

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.

The Pope calls for peace, reconciliation, and mercy across the world



VATICAN: On Christmas Day, Pope Francis delivered his traditional *Urbi et Orbi* address and blessing in Vatican City, urging individuals and nations to “silence the sound of arms and overcome divisions.”

Addressing a crowd of thousands of pilgrims gathered in St Peter’s Square, the Pope emphasised that a “just and lasting peace” can only be achieved by turning to the “Father of Mercies.” He called for reconciliation with God, which, he said, would enable reconciliation with ourselves and even with our enemies. “God’s mercy can do all things. It unties every knot. It tears down every wall of division,” he stated.

The Pope used his address to advocate for peace in several regions affected by conflict, emphasising the need for boldness in negotiations. He called for an end to the violence in Ukraine, saying, “May the sound of weapons be silenced in Ukraine” and for leaders to embrace dialogue and encounter. He also reiterated his plea for a ceasefire in Gaza and expressed spiritual closeness with Christian communities across Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria,

and Libya, urging that “the doors of dialogue and peace be flung open throughout the region devastated by conflict.”

Turning his attention to Africa, Pope Francis prayed for a “new season of hope” for the populations in the Horn of Africa, Congo, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Mozambique, and Sudan, whose humanitarian crises are exacerbated by armed conflicts, terrorism, and climate change. He specifically prayed for Sudan, asking God to sustain the international community’s efforts to provide humanitarian aid and support peace negotiations.

The Pope also appealed to political authorities in Myanmar, Haiti, Venezuela, Colombia, Nicaragua, and Cyprus, praying that they work toward peace, the common good, and respect for the dignity of each person. “May this jubilee be an opportunity to tear down walls of separation and the ideological walls that so often mark political life,” he concluded, urging the faithful to transform the world through hope, mercy, and reconciliation.

Pilgrims on a journey of faith



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we joyfully welcome 2025, I extend my heartfelt blessings to each of you and your loved ones. This year is not just another year on the calendar; it is a special milestone in our journey of faith as we embark on the Jubilee Year, themed *Pilgrims of Hope*. In the spirit of renewal and reflection, we gather to embrace the gifts of this sacred time, to reaffirm our commitment to being a community of faith, hope, and love amidst a world often besieged by challenges.

There may have been complexities and adversities that tested our spirits in 2024. Many among us have encountered hardship, loss, and trials that have caused us to question our path. But I urge you to remember, dear friends, that we are a resilient people. As pilgrims, we walk together — united by our faith, empowered by our hope, and encouraged by the promise of Christ. Scripture reminds us, “Hope does not disappoint us” (Romans 5:5). Even in moments of darkness, there shines a light — our guiding star, Jesus Christ.

As Christians, we are called to be pilgrims on a journey of faith — a journey that does not always follow smooth paths but is often fraught with difficulties. Many of us may have struggled with doubts, fears, and uncertainties, but in these very struggles, we are reminded of God’s unwavering presence in our lives. He walks beside us, guiding us through

the darkness and into the light. The essence of being a pilgrim means acknowledging that we are always on the move, always seeking greater understanding, love, and communion with our Creator.

This jubilee year offers us a unique opportunity to deepen our faith and to recommit ourselves to a life of prayer, repentance, and welcome. I encourage each and every one of you to embrace this time as a sacred journey — a pilgrimage that invites us into a deeper relationship with God and with one another. Our pilgrimage will lead us to both local and extended pilgrimage centres, not only within the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur but also our neighbouring dioceses. Let us visit these sacred places, where the faithful have encountered God and where we can rekindle our spirits as we participate in the rich tapestry of community prayer and devotion.

Through our visits to these pilgrimage sites, we are not merely tourists; rather, we are spiritual seekers yearning to encounter God in new ways. Allow these sacred spaces to inspire you, as we meet those whose journeys are different yet resonate with our own struggles and hopes. Let us gather together to reflect on our shared faith, recalling the words of St Paul: “We are convinced that the One who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us with Jesus and place us in His presence.” (2 Corinthians 4:14)

This is a time to surrender our burdens through prayer. I invite you to dedicate these months ahead to the sacred act of prayer, a powerful weapon we wield against adversity. In prayer, we are reminded of the support we find in one another, the love poured out upon us from God, and the strength that builds within our hearts. Let us pray for one another, uplift one another in our struggles, and extend our arms in charity to those in need, for it is in giving that we truly receive.

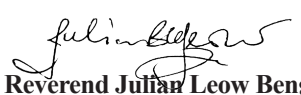
The Jubilee Year also calls for a posture of repentance and reconciliation. We must look within ourselves honestly, acknowledging the imperfections we all carry. But let us not be weighed down by guilt; instead, let the act of repentance be an invitation to renew our commitment to Christ and to one another. In this time of reflection, I extend a warm invitation to those who have drifted from the Church — know that our arms are wide open to welcome you back into the fold. There will be no judgement, only love, understanding, and a desire to walk this journey together once more. As we celebrate this year, may you find the courage to return and experience the embracing warmth of our community.

In addition to the aspects of pilgrimage, prayer, and reconciliation, let this year also be a season of service — reaching out to those who are suffering, marginalised, the lonely, and the lost. As a community of believers, we are called to be the hands and feet of Christ

in the world. May our acts of kindness and compassion be the witness of our faith and the hope for those who feel abandoned or unheard. Together, let our love overflow into the communities in which we live, igniting hope in places where darkness may linger.

In our gatherings, may our words of peace ripple through our neighbourhoods, and may our actions of kindness be a testament to the hope we cherish. We are called to be the bearers of that light, poignant reminders that, even in uncertainty, faith remains steadfast and hope endures.

As we embark on this pilgrimage of hope, let us walk hand-in-hand, ever mindful of our calling to love and serve. May we open our hearts to the myriad of graces that this year holds, nurturing a spirit of joy, faithfulness, and unwavering hope. Together, as a vibrant community of pilgrims, let us rejoice in the blessings that God has for us. May God bless you all richly in this Jubilee Year. Happy New Year!


Most Reverend Julian Leow Beng Kim
Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

As we stand on the threshold of yet another year, we pause to reflect with gratitude on the journey we've shared. With every word printed, every story shared, and every thought exchanged, you — the loyal readers of our publication — have been a vital part of our mission. Your support, whether through engaging with our content, providing feedback, or encouraging others to join this community of faith, has helped sustain us through the challenges we have faced.

In a world increasingly dominated by digital communication, print media has encountered significant hurdles. The shift from printed pages to virtual screens has transformed how information flows, often placing traditional newspapers under strain. However, we remain steadfast in our commitment to bring you a publication that highlights the vibrancy and depth of the Catholic faith. Our legacy is built on meaningful dialogue about Church news, comments, and commentaries, offering you insights that ignite your soul and inspire action in the world around you.

The year 2024 has been a testament to resilience for so many, both within the Church and in the broader world. We have witnessed trials that have tested our spirits — global uncertainties, social upheavals, and the ongoing dialogue about the role of faith in our increasingly secular society. Yet, amid these challenges, our community has also experienced remarkable expressions of hope and charity. Together, we have shared in the joy of sacraments, the wisdom of teachings,

and the comfort of fellowship. As we embark on this New Year, we are reminded that our publication stands as a platform that not only informs but inspires.

This year the Church will mark a significant milestone — the Jubilee Year, a time of grace and renewal. This year is a pilgrimage of hope, calling all of us to deepen our relationship with God, to reflect on our commitment to the Gospel, and to reignite our passion for spreading His message. We are excited to embrace this opportunity, both spiritually and through the pages of our publication. In tandem with the faithful who will journey towards the Jubilee, we are embarking on our own news pilgrimage, committed to covering the events, stories, and teachings that resonate with the heart of the Church. The experiences and reflections of everyday believers will be essential in painting a fuller picture of this sacred time.

To enhance the depth and breadth of our coverage, we are thrilled to announce the introduction of new columnists in 2025. These talented individuals, each with unique perspectives and experiences, will bring fresh insights into the vibrant life of our Church. They will help illuminate the myriad ways faith touches our daily lives — from the theology that shapes our understanding to the lived experiences of communities answering the call to serve. As we welcome these new voices, we remind you that this paper is, and will always be, the paper of the people. Your stories, your reflections, and your questions are what shape our discourse and enrich our

content. We invite you to continue sharing your thoughts and testimonies; they are the threads that weave our community together.

What are our hopes and aspirations for the paper in this new year? We dream of deepening our commitment to you — our faithful audience. We aspire to illuminate the path forward by offering inspiring stories of faith in action, powerful testimonials of lives transformed by love, and insightful dialogues inviting us to think critically about our roles. Each issue will rise like a new dawn, presenting opportunities for renewal and sharing the steadfast light of Christ.

But we cannot achieve this without your support. In a world increasingly moving towards digital platforms, we recognise that our ability to produce a high-quality print publication is under threat. Yet, it is precisely in these moments of uncertainty that we are called to be more diligent, more creative, and more united in our mission. We ask that you, our faithful readers, continue to stand with us as we navigate these waters together. Your subscriptions, your contributions, and your advocacy for our publication are what enable us to amplify our voice in a landscape that desperately needs the light of faith.

Thank you for being an integral part of our family. Here's to a year filled with blessings, growth, and opportunities for all of us to journey deeper into the heart of Christ. Together, let us illuminate the path ahead. Happy New Year!

Patricia Pereira

Trap of the human heart

Self-involvement is one of the great traps of the human heart. What do I mean by that? A self-involved person interprets everything, such as how every person and every event is filtered through the lens of "How does this affect me?" No matter what happens, they make it about themselves. Self-involvement isn't just about taking care of oneself or having healthy self-awareness, as those are good and necessary. Instead, it's about being overly absorbed in oneself to the exclusion of others and God.

The feast of Epiphany celebrates the "manifestation" of God in the person of Jesus. Manifestation happens outside us. In this homily, I want to propose, or argue, that we cannot experience the manifestations of grace when we are so self-involved to the point that we cannot look past ourselves. In this sense, even moments of beauty or grace become mere tools, seen only in terms of how they serve, challenge, or threaten our interests.

Herod is an example of this. When the Magi arrived with news of the newborn King of the Jews, Herod's reaction wasn't one of awe or joy. It was fear. Why? Because for Herod, everything was about him. His power, his throne, his kingdom. Even the long-awaited Messiah was seen not as a Saviour but as a threat to his control. His self-involvement was so complete that he couldn't rejoice in the incredible work of God happening right in his midst.

Therefore, Herod was "greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." Instead of seeking Christ with humility, Herod manipulated the Magi, schemed with his advisors, and ultimately ordered the massacre of innocent children.

The Magi and the Journey to Christ

The Magi showed us another way, one that is the opposite of self-involvement. These wise travellers had every reason to stay in their

comfort zones. They were far from home, relying only on the light of a star. Yet they were willing to step into the unknown, not for personal gain, but to seek and honour Christ.

Unlike Herod, the Magi didn't make the journey about themselves. They didn't ask, "What's in it for me?" They came to give, offering gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Their hearts were open to God's revelation, and because of this, they found the Saviour.

The Gospel tells us that the Magi returned home by another route after being warned in a dream to avoid Herod. On a practical level, their change of direction was to ensure their safety and protect the child Jesus from Herod's schemes. But there's also a deeper spiritual insight here: encountering Christ often changes the course of our lives. While their new route was a physical one, it reflects a longstanding truth in the Christian tradition — that a genuine encounter with God transforms us. It may not be dramatic or immediate, but it invites us to walk a different path, one shaped by faith, humility, and openness to God's will.

An Invitation to See

Herod's story is a warning for all of us. Self-involvement narrows our vision, making it difficult to see the wonder of God's work. Worse, it can lead us to resist or even destroy what challenges our comfort or control. Herod's fixation on himself blinded him to the light of Christ. Pope Benedict XVI once said, "The world offers you comfort, but you were not made for comfort. You were made for greatness." Herod clung to his own small kingdom, but it cost him the greatness of encountering Christ.

The Magi, on the other hand, offer us an invitation. Their journey reminds us that faith isn't about being in control, but about being open. It's about stepping out of our comfort zones and following the light

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with Fr Dr Lawrence Ng Yew Kim

Epiphany of the Lord (C)

Readings: *Isaiah 60:1-6;*
Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6;
Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

manifested to us.

The Magi offered gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, symbolising Christ's kingship, divinity, and sacrifice. What can we offer? Perhaps it's the gift of our time, our talents, our service or a renewed commitment to seek Christ in prayer, service, and love.

A Decisive Moment

Epiphany celebrates the moment when Christ is revealed to the nations, represented by the Magi. But it's also a moment of decision. Herod and the Magi both encountered the revelation of Christ, yet their responses differed. Herod clung to his self-interest and missed the Saviour. The Magi opened their hearts and found Him.

This Epiphany, we're invited to reflect on our response to Christ's revelation. Are we self-involved like Herod, interpreting everything through the lens of how it affects us? Or are we open like the Magi, willing to follow God's light wherever it leads?

Herod's tragedy wasn't his lack of resources or knowledge but his inability to see beyond himself. The Magi remind us that God's revelation requires openness, humility, and a willingness to change.

Epiphany celebrates a profound truth: God's light is for all people, regardless of background or journey. Like the Magi, we are invited to follow that light with joy and trust. May we do exactly that, which is being able to set aside our self-involvement and always ready to respond to God's invitation.

SSVP celebrates 90 years of compassion

Lucia Lai

PENANG: The Society of St Vincent de Paul (SSVP) in Malaysia has made remarkable strides over the past ninety years. Established in 1934 with the first conference at the Church of the Assumption in Penang, SSVP has gradually expanded its reach. By the early 1950s, the Society began to flourish along the western half of the Peninsular Malaysia, and in the 1980s, it made its way to Sarawak.

Today, SSVP boasts 63 conferences across the nation and approximately 700 dedicated members.

In 2004, SSVP celebrated its 70th anniversary at the state level with a Mass at the Church of the Assumption, followed by a fellowship dinner at St Xavier's School hall next door.

The following significant milestone, the Diamond Jubilee in 2009, was celebrated on a grand scale at the national level. This event coincided with the National Council AGM and was hosted over two days at a hotel, attracting around 500 members and guests from locations including Singapore

and Bangkok. The first day included the AGM and tea at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, while on the second day, a special Mass was celebrated at the Church of the Assumption, culminating in a dinner at the hotel.

The Mass was presided over by the then Bishop of Penang, Rt Rev Antony Selvanayagam, with the late Cardinal Soter Fernandez and the late Fr Mari Arokiam, who was the National Council's spiritual director at the time, also in attendance.

In 2014, SSVP marked its 80th anniversary with a celebration hosted by the Conference of the Assumption. A Thanksgiving Mass was held at the church, followed by a simple catered dinner on the church grounds, attended by SSVP members.

In 2024, the 90th anniversary was a particularly special occasion, taking place at the conference level and focusing on the Friends In Need (FIN), a group of individuals and families that SSVP regularly supports, previously referred to as 'adoptees.' The Assumption Conference in Penang currently has nine members and cares for



FINs and SSVP members at the luncheon.

six FINs, which includes three individuals and three families.

