounded world. And in such communities, faith does not simply survive. It quietly, beautifully flourishes.

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



Fr Ron Rolheiser

Praying for Israel and Jerusalem

Once lived in community for several years with an Oblate brother who was wonderfully generous and pious to a fault. But he struggled to pick up symbol and metaphor. He took things literally. For him, what the words said is what they meant!

This caused him considerable confusion and consternation when, each day praying the psalms, we would pray for Jerusalem and Israel and would occasionally pray for the demise of some other nation. Coming out of prayer, he would ask: "Why are we praying for Jerusalem? For Israel? What makes those places more special in God's eyes than other cities and other countries? Why does God hate some countries and cities?"

We would try our best to have him understand that these names were not to be taken literally, as places on a map, but rather, as symbols. Wisely or unwisely, I would sometimes say, "Brother, whenever you read the word 'Jerusalem' or 'Israel', just take that to mean the 'Church', and whenever a nation or a city is named that God seems to hate, take that to mean that God hates sin."

We might smile at his piety and literalism, but I'm not sure we don't all still struggle with our own literalism in understanding what in fact the Scriptures mean by words like Jerusalem, Israel, Chosen people, and God's elect. Indeed, as Christians, what do we mean with the words Christian,

Church, and Body of Christ?

For whom are we praying when we pray for Jerusalem and Israel?

What we see in Scripture is a progressive de-literalising of names and places. Initially, Israel meant a historical nation, Jerusalem meant a historical city, the Chosen People meant a genetic race, and God's elect was literally that nation, that city, and that genetic race. But as revelation unfolds, these names and concepts become ever more symbolic.

At least this is true for most parts of Judaism. Most parts of Judaism understand these words symbolically, though some still understand these words literally. For them, Jerusalem means the actual city of Jerusalem, and Israel means an actual strip of land in Palestine.

Christians mirror that. Mainstream Christian theology has, from its very origins, refused to identify those names and places in a way where (simplistically) Jerusalem means the Christian Church and Christians are the Chosen Race. However, as is the case with parts of Judaism, many Christians, while de-literalising these words from their Jewish roots, now take them literally to refer to the historical Christian churches and to its explicitly confessing members. Indeed, my answer to my Oblate brother ("Jerusalem means the Church, Israel means Christianity") seems to suggest exactly that.

However, the words Church and Christianity themselves need to be de-literalised. The Church is a reality which is much wider and more inclusive than its explicit, visible, baptised membership. Its visible, historical aspect is real, is important, and is never to be denigrated; but (from Jesus through the history of Christian dogma and theology) Christianity has always believed and taught clearly that the mystery of Christ is both visible and invisible. Partly, we can see it and partly we can't. Partly it is visibly incarnated in history, and partly it is invisible. The mystery of Christ is incarnate in history, but not all of it can be seen. Some people are baptised visibly, and some people are baptised only in unseen ways.

Moreover, this is not new, liberal theology. Jesus Himself taught that it is not necessarily those who say 'Lord, Lord' who are His true believers, but rather it's those who actually live out His teaching (however unconsciously) who are His true followers. Christian theology has always taught that the full mystery of Christ is much larger than its historical manifestation in the Christian churches.

Kenneth Cragg, a Christian missionary, after living and ministering for years in the Muslim world, offered this comment: I believe it will take all the Christian churches to give full expression to the full Christ. To this, I would add, that it will not only

take all the Christian churches to give full expression to the mystery of Christ, it will also take all people of sincere will, beyond all religious boundaries, and beyond all ethnicity, to give expression to the mystery of Christ.

When my pious Oblate brother who struggled to understand metaphor and symbol asked me why we were always praying for Jerusalem and Israel, and I replied that he might simply substitute the word Church and Christianity for those terms, my answer to him (taken literally) was itself over pious, simplistic, and a too-narrow understanding of the mystery of Christ. Those terms Church and Christianity, as we see in the progressive unfolding of revelation in Scripture, must themselves be de-literalised. For whom are we praying when we pray for Jerusalem or for Israel? We are praying for all sincere people, of all faiths, of all denominations, of all races, of all ages. They are the new Jerusalem and the new Israel.

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

LITTLE CATHOLIC'S CORNER

Hello children,

Everybody thought that John the Baptist was a great preacher and prophet.

Some people thought that he might even be the Messiah who would save their people.

