

Renewal must begin with us



KUALA LUMPUR: The Catholic Church in Malaysia must continue its journey of renewal, mission and courageous witness by recognising the signs of the times, or risk becoming “an empty gong,” said Archbishop Julian Leow Beng Kim, president of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei.

Reflecting on the life and mission of the Church following the recent *ad limina* visit to Rome, Archbishop Julian said the Catholic community in Malaysia, though small, remains vibrant and filled with hope. At the same time, he stressed that the Church must continue discerning how to respond faithfully to today’s social, cultural and spiritual challenges.

His reflections come as the Church prepares for the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 (MPC2026), the first national pastoral gathering bringing together delegates from all nine dioceses across Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak. The convention, to be held from Sept 9–12, will be a moment

of listening, dialogue and discernment on how the Church can live its mission more authentically.

“We are called to act prophetically. Renewal must begin with us, otherwise we are like an empty gong,” Archbishop Julian told *Fides News Agency*.

Describing the Malaysian Catholic community as “dynamic and continuing to grow,” the archbishop acknowledged that the Church carries out its mission within a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, while navigating certain political, legal and social realities.

Although Catholics represent approximately three per cent of Malaysia’s 36 million population, with about 1.3 million faithful, the Church continues to grow. In the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur alone, between 600 and 700 adults are baptised each year through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), in addition to infant baptisms.

“We continue to see many conversions and baptisms of both adults and children,” he said. “That is why we look to the future of our community with hope.”

Migrants and refugees have also become part of the life of the local Church, including communities from Myanmar, Pakistan, Iran and other countries. Archbishop Julian noted

that many come seeking safety, stability and a better future.

Among the greatest challenges facing the Church today, he identified secularism, religious indifference and the impact of digital culture. In an increasingly technological world, he said many people are losing interest in spiritual life and questions about God.

The COVID-19 pandemic also affected participation in Church life, especially among young people and some elderly faithful who became accustomed to online Masses. However, he noted that many are gradually returning.

In Malaysia’s diverse society, interreligious dialogue remains an important part of the Church’s mission. Archbishop Julian highlighted the cooperation among Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs and Taoists in addressing issues of shared concern.

“When we speak with one voice, the government listens,” he said, adding that despite challenges, Malaysia continues to enjoy a spirit of peace and harmony among religious communities.

The archbishop also expressed concern over priestly and religious vocations. While there are about 85 seminarians across Malaysia’s nine dioceses, including 17 from Kuala Lumpur, he said more vocations are

needed as older priests retire.

Looking ahead, Archbishop Julian emphasised that the future of the Church depends greatly on accompanying young people.

“We are called to give priority to young people,” he said, warning that the Church risks losing its future if it fails to journey with them through the challenges of the modern world.

This commitment is reflected in preparations for World Youth Day 2027 in South Korea, where he hopes to accompany hundreds of young Malaysians.

“Young people are searching for answers to life’s big questions,” he said. “Our faith can offer those answers, but we must learn to communicate them in their language.”

He stressed that major events alone are not enough. Young people must continue to receive meaningful accompaniment when they return to their dioceses and parishes.

“Christ is with you in every moment and in every aspect of your life,” he said.

Expressing hope for the future, Archbishop Julian said the Church’s mission is ultimately to become a witness of God’s love for all.

“I hope we can strengthen our faith to bear authentic witness to the Gospel and be a beacon of light for the entire nation,” he said.

Paolo Affatato, Fides

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.
Romans 8:26-27



Regional meeting addresses growing challenges facing families

■ P5



MJD launches month-long celebration for grandparents and the elderly

■ P7



Katholikos 2026: Forming Leaders, Building Bridges

■ P16

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

A call to awaken the whole Church

As the countdown to the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 begins, the Catholic Church in Malaysia stands before a moment of grace. From September 9 to 12, delegates from all nine dioceses in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak will gather for the first-ever national pastoral convention of the Malaysian Church.

This is no ordinary meeting. It is an invitation to ask, together and honestly: What is the Holy Spirit saying to the Church in Malaysia today?

MPC2026 did not appear suddenly on the calendar. It comes after years of parish, diocesan and regional assemblies, pastoral conversations, consultations and discernment. Each step has been part of a continuing journey to understand more deeply where God is leading His Church in Malaysia.

At the heart of MPC2026 are four core areas of pastoral concern — Family, Church, Ecology and Society. Within these areas are the many realities that shape Catholic life today, including the strengthening of families, the renewal of BECs, the accompaniment of youth, care for creation, social responsibility, leadership formation and the mission of the Church in an ever-changing world.

These themes are not unfamiliar. From the earlier Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Conventions, the Church has repeatedly returned to the call to build vibrant communities of faith, strengthen formation, empower lay leadership, accompany families and youth, care for creation, and become a more outward-looking Church engaged with society.

Some may ask, understandably, "Haven't we discussed all this before?"

Yes, we have. But perhaps the deeper question is not whether these issues have been discussed, but whether they have been sufficiently received, lived

and acted upon.

The danger with any pastoral convention is that it becomes an event for delegates, a document for archives, or a memory for those who attended. The greater hope is that it becomes a movement of conversion for the whole Church.

That is why the lukewarm response in some places should not simply be dismissed as ignorance or apathy. It should be received as a pastoral signal. If some parishioners do not know the significance of the *Perjalanan Salib*, or if the MPC2026 prayer has not become part of parish life, it may reveal not bad will, but a gap in communication, ownership and formation. People cannot be expected to embrace what they have not been helped to understand.

The *Salib* is not merely "another Cross" placed in a church. It is a visible reminder that the Malaysian Church is journeying together under the shadow and hope of Christ's Cross. It represents communion across geography, language, culture, age and pastoral reality. It tells us that no diocese walks alone, no parish exists for itself, and no Catholic is merely a spectator in the life of the Church.

MPC2026 must therefore challenge everyone — hierarchy, clergy, religious and laity — to move from attendance to participation, from consultation to conversion, from discussion to mission.

For the bishops and clergy, this is a moment to continue listening deeply, communicating clearly, and helping the faithful see why this journey matters. For parish leaders, it is a reminder that pastoral plans cannot remain at committee level. They must reach the pews, the families, the youth, the elderly, migrants, the poor, and those who have quietly drifted away.

For the laity, it is a call to mature discipleship. The Church is not "they"; the Church is "we".

Representation at MPC2026 must also be properly understood. Delegates are not merely attendees, observers, or personal opinion-bearers. They go as listeners, witnesses and servants of their communities, carrying with them the hopes, struggles, questions and dreams of the people entrusted to them.

Their responsibility does not end when the final session closes. Upon returning, they must not disappear into parish anonymity. They should be expected to reconnect with their communities, share what was discerned, explain what pastoral pathways emerged, and help transform the fruits of MPC2026 into concrete action.

A convention bears fruit only when delegates return as bridges — between bishop and parish, clergy and laity, vision and action, prayer and pastoral life.

Perhaps the repeated themes are not a sign of failure, but a sign of God's patience. Family, Church, Ecology and Society continue to return because they remain the places where faith is lived, challenged and witnessed each day. The "broken-down recorder" may, in fact, be the Church hearing the same call until we finally respond with courage.

MPC2026 will not solve everything. No convention can. But it can awaken something vital: a renewed sense that the Catholic Church in Malaysia belongs to all her people, and that the future cannot be built by a few while the many remain unaware.

The countdown has begun. The question is not only whether Malaysia is ready for MPC2026.

The deeper question is whether MPC2026 will find us ready — ready to listen, ready to change, and ready to walk together as one Church in this land we love.

Patricia Pereira

Discerning the darnel and wheat

Darnel and wheat are remarkably similar plants, almost indistinguishable, especially in their early stages of growth. Their roots become intertwined, making it nearly impossible to separate the darnel from the wheat without also damaging the wheat itself. Only when the plants mature do their differences become apparent. Wheat produces healthy, plump kernels that nourish, while darnel bears smaller, slender grains that may be contaminated with a toxic fungus.

Our world today is besieged by countless issues that plague humanity. Every day we hear of social and geopolitical conflicts, accompanied by incomprehensible acts of violence and injustice that seem to make the world a darker place. Like the enemy who secretly sowed darnel among the wheat, today's Gospel reminds us that evil often enters quietly into our lives, frequently without our even noticing it.

Things are no longer as simple or as clear-cut as they once seemed. Many issues that were once considered black and white now exist within an ever-expanding landscape of grey. Questions surrounding identity, morality, and human relationships have become increasingly complex. Even the news we receive requires careful discernment. Where newspapers and evening broadcasts were once regarded as trusted sources of information, today's media landscape is often shaped by political, ideological, or economic interests, making it increasingly difficult to distinguish truth from manipulation.

This is the reality in which we live. Our daily lives are intertwined with issues that demand wisdom and discernment. Our minds and hearts are constantly confronted with competing voices, opinions, and narratives.

Things are not always what they first appear to be.

It is precisely here that temptation arises. Faced with confusion, we naturally long for certainty and purity. Like the servants in today's Gospel, we are tempted to pull up the darnel immediately, without considering the consequences. Although our intentions may be good, impulsive and aggressive responses often lead to actions that are harsh, lacking in compassion, and sometimes even unjust. We see this reflected in today's culture of polarisation, public condemnation, and the expectation of instant solutions to deeply complex problems.

The master's response is therefore both wise and surprising. He tells his servants to leave the wheat and darnel to grow together for a time, knowing that they will eventually be distinguished by their fruits. Premature action risks destroying the very wheat they seek to protect. Patience is not weakness; it is wisdom rooted in trust.

The same principle applies to our own lives. We must resist the temptation to react hastily to situations that may later reveal themselves in a different light. Some circumstances that initially appear harmful can ultimately produce good, while appearances can also deceive us into judging others unfairly. Through patient discernment, we allow truth to emerge over time and learn to judge not by first impressions, but by the fruits that are borne.

There is no doubt that evil exists in our world. It is present in society, in our communities, and even within our own hearts because of the reality of original sin. Yet the Gospel does not call us to wage a reckless battle against every perceived evil. Instead,

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with Bro Lincoln Lee

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

Readings: Wisdom 12: 13, 16-19;

Romans 8: 26-27;

Gospel: Matthew 13: 24-43

it calls us to grow in discernment. We are invited to exercise patience, humility, and hope, allowing God's grace to mature us so that we ourselves may become good wheat amid the weeds.

The saints offer us a beautiful example of what this looks like. They were not born holy or free from weakness. Like us, they struggled with temptation, failure, and sin. Yet, rather than fleeing from the world or attempting to control it through force, they allowed God's grace to purify them. As they grew in holiness, the fruits of their lives became increasingly evident. Their witness transformed the world, not through impulsive reactions, but through steadfast fidelity to Christ.

As we encounter the darkness and brokenness of our world, we must first acknowledge that evil is real. We must then resist the temptation to respond merely out of anger or fear. Instead, we are called to discern wisely, to act with patience and charity, and to allow God's grace to shape our responses. Above all, we place our hope in God, for He alone is the ultimate judge of every human heart. In the end, it is not our task to separate the wheat from the darnel before its time, but to remain faithful disciples, trusting that God will bring about His perfect justice in His perfect time.

SIBU: With just over two months before the Malaysia Pastoral Convention (MPC2026), the Diocese of Sibu took another significant step in its preparation journey by holding its second preparatory session, bringing together representatives from all 12 parishes who will serve as the voices of their communities at the national gathering from September 9–12.

Reflecting the spirit of Celebrate-Listen-Walk Together, the session was a time of formation, preparation and renewed commitment as delegates prepared to enter into prayerful discernment on the future direction of the Church in Malaysia.

Fr Alphonsus Tang, Diocese of Sibu coordinator for MPC2026, guided participants through the next phase of preparations, introducing the spiritual practice of Conversation in the Spirit (CIS).

He explained that delegates, facilitators and note-takers are called not merely to exchange views, but to listen attentively — to God, to one another and to the movements of the Holy Spirit — as they discern together the will of God for the Church.

Participants were also briefed on the MPC2026 programme, which will gather delegates from Malaysia's nine dioceses and archdioceses in Sibu this September.

A key highlight will be the merging of the nine crosses during the opening ceremony on September 9. Since April 3, 2025, the diocesan crosses (*Perjalanan Salib*) have journeyed across Malaysia, inviting communities into prayer and preparation.

The nine crosses will enter Sacred Heart Cathedral through its nine aisles before being assembled into One Cross — a powerful symbol that although the Church is made up

Nine Crosses, one mission: Sibu prepares for MPC2026

of many communities, cultures and traditions, it remains one Body in Christ, united in faith and mission.

Moving from spiritual preparation to practical arrangements, MPC2026 Logistics coordinator James Lau briefed participants on preparations to welcome hundreds of delegates to Sibu.

His presentation covered accommodation, registration, participant verification, identification tags, CIS table assignments and the distribution of convention materials, including the commemorative cross, canvas bag and programme booklet. Participants were also introduced to official MPC2026 merchandise.

Among the items available will be the limited-edition LEGO Cross, which carries a deeper message beyond being a souvenir. Just as individual LEGO bricks come together to form one cross, every baptised person — with different gifts, cultures and experiences — is called to build up the one Body of Christ.

The symbol echoes the message of the merging of the nine crosses: the unity of the Church is not found in uniformity, but in communion with Christ and one another.

Offering words of encouragement, Bishop Joseph Hii Teck Kwong invited the entire Diocese of Sibu to accompany the journey to-



Bishop Joseph Hii addressing the participants.

wards MPC2026, reminding the faithful that preparation is not limited to delegates alone.

He proposed a prayer initiative where the names of diocesan delegates would be placed in each parish, allowing parishioners to select a name and pray daily for that person until the convention. Through this, every parishioner becomes spiritually connected to MPC2026 by accompanying the delegates through prayer.

Looking ahead, Bishop Joseph expressed his hope that the prayerful discernment during MPC2026 would allow the Holy Spirit —

the Spirit of the Risen Christ — to reveal the path the Church in Malaysia is called to take.

The collective discernment is expected to lead to a Pastoral Statement offering a Spirit-led vision for the pastoral direction and missionary life of the Church in Malaysia.

As the countdown continues, the Diocese of Sibu is preparing not only its delegates and volunteers but the entire diocesan family. Through prayer, listening, planning and communion, the local Church continues its journey towards MPC2026, trusting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit.



KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

July

- 20-27 XII Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC) Plenary Assembly – Jakarta
- 28-30 Meeting – CFM Exco, Kuching
- 31 Mass – Feast Day, Church of St Ignatius, Petaling Jaya



PENANG DIOCESE

Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

July

- 20-27 XII Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC) Plenary Assembly – Jakarta
- 28-1/8 Visit of Parish Priest and parishioners of the Titular Church in Rome, Santa Maria Causa Nostrae Laetitiae to Penang



MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

July

- 28 Meeting via Zoom – Caritas Malaysia Diocesan Directors & Ecclesiastical Assistants (CM DEA)



Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #280

F12
MJD NEWS
UPDATES

Welcome dear friends,

The *countdown* to MPC2026 has begun. Another 60 days plus or minus! *The Pilgrim Cross* is currently at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, JB.

Another massive pilgrimage is expected this month during the feast of *Sts Anne & Joachim*. July 26 coincides with the *World Day for Grandparents & the Elderly*. Anne and Joachim are the grandparents of Jesus. July 26 commemorates the aged, the seniors, the neglected, the forgotten and lonely who are called the “new people with new potentials”. Interestingly Pope Leo called parishes and diocesan ministries to set up *permanent pastoral care* for them.

Local takes! The Rakyat's concerns!

Polling day for Johor took place on July 11. Voters were more concerned with the economy and rising living costs, not the royal issue.

The PM declared that the era of plunder and crony enrichment was over and questioned racial politics on his campaign trail.

Dengue, abandoning of babies and organised begging are on the rise. Foreigners possessing expired passports are raising security concerns.

Fuelling social divisions via online by agencies and AI-generated disinformation in politics and election campaigns have been exposed.

SUHAKAM warned that the proposed RM5.4 billion budget cuts to health/education could hurt vulnerable groups.

Reading the Signs: Becoming little reflections of God's presence
On being shepherds: Peter teaches patient

communion, listening and discernment; *Paul shows* the transforming power of God's word. Together, they call every Christian, especially shepherds, to carry others, serve generously, proclaim the Gospel and build harmony in Christ.