On December 8, all the FINs were invited to a delightful dinner at a popular restaurant, celebrating both the 90th anniversary and the Christmas season. A total of 12 FINs, including adults and children, joined the six SSVP members for the occasion.

Fr Desmond Jensen, the assistant parish priest, graced the dinner, offering prayers to bless the food and expressing gratitude to God for the Society's 90-year legacy. This gathering provided a beautiful opportunity to celebrate both the anniversary and the Christmas spirit alongside the FINs.

The evening was filled with camaraderie as SSVP members engaged in meaningful conversations with the FINs, learning more

about their stories. The FINs were also informed about the Society's impressive 90-year history and how this long-standing presence enables continued support for them.

The celebration included a cake-cutting ceremony, and before the FINs left, each received a Christmas gift to take home.

This event represented a rare and cherished opportunity for members and FINs to come together over a shared meal. The gathering cultivated a closer and more meaningful relationship between the members and FINs, embodying the belief of our founder, Blessed Frederic Ozanam, that closeness to the poor exemplifies the essence of Catholic Social Teaching and reflects compassion without judgment.

KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

January

- 6-10 Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia Singapore & Brunei & Catholic Religious Major Superior – MAJODI Centre
- 11 Red Mass – Cathedral of St John the Evangelist, KL

PENANG DIOCESE

Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

January

- 6-10 Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia Singapore & Brunei & Catholic Religious Major Superior – MAJODI Centre

MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

January

- 6-10 Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia Singapore & Brunei & Catholic Religious Major Superior – MAJODI Centre
- 17 Meeting – 1st Caritas Malaysia Diocesan Directors & Ecclesiastical Assistants (CM DEA), via Zoom



Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #204



Greetings dear friends of MJD, a blessed and holy Christmas and New Year

Miracles do happen at Christmas, yet we need more miracles than ever today: The Christmas season began with the latest movie entitled *Mary*, with many Israeli casts and directed by a Catholic, D J Caruso.

The Catholic Church officially recognised the 71st miracle of Lourdes, the 1923 healing of a British soldier, only in 2024 (101 years later). There's a surge in Bible sales.

Influencers on platforms like TikTok and YouTube and high profile celebrities are increasingly sharing their faith with authenticity and openly make faith-based conversations. When interviewed, the respondents said "Christmas is being with loved ones, sharing a meal, or exchanging gifts, while others felt that it is about honouring the Saviour through actions and remembering that God's power is in His hands.

A Seri Manjung Hospital MO, seeing the dire shortage of doctors, wrote to all the patients and their families: "I am sorry I did not attend to your dying ones because I was attending to another dying patient."

For the Palestinian, the Lebanese, the Syrians, the Ukrainian refugees and displaced, it was a cold, waterless or powerless time.

Janorashikin, a Malay, a teaching assistant at SJKT Ladang Jawi, gently cooling the hot food and feeding her young charge, an Indian boy, was praised by many. Little miracles happen everyday. Yet there are many waiting for the smallest of miracles to

live another day or tide through. Can we be the miracle in one another's life like "the child born unto us"?

Riveting Times: The Child in a Manger God was not what the world was preparing for. "In Christ, we see an image of a God who is not armed with lightning bolts but with basin and towel, who spewed not threats but good news for all, who rode not a warhorse but a donkey, weeping in compassion for people who do not know the way of peace. In Christ, God is supreme, but not in the old discredited paradigm of supremacy; God is the supreme healer, the supreme friend, the supreme lover, the supreme life-giver who self-empties in gracious love for all. The king of kings and lord of lords is the servant of all and the friend of sinners. The so-called weakness and foolishness of God are greater than the so-called power and wisdom of human regimes".

In God's sovereignty or supremacy or kingship which was likened to the kings of this world who dominate, oppress, subordinate, exploit, scapegoat and marginalise — an old idea has been subverted. It is not demoting God to a lower, weaker level; it is rising to a higher and deeper understanding of God as pure light, with no shadow of violence, conquest, exclusion, hostility, or hate at all. Yes, it could be said that two thousand years ago, Jesus inserted into the human imagination a radical new vision of God — non-dominating, nonviolent, supreme in service, and self-giving. Maybe only now, are we

becoming ready to let Jesus's radical new vision replace the old vision. (adapted from Fr Richard Rohr)

A Thought For The Week: A wealthy man was enjoying his coffee on the balcony when a little ant caught his eye. It was trying to carry a leaf several times bigger than its own size. For an hour he watched.

He saw the many impediments it had to overcome, the diversions it had to make. At one point, the tiny creature came across a crack in the floor. It paused for a little while, analysed and then laid the huge leaf over the crack, walked over the leaf, picked the leaf on the other side and continued its journey. The man was captivated by the cleverness of the ant, one of God's tiniest creatures.

Lesson from the ant: One can be big or small. But one's greatness is in how we rise or adapt or improvise and overcome.

See The Holy Spirit @ Work: The Holy Spirit ignites a fire in your heart, a passion for God's purposes. (Anonymous)

Something To Tickle You: Jesus teaches and is himself a message of now-ness, here-ness, concreteness, and this-ness. Virtually the only time Jesus talks about future time is when he tells us not to worry about it. Richard Rohr

Bishop Bernard Paul

A pilgrimage of hope at Krubong parish

Bernard Anthony

KRUBONG, Melaka: Over two thousand parishioners, including pilgrims from various regions, gathered at the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe on December 14 to celebrate the annual feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe and the 15th anniversary of the church's reconstruction. Originally built by the Portuguese in the early 1600s, the church was a site of historical significance, and its ruins still stand beside the current church building.

This year's celebration was themed *Pilgrimage of Hope*, with triduum Masses held from Dec 11 to 13. On the feast day, Fr Joseph Heng served as the main celebrant. Concelebrants included Fr Neville Sinnappah; Fr Jason Wong from Muar; Fr Thomas Chong SJ; Fr Devadasan Madala Muthu; Fr John Yoew, and Fr Michael Goh, all from the Malacca Vicariate. Also present was Fr Joseph Chan, a priest from China, based in Singapore. The Mass commenced with Rosary prayers.

Fr Joseph welcomed attendees, highlighting the significance of gathering to honour Mother Mary. "We come together to worship the Lord in this feastday Mass," he said, on

behalf of Fr Neville.

In a departure from tradition, this year's feast featured a re-enactment of the Apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico. Several catechism students participated, donning costumes and utilising lighting to bring the story to life. Fr Joseph provided background information, recounting how Mother Mary appeared to Juan Diego in 1531 and encouraged the congregation to reflect on her message.

The congregation was captivated by this fresh approach to the traditional story, with Fr Joseph expressing his belief that everyone was touched by the narrative. During the Prayer of the Faithful, he invited the congregation to pray for increased vocations to the priesthood and for Mother Mary's intercession.

A significant part of the celebration included the Rite of Institution of the 2nd Curia of the Malacca Vicariate of the Legion of Mary. The eight priests present prayed for the committee members, with Fr Joseph presenting them with a banner amid a congregation of fellow legionaries, attired in blue Legion of Mary t-shirts.

The celebration culminated in a candlelight procession around the

church grounds with the statue of Our Lady while the clergy and parishioners recited "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee" in Mandarin throughout the 30-minute solemn procession.

Upon returning to the church's main entrance, Fr Joseph expressed gratitude for the fine weather before inviting all to a dinner fellowship in the parish hall and grounds. He acknowledged the efforts of parishioners in preparing for the feast celebrations. Fr Neville concluded the evening with a blessing for the meal, encouraging attendees to continue as pilgrims of hope. Many also took the time to visit the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe.



Fr Joseph Heng with legionaries and parishioners.



The pilgrims during the Eucharistic Celebration.

A time of thanksgiving for children of St Joseph Home

PENANG: On December 12, 2024, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the children of St Joseph Home in Georgetown offered a Thanksgiving Mass at the Church of St Francis Xavier. The Mass was celebrated by Cardinal Sebastian Francis, with Fr Joachim Roberts concelebrating. The event brought together staff, caregivers, board members, benefactors, volunteers, and Friends of the Home in a heartfelt celebration. Choir director, Celine D'Cruz, shared that the children had diligently practised the songs over the past month and prepared to serve as lectors, reciting the Psalm and proclaiming the Readings.

During the Mass, the children presented each guest with a potted plant, symbolising the nurturing of life, love, and hope. This thoughtful gesture reflects Pope Francis' words in the encyclical *Laudato Si'*: "The Human Family has received from the Creator a common gift: Nature."

In his homily, Cardinal Sebastian reflected on the significance of Our Lady's appearances to simple adults and children throughout history. He recalled how she appeared to St Juan Diego at Guadalupe, to Lucia, Jacinta, and Francisco at Fatima, and to the 14-year-old Bernadette at Lourdes. He reminded the children that Our Lady is always there for



Fr Joachim Robert and Cardinal Sebastian Francis.

them and encouraged them to be loving and trustworthy toward her. Fr Joachim, Chair of the Board, expressed gratitude to everyone involved with the children for their gift of faith, shared with love and dedication for the benefit of the children. He quoted the African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child."

Also present were board members Iruthaya Das and James Tan, along with past board member Frances Chan and around 60 guests. Iruthaya thanked all the benefactors for their generous support of the Home, which provides a wholesome education, life skills, and spiritual growth. He also noted the challenge that St Joseph Home

faces in attracting and retaining younger staff.

Sr Provincial Christin Law of the Canossian Daughters of Charity (FDCC), Malaysia, sent Sr Roslin Zaccharius to serve at St Joseph Home in 2022. The FDCC, which stands for Figlie Della Carita Canossiane in Italian, has a charism centred on education, catechesis, and care of the sick. Sr Roslin shared that St Joseph Home currently has 25 children, ranging in age from 5 to 17 years.

During the fellowship dinner, the children sang carols, and Sr Roslin opted to forgo additional presentations so that the children could dine and mingle with the guests. She also expressed her gratitude for the dedicated volunteers, including teachers who provide tuition and music lessons, therapists, and individuals who tend the garden.

The history of St Joseph Home dates back to 1865 when Fr François Xavier Hab established the St Joseph Orphanage at its current site. In the 1990s, in response to rising issues faced by families, the orphanage opened its doors to include not only orphans but also boys and girls from very poor socio-economic and psychological backgrounds. The establishment then evolved into St Joseph Home, which celebrated its 159th anniversary on November 21, 2024. **Christopher Kushi**

SFA hosts workshop on safeguarding minors

CHERAS: In a significant step towards child protection, the Church of St Francis of Assisi hosted a workshop titled *Tutela Minorum: Safeguarding Minors*, which saw participation from 86 attendees. The event aimed to enhance awareness and understanding of child safeguarding protocols within the Church community.

Fr Gregory Chan *pic*, parish priest of the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Klang, led the workshop, meticulously guiding participants through the Church's comprehensive 10-step safeguarding guidelines. These guidelines are designed to reinforce the continuous commitment of the Church to protect children and vulnerable individuals, emphasising the importance of creating a safe environment, collaborating with survivors and families, addressing allegations, and ensuring cultural responsiveness, among other vital topics.

Fr Gregory delved into real-life scenarios and case studies to illustrate appropriate responses to various situations, equipping attendees with practical knowledge essential for handling potential safeguarding issues.

Participants included catechists, members of the BECCOT, clergy, administrative staff, teachers from the Zotung



Refugee Catholic Learning Centre, and members from the Archdiocese Office for Human Development's Special Needs Centre.

The workshop underscored the Church's commitment to regularly updating its universal guidelines for the safeguarding and protection of children and minors. This iterative process ensures that the protocols remain relevant and effective in light of contemporary challenges, fostering a culture of safety across all ministries within the Church.

Feedback from attendees highlighted the workshop's value in promoting collaboration among various Church ministries to ensure that all individuals, from the youngest to the oldest, feel safe and secure within their church environments. **Jaclyn Sharmelee**

Keningau Council of Churches Christmas celebration

Juanis Markus

KENINGAU: The Keningau Council of Churches (Majlis Gabungan Gereja-gereja Keningau/MGGK) held its annual Christmas celebration at the Keningau Community Hall, organised by the Catholic Church. The event brought together various denominations to celebrate the spirit of Christmas and the love of Christ.

In his homily, Msgr Gilbert Lasius, the vicar of the Diocese of Keningau, emphasised the importance of unity among followers of Christ. "As followers who have experienced the love of Christ, we must express our love for Him by uniting in prayer and together testifying about the love of Jesus Christ," he stated.

Msgr Gilbert highlighted the true essence of Christmas, reminding attendees that "At its heart, Christmas is about the birth of Jesus

Christ, the Saviour of the world, who came to bring hope, peace, and salvation to all." He referenced the Gospel of John, saying, "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us" (John 1:14), illustrating how God entered into our broken world as Emmanuel, "God with us" (Matthew 1:23).

The theme for this year's celebration, *Love through Action*, which was inspired by 1 Corinthians 13:1-9, encouraged attendees to reflect on how they might spread the Gospel message of Jesus. "We must pray and testify that we will uphold peace and harmony in our district, state, and nation in the love of Jesus Christ," Msgr Gilbert urged.

The event commenced with a procession of church leaders introduced to the audience, followed by an opening prayer led by Msgr Gilbert. The MGGK youth then engaged the crowd in singing and praising God, creating a joyful atmosphere.



All the participants from the different denominations.

Following the homily, the celebration continued with various performances, including the evening's highlight — a Youth Carol by Candlelight from the Cathedral of

St Francis Xavier. The festivities concluded with a closing prayer led by Msgr Gilbert, bringing the community together in a shared spirit of faith and joy.

Tawau's inter-church decorations and lighting ceremony

TAWAU: The annual Tawau Inter-Church Christmas decorations and lighting ceremony, hosted by the Church of the Holy Trinity, officially launched the festive season in the community.

Rev Hendrik Linggiallo, chairman of the Tawau Churches Committee, was represented by Fr David Garaman during the ceremony. He emphasised the event's significance in promoting unity, brotherhood, and kindness among community members, highlighting that these values transcend backgrounds and beliefs.

"Christmas is a time to remember the birth of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, who brought light to a dark world," Fr David stated. "Just as the lights around us illuminate the night sky, we are called to be lights in our communities, shining with love, kindness, and compassion."

The cleric further remarked, "The decorations and lights seen tonight symbolise the warmth and joy of the season, serving as a reminder that hope persists even in challenging times, and light will always triumph over darkness."

The event showcased the collaboration



The Church leaders from Tawau.

among various churches, local communities, and authorities. Fr David extended his gratitude to the host church, Holy Trinity, and the committee members for their efforts in creating the decorations and orchestrating the event.

He also acknowledged the critical support from several key organisations that contributed to the ceremony's success, including the Tawau Municipal Council, for

allowing the decoration of the roundabout, the Public Works Department (JKR) for facilitating road use and safety preparations, and the Tawau District Police for ensuring the event's safety.

