

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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I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. **11** For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers.
1 Cor. 1:10-11



Clergy Annual Pastoral Assembly 2026

■ P4 & P5



2026 Lenten Campaign in the Peninsular Malaysia Church

■ P7



Never stay down
How a Malaysian author turned life's setbacks into success

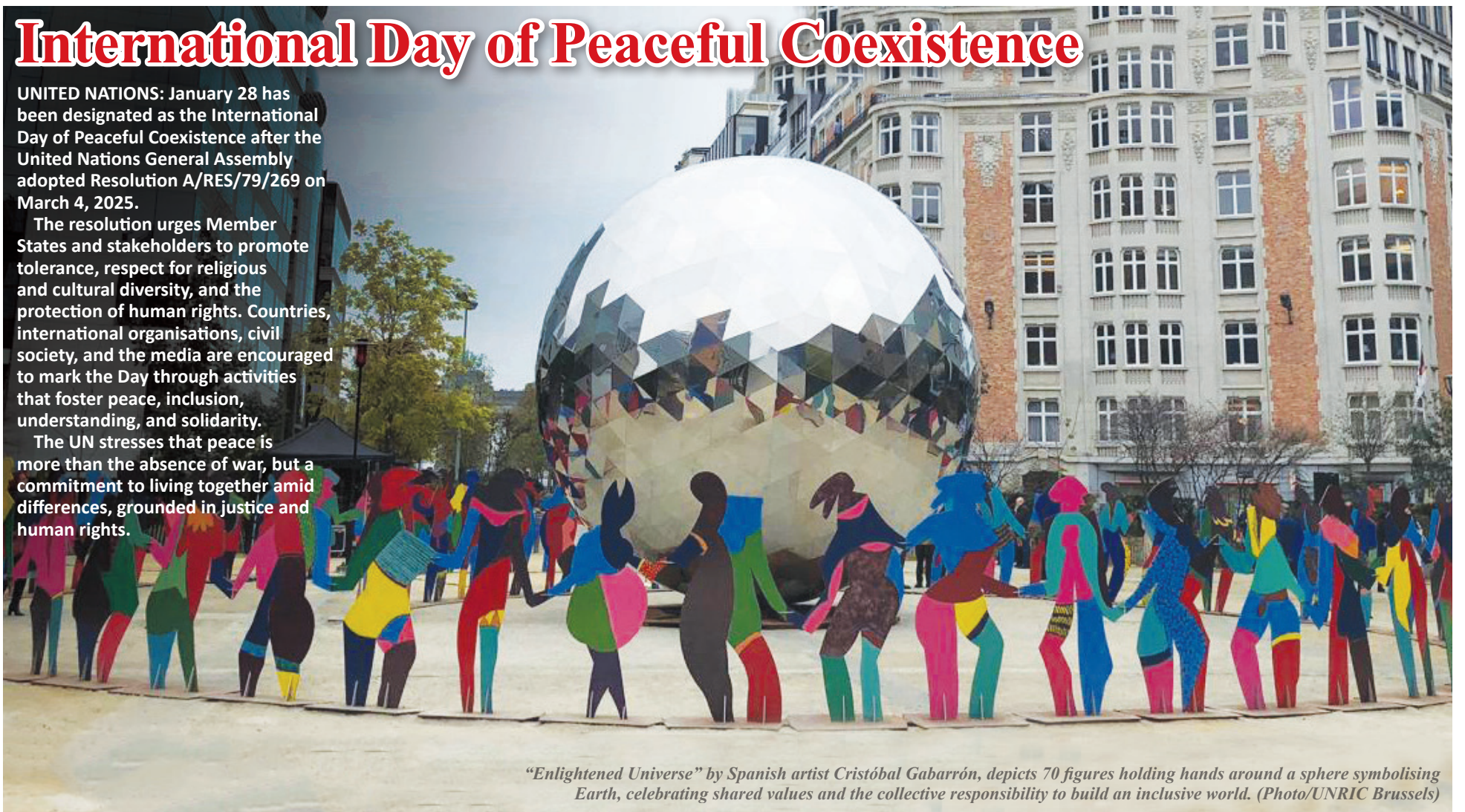
■ P12

International Day of Peaceful Coexistence

UNITED NATIONS: January 28 has been designated as the International Day of Peaceful Coexistence after the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution A/RES/79/269 on March 4, 2025.

The resolution urges Member States and stakeholders to promote tolerance, respect for religious and cultural diversity, and the protection of human rights. Countries, international organisations, civil society, and the media are encouraged to mark the Day through activities that foster peace, inclusion, understanding, and solidarity.

The UN stresses that peace is more than the absence of war, but a commitment to living together amid differences, grounded in justice and human rights.



"Enlightened Universe" by Spanish artist Cristóbal Gabarrón, depicts 70 figures holding hands around a sphere symbolising Earth, celebrating shared values and the collective responsibility to build an inclusive world. (Photo/UNRIC Brussels)

The problem is not the numbers

VATICAN: The January edition of the Italian magazine *Piazza San Pietro* shines a spotlight on the enduring challenge of nurturing faith in a modern world. Central to the edition is Pope Leo XIV's response to a heartfelt letter from Nunzia, a 50-year-old catechist from Laufenburg, a small Swiss town of just 620 inhabitants, who wrote about the struggle of involving families in parish life.

Nunzia described how, in Switzerland, parents are often reluctant to participate in Church activities, and even children and young people sometimes hesitate to trust in God. "I sow seeds, but the seedlings struggle to grow," she wrote.

"Children and families prefer sports and parties. Churches seem increasingly empty or populated only by the elderly." She concluded by asking the Pope to pray for the young people in her care and for herself, so that she might not grow discouraged.

Pope Leo XIV acknowledged Nunzia's concerns, placing them in a broader context. "The situation in which you live is no different from that of other countries with ancient Christian traditions," he said. The Pope urged a shift in perspective: the challenge is not simply about attendance numbers, but about fostering a genuine awareness of being living members of the Church.

"The problem is not the numbers — which, of course, make one reflect — but the increasingly evident lack of awareness in feeling part of the Church," Pope Leo wrote. He stressed that every member of the faithful has unique gifts and roles to play and cautioned against treating the

sacred and the sacraments as mere habit.

The Pope offered encouragement to Nunzia and all catechists facing similar struggles. "As Christians, we always need conversion. And we must seek it together," he said, reminding them that the true door of faith "is the Heart of Christ, always wide open." Drawing on the legacy of Pope Paul VI, Pope Leo concluded with a message of hope: "What we can do is bear witness to the joy of Christ's Gospel, the joy of rebirth and resurrection."

With this message, Pope Leo XIV calls the global Church to a renewed vision: one that values quality over quantity, presence over numbers, and authentic participation over routine. In a world where families and youth are increasingly distant from the Church, his words serve as both a comfort and a challenge — reminding all that the seeds sown in faith, no matter how small, always bear fruit in God's time. **Vatican News**

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Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur,
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**EDITOR**

Patricia Pereira
editor1@herald.com.my

**ASSISTANT EDITOR**

Sandra Ann Inbaraj
sandra@herald.com.my

**GRAPHIC DESIGNER**

Amanda Mah
amanda@herald.com.my

**SOCIAL MEDIA**

Kevin Francis
kevin@herald.com.my

**BAHASA MALAYSIA**

Melania Liza Magnus
liza@herald.com.my

**MANDARIN**

Adelina Wong
yin4482@gmail.com

**ADMIN ASSISTANT**

Rachael Sharma
admin@herald.com.my

ADVERTISEMENT/SUBSCRIPTION
advertisement@herald.com.my

MEMORIAM

memoriam@herald.com.my

LETTERS

letterseditor@herald.com.my

Social Media

www.heraldmalaysia.com



@heraldmalaysia



heraldmalaysia
Herald Snapshot



@heraldsnapshot

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Your contributions are essential in keeping our faith community connected and informed.

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Nurturing a culture of respect

Now that the new school year has commenced, parents and children are filled with excitement and anticipation for fresh beginnings, new friendships, and learning opportunities. Yet alongside this enthusiasm often comes a quiet concern — the fear of bullying, a reality that can shadow the joys of school life. In response to this growing challenge, on January 10, His Majesty Sultan Ibrahim, King of Malaysia, signed the Anti-Bullying Act 2026 at Istana Bukit Tunku — a significant mile-stone in the nation's effort to confront the scourge of bullying. Passed by Parliament on December 3, 2025, the Act establishes a clear legal framework to address bullying across schools, educational institutions, and other organisations, affirming that such behaviour can no longer be dismissed or ignored.

The Act empowers several key ministries — including Education, Defence, Women, Family and Community Development, MARA and Home Affairs — to regulate and manage bullying cases under their respective jurisdictions. A notable feature is the Anti-Bullying Tribunal, a quasi-judicial body authorised to receive complaints, determine cases, and issue protective orders or compensation for victims. Together, these measures represent a decisive step towards safeguarding the vulnerable and holding perpetrators accountable.

Yet, even as we welcome this legislation, we must recognise a deeper truth: laws can restrain behaviour, but they cannot transform hearts. Bullying is not merely a legal or disciplinary problem; it is a moral and spiritual one. It reveals a breakdown in empathy, respect, and the recognition of the other as a person of dignity. This is where the Church — and Catholic

educators — have a critical role to play.

For the Church, the Anti-Bullying Act 2026 is more than a legal safeguard; it is an invitation to deeper reflection and renewed commitment. Even as many of our local schools are no longer Christian-based and welcome students from all religious backgrounds, this does not diminish our responsibility. On the contrary, it challenges us to witness to Gospel values through our actions, relationships, and integrity — instilling respect, empathy, and moral responsibility wherever we serve.

Catholic education has always been about more than academic excellence. It is about the formation of the whole person — mind, heart, and conscience. If bullying persists, it compels us to ask uncomfortable but necessary questions. Are we teaching children merely how to succeed, or are we forming them to be compassionate? Do our classrooms and parish spaces reflect Gospel values, or a culture that rewards dominance, ridicule, and exclusion?

Practical responses are essential. Faith-based anti-bullying programmes that emphasise empathy, inclusion, and respect must be more than checklists or annual campaigns. Teachers, catechists, and pastoral workers need proper training to recognise often-hidden signs of bullying and respond with both firmness and care. Victims must know they are not alone, that the Church stands with them, listens to them, and will protect them.

Equally important is the role of example. Children learn as much from what they observe as from what they are taught. When adults speak harshly, dismiss concerns, or tolerate humiliating behaviour, young people quickly absorb the message. Conversely, when they witness patience, respectful dialogue,

forgiveness, and courage in standing up for others, they encounter the Gospel lived out in concrete ways.

Parents, too, are indispensable partners. Conversations at home about kindness, responsibility, and the power of words shape attitudes long before a problem escalates. Teaching children to apologise sincerely, intervene when they witness bullying, and seek help without fear or shame are acts of moral formation that last a lifetime.

The Anti-Bullying Act 2026 reminds us that justice and compassion must go hand in hand. While consequences are necessary, they should be oriented towards healing, growth, and restoration. True victory over bullying is not achieved when a case is closed, but when a heart is changed — when a former aggressor learns empathy, and a victim regains confidence and hope.

As a Church, we must see this moment as a call to deeper discipleship. Are our communities places where the wounded can find refuge? Are we forming young people who will choose kindness even when unpopular, defend the weak even when inconvenient, and recognise Christ in the face of the bullied?

Ultimately, the fight against bullying is not only about preventing harm; it is about shaping a future rooted in dignity and love. The law provides the framework. The Church provides the vision. Together, guided by conscience and faith, we can help form a generation that understands every word matters, every action has consequences, and every person deserves respect.

In doing so, we do more than curb bullying — we witness to the Gospel itself.

Patricia Pereira

Guided by one light

When I was growing up, blackouts were a frequent occurrence. Each time the lights went out, even simple tasks became a challenge, moving around the house or doing our homework was no longer easy. We owned just one small kerosene lamp, and it had to be shared. If someone needed to go to the toilet, the lamp went along, leaving the rest of us sitting quietly in the dark until it returned.

Looking back, those moments taught me two lasting lessons. First, we often fail to appreciate what we have until it is taken away. Second, even something small, a single lamp, can make a remarkably big difference in our lives.

For a time, the Hebrews, later the Israelites, were under the patronage of Yahweh. Through the patriarchs, the chosen people of God were living and walking in the light of God. Even when they were in Egypt, when the Lord sent the plagues upon Pharaoh, when the entire Egypt was shrouded in darkness, only the Hebrew people had light over them. During their exodus, the light of the Lord accompanied them.

However, as time passed, especially after they settled in the Promised Land, they slowly began to forget their God. The generation who had experienced the light of the Lord had passed on, leaving behind a generation who had no first-hand experience of the marvels of the Lord. Through the ages of the kings and exile, they constantly cried out for the return of the light. The question is this — did God abandon His people? The answer lies in the first reading from the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah tells us that the Lord humbled the people but in the coming days, those who were walking in darkness would see a great light and those who lived in the shadow, a light would shine. This was the promise of the Messiah, the One who would bring them out of darkness into light. It is only when they lost the light that they began to long for it and to appreciate what they had lost.

This is human nature. When we have something in abundance, we usually take it for granted and sometimes, we disregard its importance. This applies not only to material things but to spiritual things as well. Faith will never be appreciated until we experience some kind of loss or tragedy. Of course, in reality, not everyone will come back to the light even after a tragic event. However, many begin to long for the light when they have nowhere else to turn to.

For some people, faith may be something that is as natural as breathing but for some, it is a constant struggle. Just like the kerosene lamp of my young days, once it is taken away, everyone else will be in total darkness. While we may not see the effects of one person losing their faith, eventually, if many do, the effect will be disastrous. Faith is not only personal but also communal. Many of us will say that our faith is weak and small but if the light from a kerosene lamp can light up the whole room, so can our faith. Putting all our lamps of faith together will create a supernova that will brighten the whole world.

We are all guided by the same light — the light of Christ. However, a question arises — why are we still so divided? I often hear of one favouring this pope and “condemning”

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with Fr Philip Tay, OCD

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

Readings: Isaiah 8:23 – 9:3;

1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17;

Gospel: Matthew 4: 12-23

another, favouring one teaching over another even though it is from the same source. This is what St Paul tells us in the second reading, it is Christ who was crucified for us and it was for Christ that we are all baptised. Christ chose and sent His disciples and apostles to teach and preach. When we begin to be selective in our listening, we are no longer following the same light.

Jesus said in the Gospel, “Whoever welcomes you, welcomes Me and whoever welcomes Me welcomes the One who sent Me.” The same can be applied to the reserve — whenever we reject someone, we reject the One who sent them. The light of Christ is supposed to unite us, not divide. It is one of the marks of the Church, that we are one. If we are continually focusing on our own agenda and not Christ's, sooner or later the whole edifice will collapse. When that happens, can we still proclaim that we as Church are One?