On being communion of communities: *The Church's mission* is not dominion but service, unity, reconciliation, dialogue and faithful proclamation of Christ's love.

On the latest excommunication order: Imposed by the Vatican on the Society of St Pius X (SSPX) also *outlined paths for priests and faithful to return through profession of faith, fidelity to the Pope, and acceptance of Vatican II*.

On the Pope's Peter's Pence: In 2025, Peter's Pence received a total of **57.6 million euros**, while it spent 59.8 million euros; donations intended for the Pope's mission for the universal Church.

Thought for the Week: Happy beggar, Unhappy king!

A wealthy king who ruled a vast domain, lived in a magnificent palace and had a luxurious court, and yet he was very unhappy. The monarch, out of desperation, asked one of his servants, a renowned sage to rid him of his anxiety, depression and unhappiness.

The sage replied, “There is but one cure for the king. Your Majesty must sleep one night in the shirt of a happy man.” Messengers were dispatched throughout the realm to search for a man who was truly happy. At last, they found a man, a poor beggar, who sat smiling by the roadside.

Then they told him what they wanted, and were ready to give a large sum of money for his shirt. *The beggar burst into uncontrollable laughter and replied, “I am*

sorry I cannot oblige the king. I don't have a shirt on my back.”

The lesson from the beggar: **There are two things that contribute to happiness: What we can do without and what we can do with. Happiness is not something you have in your hands; it is something you carry in your heart.**

QnQ? Why do some enjoy suffering when they could be comfortable being transformed? Matthew 11:30

For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” *The “lightness” of Christ's yoke* is not the absence of effort, but the **presence of total alignment**; it is light because you are no longer carrying the weight of proving your own worth; it's a **relationship** where grace reshapes the one who bears it. It requires trust, surrender and living a life that's “**counter culture**” because it's being internally transformed by the “hidden things” that has been hidden from “the wise and the learned”.

When you exchange the frantic, heavy, ill-fitting yoke of modern approval for a **lifestyle rooted in grace**, simplicity, and humility, the burden of existence suddenly becomes light. It fits. You finally stop pulling against the grain of how you were actually made to live.

The Spirit @work: “The *more docile* we are to the motions of the Holy Spirit, the more our soul will grow in freedom.” *Fr Jacques Philippe*

Something to tickle you: “Human dignity has *no passport* and does not lose its value when crossing a border.” *Pope Leo XIV*

Bernard

Bishop Bernard Paul

Canonists and tribunal staff gather for 6th regional conference

PENANG: Canonists and tribunal staff from across Malaysia gathered in Penang for the 6th Canon Law Society of Malaysia, Brunei and Singapore (CLSMBS) Conference. The three-day conference, hosted by the First Instance Ecclesiastical Tribunal of Penang, was held at the Msgr Aloysius Spirituality Centre (MASC). It provided a valuable opportunity for learning, sharing experiences and strengthening fellowship among those serving in the Church's Tribunal.

The conference opened with Mass at the Church of the Immaculate Conception presided over by Msgr Jude Miranda (Diocese of Penang), with Fr Gilbertus J. Engan (Diocese of Keningau), Fr Dominic Santhiyagu (Diocese of Penang), Fr William Michael (Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur) and Fr Damian Charles Pereira (Malacca Johore Diocese) concelebrating.

The Eucharistic celebration set the tone for the conference as participants entrusted the gathering to God's guidance and blessings. This was followed by a fellowship dinner



The canonists and tribunal staff at the conference in Penang.

hosted by Msgr Jude on behalf of Cardinal Sebastian Francis.

The conference featured a series of presentations on important aspects of Canon Law and tribunal ministry. Fr Dominic presented a session on *Responsible Stewardship of Parish and Tribunal Archives and Inventory According to the 1983 Code of Canon Law*, highlighting the importance of proper record-keeping, accountability, and effective parish and tribunal admin-

istration.

Fr William delivered a presentation on *Marriage and the Annulment Process*, explaining the canonical procedures, pastoral responsibilities and the important role of the tribunal in accompanying the faithful through the annulment process.

Fr Damian, the newly graduated canonist, shared the guidelines and canonical process for married deacons. Fr Jeffri Gumu from the

Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu, presented the *Constitution of CLSMBS*, leading participants through its key provisions and facilitating a fruitful discussion on the society's governance, objectives and future direction. Members actively shared their views and suggestions before concluding the conference with the Annual General Meeting, where reports were presented, progress was reviewed, and future initiatives were discussed.

Beyond the presentations and meetings, participants enjoyed meaningful fellowship through shared meals, conversations and prayer. The gathering strengthened friendships, encouraged greater collaboration and renewed everyone's commitment to serving the Church with justice, compassion and fidelity to Canon Law.

The participants also expressed their heartfelt appreciation to Fr Dominic and the organising committee for their warm hospitality, generous service and excellent organisation, which contributed to the success of the conference.

Everyone can serve, everyone can be great

CHERAS: More than 250 parishioners representing all 33 Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) of the Church of St Francis of Assisi, gathered recently at John Paul II Hall for their annual '33 BEC Gathering', celebrating the spirit of communion, fellowship and service.

Centred on the theme, *Everyone can be great because everyone can serve*, the gathering brought BEC members together to renew their commitment towards building vibrant Christian communities rooted in faith, friendship and humble service.

The evening began with praise and worship. Participants then took part in a treasure hunt, working with their zone members to identify items connected to the Catholic faith and Church traditions.

Addressing the gathering, parish priest, Fr Paul Cheong OFM Cap, reminded parishioners that each person is precious in God's eyes and entrusted with unique gifts.

He encouraged them not to underestimate their individual calling but to recognise their God-given talents and use them generously in service of the Church and society. True greatness, he said, is not measured by position or status, but by a willing heart to serve.

In his keynote address, Parish Coordinating Council (PCC) chairman, Lt Col (Rtd) Nixon Ng Bujang expressed his appreciation to BEC leaders and members for their dedication and countless hours of service to the parish.

While many see the activities organised by the BECs, he noted that the sacrifices, commitment and hard work behind the scenes

often go unnoticed. On behalf of the PCC, he thanked all volunteers whose faithful service continues to strengthen parish life and bring Christ closer to others.

Drawing from his own experience as a Zone Leader and BEC Leader for almost 12 years in his previous parish, Nixon shared that successful BECs are not built on programmes alone but on meaningful relationships.

"The secret is bonding," he said, emphasising the importance of spending time together beyond regular prayer meetings — through family gatherings, celebrations, outreach and accompanying one another in daily life.

He reminded participants that "people do not commit to programmes; people commit to people." When genuine friendships are formed, he said, service becomes joyful, collaboration becomes natural and challenges become easier because no one journeys alone.

Echoing the vision of the upcoming Malaysia Pastoral Convention, Nixon encouraged BECs to be welcoming communities where people feel valued, supported and loved, as the mission of the Church begins within the family, the BEC and the parish.

The evening was a reminder that the strength of a parish is found not only in its programmes but in the relationships that unite its people.

The gathering reaffirmed that true greatness is found in serving God and one another, and that every parishioner has a part to play in building a Church rooted in communion, participation and mission. **Markus Lim**



St Thomas parish celebrates 120-year journey of faith

KUANTAN: The parish of St Thomas the Apostle celebrated its patronal feast and 120th anniversary with nine days of prayer, thanksgiving and fellowship.

Held under the theme, *St Thomas, the Greatest Gift of Our Time*, the celebration honoured the parish's rich heritage while renewing its commitment to continue building a Christ-centred and missionary community.

The festivities began on June 27 with the novena to St Thomas the Apostle. Over the nine days, multilingual Eucharistic celebrations reflected the diversity of the parish, with visiting priests Fr Michael Adawi, Fr Philip Asirwalam, Fr Clement Lim and Fr Jonathan Rao inspiring the faithful to imitate the faith and missionary courage of St Thomas.

A special Healing Mass was celebrated on July 4 by parish priest Fr George Packiasamy, during which the elderly and sick received the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. The celebration reminded parishioners of the Church's mission to bring Christ's healing presence and compassion to those in need.

That evening, about 700 parishioners participated in a one-kilometre Eucharistic procession through the streets surrounding Kuantan city after the Sunset Mass. Led by Fr George carrying the Blessed Sacrament, parish ministries, BEC leaders, Confirmation candidates and parishioners walked together in prayer, bearing witness to their faith in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

The procession concluded with Solemn Benediction in the church, uniting the parish community in adoration and thanksgiving.

The celebrations culminated the following day with a Thanksgiving Mass celebrated by Archbishop Julian Leow, together with Fr George and Fr Danny Mathews. The packed church included parishioners, visitors and Orang Asli communities from various villages who joined the festivities, reflecting the inclusive spirit of the Church.

During the Mass, 30 young parishioners received the Sacrament of Confirmation. In his homily, Archbishop Julian reminded the newly confirmed that they would inevitably face challenges in life, including emotional and personal struggles. He encouraged them not to carry their burdens alone, but to seek support and strength from their families, friends and the Christian community.

Addressing the congregation, he also urged the faithful to remain courageous disciples of Christ, not allowing fear or difficulties to weaken their faith, but placing their trust in God who gives true and eternal life.

Fr George expressed his gratitude to the organising committee, clergy, ministries, volunteers, benefactors, BECs, parishioners and civil authorities who contributed to the success of the celebration and Eucharistic procession.

As the Church of St Thomas continues its 120th anniversary journey, the celebration served as a reminder that its mission goes beyond preserving history. Inspired by the witness of St Thomas the Apostle, the parish looks ahead with renewed faith, hope and commitment to proclaim Christ in today's world. **Dr Francis Leong**



The BEC members actively participating in one of the sing-along-sessions.

Meeting addresses growing challenges facing families

Deacon Dr Leslie Petrus

MIRI: Complex marriages arising from migration, increasing cohabitation, declining birth rates, changing family structures, mental health struggles among young people, and the growing loneliness of the elderly were among the pressing issues confronting families that dominated discussions at the Episcopal Regional Commission for Family Life and Laity (ERCFL) Conference held in Miri from June 22–25.

The four-day gathering brought together 33 delegates from Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei under the leadership of ERCFL President Archbishop John Wong to reflect on the rapidly changing realities affecting family life across the region and to discern pastoral responses rooted in the Gospel.

The conference opened with the celebration of the Eucharist presided over by Bishop Richard Ng of Miri, who welcomed the delegates and invoked God's guidance as they began four days of prayer, dialogue and discernment.

Growing pressures on families across the region

Throughout the conference, delegates acknowledged that while every country and region faces its own unique pastoral realities, many of the social issues emerging in Singapore are increasingly becoming evident throughout Malaysia. They noted that the challenges faced in Peninsular Malaysia also differ from those experienced in Sabah and Sarawak, requiring pastoral responses that are sensitive to local contexts.

Migration and complex marital situations

One of the most significant concerns raised was the migration of people across Borneo, particularly into Sabah and Sarawak, which has resulted in increasingly complex marital situations affecting the practice of the Catholic faith.

Delegates discussed cases involving canonical impediments to marriage, interfaith marriages, customary marriages involving multiple spouses, and the pastoral challenges faced by individuals who renounce Islam and seek to become Catholics. Such circumstances often prevent individuals from regularising their marriages or receiving the sacraments. Participants noted that Brunei's legal framework offers greater clarity in addressing some of these situations.



Shifting social norms and cohabitation trends

Another growing concern shared by delegates was the increasing acceptance of cohabitation before marriage. While economic pressures are often the driving factor among couples in Singapore and the larger cities of Peninsular Malaysia, delegates observed that the reasons in Sabah and Sarawak are shaped by different cultural and social realities. Nevertheless, the trend is becoming more widespread across the region.

Changing attitudes towards marriage and family life were also discussed, with many young couples choosing to have fewer children, while some opt not to have children at all, preferring instead to keep pets.

Delegates further highlighted emerging pastoral concerns involving so-called "lavender marriages", where a man marries to satisfy family or societal expectations while maintaining intimate same-sex relationships outside the marriage. Another trend discussed was the emergence of polyamorous relationships involving multiple intimate partners, presenting new pastoral challenges for the Church's ministry to families.

Children, youth and the crisis of formation

Changing parenting patterns also featured prominently in the discussions. As more families rely on dual incomes, both parents are frequently required to work, leaving many children with less family interaction and greater dependence on technology for companionship.

Delegates expressed concern that this has contributed to increasing loneliness, emotional struggles and mental health issues among young people, including reports of suicidal tendencies among children below the age of 13.

The conference also underscored the impor-

tance of strengthening catechesis within the family. Fr Paul Shie from Brunei emphasised that the formative years before the age of 12 are crucial in shaping a child's faith and values. He stressed that parents must be actively involved in catechesis, attending formation sessions alongside their children rather than simply sending them for classes.

Delegates agreed that catechising children and young people alone is insufficient unless parents themselves are engaged in the faith formation process. They called for closer collaboration between parish catechetical ministries and family life ministries, affirming that parents remain the primary educators of their children's faith. As several participants observed, ignorance of the faith continues to be one of the Church's greatest pastoral challenges.

The ageing population and community response

The increasing number of elderly persons living alone was identified as another urgent concern. Delegates heard projections that by 2030, a significant proportion of Malaysia's population will be over the age of 60.

Recognising the growing problem of loneliness among senior citizens, participants proposed that parishes increasingly become vibrant community centres where the elderly can find companionship, support and opportunities for meaningful participation in parish life.

Regional insights and field visits

The conference also received reports from the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) Family Conference, held earlier this year in Bangkok, and from the Vatican's Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life on its regional discussions concerning loneliness among the elderly in Asia and Oceania.



A delegate presenting her report.

Delegates visited the Human Life Service Centre in Miri, which supports women facing crisis pregnancies and promotes the dignity of human life through pro-life education in both government and Christian secondary schools. They also visited an Iban longhouse, where they witnessed a vibrant model of communal living. Participants reflected that the longhouse exemplifies many of the values of a BEC, where every member is known, cared for and included.

Synodal reflections and closing exhortation

In his closing address, Archbishop John Wong thanked the delegates for their dedication and commitment to family ministry throughout the region. He reminded them that every pastoral initiative must remain centred on Christ and encouraged them to continue bringing the message of Jesus to the families they serve.

The archbishop also noted that the conference had been marked by honest conversations, attentive listening and mutual respect — an authentic expression of synodality in action, where delegates journeyed together in discerning how best to respond to the realities facing families today.

The next ERCFL Conference will be hosted by Brunei from May 10–13, 2027.

RCIA study day deepens appreciation for the Holy Mass

KUALA LUMPUR: More than 300 RCIA coordinators, catechists, facilitators and candidates from parishes across the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur gathered for the annual RCIA Study Day organised by the Archdiocesan Catechetical Ministry.

Held on June 17 at the Church of the Sacred Heart, Jalan Peel, the Study Day centred on the theme, *The Beauty of the Holy Mass*, inviting participants to deepen their understanding of the sacredness, meaning and spiritual richness of the Eucharistic celebration.

The one-day formation programme was divided into three sessions focusing on the beauty of the meaning of the Mass, the order of the Mass, and the signs and symbols used in the liturgy.

The sessions were conducted in four languages to cater to the diverse Catholic community in the archdiocese. The presenters were Fr Nalerin Erone SJ (Bahasa Malaysia), Fr Leonard Lexson (English), Fr Philip Tay OCD (Mandarin) and Fr Peter Anthony (Tamil).



Fr Leonard Lexson presenting the English session.

Throughout the sessions, participants were guided through the theological meaning of the Mass and its various parts — the Introductory Rites, Liturgy of the Word, Liturgy of the Eucharist and Concluding Rites.

The speakers also explained the significance of the prayers, gestures, symbols and postures used during the celebration, helping participants recognise the Mass not merely as a weekly obligation, but as a sacred encounter with Christ and a celebration of God's presence among His people.

Many participants described the Study Day

as a meaningful and enriching experience. A participant from the Bahasa Malaysia session shared that the theme was timely and relevant, adding that Fr Nalerin's explanation helped deepen their understanding of the true meaning of the liturgy and the Eucharist.

The participant also noted that the questions raised during the session encouraged reflection and fruitful discussion among those present.