In closing, Fr David thanked everyone in attendance and wished all a blessed Christmas, encouraging all to let the light of Christ shine brightly in their hearts and communities.

Red Crescent brings cheer to the needy

RAWANG: On December 14 the Red Crescent Society of Gombak District, under the guidance of vice-chairman Annathurai Karuppan and district secretary Kumar Subramaniam, brought festive cheer to 26 families at the Church of St Jude.

With the support of the Parish Integrated Human Development (PIHDM), they distributed food baskets to the B40 families chosen for this initiative. Contributions from the Red Crescent Society and Nestlé Malaysia have made this endeavour possible, highlighting the power of community collaboration.

Parish priest Fr Vincent Thomas expressed his joy regarding this charitable act, emphasising the importance of supporting those in need, especially during the festive season — a sentiment that resonates deeply within the church community.

One of the grateful beneficiaries, Syala Sellari, articulated the overwhelming emotions shared by many who received support. Her words reflect the appreciation of all recipients, serving as a reminder that even small acts of kindness can profoundly impact someone's life. **Mercy Almeida Stellus**

Samarahan's parade unites thousands in joyful celebration



The leaders coming together to light the candle.

KOTA SAMARAHAN: The spirit of multiculturalism and religious harmony shone brightly as a large crowd came together for the Christmas parade and celebration in Samarahan on December 8, 2024. This marked the first event of its kind since the pandemic, with the parade weaving through the streets from the Church of St Francis to Farley Supermarket, uniting participants and spectators in a joyous display of unity and festive cheer.

Themed *Peace Be With You*, the event was organised by the Sarawak Association of Churches Samarahan Branch (ACSSB), and hosted by the Methodist Church. With 700 church members from various denominations participating, the parade also attracted approximately 800 enthusiastic spectators, creating a vibrant and inclusive celebration.

The celebration kicked off with a worship service led by Reverend Steward Damat from the Sarawak Iban Annual Conference Methodist Church, who delivered a heartfelt

sermon on the birth of Jesus Christ, emphasising that "His love is meant to transform lives and inspire hope across generations."

A dynamic programme featured captivating choir performances, lively dance shows, and a highly anticipated lucky draw. Each activity showcased contributions from different denominational churches under the ACSSB, highlighting the collective spirit and diversity of the Christian community.

In a media release, the organisers underscored the event's dual purpose: to spread the message of Christmas joy and peace while fostering community cohesion and celebrating the harmonious coexistence of the diverse Samarahan community.

The organisers expressed their gratitude for the overwhelming support and participation, emphasising that the celebration transcended religious observance. It stood as a testament to the shared values of peace, love, and community harmony that define the spirit of Samarahan. **DayakDaily**

Bringing good news and cheer to one and all

Church of St Jude, Rawang

RAWANG: The parishioners of the Church of St Jude celebrated their first parish-level Christmas party since the MCO on December 15.

The celebration, organised by the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC), headed by Christine Vincent, brought together people from diverse backgrounds, uniting them in a spirit of fun, food, friendship, and fiesta.

With strong support from the entire committee, particularly Zone coordinator Michael Devadass and his assistant, Diana Rayan, they meticulously laid the groundwork for the celebration. They engaged with all Zones and Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC) coordinators to ensure widespread participation

from the parish.

“The full backing of our parish priest made this event possible. His encouragement motivated us to organize even more activities for both children and adults,” said Michael.

A standout feature was the collaboration with the Parish Integral Human Development Ministry (PIHDM), which helped include migrants in the festivities. Generous donations from parishioners ensured that every migrant child received several toys or cherished pre-loved items, while adult migrants were also generously gifted. Thanks to the PIHDM’s initiatives, the presence of migrants infused an extra warmth and community spirit into the day.



One of the performances during the celebration.

The youth took the lead in organising thrilling game stalls. The highlight was undoubtedly the dunk tank, where parish priest Fr Vincent Thomas and our home-grown semi-

narians bravely took the plunge into cold water, much to the amusement of the crowd.

The evening was further enlivened by uplifting performances from

members of the Tamil, Chinese, and Bahasa apostolates.

In his speech, Fr Vincent emphasised the significance of different communities — East Malaysians, migrants, and locals — coming together to share in the joy of the celebration. He highlighted how the diverse backgrounds of the community members reinforced the notion that we are indeed stronger together. He also praised the parish for its overwhelming turnout, which contributed to the event’s resounding success.

As families departed with cherished memories, a lingering hope for future joyful gatherings filled the air, reminding everyone that together, we can create magic during the holiday season. **Mercy Almeida Stellus**

Church of Our Lady of Lourdes Klang

KLANG: The Our Lady of Lourdes Senior Citizen Ministry (OLL SCM) recently celebrated their Christmas Luncheon at the New Bagan Restaurant on December 15.

Approximately 60 members attended the event, embracing the festive spirit by dressing in shades of green and red, the chosen theme for the occasion. The luncheon was filled with joy and laughter, featuring games, quizzes, and lively carolling. The atmosphere was charged with the essence of

Christmas, thanks to the charming decorations, twinkling lights, and cheerful carols drawing everyone to sing along.

The celebration included wine and fruitcake, followed by spirited renditions of Christmas carols and engaging games. The delicious food delighted all, and the festivities continued for about four hours. By the end of the event, everyone left with smiles on their faces, armed with thoughtful gifts and party packs to remember the joyous occasion.



Senior citizens enjoying a sumptuous lunch.

Church of St Joseph, Sentul

SENTUL: The Church of St Joseph celebrated its annual Children’s Christmas Party with the theme *Sharing God’s Love Through Giving* on December 15. The dedicated organising committee began preparations three months prior, with the blessing of parish priest, Fr Frederick Joseph, embarking on a mission to raise funds and gather donations through weekly breakfast sales, along with the generosity of donors and sponsors.

Approximately 540 children, including catechetical students, members of the Myanmar community, Educare participants, and children under the purview of the PIHD, along with their parents, attended the joyous event. Residents from St Mary’s Home and Joy Home joined the celebration.

The event also marked the 56th sacerdotal anniversary



Fr Frederick Joseph praying over the children.

of Msgr James with a cake-cutting ceremony. Adding to the excitement, Santa Claus and his santarinas made a delightful appearance, captivating the children with a lively dance. The programme continued with performances by catechism students and vibrant displays from the Myanmar and Sri Lankan communities, showcasing the unique talents that embody the spirit of Christmas.

A highlight of the event was a skit performed by the children, conveying the true meaning of Christ’s

birth, followed by an engaging clown show that kept the children entertained. Various games filled the day with fun, and the sumptuous food was enjoyed by all.

The celebration continued with carolling, filling the air with Christmas cheer. This was followed by the distribution of beautiful gifts, bringing immense joy to the children. The event concluded with a magical snow show, leaving the children in awe and creating unforgettable memories of joy and festive cheer. **John Bosco Morais**

Church of St Aloysius, Mantin

MANTIN: A joyful Children’s Christmas Party, organised by the Society of St Vincent de Paul and PHID, had children from FINs (Friends In Need) who were especially excited to be part of this merry-making

The celebration kicked off after Mass, featuring a delightful breakfast and potluck contributed by parents, setting a warm tone for a day filled with joy and fellowship.

The Vincentians led the opening segment with lively songs.

The Nativity play was a standout production, directed by T. Marie Ashely, offered a refreshing twist on the traditional story of Christ’s birth. What made this performance truly special was the enthusiastic involvement of the pupils, who not only delivered heartfelt performances but also significantly contributed to the script. Their unique

perspectives ensured that the story resonated with today’s generation, bringing the timeless themes of hope, love, and faith to life in an engaging and relatable way.

Adding to the morning’s charm, children from Kampung Belihoi, dressed in white, performed action songs that were both beautiful and inspiring, captivating the hearts of everyone present. Their joyful energy exemplified the unity and shared spirit of the occasion.

The catechism children further enriched the celebration by singing a selection of songs that filled the atmosphere with warmth and reverence. Their innocent voices echoed the joy of the season and reminded everyone of the significance of the Nativity story.

The festive spirit was palpable as the children engaged in various activities, received gifts, and enjoyed the company of friends and family. The event beautifully highlighted the essence of Christmas — sharing love and spreading joy to those around us. **Selva Manogary**



The performers of the play.



Catholic Lawyers’ Society, Kuala Lumpur ANNUAL VOTIVE MASS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT RED MASS

Principal Celebrant:
His Grace The Most Rev. Julian Leow Beng Kim
Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur

Date : Saturday, 11 January 2025
Time : 10.00 a.m.
Venue : Cathedral of St John the Evangelist
Address : 5, Jalan Bukit Nanas Kuala Lumpur
50250 Wilayah Persekutuan

For enquiries, kindly contact:
Trevor Padasian (016-2090067)

All are welcome

Christmas joy with the Orang Asli

CHERAS: The spirit of Christmas shone brightly as the Commission for Human Development of the Church the St Francis of Assisi (SFA) successfully organised its 2024 Christmas Mission at Kg Belihoi, Mantin, Negeri Sembilan.

The event, which aimed to spread the joy and hope of Christmas to the Orang Asli community, was filled with meaningful activities, heartfelt fellowship, and a celebration of unity.

The day began with Mass, celebrated by Fr Christopher Soosaipillai, which set a reverent tone for the occasion. The Mass reminded everyone of the true essence of Christmas — the birth of Jesus Christ — and the call to share God's love with others.

After the Mass, the Orang Asli community, along with volunteers from the church, engaged in a variety of activities designed to bring joy and foster bonding. Children's games and carolling by the SFA youth group filled the atmosphere with laughter and cheer, while adults participated in lively games that encouraged camaraderie.



The children enjoying themselves as the adults look on.

A fellowship lunch followed, offering a moment to strengthen relationships and share the blessings of the season. The event's highlight was the distribution of gifts and groceries to the Orang Asli families, made

possible by the generosity of donors and the parishioners of SFA.

"I am deeply touched by the joy and gratitude shown by the community today," said one volunteer. "It is a reminder of how much

of an impact we can make when we work together for a common cause."

The event concluded with a closing prayer, thanking God for His blessings and guidance throughout the day. Volunteers and participants worked together to clean the venue, reflecting the collaborative spirit of the mission.

The Christmas Mission not only brought smiles, joy, and hope to the Orang Asli community but also inspired all involved to continue serving with love and compassion. This successful event is a testament to the power of unity, faith, and generosity. As one participant remarked, "This is what Christmas is all about — sharing joy and being a light for others."

This mission would not have been possible without the unwavering support of volunteers, benefactors, and the entire SFA community. Together, we witnessed God's love in action, bringing hope and happiness to those in need. May this Christmas season continue to inspire everyone to serve with love, humility, and compassion.

Sharing love and peace at the Little Sisters of the Poor

CHERAS: The halls of the Little Sisters of the Poor (LSP) echoed with the sounds of joyful Christmas carols, as altar servers from the Church of the Sacred Heart (SHC) and Chapel of Our Lady of Good Health (OLGH) together with the Legion of Mary visited the elderly residents to spread the Christmas cheer.

The day kicked off with a lively carol session. The young altar servers, joined by the devoted Legion of Mary, sang beloved Christmas songs, filling the air with festive cheer. The elderly residents were visibly touched by the presence and energy of the group.

One elderly resident shared her gratitude, saying, "You all made my Christmas a great beginning, come again and I love you." Her words, simple yet profound, spoke to the essence of the morning — how small acts of kindness can have an immeasurable impact

on the hearts of others.

Thereafter, the group joined the residents for a joyous cake-cutting ceremony, a sweet celebration where smiles and laughter filled the room as both the young and the elderly exchanged stories and reflected on the meaning of Christmas.

The celebration continued with a tour of the LSP compound, led by one of the nuns. The group explored the peaceful surroundings, taking in the beautiful gardens and cozy corners where the elderly spend their days. It was a chance to learn more about the incredible work being done at LSP, as well as the meaningful lives being nurtured within its walls.

The day was filled with emotional moments and deep connections, marking a beautiful start to the Christmas season. As the group left, they carried with them not just the joy of the holiday, but also the love and warmth



Sr Marie cutting the cake to celebrate the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

shared between generations.

Christmas, as it turned out, began with much more than decorations and gifts. It began with the happiness, joy, and kindness of commu-

nity — and for the residents of LSP, this visit from the SHC and OLGH Altar Servers and the Legion of Mary was a Christmas gift they won't soon forget.



Spreading joy and compassion across faiths

SUBANG: The Parish Ministry of Ecumenism and Interreligious Affairs (PMEIA) of the Church of St Thomas More (STM) ended the year with an Inter Faith Tea Party on December 14.

Participants were from the Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, Baha'i, Sikh and other Christian faith communities. This is the fourth year STM has hosted such a gathering which is looked forward to each year.

Archbishop Julian Leow and YB Michelle Ng, ADUN for Subang Jaya, stayed for tea and mingled with the guests. In a short briefing before tea Parish priest, Msgr Patrick Boudville, welcomed everyone and was pleased to see the increase in participation this year compared to previous years. This was a result of the growth in

fraternity and relationships established over time.

PMEIA chairperson, Angeline Lesslar, PMEIA reviewed the growth of this ministry over the past six years which led to the formation of an Inter Faith Council that meets regularly to plan activities. The council strives to make a difference in Subang Jaya through inclusiveness and the building of bridges among religions. Though religious beliefs and practices are different, through mutual respect, all can live in peace and harmony as children of God.

Guests were taken on a guided tour of the Church before tea. A Hawaiian theme was adopted this year complete with a steel guitar and hula dancers on ukeles for entertainment.

Celebrating unity among religious leaders

KUALA LUMPUR: People from different faiths came together, warmly greeting one another, like old friends on December 17.

They were leaders from the numerous houses of worship in Brickfields who had over the decades established close ties with one another.

More than 60 leaders from eight religious groups attended the Christmas Interreligious Fellowship and Dinner at the Church of Our Lady of Fatima. It was organised by the Parish Ministry of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (PMEIA) led by Ruben Soosay.

The leaders included those from Christian denominations, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Baha'i followers, Taoists, and from the Sikh community.

One of them was Ven Datuk Dr K Sri Dhammaratana from the Buddhist Maha Vihara. During dinner, he told those at his table that he used to catch tilapia decades ago at OLF each time the church grounds got flooded.

This and other anecdotes were shared during dinner, with some sharing about how they worked together on inter-faith projects, and the closeness of their relationship with one another.

Dr Amir Farid Isahak, of Insaf, a non-profit organisation that provides technical and humanitarian relief to people in need, described the closeness of his relationship with Sardar V. Harcharan. The two were founding members of Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism.

Archbishop Julian Leow had earlier in his speech said that people from different faiths coming together was no longer something that occurred naturally and frequently.

"We have to organise inter-faith gatherings (these days). It should (instead) be part and parcel of being a Malaysian. We can be an example of how to take inter-faith gathering to a different level."



The religious leaders meeting at the Church of Our Lady of Fatima.