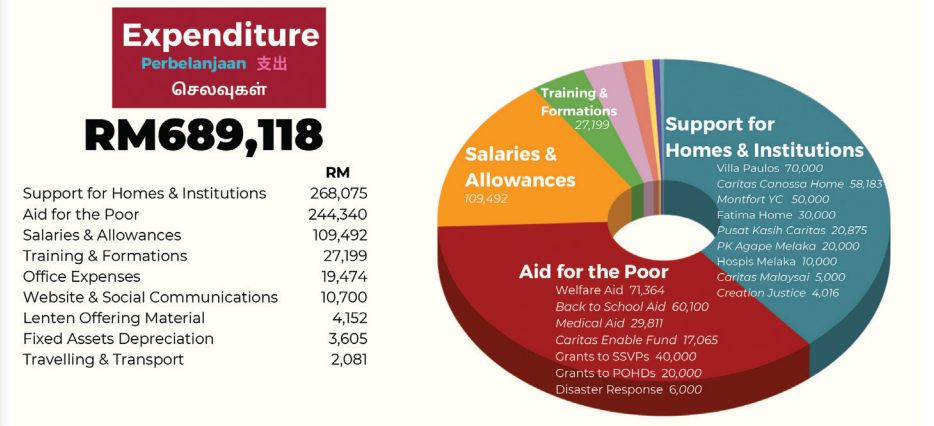
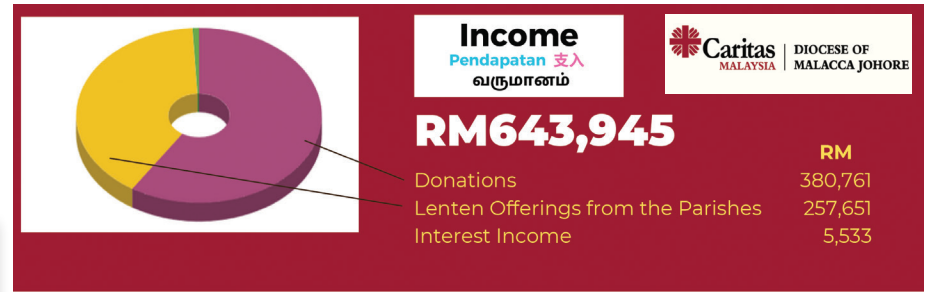
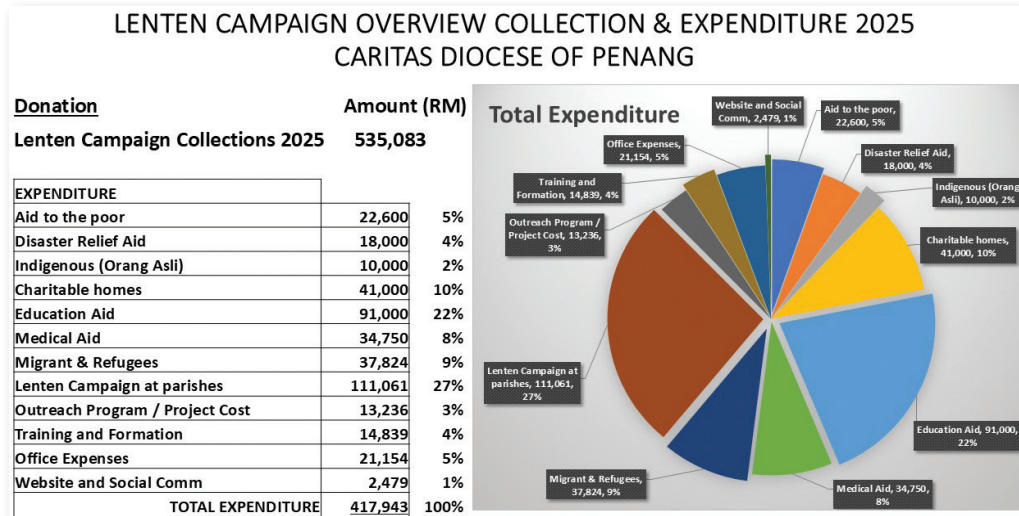
Let us acclaim, together with the psalmist, that “the Lord is my light and my help”. It is only when we have this in our lives that we can truly say “whom shall I fear?” We are called to be disciples who brings the light of Christ into the darkness of people's lives and not be an agent of darkness and division.

Breakdown of 2025 Lenten Campaign collection for Penang and MJ Dioceses

KUALA LUMPUR: The **Diocese of Penang** collected RM535,083 through the 2025 Lenten Campaign, with Caritas Penang disbursing RM417,943 to support various charitable initiatives. Of this amount, RM111,061 (27 per cent) was channelled to parishes. Education received RM91,000 (22 per cent), while RM41,000 (10 per cent)

was allocated to charitable homes (see chart below).

In the **Diocese of Malacca Johore**, a total of RM643,945 was collected, while RM689,118 was spent. Nearly 40 per cent (RM268,075) was allocated to homes and institutions, while RM244,340 (35.4 per cent) was directed towards aid for the poor (see chart on the right).



KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

January/February

- 31/1 Youth Rally – Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Klang
- 31/1 World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life – Church of the Holy Family, Kajang
- 5/2 Thanksgiving service for 5th Bishop of the Diocese of West Malaysia

PENANG DIOCESE

Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

January/February

- 30/1- Feast of Infant Jesus – Chapel of Infant Jesus, Sg Pelek

MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

January/February

- 29/1 Meeting – MPI
- 30/1- INE Discernment – Council of Churches Malaysia, PJ
- 1/2 Churches Malaysia, PJ
- 2/2 World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life – Church of St Mary, Ayer Salak

Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #256

Welcome dear friends,

The year began with the first Vicariate Pastoral Council Assembly, with Conversations in the Spirit sessions on the way forward, briefings on pastoral priorities and the setting up of the Diocesan Pastoral Council.

Looking ahead for the coming CNY, Ash Wednesday and the Rite of Election Retreat at MAJODI and the Mass at Sacred Heart Cathedral.

Local Takes! Back to school again!
We may see the return of PT3 and UPSR exams. Pigs caused a stir in Selangor. Rejoicing at the conviction angered many. The political circus is back. Excited reactions to ‘deviant culture’.

Now the Armed Forces have hit the headlines. Abuses, accidents and assurances still continue.

The immigration department streamlines cross border travels for Malaysians and foreign visitors, with MyDigital ID as the sole sign-on platform to access the National Integrated Immigration System (My NIISE) mobile application.

The Church reads the Signs: Records Broken!
Rome: 33.8 million people crossed the Holy Door of St. Peter’s Basilica during the Jubilee Year of Hope. 90.3 per cent of the pilgrims came from 25 countries, with the top five coming from Italy, USA, Spain, Brazil and Poland.

Santiago de Compostela: By the end of 2025, the Camino had drawn more than half a million people, attracting walkers from all over the world.

The Holy Door at St Peter’s Basilica, which closed on January 6, 2026, had innumerable pilgrims of hope cross the threshold of the Church.

The Pilgrims: What did they find? What was in their hearts, their questions, their feelings? Yes, the Magi still exist today. They are the people who sense the need to go out and search, accepting the risks associated with their journey, especially in a troubled world like ours that may be unpleasant and dangerous in many ways.

What’s on the Tube?
The American television and the entertainment world feature greater numbers of transgender characters appearing, advocating more LGBTQ+ visibility. Major platforms i.e. Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Apple TV+ and Disney are publicly aligned with this vision.

A Thought for The Week: A Little Kindness
One chilly afternoon, Maya was leaving the grocery store when she noticed a mother struggling with two heavy bags and a restless toddler. Without hesitating, Maya offered to carry one of the bags to the car. The woman looked surprised, then deeply relieved. “Thank you,” she said softly, her shoulders relaxing.

Maya, as she walked back to her own car, felt lighter, too. Simple gestures, like bringing coffee to a tired coworker at her workplace, brightened the day. Over the next few weeks, Maya began to notice how kindness spread like sunlight. A stranger held the elevator for her.

A neighbour left fresh flowers on her porch. One act seemed to inspire another, and soon her days were full of small but powerful reminders that people are wired for connection.

The lesson from Maya: Kindness doesn’t just change the day — it changes the world, one moment at a time. Little acts of kindness can ripple outward, touching lives in unexpected ways.

QnQ: Q asks: Problems? Problems? What causes them?
1. “99 per cent of life’s problems disappear the moment you remove the wrong foods, the wrong people, the wrong habits, and the wrong thoughts from your life.” Most of our suffering is caused by what we continue to carry. The moment we stop feeding on the wrong things, huge portions of emotional pain, drama and exhaustion evaporate from our lives!

Wrong foods cause inflammation, brain fog, mood swings, low energy and cravings.

Wrong people stifle us with their toxic criticism, one-sided relationships, people who only contact you when they need something.

Wrong habits include doom scrolling, revenge, bedtime procrastination, people-pleasing, perfectionism, waiting until “motivation arrives”.

Wrong thoughts like “I’m not enough”, “I always ruin things”, “If I relax something terrible will happen”, can overwhelm us.

These are the background apps that drain 80 per cent of our mental energy! Watch what we consume. Prov 4:23 Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

The Spirit @ work: “Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.” **Soren Kierkegaard**

Something to tickle you: “The quieter you become, the more you can hear.” **Ram Dass**

Bernard Paul
Bishop Bernard Paul

Clergy Annual Pastoral Assembly 2026

Pastors after His Heart: Policies, people and a future with hope

Fr Michael Chua

KUALA LUMPUR: This year, the Clergy Annual Pastoral Assembly (CAPA) of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur was held from January 12 to 15 at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre. This annual gathering of the clergy of the archdiocese had proceeded uninterrupted, even during the pandemic when it was held online, since its inception during the episcopacy of the late Tan Sri Dominic Vendargon.

According to one of the senior clerics, Msgr Daniel Lim, CAPA was previously known as the Arch-

diocesan Annual General Meeting. He recalled that the change of name could have been initiated due to an observation by the late Fr Andrew Volle MEP that this gathering should move from a corporate sounding name to its current designation, since the content of discussions were focused on pastoral matters rather than operational issues.

The assembly began with a keynote address by Archbishop Julian Leow who introduced the theme and foci of this year's assembly. The theme chosen for this year, *Pastors after His Heart: Policies, People and a Future with Hope*,



is based on Jeremiah 3:15: "I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed My people with knowledge and understanding."

The theme, according to the archbishop, was a reminder that the current assembly was not meant to "plan and review our programmes, but to allow ourselves [priests] once again to be shaped by the heart of the Good Shepherd." He poignantly noted that policies without a pastoral heart become rigid, people without guidance become scattered, and hope without discernment becomes mere sentiment. Archbishop Julian emphasised that it is the Heart of Christ that holds all three together.

At the start of his keynote address, Archbishop Julian also thanked Msgr Stanislaus Soosamariam, the Vicar General and the members of the steering committee which included Fr Simon Labrooy, Fr Surain Durairaj, Fr George Harrison, Fr Philip Tay OCD and Deacon Philip Asirwalam.

Fr Simon Labrooy, the main moderator, spoke after the archbishop's keynote address, reiterating some of the salient points of the archbishop's address while laying out a roadmap for the proceedings. He expressed the hope that the process would lead to "concrete, shared and adoptable" commitment by the whole presbyterium.

He also gave a brief introduction to the topics which would be discussed during the CAPA: firstly, Catechesis and the Teaching Mission of the priests; secondly, issues concerning policies with regard to boundaries and pastoral culture; and lastly, a look at the situation of the youth within the local Church with a call to renew, revive and rejuvenate.

Fr Simon also set out the expected fruits of the assembly: a draft pastoral policy note; a renewed youth action plan and finally, a refreshed Catechesis. He noted, however, that these documents should not be produced simply for filing but must be "tools for shepherding."



The steering committee

Reimagining Catechetics



In the evening of the first day, Fr David Arulanatham, *pic*, the Ecclesiastical Assistant in charge of catechetics, spoke on the need for reimagining catechetics and why this matters. He explained that there is an urgent need "to address spiritual needs beyond academic instruction, especially for those disconnected from the Church (and) to make faith relevant and accessible in a fast-paced, digital world, fostering deeper commitment and active discipleship to fulfil the Church's core mission of making disciples for the Kingdom."

Some of the paradigm shifts which must happen are, to move us from viewing catechetics as mere faith education, to an encounter with the person of Christ,

and to be focused on mission. Catechetics must also involve parents and family members; it must be contextual, inculturated, holistic and embodied. He also introduced the clergy to the synodal pedagogical approach, which is rooted in the Catholic Church's concept of synodality ("journeying together") that emphasises relational learning, participatory processes, mutual listening, and communal discernment guided by the Holy Spirit. This new pedagogy moves beyond traditional, top-down models of education to foster co-responsibility and a shared mission.



(filepic)

Policies, Boundaries and Pastoral Care



(filepic)

On the second day of CAPA, the assembly listened to Fr Clarence Devadass, *pic*, the Parish Priest of the Church of St Anthony and Director of the Catholic Research Centre, who gave two talks. In the morning, he shared a new paradigm of viewing parish boundaries in an increasingly fluid and borderless world. In the past, "belonging was assumed rather than chosen, inherited rather than discerned."

But today, the surrounding reality has shifted dramatically.

People, especially in urban and suburban areas, attend Masses and are involved in parishes beyond traditional boundaries, for a wide variety of personal, pastoral and spiritual reasons. He concluded that "belonging is no longer assumed; it must be cultivated with care and patience."

At the close of his reflection, he invited the clergy to consider new ways of cultivating a deeper sense of belonging as parishes continue their timeless mission of

gathering God's people, nourishing their faith and sending them forth to live the Gospel in the world.

In the afternoon, Fr Clarence spoke of the need for consistency in pastoral practices to avoid or minimise confusion, frustration and scandal. Some areas highlighted were in the area of administration and preparation for the reception of sacraments — marriages, baptisms, confirmation, and catechism classes. He concluded by saying that "consistency in parish practice is not about rigid uniformity but about a shared pastoral vision grounded in faith and love."

Youth and the local Church

Day 3 was dedicated to a reflection, discussion and discernment on the youth. Fr Simon Lau and Fr Michel Dass took the lead by sharing their reflections. In the morning, Fr Michel issued a call to "Renew Revive and Rejuvenate" the Church's ministry and outreach to the youth. He spoke of how the youth are perceived by the public in a particular way, but this often does not match the reality of what they are currently experiencing.

After setting out a list of issues within and outside the Church, he made an impassioned call to the priests to listen, understand and accompany



(ASAYO KL Facebook)

the youth in their particular situation and experience.

In the final input for CAPA, Fr Simon Lau, the Director of the Archdiocesan Single Adults and Youth Office, gave an overview of the process leading up to the Malaysian Catholic Youth Day in 2025 and how the voices of the young people from the nine

dioceses of the regional episcopal conference were heard and tallied. The prevailing question which emerged from this process is: "Is Jesus Christ still relevant to us today?"

Four core desires were heard: a longing and thirst for authentic accompaniment, the need to belong before serving, trust

and shared responsibility and finally, the integration of faith and life.

At the conclusion of MCYD, there appears to be a need for a crucial shift from programmes to persons, from events to encounters, from doing ministry for youth to journeying with them.

Communal Discernment

Each input talk was followed by the clergy moving into small round table groups to engage in a Conversation in the Spirit (CIS). The purpose of these sharings was not meant to be mere brain storming or intellectual discussions but an invitation to communal discernment made in prayer and with an ear for listening to fellow participants and the Holy Spirit.

After each CIS, the synthesis team came together to review, synthesise and formulate a composite summary of the results of discernment by each group.



Returning to first love



(Source/Fr Chin Sin Wee, OCD facebook)

At the concluding Mass on the last day, Archbishop Julian made an impassioned call to the clergy to remember their first love, that is, the reason why they chose to be priests, and asked them if they had lost their initial zeal over the years.

Priests should ultimately imitate the heart of Jesus by caring for the souls of the faithful and working for their salvation but their ministry should also extend beyond the borders of the parishioners to non-Catholics.

He also reminded the clergy to temper justice with compassion, to work in collaboration with others, and to find time for rest and fellowship with other priests. He closed by assuring the clergy that his "doors were always open" to listen to them, and he looked forward to listening to their concerns, their joys and sorrows.

Feedback from the clergy

Fr Surain Durairaj, who is a member of the steering committee and synthesis team had this aspiration: "During this year's CAPA, the priests and deacons present spent time through inputs and conversations in the Spirit to propose several salient directions that can be discerned and implemented. There is a great hope and realisation that we, as priests, can be good shepherds in our ministry and outreach to the people of God in the archdiocese."



A first-time participant, Deacon Philip Asirwalam shared that "this is an assembly seeking to unite and work hand-in-hand for the progress of the churches in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur by praying and discerning."



Fr Gerard Theraviam shared that he "liked the warm fraternal Conversations in the Spirit where there was attentive listening to each other. Also, there was adequate time for rest and a more relaxed programme that allowed sharing and conversations about life and ministry."



"This CAPA helped me, as a priest, to distinguish between what we already have, and to realise a clearer direction towards being a more genuine Church of Christ", said Msgr Patrick Boudville, the Vicar General.



Fr Alvin Ng SJ noted that "while the topics discussed (Catechesis, Boundaries, Youth) are not new, they address real issues that each parish is grappling with, deepening the conversations that were started earlier."



Finally, Fr George Pakiasamy shared that what truly impressed him during this CAPA was the reminder that healthy ministry flows from clarity of roles, relationships, and responsibilities. He added that the focus on youth was deeply encouraging, reminding him that young people are not just the future of the Church, but the Church of today, calling priests to accompany them in a healthy and hopeful way.