While the Church provides important liturgical documents such as *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM), the participant

observed that the understanding of these teachings may differ among the faithful.

The participant expressed hope that similar formation sessions could be extended to the wider parish community, especially to help regular Mass-goers gain a greater appreciation of the prayers, symbols and actions that form the Eucharistic celebration.

The Study Day was further enriched by the presence of Archbishop Julian Leow, who took time to meet and encourage the participants.

In his closing remarks, Archbishop Julian emphasised the importance of understanding and appreciating the beauty and depth of the Holy Mass. He encouraged participants not only to attend Mass but to actively participate with greater awareness of the prayers, symbols and liturgical actions that lead the faithful into a deeper relationship with God.

The programme concluded with Archbishop Julian inviting the four priests to join him in imparting a blessing upon all participants, sending them forth to continue growing in faith and love for the Eucharist. **Anita Sanie**

Mt Miriam marks 50 years with strategic oncology alliance

PENANG: Mount Miriam Cancer Hospital (MMCH) has marked its 50th anniversary by forging a strategic alliance with Asian Alliance Radiation & Oncology (AARO) and Straits Cancer Alliance Sdn Bhd, signalling a new chapter in its mission to provide compassionate, high-quality cancer care.

The collaboration was formalised on June 24 with the signing of an agreement by MMCH Board chair Mervyn Lim, deputy chair Rita Chiam, AARO director and senior consultant Radiation Oncologist Dr Daniel Tan, and Straits Cancer Alliance manager Ann Chong. The ceremony was witnessed by Cardinal Sebastian Francis and Catholic Health Care Asia chair Wendy Louis.

The event also marked the launch of the Mount Miriam Centre for Stereotactic Radiosurgery (MMCSR), which will introduce



Cardinal Sebastian Francis (centre) at the signing ceremony formalising the alliance between MMCH, AARO and Straits Cancer Alliance Sdn Bhd.

advanced radiotherapy technology and specialist oncology expertise to Penang and northern Malaysia. The centre commenced its phased operations on July 1 to ensure a seamless transition while maintaining continuity of patient care.

As a not-for-profit cancer hospital operating in an increasingly challenging healthcare environment, Mount Miriam said the partnership would strengthen its ability to provide specialised oncology services

while remaining true to its mission of compassionate care.

Under the alliance, AARO will oversee the hospital's oncology clinical services, enabling Mount Miriam to focus on enhancing its palliative and in-patient hospice care.

"This alliance combines AARO's oncology expertise with Mount Miriam's long tradition of compassionate service," said Mervyn Lim. "It will revitalise our oncology services, introduce state-of-the-art can-

cer treatment technology, strengthen our palliative and hospice care, and provide our nursing staff with greater opportunities for professional development."

Dr Daniel Tan described the collaboration as a shared commitment to making world-class cancer treatment more accessible.

"AARO is honoured to partner with Mount Miriam as it celebrates 50 years of compassionate cancer care. Together, we hope to ensure

that patients across Penang and northern Malaysia have access to advanced oncology and radiosurgery services for many years to come," he said.

The strategic alliance forms part of Mount Miriam's broader "Oncology-Palliative" strategy. Alongside the new radiosurgery centre, the hospital established the Mt Miriam Endowment Fund on Jan 1, 2026, to strengthen the long-term sustainability of its palliative and hospice services. The hospital has also received tax-exempt charitable status from the Ministry of Finance, further reinforcing its ability to continue serving the community.

Celebrating five decades of service, Mount Miriam reaffirmed its guiding principle — *By the Community, For the Community* — as it looks ahead to the next chapter of delivering accessible, compassionate and innovative cancer care.

Prison ministry members urged to 'fan the fire within'

MELAKA: Members of the Catholic Prison Ministry of the Malacca Johore Diocese were reminded to remain faithful witnesses of God's mercy and compassion as they continue their mission of bringing hope to inmates and their families.

The reminder came during a one-day formation retreat held on June 27, themed *Fan the Fire Within and Those We Serve*. The gathering brought together existing members and new recruits for a time of reflection, renewal and strengthening of their commitment to prison ministry.

Spiritual Chaplain Fr Thomas Chong Tet Fook SJ encouraged participants to persevere despite the challenges faced in prison outreach. He acknowledged that prison ministries across the dioceses encounter similar struggles, but reminded members that their mission is rooted in faith, compassion and the call to share the Good News.



Benedict Savarimuthu (right) facilitating one of the sessions.

Fr Thomas expressed his appreciation to retreat facilitator Benedict Savarimuthu from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, who has journeyed with the ministry over the years. Drawing from his own experience as a prison ministry member, Benedict encouraged participants to deepen their spirituality, strengthen

their teamwork and continue serving with humility and dedication.

The chaplain also paid tribute to Melaka Vicariate Catholic Prison Ministry chairman, Camillus Sinapan, for his leadership and commitment since the ministry's early beginnings 12 years ago. Through careful planning, coordination and collaboration, the ministry has built a strong working relationship with prison authorities, allowing volunteers to continue their pastoral outreach.

Fr Thomas also thanked pioneer members who have remained faithful to the ministry, recognising their perseverance, sacrifices and years of service. He encouraged them to continue guiding newer members as the ministry grows.

Addressing new volunteers, he reminded them to serve with humility, patience and courage, trusting in God's grace as they accompany inmates on their journey of healing and transformation.

The retreat concluded with prayers for prison ministry volunteers, inmates and their families, as well as prison officers and authorities.

St Anthony points the way to Christ

SLIM RIVER: The Chapel of St Anthony came alive with prayer, devotion and joyful fellowship as parishioners and pilgrims gathered to celebrate its feast on June 27.

The celebration began with the Rosary, the Litany of St Anthony and the Angelus before Mass, which was celebrated by chapel administrator and parish priest of the Church of the Most Holy Redeemer, Tanjung Malim, Fr Vincent Paul, assisted by Deacon Isaac Alfred Simbun.

Welcoming the congregation, Fr Vincent invited the faithful to entrust their intentions to God through the intercession of St Anthony. He also called for prayers for missionaries who continue to proclaim the Gospel, especially those serving in difficult circumstances.

Despite being a small Catholic community, the chapel welcomed pilgrims from neighbouring parishes and members of the Catholic Undergraduate Teachers' Society (CUTES) of Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI), who joined parishioners in honouring the beloved saint.

Preaching in English and Tamil, Fr Vincent explained that Catholics do not worship statues but honour the saints whose lives point them to Christ. Reflecting on the symbolism of the statue of St Anthony, he noted that the Child Jesus resting on the saint's arm represents his intimate relationship with Christ, while the Bible re-

minds believers that Jesus is the living Word of God who must dwell in every Christian's life.

"The closer we are to Jesus, the stronger our faith becomes," he said, encouraging the faithful to anchor their lives firmly in Christ.

He also explained that the lily held by St Anthony symbolises purity, reminding Christians of their call to holiness. "Our lives must reflect the Gospel through moral integrity, purity of heart and faithful discipleship," he said, urging the faithful to live out their baptismal calling each day.

In his reflection in Bahasa Malaysia, Deacon Isaac recounted the life of St Anthony of Padua, describing him as a Franciscan theologian, Doctor of the Church, a gifted preacher, and a courageous defender of the Catholic faith. He challenged the congregation to reflect on why they had chosen St Anthony as their patron and to imitate his unwavering commitment to Christ.

He encouraged the faithful to leave their comfort zones and become bold witnesses of the Gospel. "When we fail to share Christ, it is often because we remain too comfortable," he said. "We were created to live in God's presence. Without Him, life loses its true meaning."

Following Mass, the congregation took part in a solemn Eucharistic procession through the streets of Slim River, concluding with Benediction back at the chapel. **Bernard Anthony**



Deacon Isaac Alfred Simbun leading the congregation during the procession.

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MJD launches month-long celebration for grandparents and the elderly

Deacon Dr Leslie Petrus

JOHOR BAHRU: A Mass was celebrated at the Church of St Joseph, Plentong, to mark the beginning of a month-long celebration honouring grandparents and the elderly in the diocese of Malacca Johore throughout July.

Bishop Bernard Paul presided over the Eucharistic celebration, which was celebrated by parish priest Fr Matthew Bun, with Deacon Dr Leslie Petrus assisting at the altar. The Mass was held during the parish's sunset celebration on Saturday, July 4.

The diocesan celebration was held before the actual World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly on July 26, as Bishop Bernard will be away.

The World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, instituted by Pope Francis, is celebrated each year close to the feast of Sts Joachim and Anne, the grandparents of Jesus, reminding the Church of the invaluable role, wisdom and faith witness of older generations.

In his homily, Bishop Bernard began with the touching story of a frail elderly man who went to live with his son, daughter-in-law and four-year-old grandson.

Due to his trembling hands, the elderly man often spilled food during meals and occasionally broke dishes, frustrating the already tired couple. Eventually, they moved him to a

corner of the room and served his meals in a wooden bowl.

Their young son quietly observed everything. One evening, the parents noticed him working on a wooden bowl. When asked what he was doing, the child innocently replied: "I am making a wooden bowl for you when you grow old like Grandpa."

Through the story, Bishop Bernard reminded the faithful of the importance of compassion, respect and care for the elderly, especially as Malaysia moves towards becoming an ageing nation. He noted that many elderly people today experience loneliness and neglect, with some living alone as their children work elsewhere, while others reside in care homes due to health needs.

He said the Church must ensure that grandparents and the elderly are never forgotten but remain an important part of parish life and pastoral planning.

Reflecting on this year's theme for the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, chosen by Pope Leo XIV — *Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you (Isaiah 49:15)* — Bishop Bernard explained that God's message through the prophet Isaiah was one of reassurance and hope.

"God reminded the Israelites that even if a

mother could forget her own child, He would never forget His people," Bishop Bernard said, adding that these same words continue to speak to those who feel isolated, lonely, neglected or abandoned.

"Today, the Church directs these words to grandparents and the elderly — those who live alone, those in care homes, and those who have no visitors. You are not alone. You are not forgotten," he said.

Echoing the call of Pope Leo XIV, Bishop Bernard encouraged parishes and diocesan communities to value the elderly as storytellers, guardians of history, witnesses of faith and teachers of life. He also urged young people to be actively involved through visits to the elderly, the sick and the homebound, as well as spending meaningful time with their own grandparents.

He reminded the faithful that while today's digital culture has created many new ways to connect, the human heart still longs for the warmth, closeness and presence of another person.

"As we grow older, we remain God's sons and daughters. We are called to acknowledge our fragility and weakness, while opening our hearts to support one another and finding peace in God," he said.

Sharing his hope for the diocese, Bishop Bernard expressed his desire to see every



Bishop Bernard anointing an elderly man.

parish establish a dedicated ministry for the elderly. He proposed initiatives such as parish day-care centres, supported by organising teams, volunteers and part-time workers, as well as greater outreach by young people to seniors, the lonely and homebound members of BECs.

Bishop Bernard and Fr Matthew later blessed the elderly, the sick, those using wheelchairs and parishioners above the age of 70 with the Oil of the Sick.

KUALA KUBU BHARU: Catholics must never lose their zeal for evangelisation, as a Church that stops proclaiming the Gospel risks losing its vitality and purpose, said Fr V.A. Michael during the parish feast of the Church of St Paul the Apostle.

Preaching at the parish's triduum in preparation for the Solemnity of Sts Peter and Paul from June 27–29, Fr Michael reflected on the missionary witness of the two great apostles, urging the faithful to emulate their courage in sharing the Good News.

"St Paul declared, 'Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel.' Every Christian should feel that same inner conviction and divine obligation to proclaim Christ," he said.

He noted that both St Peter and St Paul devoted their lives to spreading the Gospel across the ancient world. Peter primarily ministered among the Jewish people, while Paul travelled extensively throughout the Mediterranean, preaching to the Gentiles and establishing Christian communities.

Fr Michael warned that countries such as Turkey and Lebanon, once flourishing centres of Christianity, now have only small Christian populations.

"When we stop proclaiming the Gospel, the Church risks losing its defining purpose and

If preaching stops, the faith withers



Fr V.A. Michael blessing the people during Mass.

vitality," he said.

Turning his attention to Malaysia, Fr Michael expressed concern over the gradual decline in the country's Christian population and shrinking Catholic communities in some areas.

"If we fail to pass on the faith to our children and grandchildren, and if we stop witnessing to Christ, darkness will slowly enter the Church," he said.

He encouraged the congregation to pray for the same zeal that inspired Sts Peter and Paul, calling on Catholics to become courageous missionary disciples wherever they are, regardless of age.

"God wants every one of us to be missionaries. Ask Him to strengthen and empower you to be instruments of His mission."

Drawing from his pastoral ministry, Fr Michael shared several encounters that reflected the growing challenges facing the Church, including Catholics drifting from the faith, neglecting Sunday Mass, or embracing beliefs incompatible with Christianity. He stressed that evangelisation must begin within families and local communities.

Reflecting on the lives of the two apostles, Fr Michael described Peter as the ordinary Galilean fisherman whom Jesus chose to become the rock upon which the Church would

be built, while Paul underwent a dramatic conversion from persecutor of Christians to Apostle to the Gentiles. Despite their different backgrounds, both remained faithful to Christ until martyrdom.

Quoting Jesus' words to Peter, "Do you love Me? Feed My sheep," Fr Michael reminded the faithful that genuine love for Christ is expressed through loving service and faithful witness.

Following the Mass, he thanked God for the example of Sts Peter and Paul, whose lives demonstrated how God transforms ordinary people into powerful witnesses of the Gospel.

He also invited the faithful to pray for Pope Leo XIV, asking God to strengthen him in leading the universal Church with wisdom, love and service.

Fr Michael expressed his appreciation to the choir from the Church of Our Lady of Fatima, Kuala Lumpur, the parish pastoral council, liturgical ministries, volunteers and sponsors who contributed to the triduum celebrations.

Although attendance was lower than in previous years, the feast was celebrated prayerfully and concluded with fellowship meals after each Mass, strengthening unity and friendship among parishioners and pilgrims who had travelled from near and far. **Bernard Anthony**

Walking with Christ through the cancer journey

PETALING JAYA: Hope, faith and quiet resilience filled the hall as some 70 participants gathered for a morning of reflection and sharing organised by the Cancer Support Group of the Church of St Ignatius. Centred on the theme *Abiding with Jesus in the Face of Cancer*, the session was led by Fr Paulino Miranda and brought together cancer patients, survivors, caregivers and those accompanying loved ones

through the illness.

Drawing participants from across the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, the gathering offered a sacred space where stories of pain gave way to testimonies of hope, reminding all present that no one walks the cancer journey alone.

Group coordinator Percy Chiew described the morning as "a space of encouragement, reflection and quiet support", adding that it was

"a beautiful and spiritually uplifting experience" for everyone who attended.

Through Scripture, personal reflections and song, Fr Paulino invited participants to encounter Christ in the midst of suffering. Accompanying himself on the guitar, he led the group in hymns, including *Jesus Rose Again*, encouraging everyone to fix their eyes on the Risen Lord, whose victory brings hope, even in life's darkest moments.

The morning was enriched by testimonies from cancer survivors. Xavier, from the Church of St John Marie Vianney in Tampin, shared his battle with stomach cancer and how his faith in God sustained him through fear, uncertainty and treatment, becoming a powerful witness to God's abiding presence.

The gathering concluded with silent

Eucharistic Adoration, Benediction and the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, offering participants an opportunity to place their burdens before the Lord and experience His healing grace and peace.

Reflecting on the day's message, Percy reminded participants that every challenge should be faced with God at the centre. "Anxiety impedes healing, while calmness nurtures health. Created in the image and likeness of God, we are also called to respond with compassion to those in need."

Participants left inspired by the reflections. Kim Ang of the parish of St Ignatius summed up her takeaway in a simple but powerful phrase: "Don't ask God for a miracle — be the miracle." Valerie, also from St Ignatius, found herself praying the words of Christ: "Not My will, but Your will be done." **SIC Cancer Support Group**



A pilgrimage of faith and sacred music

Christopher Kushi

PENANG: Nineteen members of the Cathedral Choir of St Gregory the Great, from the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd in Singapore, embarked on a four-day sacred pilgrimage to Penang as part of a lead-up to their 10th anniversary celebrations.