Celebrating 30 years of 'Spiritus Legis'

PETALING JAYA: The Catholic Lawyers' Society of Kuala Lumpur marked its 30th anniversary with a dinner and dance event on December 7, 2024, held at Hilton Petaling Jaya.

The evening, themed *Celebrating 30 Years of Spiritus Legis*, saw guests dressed elegantly in white and gold, echoing the festive spirit of the Christmas season.

Among the distinguished attendees were Archbishop Julian Leow; apostolic nuncio to Malaysia, Archbishop Wojciech Zaluski; minister and consul general of the Republic of the Philippines, Roussel R. Reyes; consul general of the Republic of Vanuatu, Dr Henry Savarimuthu and his wife, May Phuah and YB Teresa Kok.

The celebration commenced with



Commemorating the 30th Anniversary of the Catholic Lawyers' Society with a cake-cutting ceremony by current and past presidents and founding members.

a rendition of *When A Child is Born*, followed by a lively performance of *Winter Wonderland* by a group of children.

Speeches from key figures, including society president Stanislaus Cross, Archbishop Julian,

ecclesiastical assistant Fr Gregory Chan, and organising chairman Francis Pereira, resonated deeply with attendees.

This was followed by a photo montage honouring the society's founders, past presidents, and mem-

bers who have passed away and a cake-cutting ceremony.

Emcee Simon D'Cruz kept spirits high throughout the night, culminating in an exciting lucky draw that awarded prizes to ten winners, including a grand prize of a three-day,

two-night stay in Langkawi, sponsored by the consul general of the Republic of Vanuatu.

The entertainment continued with live music from the band *La Viva*.

Present were also children and youth from the Myanmar Community Learning Centre, sponsored by senior members of the society. Each child received a goodie bag.

The society continues its tradition of inclusivity, having previously invited members of the deaf community and Orang Asli students to participate in its festivities. Throughout its 30 years, the Catholic Lawyers' Society has successfully raised funds for critical initiatives, including child protection projects and support for organisations providing care for the homeless living with HIV/AIDS.

Sharing the joy of Christmas

KULIM, Kedah: Parishioners of the Church of Sacred Heart Jesus joyously organised a Christmas Sharing Party for the marginalised and underprivileged last month. This special charity event was dedicated to spreading the true spirit of Christmas by supporting the poor and bringing joy to everyone.

The event, made successful by dedicated volunteers, included the preparation of groceries and Christmas gifts for over seventy children and elderly attendees.

The event began with a warm welcome and opening remarks, followed by an opening prayer by Bro Michael Mejoery Simon.

The festivities featured a vibrant performance by the youth group, carol singing by the Senior Citizens

and a grand entrance by Santa Claus.

Adding to the fun, various games were organised, ensuring active participation and memorable moments for everyone.

This celebration truly embodied the spirit of Christmas, bringing happiness to the less fortunate and fostering a sense of togetherness in the community.

Parish priest, Msgr Henry Rajoo, extended his heartfelt gratitude to all parishioners for their full support and active engagement in organising the event. "Your collective effort has made it a resounding success. Thank you once again for your dedication and participation," he said.

The event concluded with a final blessing, followed by a luncheon. **John Kuppasawary**

Call for unity, harmony at high-tea reception

SUBANG JAYA: Transport Minister Anthony Loke urged Malaysians to celebrate their differences and cherish unity this Christmas, emphasising the importance of maintaining harmony despite the country's challenges. Speaking at the Christmas high-tea reception organised by the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) at the Full Gospel Tabernacle on December 21, Loke highlighted the need for national unity, especially in light of the economic, political, and religious difficulties Malaysia faces.

"We must celebrate our diversity together. This is crucial to maintaining Malaysia's unity," Loke said, adding that there are forces attempting to divide the nation. "We cannot allow any force to destabilise or divide us," he asserted, stressing the importance of bridging divides not only between races and religions but also between



Religious and government representatives at the high-tea reception.

Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah and Sarawak.

Loke also reiterated government policies, such as the extension of the airfare cap during festive seasons, now covering four days instead of three, to support travel between Peninsular and East Malaysia.

As Christians in Malaysia celebrate the season, Loke encouraged them to celebrate differences and pray for a better future for the

country. The reception also featured speeches by CFM chairman Very Rev Cor Episcopa Philip Thomas and performances by gospel choirs.

The CFM's yearly high-tea event, which brings together the Catholic Church, the Council of Churches of Malaysia, and the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship, celebrates the love, peace, and joy of Christmas, symbolising the birthday of Jesus.

A night of legends for Magnificat

KUALA LUMPUR: Twenty sports legends gathered to support a noble cause recently.

They were joined by 360 attendees for the Magnificat Dinner & Dance, themed *Sports Legends in Motion*. The event aimed to raise funds for the community centre of the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist.

Irene Ramachandran, a member of the organising committee, expressed her delight at seeing such a diverse mix of attendees coming together for a meaningful cause.

Among the sports legends were football icon Datuk Santokh Singh, former track star and two-time Sportswoman of the Year Datuk Marina Chin and her husband, and

ex-national rugby player Jagjit Singh. The event also featured Double Olympian sprinter Major-General (Retired) Datuk Sharudin Ali, Asia's fastest sprinter, Tan Sri M. Jegathesan, and Olympian Lt Cmdr (Retired) Datuk K. Selvaratnam.

Distinguished attendees included former High Court judge, Tan Sri V.C. George, and former Royal Malaysian Navy chief, Admiral (Retired) Tan Sri K. Thanabalasingam.

Tunku Imran Tuanku Ja'afar, former president of the Olympic Council of Malaysia, captivated the audience with his renditions of *The Young Ones* and a medley of classics such as *Cotton Fields*, *You Are My*

Sunshine, and *When The Saints Go Marching In*, displaying the charisma he once had as a national squash champion.

Stand-up comedian Rizal Van Geyzel broke the ice with his rib-tickling antics before former beauty queen Datuk Yasmin Yusuff, invited everyone to the dance floor.

Parish priest, Fr Gerard Theraviam, showcased his "greet, walk and dance" routine to the infectious tunes of the evergreen band *Small Stones* and DJ Ghandi, while Deacon Jonathan Rao relished the nostalgic 70s hits. "The music was just right and inspired me to join the fun, dancing to the beats infused with Malay, Indian, and East Malaysian elements. It was simply cool and enjoyable," he shared.

Earlier in the evening, Fr Gerard expressed gratitude to all for their contributions of time, effort, and funds. He noted the cathedral's honour in celebrating the sports legends and appreciated their ongoing support for worthwhile causes.

The organising team rejoiced over the event's success, having collectively raised RM193,880.92. **Bob Ho**



The attendees posing for a group photo.

KUBM, youth organise get together in PD

KLANG: The *Komuniti Umat Bahasa Malaysia* (KUBM) and the Youth Ministry of the Church of the Holy Redeemer (HRC) recently went on a trip to Golden Sands Baptist Assembly, Port Dickson.

The trip was made possible by the generous contributions from various fundraising events held earlier in the year. During the getaway, participants engaged in a variety of activities organized by both the KUBM and Youth Ministry, foster-

ing connection and camaraderie. From beach fun to friendly competitions, there was never a dull moment.

The highlight of the trip was the evening Mass celebrated by parish priest, Fr Andrew Kooi, which provided a moment of reflection and spiritual unity.

By the end of the vacation, everyone left feeling uplifted, content, and closer than ever, cherishing the memories made together. **Matthew Anthony**



The KUBM members and youth in Port Dickson.



The guests enjoying themselves dancing during the dinner.

Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur signs pledge to become ecological

Elvina Fernandez

KUALA LUMPUR: In a significant move towards ecological stewardship, the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur has made a pledge to become an ecological parish, reaffirming its commitment to sustainability and ecological justice. This initiative follows the signing of the Ecological Diocese Protocols by the bishops in 2023, marking a collective step towards integrating ecological spirituality and action within the Catholic community.

The pledge, as articulated by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia - Singapore - Brunei (CBCMSB), emphasises a holistic approach to ecology. The nine Malaysian bishops signed pledges to make their dioceses ecological, during the Catholic Bishops' Conference at MAJODI Centre, July 13.

The pledge states:

"The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, hereby declares its pledge to be an Ecological Diocese in perpetuity, living out a deep ecological spirituality and advancing ecological justice and resilience for all creation by pursuing decarbonised pathways and the building of community and earth resilience, according to the Ecological Diocese Protocols appended to this pledge, to the best of its ability and creativity within local circumstances."

The pledge was signed in the form of a certificate, with several appendices listing out the ecological diocese protocols in detail with accompanying Ecological Parish Protocols, self-monitoring forms and other supporting documents to help each diocese and parish make the transition towards becoming fully ecological. Each bishop was also given a pen drive filled with resources produced by the ECCJ-MSB members over the years to support ecological conversion and transformation including (flyers, bookmarks, videos, etc.) at the diocesan and parish levels. These resources were also shared with Cardinal William Goh of Singapore and Fr Robert Leong of Brunei.

The pledges made by all the bishops of



Fr Andrew Manickam OFM Cap praying as the tree is being planted.

Malaysia truly represent a milestone for the Roman Catholic Church in Malaysia, showing it is united in taking leadership and accountability, and is a clarion call for all the Catholic faithful to respond to the global emergency with urgency. It is timely as well, given that we are in our seventh year since *Laudato Si'* was released and Pope Francis repeatedly reminds us to "hear the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor".

Each parish within the archdiocese is encouraged to make a similar pledge, contributing to the broader mission of ecological transformation. Several parishes have already launched their pledges, either last year or this year, demonstrating a growing commitment to sustainable practices.

The Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, through its Creation Justice Ministry (CJM), has outlined three primary focus areas to guide this transformation: Leadership in Ecological Transformation, Ecological Spirituality, Ecological Education, and Integration Ecological Accountability.

As part of this initiative, parishioners are invited to take personal pledges towards sustainability, encouraging a collective effort in reducing environmental impact and fostering ecological awareness.

As we journey together towards a more sustainable future, the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur's commitment to ecological justice serves as a beacon of hope and a call to action for all faithful to care for our common home.

By embracing these protocols, the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur is not only fostering a sustainable environment but also nurturing a spiritually rich community that lives in harmony with God's creation. Let's unite in this mission and make a lasting impact for generations to come.

Parishes requiring assistance in setting up their CJM ministries can contact representatives Marilyn Menezes Simon (017-328-6299), Ida Chin (012-387-6231), Fr Andrew Manickam OFM Cap, Ronald Hor (012-305-2466) or Melina Yeoh (017-871-8283) for guidance.

Church of Our Lady of Fatima declared ecological parish

KUALA LUMPUR: The Church of Our Lady of Fatima in Brickfields has made a significant commitment to ecological stewardship by being declared an ecological parish. This milestone was announced by parish priest, Fr Andrew Manickam OFM Cap, after the 10.30am Mass on Sunday, December 8.

"We are committed to adhering to ecological protocols, living out ecological spirituality, and advancing ecological justice of creation."

In celebration of this declaration, Fr Andrew planted two trees, symbolising the parish's dedication to environmental responsibility. The parish is set to implement numerous initiatives that strengthen the connection between faith and ecological responsibility.

Efforts to reduce, recycle, and reuse will be intensified, alongside new initiatives to foster sustainability. Some of the initiatives in action include reducing printed bulletins, minimising the use of tissue paper, recycling cooking oil, and encouraging parishioners to bring their own water bottles/reusable containers/utensils for meals.

The parish's commitment is a testament to the growing movement within the archdiocese, encouraging parishioners to embrace practices that support ecological justice, including reducing carbon footprints, supporting renewable energy, and participating in community resilience projects.

To support parishioners in taking the step forward, there are plans to install water dispensers, eliminating the need for bottled water usage, further reinforcing the parish's commitment to sustainability.

This proactive approach by the Church of Our Lady of Fatima aims to inspire both parishioners and the wider community to embrace ecological responsibility and stewardship, reflecting a deeper integration of faith and care for creation. **Elvina Fernandez**

Letters to Editor

Dear Editor,

On November 24, 2024 I had the privilege of speaking to the laity and counsellors of the Catholic Counselling Ministry of the Diocese of Malacca Johore on the topic, *Reclaiming Joy: Healing Childhood Wounds and Restoring Peace and Serenity*. I was surprised to find that over 80 people registered for the event. Besides the 19 counsellors and para-counsellors, the rest of the audience believed in an obvious human issue, child emotional and physical abuse.

As a counselling psychologist, I have specialised in trauma-related therapy for many years, but this was the first time in decades that I'd had the opportunity to present to a crowd of people interested in

Healing childhood wounds

their own healing or the healing of others they know who have lived with the results of trauma. The audience was fully engaged, both during the early psychoeducational session and during the interactive portion of the day. Throughout the day, members of the audience approached me to talk about their own personal traumatic experiences and the ramifications for their life quality.

The culminating experience of the day was showcasing the effect of a trauma therapy session, for the sake of both the laity and the skill levels of the Catholic Counselling Centre staff, by doing a live session with a member of the audience who volunteered to share her own post-traumatic issues with me. I am always humbled by the courage that it takes for

a person to sit onstage and divulge life secrets in front of a large group, and so it behoove me to become immersed in the therapeutic relationship with any volunteer. It is a great learning experience for counsellors to see an effective therapy session in action and to have the opportunity to discuss the session's impact, as well as the reasoning behind the counselling techniques and methods I employ.

The lively discussion after the first counselling session, a video from my personal library of my professional counselling sessions, was carried by counsellors and audience members, illuminating the attendees' intense interest. Because of a lack of time after the live session, audience members were invited to write to me after the day was finished with comments

and questions, which many did. It is obvious that many in the audience were moved and motivated to attend to their own ongoing therapeutic needs.

If I could engage in future therapeutic conversations with audiences from the Catholic Dioceses across Malaysia, it would be a most rewarding and fulfilling addition to my professional career. I want to thank Fr Norris Seenivasan, SJ (Head of Counselling Ministry of the Diocese of Malacca Johore) and the professional team from the Diocese of Malacca Johore Counselling Centres for organising the Nov 24 event.

Dr Louis Downs
Professor Emeritus
California State University,
Sacramento



Send your letters to ► letterseditor@herald.com.my

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

Sri Lankan cardinal bans girls from being altar servers

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka: Nearly two months after it was written, a letter from Sri Lankan Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith of Colombo *pic* has been published, banning girls from serving as altar servers in his archdiocese. In the October 22, 2024, letter to priests,



His decision to ban girl altar servers has raised eyebrows, particularly as Pope Francis lifted the ban on girls serving in 2021. Pope Francis's 2021 decree formalized the ability of both women and girls to serve as lectors and altar servers, a practice long established in Western countries but

not previously formalised.

Ranjith stated that some parishes in the Archdiocese of Colombo had appointed girls to serve at the altar, which he views as a potential pathway to the priesthood. He emphasized that only young boys should take on this role, as altar service is one of the key sources of vocations to the priesthood in Sri Lanka.

Ranjith argued that since women cannot be ordained as priests, the practice of having girls serve at the altar would diminish the number of candidates entering the seminary. He instructed priests to comply with the decision and stated that it should not be altered at their discretion.