But John knew that was not his job. When Jesus came to him at the river to be baptised, John pointed at Him and told the people, "Behold, the Lamb of

God!" He told the people that he was not the great one; Jesus was.

Saint John the Baptist is an example to all of us. If we are really good then our lives will show other people the way to Jesus.

John the Baptist taught the people by telling them to repent of their sins and be baptized.

God wants some people to teach about Him by teaching and preaching to the people.

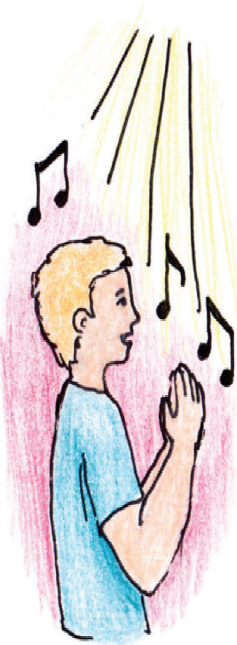
But for most of us, the best

way to teach others about God is by living a good life and loving God.

If you really do your best to love God then your life will be like St John the Baptist's and point the way to Jesus.

What is something that you can do today to lead someone to Jesus?

Love
Aunty Eliz



H O L O C A U S T O
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D E L I G H T C N R
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PSALM 40
Word-Find

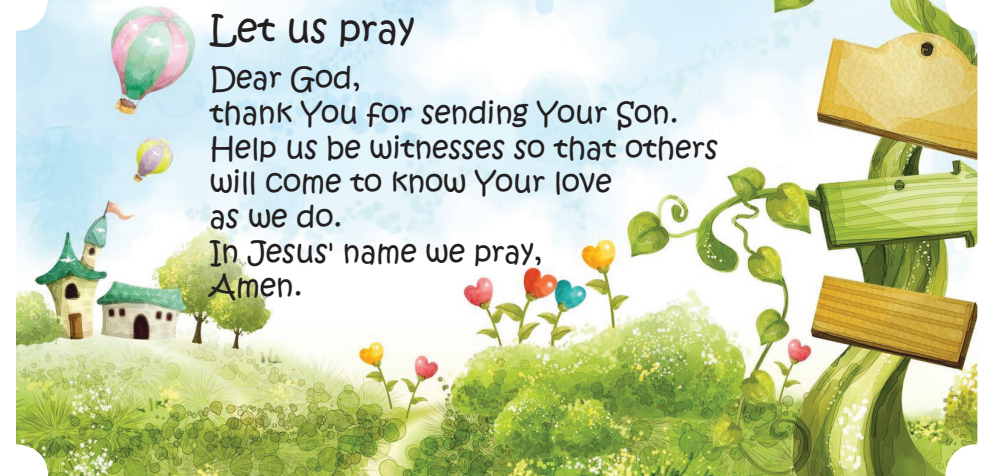
See if you can find all the words that are in CAPITALS. Use the left over letters to fill in the blanks at the end.

I have WAITED, waited for the LORD,
and He stooped TOWARD me and HEARD my cry.
And He put a new song in my mouth,
a hymn to our God.

SACRIFICE or OFFERING You wished not,
but EARS OPEN to OBEDIENCE You gave me.
HOLOCAUST or sin-offerings You sought not;
then I said, "Behold I COME."

"In the WRITTEN scroll it is prescribed for me,
to do Your will, O my God, is my DELIGHT,
and Your law is WITHIN my HEART!"

I announced Your JUSTICE in the vast assembly;
I did not restrain my lips, as You, O Lord, know.



Let us pray

Dear God,
thank You for sending Your Son.
Help us be witnesses so that others
will come to know Your love
as we do.

In Jesus' name we pray,
Amen.

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John Testifies About Jesus (John 1: 29-34)

Complete the paragraph below by filling in the blanks with the correct words from the word bank at the bottom of the story.

Then John gave this _____:
"I saw the _____ come down from
_____ as a _____ and remain on
him. And I myself did not _____
him, but the one who sent me to
_____ with _____ told me, 'The
_____ on whom you see the Spirit
come _____ and _____ is the one
who will baptize with the _____
Spirit.' I have _____ and I
_____ that this is God's
_____ One."

(John 1: 32-34)

heaven man testimony seen Spirit
dove remain one know baptize
water Holy testify Chosen down

YOUTH

Understanding AI in youth ministry

Laurencius Rony Andriyanto SJ

KUALA LUMPUR: How can Jesuits live and serve faithfully in the Age of Artificial Intelligence (AI)? How do we discern when AI has permeated many aspects of human life? How does the light of Ignatian Spirituality continue to illuminate our ministry to young people, who are fascinated by technological developments?