The choir is a mixed-voice ensemble dedicated to enriching the liturgy of Singapore's mother church and sings weekly at the weekend evening Masses, feasts, solemnities, and special liturgical celebrations with a repertoire that spans traditional hymns, contemporary praise, Gregorian chant, and polyphonic works, reflecting the breadth and beauty of the universal Catholic musical tradition.

Arriving in Penang on Saturday, June 20, their first stop was the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit where they joined the Inspiration Group – parents, caregivers, and friends of special needs children and young adults – to serve at the evening Mass.

The next morning, they sang the Sunday Mass at the Church of the

Assumption with the resident choir led by Claude Richards, with Leonard Selva accompanying the combined ensemble on the church's historic 1916 pipe organ.

But the highlight of the choir's pilgrimage was the celebration of the Eucharist at the Regional Major Seminary, College General, on June 22, with Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang, presiding.

In his homily, Cardinal Sebastian emphasised the deep historical and spiritual ties between Singapore and Penang, reflecting that the patron saint of Singapore's Cathedral of the Good Shepherd, St Laurent Joseph Marius Imbert, was himself a formator at College General before dying for the faith in Korea.

St Imbert's heroic witness – summed up in his declaration, "The Good Shepherd is the one who lays down His life for His sheep" – resonated deeply with the pilgrims, who were profoundly moved to sing in the very place where the saint once formed future priests.

A memorial plaque at College General now honours the martyrs

who gave their lives for their faith in Korea, Vietnam, Myanmar, Thailand, and Cambodia.

Cardinal Sebastian also paid tribute to notable alumni from Singapore, among them Archbishops Nicholas Chia and Gregory Yong and several other long-serving priests.

Archbishop Gregory had previously served as Bishop of Penang from 1967 to 1977 before becoming Archbishop of Singapore until his retirement in 2000.

He added that the present Archbishop of Singapore, Cardinal William Goh, was also a College General alumnus, further underscoring the ties between the two dioceses and the enduring legacy of church leaders from the Penang seminary.

The choir was led by husband-and-wife team, Alphonsus Chern and Angela Lim, who with Fr John Joseph Fenelon, directed the Papal Mass Choir when Pope Francis celebrated Mass at Singapore's National Stadium on Sept 12, 2024.

At the Mass, the choir offered a solemn four-part arrangement of St Thomas Aquinas' *Adoro te devote*



The choir presenting Cardinal Sebastian with a Holy Brick used to seal the Holy Door of the Papal Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore at the close of the Great Jubilee in the year 2000. (Photo credit: CCSGG)

(*Humbly we adore Thee*), then concluded with the Anthem to the Blessed Virgin Mary, *Salve Regina*, their voices filling the chapel with reverence and devotion.

As their hymns resounded through the Chapel of the Sacred Heart, home to a substantial collection of holy relics of the canonised, the memory of the College's saints and martyrs was stirred in the hearts of those present through solemn reflection and joyful praise.

Choir member Sergio Rinaldi, who helped plan the pilgrimage, said the most meaningful part of the trip for him was witnessing with his fellow choristers how the work of early missionaries in Penang shaped Catholicism in the region – a work

still unfolding today.

Another member, Nadine Wong, said she felt very moved knowing she had sung in the very places where priests and martyrs once walked.

"This made our shared history and ties all the more tangible," she said, adding that serving alongside the special needs cantors in the earlier part of the pilgrimage reminded her that "all of us, whatever our gifts may be, can use them to sincerely minister to others."

The choir's blessed pilgrimage was not only a journey of faith, but also a reaffirmation of its mission: to glorify God through sacred music, and to honour and remember the legacy of those so close to home who gave their lives for the faith.

Silver Liners celebrate Franciscan Jubilee in Medan

MEDAN: Inspired by the Franciscan Jubilee Year 2026 proclaimed by Pope Leo XIV to mark the 800th anniversary of the death of St Francis of Assisi, the Silver Liners Ministry (SLM) of the Church of St Francis of Assisi, Cheras organised a four-day pilgrimage to Medan, Indonesia, from June 29 to July 2.

Accompanied by parish priest, Fr Paul Cheong, the elderly pilgrims visited Franciscan churches and religious houses, including Gereja Novisiat Kapusin in Parapat, the Capuchin Seminary in Siantar and Gereja St Fransiskus Asisi in Parapat, where they celebrated Mass and reflected on the Franciscan charism.

The group also celebrated the Eucharist at the Marian Shrine of Graha Maria Annai Velangkanni and St Mary's Cathedral in Medan, making the pilgrimage both spiritually enriching and memorable.

Besides the religious visits, the pilgrims explored some of North

Sumatra's well-known attractions, including the hot springs at Berastagi, Sipiso Piso Waterfall, Lake Toba, Tomok Village, Maimun Palace and Samosir Island. A highlight of the trip was the visit to Sibeabea Hills, where the towering 61-metre Christ the Redeemer statue overlooking Lake Toba left many pilgrims deeply moved by its beauty and serenity.

Despite encountering bad weather and minor travel delays, the pilgrimage concluded safely. The Silver Liners Ministry thanked God for His protection and blessings throughout the journey and expressed gratitude to Pope Leo XIV for proclaiming the Franciscan Jubilee Year, which inspired the pilgrimage.

For many participants, the journey was more than a visit to sacred places – it was an opportunity to deepen their faith, strengthen friendships and experience the joy of growing together as a community of pilgrims. **Consuela Foong**



Beach clean-up brings *Laudato Si'* message to life

MELAKA: A beach clean-up project organised by Creation Justice, with the support of Caritas Malacca Johore Diocese, various Catholic churches in Melaka and MBMB Ops Bebas members, was recently carried out at Muara Sungai Lereh as a practical response to the call to care for creation.

Held under the theme, *Care for God's Creation, Be Stewards of the Earth*, the initiative brought together some 130 participants, including parishioners, youths and families with children from various parishes in the Malacca Vicariate.

Led by organising chairperson Mary Ann, participants gathered along the beach and river mouth area to put faith into action by protecting the environment and safeguarding God's creation.

The clean-up aimed to raise awareness that everyday waste from homes can eventually contribute to ocean pollution. Organisers highlighted that a significant amount of plastic waste found in oceans originates from land, carried into waterways through rivers, coastal runoff and wind, while the remainder comes mainly from maritime activities.

This reality was reflected in the items collected during the clean-up. Volunteers removed large amounts of plastic waste and polystyrene de-

bris, along with discarded items such as fishing hooks, fishing nets, pil- lows, chargers and cables.

Within just one-and-a-half hours, participants collected almost 100kg of plastic bottles and 300kg of non-recyclable waste along a 500-metre stretch of coastline. Such waste not only damages the beauty of coastal areas but also threatens marine ecosystems and wildlife.

During the programme, Dr Maria Lee, coordinator of the Creation Justice Commission under Caritas Malaysia (Malacca Johore Diocese), and Fr Joseph Heng, parish priest of the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Melaka, highlighted the connection between faith and environmental responsibility.

They encouraged participants to respond to Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* by embracing ecological conversion and making care for creation part of daily life.

Fr Joseph also urged participants to reduce their dependence on single-use plastics by adopting simple habits such as carrying reusable water bottles, bringing their own cutlery and using reusable shopping bags.

Beyond collecting visible waste, the programme also created awareness about the impact of microplastics, which are increasingly found in oceans, drinking water and even in

the human body. Participants were reminded that reducing plastic consumption is not only about protecting the environment but also about safeguarding human health.

Marine biologist Cole Miller explained that removing waste from the ocean helps reduce pollution and the presence of harmful particles.

"The more trash we remove from the ocean, the less pollution remains in the water, and the fewer tiny particles will be present. This benefits marine life and helps protect human health as well," he said.

Towards the end of the programme, Dr Maria introduced participants to the concept of "food rescue" as another way of practising responsible consumption.

Using jelly products obtained from a wholesaler which had passed their "Best Before" date but remained safe for consumption, she explained the difference between food quality dates and actual spoilage. She encouraged participants to avoid unnecessary food waste by using their senses and proper judgement when assessing food.

The participation of families with children also provided an opportunity for the younger generation to learn firsthand the importance of protecting the environment and respecting creation. **Natalie Nun & Maria Lee**



Vatican unveils agenda for global family summit

VATICAN: The Vatican has released the framework for an October gathering of Eastern Catholic Church leaders and presidents of bishops' conferences to mark the 10th anniversary of *Amoris Laetitia* and reflect on the Church's pastoral mission to families today.

The October 7-14 meeting will focus on "mutual listening" and synodal discernment on how the Church can continue proclaiming the Gospel to families amid changing social realities.

Amoris Laetitia, the post-synodal apostolic exhortation on love and family life, was issued by Pope Francis following the 2014 and 2015 Synods on the Family.

According to the Vatican frame-

work, released July 6, the gathering seeks to continue the path of "pastoral conversion" by recognising families not only as recipients of pastoral care but also as active witnesses and agents of evangelisation.

Participants will reflect on how families live the Gospel through "daily relationships, choices, fragility and hope," while sharing pastoral experiences from local Churches around the world.

The discussions will centre on five key themes, beginning with the reality of families today. Participants will examine the beauty and challenges of family life, including financial pressures, housing difficulties, illness, raising children, loneliness, caring for the elderly and supporting

family members with disabilities.

A second session will focus on young people and the vocation to marriage, exploring how the Church can better accompany younger generations in discovering the value of lifelong commitment amid social and cultural changes.

The early years of married life will also receive special attention, with discussions on strengthening couples as they adjust to family responsibilities, parenthood and balancing work and home life. The Vatican noted that this stage is crucial for developing the human and spiritual foundations needed throughout married life.

Another key area will be accompanying families facing complex



Pope Leo XIV greets a baby and family at the conclusion of his weekly general audience in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican August 27, 2025. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

situations, including difficulties, separation and personal struggles. The framework highlights the need for Christian communities where people experiencing suffering can feel listened to, welcomed and supported.

The final session will focus on Christian families as participants in the Church's mission, recognising the family as a place where faith is passed on and where love becomes

a witness to society.

Announcing the gathering, Pope Leo XIV said the Church must respond to the changes affecting families through listening and discernment, while recognising what is already being lived in local communities.

He entrusted the journey to the intercession of St Joseph, "guardian of the Holy Family of Nazareth." **OSV News**

Forming priests for a changing Church

BOGOTÁ: As priestly vocations decline, the Church in Colombia is renewing its commitment to forming priests capable of responding to today's pastoral realities through listening, discernment and missionary service.

This focus guided the 121st Plenary Assembly of the Colombian Bishops' Conference, held in Bogotá from July 6-10 under the theme, *Initial formation for the priesthood in a synodal and missionary perspective*.

The gathering brought together 90 Colombian bishops, along with seminary rectors, formators, seminarians, religious and lay representatives of the Organisation of Seminaries of Colombia, highlighting the shared responsibility of the entire Church in nurturing future priests.

According to the Bishops' Conference, priestly formation must strengthen the "human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral maturity" of candidates, recognising that preparation for ministry begins long before ordination.

The bishops noted that rapid social, cultural and digital changes, together with emerging pastoral challenges, require a renewed approach to accompanying those dis-



cerning the priesthood.

During the assembly, participants worked on updating the *Ratio Nationalis*, the document guiding priestly formation in Colombia, in line with the synodal journey of the universal Church. The process included prayer, reflection, dialogue and communal discernment.

The bishops stressed that forming priests is not solely the task of seminaries but a mission shared by bishops, clergy, religious and lay faithful. The quality of formation, they said, directly influences the Church's ability to proclaim the Gospel and accompany families, young people and vulnerable com-

munities.

The discussion comes amid a wider decline in priest numbers worldwide. In Colombia, a country of about 52 million people — including around 48 million Catholics — nearly 9,700 priests serve more than 4,600 parishes.

Despite these challenges, the Church's mission continues through the collaboration of priests, more than 11,000 religious sisters, 51,000 catechists and nearly 73,000 lay missionaries.

The bishops said this shared responsibility is essential in building a missionary Church where priesthood is lived above all as service to God's people. **Fides**

New Jaffna bishop raises hopes for reconciliation

JAFFNA: The appointment of Bishop Anton Ranjith, *pic*, as the new Bishop of Jaffna has renewed hopes for justice, reconciliation and stronger pastoral leadership as northern Sri Lanka continues to recover from the wounds of decades of civil war.



Bishop Ranjith's pastoral experience positions him well to promote dialogue, reconciliation and community building.

"At a time when northern Sri Lanka continues its journey of healing and reconciliation, Bishop Ranjith's appointment brings renewed hope for

pastoral leadership, educational development and a strong sense of unity within both the Church and society," CCJ member Marcus Priyantha Perera said.

The Vatican appointed Bishop Ranjith, formerly Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Colombo and Apostolic Administrator of Batticaloa, following the resignation of Bishop Justin Bernard Gnanapragasam.

Born in Jaffna, Bishop Ranjith returns to his Tamil-speaking homeland after years of ministry across different regions of Sri Lanka. Since his priestly ordination in 2000, he has served in the Archdiocese of Colombo, including in Catholic schools within Sinhala-majority communities, giving him a broad understanding of the country's cultural and ethnic realities.

The Christian Collective for Justice (CCJ), a network promoting human rights and accountability, welcomed the appointment, saying

He added that the bishop's experience in the northern, eastern and western regions of Sri Lanka gives him a unique ability to accompany communities still affected by the legacy of conflict.

Bishop Ranjith has served in several Catholic institutions, including St Peter's College and St Joseph's College, and was later rector of St Sebastian's College in Moratuwa and director of the Tamil Theologate. Within the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka, he has also contributed to education, catechetics and youth ministry. **ucanews.com**

Thai diocese trains lay MCs in human-centred Church communication

BANGKOK: The Diocese of Chanthaburi in eastern Thailand has concluded a pioneering workshop for lay Masters of Ceremonies (MCs), aimed at strengthening the spiritual, pastoral and welcoming quality of parish events.

Held July 6-7, the two-day training brought together parish MCs and representatives of lay organisations from across the diocese to develop a more professional and human-centred approach to communication and service.

Among the speakers was Fr John Baptist Nuphan Thasmalee, head of the Chanthaburi Diocesan Secretariat, who invited participants to reflect on their role through

the lens of Pope Leo XIV's 2026 encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*.

Published in May 2026, the encyclical focuses on safeguarding human dignity in an age shaped by artificial intelligence. Fr Nuphan encouraged participants to look beyond its technological concerns and recognise its deeper message on the irreplaceable value of authentic human connection.

"While the document primarily addresses safeguarding human dignity in the age of artificial intelligence, its core message centres on the importance of genuine human relationships," he said.

Applying the Pope's teaching to parish communication, Fr Nuphan

reminded participants that an MC's greatest strength is not a perfectly timed programme or carefully prepared script, but the ability to be present to the community.

"Your primary value is your humanity," he said. "Read the room and show genuine emotion."

The workshop also focused on practical aspects of public speaking, including body language, vocal delivery and presence. Fr Nuphan said even where an MC stands can influence the atmosphere of an event.

"Where you stand is absolutely critical," he explained. "It must be a vantage point where you can see everyone, and where everyone can

see you."

Sharing from his own experience, he recalled occasions where the lack of eye contact and interaction affected the connection with his audience. He stressed that effective communication is built not only on words but also on attentiveness, awareness and engagement.

To encourage continuous improvement, participants were advised to record their presentations and review their gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice and clarity.

"We might think we are standing perfectly or behaving properly, but when we speak, we may over-enunciate or make exaggerated gestures," Fr Nuphan said.

"The tone of voice is equally vital. By recording ourselves and listening back, we can recognise if we are speaking too quickly or whether our diction is clear. Always ask: If I were the listener, how would I feel?" he added.

Concluding the session, Fr Nuphan returned to the central message of *Magnifica Humanitas* — that communication must always serve the human person.

Just as emerging technologies should promote human flourishing rather than diminish it, he said Church communication must go beyond simply passing on information and instead create moments of encounter. **LiCAS News**



A Church growing beyond its means

Richard Chia

The remarkable growth of the Church in Sarawak was both a blessing and a burden.

By the mid-1980s, the Catholic population had grown to about 120,000. As new communities embraced the faith and existing parishes flourished, the demands on the local Church increased dramatically. It soon became evident that the ecclesiastical structures established in 1976 would need to evolve to keep pace with this expansion.