The Cardinal's stance is a reflection of his more conservative theological views, which have earned him the nickname "little Ratzinger," due to his similarity to the late Pope Benedict XVI.

Ranjith's ban challenges these reforms, as it adheres to the traditional belief that the role of altar server is tied to priestly vocations, which are exclusively male in the Catholic Church. While Pope Francis has advocated for the inclusion of women in leadership roles within the Church, the question of women's participation in altar service remains a contentious issue in some parts of the global south, which tend to be more conservative.

In his 2021 ruling, Pope Francis allowed local bishops the discretion to decide how to implement these roles, depending on the needs of evangelization in their territories. Thus, Ranjith's decision to ban girls from serving as altar servers aligns with his interpretation of these guidelines, despite the broader changes within the Church. **CruX**

King Charles III attends Advent service of pontifical charity

LONDON: King Charles III attended a special Advent service December 17 at the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Mayfair, London. The event, co-hosted by Pontifical Charity Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), celebrated the resilience of Christian communities and marked the 10th anniversary of the Islamic State

group invasion of Mosul and the Nineveh Plains in northern Iraq.

During the service, the king met with representatives of the London-based Iraqi Christian diaspora, including those who had endured persecution and displacement when the militants took control of the Nineveh Plains.

He also interacted with mem-



Britain's King Charles III greets a man after attending an Advent service celebrating the strength and courage of faith communities at the Church of the Immaculate Conception in London December 17, 2024. (OSV News photo/Arthur Edwards pool via Reuters)

Cardinal Charles Bo bids farewell as FABC president

BANGKOK: Myanmar's Cardinal Charles Maung Bo of Yangon has issued a farewell message as he concludes his second three-year term as President of the Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC).

Reflecting on his tenure, he expressed profound gratitude and humility, highlighting the collective growth, learning, and commitment to Christian values that have marked their journey together.

Cardinal Bo emphasised that the FABC's mission has been guided by Jesus and a Christological vision for Asia, leading to significant achievements, including the ongoing synodal journey fostering collaboration, dialogue, and mutual understanding.

He also commended the FABC's engagement in meaningful conversations that have led to tangible actions, ensuring that faith remains relevant in the contemporary world. Looking back on the last six years, he noted much pro-

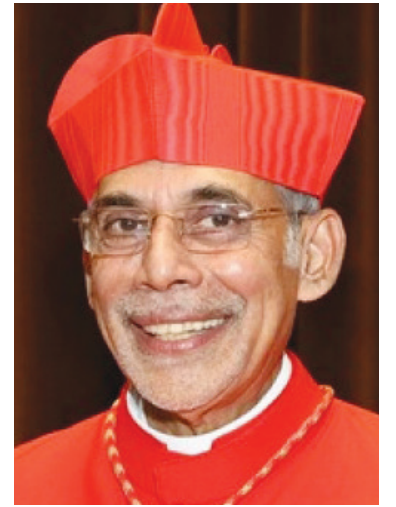


Cardinal Charles Maung Bo

gress and accomplishment.

Cardinal Bo warmly welcomed his successor, Cardinal Phillip Neri, Archbishop of Goa e Damão, India, praising his intellectual skills, prophetic leadership, and Christocentric vision, which he believes will usher in a new era of progress.

As his term ends, Cardinal Bo



Cardinal Phillip Neri

thanked everyone for their dedication, contributions, and support, wishing them a joyful Christmas and a prosperous New Year. He expressed confidence that the legacy they have built together will endure, and that the FABC will continue to grow stronger in the Spirit under the new leadership.

Vatican News

Formation programme equips young Indonesian priests for modern challenges



Participants of the ongoing formation programme under UNIO Indonesia's MAM Region gather for a motivational and leadership training session in Makassar. (ucanews photo)

MAKASSAR: The Indonesian Diocesan Priests Association (UNIO Indonesia or UNINDO) has successfully conducted an ongoing formation programme for 27 priests from the Makassar, Amboina, and Manado dioceses in the MAM region.

The programme, organised by the Makassar Archdiocese's UNINDO, targeted diocesan priests ordained for less than ten years. Fr Albert Arina, head of UNIO Makassar, shared that the event featured priests from Manado, Amboina, and Makassar dioceses.

Facilitated by Ferdinand Hindiarito, dean of Soegijapranata Catholic University, the sessions focused on personal spiritual

development and adapting to the modern world. The programme aligns with Pope John Paul II's *Pastores Dabo Vobis* apostolic exhortation, emphasising the necessity of ongoing priestly formation.

The programme began with a Eucharistic celebration celebrated by Bishop John Liku Ada', who shared his challenges as a young priest in the Makassar Archdiocese, where diocesan priests were scarce.

Participants, including Fr Ardianto Allolayuk and Fr Rikon Patiana, expressed gratitude for the programme, highlighting the importance of prayer and pastoral work in their priestly lives.

LiCAS News

For the right to an education: Reimagining the Church's mission

Pope's prayer intention for January



PRAYER PRISM

Fr Fabian Dicom

As we step into January 2025, Pope Francis calls us to pray for a renewal in how we think about education. The Pope's prayer intention for this month is: "Let us pray for migrants, refugees, and those affected by war, that their right to an education, which is necessary to build a better world, might always be respected." This intention highlights the importance of education for all, not just for children and the young but for people of all ages, as a pathway to hope and dignity. How do we, as a Church in Malaysia, respond to this urgent call?

A Challenge Rooted in the Gospel

In Malaysia, this intention holds deep relevance, resonating with the challenges faced by our society. Our nation's diversity is both a strength and a challenge, as disparities persist. Migrant and refugee communities, including stateless children, are often denied access to quality education. These groups remain invisible to a system that fails to recognize their worth.

As individuals and as Church, we must ask: How have we responded to this reality? Are we fulfilling the Gospel's call to love our neighbour and defend human dignity, or have we grown comfortable with an education system favouring the privileged?

Rethinking Our Legacy

Christian education in Malaysia has a proud history of forming leaders and building communities through mission schools. These schools, once vibrant centres of holistic education rooted in Gospel values, have over time lost much of their autonomy due to the political agendas of those in power, which led to policy changes and laws that shifted control away from the Church. Today, key aspects such as curriculum, teacher placement, school administration and admittance are largely determined by the Ministry of Education, leaving the Church with minimal influence over their direction and ethos.

The Church now faces a crossroads: Will we continue to direct much of our resources and attention toward schools and institutions that primarily serve those already advantaged, or will we reimagine our role as champions of education for the marginalised? While certain dioceses have made commendable efforts to provide learning centres and programmes for migrants and refugees, these initiatives remain insufficient given the scale of the need. Malaysia hosts over 180,000 refugees and asylum seekers registered with the UNHCR, many of whom are denied access to formal education due to their legal and economic status.

Scriptural Foundations

Proverbs 31:8-9 calls us to "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute." Educa-



tion is one way we can defend the dignity of the poor, migrants, and refugees, granting them access to knowledge and opportunity. Hosea 4:6 speaks to the devastating effects of rejecting true knowledge: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." While this verse addresses spiritual ignorance, it also carries a broader lesson. Knowledge — understood as both wisdom and the understanding of God's law — is essential for the well-being of individuals and communities. Denying access to education, particularly for marginalised groups, perpetuates cycles of poverty, exclusion, and disempowerment. As a society, we are called to break these cycles by ensuring that all people can learn, grow, and flourish in both spirit and mind. In this way, true knowledge leads to life, justice, and dignity for all.

Implicitly, the call of the Pope's prayer intention echoes the teachings of Jesus, who spent His ministry empowering and restoring dignity to the marginalised. Whether welcoming the Samaritan woman, healing the sick, or teaching the crowds, Jesus consistently uplifted those excluded by society. As His followers, we are called to do the same — offering education as a path to dignity and hope for all, regardless of their background.

Insights from Church Documents

The Church's teachings on education provide a good foundation for understanding its importance as a universal right rooted in human dignity.

The Vatican II document on the Declaration on Christian Education — *Gravissimum Educationis*, highlights this by declaring that all people, regardless of race, condition, or age, possess an inalienable right to an education that aligns with their ultimate purpose (n 1). This call extends especially to those who are marginalised, urging Christians to pay special attention to those "who are poor in the goods of this world" (n 9). Education is

thus not a privilege reserved for a few but a fundamental necessity for the flourishing of every person.

Pope Francis, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, connects the Church's mission to serve the marginalised with the very heart of our faith in Christ, who "became poor and was always close to the poor and the outcast" (n 186). This faith compels the Church to work for the integral development of society's most neglected members, emphasizing that such work is not peripheral but central to the Gospel. The Pope, further challenges us to go beyond addressing immediate needs like food and shelter, envisioning a society where everyone enjoys "general temporal welfare and prosperity" (n 192). This vision includes ensuring access to education, healthcare, and dignified employment - elements that not only fulfil basic needs but also allow individuals to express and enhance their dignity. The call to justice in education aligns with this broader vision, emphasizing that it is not just an act of charity but a necessary step toward creating a just and inclusive society.

A New Vision for Catholic Education

The Pope's intention urges us to create a bold and inclusive vision for education that prioritises the marginalised. Reimagining Catholic education means shifting from serving the elite to walking with the poor, the displaced, and the forgotten.

What might this look like in practice?

- **Innovative Partnerships:** Collaborate with NGOs, civil society, and other faith-based organisations to establish community schools, vocational training centres, and scholarship programmes for marginalised groups.

- **Alternative Models:** Develop mobile classrooms, skill-based learning programmes, and holistic educational spaces tailored to the needs of refugees, stateless children, and the urban poor.

- **Parish Involvement:** Equip parishes to be

hubs of learning by offering language classes, tutoring, and mentoring programmes for vulnerable communities.

A Call for Personal Commitment

This mission is not solely the work of the Church as an institution. Each of us, as Catholics, is called to make education a priority in our lives and communities. Here are concrete ways you can contribute:

1. **Advocate:** Speak up for inclusive policies that grant all children, including migrants and refugees, access to education. Use your voice in parish gatherings, social media, and community platforms to raise awareness.
2. **Volunteer:** Offer your time and skills by teaching or mentoring children and youth in need. Many communities or NGOs run programmes where your talents can make a difference.
3. **Contribute Resources:** Pool funds or donate to scholarships and learning initiatives for marginalised communities. Even small contributions can change lives.
4. **Foster Parish Engagement:** Encourage your parish to create or support educational programmes for the poor and marginalised, making it a core part of its mission.
5. **Lead by Example:** Show Christ's love in action by supporting and uplifting the excluded, reminding them of their worth and potential.

Hope for the Future

Reimagining Catholic education is not just a strategy but a spiritual call to embody Christ's love and justice. The Pope's prayer intention inspires us to take bold steps forward — building schools, programmes, and spaces that empower the poor and uplift the marginalised. Let us unite in prayer and action, trusting that our efforts will make education a beacon of hope for all.

Fr Fabian Dicom is the National Director of Caritas Malaysia

Caritas MJD's mission to serve and transform lives

SABAH: Beyond Borders is an experiential service-learning mission initiated by Caritas MJD, designed to provide volunteers with the opportunity to support underprivileged communities beyond the Malacca Johore Diocese. This programme aims to inspire transformative experiences, enabling participants to embody their faith through action while gaining deep insights into the daily lives and challenges faced by these communities.

Recently, a group of volunteers had an experiential exposure in Sabah. As the main organiser and sponsor, Caritas MJD, collaborated closely with the Church of the Holy Cross Toboh in Tambunan,

Sabah (a Caritas affiliate), to create a safe, meaningful, and impactful experience for all volunteers. During their time at Rumah Kanak-Kanak Bondulu — located next to Holy Cross Church Toboh and run by the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (FSIC)—the Caritas Beyond Borders team orchestrated a variety of enriching activities for the children. These activities included interactive icebreakers and games to foster connections, as well as relaxing movie afternoons that conveyed important values through film. Volunteers also offered engaging basic English lessons, making language learning enjoyable and accessible.

A memorable highlight of the trip was



A Caritas member tutoring the children.

an excursion to the stunning Mahua Waterfall, where the children could revel in the beauty of nature. They also explored the local “tamu” morning market, purchasing breakfast items to immerse themselves in the local culture. Committed to making a difference, the team initiated fundraising efforts to provide food supplies for families in rural hillside villages and to replace faulty equipment like fans, taps, a chiller, and a projector at the centre. These initiatives embody the spirit of Caritas Beyond Borders, cultivating meaningful connections and addressing the ongoing needs of the community.

This mission trip served as an excellent

platform for volunteers to deepen their understanding of empathy, resilience, and responsibility. By stepping outside their comfort zones, they broadened their perspectives, experienced diverse lifestyles, and gained life lessons that will resonate long after the trip concludes. Through these experiences, Beyond Borders harnesses the power of the volunteers’ presence, resources, time, and talents to create a significant impact in the lives of those they serve, promoting growth, compassion, and a renewed commitment to service.



Turn to Page 17 for some sharing by the participants.



The Caritas MJD team.

Volunteers go on a transformative journey to Amritsar

From November 22 to December 1, a group of volunteers went on a mission trip to Amritsar, Punjab, India. It was organised by the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development (AOHD) as part of their newly launched Missions initiative.

The mission commenced with a celebration of the Eighth World Day of the Poor at St Mary’s Catholic Church in Gumtala on Nov 24. The team sponsored and served lunch to 450 individuals who gathered after the morning Mass. Embracing the Punjabi tradition of *Langar*, where everyone sits together to share a meal, the volunteers fostered an atmosphere of equality and community.

After the communal meal, the team visited the local Missionaries of Charity, where the Sisters care for 19 women with various disabilities. It was inspiring to witness the comprehensive support provided to their small community, ranging from a chapel to a garden of vegetables and fruit trees. This visit was a reminder that the love expressed by these devoted women reflects the enduring spirit of St Teresa of Calcutta, whose mission to serve the marginalised continues through their unwavering devotion and nurturing hands.

Pingalwara, founded by Bhagat Puran Singh, is a 35-acre charitable institution dedicated to caring for the disabled, ill, impoverished, and marginalised. It offers a variety of facilities, including schools for children with special needs, a prosthetic



The volunteers assisting a paraplegic patient during physical therapy.

centre, and a natural farm. Singh’s lifelong mission began with an act of kindness toward an abandoned disabled person, which grew into Pingalwara’s expansive services for the vulnerable.

During their time at Pingalwara, the volunteers were warmly welcomed by Dr Inderjit Kaur, the Patron President of the society. The hospitality and kindness of the staff inspired them to connect with the Pingalwara family. Despite cultural and religious differences, they discovered that love and compassion transcend all barriers, forging profound bonds through shared experiences.

Each day was filled with activities.

Volunteers assisted in caring for children with special needs, providing gentle massages and sharing laughter through songs and games. They helped rehabilitate paraplegic patients, gaining insights into the importance of physical therapy in restoring hope. In the prosthetics workshop, they participated in crafting limbs for individuals from all walks of life. Engaging with adults at the special needs school enriched their experience with dancing and joyful conversations, while assisting in the central kitchen nourished not only bodies but also spirits, as they prepared meals for over 1,500 people daily.