These questions guided the Scholastics and Brothers Circle (SBC) meeting, held from December 22 to 30 in Kuala Lumpur. Hosted by the Malaysia-Singapore (MAS) Region, the SBC gathered 43 scholastics from JCAP, as well as participants from Brazil, the United States, and Kenya, under the theme *Youth in relation to the Burgeoning of AI*.

We were warmly welcomed by the youth of St Francis Xavier (SFX) parish. Wearing traditional attire, they gave performances and shared local snacks, showcasing the richness of Malaysian culture. The atmosphere was vibrant and lively, revealing a hopeful vision of the future Church in a Muslim-majority country.

Following Ignatian Pedagogy, the SBC programme flowed through study, experience, reflection, and response. During the study sessions, Fr Francis Lim SJ and Fr Alvin Ng SJ introduced the Jesuit mission in the Malaysia-Singapore Region and their work with young people. The sessions continued with a presentation by the Chief of AI Singapore, William Tjhi, who shared about his work developing open-source language models for the Southeast Asian context. He elucidated how AI works, its hidden mechanisms, and the ways it shapes people's daily lives.

From an ethical perspective, Benedict Chang, a Singaporean theologian currently writing his dissertation on AI and the concept of Imago Dei, addressed both the advantages and challenges of AI, as well as the human responsibility behind its impact. Lively discussions added colour to the sessions, including about national-level AI regulation. William, who is also involved in government AI projects, noted that the challenges of creating regulations about AI lie in AI's rapid and continuous development, which leaves laws perpetually outdated.

On Christmas Day, we explored the city. Divided into six groups, we visited Batu Caves and the Chinese Temple and explored various sites in Kuala Lumpur. Some visited the National Mosque, while others went to the Twin Towers, all while strengthening bonds with fellow Jesuits.

The next couple of days focused on hands-on training as part of the experiential process. Accompanied by Darry Ma, Head of Digital Automation at CelcomDigi, we learnt how to create content using various AI tools. The final personal project was a biblical reflection, in which we interpreted a Nativity passage from the Gospel and connected it to our lives. We were struck by the reflection questions Darry posed at the end of our session: Should priests be allowed to use ChatGPT to prepare homilies? Is it acceptable for the Word of God to come from a bot?

Beyond learning how to use AI, the experiential process also included activities that highlighted "what AI cannot do". Two of these were street feeding and an encounter with the elderly. Surrounded by the towering skyscrapers of Kuala Lumpur and notwithstanding the drizzle, we carried porridge, water, and medicated oil while seeking out the poor on the street. These encounters highlighted compassion, embodied presence, and human connection, none of which can be replicated by AI.

After being immersed in the technicalities of AI, we spent the last two days reflecting on AI vis-à-vis our Jesuit identity. Fr



Johnny Go SJ guided our discernment with these questions: (1) Since Jesuit ministries with the youth are closely tied to education, how do Jesuit schools respond to the rapid rise of AI, with both its opportunities and challenges? (2) What is the significance of Ignatian discernment in situations where AI can provide many answers? At the conclusion of this process, Fr Johnny encouraged us not to become overly defensive critics or uncritical enthusiasts, but rather, mystical discerners who continuously seek and develop our own voices as Jesuits.

At the closing ceremony, we presented our cultures by country, including Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia-Singapore, Pakistan, Brazil, Kenya, the USA, Vietnam, Timor-Leste, China, Myanmar, Cambodia, and South Korea. We ended with a gift exchange, sharing our cultural symbols with one another.

As technological advancement rapidly develops, our SBC meeting on AI and the youth served only as a springboard for deeper reflection and ongoing discernment. It invited us to respond creatively and responsibly to the development of AI while remaining firmly rooted in Ignatian Spirituality in both life and mission.

jcapsj.org





SEEK 2026

A strong voice of young Church in United States

SEEK 2026 was held from January 1 to 5 simultaneously in three cities: Columbus, Denver, and Fort Worth, Texas. In total, the event attracted more than 26,000 participants, a 24 per cent increase from the previous year. Columbus alone welcomed over 16,000 attendees, making it the conference's main hub.