Community builds bright future



RAWANG: The final phase of the annual *Back to School* programme of the Church of St Jude came to a meaningful close at the *Hari Hari* shopping complex on January 9.

The event went beyond handing out school items, serving as a powerful testament to what a caring community can achieve when it comes together in the service of its children.

Organised by the Parish Integral Human Development Ministry (PIHDM), in collaboration with SP CARE Clinic, the initiative successfully equipped the third and final group of students, ensuring they step into the new academic year with confidence and dignity.

Since its launch in November 2025, the programme has drawn an encouraging outpouring of generosity from parishioners,

well-wishers and individual donors. In this concluding session alone, 52 children from underprivileged communities in Rawang, parish families and a children's home in Kajang, received essential school supplies. Altogether, the programme reached 137 children over its three phases.

Each student was provided with a school bag, two sets of uniforms (or tracksuits and sportswear where required), two pairs of school shoes and three pairs of socks — simple items that carry the power to restore confidence, nurture self-worth and open doors to learning.

Addressing the families, Dr Satiya Prakash, founder of SP CARE Clinic and a long-time supporter of the initiative, offered a stirring reminder of the true purpose of education. “The Church and phi-

lanthropists are merely catalysts,” he said. “We can provide the tools, but the effort must come from the children and their families. Hard work and diligence are essential, because their future is truly in their own hands.”

The success of the programme was made possible through close cooperation between PIHDM, the management of the *Hari Hari* shopping complex and community partners. Parish priest, Fr Simon Labrooy, expressed heartfelt gratitude to Majlis Datuk Dato' Malaysia for its support and resources, to the shopping complex management for providing the venue and logistical assistance, and to the pilgrims and parishioners of St Jude's, Rawang, who formed the grassroots backbone of the initiative. He also paid special tribute

to the many generous donors whose contributions enabled the programme to grow and reach more children.

Fr Simon stressed that the initiative goes far beyond providing clothing. “This is about long-term impact,” he said. “By ensuring children are properly equipped for school, we help them feel equal to their peers, uphold their dignity and affirm their worth. In doing so, we invest in their education and in the future of our society.”

The *Back to School* programme stands as a testament to what can be achieved when faith communities, civic organisations and individuals work hand in hand for the common good — turning compassion into action and hope into opportunity for the next generation. **Mercy Almeida Stellus**



Evelyn Jock

SANDAKAN: The Jubilee Year 2025 unfolded quietly yet powerfully as a sacred season of grace for those who took part in the Jubilee pilgrimages across the diocese. What began as a journey of footsteps soon became a journey of the heart. For many pilgrims, it was not distance that mattered, but direction — a turning back to God through prayer, sacrifice, and honest reflection.

Guided by the Jubilee theme, “Hope does not disappoint” (Romans 5:5), pilgrims discovered that hope is not an abstract idea but a lived experience. Along the way, they were reminded that faith is never walked alone. God revealed His living presence through fellow pilgrims — in shared prayers, quiet conversations, patient listening, and mutual encouragement. In moments of silence and liturgy, many encountered healing, reconciliation, and a renewed sense of purpose. They returned home not unchanged, but transformed, carrying within them a deeper gratitude and a renewed commitment to live the spirit of the Jubilee in daily life.

The Jubilee Year in the Sandakan Diocese came to a close with a solemn Mass at the Cathedral of St Mary on December 28, 2025. As thanksgiving rose from the hearts of the faithful, there was a quiet awareness that such a sacred season is rare, celebrated only once every 25 years. Yet the grace of the Jubilee does not end with its closing. The pilgrimage leaves an enduring reminder: hope rooted in God does not fade — it continues to shape the pilgrim long after the journey has ended.



For **Martinus Simon** from the Church of St Dominic, Lahad Datu, the Jubilee pilgrimage was a personal response to God's gentle call. As a member of the Parish Youth Apostolate, he journeyed with other young pilgrims, drawn by a deeper understanding of the grace of indulgences. What touched him most was the opportunity to offer this grace not only for himself, but also for his family, loved ones, and the souls in purgatory.

As he travelled from Lahad Datu, Martinus carried with him both hopes and challenges. The Jubilee theme became a quiet reassurance, affirming his need to place his trust fully in Christ. Through sacrifice and reflection, he came to recognise that God was not only the destination of the pilgrimage, but the strength sustaining each step. Walking alongside fellow pilgrims deepened his experience, as shared struggles and joys formed a community centred on Christ. At the journey's end, what remained was gratitude—a grateful heart resolved to live with hope and trust in God's abiding love.

Journeys of Hope Reflections from Jubilee Pilgrims

For **Agness Karim** of St Anthony Parish, Tenom, the Jubilee pilgrimage was a rare and precious gift. Aware that the grace of indulgences is offered only once every 25 years, she set out with reverence and gratitude, longing for forgiveness and renewal. Travelling with members of her parish, she accompanied others even as she herself was being gently led closer to God.

The words “Hope does not disappoint” became real and personal for Agness. Through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, she encountered God's mercy in a profound way, renewing her trust in His unconditional love. Walking with other pilgrims allowed her not only to grow spiritually, but to witness quiet transformations in those around her. One moment stayed with her deeply—a wife sharing how her husband had begun returning to church and becoming more involved in parish life. It was a reminder that faith, when lived and shared, bears fruit beyond what is immediately seen.

As she reflected on the pilgrimage, Agness felt deep gratitude for the grace received and the opportunity to pause and look honestly at her life before God. She hopes to carry the Jubilee spirit into all circumstances, especially during difficult times, and gently encourages others to consider pilgrimage as a sacred space to ask a life-shaping question: “Who am I before God?”



For **Nora Marcus** from the parish of Our Lady of Fatima, Beluran, the Jubilee pilgrimage marked a desire for renewal — a longing to deepen her relationship with God. Drawn by prayer and hope, she embraced the journey as a meaningful sacrifice, grateful for each step that reminded her of faith's call to trust and perseverance.

The Jubilee theme spoke directly to her personal struggles, reassuring her that hope placed in God is never in vain. Through prayer, silence, and shared moments with fellow pilgrims, Nora discovered anew that she was not alone. The companionship of others — their stories, support, and presence — became quiet signs of God walking with her.

At the end of the pilgrimage, Nora described the experience as a new beginning. She returned home resolved to live with greater gratitude, hope, and love in her family, workplace, and community. For her, the Jubilee pilgrimage was more than a journey undertaken — it was a sacred encounter with God, one that continues to shape her heart and her life.

2026 Lenten Campaign in the Peninsular Malaysia Church

Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur

This year marks the 45th Lenten Campaign of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, organised annually by the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development (AOHD). The theme for Lent 2026, “In the One, We Are One”, draws from Matthew 25:40 and calls us to continue walking together in hope and unity, journeying as ‘pilgrims of hope’.

We are one Body, shaped by the One who formed us, and no one is excluded. Inspired by the writings of Saint Augustine, the theme reminds us that our unity in Christ surpasses all differences, drawing us closer as a community rooted in faith and love.

Focusing on “Accessibility & Inclusion in Society for Those with Special Needs, the Deaf, and the Differently Aabled,” this year’s Lenten Campaign calls us to recognise and embrace members of our communities who often face barriers. The love of God poured into our hearts unites us and inspires us to see the divine in every person, to acknowledge their challenges, and to actively work toward a society where everyone — regardless of ability — can participate fully, independently, and with dignity.

In prayer, let us ensure that our spiritual and physical environments are welcoming to all. In fasting, let us release indifference and

cultivate empathy, awareness, and inclusion. In almsgiving, let us give generously, supporting accessibility, promoting justice, and being present to those in need. Archbishop Julian Leow reinforces this call in his 2026 Lenten Message to the faithful, which will be shared via a short video in parishes starting Ash Wednesday, highlighting the theme and its focus on community.

The Lenten Campaign 2026 begins with briefing roadshows across the eight districts of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur. These roadshows introduce the programmes and activities organised by the various ministries, familiarise the faithful with the Lent theme, and provide resources, ideas, and suggestions to enrich the season. They also offer opportunities for encounter and outreach, connecting the faithful with the archdiocese’s ministries and raising awareness of the impactful initiatives led by the 10 AOHD ministries and the Parish Integral Human Development Ministry (PIHDM).

Besides giving an overview of the programmes, the campaign draws together resources from across the archdiocese: the Liturgical Commission provides Lent prayers, the Prayer of the Faithful, and Stations of the Cross; the Catechetical Centre offers activity sheets for catechism children;



API (NEWBEC) shares reflection sheets by Fr Michael Chua; the Prayer Ministry hosts 24 Hours for the Lord; and the Catholic Singing Ambassadors present a special Lent choir presentation.

For a complete overview of all programmes

in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur and to register for events, visit www.aohd.org/lent

Resources are also available for download, helping the faithful to experience a more meaningful and spiritually enriching Lent.

Diocese of Malacca Johore

This Lenten Journey is structured into three distinct phases, centred on the theme “Live Simply, Love Deeply, Give Freely.” It is both a practical and reflective journey, inviting us to meaningful lifestyle changes rooted in faith — moving from preparation to action, and finally to reflection. Below is an overview of what to expect in each phase:

Phase 1: Preparation

Ash Wednesday – 3rd Sunday of Lent

This first phase invites us to enter Lent intentionally, guided by the question:

How is Jesus inviting me to make practical lifestyle changes rooted in faith during this season of Lent?



It is a time to examine our lives, attitudes, and habits — learning to live more simply, love more deeply, and open ourselves to generosity.

This phase prepares our hearts and minds for Faith in Action in Phase 2.

Phase 2: Doing → Being (Faith in Action)

4th Sunday of Lent – 5th Sunday of Lent

“Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty?”

The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of Mine, you did for Me.’ (Matthew 25:35–40)

This phase is a call to action and service, where faith moves beyond words into lived experience. It may involve feeding the hungry, visiting the lonely, caring for the sick and the elderly, or even something as simple — and powerful — as listening attentively to another.

Through these acts of love, we begin to encounter Christ in the least, allowing our actions to shape who we are becoming.

Phase 3: Reflection

Holy Week

During Holy Week, we contemplate Jesus offering Himself completely in love through His Passion — the ultimate expression of service.

In this final phase, we are invited to reflect prayerfully:

- What is Jesus saying to me through my experiences of service in Phase 2?
- What have I felt, encountered, or struggled with?
- How has my Faith in Action deepened my prayer and relationship with God?

This is a time to listen deeply, allowing our experiences and prayers to transform our hearts as we journey towards Easter.

Diocese of Penang

The Penang Diocesan Lenten Campaign 2026 calls all parishioners across the diocese to take concrete personal and collective action to give hope by uplifting and transforming the lives of the poor and marginalised. These include the homeless and the hungry, the sick, orphans, the elderly, refugees and migrants, victims of abuse and natural disasters, as well as efforts to care for our common home, the environment.

With the theme *Hope in Action*, this year’s campaign energises the diocese’s mission to live out the Gospel through compassionate service and tangible works of mercy. It is a call not merely to feel concern, but to act with love that brings real change to those in need.

Emphasising the heart of the campaign, Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang, reminds the faithful: “We are called to have compassion and help others. Christian love overcomes all barriers, goes the distance, unites strangers and transforms enemies into friends.”

Echoing this call, Fr Joachim Robert, Director of Caritas Penang and Chairman of the Penang Diocesan Lenten Campaign, encourages active participation: “Through our actions, we can bring hope. Join us now in this shared mission of love

HOPE IN ACTION

Harapan Dalam Tindakan.

希望的行动

செயலில் எதிர்போக்கு

- Prayer
- Fasting
- Almsgiving



GIVE A GIFT OF HOPE!



and mercy.”

This year, the campaign will be supported not only through printed materials such as T-shirts, posters, banners and brochures, but also through a comprehensive e-campaign during the Lenten season. Content will be shared across social media platforms including Instagram, Facebook and YouTube, as well as on the Caritas Penang website, to reach a wider audience and invite more people to be part of this journey of hope.

Through prayer, generosity and concrete action, the Penang Diocesan Lenten Campaign 2026 invites everyone to become visible signs of hope in action.

Pakistan's first palliative centre opens

HYDERABAD: St Elizabeth Catholic Hospital in Hyderabad, Sindh province, has inaugurated Pakistan's first day centre for palliative care, providing terminally ill patients — particularly those with cancer — with pain relief, comfort, and compassionate support. The facility was officially opened and blessed on January 12, in a ceremony attended by religious and civil dignitaries.

Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Germano Penemote and Bishop Samsun Shukardin, President of the Pakistani Bishops' Conference, led the inauguration. Other attendees included Anthony Naveed, Christian Vice President

of the Sindh Provincial Assembly, and Zoltán Varga, Hungarian Ambassador to Pakistan.

The initiative was made possible through support from the Hungarian government, as well as benefactors from Australia and the United Kingdom. Fr Robert McCulloch, an Australian missionary of the Society of St Columban and hospital board member, described the centre as “a fundamental turning point in healthcare in Pakistan,” offering free palliative care alongside the hospital's established home-based service.

“This centre provides compassionate care tailored to each patient, restoring dignity for cancer pa-

tients while reflecting the Catholic Church's longstanding commitment to healthcare in Pakistan,” Fr McCulloch said. “Patients of all religions, cultures, and ethnicities are welcome, which also promotes interfaith harmony in the region.”

St Elizabeth Hospital, founded in 1958 and named after St Elizabeth of Hungary, has been a key healthcare provider in Hyderabad, offering professional medical services and training programmes. Its home-based palliative care service, piloted in recent years, demonstrated a critical need for such specialised care. Many terminally ill patients previously lacked access to pain relief and



spent their final days in suffering, with families bearing heavy costs.

The new day centre, supported by Hungary's “Hungary Helps” programme, aims to address this gap by offering structured treatment plans and personalised care for patients unable to afford costly cancer

treatment.

Fr McCulloch emphasised that the centre reflects “the spirit of compassion” at the heart of St Elizabeth Hospital and will serve as a model for accessible, dignified healthcare for Pakistan's most vulnerable patients. **Fides**

Sri Lankan Church celebrates 375th birth anniversary of St Joseph Vaz

COLOMBO: This year marks the 375th birth anniversary of St Joseph Vaz, a humble Goan priest whose daring mission helped evangelise Sri Lanka in the 17th century.

A grand feast Mass was celebrated at the National Shrine of St Joseph Vaz in Mahagalagamuwa, Kurunegala, on January 15, led by Bishop Harold Anthony Perera of Kurunegala and Bishop Anthonypillai Gnanaprasam of Mannar. The festivities centred on the theme: “Our Apostle, give us courage in the Lord to build our nation.”

While the history of Catholicism in Sri Lanka dates back to before the Portuguese arrival in 1505, it was during the Portuguese era that the faith spread extensively across the island, particularly from the North to the West. Consequently, the Catholic community in Sri Lanka today is a diverse tapestry of both Sinhala and Tamil-speaking faithful.

However, a dark period for the Church began when the Dutch ousted the Portuguese and seized



control of the island's coastal regions. During this era of persecution, Catholic priests were banished and the practice of the faith was strictly prohibited. After nearly 30 years without a single priest, the survival of the faith seemed impossible.

In May 1687, the tide turned when Fr Joseph Vaz arrived from Goa, India. Disguised as a beggar and accompanied by his faith-

ful assistant, John, he entered the island with a martyr's courage. Without his arrival, Catholicism in Sri Lanka might have vanished entirely.

In the book *The Catholic Church in Ceylon under the Dutch Rule* (Rome, 1957), Fr Robert Boudens, OMI, captures the essence of his mission:

“There was a humble, brown-skinned man from Goa. Clad in a simple loincloth and seeking alms, this individual moved about with the sole purpose of finding followers of the Word of Jesus. His presence remained rooted in the land, and the sweat he shed upon the soil of Lanka will forever bear fruit.”

Fr Joseph Vaz traversed the island from the North to the Northwest, the West, and into the Kandyan Kingdom. The miracles performed through him and his tireless missionary journeys prompted Bishop Dom Pedro of Cochin, to initiate the process for his canonisation as early as 1713, just two years after his death.