A volunteer interacting with the women.

Though their time at Pingalwara was brief, the bonds formed were deep and lasting. Each volunteer left with a piece of their heart intertwined with this remarkable community.

The trip was an awakening, teaching the volunteers that love, compassion, and selfless service can transcend cultural divides. Inspired by Pope Francis’s call to be pilgrims of hope, the volunteers returned with a renewed commitment to kindness and service, embodying the Sikh principle of ‘seva.’ Their journey exemplified how small acts of love can create lasting change and inspire future generations. **Magdalene and Bibiana**

Change and discernment

I hate New Year's resolutions. Though in our Malaysian culture, it has been proven time and time again that the good intentions of the English new year are quickly overridden by the largesse and consumerism of the Chinese Lunar New Year, people persist in outlining things that they feel they will manage to accomplish in the next 365 days.

Market research and American data specialist Statista tracked new year resolution-making among the American population and has listed saving more money, eating healthier, exercising more, losing weight and spending more time with friends and family as the top five goals for the coming year. The Malaysian equivalent, though unpolled, is probably very similar.

The reason I dislike hearing about people's resolutions is the fact that these goals are rarely backed up with a road map of how they will be achieved. It's almost as if people think that speaking of the endgame will guarantee results. Having been there and done it, I have found that the only way resolution-setting has a whisper of hope of success is if it is backed by discernment and has faith and God in the mix.

Everything I have grandiosely proclaimed that I would achieve in the course of a year has derailed because it was driven solely by myself. Basing everything on the sole power of Me is a guaranteed way to crash and burn, because we are flawed, failed and fallen people. Yet the trainwreck that is the human race was created by God, for God, and in the image and likeness of God.

So, if you are going to make a resolution, remember that the presence or absence of God in that journey will make the difference between success and failure. This is because change - real, long-lasting change - begins with conversion. Only when a person is convicted wholly does conversion take place.

From a Catholic standpoint, I also want

to point out that conversion is never planned; most of the time it is a sudden, bolt-out-of-the-blue occurrence that is not tied to a season or a calendar date. While most biblical conversions are immediate, life-changing occurrences (think Saul of Tarsus' blinding on the road to Damascus in Acts 9:1-9, the Philippian jailor in Acts 16:30 who was converted by Paul and Silas, and Zacchaeus the tax collector in Luke 19:1-10), Scripture also tells of steady, slow-burn conversions which begin slowly, is nurtured over a period of Scripture reading and faithful adherence to the law, and then fanned into a consistent, unwavering flame of faith by one fateful encounter (the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:38, and Lydia, the dealer in purple cloth in Acts 16:14-15).

A catalyst is nearly always necessary for change to happen, but unfortunately for most diet-minded people, desiring to be a size 30 instead of 40 is never as pressing when fresh pretzels beckon, or when you've had a stressful day fuelled only by hard-boiled eggs and carrot sticks. So, if you are thinking about setting resolutions pertaining to your weight this year, may I suggest gaining something as you lose those kilos?

If you are dreading cutting out fancy coffees and pretty pieces of cake, how about buying them as a treat for the colleague who always packs their meal to work, and never joins the others for lunches in their bid to save money? You can find out the person's birthday and give them a gourmet treat.

Or if you decide to replace your food with diet shakes, how about dropping off a 10 kilo bag of rice to a soup kitchen, or sponsoring the cost of restaurant meals you did not eat



Word in Progress

KAREN-MICHAELA TAN

in vegetables and pantry staples for a street feeding enterprise? This way you are not working on your weight loss in a void. You can still purchase the things you like, but instead of consuming the calories, you spread goodness.

Fasting, especially done intermittent-style, also helps to keep one calorie-deficit, and if paired with prayer, will do wonders with the dieting state of mind which often is much too taken up with thoughts of the foods we deny ourselves.

A friend of mine made it a habit to say the Divine Mercy chaplet each time he felt the urge to snack. As the pedantic code writer he was, he counted every chaplet he said. Over the course of 2024 he said 513 chaplets and lost 14 kilos. He has also become less compulsive and irritable from the infusion of prayer. This year he will incorporate exercise into his diet practice and jog in place for the length of a Hail Mary each time he wants to eat something he does not need to.

When setting any kind of resolution, it is also helpful to have some discernment about why you've chosen a particular aspect of your life to work on. As a career overeater, I can tell you my issue with food is not the lack of control but the amount of stress in my life. The two are co-related and if I tackled only the eating with calorie restrictions and food group control, I would invariably be brought down because I was not addressing the fact that I did not seek help, sympathy or emotional support in times of stress. When I did call a friend instead of eating a box of breadsticks, chances are the need for snacks would cease.

Therefore, if overspending is an issue you want to work on this year, you will need to be honest and track your emotional state

when you are tempted to add things in your online shopping cart, or go to the bookstore, or wherever you find your emotional comfort items. Good sense flies out the window when we are emotional, and it is only when we identify the emotional triggers that we can begin to realize we use retail therapy as a substitute for the things our hearts really crave.

Last year a friend saved RM700 every month by realising that emotions relating to a particular time of the month (no, it was not hormonal) caused her to whip out her credit card. When she started tracking her feelings, and the dates of her most overboard purchases, she discovered her trigger, and by sticking to the plan of calling one of three neighbours and friends to either talk, or go out for a walk together, she managed to break a cycle of credit card debt.

Additionally, to replace a negative emotion and action with a positive one, she adopted a family through her parish's St Vincent De Paul Society. She uses some of the money she no longer spends frivolously on keyboard lessons for a child from that family, who loves music, has a natural ear for it, but never had the ability to pursue it because of financial constraints.

Amazing things can happen when we stop looking to self-comfort, and search instead for ways to be the comforter. Taking a line out of Saint Francis' Prayer for Peace is a great start to turning personal adversity into life-enhancing growth. When used in conjunction with discernment and proper goal-setting, a trite New Year resolution can become catalyst to real conversion and a whole new way of drawing us closer to God.

Karen-Michaela Tan 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.

Allow us time to grieve

Losing a parent is never easy, no matter how prepared one can be.

During the last week of my Dad's life, my siblings and I were over prepared with every detail; from contacting the undertaker, handling his remains when he passed, the funeral arrangements to the final rites.

As his condition deteriorated rapidly, we were inevitably preparing ourselves for when Dad would leave us to return to his Maker.

One fateful Saturday night, 25 minutes to midnight, the hospital called and I knew in my gut this had to be that dreaded phone call we were least expecting. Ten minutes passed and my sister, who was on her way to the hospital, called me to ascertain that Dad had left us.

I scurried along making phone calls to the undertaker, making a quick notice on *Canva* to inform immediate family members, while rushing home to mom, who was alone, unbeknownst to her that the love of her life of 45 years had left her.

The next morning we were busy preparing the house for the return of Dad's remains while arranging details of the funeral Mass. Here's where things got a whole lot interesting. Along with the outpouring of condolence messages from family and friends, and wreaths, came a series



To be honest

MARTIN ARUL

of comments that would continue until the seventh day of prayers.

The comments included, in a gist, but not limited to;

1. *The direction the body was facing,*
2. *The funeral Mass time should be as late as possible,*
3. *Covering of the altar at home,*
4. *What time we should bring the body home (since Dad was in hospital for a month, we should push the undertakers to prepare the remains*

immediately and send him home first thing in the morning),

5. *How the remains "should" be handled,*
6. *How the ashes cannot be brought into the house after cremation,*
7. *Why are we not burying him,*
8. *How many people should go to the cemetery to have him interred,* and honestly a whole lot more I am not going to stress you out with (and frankly cannot remember because there were too many and almost too ridiculous).

Now, you may be wondering what I am about, mindlessly rambling about random things that occurred then, and some of you may even say, but this is a normal occurrence in any funeral. As the family of the deceased, we were merely executing what was desired by Dad. He wanted to be handled in a certain way, and that was

what we were doing, with the help of the undertaker.

However, what people fail to realise is that, with all these comments being thrown to family members, you are not allowing them the liberty to grieve.

In that state of mind, we, as the family of the deceased, were so caught up in our own emotions, the entire episode was a blur to most of us. Adding to our grief were comments that come from a superstitious or selfish place and not one of care and comfort. And this pushed us off the edge into a state of anger.

As Catholics our faith does not encompass superstitious practices like ensuring the direction of the deceased's feet, or covering the altar at home because we are in a state of "bad luck", or leaving the ashes outside the house because it is deemed "unclean". These stem from a very different belief that has been passed down from generations, completely blindsiding people to what is religious, what is cultural, and what is plain superstition.

We left our altar lights on the entire time in its full glory, as God is the centre of all our happiness and sadness. There is no bad luck, as the Church does not believe in luck. Dad's ashes were delivered home, after which we brought him inside. We said a prayer as a family, and when the time came, took him to be interred.

At this point, nothing else mattered. We had lost a family member, and following superstitions would neither bring him back

to life, nor accelerate his entry into heaven.

Through all this chaos, we were very blessed to have a strong supportive family unit, who were constantly in touch to give any help they could, a BEC that showed up when we needed them the most (and assisted with the daily prayers), and a priest whom I call a dear friend who went above and beyond to ensure Dad was given a prayerful and meaningful send off. In his homily, the priest affirmed that Dad's passing during the first week of Advent was a call to the coming of Christ, as we prepare for His coming during Christmastide.

As I write this, it is close to his 30th day memorial, and wrapping up 2024, I hope in 2025 we do better as a people of Christ. I hope as a community we will continue to strive and uplift people who are in need and continue to be Christ-like in rendering our services to the poor, the marginalised, and the grieving. Grief is a quintessential part of life, and allowing families to grieve is important, and although our need to help comes from a place of love, let us engage some tact when dealing with people who are at the most vulnerable emotionally.

Wishing all *HERALD* readers a blessed 2025, filled with love and peace.

Martin Arul is a believer who questions everything that is wrong, believing that everyone is equal in the eyes of God, and one must live as a Christian more in deeds than in words, outside the conformities of the building of the church.



Fr Ron Rolheiser

Christ's birth in Bethlehem – soothing or disturbing?

I've never been fully comfortable with some of my friends who send out Christmas cards with messages like: *May the Peace of Christ Disturb You!* Can't we have one day a year to be happy and celebrate without having our already unhappy selves shaken with more guilt? Isn't Christmas a time when we can enjoy being children again? Moreover, as Karl Rahner once said, isn't Christmas a time when God gives us permission to be happy? So why not?

Well, it's complex. Christmas is a time when God gives us permission to be happy, when the voice of God says: *Comfort my people. Be comforted! Speak words of comfort!*

But Christmas is also a time that highlights the sad truth that when God was born in our world two thousand years ago, there wasn't room for that birth in all the normal homes and places of the day. *There was no room for Him at the inn.* Peoples' busy lives and practical concerns kept them from offering Him a place to be born. That hasn't changed. So, there are also good reasons to be disturbed.

But first, the comfort: Several years ago, I participated in a large diocesan synod. At one point the animator in charge had us divide into small groups and each group was asked the question: What's the single most important message the Church

needs to say to the world right now?

The groups reported back and each group named some important spiritual or moral challenge: *"We need to challenge our society toward more justice!" "We need to challenge the world to have real faith and not confuse God's word with its own wishes." "We need to challenge our world toward a more responsible sexual ethos."* Wonderful, needed challenges, all of them. But no group came back and said: *"We need to speak to the world of God's consolation!"*

Granted, there is injustice, violence, racism, sexism, greed, selfishness, sexual irresponsibility, and self-serving faith around; but most adults in our world are also living in pain, anxiety, disappointment, loss, depression, and unresolved guilt. Everywhere you look, you see heavy hearts. Moreover, many people living with hurt and disappointment do not see God and the Church as an answer to their pain but rather as somehow part of its cause.

So, in preaching God's word, our churches need to assure the world of God's love, God's concern, and God's forgiveness. Perhaps before doing anything else, God's word is meant to comfort us; indeed, to be the ultimate source of all comfort. Only when the world knows God's consolation will it be more open to

accept the concomitant challenge.

And prominent in that challenge is to make room for Christ at the inn, namely, to open our hearts, our homes, and our world as places where Christ can come and live, no matter how inconvenient that may be. From the safe distance of two thousand years, we too easily make a scathing judgment on the people at the time of Jesus' birth for not knowing what Mary and Joseph were carrying and for not making a place for Jesus to be born. How could they be so blind?

But that same judgment can still be made of us. We aren't exactly making room in our own inns.

When a new person is born into this world, he or she takes a space where before there was no one. Sometimes that new person is warmly welcomed and a loving space is created and everyone around is happy for this new invasion. But that isn't always the case; sometimes, as was the case with Jesus, there is no space created for the new person and his or her presence is not welcomed.

We see this today (and this will constitute a judgment on our generation) in the reluctance, almost all over the world, to welcome new immigrants, to make room for them at the inn. If Christ is in the poor, in the stranger, and the Gospels assure us that He is, then Christ is surely in the im-

migrant. Today there are over fifty million refugees in the world, people whom no one will welcome. Why not?

We are not bad people and are capable most times of being wonderfully generous. But letting this flood of immigrants enter our lives would disturb us. Our lives would have to change. We would lose some of our present comforts, some of our old familiarities, and some of our securities.

We are not bad people, neither were those innkeepers two thousand years ago who, not knowing what they were dealing with, in inculpable ignorance, turned Mary and Joseph away. I've always nursed a secret sympathy for them. Maybe because I am still, also in ignorance, doing exactly what they did. My comfort and security often have me say, No room at the inn.

The skewed circumstances of Christ's birth, if understood, cannot but disturb. May they also bring deep consolation.

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

The Jubilee Year 2025 is upon us and we journey on as Pilgrims of Hope, celebrating the 2,025th anniversary of the Incarnation of our Lord. We are invited to have hope amidst situations of war, economic uncertainty and poverty because it is God who has put that hope into our lives through faith.

In the Old Testament, the Jubilee (Hebrew: *yōḅel*) was the year that followed the passage of seven "weeks of years" -seven cycles of sabbatical years, or 49 total years. This is described in Leviticus 25, 8-10). The 50th year was an economic, cultural, environmental and communal reset, when the land and people rested, and slaves were freed. The Jubilee Year represented God's mercy because debts were forgiven — literally wiped out! Land was returned to original owners and their families. Slaves were not only set free but were provided with resources to enable them to begin a new and independent life.

Jesus announced that He was enacting a Year of Jubilee when He launched His public ministry. Quoting from Isaiah 61:1-3, he proclaimed in the synagogue of Nazareth: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." (Lk. 4:18-19) This was actually His personal mission statement which was subsequently lived out in His Life, Death and Resurrection.



As I was Contemplating

FR GERARD THERAVIAM

High hopes for the Jubilee!

In Western Christianity, the tradition of jubilee years dates to 1300, when Pope Boniface VIII convoked a holy year, following which ordinary jubilees have generally been celebrated every 25 or 50 years, with extraordinary jubilees in addition, depending on need.

