

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

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.  
*Col. 1:24*



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# AI must foster dialogue, promote solidarity



(Freepik)

**GENEVA:** Pope Leo XIV has called on world leaders, technology developers, and everyday users of artificial intelligence (AI) to ensure that its rapid evolution serves the common good, promotes ethical standards, and strengthens human dignity. His appeal came in a message delivered to the participants of the 2025 AI for Good Summit in Geneva, Switzerland, July 8 to 11.

In a statement signed by Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Pope underscored the urgent need for both local and global governance frameworks that align AI innovation with the fundamental values of humanity.

"I would like to take this opportunity to encourage you to seek ethical clarity and to establish a coordinated local and global governance of AI, based on the shared recognition of the inherent dignity and fundamental freedoms of the human person," the message read.

The AI for Good Summit, hosted by the United Nations' International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and co-sponsored by the Swiss government, brings together government officials, tech industry leaders, academics, and civil society actors to explore how AI can be used to advance the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

Describing the world as being at a "crossroads," Pope Leo characterised the digital revolution as a moment of profound transformation with consequences that touch nearly every aspect of life — education, healthcare, work, governance, and even the military.

"Humanity is at a crossroads, facing the immense potential generated by the digital revolution driven by artificial intelligence," he said.

However, he warned that while AI can simulate human reasoning and execute tasks with unprecedented efficiency, it lacks the capacity for moral judgment and genuine relationships — capacities that define the human experience.

"This technology cannot replicate moral discernment or the ability to form genuine relationships," the Pope said. "It must go

hand in hand with the capacity to judge with a clear conscience and with growth in human responsibility."

Pope Leo emphasised that accountability for the ethical use of AI does not rest solely with developers and tech companies. End-users, governments, and society at large also bear responsibility for how these tools are used and integrated into daily life.

"Although responsibility for the ethical use of AI systems begins with those who develop, manage, and oversee them, those who use them also share in this responsibility," he said.

He warned against a purely utilitarian approach to technology and stressed the importance of keeping the human person at the centre of all AI development.

"What is required is proper ethical management and regulatory frameworks that go beyond the mere criteria of utility or efficiency," the message said.

In a sobering reflection on global inequality, Pope Leo noted that despite AI's revolutionary potential, an estimated 2.6 billion people in rural and low-income regions still lack access to basic digital communications technology.

This disparity, he argued, highlights the need for ethical discernment in AI development — ensuring it does not deepen existing divides but instead contributes to inclusive growth and development.

"This epochal transformation requires responsibility and discernment," he said. "AI must be developed and utilised for the common good, building bridges of dialogue and fostering fraternity."

Referencing St Augustine's concept of the *tranquillitas ordinis* — or "tranquility of order" — the pontiff urged that AI should be guided by the goal of creating more peaceful, just, and humane societies.

"Ultimately, we must never lose sight of the common goal of contributing to the tranquility of order," he said. "Let us foster a more humane order of social relations and build peaceful and just societies in the service of integral human development and the good of the human family."

The Pope has made AI a central concern of his early papacy. In his first address to the College of Cardinals on May 10, he referred to AI as a "new industrial revolution" that poses fresh challenges to justice, labour, and human dignity. **Vatican News/CNA**

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## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

# The silent struggles behind the collar

The tragic death of Fr Matteo Balzano has cast a long, sobering shadow over Italy's Catholic communities and beyond — and rightly so. At just 35, the young priest was found dead in his parish residence in Cannobio on July 5, after failing to appear for Sunday Mass. His death, ruled a suicide — an act that is always deeply unsettling, but even more so when committed by someone seen as a spiritual guide and figure of unwavering strength.

Ordained in 2017, Fr Matteo had dedicated himself to the Diocese of Novara with sincerity and zeal. Most recently, he served the parish of Cannobio and ministered to youth in the Cannobina Valley after a period at a Marian shrine. To many, he was a devoted shepherd. But behind that familiar image was a man in pain — pain he himself hinted at not long before his death. Reflecting on another recent suicide, Fr Balzano reportedly told a parishioner, “No one knows the hell one has inside to commit such an extreme act.” Those words now land with haunting weight.

This heartbreaking loss should force us to confront an often-ignored truth: priests, for all their spiritual authority and symbolic strength, are human beings — like the rest of us. They laugh, they suffer, they get overwhelmed, they burn out, and they break — sometimes under the very weight of the expectations we place upon them.