Despite many obstacles that stalled the process over the centuries, it finally reached fruition 302 years later. On January 15, 2015, Pope Francis canonised him at the historic Galle Face Green in Colombo, before a massive gathering of hundreds of thousands of devotees from both Sri Lanka and India.

The feast of St Joseph Vaz is celebrated annually on January 16. He left behind profound wisdom for all, famously stating: “No one can do at the moment of death what they failed to do during their lifetime.”

St Joseph Vaz remains a bridge of faith between India and Sri Lanka, a humble “Apostle of Lanka” whose spiritual influence continues to bless both nations. **Mahinda Namal, RVA**



Our Lady of Arabia Church elevated to minor basilica

KUWAIT CITY: The Church of Our Lady of Arabia in Ahmadi, Kuwait, has been officially elevated to the status of Minor Basilica, marking a historic first for the Gulf region. The ceremony took place on January 16, during a two-day visit by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin, who celebrated Mass and conferred the title on the church.

The elevation follows a June 28, 2025, announcement by the Vatican that Pope Leo XIV had approved the honor for the oldest church in the Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia, which covers Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia under the leadership of Bishop Aldo Berardi, O.S.S.T.

During his visit, Cardinal Parolin also met with Kuwait's civil authorities and held an encounter with the local Catholic community at the Holy Family Co-Cathedral in Kuwait City, reinforcing the Church's presence in the region.

Known as the “mother church” of the Northern Vicariate, the Basilica of Our Lady of Arabia sits on the site of a former power station. It began as a temporary chapel in December 1948 through the efforts of the Carmelite Fathers and Bishop Ubaldo Teofano Stella. The Kuwait Oil Company later helped fund a permanent building to serve the spiritual needs of

migrant workers arriving in the country for employment in the oil industry.

The Minor Basilica houses the image of Our Lady of Arabia, initially dedicated to Our Lady of Mount Carmel. The image was blessed by Pope Pius XII in 1949 and crowned by Pope Benedict XVI in 2011.

Bishop Berardi highlighted the church's role for the migrant community. “It is a shrine of great devotion,” he said. “Even in a predominantly Muslim region where such representations are restricted, the Marian image here provides spiritual care and protection for all.”

Our Lady of Arabia serves as Patroness of both the Northern and Southern Vicariates, with her feast day celebrated on the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time — just two days after the elevation ceremony. Bishop Berardi described the church as “a flower in the area,” recalling that the image of Our Lady remained a source of protection during the Iraq-Kuwait war in 1990.

Minor Basilicas enjoy a special connection to the Pope and the See of Rome, and the title is reserved for churches of exceptional liturgical, pastoral, historical, and architectural significance. **Vatican News**

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Malawi bishop warns youth against gambling

MALAWI: The Bishop of Dedza, Peter Adrian Chifukwa, has warned young people against gambling and betting, describing the practice as a growing threat that exposes youth to serious personal, social, moral and economic harm.

Speaking at the closing Mass of the national annual meeting of the Young Christian Workers (YCW) on January 11, Bishop Chifukwa said gambling is increasingly



being viewed by some young Malawians as a means of survival amid unemployment and rising living costs, but cautioned that it offers only false hope and long-term damage.

“Betting may appear to be an easy solution, but it carries destructive consequences,” the bishop said, addressing about 300 youths gathered at St Joseph’s Teachers Training College in the Diocese of Dedza.

According to the Church’s news agency, *Agenzia Fides*, Bishop Chifukwa noted that economic hardship has made young people particularly vulnerable to the lure of gambling, fuelled by aggressive advertising and easy access through mobile phones.

“Many young people are drawn to betting in the hope of earning a living, especially at a time when unemployment is high and some have no reliable sources of income beyond support from their parents,” he said.

The bishop warned that gambling

often leads to addiction and harmful behaviour, including dishonesty and theft, as individuals become obsessed with securing money to continue betting in pursuit of bigger wins.

“It exposes young people to multiple risks and undermines their values and future,” he said.

Bishop Chifukwa urged the youth to seek honest and dignified means of earning a living and to share their struggles with others rather than turning to practices that erode their integrity.

“When problems are shared, one

realises that every challenge can be addressed,” he said.

He reaffirmed the Catholic Church’s commitment to youth ministry, describing the Young Christian Workers as an important platform for accompanying young people in today’s challenging social and economic climate.

National Youth Chaplain Fr Patrick Kamba also highlighted the importance of regular gatherings such as annual assemblies, saying they provide opportunities to identify and respond to the real challenges facing young people. **Vatican News**

Communities unite for annual tree planting day

MOROCCO: On January 19, the High Atlas Foundation (HAF) celebrated its 13th Annual Tree Planting Day, a collaborative initiative spanning eight regions throughout the nation: Casablanca-Settat, Rabat-Sale-Kenitra, Beni Bellal-Khenifra, Marrakech-Safi, Oriental, Laayoune Sakia Hamra, Fes-Meknes, and Draa Tafilalet.

In the 2024/2025 tree-planting season, HAF planted 2,537,808 seeds of change in Morocco, symbols of resilience, opportunity, and the power of community. This year, HAF carried forward that same commitment with the 2026 plant-

ing season, inspiring hope and empowering communities nationwide to cultivate a greener, more sustainable future.

The celebrations gathered diverse groups — farmers, educators, youth, families, and local organisations — who cultivated seedlings at various locations secured through partnerships with government agencies, educational institutions, nonprofit groups, and farming collectives. This approach demonstrates HAF’s philosophy of building environmental stewardship through shared responsibility.

Having reached the milestone

of one million planted seedlings in early 2014, HAF maintains its annual tradition of large-scale planting efforts. Participants transplanted multiple varieties sourced from HAF’s network of community-managed nurseries, featuring species such as olive, carob, almond, cherry, walnut, fig, pomegranate, and argan. These varieties were chosen by local agricultural families based on their adaptation to regional climates, promoting ecological diversity while strengthening natural habitats.

The daylong initiative involved planting over 20,000 tree saplings



at educational and community locations. Implementation occurred through collaboration with several supporting partners, including Yves Saint Laurent Beauty, Reforest, Planeterra, Cash Plus and more.

HAF is committed to promoting environmental sustainability through its tree planting

programme, encouraging local participation in protecting Morocco’s natural resources. This initiative empowers communities by restoring the environment and individuals, schools, and local organisations to come together and create a positive impact, planting hope, one tree at a time. **HAF**



Holy doors sealed

VATICAN: With the sealing of the Holy Door of St Peter’s Basilica on January 16, the Holy See formally completed the closure of the four Holy Doors of the papal basilicas, marking the conclusion of the Jubilee of Hope.

The closing rites began on Jan 13 at the Basilica of St Mary Major, followed by St John Lateran on Jan 14 and St Paul Outside the Walls on Jan 15. The Holy Door of St Peter’s Basilica was sealed last, completing the sequence of closures.

The sealing involved traditional masonry work carried out by the *sanpietrini* — the skilled craftsmen of the Fabric of St Peter, including carpenters, cabinetmakers and electricians — who erected a brick wall inside each basilica to permanently close the Holy Door.

As part of the rite, a metal capsule

(capsis), a bronze box, was embedded within the wall of each basilica. The capsule contains the official document attesting to the closure of the Holy Door, coins minted during the jubilee year, and the keys to the Holy Door.

These items serve as both material and symbolic testimony to the Jubilee of Hope. As the Pope emphasised during the Jan 6 ceremony closing the Holy Door of St Peter’s Basilica, the jubilee may have ended on the calendar, but its spiritual fruits are meant to continue in the life of the Church.

In each papal basilica, the closing document was deposited together with the Holy Door key and a collection of pontifical medals, continuing the tradition observed at the conclusion of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy in 2016. **CNA**

Feast of the Black Nazarene draws 9.6 million devotees

MANILA: More than 9.6 million Catholics joined the annual feast of the Black Nazarene on January 9, one of Asia’s largest religious events, seeking miracles and spiritual renewal.

This year’s traslacion — the procession of the glass-encased image of Jesus Nazareno — lasted 30 hours, 50 minutes, and 1 second, making it the longest in history, according to Police Major Hazel Asilo of the National Capital Region Police Office. Last year’s procession lasted nearly 21 hours and drew 8.1 million devotees.

Bishop Rufino Sescon Jr of the Diocese of Balanga celebrated Mass at Quirino Grandstand before the procession and used his homily to condemn politicians involved in flood-control and infrastructure corruption. “Some refuse to step down despite having done bad things or made the poor suffer...

Shame on you. Please step down for the people’s sake,” he said.

Devotees, many walking barefoot and wearing maroon shirts — the colour of the Nazarene — braved the massive crowds along the four-mile route through Quiapo. Maria Christine Rey, a mother of four, said the procession inspired her to “be tough amid all situations and not give up.” College student John Quilaquil, despite flu and chronic joint pain, called the event transformative, recalling how he pulled the carriage rope and climbed behind the cross. Authorities deployed more than 18,000 personnel to manage safety.

The feast follows a nine-day novena attended by the same 9.6 million devotees. On Jan 4, Manila Archbishop Cardinal Jose Advincula presided over the fifth novena Mass before leaving for Rome to participate in the first

extraordinary consistory convened by Pope Leo XIV. In his homily, Archbishop Advincula urged humility and selfless devotion, encouraging faithful to “give without needing recognition, serve without looking to be praised, and love without expecting anything in return.”

The Black Nazarene, a life-size dark-skinned statue of Christ carrying the cross, arrived from Mexico in 1606, brought by Augustinian Recollect missionaries. It is enshrined at the Minor Basilica and National Shrine of Jesus Nazareno (Quiapo Church) and is one of the Philippines’ most venerated religious icons.

Fr Benigno P. Beltran, a Divine Word missionary, noted that devotion remains intense, with folk Catholics experiencing profound encounters with the image. Rector Fr Ramon Jade Licuanan described the feast as “born of suffering, faith, and hope,” while Fr Daniel Franklin E. Pilario, CM, said critics may see the devotion as superstition, but for participants, it represents “everyday resistance” and solidarity with Christ in human suffering.

The procession reenacts the 1787 transfer of the image from its original shrine in Bagumbayan (present-day Rizal Park) to Quiapo Church. This year’s theme, *He Must Go Up, and I Also Go Down* (John 3:30), reflected the spiritual journey of humility and sacrifice that devotees seek to emulate. **CNA**



Devotees crowd the streets of Quiapo district during the annual procession of the Black Nazarene in Manila, Philippines, on January 9, 2026. (CBCP News)



From Straits Settlements to Borneo

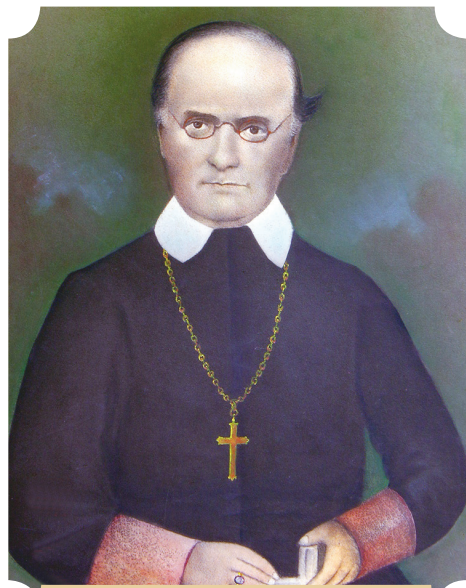
Richard Chia

The Church in the Straits Settlements

With the establishment of Penang under British control, the dominance of British commercial interests in the region took root. This was formalised in 1826 with the creation of the Straits Settlements — comprising Penang, Province Wellesley (now Seberang Perai), Singapore, Malacca, and Dinding (present-day Manjung District in Perak) — to consolidate and administer these territories under British colonial rule.

Between 1826 and 1838, the Christian population in Malacca declined from 2,239 to 1,799, comprising English, Dutch, Portuguese, and local inhabitants. The Portuguese community was predominantly Catholic, while the others were largely Protestant. With the establishment of a new British base in Penang, migration patterns shifted towards the island, drawing settlers away from Malacca. There was little intention on the part of the British to revive Malacca's former prominence or to encourage its further development.

In 1841, by decree of Pope Gregory XVI, the Apostolic Vicariate of Malaya — also referred to as the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Siam — was established, having been separated from the Apostolic Vicariate of Siam. The new vicariate was entrusted to the care of the French Missions Étrangères de Paris (MEP) Fathers.



Bishop Jean Paul Hilaire Courvezey MEP

Bishop Jean Paul Hilaire Michel Courvezey, MEP, was appointed to lead the vicariate, which encompassed five districts: Singapore, with a Catholic population of 500; Penang, with 2,200; Malacca, with 2,000; and Mergui and Tavoy (in southern Myanmar), together accounting for more than 300 Catholics.

Following Bishop Courvezey's resignation in 1844, Fr Jean Baptiste Boucho, MEP, was ordained bishop in 1845 and appointed as the new Vicar Apostolic, based in Penang. Bishop Boucho's responsibilities soon expanded to include administration of the Apostolic Vicariate of Ava and Pegu (Burma) and the role of Vicar Apostolic of Rangoon. When Rome later appointed him to oversee the British territories in Borneo, Fr Michel Esther Le Turdu, MEP, received episcopal ordination and succeeded Bishop Boucho in 1871.

This is the third article in a series chronicling the people, events, and milestones in the journey of the Catholic Church in Malaysia. In the previous instalment, we explored the decline of the Portuguese colonisers, the rise of the Dutch empire in Malaya, and the resulting persecution and suppression of the Church.

In 1888, Pope Leo XIII re-established the ancient Suffragan See of Malacca as a suffragan of the Metropolitan Archdiocese of Pondicherry, a French colony in India. The Apostolic Vicariate was thus elevated to the status of the Diocese of Malacca. Msgr Edward Gasnier was appointed the first bishop of the restored diocese, which now encompassed Malaya and Singapore. The diocese comprised one bishop, 30 French missionary priests, and two local priests, with Bishop Gasnier taking up residence in Singapore.

By 1896, 17,796 Catholics were served by 32 missionaries and 41 catechists across 41 churches and chapels.

British influence in Borneo



Sir James Brooke (1847) by Francis Grant

The British presence in Sarawak — then a loosely governed territory under the Sultan of Brunei — began with adventurer James Brooke, who arrived in 1839. Brooke assisted the Sultan in suppressing a tribal uprising and, as a reward, was granted the title of Rajah of Sarawak in 1841. This marked the beginning of the "White Rajahs" dynasty, which ruled Sarawak as a virtually independent state.

During his reign in Sarawak, Brooke reformed the administration, established laws, and combated the pirates who frequently threatened the state. He pacified the native tribes, including the Dayaks, suppressing both headhunting and piracy, and incorporated many Dayaks into his forces. In 1846, Brooke also secured the Island of Labuan for the British Crown, while additional territories were leased or purchased from the Sultan of Sulu to serve as trading posts.

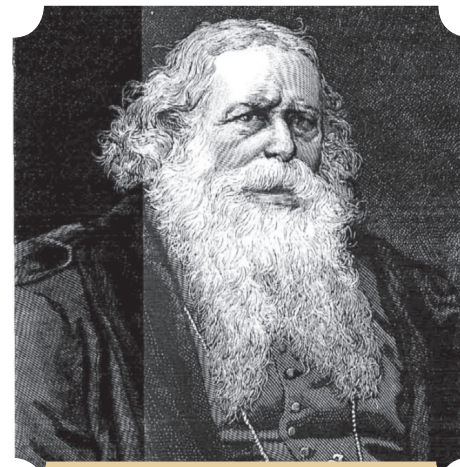
James Brooke died in 1868, and his nephew, Charles Brooke, succeeded him as the second White Rajah of Sarawak. He was later succeeded by his son, Charles Vyner Brooke, who became the third and final White Rajah.

In 1946, following the Japanese occupation during World War II, North Borneo was formally ceded to the British

Crown, bringing an end to the rule of the White Rajahs in Sarawak.

Christian missions in Borneo

The first recorded planned mission to Borneo was undertaken by the Theatine Order (Congregation of Clerics Regular) under the leadership of Fr Antonino Ventimiglia in 1689. The mission focused primarily on the Kalimantan region of Borneo but met with limited success and was ultimately closed following Fr Ventimiglia's death in 1692.