Attendees included primarily university students and young adults, joined by priests, consecrated persons, lay leaders, and bishops. Notably, 58 bishops from across the United States were present, while the number of seminarians rose by 43 per cent.

A papal message

A key moment of the conference was Pope Leo XIV's message, emphasising personal encounter with Jesus as the heart of SEEK 2026.

The Holy Father invited young people to

spend time with Jesus — both those meeting Him for the first time and those growing in an established relationship.

Speaking to *Vatican News*, Bishop Earl Fernandes of Columbus stressed the importance of the Pope's words as central to the conference's mission.

"When the image of the Pope appeared on the screen, there was an overwhelming surge of enthusiasm. And then the Pope spoke not for one minute, but for five," Bishop Fernandes said. "Many SEEK organisers and members of FOCUS later told me that the Pope summarised the meaning of SEEK better than they themselves could have. He planted a seed in the hearts of many young people, helping them reflect on their own vocation and respond to the question, 'What are you seeking?' — the question Jesus asks Andrew and the beloved disciple."

The bishop also stressed that SEEK 2026

challenged stereotypes about the Catholic Church in the United States. He emphasised that what occurred at SEEK clearly demonstrated the Church's youthfulness and vitality, reinforcing the conference's message that young people are at the heart of today's Church.

Voice of the young

Among the participants was Mary Brecourt, a student at Hillsdale College in Michigan and a volunteer with Camp Wojtyla in Jamestown, Colorado. Speaking with *Vatican News*, she underscored the event's spiritual dimension.

"Young people around the world today carry a deep hunger within them. They long to know the purpose of their existence and the heart of their God. Gathering 17,000 students who are searching together for something that can truly satisfy is a breathtaking experience," she said. "SEEK

reminded us that we are not alone in our pursuit of Christ, but that we are part of a living, faithful, and committed community of believers."

Reflecting on the papal message, she described it as a fatherly reminder of the Church's unity.

"We are not merely the future of the Church in a passive sense. We are its living, breathing, active heart. This moment is not far off — it is happening now," she noted.

Community and continuity

The SEEK conference, organised by the FOCUS community, brought together catechesis, liturgy, Adoration, Confession, and sessions on vocational discernment.

Organisers have already announced that the 2027 edition will once again take place in Columbus and at the same time in San Antonio, Texas. **Vatican News**



Be open to what God has in store for you!



where Jesus was staying. "It was not enough for someone else to tell them that Jesus is the Lamb of God," he said. "They wanted to get to know Him personally by spending time with Him.

The Holy Father told young people that they, too, would have the opportunity "to spend time with the Lord" during the Conference — some for the first time, while others would have the opportunity to deepen their relationship with Jesus.

Pope Leo encouraged participants to "be open to what the Lord has in store for you," reminding them that though the disciples first encounter with Jesus lasted only a few days, it changed their lives forever.

Missionary zeal

Getting to know Jesus, the Pope continued, inspires "missionary zeal," as it did for St Andrew, who immediately went to tell his brother, St Peter, that he had found the Messiah.

Pope Leo prayed that young people at the conference would "be moved by this same missionary zeal to share with those around you the joy that you have received from a genuine encounter with the Lord."

And he encourages them to not be afraid to ask God what He is calling them to: whether to priesthood, religious life, or marriage and family life. If you feel the call, he said, "do not be afraid... Let God lead and guide you!"

Pope Leo concluded his message by inviting his listeners to join him in asking Mary "to lead us to know Jesus Christ, her Son, so that we may truly come to know Him, to know His love for us, and the marvellous plan He has for each of our lives." **Vatican News**



"What do you seek?"

Jesus' question to the first disciples shows that He knew what was in their hearts, that they were "restless, but in a good way." They were open to God and longing to find meaning in their lives.

In a video-message for young people participating in the annual "SEEK" Youth Conference in the United States, Pope Leo says Jesus is asking each of us that same question today.

"The answer," the Pope said, "is found in a person: The Lord Jesus alone brings us true peace and joy, and fulfils every one of our deepest desires."

Getting to know Jesus

Continuing to reflect on the experience of the first disciples, Pope Leo recalled that they asked

More lives lost as Sudan marks 1,000 days of war



A Sudanese woman who fled El-Fasher sits next to aid she received at the Al-Afad camp for displaced people in northern Sudan. (Vatican News)

KHARTOUM: Sudan reached a tragic milestone on January 9, which marked 1,000 days of conflict in the African nation. Violence continued to escalate and attacks are ongoing, with recent drone strikes on villages in different parts of the country. Thirteen people — including children — were killed on Jan 6 following an attack on Sudan's North Kordofan region.