It's a truth the Church can no longer afford to overlook.

It's time to address a pressing truth: priests are not immune to mental health crises. In fact, the very structure of their vocation often leaves them vulnerable. They are entrusted with guiding

entire communities, shouldering the emotional and spiritual burdens of others while often having little space to express their own.

A priest's life is filled with meaning, but also burden. They are spiritual anchors for their communities, expected to offer support, guidance, and comfort—often without a safe space to voice their own struggles.

Fr Omar Buenaventura, a Peruvian priest known for working with the most marginalised, recently described it with raw clarity: “Inside every priest there is a human heart, with feelings, joys, wounds, traumas, and histories that few people know.” While they draw strength from their faith, they are not immune to sadness, stress, or despair. Fr Buenaventura's words echo a silent cry heard by many clergy: “Sometimes the weight is enormous, and without God, I would be crushed too.”

Fr Matteo's death is not an isolated incident. In France, seven priests died by suicide between 2016 and 2020. In Ireland, at least eight have taken their lives over the past decade. In Brazil, the toll stands at 40 since 2016. These numbers are not abstract — they represent lives lost to a silent epidemic of emotional exhaustion, unrelenting expectations and untreated mental distress.

Fr Francisco Javier Bronchalo of Spain, reflecting on this troubling trend, points to a systemic issue within the Church: priests are often seen not as men, but as “functionaries of the rite” — expected to perform, never falter, and certainly never complain. “The loneliness of priests is not so much physical but emotional,” he wrote. The communities they serve can, intentionally or not, create climates of judgment and indifference. Failures are harshly criticised; successes are

expected and go unacknowledged. “We are not superheroes,” he reminded his readers. “We are poor men with fragile souls.”

That fragility must no longer be treated as taboo.

If there is anything to be learned from Fr Matteo's death, it is that support for priests must go beyond the spiritual. The Church — both as an institution and as a community — must make mental health care, emotional support, and open dialogue a priority. Not someday. Now.

This means establishing systems that actively monitor and support the wellbeing of clergy. It means reducing the stigma around therapy and psychological care. It means training laypeople and Church leaders alike to recognise the signs of burnout and distress. And it means allowing priests the space to be vulnerable without fear of being judged or dismissed.

But it also demands a deeper cultural shift. The narrative of the ever-available, ever-sacrificing priest must be tempered with a new understanding — that rest, friendship, and personal boundaries are not weaknesses — they are lifelines. Priests are not above human needs. If anything, their work demands even greater care for their humanity.

As Fr Bronchalo said, priests don't need pity — they need truth, prayer, affection, and community. They need us. And if we truly believe in the dignity of their vocation, we must also believe in and protect their humanity.

Because behind every collar is a heart that beats, a soul that weeps, and a person who, like all of us, sometimes struggles to carry the weight of life.

*Patricia Pereira*

## Finding God in our humanity

Today, as we gather for the 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time, our readings present us with three familiar yet profoundly layered narratives. When examined through an anthropological lens, these stories unveil intricate insights about human nature, relationships, and the divine presence among us.

In Genesis 18:1–10, Abraham demonstrates extraordinary hospitality by welcoming three strangers with great generosity — offering water, bread, and a freshly slaughtered calf. This reflects the vital role of hospitality in ancient Middle Eastern culture, where offering shelter and sustenance was essential for survival. However, Abraham's actions go beyond cultural duty; his kindness to strangers becomes a divine encounter, as the visitors are revealed to be messengers of God bringing the promise of a son to Sarah.

This passage highlights that our ability to welcome others can become a sacred encounter with the divine. While societies often draw lines between insiders and outsiders, faith calls us to move beyond these divisions. Abraham's story challenges us to reflect on how we receive unexpected visitors—not just through outward acts of hospitality, but with hearts open to those who may challenge our comfort and beliefs, yet carry the presence of God.

In Colossians 1:24–28, Paul views his suffering as a shared participation in Christ's afflictions, offered for the Church's sake. Anthropologically, shared suffering often strengthens communal bonds, as seen in responses to disasters or struggles for justice. Paul reframes this universal human experience, showing that suffering is not isolated but part of a divine mystery. His efforts reveal the profound truth of “Christ in you, the hope of glory,” emphasizing that his

sacrifices serve the spiritual growth and unity of the community.