Portrait of Carlos Cuarteroni published in 1880, La Ilustración Española y Americana

Modern missionary activity in Borneo began in 1807 with the establishment of the Apostolic Prefecture of the East Indies by Pope Pius VII. Its jurisdiction encompassed the entirety of Indonesia, including the island of Borneo, which comprised present-day East Malaysia and Brunei. In 1842, Pope Gregory XVI elevated the prefecture to the status of the Apostolic Vicariate of Batavia (Jakarta).

In 1857, Msgr Don Carlos Cuarteron, the first Apostolic Prefect of Labuan and Borneo, arrived in Borneo, accompanied by two priests, Fr Antonio Riva and Fr Ignazio Borgazzi, from the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME), France. Msgr Cuarteron established the first Roman Catholic missions in northern Borneo and is remembered as one of the most remarkable missionaries to serve on the island.

In 1870, when Fr Herbert Vaughan, founder of the Mill Hill Missionaries, was ordained, he had still not been assigned a mission territory by Rome despite repeated requests. Rome eventually suggested the mission of Labuan and North Borneo, as the then Apostolic Prefect,



Herbert Vaughan MHM, Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster

Msgr Cuarteron, was in poor health and lacked sufficient support.

In 1878, Rome summoned Msgr Cuarteron to the Vatican, and when he arrived at the end of 1879, he submitted his resignation due to age and ill health. He returned to his native Spain, where he passed away the following year.

In 1880, the Borneo Mission was entrusted to the St Joseph's Society of Foreign Missions, also known as the Mill Hill Missionaries. This marked the beginning of a new chapter in the history of the Church in what is now East Malaysia.



Msgr Edmund Dunn MHM

Fr Thomas Jackson was appointed the second Apostolic Prefect, accompanied by Frs Edmund Dunn and Aloysius Goossens, who were not yet ordained, and the newly ordained Fr Daniel Kilty. Fr Jackson was instrumental in bringing the Franciscan Missionaries of St Joseph (White Sisters) to Kuching in 1885 and to Sandakan in 1892.

Following Fr Jackson's resignation in 1895, Fr Edmund Dunn was appointed the third Apostolic Prefect in 1897. He implemented policies that gradually expanded the mission's influence across the region. With the support of additional priests from the Mill Hill Fathers, mission stations were established in Labuan and Sabah, and schools were built and staffed by the missionaries.

In 1927, Rome divided the prefecture into the Prefecture of Sarawak and the Prefecture of North Borneo. The latter encompassed North Borneo, Labuan, and Brunei, while Fr Dunn was appointed to lead the Prefecture of Sarawak.

Next: Period leading to Independence

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

Still dancing with dementia?

Happy brand new 2026! Yes — lo and behold, I am still around, and I am still dancing with people living with dementia. I now have fellow dancers who have joined me on this journey.

If you're wondering why I'm still here writing this column, it's because I was honestly debating whether to continue. I wondered if I should give it up and give way to another topic that might interest more people. Then I received a phone call.

Someone from Mauritius had read my article and reached out to me. He shared that his sister had settled in Taiwan, and her husband is living with dementia. He was seeking advice and opinions. In turn, I reached

out to a Taiwanese colleague for local resources. Just like that, my decision became clear.

I chose to continue contributing this year because someone, somewhere, feels a little less alone in their struggle because of this column.

Often, people who are living with dementia are the missing people, forgotten, and denied by a society that values independence, productivity, and youthfulness, and shuns away from vulnerability. Yet, we all, as humans as a species, have evolved to be social. We have an innate, biologically driven ability to develop and form interpersonal connections. The COVID-19 period of on-and-off lockdowns, restrictions, and social isolation has made it abundantly clear that we are not meant to be alone. Nothing has highlighted the importance of social connections more than the COVID-19 pandemic has. So, we are inherently social beings. We need one another as we navigate life. Someone in Mauritius reached out to me; I reached out to a friend in Taiwan. This web of connections



Dancing with Dementia
Dr Cecilia Chan

protects us and supports us. We all need it. We are in this thing called life together. And when we create a better place for someone else, we inevitably create a better place for ourselves.

I truly believe that, as a community, we can disrupt the assumptions surrounding dementia—the belief that it is shameful or that the condition is hopeless. I am also stubborn enough to believe that care should not rest solely on family members or professional service providers. Each one of us can make a difference. Each of us can be part of the web that forms a safety net.

For this to happen, meaningful social change must occur at multiple levels of public life. To begin with, on an individual level, we must change the way we talk about dementia. The habit of framing dementia only through the language of dread and despair is deeply ingrained. The label “living death” or “zombies” is so commonly used to frame those living with dementia as passive, unresponsive beings. This often leads to social death. This is a fancy term that means that they are excluded from the community as they seem to have nothing to contribute. People with dementia are often treated as if they

are already dead and as walking corpses to be both pitied by some and feared by most. Yes, to change this deeply ingrained idea is not easy. But I believe it is not impossible.

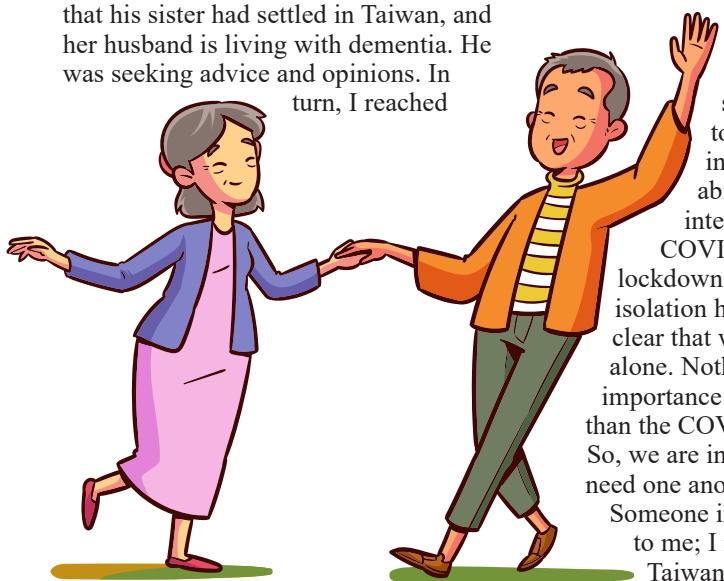
Once upon a time, women were treated as commodities. My grandmother never dreamed of receiving an education — yet here I am today. Once upon a time, slavery was legal. Change happened because people challenged the norm. We have the same power now.

We can choose to perceive dementia not as a tragedy to be hidden, but as a disability that can be accommodated in many ways. This shift would benefit not only those living with dementia but society as a whole. After all, wouldn't we all want to live in a community that offers hope and dignity to everyone?

The thing about dementia is that it does not discriminate. You and I are not exempt. Wouldn't it be wiser to build an inclusive community — one that will accept and support us if one day we are the ones living with dementia? Wouldn't it be better to dance with dementia rather than fight it?

So... shall we dance?

Dr Cecilia Chan is a Gerontologist and Dementia Advocate and Activist. She can be contacted via WhatsApp (013-4384388).



Growing faith, food and hope

Pope Francis, in *Laudato Si'*, reminds us that our faith calls us to care for creation and for one another, especially the poor and vulnerable. In Malaysia today, many families are feeling the burden of rising food prices, concerns about food safety, and the challenge of feeding their children healthy, nutritious meals.

What if our parishes could respond in a simple, practical, and inspiring way — by teaching our communities how to grow their own vegetables and fish?

What is aquaponics?

Aquaponics is a sustainable system that combines fish rearing (aquaculture) with vegetable growing (hydroponics). The fish produce natural waste, which beneficial bacteria convert into nutrients for the plants. The plants then help clean the water, which is circulated back to the fish.

The result is a beautiful cycle of life: clean water, fresh vegetables, and healthy fish, all produced with minimal waste and without harmful chemicals. It is an excellent example of how, when we work with God's creation instead of against it, we can produce abundance from even small spaces.

Why this matters for our Catholic community

Aquaponics is especially timely and relevant for our parishes. It provides healthy, chemical-free food for families concerned about pesticides and contaminants, with home-grown vegetables and fish that are fresh, safe, and nutrient-rich — ideal for children, the elderly, and those with health concerns.

It also supports food security and affordability. With the rising cost of living in Malaysia, growing food at home can reduce grocery bills. Even without full self-sufficiency, every kilogram of vegetables grown represents both money saved and nutrition gained.

Aquaponics offers valuable education for adults and children. A church garden can serve as a living classroom where children and youth learn science, responsibility, and respect for creation, while adults gain

practical skills. Catechism lessons can also use the system as a real-life example of stewardship and collaboration with God's creation.

Finally, this project embodies Catholic social teaching. It protects the environment, supports the poor, and builds community, turning the church compound into a place where faith meets daily life.

Introducing the UrbanKit family system

To make this vision practical and accessible, we can begin with a simple, “plug-and-play” aquaponic system designed for urban families. One example is the UrbanKit system, which costs approximately RM2,000 and is sufficient to support a family of four. It is compact and modular, making it suitable for a variety of spaces, including open areas in church gardens or courtyards, as well as balconies, small terraces, or backyards. The system requires no advanced technical skills to operate, and once set up, it can be maintained with basic guidance and regular care.

With proper guidance, families can learn to grow leafy greens and other vegetables that thrive in the Malaysian climate, rear fish in a safe, controlled, and humane manner, and manage water quality and nutrient balance in a simple, hands-on way. Over time, this relatively small one-time investment can bring long-lasting benefits — both in tangible food on the table and in skills that can be passed down from parents to children.

Why start on Church grounds?

Starting an aquaponic system on church grounds brings many benefits. Its presence can spark curiosity among parishioners, turning the garden into a conversation starter and a silent teacher. Short workshops after Mass or on weekends can teach families how the system works, with ministries like the Creation Care Ministry, Youth groups, Catechism, and BECs collaborating to run the sessions.

The project also fosters shared responsibility and community spirit, as

children, youth, seniors, catechists, and BEC leaders take turns caring for the plants and fish, building teamwork and pride in a shared effort. Once established, the system can serve as a model for families — especially those in flats or condominiums with limited space — to set up their own units at home.

By starting in the parish garden, this idea can grow and flourish, both literally and spiritually, spreading into homes and neighbourhoods.

Benefits for families and society

An aquaponic system is not just a gardening project. It can help families stretch their budgets by reducing some food costs and encourage healthier eating habits, particularly among children, who are often more willing to eat vegetables they have helped to grow. It also provides a positive, screen-free activity that families can enjoy together, while teaching values such as patience, care, responsibility, and gratitude for God's gifts. Additionally, aquaponics contributes to local food resilience, which is especially important in times of supply disruption or economic uncertainty.

For urban Catholics living in high-rise apartments and condominiums, aquaponics is particularly appealing because it allows food cultivation even on a small balcony, bringing the concept of a “kampung garden” into the heart of the city.

A call to our parish councils and pastors

Parishes could consider allocating a small section of the church garden or compound for a pilot aquaponic system. A creation care or aquaponics committee could be formed to oversee the project, potentially under the parish pastoral council or social concerns ministry. Parishes might also collaborate with experienced trainers to design the initial setup, train parishioners — both adults and youth — and provide basic support during the system's early stages. Educational sessions could be organised after Mass or during catechism classes to introduce parishioners to the concept, explain its benefits, and guide them through practical steps.



An aquaponic system where a child can interact with the fish while plants grow above in a hydroponic setup.

Although modest in terms of space and cost, this initiative has the potential to bear abundant fruit — nutritionally, educationally, spiritually, and socially.

Trusting in God to bless the harvest

Our Church has always cared for both soul and body. An aquaponic system on church grounds offers a small but tangible expression of that care — a way of saying to families: “We see your struggles. We want to help you feed your children well. We want to honour God's creation and use it wisely.”

Pastors, parish councils, and parishioners are invited to support this initiative by considering the allocation of a portion of the church gardens for its setup. This shared effort not only brings the project to life but also strengthens the parish's sense of community and care for creation.

May the Lord, who multiplied the loaves and fishes, bless this effort to grow food, nurture families, and deepen respect for the gift of creation — right here on our parish grounds. **Monica Pheny**



Tianne Pereira

In the heart of Kuala Lumpur, where dreams are both born and shaped, Zachary Roland Anthony's journey is one that defies the odds. What began as a simple desire to explore the world of advertising after a life-changing church seminar, has evolved into something far greater. This is an inspiring tale of faith, perseverance, and self-discovery.

Born into a family of four, where he humorously refers to himself as the "rose between the thorns" in reference to his two sisters, as a young boy, his life was marked by the loss of his father at an early age. But through the challenges, his mother and two sisters provided a foundation of love and support. Early on, Zachary was drawn to the faith, particularly during a seminar at church that made him realise he was meant for a life in advertising. It was a decision that would shape his future, though not without a few detours.

After completing his studies at St John's Institution, Zachary found himself struggling to find work. Despite multiple interviews, his lack of experience left him with no job offers, so he reluctantly took a position at a bank. He spent five years there, hating every minute of it but also finding immense value in the people he met who helped him grow and discover more about himself.

It was five long years at the bank before he decided to take a second shot at his dream of working in advertising. After a staggering 35 interviews, he was on the verge of giving up when, out of the blue, he got a call for an interview with a local agency. The interviewer was curious as to why he would leave the security of a bank job, and Zachary answered honestly: he wasn't looking for security, he just wanted to prove himself. The conversation ended with a promise to call him back in a week.

NEW DELHI: On a quiet morning at the Pathanamthitta bus stand in Kerala, a small but determined caravan of bicycles was flagged off by Kerala Transport Minister Ganesh Kumar. At the heart of this unusual journey is 37-year-old Raneesh Thattaruparambil, a mobile shop owner on a mission that is as ambitious as it is inspiring: to build India's first enclave for the disabled.

Raneesh began his "Give One Rupee – Change Somebody's Life" cycle tour on January 10, 2021, accompanied by his schoolteacher friend Nijin. Starting with just one rupee (RM0.45) from passersby, the duo aimed to fund homes for families with disabled members, turning a tiny coin into hope and shelter. Midway through the journey in 2025, Nijin had to leave for personal reasons, but Raneesh did not pause for long. In January 2026, he resumed the journey with his wife Rajini and their fourth-grade son Rio, turning the mission into a family endeavour.

"Our goal is simple," Raneesh explains. "We wanted to leave a mark in this world, and helping the less privileged seemed the most meaningful way. We decided to focus on the disabled because if healthy people struggle to build a home, imagine the challenges the disabled face."

Never stay down

How a Malaysian author turned life's setbacks into success

On his way home, however, a strange thing happened. Zachary received a call and it was the same person from the interview, except this time, she was calling to inform him that he got the job on the spot. Oh, the excitement!

But here's the plot twist: Zachary had been advised by one of his lecturers to always choose international agencies over local ones for better opportunities. So, when he spotted an ad for a job at an international agency, he applied on a whim, was interviewed that very day and was hired immediately. It was a pivotal moment that solidified his future in the advertising world.

From there, his career flourished, but not without its challenges. Eventually, Zachary found himself in a morally complicated situation, where he was expected to put someone down in order to climb the corporate ladder. Instead of compromising his values, he made the courageous decision to walk away from the industry. It was this moment of clarity that led him to a surprising new path - teaching.

One of his former lecturers dared him to give teaching a try, though Zachary was initially reluctant. When he stood before a classroom for the first time, unprepared and speaking from the heart, he was astonished by the undivided attention and respect his students showed him. It was in that quiet, transformative moment that Zachary heard a voice, a calling from God that would change the course of his life forever: "This is where you belong."

His career in teaching began and his portfolio of experiences continued to expand. Today, Zachary is a TEDx speaker, a trainer, an artist, an emcee, an educator, and now, an author. Each of these roles is a reflection of his journey, one that constantly pushes him to grow and give back to others. Yet, it wasn't until much later that a new idea began to stir within him. As an introvert with a poor command of communication, he questioned whether anyone would care about his story. But friends and colleagues who knew the

struggles he'd endured urged him to write it down. Encouraged by these voices, Zachary set out to pen his first book, a raw and unfiltered look at his personal journey.