Recognising the need for more effective pastoral care, Pope John Paul II established the Diocese of Sibü on December 22, 1986. Carved out of the Archdiocese of Kuching, the new diocese encompassed the divisions of Sibü, Mukah, Sarikei and Kapit. Fr Dominic Su was appointed its first bishop and ordained on Jan 6, 1987.

The creation of the new diocese eased administrative responsibilities, but it did little to solve the Church's greatest challenge — an acute shortage of priests.

Following the division, the resized Archdiocese of Kuching comprised some 74,000 Catholics served by only 20 priests, six of whom were Mill Hill missionaries and 14 local diocesan clergy. Three years later, the Catholic population had increased to more than 82,000, while the number of priests remained virtually unchanged. In many rural districts, a single priest was responsible for as many as 8,000 Catholics.

The statistics told only part of the story. The real challenge lay in Sarawak's geography.

Shepherds across rivers and mountains

Unlike urban dioceses, the Church in Sarawak was spread across immense stretches of rainforest, winding rivers and mountainous terrain. A parish often consisted not of one congregation but dozens of scattered longhouses and villages separated by hours — sometimes days — of travel.

The Parish of St Ann in Kota Padawan was a striking example. Two priests cared for more than 12,000 Catholics spread across 45 outstations. Their ministry involved constant travel, celebrating Mass, administering the sacraments, visiting families, counselling parishioners and nurturing communities that might otherwise see a priest only occasionally.

Even Mondays, traditionally a priest's day of rest, were filled with marriage preparation, pastoral meetings, counselling sessions and sermon preparation.

Archbishop Peter Chung himself was no stranger to these hardships. On one occasion, he trekked for three hours through forests, streams and mountain trails simply to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation to Catholics from 70 villages.

Government restrictions on foreign missionaries further compounded the problem. Unlike many dioceses around the world, Kuching could not simply invite additional missionaries to share the workload. The Church had little choice but to rely on its own limited resources while continuing to proclaim the Gospel across one of Southeast Asia's most challenging mission territories.

By 1991, more than 4,000 people had been baptised in the rural parishes, yet only one priest was ordained that year. Even more worrying,

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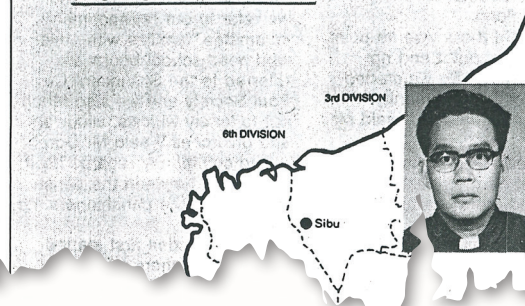
New bishop and new diocese for Sarawak

SARAWAK now has a new bishop for its newly-created diocese of Sibü.

Former procurator and Vicar-General Dominic Su, 47, of Kuching was ordained bishop of Sibü, Jan 6, the Feast of the Epiphany by Pope John Paul II at St Peter's Basilica in Rome.

Bishop Su, who was born and educated in Sibü, will be formerly installed in his new appointment tentatively on Feb 11, at the Sacred Heart Church

ARCHDIOCESE OF KUCHING



there had been been no new entrants from the Archdiocese of Kuching to the seminary during the previous two years.

By the mid-1990s, nearly three-quarters of the archdiocese's Catholics lived in rural communities. For many of them, the Eucharist was a precious gift received only once every few months.

The neighbouring Diocese of Sibü faced similar realities. Fifteen priests served 12 parishes and some 415 mission stations, many accessible only after days of travelling by river, through rapids, swamps, mountains and dense jungle.

Reflecting on these realities, Bishop Dominic Su once remarked: "Some mission stations can only have Mass once a year, or once every two or three years. To reach some of the more distant mission stations, we have to travel across rivers, rapids, swamps, mountains and semi-jungle. It takes several days just to reach the community."

The words captured both the enormity of the challenge and the extraordinary dedication of the priests serving the Church in Sarawak.

Forming local shepherds

Archbishop Peter knew that the long-term answer could not depend on foreign missionaries. The future of the Church rested on forming local priests.

Until 1980, seminarians from Sarawak were sent to St Francis Xavier Major Seminary in Singapore and College General in Penang. For many young men from rural communities, however, language proved a significant obstacle, making priestly formation particularly demanding.

To address this need, Archbishop Peter

pursued a vision he had first conceived in the late 1970s. In 1985, St Peter's College Major Seminary officially opened in Kuching.

The seminary became the principal formation house for all four dioceses in East Malaysia — Kuching, Miri, Sibü and Kota Kinabalu. It represented a significant investment in the future of the local Church and a concrete expression of Archbishop Peter's conviction that East Malaysia must eventually provide its own priests.

Although the seminary produced a steady stream of vocations, it could not immediately replace the ageing missionaries or keep pace with the Church's rapid growth.

The rise of lay leadership

Faced with an ever-increasing pastoral workload, the Church looked increasingly to the laity.

Across Sarawak, catechists and prayer leaders became indispensable partners in evangelisation, especially in rural communities where priests could visit only occasionally.

They taught catechism, prepared children for First Holy Communion and Confirmation, visited the sick and elderly, led Scripture services and prayer gatherings, and accompanied grieving families during wakes and funerals. In many villages, they became the steady pastoral presence that sustained the community between a priest's visits.

Yet their ministry was not without challenges. Many catechists came from farming families and struggled to balance their pastoral responsibilities with supporting their households. The Church also lacked permanent centres for their systematic formation, although earlier initiatives, including a catechists' school in Marudi, had laid important foundations.

In 1989, Bishop Dominic Su noted that the Diocese of Sibü had only 14 full-time catechists — 12 indigenous and two Chinese — serving alongside the clergy across its vast mission territory.

These quiet, faithful men and women became the backbone of the rural Church, embodying Archbishop Peter's conviction that the mission of evangelisation belonged to the whole People of God.

Renewing the Church from within

While pastoral resources remained stretched, Archbishop Peter believed that the Church's greatest strength lay not in numbers, but in the

spiritual vitality of its people.

This conviction inspired a series of renewal initiatives that would leave a lasting mark on the archdiocese.

Foremost among them was the first Archdiocesan Eucharistic Congress, held over four weekends in May 1989 and culminating in a grand closing celebration at St Joseph's Cathedral, Kuching.

The congress sought to deepen Eucharistic faith, strengthen unity among parishes and foster a greater sense of belonging to both the local and universal Church.

Archbishop Peter saw the gathering not as an end in itself but as the beginning of a new way of thinking.

"Today, inter-parochiality is very much needed in the archdiocese and therefore must be earnestly promoted," he told participants. "I do not consider them as mere possibilities. They are my hope."

The response surpassed expectations.

Around 20,000 Catholics attended the closing Mass, many rising as early as three o'clock in the morning and travelling up to 200 kilometres by specially arranged buses to be present. It was one of the largest gatherings of Catholics in the history of the archdiocese.

The momentum continued. During the Feast of *Corpus Christi* the following year, more than 3,000 faithful once again gathered at St Joseph's Cathedral to celebrate the anniversary of the congress, a visible sign that the spirit of renewal was taking root.

Looking back, Archbishop Peter described the Eucharistic Congress as a watershed moment.

"It is a source of widespread renewal, deepening Christian faith and giving our people a greater sense of belonging, both to their parish communities and to the archdiocese. It has led to a noticeable growth in the laity's commitment to their role in the Church and to more active liturgical celebration."

Sharing responsibility for the Church

That same spirit inspired another significant milestone.

In March 1991, Archbishop Peter established the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council, giving practical expression to the Second Vatican Council's call for greater collaboration between clergy and laity.

The council was entrusted with promoting Christian formation, coordinating lay apostolates, strengthening evangelisation, encouraging respect for the diverse cultures and religions of Sarawak, supporting the poor and helping the archdiocese fulfil its pastoral mission.

Above all, it reflected Archbishop Peter's belief that every baptised Catholic shared responsibility for the life and mission of the Church.

A legacy that endures

Looking back, it is remarkable how many of the issues Archbishop Peter identified nearly five decades ago remain relevant today — nurturing local vocations, forming lay leaders, strengthening parish communities, sustaining evangelisation and building a financially responsible Church.

His response to these challenges was never driven by pessimism, but by hope.

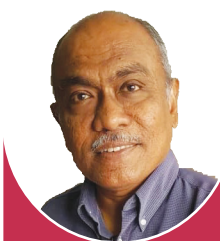
Rather than allowing limited resources to define the future, he invested in people — priests, religious and laity alike — convinced that a local Church rooted in faith, united in mission and confident in its calling would continue to flourish.

The Church in Sarawak today stands as a testament to that vision: a Church shaped not merely by its remarkable growth, but by the courage, perseverance and faith of those who accepted the responsibility of building it for future generations.



Key ministries and offices of the RCIA

In the previous article, I examined the role of the Christian community in the RCIA. I explained that the RCIA is a mentorship process by which the community nurtures and supports the catechumens toward Christian discipleship. The community evangelises, welcomes and extends hospitality, shares the faith, prays with and celebrates the liturgy with the catechumens. Therefore, the RCIA, as P. Ball calls in his book *Adult Believing: A Guide to the Christian Initiation of Adults*, an “every member ministry”. The RCIA, however, also indicates that there are several key ministries and offices that have to carry out the mentoring role in a more significant way.



Echoing the Faith

Dr Steven Selvaraju

anxiety, to bear witness and to guide the candidate's progress in the baptismal life. Chosen before the candidates' election, godparents fulfil this office publicly from the day of the rite of election, when they give testimony to the community about the candidates. They continue to be important during the time after reception of the sacraments when the neophytes need to be assisted so that they remain true to their baptismal promises (RCIA, 11).

The above-stated description of the office of the godparent has two implications for the Christian community. Firstly, the choosing

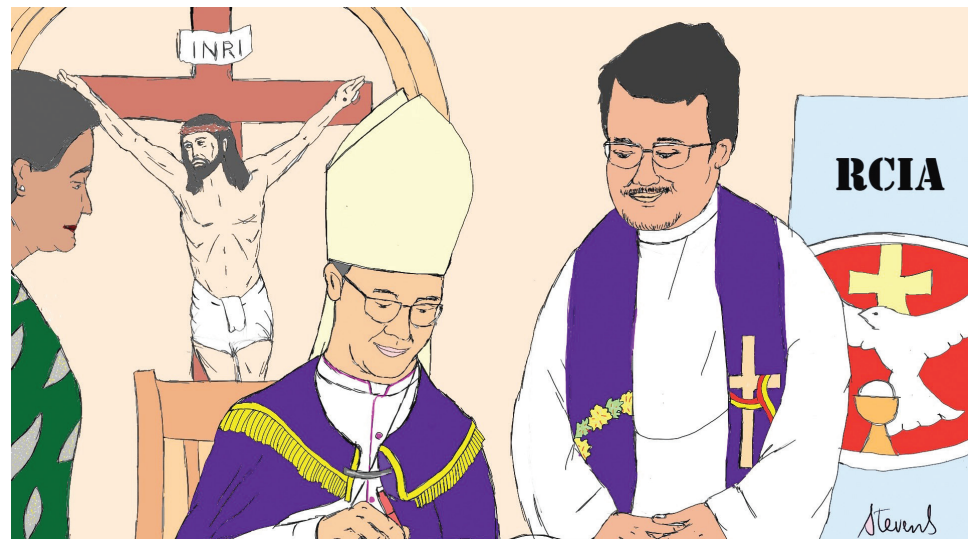
of godparents is a responsibility in which the entire community participates since it is the community itself that delegates the godparent, although the priest gives the approval. Secondly, since godparents come from the community and serve as representatives of the community, they have a responsibility not only to the catechumens, but to the community that they perform their responsibilities well.

Bishop

The General Introduction to Christian Initiation states that bishops “should have a particular concern for the preparation and baptism of adults” (GI, 12). The RCIA points out that it is the bishop who is primarily responsible for establishing, regulating and promoting the adult initiation process in the diocese (RCIA, 12). More specifically, it is his role to preside at the Rite of Election and to admit catechumens for baptism, and when possible, at the Easter Vigil, where those who have undergone proper preparation will receive the Sacraments of Initiation.

Priests

The RCIA states that priests, besides presiding at the liturgical rites of the initiation process and the Sacraments of Initiation, have the responsibility of attending to the “pastoral and personal care of the catechumens, especially those who seem hesitant and discouraged”. They are to provide catechesis to the catechumens and approve the choice of godparents (RCIA, 13). In general, priests can exercise a considerable influence on the catechumenate. Since they are



charged with overseeing the complete pastoral and spiritual care of a parish, they can help integrate the catechumenal process with the life of the parish. Through their initiative, and in collaboration with the sponsors, godparents and RCIA team, priests can ensure that the adult catechumenate becomes the responsibility of the entire parish community.

Deacons

According to the RCIA, “Deacons should be ready to assist in the ministry to catechumens” (RCIA, 15). In dioceses where the permanent diaconate has been established, bishops are to ensure that there are sufficient numbers of permanent deacons to assist in the liturgical rites and formation of the catechumens.

Catechists

The RCIA describes the catechist as having an “important office for the progress of the catechumens and for the growth of the community” (RCIA, 16). In reality, however, the term “catechist” is not often used in the context of the catechumenate. Instead, the preferred term is “facilitator”. This is due to the manifold responsibilities that members of the RCIA team have to carry out. In fact, besides catechising the catechumens, the RCIA team has the main responsibility of overseeing the entire initiation process in the parish.

The RCIA team, consisting a small number of persons, would welcome those seeking initiation and accompany them closely, integrate them into the community, prepare them for the celebration of the liturgical rites and for the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil, as well as, perform numerous other duties. Therefore, the role of the RCIA team is crucial to the whole process. Not only are its members directly involved in the formation of the catechumens but also serve as a “bridge” between the catechumen and the community.

In creating more awareness of the RCIA and getting more parish members to come into contact with the catechumens, the RCIA team can cause a ‘ripple effect’, leading to greater involvement of the community in the initiation process.

Other related-ministries

Although the RCIA only mentions the above-stated offices and ministers of the initiation process, other ministries have developed over the last few years. Catechetical expert, J. Wilde, in his book, *A Catechumenate Needs Everybody*, for example, identifies twenty different ministries in the RCIA. These include: prayer partners, catechumenate directors, catechumenate coordinators, pre-catechumenate coordinators, ministers of hospitality, musicians, ministers of evangelisation, ministers of discernment, sponsor coordinators, spiritual directors and others. Many of these ministries have developed as a result of the social and cultural contexts in which the catechumenate takes place, as well as the needs of the community.

Conclusion

In the previous fifteen articles, I have written about various aspects of the RCIA. This is because the RCIA forms an essential part of the Church's life and mission and all the baptised are to participate in the initiation process. It is hoped that the articles have been beneficial not only to those involved in the RCIA but to the readers at large. With this present article, I conclude the series on the RCIA.

Dr Steven Selvaraju, STD, STL, holds a Doctorate in Theology with Specialisation in Catechetics and Youth Ministry from the Pontifical Salesian University, Rome. He serves as Director of the Archdiocesan Catechetical Centre, Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.

Lost in the Bible? Finding your way through God's Word

Many Catholics begin the Bible with great enthusiasm — only to find themselves struggling through unfamiliar names, ancient customs and difficult passages that leave them more confused than inspired.

For those who have ever opened the Bible and wondered where to begin, Spanish biblical expert Fr Valentín Aparicio has a simple suggestion: start with the Gospel of Luke.

Fr Aparicio, vice rector of the major seminary of the Archdiocese of Toledo in Spain and an expert in biblical archaeology, said beginning with Luke's Gospel, followed by the Acts of the Apostles, gives readers a clearer understanding of the message and mission of the New Testament.

Known on social media as *Un cura de Toledo* (A Priest from Toledo), where he has gained a large following, Fr Aparicio shared his advice during an interview on the podcast *Se buscan rebeldes* (Rebels Wanted), hosted by fellow Spanish priest Fr Ignacio Amorós.

During the conversation, Fr Amorós

described the Bible as the “bestseller” that never goes out of style — a book that has shaped history and reveals the story of God's love for humanity.