This reflection reminds us that pain and sacrifice, when offered in love, are not isolated—they become part of the Church's shared life. Faith transforms suffering into a communal and redemptive experience. It calls us to recognise those carrying hidden burdens and to stand with them in solidarity. Even our small sacrifices — of time, energy, or resources — carry deep meaning, contributing to God's larger work of redemption in ways we may never fully understand.

Finally, in Luke 10:38–42, we encounter the well-known story of Martha and Mary. Martha, preoccupied with the tasks of hospitality, grows frustrated as Mary sits at the feet of Jesus, listening intently to His words. Jesus' response is both tender and resolute: “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part.”

From an anthropological perspective, this moment captures a universal tension, the balance between action and contemplation, doing and being. Every culture grapple with this dynamic. Martha embodies the active, essential work of daily life, preparing meals, organising the home while Mary reflects the human yearning for stillness, for the pursuit of wisdom and spiritual nourishment. Jesus does not dismiss Martha's efforts, but He invites her to recognize that all activity must be anchored in a deeper relationship with God.

How often do we succumb to the trap of Martha, believing our worth lies solely in our productivity? In a world that prizes busyness and achievement, it is easy to measure our value by how much we accomplish. Yet this story urges us to cultivate the ‘Mary’ within us, to carve out moments of silence, to sit at the

## Reflecting on our Sunday Readings with Fr George Vaithyanathan

### 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

Readings: **Genesis 18:1–10;**

**Colossians 1: 24–28;**

**Gospel: Luke 10:38–42**

feet of Christ, and to nurture our inner life. For it is in those moments of quiet reflection that we allow God's Word to take root in us, guiding our actions and intentions. Without this foundation, even our busiest efforts can become hollow.

Thus, dear friends, these readings speak to fundamental dimensions of our humanity: the instinct for hospitality, the reality of suffering and community, and the delicate balance between action and contemplation. As we ponder Abraham's open-hearted welcome, Paul's redemptive suffering, and the contrasting postures of Martha and Mary, let us ask ourselves:

- How do I receive the stranger, not just into my home, but into my heart?
- How do I transform my own struggles into moments of grace for the community?
- Am I making time not only to do but to be sitting in the presence of Christ?
- Do I strike a balance between my work for others and my time with God?

May the God who revealed Himself to Abraham through strangers, who strengthened Paul in his afflictions, and who gently guided Martha and Mary, lead our hearts and minds this week. May we embody the spirit of hospitality, share in one another's burdens, and root all our actions in the stillness of God's presence.

**IMPORTANT DATES**

July 27: World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly



**KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE**

**Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow**

**July**

- 27 Confirmation – Church of St Thomas, Kuantan
- 27 Archdiocesan Bahasa Malaysia Apostolate KAGAPE Dinner
- 30 Archdiocesan Office of Human Development Board of Management Meeting



**PENANG DIOCESE**

**Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis**

**July**

- 18-27 Novena & Feast of St Joachim and St Anne, Parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary – Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam
- 20 Courtesy Visit to Menteri Besar of Kedah – Pejabat Menteri Besar, Kedah
- 22 Caritas Cheque Presentation Ceremony to Parishes of the Diocese of Penang, Pusat Keuskupan Katolik
- 29 Book Launch of *Sybil Kathigasu: A Heroine's Legacy* – Church of St Michael, Ipoh



**MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE**

**Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul**

**July**

- 23 Mass for Caritas Archdiocese Kota Kinabalu – Chapel of St James, MAJODI Centre
- 25 MAJODI Centre Reporting Meet
- 26 Combined Confirmation for St Peter's Church and St Francis Xavier's Church – Church of St Francis Xavier
- 26 St Anne's Feast Day – Chapel of St Anne, Alor Gajah, Melaka
- 31 25th Sacerdotal Anniversary Thanksgiving Mass of Fr Simon Yong SJ – Cathedral of Sacred Heart, Johor Bahru

# MCCBCHST seeks clarity on judges' tenure

KUALA LUMPUR: The Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST) has called on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim to clarify whether he referred the names of three top judges for tenure extensions to the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong, as required under Article 125 of the Federal Constitution.

In statement dated July 4, the interfaith council referred to the Prime Minister's recent remarks that procedures must be followed for extending judicial tenures, emphasising that such extensions are not automatic and involve the commission, the Prime Minister, and the King. However, MCCBCHST highlighted that while Article 125 allows for up to a six-month extension beyond the age of 65, the process must be initiated by the Prime Minister and approved by the King — not the Judicial Appointments Commission (JAC), which only handles judicial appointments.