Already we have seen in the Cathedral of St John, the 'kick-off' or inauguration of the

Jubilee at the Kuala Lumpur Archdiocesan level. There is great interest in the Jubilee Year activities that will also happen in the other four designated pilgrimage churches. Pilgrimage parishes have the task of being hosts to the many who will flock for liturgies and visits by individuals and groups. Already, groups in my parish are making arrangements to visit all the other pilgrimage parishes.

My only apprehension is that we don't become mere 'spiritual' tourists looking out for the sights and even shopping opportunities. Our pilgrimages must also include a pilgrimage within — towards our hearts, encountering God within. In all of this we need to balance the Mary and Martha in us. Yes, we need activities in this jubilee

year but let us also get into a frenzy that we fail to be reflective and miss a genuine encounter with God, self and our neighbour.

During this year, we are called to reach out to different categories of persons. Among these special categories that might otherwise be forgotten are the sick, prisoners, migrants and refugees, the elderly as well as the young and the poor. Surely the different diocesan and parish ministries will work towards celebrating the Jubilee with each of these categories to bring hope in each of their differing situations. Indeed, we must allow everyone an opportunity to connect with the Church as we celebrate the Jubilee.

Among the exciting pastoral initiatives that I am looking forward to as a pastor of souls is the monthly encounters on First Saturdays that the Central District parishes will take turns to host. Individuals who have been away from the Church for any reason and who feel the nudge to "come home" but are unsure where to start, are invited to meet our priests and lay collaborators for a friendly chat and a cup of coffee. The Sacrament of Reconciliation will be made available for those who desire it. I do personally hope that people will take

this invitation seriously as there are many who want to return but are unsure how to do so. This initiative is an attempt to allow people to re-discover their faith and place within the Church. It will need people to invite and encourage those returnees who may be reluctant due to being shy or embarrassed for having been away.

The Cathedral parish is also inviting couples who have, for one reason or other, not had their marriages solemnised in church to come forward to meet the priests to see how we can 'convalidate' their marriages so that they can fully participate in the Eucharist and other sacraments again. Also invited are couples who have been divorced and remarried, to see if there are grounds for annulments so that they too may find freedom again.

I also hope that we may somehow be able to encounter the young, especially young adults who are often busy with education or work and sometimes are not very connected to the Church. This seems a difficult task as we seem to have a pool of a few active youth but a large untapped majority who may attend Mass but not get involved in the community.

Much more needs to be thought through and subsequently executed in our jubilee journey. Well, there is a whole year ahead and I hope the cross-pollination of ideas and experiences will allow us to reach out to all. I do hope that every Catholic and others of goodwill will enter into the spirit of the Jubilee and be able to say: *Hope does not disappoint* (Rom 5:5).

Fr Gerard Theraviam 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.



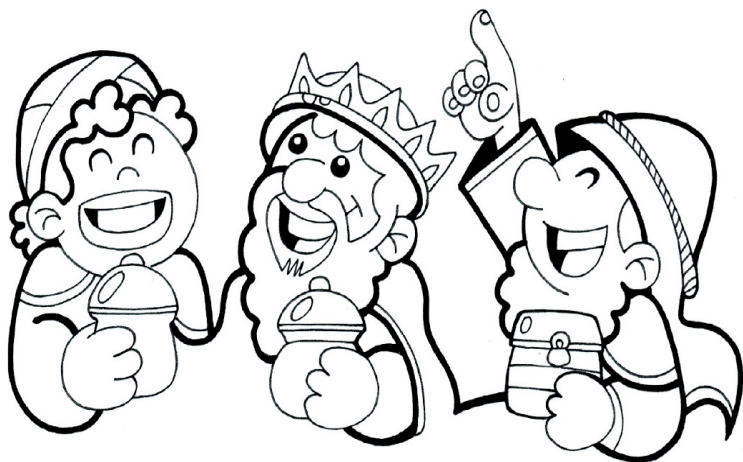
Little Catholics' corner



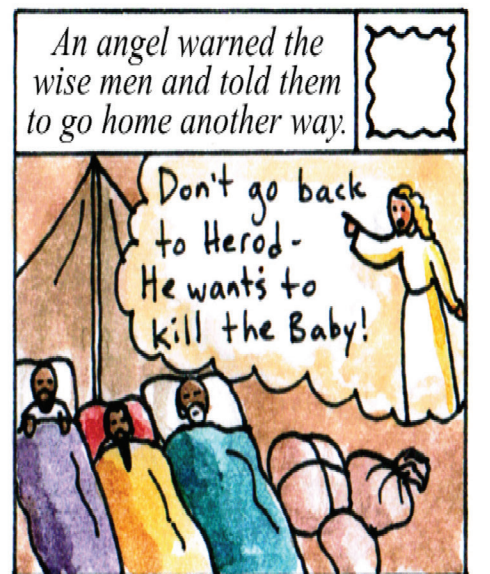
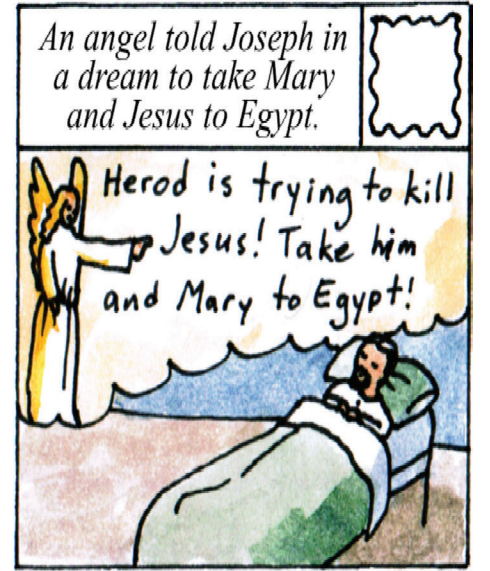
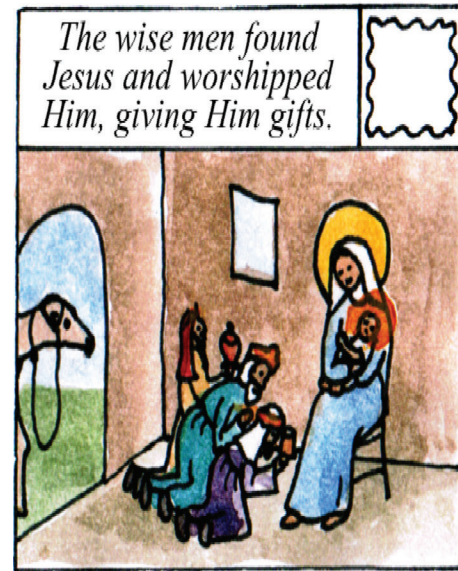
The feast of the Epiphany of Our Lord is a special part of the Christmas season!

Connect the dots and colour the picture.

The Magi from the east came to Jerusalem to search for the new born King. When they found Him, they bowed down and worshiped him. They presented Him with three gifts. What were the gifts? Colour the correct answer in the picture below.



Do you know the story of the wise men who came to worship Baby Jesus? What order do these pictures go in? Write the numbers from 1 to 6 in the boxes.



Answers: Top: 3, 6 Middle: 5, 1 Bottom: 2, 4

After Jesus was born, some wise men, also called Magi, saw a star in the sky which they believed announced the birth of a king.

They travelled to Jerusalem and began to ask "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw His star as it rose, and we have come to worship Him."

Herod heard about the Magi and their search for a king and he was deeply disturbed. So, Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men and told them to go to Bethlehem to search for the child.

Herod asked the Magi to come back and tell him if they found the child so that he could go and wor-

ship Him, too!

Children, as you know, the wise men did not have a map to guide them to Bethlehem, but they had something even better - a star to guide them, and it led them right to Jesus. When they found Him, they gave Him gifts and bowed

down and worshiped Him. (Matthew 2:1-12)

Children, the Bible is the map and star that will lead us to Jesus. All of us can read it every day to make sure we are headed in the right direction to find Jesus!

Love
Aunty Eliz



Unforgettable Staycation:



A Weekend of Faith, Unity, and Spiritual Growth

Sahana Christie

KUALA LUMPUR: The youth from the four parishes in the KL Central District — the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist, Church of St Anthony, Church of Our Lady of Fatima, and Church of the Holy Rosary — recently organised a remarkable staycation that brought together young people from each parish, united by their shared faith and purpose. The event proved to be a powerful reminder of the strength of the community and the unifying power of faith.

The staycation started with an opening session that set the tone for the entire weekend: one of unity, shared mission, and mutual support. Youth from different walks of life, various parishes, and diverse levels of experience came together, forming a bond that transcended the boundaries of their individual churches. Amid the hustle and bustle of Kuala Lumpur, the event became a testament to the unifying force of faith, showing how it can bring people together despite the city's fast pace.

Over the weekend, participants engaged in a wide array of activities

designed to promote spiritual growth and deeper connections. Group prayers, reflective discussions, and team-building exercises helped everyone experience the strength of community and the beauty of shared faith. These activities not only brought joy and laughter but also allowed participants to reflect on the deeper meaning of being part of the body of Christ.

A central focus of the staycation was prayer and reflection. Workshops and prayer sessions provided attendees with the opportunity to reflect on their personal relationships with God and contemplate how they could contribute to the greater mission of the Church. Participants were encouraged to embrace vulnerability, share their stories, and listen to the experiences of others. This openness created an atmosphere of trust and understanding, allowing everyone to feel supported and encouraged on their spiritual journey.

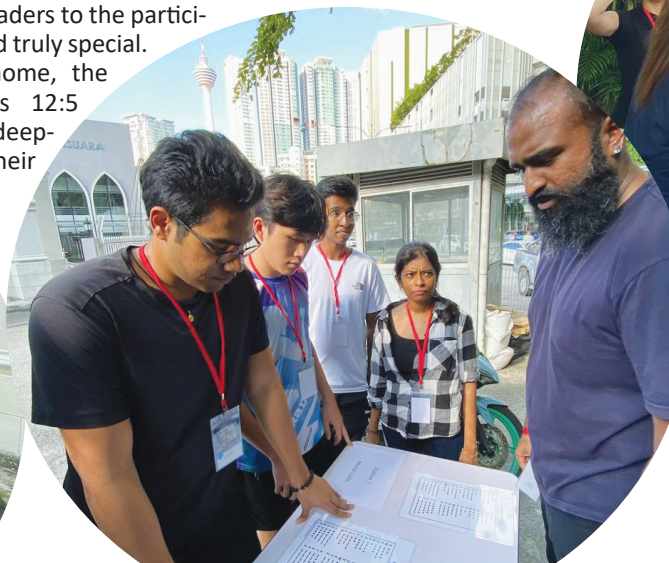
As the weekend came to a close, participants expressed deep gratitude and joy. Many spoke of the meaningful new friendships they had forged, the spiritual growth they had experienced, and the strong sense of belonging the event had fostered. The success of the staycation was a direct result of the hard work and dedication of everyone involved — from the organizers and leaders to the participants who made the weekend truly special.

As the youth returned home, the words of Romans 12:5 resonated deeply in their

hearts: “So in Christ, we, though many, form one body.” The staycation served as a powerful reminder that, despite the diversity of backgrounds, experiences, and challenges, the youth of the KL Central District are united in Christ. They are called to support one another, lift each other up, and work together for the greater good of the Church and the world.

A special thank you was extended to the youth ministries of the four parishes for their dedication in organising the event. Their commitment to nurturing a vibrant and engaged youth community was evident in the success of the gathering. Through their tireless efforts, they created a space where young people could come together, learn from one another, and deepen their relationship with Christ.

As we reflect on this incredible weekend, we give thanks for the opportunity to come together as one mind, one body, and one spirit in Christ. The journey doesn't end here — may we continue to live out our calling, united in faith and love, as we serve God and one another.



Volunteering with Caritas Beyond Borders

• Continued from Page 12

Shalom! I feel truly blessed to have participated in the *Caritas Beyond Borders* mission. My motivation was to accompany the Caritas MJD team and experience the lives of the children at Rumah Kanak-Kanak Bondulu, as well as the realities faced by their families in Kampung Nandal and Kampung Lotong.

Despite their material challenges, I was deeply moved by the sense of peace, togetherness, and generosity in these communities. Though they live with limited resources, the families share what little they have, showing sincere hospitality.

Spending time with the children at Rumah Kanak-Kanak Bondulu was the most touching part of the mission. Their love and affection were heartfelt, and I felt privileged to temporarily fill the gap left by their absent parents. Our presence brought them joy and comfort.

The farewell was emotional, with the children's tears and reluctance to part ways breaking our hearts. It was a painful goodbye, but one that reinforced the deep bonds formed.

I am immensely grateful to Caritas MJD for this opportunity. This experience has opened my heart, reminding me of the true essence of love and compassion. **Nisah (Angelelisa Sintir)**



Greetings! Recently, I had the privilege of volunteering with *Caritas Beyond Borders* in Tambunan, Sabah, and it was a deeply rewarding experience. Our mission took us to Bondulu Children's Home, where we were guided by faith and filled with love and purpose.

On our first day, Sr. Germaine and Sr. Anna welcomed us with warmth, setting the tone for a meaningful stay. We organized games, educational sessions, and completed practical tasks like repairing fans and pipes. The children's enthusiasm made activities like biscuit bites, candy grabs, and cup tower building a joy for everyone. We also introduced creative lessons on coloring, handwriting, and Malaysia's cultural attire, with the children eagerly embracing Tamil and Chinese language lessons.

Our journey also included a visit to the Mahua Waterfall, where we distributed supplies to families in the mountainous region and offered prayers. That evening, we watched *Zootopia* with the children and had thoughtful discussions about its lessons.

On our last day, we enjoyed a farewell feast of *bak kut teh*, with the children expressing their gratitude through ukulele performances, songs, and dances. After Mass, we said emotional goodbyes as the children headed to school.

This experience taught us love, humility, and the beauty of humanity. We are grateful to all who supported this cause, and we hope the impact of *Caritas Beyond Borders* continues to spread kindness and light. **Maria Vincent**



Shalom! I had the privilege of serving as the games and photography coordinator for the programme. This journey was a profound experience, allowing me to connect deeply with the children and families at Rumah Kanak Kanak Bondulu.

I first learned about the struggles faced by families in Tambunan — poverty, poor housing, and limited access to education — through social media. This mission gave me the chance to understand their circumstances firsthand and offer compassion.

At Rumah Kanak Kanak Bondulu, I was amazed by the children's resilience, joy, and gratitude. Despite their challenges, they radiated hope, and their energy was contagious. We played games, shared

motivational chants, and formed a connection that left a lasting impact. Before we left, they even asked when we would return, which touched me deeply.

A powerful moment occurred during a visit to a remote family's home, where we brought provisions and prayed together. One woman thanked us with tears in her eyes, reminding me of Matthew 25:36, "I was sick, and you visited me." This moment embodied the grace of serving others with love.