Yet, he acknowledged that many Catholics find Scripture challenging. Some struggle to understand its meaning, while others are troubled by certain passages, especially in the Old Testament.

Fr Aparicio explained that the difficulty often comes not from the Bible itself, but from the enormous historical and cultural distance between today's readers and the world in which the Scriptures were written.

“There are times when we do not understand the Bible because of the cultural gap that exists,” he said, noting that some

biblical texts come from a period stretching back thousands of years.

Because of this vast difference in time, language and culture, he said readers sometimes need someone to “take them by the hand” and guide them through Scripture. He encouraged Catholics to make use of reliable resources and explanations that help uncover the deeper meaning of biblical texts.

The priest stressed that reading the Bible is not simply about moving from one page to another or “stringing words together.” Instead, the purpose is to discover what God is trying to reveal.

To explain this, he compared Scripture to watching a movie.

A good movie, he said, is not just a collection of individual scenes. What gives it meaning is the storyline that connects

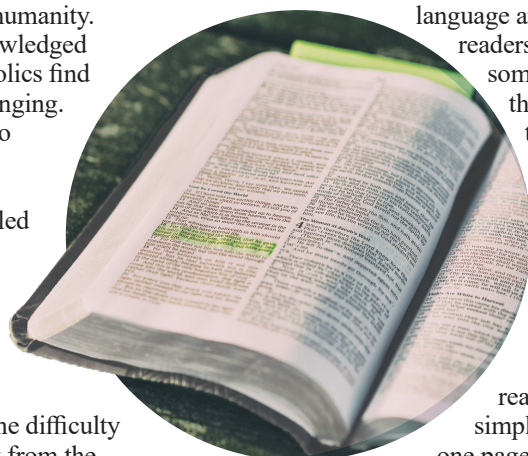
everything together. Without a plot, the audience quickly loses interest.

The same is true of the Bible. Although it contains many different books, stories and styles of writing, Fr Aparicio said they are all connected by one central theme — God's desire to enter into a covenant of love with humanity.

This idea is captured in the Hebrew word *berit*, meaning covenant. From beginning to end, Scripture tells the story of God reaching out to restore His relationship with His people.

“In the Book of Genesis, God begins by creating the world; and in the Book of Revelation, He culminates with a new creation, restoring His plan and returning us to the paradise we had lost,” Fr Aparicio explained.

For anyone intimidated by the size and complexity of the Bible, his advice is clear: do not approach it as a textbook to be completed, but as a journey to be entered into — one where every page points towards God's enduring love and His desire to walk with humanity. **EWTN News**



Theresa Tee

Reflecting on his vocation, Fr Park shared that, before entering the Society of Jesus, he lived with a profound sense of emptiness — an inner void that nothing in the world seemed able to fill. It was only after joining the Jesuits that he discovered that the emptiness was not a curse but a gift. It created the space for God's love and light to enter, heal and transform his life. Looking back, he realised that without that deep longing, he might never have experienced the fullness of God's presence.

One experience during his formation left an indelible mark on his heart. His formation director, who had returned from Cambodia, presented him with a crucifix depicting Christ with one amputated leg. As he held the crucifix, Fr Park said it felt as though Christ had come alive in his hands. Moved by the encounter, he wandered into the garden in silent prayer, pondering its meaning.

There, he gathered a few sticks and twigs, fashioned a simple crutch and placed it beneath the one-legged Christ. It was a deeply symbolic gesture — an expression of his desire to become a crutch for the wounded Christ whom he saw in the suffering people of Cambodia. Though he felt inadequate and unworthy, he found the courage to say "yes" to God's invitation. Looking back, he recognised that quiet moment in the garden as the beginning of his call to serve in Cambodia.

His personal vocation

During his annual retreat in the first year of regency, Fr Park experienced another defining moment while praying with the Gospel passage of Jesus washing His disciples' feet. As he contemplated the scene, a vivid image suddenly filled his mind — not of the disciples, but of the people he had come to know in Cambodia. He saw the prosthetic limbs of his co-workers and staff, many of whom had lost one or both legs to landmines. He recalled the heartbreaking stories of those who had fallen into such despair that they had attempted to take their own lives.

Overwhelmed, he prayed, "Jesus, please wash away their wounds."

He tried to imagine Jesus washing their feet, but he could not. The painful reality struck him with overwhelming force: even if Jesus longed to wash their feet, there were no feet to wash. For the first time, the depth of their suffering, loss and poverty pierced his heart so profoundly that he wept for a long time. That encounter became a

Called to be a crutch for the wounded Christ

What began as an evening talk became a moving witness to God's surprising ways of calling His people. Through deeply personal stories from Cambodia, Jesuit missionary Fr Jinhyuk Park SJ revealed how an encounter with the wounded Christ transformed his own life and continues to inspire a mission of healing, accompaniment and hope.



Fr Jinhyuk Park SJ pronouncing his final vows at the chapel of Metta Karuna Reflection Centre in Siem Reap, Cambodia on September 14, 2021.



turning point in his spiritual journey, transforming not only the way he saw the people around him but also the way he understood his own vocation.

Fr Park recognised this as God's second call — a call to serve in Cambodia through the Jesuit Service Cambodia (JSC), accompanying survivors

of landmines and others living with severe disabilities. Before his departure, his Provincial Superior offered words that would remain with him for life: "I am not sending you to Cambodia for the people. I am sending you there for you."

The message was clear. He was not being sent primarily to evangelise others, but to allow himself to be evangelised by those he would serve. His mission was not to exercise "power over" others, but to discover the transforming power of walking "with" them — in shared humanity, dignity and faith.

Years later, during his long retreat in tertianship, Fr Park came to a deeper understanding of the one-legged Christ he had encountered during his formation. He realised that Christ had been inviting him all along to become a "crutch" for the wounded Christ present in the suffering

people of the world.

Fr Park reminded those present that this calling is not unique to him. "True mission is a natural intimacy with God," he said. "God calls each of us to join Him in His work of reconciliation and healing, right where we are. He does not call us to be perfect, but to be present — to our own wounds and to the wounds of others. It is within those shared wounds that Christ, the Wounded Healer, is present among us."

Metta Karuna Reflection Centre

Today, Fr Park serves as coordinator of the Metta Karuna Reflection Centre in Siem Reap, Cambodia, where the mission is to accompany persons with disabilities (PWDs), many of whom continue to bear the physical and emotional scars of the Khmer Rouge era and decades of conflict. Crippled by poverty, limited educational opportunities and life-changing disabilities, many struggle not only for survival but also for dignity and hope.

At the heart of the Centre's ministry is a commitment to "walk with the wounded." Whether providing livelihood assistance and advocacy for landmine survivors, distributing wheelchairs, offering ongoing pastoral care, supporting the education of migrant children, or conducting formation and empowerment programmes for youth and adults, every initiative is a concrete expression of reconciliation, healing and

peace-building.

Yet the Centre offers something even more profound than practical assistance. It is a sanctuary where the historical and social wounds of war are met with compassion, honesty and hope. Here, Fr Park explained, there is a remarkable "reversal of the washing of feet." Visitors often arrive believing they have come to serve or help. Instead, they find themselves transformed by the extraordinary resilience, joy and faith of those who have suffered unimaginable loss. In the process, the wounded become the healers, quietly washing the hearts of those who came to wash theirs.

Open to people of all faiths, the Metta Karuna Reflection Centre welcomes individuals and groups for retreats, reflection, seminars and team-building programmes. Its peaceful grounds include 16 guest rooms, an interfaith prayer room, a contemplative walking path featuring symbols from different faith traditions, and a small museum documenting stories of peace-building and reconciliation.

Greeting every visitor at the entrance is a striking stone sculpture of Jesus washing the foot of a landmine survivor — a powerful image that also appears on Fr Park's ordination card. The sculpture captures the heart of the Centre's mission: Christ is found among the displaced, the wounded and the forgotten. It is here that broken people encounter the broken Christ and begin the journey towards healing and hope.

"You are always welcome here, no matter who you are," Fr Park said warmly, before concluding the evening with a blessing in the Cambodian language.

As a final gesture, he presented each participant with two keepsakes: a mini crucifix of the one-legged Christ (*pic*), and a copy of his ordination card depicting the poignant scene of "no foot to wash."

Together, they serve as enduring reminders that authentic Christian mission is rooted not in achievement or strength, but in humble accompaniment and the shared journey of healing with Christ, who continues to suffer in His people.

Fr Park was in Malaysia at the invitation of Fr Alvin Ng SJ, parish priest of the Church of St Francis Xavier, Petaling Jaya. His talk was organised by the parish's Firm Foundation ministry and attended by about 100 participants.

From Hosanna to Crucify Him

Rediscovering the Christ we follow

Who is the Jesus we choose to follow — the One who comforts and blesses, or the One who challenges us to embrace the Cross?

This is the central question explored by Fr Mark Michael in his new catechetical book, *From Hosanna to Crucify Him*, a reflection on one of the most profound yet often difficult aspects of the Christian faith — the mystery of Christ's suffering, sacrifice and saving love.

Released in conjunction with his 25th sacerdotal anniversary on March 25, 2026, the book draws from Fr Mark's pastoral encounters with Catholics who struggle with, reject or feel uncomfortable with the theology of Christ's vicarious suffering —

the belief that Jesus willingly suffered and died for the salvation of humanity.

Although the Passion and Death of Christ stand at the heart of the Gospel message, Fr Mark observes that conversations on suffering, sacrifice and the Cross can sometimes be met with discomfort or resistance.

Through this work, Fr Mark explores the contrast between the Jesus whom people joyfully welcome with cries of "Hosanna" and the same Jesus who is later rejected with shouts of "Crucify Him." It is a powerful reminder of the tension that exists even today — many are drawn to a Christ who consoles, heals and offers hope, but struggle to accept the

Christ who challenges, transforms and calls His followers to conversion.

From Hosanna to Crucify Him invites readers to reflect on their own journey of faith: Are we merely spectators watching the story of salvation unfold, or are we willing participants who allow the mystery of the Cross to transform our lives?

Written with pastoral sensitivity and theological insight, the book encourages Catholics to move beyond a selective



understanding of Jesus and embrace the fullness of His mission, sacrifice and redeeming love.

This timely catechetical work seeks to deepen faith, strengthen understanding and guide believers towards a more authentic encounter with the Christ revealed through Scripture and the teachings of the Church.

From Hosanna to Crucify Him is available

at St Anne's Minor Basilica, Bukit Mertajam, and the Catholic Information Centre, Penang, at RM10 per copy.

The Church's mission is greater than politics

There is an old saying that the Church should comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. It has never suggested that the Church should become comfortable with politics.

Yet in today's increasingly polarised world, where every institution is expected to choose a side, the Catholic Church faces a challenge unlike any before. Politicians seek photo opportunities at parish events. Election candidates appear at church celebrations. Donations are announced, plaques unveiled and goodwill exchanged.

Most of these gestures are no doubt well intentioned. Churches need money to function, and politicians, like everyone else, are entitled to practise their faith and contribute to causes they believe in.

But perception matters.

The Church's greatest strength has always been its ability to stand above politics, speaking to governments of every persuasion with equal courage and equal honesty. Once that independence is called into question, even by appearances alone, the Church risks surrendering something far more valuable than financial support — its moral credibility.

The Church belongs to everyone. Within every parish are government supporters, opposition supporters and those who have long abandoned politics altogether. They kneel side by side before the same altar.

None should ever feel that the Church has become more welcoming to one group than another.

Throughout history, the Church has wielded its greatest influence not because it held political power, but because it was prepared to challenge those who did. Whether defending the poor, speaking against injustice or protecting human dignity, its authority has always come from the Gospel rather than from proximity to those in office.

History also offers sobering reminders of what happens when those boundaries become

blurred. The Church's association with political power at various points over the centuries has often left wounds that have taken generations to heal. The lesson is not that the Church should retreat from public life. Rather, it should remain free enough to praise what is good and criticise what is wrong without fear of offending political benefactors.

That independence is priceless.

It is equally important that the Church looks inward.

Across every diocese, parishioners contribute generously and often sacrificially. They fund parish operations, maintain ageing churches, support charities, educate seminarians and finance countless ministries. Many give quietly every week without expecting recognition.

Their generosity deserves something in return.

Not influence. Not control. But transparency.

Increasingly, Catholics are being asked to contribute towards new projects, renovations, development funds and special appeals. Most do so willingly because they understand that ministry requires resources. Yet there is also a growing expectation that the faithful should be kept properly informed about how these funds are spent and why certain projects are being prioritised over others.

That expectation is neither unreasonable nor disrespectful.

It is good stewardship.

The Church has nothing to fear from transparency. On the contrary, openness strengthens trust.

Regular financial reports, clearly presented parish accounts and honest explanations of major expenditure should not be viewed as administrative formalities but as part of pastoral leadership itself. Parishioners are not merely donors. They are stakeholders in the mission of the Church.

Where communication is clear, generosity usually follows.

...The Church Mouse



Where information

is sparse, uncertainty inevitably fills the vacuum..

To be fair, many parishes already practise exemplary financial accountability. Their finance committees provide regular reports, major expenditures are explained, and parishioners understand how decisions are made.

Unfortunately, that is not always the case everywhere.

In some places, decisions can appear to emerge from behind closed doors, with little opportunity for explanation or discussion. There may be perfectly sound reasons for every expenditure, yet when communication is lacking, perceptions quickly develop that priorities are being set without adequate consultation or transparency.

The issue, therefore, is often not the money itself.

It is confidence.

Equally sensitive is the question of fundraising.

The Church undoubtedly requires financial support, and priests often find themselves carrying the heavy responsibility of maintaining ageing buildings while expanding pastoral ministries. That is no easy task.

However, repeated appeals for funds inevitably prompt parishioners to ask whether every proposed project is equally urgent.

Some initiatives are obviously essential — maintaining places of worship, supporting charitable outreach, providing catechetical formation and caring for the vulnerable.

Others may be viewed by sections of the faithful as desirable rather than necessary.

Such differences of opinion are perfectly healthy.

Indeed, explaining why a project deserves priority often generates greater support than repeated fundraising appeals alone. People are remarkably generous when they understand

both the vision and the need.

The Church would do well to remember that stewardship is built on trust far more than on persuasion.

The same principle applies when donations come from political figures.

There is nothing inherently improper about politicians contributing to the Church. They are members of society and, in many cases, practising Catholics themselves.

Nevertheless, prudence is essential.

Large donations, prominent presentations and highly publicised ceremonies may unintentionally send the wrong message. Even if no influence is sought or granted, the optics can create unnecessary questions about independence and impartiality.

The Church's prophetic voice should never be weakened by the perception that it has become indebted to political generosity.

Its loyalty belongs to Christ alone.

The Church must continue speaking boldly on poverty, corruption, human dignity, religious freedom, environmental stewardship and the sanctity of life. These are not political issues in the partisan sense; they are moral issues grounded in the Gospel.

That is where the Church's authority lies.

Not in political patronage. Not in fundraising totals. Not in prestige projects.

But in credibility.

Pope Francis once reminded the faithful that the Church is not a political party but a community of believers journeying together. That journey requires trust between clergy and laity, openness in stewardship and the humility to recognise that accountability strengthens rather than weakens leadership.

Perhaps that is the challenge facing the Church today.

Not whether it should engage with society — it must.

Not whether it needs financial support — it certainly does.

But whether it can continue to do both while remaining unmistakably independent, transparently accountable and firmly anchored in the Gospel.

The Church has survived for more than two millennia because it has repeatedly returned to first principles whenever the temptation of power became too great.

Perhaps our own generation is being called to do exactly the same.

Communication is often seen as simply the exchange of information. Yet every conversation carries the possibility of leaving a lasting impression.

Words have an extraordinary way of remaining with people. Many may forget an entire conversation, yet remember a single sentence spoken years ago — a word of encouragement at the right moment, thoughtful advice, a sincere welcome or, a simple act of kindness expressed through words.

What seems ordinary to the speaker can become deeply meaningful to the one who receives it. Its impact often lasts far beyond the conversation itself.

For Christians, this invites us to reflect more deeply on the gift and responsibility of communication.

The Word made flesh

The Christian faith begins with a God who speaks. Throughout salvation history, God revealed Himself through His Word, and in the fullness of time, that eternal Word became flesh in Jesus Christ.