In his book, Zachary makes it clear: there is no such thing as "I can't." It is a message of courage, resilience and the refusal to let self-doubt hold you back. The three central pillars of his book - God, Family, and Society are woven together to provide readers with strategies to build confidence and believe that tomorrow can always be better.

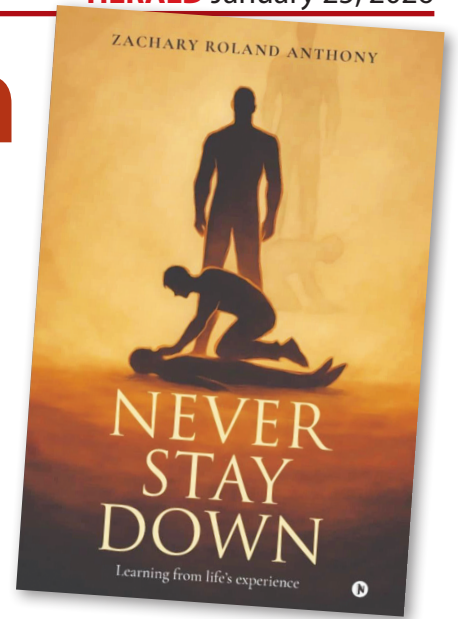
It's not a book about becoming rich, Zachary explains, but about becoming the best version of yourself. "For those who feel they can't, God never gives up on us," he affirms. The book is not just a story, it is a blueprint for personal growth, a roadmap to help others overcome their challenges.

Though he didn't consider himself an author at first, Zachary was spurred on by the encouragement of those around him and by the realisation that his story would be left untold if he didn't write it. As the book began to take shape, a publisher in India helped him fine-tune the concept, and in the end, the book became more than he ever expected.

Since releasing the book, Zachary has been invited to deliver a keynote speech in India in January 2026. He now reflects on how writing the book allowed him to share his story and touch lives. "If I hadn't written the book," he admits, "the story of my experiences would have been just left untold."

Through it all, his faith has remained central. Every day, he begins with gratitude to God, praying that God will use him in whatever way He sees fit. For Zachary, the journey of life is about humility and allowing God to guide you, even when the road ahead is uncertain.

Zachary credits his Catholic faith as a cornerstone of his resilience. The saints, he says, were prime examples of perseverance, especially in the face of suffering and their stories inspire him. He points to St Ignatius of Loyola, the patron saint of his home parish, St Francis Xavier, as a model of conversion and



faith and reflects on the example of Pope Francis who, despite his frailty, continued his work for God.

In times of discouragement, Zachary leans into prayer, finding strength and comfort in the knowledge that God is always present, even when we feel inadequate. "I don't see myself here if not for Him," he says, emphasising that prayer is his anchor, especially in moments of doubt.

For those who feel they've failed too many times, Zachary has simple yet powerful advice: "Admittance is the first step. It's okay to not have everything figured out. We build each other up by sharing our struggles."

In his book, Zachary offers readers a message of hope, urging them to keep digging their treasure boxes. Instead of setting resolutions, he encourages us to ask: *What can I bring out of myself this year?* It's a challenge to dig deep within and discover the potential that lies dormant inside us all.

Zachary's message is clear, there is always a solution to every problem, and the greatest gift we've been given is our mind. So, use it! Don't let self-doubt and challenges stop you from reaching your potential. Your purpose is not by chance or luck; it is by design, and you are capable of achieving far more than you believe.

For just RM32.00, Zachary's book *Never Stay Down – Learning from life's experiences*, is available on Amazon. You can also connect with him on Facebook to learn more about his journey and message. Whether you're struggling with self-doubt, searching for meaning or simply looking for a dose of inspiration, this book is a reminder that resilience and faith are the keys to unlocking a brighter tomorrow.

One-rupee cycle mission to change lives



The first leg of the journey took longer than anticipated but achieved a historic milestone: with funds collected from contributions — some as small as one rupee, some as large as 45,000 rupees (RM2,019) — Raneesh purchased land and laid the foundation for five homes in Ambalavayal, Wayanad. Once completed, this will be India's first colony designed specifically for the disabled. Each house, modest but complete with two rooms, a hall, and a

kitchen, costs approximately six lakh rupees, a target that Raneesh continues to fund through his unique caravan.

The caravan itself is a marvel of ingenuity: a small house built atop two bicycles, equipped with a fan, lights, a solar system, and a water tank. Raneesh and his wife cook inside, sleep in it at night, and pedal it across India — enduring discomforts for a noble purpose. "Not everyone can make a journey like this," he admits. "But everyone has the desire to

help; we just give them an opportunity."

The response along the route has been overwhelmingly positive. People have embraced the mission, contributing what they can and offering encouragement. But Raneesh acknowledges the challenges too: some are hesitant to donate even a rupee, citing distrust in charitable efforts. His solution is simple and steadfast: complete the houses and hand over the keys to the beneficiaries, proving that trust and action go hand in hand.

Even before this journey, Raneesh has been committed to charitable work, offering food, medicine, and support to those in need, often from his own limited resources. "I follow the teachings of Christ," he says, "who went around doing good to all."

As Raneesh, Rajini, and Rio pedal across India, their message is clear: even the smallest contribution, when combined with courage, determination, and faith, can transform lives. Through every rupee collected and every mile cycled, they are building more than houses — they are building hope, compassion, and a legacy of love for the disabled. **Matters India**

We're embarking on the fourth week of the year. How many times have you failed in your New Year's resolutions so far? To date, I have crept down to the kitchen to eat a steamed potato cold from the fridge at 11.00pm when my intermittent fasting window began at 5.00pm, and lied to my physiotherapist that I have been doing my stretches in earnest daily, so I don't know why I am in pain again. Every new year, the same story.

Resolutions made, resolutions broken.

This pattern of best laid plans and derailed good intentions can be the butt of good-humoured ribbing or wry public self-chastisement, but it can also mask the secret pain of our broken nature. In a self-flagellating *mea culpa* to my Methodist friend about my sullied fasting track record (over dinner, naturally), I realised how different Catholics and those of the different Christian denominations approach, understand, and receive grace.

In religious terms, grace is the unmerited love and kindness that God extends to humanity, serving as a transformative gift that fosters forgiveness and connection. But the practice of receiving grace seems to differ amongst the larger Christian community. An evangelical church that a friend attends sends out a statistical report to its members after every Christmas service, listing down the number of invitations sent out to non-Christians, the actual attendance, and how many individuals were 'saved' when they answered the rail call and came forward to profess belief in the Lord God Almighty.

Being Catholic and pragmatic, I asked, "But who of us is truly saved?" The reply? Simply by professing belief in Jesus Christ, a person is deemed a new Christian and assured of salvation, and heaven, when



Word in Progress

Karen-Michaela Tan

they die. I joked with my friend that the burden of her sect of Christianity seemed a lot lighter than the Catholic cross. She quoted Ephesians 2:8-9 "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast." I asked where the practice of the Beatitudes came

in if salvation did not have to be earned. She snorted and told me that Catholics had a hundred ways to sin and fall short, while her take on faith was dependent on receiving a gift given freely.

Because I was chasing a rapidly closing eating window, I concentrated on my sushi instead of apologetics, but later, way into the night, I gave thanks for the fact that Catholicism is a brilliant diamond whose facets are cut with such precision that its beauty can be seen from so many angles.

Catholic teaching states that sanctifying grace is first received at baptism, which cleanses original sin and initiates a person into the Church. This grace makes a person holy and pleasing to God, but it can be lost through mortal sin (though it is restored through repentance and the sacrament of reconciliation).

There is also a type of grace called actual grace, which is a supernatural, temporary help from God to act in a particular moment where, without it, we would fall into sin. I stand by the belief that this is the kind of grace that keeps me from gluttony and *roti telur bawang* at 3.00am. Unlike sanctifying grace, actual grace does not remain in the soul but is given as needed. This aid for a specific action can result in an angry adult child deciding to forgive an emotionally abusive parent, or a person acting contrary

The weight of grace

to the high negative emotion of a situation. Actual grace is essential for daily living as it shows that God is active in the world, and choosing to work through us.

While many Christian churches see grace only as a one-time gift received at baptism, Catholics are taught that the sacraments are the primary means of receiving grace. Baptism initiates a person into grace, while the Eucharist strengthens it. Confession restores grace lost to sin, and confirmation deepens the believer's commitment to God.

The Church holds that these sacraments work *ex opere operato*, meaning their effectiveness comes from Christ's power, not the worthiness of the minister or recipient. However, the grace received depends on the individual's openness to it. The CCC, in sections 1127-1129, explains that sacraments are not magic rituals but encounters with Christ, who imparts grace through them. They are visible signs of an invisible reality, instituted by Jesus Himself.

Throughout all of this, mankind (and womankind) has free will. Unfortunately, that free will doesn't look to the things of heaven as a first (or even second) response. Free will made an apple look irresistible, and now powers the decision to 'add to cart' even though our nakedness has so many coverings that our cupboards explode with unworn clothes. Freewill goes grocery shopping for fresh vegetables and tofu, then orders burgers at the convenient drive-through.

Grace does not override human freedom, but works with it. So perhaps our new year's resolutions hinge on the fact that God's grace is available to us all, but it is up to us to accept grace and attune to the way grace manifests in our lives.

A habitual clothes shopper friend was

advised by a priest to turn her skill into acts of mercy. After much reflection she told me that her desire to shop was not so much because she adored buying clothes, but because she got a dopamine hit from the discounts she could get by astute use of coupons, vouchers and credit card points. For the last quarter of 2025 she put her shopping skills to positive use by helping me shop for the Saint Vincent de Paul food pantry. Her coupon collecting, purchase with purchase savviness and monitoring of various supermarket promotions resulted in me getting 37 percent more product for the money I usually spend!

That is why I am not despairing over cold potatoes and late-night sushi. I know that I am human and fallible. But I also know that grace is a muscle. If I call on it frequently, I develop better patterns of eating behaviour and greater self-control. While part of me does wish for my patron saint, Michael the Archangel, to put himself in front of the fridge with a blazing sword when I get the midnight munchies, I also know that there are far greater battles needing the Prince of the heavenly host, and that I better use my God-given powers of reasoning to find a way to stop devouring the slice of leftover carrot cake.

So, this year, let grace in all its forms be the answer to our challenges. As the new year threatens to sweep our feet from under us and plunge us again into the swamps of self-doubt, let us remember we are loved, we have been chosen, and given an inexhaustible supply of grace to keep us upright, afloat and striving.

Karen is a poet, writer and editor who seeks out God's presence in the human condition and looks for ways to put the Word of God into real action.

On January 6, the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord, Pope Leo XIV presided over Holy Mass at St Peter's Basilica and solemnly closed the Holy Door, marking the official conclusion of the Jubilee Year of Hope for the Universal Catholic Church. In his homily, Pope Leo XIV beautifully captured the spirit of the Jubilee, proclaiming, "It is wonderful to become Pilgrims of Hope, and it is wonderful to continue to be Pilgrims of Hope together, going forward." For twelve months, the People of God journeyed as one, united as Pilgrims of Hope, with Christ as both the source and fulfilment of that hope.

For Catholics of the Diocese of Penang, 2025 was truly a radiant year of Hope. Hope was everywhere! Every celebration, every meeting, and every assembly revolved around this key theme, inviting us to embrace hope as a guiding light in our spiritual journey.

Cardinal Sebastian Francis often concluded his speeches with the greeting *Salam Damai, Salam Harmoni, and Salam Harapan* — Peace, Harmony, and Hope. These words found concrete expression across the life of the Church. The Feast of St Anne 2025 was celebrated under the theme, "Celebrating, Listening and Walking as Pilgrims of Hope." The National Cancer Society of Malaysia (NCSM)—CARITAS Home of Hope in Kampung Simee, Ipoh, stands as a living testament to hope made tangible. The Church of Our Lady of Fatima of the Holy Rosary in Kota Bharu marked its 75th anniversary with the theme "As Pilgrims of Hope," while College General Penang commemorated its 360th anniversary with the theme "Remembering with Gratitude, Fidelity and Hope."

Beyond words and celebrations, Cardinal

The hope-giver never stops

Sebastian led by example — journeying as Missionaries of Hope to the Orang Asli community in Gua Musang, Kelantan, and as Pilgrims of Hope to a Christmas gathering with the prospects at the Correctional Institute in Sungai Petani, Kedah. Hope was not merely preached; it was lived.

As the contact person for the Professional Standards Office on Safeguarding, I encountered many individuals weighed down by concern and uncertainty. Each time, I sought to respond with the language of hope. More often than not, their anxieties softened and calm gradually took hold. For me, 2025 became a profound season of living in hope, sustained by a hope that never disappoints. I am no counsellor — only a humble Pilgrim of Hope, striving to be a bearer of hope to others.

The January 11 issue of *HERALD* thoughtfully echoed the vision of our bishops as the Jubilee Year drew to a close. Cardinal Sebastian Francis urged the faithful to be filled with God's hope, calling for pilgrimages — real or virtual, outward or inward — that lead to genuine spiritual transformation. Such journeys, he noted, allow divine hope to prepare us for the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 in Sibul, Sarawak.

Archbishop Julian Leow emphasised our calling to be agents of hope, encouraging simple yet meaningful acts of love within our homes, parishes, and communities. Echoing Christ's mandate, he urged

the faithful to bear hope, especially to the marginalised, the differently-abled, and the voiceless, becoming Christ's light in a world yearning for hope.

Bishop Bernard Paul reminded us that even as the Jubilee Year concludes, the flame of hope must be kept alive through fidelity in daily life — standing with the weak and vulnerable, looking ahead with hope, and inspiring today's generation to pursue holiness. He pointed to the saints as models, especially Saint Carlo Acutis, as we

continue our journey towards God.

As Catholics, how do we understand hope? The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines hope as "the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit" (CCC 1817). This assurance is echoed by St Paul, who reminds us that "hope does not disappoint" (Romans 5:5).

Hope was vividly alive in the Penang Diocese. During the Christmas Parade in Georgetown, a heavy downpour did little to dampen the participants' joy. Undeterred, everyone pressed on with unwavering enthusiasm, embodying the truth that Christians are a people of hope who do not despair. In that moment, the confident assurance of hope was truly felt by all.

Penang also played host to a major Asian gathering: The Great Pilgrimage of Hope

(November 27–30, 2025), which brought together over 900 Catholic leaders from 30 nations under the theme, "Journeying together as peoples of Asia... and they went a different way" (Mt 2:12). In his keynote address, Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle reminded delegates that the heart of Christian life is always a journey shaped by Christ. He is our guiding star, our destination, and our enduring hope.

The Church of the Immaculate Conception in Pulau Tikus welcomed the "Light of Hope," with its nativity plays portraying the journey to Bethlehem by the Blessed Virgin Mary and St Joseph — a pilgrimage of profound spiritual significance, undertaken in hope that the child would be born in fulfilment of God's promise. That holy night, the shepherds, guided by an angel, embarked on their own pilgrimage to see and worship the newborn King. Even the wise men became pilgrims of hope, drawn by God's grace.

With the Jubilee now concluded, the mission continues. We are called to live hope in our daily lives —through acts of charity with Caritas, engagement in inter-religious dialogue, and faithful witness to Christ in the world. As we step into 2026, I remain committed to walking as a Pilgrim of Hope, inspired by our beloved Holy Father, Pope Francis, who proclaimed, "I want a Church on the move."

Christopher possesses experience across a diverse array of job portfolios both in government and private sector. He is happy to share his professional journey and is engaging with the principles outlined in Pope Francis's encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* to transcend border and embrace a culture of fraternity, social friendship and dialogue.



Turun Padang

Christopher Kushi



Fr Gerard Theraviam

Hoping beyond the Jubilee

The Jubilee Holy Doors in Rome are firmly shut. Locally, the banners have been brought down and the pilgrimages to the designated Pilgrim Churches have all ended – and so it's back to life as usual!

But should that be so? Certainly not! Surely the Jubilee Year has made some impact on the Church that we certainly must hold on to the Hope rooted in our memories – recalling the graces, pilgrimages, and spiritual renewals experienced during 2025. Hope is not a fleeting phenomenon, but a permanent virtue to be integrated into daily life as we respond to God's faithfulness to us and His call to continue to follow Him.

What were my learnings as a priest in a Jubilee parish?