United Nations spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric said the latest strikes are placing civilians at "extreme risk" and are driving displacement, as families flee the violence in an effort to protect themselves.

Sudan has been embroiled in violence since April 2023 with rival militaries fighting for control of the country. The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) militia has been gaining traction in the west and south as Sudan's military has control of the majority of the east, including the capital - and this has divided the country.

Following a series of recent drone strikes, the number of casualties has risen as the attacks also hit the "epicentre of Sudan's hunger crisis, North Darfur", as the UN reported. In December 2025,

UNICEF conducted a nutrition survey in a city in the North Darfur state — one of the areas most devastated by the conflict — which found that more than half of children under five are acutely malnourished.

The situation appears grimmer when looking at the number of people who have been uprooted as a result of the internal conflict. The International Organisation for Migration has pointed out that almost 1,000 people were forced to flee a city in South Kordofan between December 31, 2025 and January 4, 2026. Another 2,000 were displaced from a locality in North Kordofan on Jan 5.

Over the course of a two-month period (the end of October to the end of December), some 65,000 people have had to flee from the Kordofan region. Amid ongoing violence — fuelled by external influences and resulting in the destabilisation of several neighbouring countries — the UN aid coordination office, OCHA, has identified Sudan as facing one of the world's largest displacement crises, with more than 12 million people uprooted. **Vatican News**

In memory of a dedicated Secular Franciscan

The fraternity of St Felix of Cantalice, Penang bade farewell to its most senior member, 94-year-old Anthony Faustin Chan on December 23, 2025.

Professed in 1959 at the Church of Our Lady of Sorrows, Penang, Anthony was faithful to the Third Order till the very end. He never once missed our monthly gatherings and retreats. He was vocal but was always supportive of the fraternity.

A very prayerful and devout Catholic, Anthony had a great devotion to our Lady, especially to the recitation of the Rosary and the Divine Mercy chaplet. He would recite his prayers meditatively

and very slowly. This would sometimes irk some of the members who wished he could speed up a little.

Anthony was a gifted musician and he served as an organist in many parishes in Penang during his younger days. A quiet and humble man, he never failed to say thank you and give compliments when due.

What a simple prayerful soul and a great example for all at St Felix fraternity. We praise and thank God for the gift of Anthony. May his soul rest in peace.



Anthony Faustin Chan

MEMORIAM

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

56th Anniversary
In Cherished Memory of



Abraham Devasahayam
Gracian Lopez
1 January 1900 ~
21 January 1970
(ex-Headmaster St. Joseph's Lower Primary School, Trivandrum)

Dearest Grandpa
You have left us
With wonderful memories
Just as your stories
Held us with breathless wonder.
Praise be to God!
Your loving daughters,
Gladys and Marykutty,
and grandchildren.

3rd Anniversary
In Loving Memory of



Josephine Antony D'cruz
Departed 11th January 2023

We lost a mother with a heart of gold and how much we miss her could never be told. She raised us with love and helped us along, if we follow her footsteps we will never go wrong.

Deeply missed by
Daughters, Son-in-law,
Grandchildren, Great grandchildren and loved ones.

23rd Anniversary
In Loving Memory of



Alphonso Sta Maria
(Sunny)

Departed: 24-01-2003

Deeply missed and fondly remembered by loving wife, children, their spouses and grandchildren.

That this is God, our God forever and ever.
He will guide us forever.

Psalm 48:14

In Loving Memories of

50th Anniversary

14th Anniversary



JOSEPH THAMBY RAJ @ DELAMOUR

Departed 9th AUGUST 1976



MARIA JOSEPHINE @ SOOSAIAMMAL

Departed 15th JANUARY 2012

"I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in Me, though he dies shall live" *John 11:25*
Eternal rest grant to them O Lord and let the perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace.

Always remembered by family, relatives and friends.

NOTICE

The cost for placing a memoriam is RM150 per column.

For enquiries, please contact us:

Tel/WhatsApp: 03-2026 8291

Email: memoriam@herald.com.my

3rd Year Memorial

Joel Joseph

From God: 3rd July 1995

Return to God: 16th January 2023

Matthew 5:8
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Called home to the Lord 3 years ago.