This reminds us that words are far more than a practical necessity. They can become instruments through which God draws others closer to Himself.

If communication lies at the heart of God's relationship with humanity, the way we communicate with one another deserves greater attention. Words are never merely



Encountering Faith

Thomson Emmanuel

When words become witness

words. They can encourage, heal, restore dignity and strengthen communion.

This is why St James reminds us of the immense power of the tongue. The challenge is not simply to speak well, but to allow our words to be shaped by the Gospel.

The quiet test of charity

Whether at home, in the workplace, among friends, within parish communities or through a simple

message on a phone, every conversation presents an opportunity to reflect something of Christ.

Modern life often encourages speed.

Messages become shorter. Replies become quicker. Efficiency becomes the priority. Yet love rarely grows at the speed of urgency.

Behind every conversation is a person created in the image and likeness of God.

The real challenge is not how quickly we communicate, but whether our words continue to reflect the charity of Christ.

This charity is often tested not when life is calm, but when deadlines are pressing, misunderstandings arise or emotions begin to surface. Choosing patience over irritation, or a gentle explanation over a hurried response, may seem like a small decision. Yet these are often the quiet moments where Christian discipleship is lived most faithfully.

A thoughtful reply can reassure someone who is anxious. A kind correction can encourage rather than discourage. Even simple

expressions of courtesy can remind another person that they are seen, respected and valued.

Living the Gospel does not mean avoiding difficult conversations or remaining silent when truth must be spoken. Jesus Himself spoke with firmness when confronting hypocrisy and injustice. Yet His firmness always flowed from love and was directed towards healing, repentance and reconciliation.

There is a profound difference between holy zeal and ordinary impatience. One of the hardest lessons of Christian discipleship is recognising that speaking the truth and winning an argument are not always the same thing.

As St Francis de Sales reminds us, the manner in which truth is spoken often determines how readily it is received. The question is not only whether something is true, but whether it is spoken in a way that reflects the love of Christ.

When words become witness

Long before people hear what Christians believe, they often experience how Christians speak. Before they encounter a homily, they encounter a conversation. Before they hear the Church's teaching, they encounter the way Christians listen, respond and care.

A visitor may not remember every detail of a Mass, but they may remember a warm welcome. A colleague may not remember every discussion, but they may remember patience shown during a difficult moment.

For those searching for faith, the first encounter with the Church is often not through

a document or teaching, but through ordinary Catholics living ordinary lives. Through these encounters, people begin to see what it means to follow Christ.

God often works quietly through simple moments — a kind word, a listening ear, a genuine welcome.

Every conversation matters

Every ministry in the Church exists to draw people closer to Christ. Yet we sometimes overlook how ordinary conversations can serve that same mission.

Evangelisation does not mean turning every conversation into a lesson about faith. More often, it means reflecting Christ through patience, humility, compassion and genuine charity.

A conversation after Mass. A welcome offered to someone new. A kind word spoken to a stranger.

These may seem like small moments, but in God's hands, they are rarely insignificant.

If Christ is the Word made flesh, then every word spoken in His spirit has the potential to reveal something of His love and draw another person closer to Him.

In the end, Christian communication is about far more than speaking well. It is about helping others encounter Christ.

And sometimes, the journey of a soul begins with something as ordinary as a gentle word.

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



Patti Maguire Armstrong

Don't let a priest's failure cost you your faith

People will disappoint you, and priests are people. They are also *in persona Christi* — in the person of Christ — bringing us the sacraments and leading us to heaven. We hold them in high esteem, but when they fail, disappointment can threaten to seep into our very faith. If their example seems hypocritical, it can cause confusion, anger, cynicism or even apathy toward religion.

As members of their flock, we are affected by our shepherds. So, how can we believe in a Church when its leaders let us down?

Consider who a priest is. He is not his own. The priest belongs to the Church, ordained to serve God and the faithful through sacramental ministry. We pray for vocations and celebrate each new ordination as each man becomes Christ to us, giving his life to the Church. But do we pray for our priests daily?

There is fatigue from long days and nights spent bringing us the sacraments, counselling the downhearted, ministering to the sick and dying, managing a parish or mission, preaching the Gospel and representing the Church in so many ways. It's an all-consuming vocation: "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 5:6 and 7:17, quoting Psalm 110:4).

Cardinal Timothy Dolan has used this description in his writings and addresses:

The priesthood is a call, not a career; a redefinition of self, not just a new ministry; a way of life, not a job; a state of being, not just a function; a permanent, lifelong commitment, not a temporary style of

service; an identity, not just a role.

Our faith is intertwined with our priests, who teach and guide us. Scandal from the clergy, therefore, shakes us up. Some people cannot accept or comprehend it, so they leave. For those who remain, there needs to be a reckoning alongside the disappointment to separate Jesus and His sacraments from human weakness.

In a well-known story about St Francis of Assisi towards the end of his life, some people from a nearby town asked him to intervene with their parish priest who was in a scandalous relationship with a woman of that town. St Francis was brought before the priest in front of the angry townspeople. They expected the saint to admonish the fallen priest.

Instead, St Francis fell to his knees, took the priest's hands into his own stigmatised hands, kissed them and said, "All I know and all I want to know is that these hands give me Jesus." The priest was converted and changed his way of life.

How to respond

In a *Reddit* post, someone asked: "Does anyone on here have guidance for someone dealing with disillusionment with the clergy?" The person shared they had been affected by more than one scandal and were struggling to remain Catholic.

Responses included recognising priests as humans with flaws, seeking spiritual growth elsewhere within the Church, focusing on Jesus and the Eucharist, finding another parish if there's a personality conflict with a particular

pastor, and in serious cases, holding them accountable by reporting it.

The laity are sometimes left on their own when there is a scandal or other serious issue involving a priest. Perhaps the thinking is not to air dirty laundry as if addressing a situation will make it worse or spread it. But when an explanation is lacking, there is a natural human reaction to wonder what happened.

In a family, if the father leaves and no explanation is given to the children, the silence, in and of itself, is a cause for further woundedness and distrust. In the case of scandal, the situation of harm can be multifaceted when there is silence or even resentment at the laity for wanting to know what is going on. We are also at risk of being so curious that we seek gossip and spread it.

Regardless of how a scandal is handled, we can look for ways to overcome disappointment and shore up our faith rather than detracting from the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church established by Our Lord.

What we can do

Spend time in prayer, especially before the Blessed Sacrament, praying for the clergy and for our own faith to remain strong.

Do not expect perfection. For personality conflicts and disagreements, consider that we might be the problem, but regardless, priests too need mercy.

Make connections to shore up your faith and parish through parish organisations and ministries.

Support and participate in the work of the Church, including faithful Catholic media, as a way of strengthening your faith.

Keep your focus on Christ and the sacraments.

Recognise that history abounds in human imperfection and scandal, but the gates of hell have not prevailed against the Church.

Fr Mark-Mary Ames offers insight on how to react "when priests get it wrong." (<https://bit.ly/4aKnnrC>).

He explains that there are generational differences, and that some priests may have been swayed by a culture not in line with Church teaching. If a priest's words seem unclear or inconsistent with Church teaching, he suggests that you approach the conversation with kindness, seek clarity, and above all, place your trust in the Lord:

It is not our job to supervise the priests or save the Church, but we can charitably address problems and certainly report wrongdoing. And regardless of any problems with individual priests, remember to pray in thanksgiving for the gift of the priesthood, which brings us the fullness of God's gifts.

"If I were to meet a priest and an angel, I should salute the priest before I saluted the angel. The latter is the friend of God, but the priest holds His place." — St John Vianney

Patti is an award-winning journalist and was managing editor and co-author of the bestselling *"Amazing Grace Series"*.



Fr Ron Rolheiser

A naivete of the heart

Darkness is only bad because there is light. Sin can only happen if, first, there is love.

Karl Rahner makes a very insightful comment about the text in the Gospels where Jesus is being crucified and says of His executioners: "Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do!"

Rahner suggests that they knew exactly what they were doing. They knew they were putting an innocent man to death, that they were shedding innocent blood. So why does Jesus say what He said?

What was their innocence? What was their naivete?

Rahner's answer: "They didn't know what they were doing because they didn't know how much they were loved." And that can make for a naivete of the heart. How so?

There's a place inside us, a place of which we are rarely consciously aware, where each of us is being held unconditionally in love by God. The people who crucified Jesus didn't know what they were doing because they weren't aware of that. That was their blindness, their ignorance. Despite what it looks like on the surface, they didn't know what they were doing.

This is also true for us. Far too often we crucify others and ourselves because of this ignorance: we don't know how much

we are loved. Consequently, we're sometimes cruel in our judgments and prone to do things which compromise our dignity. We struggle not to be one of the executioners at the crucifixion because, at the end of the day, we are acting out of ignorance. We don't know any better, like the naivete of the child who hurts herself in ignorance.

But this isn't a new insight.

Theology has classically distinguished *culpable* and *inculpable* ignorance. The latter, also called invincible ignorance, was seen to excuse one from sin and responsibility. Hence, there was the teaching that you could do things that were wrong but not sinful because you were acting in ignorance. This was predicated on the belief that you could act morally and responsibly only if you actually knew what you were doing. To sin, you had to act "knowingly". Granted, that's a tricky caveat.

However, looking at our world today, I would risk saying that in of important moral matters, we are acting in invincible ignorance. Simply put, we don't know any better. Only the type of ignorance that allowed sincere people to crucify Jesus can explain why we, good and sincere people, can be so massively blind, communally and individually, to the poor, to the economic and social demands made by our faith. The real reason

we can live so comfortably as the gap between the rich and the poor widens is not that we are bad and without conscience, but rather, as Rahner says, we don't know how much we are loved.

The same holds for our attitude towards sex. We have been able to trivialise sex, split it off from the sacredness of marriage, and turn it into an extension of dating (or simply recreational sex) only because of a certain invincible ignorance. We don't know any better, not because we lack conscience, but because we lack any real sense of the deep love of God and the dignity it gives us.

Like Jesus' executioners, we have an astounding capacity to rationalise, trivialise, and compensate precisely because we don't know what we're doing. We don't have a conscious sense of God's love for us. Hence, it's easy to lose perspective, feel excluded, and do things that we would never do if we were more aware of our full dignity.

Small wonder we settle for second-best or for most anything that promises comfort and security. Jesus, no doubt, is looking at us and saying: "Forgive them Father for they know not what they do!"

But is that true? Can we really plead ignorance and innocence and say that we don't know any better?

I say yes, though it's not that we're stupid

or lack intelligence. This is a naivete of the heart. We are inculpably unaware of how much God loves us.

Too few of us, at any existential level, have ever heard God say to us: "I love you!" Too few of us have ever heard/ felt what Jesus must have felt at His baptism when He heard His Father say: "You are My beloved child; in You I take delight!" Indeed, too few of us have ever heard another person, soul to soul, say to us, I love you unconditionally! In you I take delight! Is it a surprise then that, like Jesus' executioners, we have an amazing capacity, in good conscience, to sometimes be blind and not true to ourselves?

Darkness is only bad because there is light. Sin can only happen if first there is love. Betrayal is only possible if first one has heard the words: "I love you." Jesus' executioners acted in a darkness that came from never having heard that. The same, I suspect, is true for many of us

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LITTLE CATHOLIC'S CORNER

Dear children,
In today's Gospel, Jesus tells several stories called parables to teach us about the Kingdom of Heaven.

First, Jesus tells the *Parable of the Weeds*. A farmer planted good seed, but an enemy secretly planted weeds among the wheat. The farmer told his workers to wait until harvest before separating them. Jesus explained

that, in the end, God will separate those who follow Him from those who choose evil and will judge everyone fairly.

Next, Jesus tells the *Parable of the Mustard Seed*. Did you know that a mustard seed is one of the smallest seeds? But it can grow into a large tree. Jesus teaches that God's Kingdom may begin in small ways but will continue to grow and bless many people.

Then Jesus shares the *Parable of the Yeast*. Just as a little yeast makes a whole batch of dough rise, God's love and His work in our hearts may start small but can grow to transform our lives and the lives of those around us.

Jesus wants us to remember that even small acts of faith can make a big difference. When we choose to pray, be kind, tell

the truth, forgive others, or help someone in need, we are helping God's Kingdom grow. We should also trust God to be the perfect Judge instead of judging other people. If we keep following Jesus every day, He will help us grow to become more loving, faithful, and like Him.

Love, Aunty C





The Weeds Among the Wheat

Can you find and **circle** all the wheat? Put an **X** on the weeds.





Yeast Changes the Dough



Number the pictures from 1-4 in the correct order.





UNSCRAMBLE THE GOSPEL WORDS



Unscramble each word.
Write the correct word on the line.

1

TEHAW → _____

2

WDEES → _____

3

ESED → _____

4

MARFER → _____

5

GDOKNIM → _____

6

UMASTDR → _____

7

EYAST → _____

8

HODUG → _____





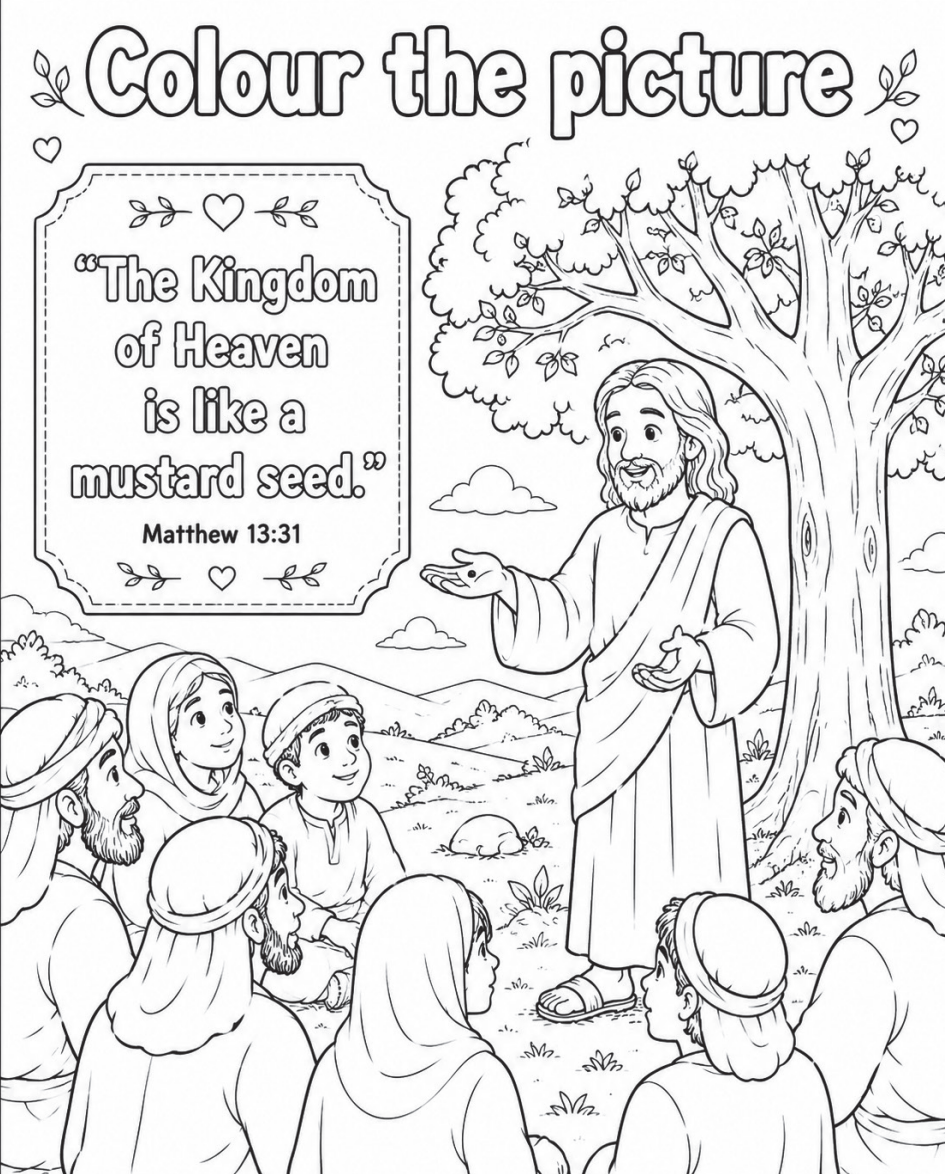
These words come from Jesus' parables. They teach us about God's Kingdom!