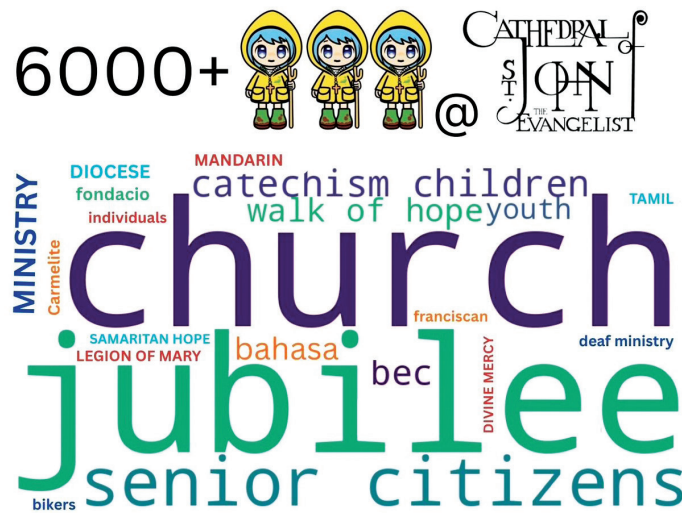
Surely just as I proclaimed Hope, I also learnt to live it myself.

Firstly, by looking at Life not just optimistically, but also from the viewpoint that even if life was tough, hope would never disappoint me. (Rom 5:5)

I am not alone in the pilgrimage through life – there are others who carry the cross alongside with me – and as we share our life struggles, there is a sense of solidarity that buoys us up. More importantly, God's grace is sufficient! I need to not just rely on my own strength or ability or that of others, but also on the grace of God – and that's amazing! God never disappoints – His ways are not ours (Thy Will Be Done!) and while we may want Him to do things in a certain way and timeframe, we cannot control God – for He is certainly a God of Surprises, often exceeding our wants and desires. Prayer sustains us and it is not just about 'saying prayers' but a dialogical, loving and living relationship between ourselves and God.

In the meantime, the wait for God's plan to be fully rolled out teaches us patience, which Pope Francis referred to as 'the daughter of hope'.

I have also been reminded of the call to be a welcoming church. More than 6,000 pilgrims visited the Cathedral as part of organised pilgrimages, brandishing their pilgrim passports to be stamped, in addition to many others who slipped in and out unnoticed, but who nevertheless came to pray and reflect as well as to attend



Masses. Many of these were from far away – other dioceses and countries, in addition to the many familiar faces from neighbouring parishes, especially when we had special Jubilee events. We had many volunteers who came to be part of the welcome teams, generously giving up their weekends and public holidays to show hospitality and guide the pilgrims.

I grew in faith when pilgrims shared their life stories and what God was doing in their lives.

In the confessional, I saw God bring forgiveness and healing as individuals unburdened themselves of "excess baggage" that they had been struggling with and walk away joyfully with the freedom of God's children. In my conversations with some, especially the sick and differently-abled, I realised the sense of faith and wonder that spurred them to make their pilgrimages.

Going on pilgrimages to other churches beyond the confines of the familiar was also an exercise in the universality of the Church. People may pray in different locations, styles and languages – yet there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism." (Ephesians 4:5)

I recall my own pilgrimages to other churches, delighting in the creativity as they showcased God's mercy concretely in the prayer-services, art and above

all, the warm, loving hospitality. In my pilgrimage with a group to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico, I saw hordes of pilgrims, both men and women, some in native dress, many of them poor; making their pilgrimages on foot to what is the biggest Catholic pilgrimage site apart from Rome. I was amazed to hear that in the 10 years after the apparitions of the Blessed Mother there, fifteen million (!) natives, earlier lukewarm to the Gospel, came forward to be baptised as they discovered a native Madonna who pointed them to her Son. This was a reminder to me that our encounters with God must bear good fruit, whether in our personal lives or in our relations with others.

The "missionary spirit" of the Jubilee must bear fruit as we listen to 'the cry of the Earth and of the Poor.' It must lead to acts of charity to the Last, the Lost, the Least and the Little. The Jubilee was not just for personal sanctification but to remind us of our call to be missionary-disciples. The 'events' that were directed at the poor during the Jubilee were not just one-offs but rather, a celebration of a continued relationship, to walk together.

It was also a joy to welcome persons of other faith and traditions to our Jubilee activities. It was an opportunity to showcase our faith in the Lord but to also recognise in others the desire for the Divine, and to allow them to be drawn by God into faith. Our Jubilee events were an opportunity to share our faith with people of all ages, especially the younger generations who need to be initiated into the story of Jesus. To quote Archbishop Julian Leow at our closing Mass for the Jubilee in the Cathedral, "The story of Jesus is ready to be told in new ways through our churches, communities, and pilgrimages". Looking ahead, the Church now looks toward the Extraordinary Jubilee of 2033, which will celebrate the 2,000th anniversary of the Redemption (the Death and Resurrection of Jesus). The pilgrimage thus continues in and through our lives as we continue walking together in hope.

Fr Gerard is the Parish Priest of the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist in Kuala Lumpur, as well as the Spiritual Director to the World Community for Christian Meditation, Malaysia.



Fr Ron Rolheiser

Our struggle with love and with God

God is love. If this is true, and it is, then why are we afraid of God, and why are we afraid to die?

We live in too much fear of God and death. From where does this come? Why should anyone be afraid of coming face to face with love?

This fear is not something that is simply the product of bad religion which can give us a distorted concept of God. Bad religion can play a role in creating an unhealthy fear of God in us, but there are more salient factors at play here.

First, unless we have been extremely blessed in how we have been loved, all of us struggle with a deep fear that we are somehow unlovable, undeserving, and unable to stand morally and psychologically naked before pure love. So, it's understandable that we stand in some fear before a God who is pure love and not surprisingly fear facing that God when we die. I say this with compassion. For most of us this is simply our human condition, and bad religion does not lie at the deepest roots of this. What lies at its deepest roots?

Our congenital struggle with love. In essence, our struggle is the struggle of the biblical Jacob who spends a night wrestling with an unknown divine force. What's the force? An angel? God? Yes, both of these, but ultimately, he is wrestling unknowingly with love, and that's why near the end of the struggle when it has grievously wounded him, he finally realises what he is wrestling with and now clings to it and begs for its blessing. That's our deep struggle with God, with love.

However, bad theology sometimes does play a role

because of our misunderstanding of the biblical counsel "the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom". (Proverbs 9.10)

The theology and catechesis of my youth (much of it very healthy) did contain however, and quite strongly, a motif of unhealthy fear. God was to be feared. God noted our sins, counted them, and kept a strict record of them in a book. We would one day have to face God, with that encounter searing our souls, and answer for those shortcomings. Moreover, there was also the fear of going to hell after death. No matter our sincerity, we might die in a state of mortal sin and be condemned to hell for all eternity. The theology and catechesis in which I was baptized and raised, despite all its other goodness, instilled an unhealthy fear of God in me. I suspect this is true for many of us.

But isn't *the fear of God the beginning of wisdom*? Shouldn't we stand before God in fear? Yes, but only in a certain type of fear.

Fear has many faces, some healthy, some not. We fear the playground bully, fear getting a serious illness, fear physical pain, fear losing someone in death, fear our own death, and fear judgment for our shortcomings. That's one face of fear.

But there's another, the fear of being unfaithful, the fear of betraying someone we love, the fear of being calloused and boorish and keeping our shoes on before the burning bush. That's the type of fear which is the beginning of wisdom. That's a healthy fear in the face of God and of

love.

St Paul, in speaking of grace, in essence puts it this way: We shouldn't try to be good so that God loves us. Rather, *we should want to be good because God loves us!* For example, in a marriage, we should want to be faithful not first of all so that our partner doesn't stop loving us. Rather *we should want to be faithful because our partner loves us.* That's holy fear, fear of betraying love, the beginning of wisdom, a healthy fear of God and of love.

As well, today we have an ever-expanding literature that recounts the experience of people who had been clinically dead and then were resuscitated and brought back to life. In basically every instance, the person who had been dead and then resuscitated, didn't want to come back to his or her earthly life. Virtually everyone describes being met by a warmth, a light, and an embrace of love that surpassed anything they had ever experienced in this life. None experienced fear.

God is never a tyrant, a bully, arbitrary, legalistic, cold, without warmth, or without full understanding and compassion. We only need to fear betraying that goodness. My image of standing before God after death is the image of a newborn baby being picked up by his mother for the first time or the image of a grandparent beaming at his or her grandchild trying to coax a smile from the toddler. We needn't fear facing God before or after death. It will be an experience of meeting pure, unconditional love. Then, like the biblical Jacob, we can finally stop wrestling with love and cling to it instead.

LITTLE CATHOLIC'S CORNER

Dear children,

Our Bible lesson today has something to do with fishing. One day, Jesus was walking along the seashore when He saw two brothers named Peter and Andrew. Jesus knew they made their living by fishing, so He called out to them, "Follow Me, and I will show

you how to fish for people!" Do you know what they did? They laid down their fishing nets and followed Jesus! Jesus wants you and me to fish for people, too. That means that Jesus wants us to tell others about what He has done for us and what He wants to do for them.

Fishing for people is a lot like fishing for fish. First, we need to be properly equipped. We need to know what the Bible teaches and learn how to share it with others. Next, we tell them about Jesus through our action, deeds and words. Finally, we must be patient.

If we will do these things, we can really become fishers of people like Jesus wants us to be. If you think there is a great feeling of excitement in catching a fish, just imagine how exciting it must be to bring someone to Jesus!

Love
Aunty Eliz

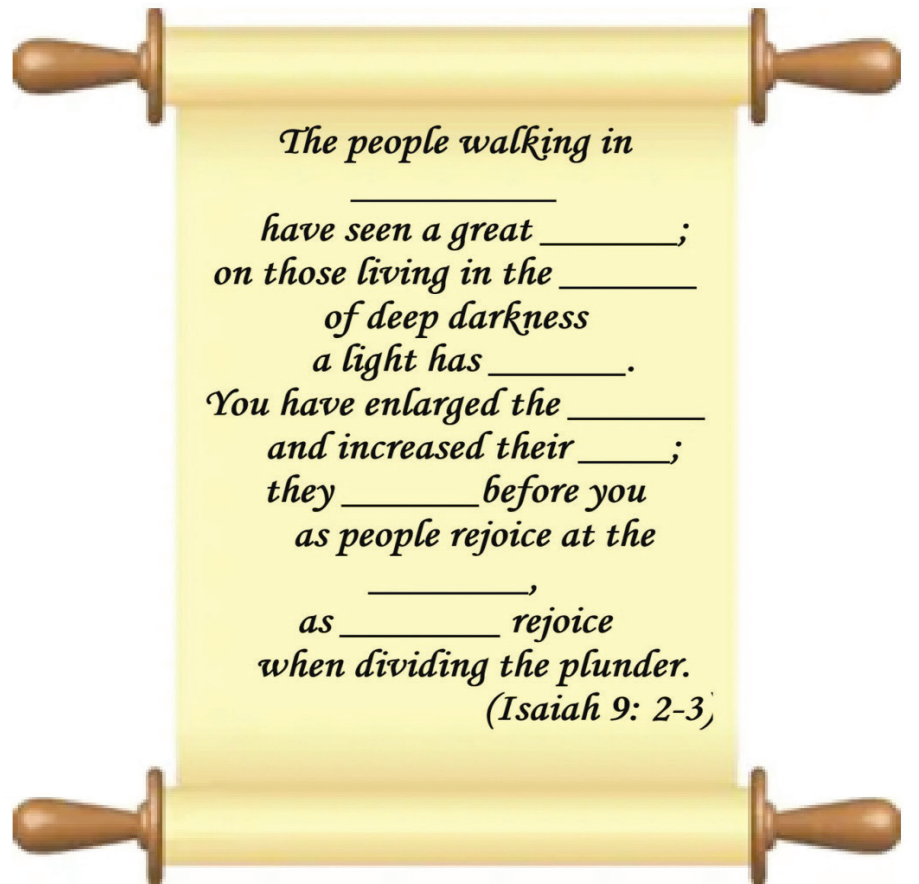


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|----------|--------|-------|---------|---------|
| BROTHERS | JAMES | NETS | COME | GALILEE |
| BOAT | PETER | WATER | FOLLOW | BEHIND |
| ANDREW | LIVING | JESUS | SITTING | FISH |
| WALKING | PEOPLE | JOHN | SHORE | LEAVING |

Fill in the Blanks:

A Prophecy about Jesus...



The people walking in

 have seen a great _____;
 on those living in the _____
 of deep darkness
 a light has _____.
 You have enlarged the _____
 and increased their _____;
 they _____ before you
 as people rejoice at the
 _____,
 as _____ rejoice
 when dividing the plunder.
 (Isaiah 9: 2-3)

rejoice warriors joy nation harvest
 darkness light dawned land

Can you find EIGHT differences between two pictures?



YOUTH

Be a hero at the altar!

Evelyn Jock

Serving at the altar is both a privilege and a quiet, heartfelt response to God's invitation. Altar servers assist the priest and help the faithful enter more deeply into the sacred mysteries of the liturgy. Through their service, they learn reverence, discipline, and a love for the Eucharist.

Whether preparing incense, carrying the processional cross, or walking solemnly with lighted candles, altar servers carry out each task with care, devotion, and a joyful sense of responsibility. Behind the youthful smiles lies a sincere commitment to the liturgy, where every gesture, however small, has meaning. This devotion shines especially during major diocesan celebrations, such as the ordinations of deacons and priests, where serving at these sacred moments fills them with awe and pride as they witness lives wholly offered to God. Standing so close to these milestones deepens their appreciation of the priesthood and the sacredness of vocation.

Mistakes are part of the journey. When they occur, it is not carelessness but a sign of learning. Often unnoticed is how deeply altar servers feel when they fall short, wishing they could have done better for the Lord. These moments cultivate humility, perseverance, and a desire to try again. A kind word, a patient correction, or simple encouragement from parents, parishioners, and the



community can inspire them to grow in confidence and remain open to God's call.

The spirit of commitment among altar servers was clearly seen during the opening of the Jubilee Year on December 28 December, 2024. Even those on college holidays made the effort to travel and serve together. Standing at the altar alongside a bishop, priests, deacons, and seminarians, they witnessed the unity of the Church and the beauty of shared service. Their presence was a living testimony of faith expressed generously. A year later, at the closing of the Jubilee Year on Dec 28, 2025, they once again served with love and dedication, marking a Jubilee journey completed — hearts shaped by perseverance, commitment, and joy in serving the Lord.

In the diocese of Sandakan, the altar

servers' dedication is renewed each year during Holy Week and Easter, when they gather at the Fr Mulders Catechetical Centre in Sandakan for a special camp. Through prayer, community life, and service, they prepare to assist at the Holy Week and Triduum liturgies in both Bahasa Malaysia and English. These experiences leave lasting impressions on their faith and identity, deepening their understanding of Christ's Passion, Death, and Resurrection.

The witness of former altar servers is equally inspiring. Now working adults, many return during holidays to serve whenever possible, mentoring younger boys and guiding them with encouragement. These role models show the younger servers what faithful, generous service looks like in practice.

At St Mary's Cathedral, altar serving is entrusted to many willing young boys. During these formative years, they learn prayer, discipline, teamwork, and responsibility. Some may one day be called to the priesthood or religious life; others to marriage or other vocations. Whatever path they choose, their time at the altar forms them into men who know how to serve with love.

To every young man, altar serving is an invitation: to draw closer to Jesus, to grow in faith, and to discover the joy of giving oneself to God. To parents and parishioners, it is a call to walk gently with them, to encourage rather than discourage, and to help them hear God's voice with courage and hope. Those who serve faithfully at the altar today may well become the faithful leaders, fathers, and shepherds of tomorrow.

Polish youth defend legacy of St John Paul II

WARSAW: History reminds us that when faith confronts fear, courage often rises among the young. In Poland, the legacy of St John Paul II is once again being tested — not by open persecution, but by attempts to erase memory and silence a voice that shaped the nation's soul.

During the communist era, the Church was seen as an enemy. Its belief in human dignity challenged a system rooted in control and materialism. Priests and bishops were targeted, especially figures such as Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński and Cardinal Karol Wojtyła. Even after Wojtyła became Pope John Paul II, the regime

sought to discredit him, fearing the hope he inspired among the people.