Though we miss you dearly, we find comfort knowing you rest in God's embrace. Until we meet again.

Deeply missed by beloved parents, brother, relatives and friends.

TRINITY FUNERAL SERVICES

SDN BHD 1027544-D



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019-241 5215 or
016-275 5215

016-655 2195
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No 48, Jln Anggerik Doritis 31/128, Kota Kemuning, Section 31, 40460, Shah Alam, Selangor REST IN PEACE



Singapore's St Jude Church underway



The updated design of the façade unveiled during the groundbreaking ceremony, featuring Gothic-inspired arches above the entrance staircase and a cross above the belfry. Image: CIAP Architects.



An artist's impression of the church hall with stained glass, a pitched roof for optimal acoustics, and stone grey walls. Image: CIAP Architects.

SINGAPORE: Construction of the Archdiocese of Singapore's 33rd parish church has officially begun, following a groundbreaking ceremony led by Cardinal William Goh.

The Church of St Jude Thaddaeus in Tengah is expected to be completed by December 2028. The ceremony, held last month at the Tengah Garden Avenue site, drew about 80 attendees, including members of the church building committee, archdiocesan priests, contractors, and nearby Catholic residents.

Cardinal William blessed the location where the columns supporting the main church hall will stand. Frs Adrian Danker,

Aloysius Ong, Benedict Chng, and Jude David sprinkled holy water at the four corners of the 2,973.2-square-metre plot. "This land belongs to Christ," Cardinal William said. "We want to sanctify and consecrate this land so we can truly say: Jesus is the foundation of this place."

Updated renderings of the church's façade and interior were unveiled, revealing design changes since last year. Gothic-inspired arch motifs and a prominent cross above the entrance staircase now highlight the church's Catholic identity. Theodore Chan, senior director of CIAP Architects and chair of the Catholic Architectural Guild, said the revisions were made to give the building a more

unmistakable "Catholic vibe." The 800-seat church will also feature stained glass windows and a long central nave to accommodate liturgical processions.

The parish's patron, St Jude Thaddaeus, venerated as the saint of desperate situations and hopeless causes, was chosen following a survey of 1,500 respondents. The selection was affirmed by Cardinal William and the College of Consultors, a group of seven priests who assist him in administering the archdiocese.

Fundraising for the project will be led by Fr Michael Sitaram, parish priest of the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes. He will visit parishes to seek donations, encouraging

support from Catholics and non-Catholics alike. "I hope the faithful in Singapore will donate generously to support the creation of a new beacon of hope in Christ for thousands of young families in Tengah and beyond," Fr Sitaram said. Contributions can be made via PayNow or by cheque.

The project, estimated to cost \$42 million (approximately RM133 million), will be funded through contributions from the archdiocese, its existing parishes, and fundraising efforts. Once completed, the Church of St Jude Thaddaeus is expected to serve around 130,000 residents in Tengah, including an estimated 9,000 Catholics. **Catholic News SG**

FEAST DAY CELEBRATION
6 - 15 February, 2026

Mary, Companion on Our Journey of
MISSIONARY DISCIPLESHIP

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

OUR LADY OF LOURDES

THEME : MARY, COMPANION ON OUR JOURNEY OF MISSIONARY DISCIPLESHIP
Mary set out and travelled in haste (Luke 1:39)

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

TEMA : MARIA, TEMAN DALAM PERJALANAN KITA SEBAGAI MURID MISIONARI
Maria pun berangkat, dan pergi dengan segera (Lukas 1:39)