Colour the picture

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed."

Matthew 13:31



YOUTH

Katholikos 2026



Forming Leaders, Building Bridges

Patrick Wong

Young leaders aged 13 to 39, from various parishes across the Diocese of Malacca Johore, gathered over three consecutive Saturdays on June 13, 20, and 27, for *Katholikos 2026*, a diocesan formation initiative aimed at equipping Catholic youth with the practical skills and the right spirit needed to serve their parishes and the wider Church with greater intentionality and professionalism.

The event was organised by the Malacca Johore Diocese Young People Network (MJDPN). More than a training programme, *Katholikos 2026* was a genuine encounter for young leaders to learn together, deepen bonds between different parishes, and grow in their sense of shared mission.

There were two core sessions in *Katholikos*. The first session was about *Organisation Skills*, where participants were introduced to practical planning frameworks such as the Eisenhower Matrix, the GOST model, and SMART goal setting. They then applied these tools to develop a sample parish event in a structured and systematic manner. Beyond learning how to plan an event, the session encouraged participants to reflect on why intentional planning is important in Church ministry, cultivating a mindset of purposeful and well-organised service rather than simply striving for efficiency.

The second session was about *Communication Skills*. The session explored the foundational role of effective communication in ministry. Participants learned about the different communication and planning processes involved in organising events at both the parish and inter-parish levels, helping them avoid unnecessary misun-



derstandings, conflicts, and confrontations. They were also guided on preparing letters or emails seeking permission from the parish priest, providing updates to the parish priest, preparing bulletins and Mass announcements, and sending invitation letters to speakers in a professional and appropriate manner. In addition, the session highlighted the distinction between formal and informal communication, enabling participants to recognise which approach was most appropriate at each stage of event planning and execution.

Ultimately, *Katholikos* was never just about acquiring new skills. It was a reminder to young leaders that they are not alone, that across parishes and vicariates, there are others who share the same heart for the Church and the same call to serve. The Church's mission is never carried out in isolation. It is always a shared endeavour, built on trust and communion.

The question that said everything

What stayed with me was not the sessions or the frameworks. It was the people. The participants came with different hearts. Some were genuinely excited to be there,

eager to learn, some had no idea why they were there, others were genuinely confused by the frameworks introduced. Yet what moved me was watching all of them try.

The eager ones immersed themselves in the planning exercises and produced remarkably coherent event proposals within half a day. The confused ones kept going anyway. And somewhere in the middle of a planning exercise, one group stopped and asked a question that quietly captured the spirit of the entire initiative: "Why are we actually doing this?" They realised in that moment that their proposed programme did not align with the deeper goal in their hearts. It was a simple question, but it said everything. That kind of honesty, stopping to ask why instead of just pushing through, takes courage, especially in a culture when saying no to ministry can feel like saying no to God.

That question, I believe, is exactly what *Katholikos 2026* set out to provoke. Not compliance, but critical thinking. Not blind execution, but prayerful discernment. The planning exercises were not intended to produce people who could simply execute a checklist, but leaders who think, discern

and are not afraid to question whether what they are doing serves the people they are called to serve. As youth leaders, we are called not simply to run events, but to understand why we run them, and to ensure that every strategy, every tactic, every decision flows from a goal that is genuinely worth pursuing.

A lesson in humility

It was a privilege and a time of formation for me to accompany these young leaders across three Saturdays. I personally learned that true professionalism in ministry begins with honesty — about your goals, your motives, your limitations, and your dependence on the Holy Spirit. A ministry can look polished on the outside and mean nothing on the inside. But without love at its centre, it is, as Paul puts it, just a noisy gong (1 Corinthians 13:1). That's not ministry. That's performance.

I came to understand that an event that does not align with its own purpose creates not just confusion, but an uncomfortable and hollow experience for everyone involved. Because without that honesty, it is easy to slip into leading others poorly out of emptiness. Slowly, inviting people into service becomes a source of pressure on them. Spiritual language becomes a tool for obligation rather than inspiration. And people begin serving not because they are called, but because they are afraid to say no. It is better to be genuine and true to ourselves as leaders, rather than simply following what has always been done, or doing without understanding, serving without meaning and unknowingly passing that same emptiness onto the people we are called to lead.

The Church in ten years

What will the Church in Malacca Johore look like in ten years if these young leaders continue on this path? It will not be perfect. Some will remain uncertain, and others will still be finding their footing. Yet it will be shaped by leaders who stop in the middle of planning to ask, "Why are we doing this?" Leaders who refuse to do things simply for the sake of doing them, who pray and discern before they plan, and who understand that the Holy Spirit is not just the opening prayer before an event, but the very reason the event takes place. That, I believe, is enough. More than enough.



Adults in the faith

KUALA LUMPUR: On Sunday, June 28, twenty-three young parishioners of the **Church of Our Lady of Fatima** received the Sacrament of Confirmation, marking an important milestone in their journey of faith as they were strengthened by the gifts of the Holy Spirit and commissioned to live out their faith with courage and conviction.

The Eucharistic Celebration was a joyful occasion as family members, friends, catechists and various parish ministries came together in prayer and support for the confirmands. Their presence reflected the parish community's commitment to accompanying its young people as they continue to grow in their relationship with Christ and take a more active role in the life of the Church.

In his homily, Archbishop Julian Leow encouraged the young people to listen attentively to God's promptings and to respond generously to His call, reminding them that God continues to speak to each person in unique ways. He also shared his own vocation story, recounting the challenges and uncertainties he faced,

and how his father, who was initially hesitant, eventually became his greatest support and source of encouragement.

Following Mass, the archbishop spent time chatting with the confirmands over refreshments, where he got to know their aspirations, their daily lives, future plans, and even their thoughts on football. The informal gathering provided a meaningful opportunity for the young people to connect with the archbishop.

Parish priest, Fr Andrew Manickam reminded the newly confirmed that God has a purpose for each one of us and calls us to fulfil His mission in the world. He encouraged them to remain close to the Church, nurture their faith through prayer and the sacraments, and allow the Holy Spirit to guide their decisions each day.

Congratulations to our newly confirmed brothers and sisters. May the Holy Spirit continue to guide, strengthen and inspire you as you grow in faith and become joyful witnesses of Christ in your families, schools, workplaces and communities.



PORT DICKSON: A total of 13 candidates received the Sacrament of Confirmation during the Eucharistic Celebration at the **Church of the Immaculate Conception**, July 4.

Of the 13 confirmands, nine were secondary school students, while four were adult candidates who had undergone a separate faith formation journey through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). Archbishop Julian Leow was the main celebrant with parish priest, Fr Edwin Peter, concelebrating.

In the presence of their families, sponsors, catechists and the parish community, the candidates renewed their baptismal promises before receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation through the laying on of hands and the anointing with Sacred Chrism. Strengthened by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, they were commissioned to continue living as faithful disciples of Christ.

In his homily, Archbishop Julian encouraged the newly confirmed to continue growing in their faith and to remain rooted in Christ through prayer, participation in the sacraments and service to others. He reminded them that

Confirmation is not the completion of their faith journey but the beginning of a deeper commitment to live out the Gospel with courage and love under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

As part of their preparation, the student confirmands participated in a combined Negeri Sembilan Confirmation Camp for parish candidates the previous weekend. They will continue their faith formation by taking part in an Alpha Youth programme next month.

The celebration concluded with a group photograph of Archbishop Julian, Fr Edwin Peter and the

13 newly confirmed Catholics, marking a memorable milestone in their spiritual journey.

We extend our heartfelt appreciation to the parents and catechists whose dedication and commitment made this special celebration possible. It was also heartening to see that almost all of the newly confirmed, with the encouragement and support of their families, are actively involved in various parish ministries, reflecting their commitment to serving the Church beyond the celebration of the sacrament.

Lawrence Noorthisamy



Archbishop Julian Leow, flanked by Fr George Packiasamy and Fr Danny Mathews with the newly confirmed at the Church of St Thomas, Kuantan.



PORT DICKSON: The parish grounds of the Church of the Immaculate Conception came alive with the Galilee Breakfast Corner, organised by Form 3 and Form 4 Catechism students under the Catechetical Ministry, with the guidance and support of parish priest, Fr Edwin Peter.

More than a fundraising initiative, the programme was also designed as a hands-on catechetical formation experience, enabling students to discover discipleship through service, responsibility, and active participation in parish life. Inspired by Galilee — the place where Jesus called His first disciples in the midst of ordinary life — the Breakfast Corner became a symbolic space where faith was expressed through simple and practical action. The students were not merely participants, but young disciples who learned through doing, serving alongside one another with cooperation, joy, and a shared sense of mission.

Through planning, coordination, and service, the students gained valuable real-life experience in leadership, teamwork, communication, and accountability. At the same time, they encountered values that could not be fully taught through classroom instruction alone: patience in serving others, respect in working together, responsibility in carrying out assigned tasks, and the joy of contributing to parish life.

In this way, faith became something tangible — lived through everyday acts of ser-

Galilee breakfast corner forms young disciples through hands-on service



Galilee Breakfast Sale
Sunday, 5th July 2026

vice and shared responsibility.

The initiative was further strengthened by the generous support and encouragement of parents, whose presence and co-operation affirmed the students' efforts and deepened the spirit of community. Their involvement reflected an important partnership between families, catechists, and the parish in nurturing the faith formation of

young people.

What distinguished the Galilee Breakfast Corner from a typical parish breakfast sale was its deliberate integration of catechesis, creativity, practical learning, and community life.

The students brought a joyful and imaginative touch to the initiative through creatively named menu items such as Parish

Puffs, Cheesy Blessings, Golden Scrolls, Faithful Franks, Noble Nasi Lemak, Heavenly Tea, Kueh Kasih, and others. Beyond adding fun and character to the event, these creative elements reflected the students' active involvement and sense of ownership.

Within a real parish setting, the students were given meaningful opportunities to take responsibility, work as a team, serve others, and experience what it meant to contribute to the Church's mission. The Galilee Breakfast Corner reflected a vision of catechesis that extended beyond classroom instruction into lived engagement with the Church community.

Through such experiences, young people were gently formed as disciples who learned to follow Christ through service, responsibility, and communion with others in the ordinary moments of life, echoing Jesus' call to the first disciples by the Sea of Galilee: "Follow Me, and I will make you fish for people" (Matthew 4:19). In this same spirit, they were invited to discover that discipleship begins not only in words, but in the willingness to follow, serve, and share in the life of the community. **Susan Teng Yee Ling**

India remembers Fr Stan Swamy five years after his death in custody



Fr Stan Swamy SJ (r) at a rally for indigenous rights. (Vatican News)

MUMBAI: Memorial programmes were held across India on July 5 to mark the fifth anniversary of the death of Jesuit priest and tribal rights activist Fr Stan Swamy, *pic*, who died in custody in 2021 while awaiting trial in a terrorism-related case.

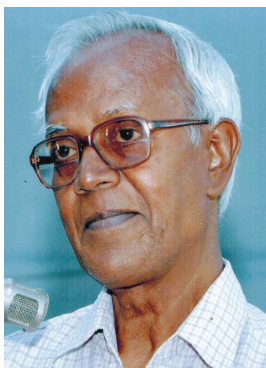
The 84-year-old Jesuit, known for his decades of work among Adivasi (indigenous) communities in Jharkhand, died at a Mumbai hospital after being arrested in October 2020 in connection with the Elgar Parishad-Bhima Koregaon case. He was among 16 activists, academics and lawyers accused of alleged links to a banned Maoist organisation — allegations he consistently denied.

At Bagaicha, the Jesuit social action centre founded by Fr Swamy near Ranchi, Archbishop Vincent Aind of Ranchi led supporters in offering floral tributes at a bust of the late priest. The centre's director, Jesuit Fr P.M. Antony, said the gathering reflected on the current social and political realities affecting communities in Jharkhand.

The commemoration also included a screening of *Carrying the Cross*, a documentary highlighting Fr Swamy's life, mission and advocacy for marginalised communities.

In Mumbai, where Fr Swamy died, a memorial gathering was held at St Peter's Church, Bandra, the same church where his funeral took place in 2021. Organised by the Bombay Catholic Sabha together with civil society groups, the event brought together activists and supporters who remembered him as a committed voice for the poor and vulnerable.

Senior advocate Mihir Desai, who represented Fr Swamy, recalled the Jesuit's lifelong commitment to equality, justice and constitutional rights. Desai, who had worked with him for three decades, said efforts would continue to seek a declaration clearing the



priest's name.

"Father Stan is gone. But we want the court to declare him not guilty," Desai said, adding that he plans to pursue further legal steps.

Supporters of Fr Swamy have maintained that he was wrongly implicated. In 2022, U.S.-based digital forensics firm Arsenal Consulting, engaged by his lawyers, reported that incriminating documents had allegedly been planted on his computer through malware. India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) has disputed the findings, while the trial court declined to consider the report.

The NIA maintains that Fr Swamy and others were linked to activities supporting the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist). The special NIA court had denied him bail, citing what it described as "prima facie" evidence.

A judicial magistrate's inquiry into his custodial death concluded that he died of natural causes and found no wrongdoing. In 2025, the Maharashtra State Human Rights Commission accepted the findings, stating there was no evidence of medical negligence. However, his supporters continue to seek further legal review.

Speakers at the memorial noted that all 15 surviving co-accused have since been granted bail, while Fr Swamy died before his trial could begin.

Civil rights activist Teesta Setalvad described him as a priest who went beyond conventional ministry to stand with the oppressed and defend those without a voice.

Similar commemorations were held in other parts of India, including New Delhi, as supporters remembered Fr Swamy's legacy of service, justice and solidarity with marginalised communities. **EWTN News**

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Seeing the man behind the papacy

ROME: Pope Leo XIV still carries a Peruvian credit card, checks football scores when he cannot sleep, follows the Chicago White Sox and uses a cell phone.

But behind these ordinary details, says Brian Burch, the US ambassador to the Holy See, is a Pope deeply conscious of his mission as pastor of the universal Church — one who values his American roots but is careful not to be seen as only “an American pope.”

Burch shared the personal insights during a conversation with Italian journalists about the July 4 dinner he hosted for Pope Leo at Villa Richardson, the US ambassador’s residence in Rome.

The informal evening saw the Pope arrive without secretaries, accompanied only by two Vatican gendarmes. He prayed with Burch’s family before sharing a meal featuring American favourites, including Chicago-style hot dogs, apple pie and gelato.

The invitation, Burch explained, was intended to mark the 250th anniversary of the United States and celebrate the historic significance of the first US-born pope.

The Pope arrived around 7.30pm, blessed Burch’s family, joined them for an aperitif and later spent time speaking privately with the ambassador in the garden. Before leaving around 10.00pm, Pope Leo sang *God Bless America* and signed several baseballs with the date.

Burch described the Pope as relaxed, warm and humorous, saying people sometimes forget that behind the office of the papacy is “a man like everyone else.”

During their conversation, Pope Leo spoke about his love for the United States, his hometown of Chicago, his interest in sports and his vocation, including his decision to become a missionary priest.

At the same time, Burch said, the Pope is very aware that he leads a global Church and does not want his words or actions viewed only through an American political lens.

The ambassador said Pope Leo expressed frustration that some gestures, including his visit to Lampedusa on the same day, were interpreted as political statements. Burch said the Pope’s focus was not on criticising any nation but highlighting the global human challenge of migration.

“The Pope’s role is to be pastor of the world,” Burch explained.

While acknowledging differences between the Holy See and the United States on some issues, including approaches to migration, Burch said both sides share many common goals, including promoting peace and protecting vulnerable communities.

Asked what left the deepest impression from the evening, Burch said there is naturally great respect for the Pope, whether one is Catholic or not. Yet beyond the office and global influence, he encountered a warm and genuine person who enjoys simple moments like everyone else.

Reflecting on their conversations, the ambassador said he was struck by Pope Leo’s intelligence, deep awareness of world affairs and ability to engage thoughtfully on a wide range of issues. EWTN



Pope Leo XIV spends the evening of July 4, 2026, with US Ambassador Brian Burch and his family, where they discussed peace and freedom. (OSV News photo/courtesy US Embassy to the Holy See)



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