Although communism fell in 1989, many Poles believe these attitudes have not fully disappeared. Today, controversy surrounds the "Memory and Identity" Museum of St John Paul II in Toruń, inspired by the pope's final book and intended to present Polish history through his spiritual and moral vision. Despite being nearly completed, the museum now faces efforts to undermine its mission, raising concern across the country.

For young people, this is not simply a political or cultural issue — it is about identity, truth, and memory. More than half a million citizens have signed petitions to defend the museum, with Catholic youth among the most vocal supporters.

The Polish Catholic Youth Association has spoken out strongly, warning that limiting the museum would damage the foundations of national and spiritual memory. In a world marked by misinformation, shifting

values, and a culture of forgetting, young people need spaces for formation and reflection. To deny them this, the youth leaders say, would harm the future of the nation.

Their stance is deeply rooted in history. As a young priest, Karol Wojtyła accompanied Catholic youth, guiding them during years of oppression and encouraging courage, responsibility, and faith. His closeness to young people made him a threat to the communist regime.

The memory of persecution remains vivid. In 1953, the trial of the priests of the Kraków Curia falsely accused clergy and laypeople of treason, leading to death sentences and widespread intimidation. Catholic youth were labelled "anti-state" and pushed aside. Today's young Catholics see echoes of that past in modern attempts to "cancel" John Paul II's legacy.

In response, the Catholic Youth Association



has reaffirmed its commitment to defend truth, promote education, and preserve historical memory. They envision the museum as a place of dialogue and unity, helping young people understand their roots and their responsibility to the future.

Their message is clear and hopeful: fear must never define the next generation. Remembering St John Paul II is not about living in the past, but about shaping a future grounded in faith, courage, and truth. **Exaudi News**



CHOOSING PATIENCE OVER IMPULSE

As the new year begins, many young Malaysians step into workplaces, brimming with hope and ambition, eager to make their mark. At the same time, surveys show a growing trend of early job changes: many young workers move to a new job within 18 months, and some even consider leaving within the first year. This is particularly common among Gen Z and millennials in urban areas and fast-growing sectors such as digital services, retail, logistics, and tech — a trend reported in *The Star*, January 11.

The reasons are understandable. Young professionals seek faster career progression, meaningful work, flexible schedules, and opportunities to learn new skills. Social media and digital platforms amplify these options, raising expectations, showcasing alternative paths, and normalising job changes. Many young people are also less financially constrained by family obligations, giving them freedom to explore opportunities that align

with their ambitions and lifestyle.

Yet, while mobility can open doors, there is wisdom in restraint. Employers value not only breadth of experience but also depth: the ability to master skills, build credibility, and cultivate relationships that endure. Early career growth often requires patience, resilience, and steady progression. Staying long enough to learn, contribute, and grow transforms work from a mere task into a meaningful formation of both skill and character.

Here, Christian values offer timeless guidance. Patience is not passivity; it is active cultivation of growth, character, and faith. The parable of the talents reminds us to steward well what we are given. Every role, every assignment, and every responsibility is a chance to serve, learn, and grow. Leaving prematurely risks abandoning lessons unlearned, relationships unformed, and responsibilities unmet.

Workplace culture also matters. High turnover often stems from insufficient mentorship, unclear career pathways, or weak people management. Employers who provide meaningful work, clear avenues for growth, and supportive guidance allow young workers to flourish. From a Christian perspective, the workplace becomes a space to practise



integrity, service, and respect, where everyday tasks transform into acts of witness and responsibility.

Seeking flexibility, meaningful work, or work-life balance is natural — gig work, freelancing, and side projects can all be valid avenues if approached with purpose. The question is always intention: Are we using each opportunity to cultivate our gifts, serve others, and develop virtues such as diligence, patience, and charity? Are we growing not just professionally, but morally, learning to treat colleagues with kindness, fairness, and respect?

Parents, educators, and mentors play a crucial role in this journey. Conversations about responsibility, empathy, and stewardship of talents help youth navigate career decisions wisely. Encouraging young people to ask how they can contribute, learn, and serve — rather than merely what they can

gain — nurtures a deeper understanding of vocation, whether in a first job or a long-term career.

Ultimately, every job is formative. Each role is a classroom, every challenge a teacher, and every mentor a guide. Job-hopping may be a modern trend, but the Christian call is to act with discernment, patience, and moral responsibility — ensuring that every step builds not only a resume but also character, competence, and the capacity to serve.

By integrating faith and reflection into career choices, young workers can turn every opportunity into a witness of Christian values: patience in learning, stewardship of talents, service to colleagues and society, and moral courage to do what is right. In doing so, they do more than navigate a career; they grow as conscientious, skilled, and compassionate members of the workforce — and of the Church.

St Brigitta Learning Centre empowering young people

INDONESIA: On Indonesia's remote Kei Besar Island in Southeast Maluku, an unexpected meeting between medical service and pastoral care led to the creation of a Church-run initiative dedicated to youth development. The St Brigitta Learning Centre emerged from the shared vision of two individuals with different vocations but a common concern for the future of local children and youth

One of them is Dr Angelina Vanessa, a general practitioner from Jakarta who spent 12 years working with DoctorShare, a humanitarian organisation founded by Dr. Lie Dharmawan. DoctorShare is best known for its *Kapal Apung* (Floating Hospital) program, which delivers medical services to isolated regions across Indonesia. During her long service on Kei Besar Island, Dr Vanessa became deeply familiar with the challenges faced by local communities beyond health care, especially the limited

opportunities available to young people

The other key figure is Fr Patrisius Jeujan, MSC, a native priest from Bombay village on Kei Besar Island. During the COVID-19 pandemic, travel restrictions forced him to remain on the island for nearly seven months. During this time, he and Dr Vanessa often discussed the needs of local youth, particularly the lack of spaces where they could develop skills, confidence, discipline, and faith outside formal schooling.

These conversations led to the establishment of the St Brigitta Learning Centre, designed to empower children and teenagers through nonformal education. The pro-

gram focuses on music, English language learning, public speaking, self-discipline, and Christian faith formation, reflecting the predominantly Catholic population of the island. Located on higher ground, the centre includes a multifunction hall for classes and gatherings, as well as simple accommodations for visitors and volunteers.

Music plays a central role in the centre's activities, drawing on the well-known musical talent of the Moluccan people. When visitors from Jakarta arrived in December, they were welcomed by students singing and playing guitars. The youth confidently led discussions, storytelling sessions, and traditional dance performances, demon-

strating the impact of years of guidance from teachers and volunteers.

Although Dr Vanessa and Fr Patrisius now live in Jakarta, the centre's daily operations are overseen by Tien Jeujan, an experienced educator and musician, assisted by two dedicated volunteers who teach English, music, and choir. The mission continues to expand, with plans for a kindergarten, a retreat facility, and sports infrastructure. Together, these efforts reflect a holistic approach that combines medical service, pastoral care, and community involvement to support the formation and well-being of young people on Kei Besar Island. **Mathias Hariyadi, LiCAS News**



Fr Patrisius Jeujan, MSC, national director of social works of the Indonesian Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, speaks during a youth formation session. (LiCAS News/Mathias Hariyadi)



Students of the St Brigitta Learning Centre sing and play string instruments as they welcome visitors from Jakarta on Kei Besar Island, Southeast Maluku. (LiCAS News/Mathias Hariyadi)

Thailand mourns legendary social reformer

BANGKOK: Dr Prawase Wasi, one of Thailand's most respected public intellectuals, civil society leaders, and public health scholars, passed away recently at the age of 93.

Widely regarded as a moral voice in Thai society, Dr Prawase devoted his life to advancing human dignity, community-centred development, and social transformation grounded in compassion and wisdom.

His work consistently crossed religious and institutional boundaries, making him a key figure in Thailand's interreligious and civil society landscape.

Dr Seri Phongphit, a veteran social development scholar and long-time collaborator, told *LiCAS News* that Dr Prawase played a quiet but decisive role in fostering cooperation between religious communities, including sustained engagement with Catholic social development initiatives.

According to Dr Seri, the late Fr Michel Boonluen Mansap, who later became a bishop responsible for social development within the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand, had encouraged Catholics to collaborate with leaders of other faiths to address social challenges.

"Then as it is now, Catholics were a small minority," Dr Seri said. "There was a shared awareness that meaningful social change required cooperation across religious traditions."

Through Buddhist social thinker Sulak Sivaraksa, Dr Seri was introduced to Dr Prawase in 1979 at Siriraj Hospital in Bangkok. That first meeting marked the beginning of a decades-long partnership rooted in mutual respect and shared concern for society's most vulnerable.

Recognising Thailand's religious context, Dr Prawase advised that Catholics should not serve as coordinators of interreligious initiatives.

Instead, he supported the creation of the Interreligious Commission for Development, a neutral platform that enabled Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, and others to collaborate on social development, education, and community empowerment.

For Catholic social workers, this approach reflected core principles of Catholic social teaching, particularly the common good, subsidiarity, and solidarity, while respecting the country's predominantly Buddhist culture.

Dr Prawase was also a leading advocate of "local wisdom," emphasising that authentic development must emerge from communities themselves rather than being imposed from above.

This conviction shaped his engagement with



grassroots movements, village-based initiatives, and educational reform.

"He believed development begins with listening," Dr Seri recalled. "People are not objects of development; they are its subjects."

His influence extended into public health, especially during the early response to the AIDS crisis in Thailand and the wider region.

Dr Seri recounted asking Dr Prawase to write the foreword to a book addressing HIV and human suffering.

The resulting reflection, titled *AIDS and the Transformation of Humanity*, framed the epidemic as not only a medical challenge but also a moral test for society, calling for compassion, inclusion, and shared responsibility.

Dr Prawase's counsel was also sought by those working within international institutions. When Dr Seri considered leaving a senior position with the United Nations AIDS programme, Dr Prawase personally visited his office to understand the situation.

"He listened without judgment," Dr Seri said. "Only after hearing everything did he gently affirm that leaving was the right decision."

Beyond policies and institutions, those close to Dr Prawase remember him as a deeply attentive listener and a humble elder whose guidance helped others discern their path.

"When he gave advice, it was never imposed," Dr Seri said. "He helped you see more clearly what your conscience was already telling you."

Dr Prawase also played a key role in promoting community-based learning and leadership formation. His encouragement led to the creation of independent institutions dedicated to public learning and community enterprise, initiatives that emphasised lifelong education, ethical leadership, and social responsibility.

Dr Prawase Wasi was a 1981 Ramon Magsaysay Awardee, recognised for advancing public health and making medical care accessible to the poor. Often described as Asia's Nobel Prize, the Ramon Magsaysay Awards honour individuals and organisations for transformative leadership and service in the region.

As Thailand reflects on his passing, Church workers and civil society leaders alike remember Dr Prawase Wasi as a bridge-builder whose life echoed values central to the Church's mission in Asia: dialogue over dominance, service over power, and hope rooted in shared humanity. **LiCAS News**

MEMORIAM

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

In Loving Memory Of



Andrew Ng Su Boon
1st ANNIVERSARY
Called Home to the Lord
23 January 2025



Majorie De Costa
11th ANNIVERSARY
Called Home to the Lord
11 April 2015

You were the heart of our family, you taught us strength, you taught us grace; In every memory, you'll find your place. It broke our hearts to lose you; you did not go alone; for part of us went with you the day God called you home. Our family chain is broken and nothing seems the same, but as God calls us one by one, the chain will link again.

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me"
John 14:6

Lovingly remembered and deeply missed by children, grandchildren, siblings, relatives and loved ones.

9th Anniversary In cherished memory of



Kandamkary Mathai Cherian
12 October 1927 - 25 January 2017

*Dearest dad
Our very grateful thanks for the many great blessings we received from you.
Praise be to God!
Your loving family*

5th Anniversary In Ever Loving Memory of my beloved wife, AMY PHILOMENA ZUZARTEE

15.04.1953 - 26.01.2021



Deeply missed by husband Vincent Shanmugan and loved ones.
For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. Whoever believes, will not perish but will have eternal life.

6th Anniversary In Loving Memory of Joe De Cruz



20/10/1960 - 26/01/2019

*Your life was a blessing, your memory a treasure, you are loved beyond words and missed beyond measure.
Dearly missed by all loved ones.*

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In Loving Memory of

9th Anniversary



Catherine Ho Lai Koon

(19-3-1939 to 27-1-2017)

5th Anniversary



Joseph Fong Meng Tao

(16-6-1933 to 3-2-2021)

You are missed but always loved, You are gone but never forgotten, We know your souls are at peace above, In eternal joy in the Lord's kingdom in heaven.

Deeply missed by your children, grandchildren, siblings, relatives and friends.

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• BUILDING OF MONUMENTS • SUPPLY OF CONDOLENCE WREATHS •

Pope Leo XIV debuts a new pastoral crosier



VATICAN: On January 6, the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord, during the closing rite of the Holy Door of St Peter's Basilica — which marked the end of the Ordinary Jubilee of 2025 — Pope Leo XIV used a new pastoral staff for the first time. According to a statement published on the website of the Office for the Liturgical Celebrations of the Supreme Pontiff, this new symbol maintains those used by his predecessors but places particular emphasis on the Paschal Mystery: the union of the Cross and the Resurrection.

Historically, the crosier was not part of the insignia of the Roman pontiff. In the Middle Ages, popes used the *ferula pontificalis*, a staff with a simple cross at the top, a symbol of their spiritual and governing authority. Its use was limited to specific occasions, such as the opening of the Holy Door or the consecration of churches.

The modern change came with St Paul VI, who, in 1965, at the close of the Second Vatican Council, introduced a crosier bearing the figure of Christ crucified, designed by the sculptor Lello Scorzelli. This gesture symbolised the proclamation of "Christ crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). His successors, such as St John Paul II and Benedict XVI,

continued this tradition, adapting it with variations that emphasised both the Cross and elements of the Resurrection, such as the Paschal Lamb.

The new crosier of Leo XIV, inspired by the style of Scorzelli, depicts Christ not nailed to the cross but with his glorified body in the act of ascending to the Father. It shows the wounds of the Passion as "luminous signs of victory," which transform human suffering into the hope of divine life. Furthermore, it bears the papal motto "In illo uno unum" ("In that one, one"), which underscores the unity and ecclesial communion centred on the one Eucharistic Bread.

This symbolic unveiling during the closing of the Jubilee of Hope reinforces the message that the foundation of the Christian faith lies in Christ crucified and risen. The crosier, in the words of the Vatican statement, becomes a testament to the Petrine ministry: to confirm the brethren in the faith and to preside over the Church in charity.

The choice of this new symbol has been interpreted as a gesture of theological continuity, uniting redemptive suffering with the glory of the Resurrection, offering a message of hope for humanity at the start of this new year. **Exaudi News**

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New mosaic of Holy Father ready for St Paul's Basilica



Pope Leo XIV looks at a round mosaic featuring his portrait at the Vatican January 14, 2026. (OSV News photo/Simone Risoluti, Vatican Media)

VATICAN: The Vatican Mosaic Studio of the Fabric of St Peter has completed the mosaic medallion dedicated to Pope Leo XIV, the Holy See Press Office announced on January 14.

In accordance with the ancient tradition that accompanies the election of every pope, just over eight months after the election of Pope Leo XIV, the studio has completed the mosaic portrait destined for the Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls, at the request of the Basilica's Archpriest, Cardinal James Michael Harvey.

The mosaic roundel, with a diameter of 137 centimetres, was created using glass enamels and gold on a metal structure at the studio of the Fabric of St Peter.

The tesserae (individual pieces of glass

or tile) were produced using the ancient cut-mosaic technique and were set with the traditional oil-based mastic of the Vatican tradition.

The execution of the work was based on a painted preparatory sketch by Master Rodolfo Papa — an oil on canvas of the same dimensions as the mosaic roundel — specifically conceived for its translation into mosaic.

The work will be installed in the space next to the portrait of Pope Francis, in the right nave of the basilica, at a height of approximately 13 meters.

The painted sketch, on the other hand, will be preserved — together with the entire series of portraits of the pontiffs — at the Fabric of St Peter in the Vatican. **Vatican News**

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