主题：玛利亚，陪伴我们走向福传门徒旅程
玛利亚起身，急速往山区去（路加福音 1:39）

6 FEB-FRI	7 FEB-SAT	8 FEB-SUN	9 FEB-MON	10 FEB-TUE
6:30AM Mass (E) 7:00AM Rosary & Novena 7:00PM Rosary 7:30PM Adoration & Novena 8:00PM Mass (Multilingual)	6:30AM Mass (E) 7:00AM Rosary & Novena 9:00AM Holy Hour for children 10:00AM Mass for children 5:00PM OLPH Novena & Benediction 6:00PM Mass (E)	6:00AM Rosary & Novena 6:30AM Mass (E) 7:20AM Rosary & Novena 8:00AM Mass (E) 9:20AM Rosary & Novena 10:00AM Mass (T) 12:00PM Rosary & Novena 12:30PM Mass (BM) 2:30PM Rosary & Novena 3:00PM Mass (Myanmar) 5:20PM Rosary & Novena 6:00PM Mass (E)	6:30AM Mass (E) 7:00AM Rosary & Novena 7:00PM Rosary 7:30PM Adoration & Novena 8:00PM Mass (Multilingual)	6:30AM Mass (E) 7:00AM Rosary & Novena 7:00PM Rosary 7:30PM Adoration & Novena 8:00PM Mass (Multilingual)
SUB-THHEME Mary, Mother of Faith மரியா, நம்பிக்கையின் தாய் Maria, Bunda Iman 玛利亚, 信德之母	SUB-THHEME Mary, Our Mother of Listening and Discernment மரியா, கேட்கும் மற்றும் பகுத்தறிய உதவும் நமது தாய் Maria, Bunda Pendengaran dan Kebijaksanaan 玛利亚, 我们聆听与辨别之母	SUB-THHEME Mary, Model of Hope and Trust in God's Promises மரியா, கடவுளுடைய வாக்களிப்பில் நம்பிக்கை வைக்கும் முனராதிரி Maria, Teladan Harapan dan Kepercayaan kepada Janji Tuhan 玛利亚, 信赖天主许诺的希望典范	SUB-THHEME Mary, Servant of the Word Made Flesh மரியா, வார்த்தை மனுவருவெடுத்தலின் பணியாளரி Maria, Hamba Sabda yang Menjelma Menjadi Manusia 玛利亚, 使圣言成肉身的婢女	SUB-THHEME Mary, Mother of the Poor and Guardian of Creation மரியா, ஏழைகளின் தாய் மற்றும் படைப்புகளின் காவுலி Maria, Bunda Orang Miskin dan Penjaga Ciptaan 玛利亚, 贫者之母和爱造界的守护者
11 FEB-WED	12 FEB-THU	13 FEB-FRI	14 FEB-SAT	15 FEB-SUN
9:00AM Rosary 9:30AM Adoration & Novena 10:00AM Mass (Multilingual) - Anointing of the Sick 7:00PM Rosary 7:30PM Adoration & Novena 8:00PM Mass (Multilingual)	6:30AM Mass (E) 7:00AM Rosary & Novena 7:00PM Rosary 7:30PM Adoration & Novena 8:00PM Mass (Multilingual)	6:30AM Mass (E) 7:00AM Rosary & Novena 7:00PM Rosary 7:30PM Adoration & Novena 8:00PM Mass (Multilingual)	09:30AM Rosary & Novena 10:00AM Mass for Public Servants (BM) 5:00PM Rosary 5:30PM Adoration & Novena 6:00PM Mass followed by Procession & Benediction (Multilingual)	6:00AM Rosary & Novena 6:30AM Mass (E) 7:20AM Rosary & Novena 8:00AM Mass (E) 9:20AM Rosary & Novena 10:00AM Mass (T) 12:00PM Rosary & Novena 12:30PM Mass (BM) 2:30PM Rosary & Novena 3:00PM Mass (Mandarin) 5:20PM Rosary & Novena 6:00PM Mass (E)
SUB-THHEME Mary, Star of the Journeying Church (World Day of the Sick) மரியா பயணிக்கும் திரு அலையின் விண்மீன் (உலக நோயாளிகளின் தினம்) Maria, Bintang Gereja yang Berziarah (Hari Orang Sakit Sedunia) 玛利亚, 旅途教会之星 (世界病人日)	SUB-THHEME Mary, Teacher of Unity and Communion மரியா ஒன்றிப்பு மற்றும் ஒற்றுமையின் போதகர் Maria, Guru Kesatuan dan Komuni 玛利亚, 共融与合一之导师	SUB-THHEME Mary, Guide of Families in Faith மரியா, நம்பிக்கையில் குடும்பங்களின் வழிகாட்டி Maria, Pembimbing Keluarga dalam Iman 玛利亚, 家庭信德之引导者	SUB-THHEME Mary, Mother of Missionary Disciples மரியா, மறைப்பரப்பு சீடத்துவத்தின் தாய் Maria, Bunda Para Murid Misionari 玛利亚, 福传门徒之母	SUB-THHEME Mary, Mother of Missionary Disciples மரியா, மறைப்பரப்பு சீடத்துவத்தின் தாய் Maria, Bunda Para Murid Misionari 玛利亚, 福传门徒之母