Reflecting on this journey, I am reminded of Proverbs 11:25, "The generous soul will be made rich." Serving in Tambunan has enriched my spirit, and I am deeply grateful to Caritas MJD for this opportunity to witness God's love in action. **Michelle Kiong**



I had the honour of organising the children's games at Rumah Kanak Kanak Bondulu in Toboh, Tambunan. This mission was a dream come true, fulfilling my long-standing desire to serve those in need. Since my first service trip to Vietnam, where I worked at an orphanage, I've felt called to help others. Through prayer, I realised my purpose is to serve, as taught in Matthew 25:35-36, where serving others is serving God.

One of the most memorable moments was the warm welcome from the children, who greeted us with a song that touched my heart. Spending five days with them taught me valuable lessons about love, sharing, gratitude, and joy. Despite their challenges, they radiate warmth and kindness, showing me that love and joy define them, not their hardships.

I am deeply grateful for this mission and for being part of a supportive and inspiring Caritas MJD team. This experience allowed me to fulfil a dream rooted in service and faith, and I thank Caritas MJD for making it possible. **Alexander Wong**

This was my first time participating in the mission trip, and I am deeply grateful for the opportunity. The experience was filled with love, both shared and received, and has added a meaningful chapter to my life.

Before the trip, we had two training sessions, but the reality of being in an unfamiliar place taught me that plans are only guides. Flexibility and faith allowed us to adapt and find grace in unexpected moments. The journey was not just about tasks but about teamwork, support, and perseverance.

In Tambunan, we were greeted by the loving children of Rumah Kanak Kanak Bondulu. Despite my concerns about language barriers, I quickly realised that love transcends language. With Michelle and Alex's guidance, we bonded with the children through laughter, games, and simple joys.

Over the next few days, we engaged in activities like watching movies, doing crafts, and playing games. The children's happiness was contagious, and Anthony



worked tirelessly to improve their living conditions.

A highlight was our family visit. After a challenging drive, we arrived in Kampung Nandal and Kampung Lotong, where the families' warmth and hospitality touched me deeply. Their simple acts of love were mutual blessings.

On our final evening, we shared a meal of *bak kut teh* and enjoyed cultural

performances, including the children's ukulele performance and dances. Despite being introverted, I found joy in contributing with my painting and design skills to create a poster and postcards for the children.

This mission was a journey of growth, love, and new experiences. The memories from Tambunan will always hold a special place in my heart. **Christina Wong**

Bodies of about 100 Kurdish women, children found in Iraq mass grave



Graphic content / Flags mark the location of human remains exhumed from a mass grave lie in Tal al-Shaikhia in the Muthanna province in southern Iraq on December 25, 2024

IRAQ: Iraqi authorities are working to exhume the remains of around 100 Kurdish women and children thought to have been killed in the 1980s under former Iraqi ruler Saddam Hussein, three officials said.

The grave was discovered in Tal al-Shaikhia in the Muthanna province in southern Iraq, about 15-20 kilometers from the main road there.

Specialised teams began exhuming the grave earlier this month after it was initially discovered in 2019, said Diaa Karim, the head of the Iraqi authority for mass graves, adding that it is the second such grave to be uncovered at the site.

"After removing the first layer of soil and the remains appearing clearly, it was discovered that they all belonged to women and children dressed in Kurdish springtime clothes," said Karim.

He added that they likely came from Kalar in the northern Sulaimaniyah province, part of what is now Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region, estimating that there were "no less than 100" people buried in the grave.

Efforts to exhume all the bodies are ongoing, he said, adding that the numbers could change.

Following Iraq's deadly war with Iran in the 1980s, Saddam's government carried out the ruthless "Anfal Operation" between 1987 and 1988. The operation is thought to have killed around 180,000 Kurds.

Violence mars Christmas celebrations in India

NEW DELHI: Christmas celebrations were disrupted by violent incidents across India.

Reports of attacks on Christians have come from Manipur in northeastern India, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab in the north, and Kerala, south.

The violence was allegedly carried out by rightwing Hindu groups, or Sangh Parivar organisations, such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council) and Bajrang Dal (Brigade of the stout).

In one incident, a Pentecostal pastor was attacked by a man named Sonu Singh in Ludhiana, Punjab, on accusations of trying to convert people.

In Rajasthan's Jodhpur and Jaisalmer cities, activists unleashed violence against teachers and students of schools celebrating Christmas.

In a bizarre incident at Indore in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, an employee of Zomato food delivery company, dressed as Santa Claus, was beaten up by the activists of the Hindu Jagran Manch (Forum for Hindu Awakening). The activists also released a video threatening Zomato workers.

Violent incidents were also reported from Manipur, where ethnic clashes have raged since May 3, 2023. Widespread violence was reported in various parts of the state on Christmas Day, with firing in Sinam Kom village in the eastern part of the state capital of Imphal.

In Kerala, three Vishwa Hindu Parishad activists attacked Christmas celebrations at a government school in Palakkad, leading to widespread protests.

Saddam was toppled in 2003 following a US-led invasion of Iraq. He was hanged three years later, putting an end to Iraqi proceedings against him on charges of genocide over the Anfal campaign.

Karim said a large number of the victims found in the grave "were executed here with live shots to the head fired at short range".

He suggested some of them may have been "buried alive" as there was no evidence of bullets in their remains.

Ahmed Qusai, the head of the excavation team for mass graves in Iraq, meanwhile pointed to "difficulties we are facing at this grave because the remains had become entangled as some of the mothers were holding their infants" when they were killed.

Durgham Kamel, part of the authority for exhuming mass graves, said another mass grave was found when they began exhuming the one at Tal al-Shaikhia.

He said the burial site was located near the notorious Nugrat al-Salman prison, where Saddam's authorities held dissidents.

The Iraqi government estimates that about 1.3 million people disappeared between 1980 and 1990 as a result of atrocities and other rights violations committed under Saddam. ucanews.com

The violence has reportedly tarnished the Christmas diplomacy efforts of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the state.

The BJP Kerala leadership has demanded an investigation into the violence, which occurred on December 23, the same day Prime Minister Narendra Modi celebrated Christmas with Christian leaders in Delhi.

However, several bishops have criticised the Sangh Parivar's strategy of appeasement and violence, calling it "useless." **Matters India**

MEMORIAM

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Rest in Peace



Victoria Alexis Ratnam
25 June 1971 – 6 Jan 1995
30th Anniversary



Beatrice Patrick Ratnam
14 Jan 1937 – 31 Mar 2020
5th Anniversary

40th Day Memorial Mass
In Loving Memory of
My Beloved and Dearest Mum



Madona a/p M.M. Pereira
(Mrs Antony)

27 May 1948 – 24 November 2024
'Eternal Rest Grant unto her, O Lord, and
Let Perpetual Light Shine upon her.'
May Her Soul Rest in Peace.

I cordially invite your presence to attend the 40th day Memorial Mass at the Church of St Philip, Segamat, No. 8, Jalan Buloh Kasap, 85000 Segamat, Johor at 6pm on Saturday, 4th January 2025 and thence followed by fellowship at St Joseph's Hall after mass.

On behalf of my late mum, I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude for your prayers, presence and assistance during my recent bereavement.

A Special Thanks to BEC St Paul of St Philip's Church Segamat and also lovely parishioners of St Philip's Church Segamat for their love and support.

Deeply and Dearly Missed, Remembered and Forever Cherished always by Daughter Claina Antonette Antony @ Molly, Relatives and Friends.

Kindly treat this as a personal invitation to attend my beloved Mum's 40th day Requiem and Memorial Mass.

*That this is God,
our God forever
and ever.*

He will guide us forever.

Psalm 48:14

NOTICE

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25th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of
Tobias Xavier Pakiam



15th July 1921 - 3rd Jan 2000

*Twenty-five years since you've gone,
yet your spirit shines so bright,
Held in God's eternal care, bathed in Heaven's light.
Your love still guides our hearts, as we lift you in prayer,
And one sweet day, we'll meet again in the joy
His love has made.*

Dearly missed by wife, sons & daughters, son-in-law and daughters-in-law, grandchildren, relatives & friends.

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF



EVA JOSEPHINE EDMONDS
16.1.1929 – 1.12.2018

ANDREW RAPSON EDMONDS
6.12.1919 – 28.1.1991

Always in our hearts, your beloved family.

Pope Francis inaugurates the Jubilee of Hope 2025

VATICAN: On the evening of Christmas Eve, December 24, 2024, Pope Francis opened the Holy Door of St Peter's Basilica, officially inaugurating the Jubilee of Hope for the year 2025. As the basilica bells rang out, marking the beginning of this significant event, the Pope, left his wheelchair and knocked five times on the sacred bronze door, which had been sealed since the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy in 2016. Surrounded by a garland of green pine branches, red roses, and gold pinecones, the door symbolised the entrance to a year of grace, reconciliation, and hope.

Following the opening, the Pope entered the basilica with cardinals, bishops, and pilgrims, including representatives from different Christian churches and Catholics from around the world wearing traditional dress. The choir sang the Jubilee hymn, *Pilgrims of Hope*, and the liturgy emphasised the themes



Pope Francis pushes open the Holy Door of St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican December 24, 2024, inaugurating the Holy Year 2025. (CNS photo/ Romano Siciliani, pool)



Pope Francis at the threshold of the opened Holy Door of St Peter's Basilica. (Vatican Media)

of mercy, forgiveness, and the promise of salvation through Jesus Christ.

In his homily, Pope Francis explained that the Jubilee of Hope invites everyone to become "pilgrims of hope" in a world filled with suffering, injustices, and war. He emphasised that Christian hope is not a passive expectation of a happy ending but a call to active participation in God's transformative love. Hope, he said, is grounded in the certainty that nothing can separate us from God's love. He also urged the faithful to bring hope to the brokenhearted, the lonely, and those oppressed by failure or violence, highlighting the plight of prisoners and war victims.

Reflecting on the role of hope in today's world, Pope Francis pointed to the Christmas story, where God descended among humanity to offer forgiveness and a path to redemption. The Holy Door, he said, symbolises God's open heart, offering a welcoming em-

brace for all.

The Jubilee of Hope, which began on Dec 24, 2024 will run through Jan 6, 2026. It will feature significant events such as the canonisations of Blessed Carlo Acutis and Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, and special celebrations for teenagers, young people, families, and the elderly. As part of the Jubilee, Pope Francis also invited Catholics to receive plenary indulgence, a grace of forgiveness and spiritual renewal, as a step towards a personal encounter with the Lord.

In his final reflection, the Pope urged everyone to embrace the call of the Jubilee, not just as a time for spiritual renewal but also as an invitation to work toward transforming the world, especially for the poor and marginalised. As the year unfolds, Pope Francis' message remains clear: Christian hope is a gift that empowers believers to become agents of change, bringing peace and reconciliation to a world in need. **Agencies**

Campaign to turn debt into hope

WASHINGTON: A US-based jubilee network is partnering with international aid organisations to provide debt relief for the world's poorest countries during the 2025 Jubilee Year. The campaign, *Turn Debt into Hope*, was announced on December 23, 2024, by Caritas Internationalis and Jubilee USA Network.

Eric LeCompte, Executive Director of Jubilee USA Network, emphasised that the effort seeks to complete the mission of Jubilee 2000, when St John Paul II called for debt relief for poor nations. Pope Francis has also urged wealthy nations to forgive debts that poor countries will never repay especially in the Jubilee of Hope.

LeCompte highlighted the success of previous efforts, noting that over \$130 billion (RM581 billion) in debt relief has been secured in the past 25 years, enabling millions of children in Africa to access education.

Caritas Internationalis Director Victor Genina Cervantes explained that the campaign seeks to reform the global financial system to prioritise people and the planet. Cardinal Silvano Tomasi stressed that the burden of debt falls on individuals and families in poor nations.

The campaign will advocate for debt cancellation and the creation of a transparent, universal international bankruptcy process. Cervantes also pointed out that foreign debt is linked to climate debt, hindering poorer nations' ability to address climate change and recover from natural disasters. A petition for the campaign calls on creditors and political leaders to act with compassion and courage. **CNA**

Historic moment as Holy Door opens at Rebibbia Prison

ROME: Pope Francis marked a historic moment by celebrating Mass at Rebibbia Prison on the feast of St Stephen, the first Christian martyr. The Mass on December 26, 2024, celebrated the opening of the Jubilee Holy Door at the prison, the first time a Holy Door was opened in a correctional facility. This act symbolised the beginning of the Catholic Church's Jubilee of Hope, a time of redemption and new beginnings, especially for those incarcerated.

In a solemn ceremony, the Pope stood from his wheelchair and knocked six times on the bronze Holy Door of the prison's Church of Our Father. As he crossed the threshold, the church filled with around 100 inmates, along with prison staff, chaplains, volunteers, and families. Members of the penitentiary police band played the official hymn for the Holy Year 2025, and the church was beautifully decorated with a pine garland adorned with white roses and silver-tinted pinecones. The festive atmosphere was complemented by Christmas hymns sung by the inmates and prison guards.

Pope Francis explained that while the first Holy Door had been opened at St Peter's Basilica, he wanted the second to be in a prison, signifying that both those inside and outside could open the doors of their hearts

and understand that hope does not disappoint. The Holy Door at Rebibbia stands as a unique symbol of hope for the inmates and staff, far removed from the public jubilee doors in Rome's historic basilicas.

The Mass, which was also attended by Rome Mayor Roberto Gualtieri and Italian justice officials, featured music provided by inmates, Scripture readings by prison guards, and prayers of the faithful focused on rehabilitating and supporting people who have made mistakes. Pope Francis delivered an off-the-cuff homily, speaking directly to the inmates. He reminded them that hope is like an anchor, firm and steady, even in life's most difficult moments. He encouraged them to "hold on to the anchor of hope" and to always have an open heart.

At the end of the Mass, the Pope greeted each of the 300 people in attendance and personally prayed for the inmates, telling them, "I think of you and I pray for you." The prisoners presented him with gifts, including a miniature reproduction of the Holy Door made from wood salvaged from migrant boats, and a basket of handmade items from the women's section of the prison. In return, Pope Francis gave them a parchment bearing a message of hope.

Reflecting on his visit, the Pope emphasised the importance of not losing hope



Pope Francis walks through the Holy Door at Rome's Rebibbia Prison Complex on the Feast of St Stephen, December 26, 2024. (Vatican Media)

and noted that all Christians, including the prisoners, are on a shared journey of faith. He spoke about the need for governments to support initiatives that restore hope, such as amnesty, pardon, and reintegration programs for prisoners. His message was one of compassion, urging society not to forget those who are imprisoned and to treat them with dignity.

Pope Francis also gave an impromptu interview after leaving the prison, reflecting

on his experience and emphasising that, "we all can fall," but the key is to not lose hope and to hold on to the anchor of hope. He quoted Jesus, reminding the faithful that visiting those in prison is an essential part of Christian life.

This profound and symbolic moment in the Jubilee of Hope was a powerful reminder that redemption, mercy, and hope are available to all, regardless of past mistakes. **Agencies**