The council questioned whether the Prime Minister submitted the names of outgoing Chief Justice Tengku Maimun Tuan Mat, Court of Appeal President

Abang Iskandar Abang Hashim, and Federal Court Judge Nallini Pathmanathan for extension. If he did not, they asked why, and what the King's decision was on the matter.

MCCBCHST stressed that "merely outlining the procedure is insufficient" and called for transparency in the actual decisions made, especially given the routine practice of granting brief extensions to allow judges to complete pending judgments.

On a separate but related issue, the council expressed strong support for the establishment of a tribunal to investigate allegations of misconduct by a senior judge. According to media reports, the judge was summoned by the JAC in May 2025 to respond to accusations of interference in judicial appointments dating back to 2024. A subsequent police report was filed by a subordinate, who also raised concerns about the alleged leak of sensitive information related to the proceedings.

MCCBCHST said the allegations, if true, represent serious judicial misconduct and potentially criminal behaviour under both the Judicial

Appointments Commission Act and the Penal Code. Section 34 of the JAC Act provides for penalties of up to RM100,000 in fines or two years' imprisonment for individuals who improperly influence the commission.

The council backed calls by the "Defend Judiciary" Secretariat to establish a formal tribunal under Article 125(3) and (4) of the Federal Constitution. Given that Chief Justice Tengku Maimun's tenure ended on July 1, MCCBCHST said the responsibility now lies with the Prime Minister to advise the King on the formation of the tribunal.

"We urge the Prime Minister to act urgently. He has repeatedly pledged to protect judicial independence and refrain from interference," the council said in a statement. "This is the moment to uphold those commitments."

MCCBCHST also reiterated its hope that public clarification from the Prime Minister will dispel rumours and speculation surrounding the non-extension of the judges' tenure and demonstrate a clear commitment to judicial transparency and accountability.



## Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #231



**F**irst Eucharistic Congress after a long time. First vicariate level Eucharistic Congress. The 6 parishes of the Malacca Vicariate, the chapels and outstations walked together, worked together, worshiped together and witnessed together, with the theme: TOGETHERNESS! TOGETHER! TO GATHER! It was a 5th of July Communion-in-Prayer. Syabas to the newly established MV Pastoral Council. Local takes: Snags! Glitches! Gostans! SST and e-invoicing appear to have hit a snag.

Malaysia was hit with a 25 percent tariff by the US. Simmering tensions between the Prime Minister and certain segments of the judiciary are out in the open. The home ministry will soon begin registering refugees. For what? More than 30 per cent admitted how difficult it was to differentiate real and AI-generated videos. Will truth prevail? Endless policy changes. What we need is leadership that serves without fear or favor.

Praying Time: Until 1964, the St Michael Prayer was recited at *all low Masses* to pray for the *protection* and independence of the Church. It was an invocation of the protection of St Michael against the snares of the devil, pleading for *divine intervention*, and seeking *God's help* through St Michael's intercession. In 1884, after a Mass, Pope Leo XIII reportedly had a vision in which he heard a conversation between God and Satan. Satan boasted that he could destroy the Church within 75 to 100 years, and God granted him permission to try. Leo XIII was moved

to compose the prayer below: "O glorious Archangel St. Michael, Prince of the heavenly host, defend us in battle, and in the struggle which is ours against the principalities and Powers, against the rulers of this world of darkness, against spirits of evil in high places (Eph 6:12). Come to the aid of men, whom God created immortal, made in His own image and likeness, and redeemed at a great price from the tyranny of the devil (Wisdom 2:23-24, 1 Cor 6:20)".

The reciting of this prayer has returned. Pray that churches be houses of prayer and a refuge from evil.

**A Thought For The Week: A Poor Farmer**

A poor farmer named Fleming, while working in the fields, heard a cry for help from a nearby muddy area called a bog. He hurried to the place, leaving behind his tools. There, he saw a scared, young boy stuck in the mud, sinking and screaming... Fleming rushed in and saved the boy's life.

The next day, a fancy carriage with a nicely dressed rich man, stepped out. He was the rescued boy's father. He wanted to reward the farmer. Fleming replied "No, I can't take money for helping someone in need." That moment the farmer's son came out. The nobleman, learning about the son, smilingly said: "Let me give your son the same high-quality education as my own son. If he's anything like you, I'm sure he'll become someone special." Farmer Fleming's son went to the best schools, later graduating from St Mary's Hospital Medical School in London,

and became famous all over the world. His name was Sir Alexander Fleming, the man who discovered Penicillin – the medicine that saved millions of lives.

Many years later, the same rich man's son — the boy saved from the mud — got very sick with pneumonia. Penicillin, the medicine discovered by the farmer's son, saved him. The name of the rich man was Lord Randolph Churchill. His son's name was Sir Winston Churchill — the famous Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.

**The lesson from the bog:** What goes around, comes around. One kind act can return to you in ways you can't imagine.

**QnQ! Q asks? Is Pope Leo continuing the legacy of Pope Francis?**

Listen to what he says. His messages and addresses, which are simple, clear and precise, reflect continuity. See his latest: We are a missionary Church, a Church that builds bridges and encourages dialogue, a *Church ever open to welcoming, like this Square (St Peter's) with its open arms, all those who are in need of our charity, our presence, our readiness to dialogue and our love.* (Leo XIV)

**The Holy Spirit @work:** Knowing is not enough, we must apply. Willing is not enough, we must do."

Something to tickle you: God doesn't want something from us. He simply wants us. C. S. Lewis

Bishop Bernard Paul

# St Thomas parish celebrates feast with deepened faith

Dr Francis Leong

KUANTAN: The parish of St Thomas the Apostle celebrated the feast of its beloved patron saint with a novena that began on June 26, coinciding with the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. The first day of the novena featured a special Holy Hour of Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, during which prayers were offered for all priests in honour of the Jubilee of Priests.

To enrich the faith experience, parish priest Fr George Packiasamy invited several guest priests from neighbouring parishes to preside over the novena Masses and deliver homilies.

The first three days of the Novena were led by Fr Peter Anthony, followed by Fr Xavier Andrew who presided for the next two days. Fr Clement Lim celebrated the sixth day, while the final four days were led by Fr Joe Stephen CSsR from Ipoh, whose presence was warmly received by the parishioners.

As part of the novena activities, a special Mass for the elderly and the sick was held on the morning of July 5. During this meaningful celebration, the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick was administered, offering healing and comfort to those in need.



A powerful public witness of the Catholic faith through the streets of Kuantan city.

That same evening, with official police approval, the parish held a solemn candlelight Eucharistic procession following the Sunset Mass. This year's permit was granted with minor restrictions, including the prohibition of using vehicles to carry the Blessed Sacrament or Cross. Undertaken, approximately 600 parishioners and pilgrims — including visitors from Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya — reverently

walked a one-kilometre route through the streets of Kuantan City, reciting the Rosary and adoring the Lord Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. After last year's permit application was denied, the successful procession during this Jubilee Year of Hope was received as a profound blessing and a powerful public witness of the Catholic faith.

The novena celebrations concluded on July 6, with a joyous Thanksgiving Mass,

followed by light refreshments and warm fellowship at the nearby Community Centre breakfast corner.

In a parallel act of compassion and outreach, the Parish Integral Human Development Ministry (PIHDM) invited the Malaysian Red Crescent Society (MRCS) from Kuala Lumpur to conduct free health and dental screenings. A dedicated team of 12 members served the Orang Asli community in Kuala Rompin, migrant workers from nearby oil palm plantations, and parishioners. Over two days, a total of 80 individuals received vital medical care — a powerful expression of the Church's mission to uphold human dignity and promote holistic well-being.

This year's novena and feast day celebrations stood as a profound testament to God's mercy and grace in this Jubilee Year of Hope. "These days have stirred within us a renewed desire to discern wisely, remain faithful, and bear witness to Christ Jesus," reflected Fr George. "Together, we echo the declaration of our patron, St Thomas: 'My Lord and my God.'"

Truly, this Jubilee celebration has been a moment of grace — awakening hearts to personal conversion, deepening faith, and strengthening the bonds of unity within the Body of Christ.

## Bible month event strengthens family faith

PETALING JAYA: In celebration of Bible Month, the Assumption Bible Group, in collaboration with the Assumption Youth Ministry and Catechism team, hosted a half-day programme designed to help Catholic parents introduce their children to the Bible and foster a love for God's Word.

The event, titled "The Journey Starts Here," was held at the Church of the Assumption and catered specifically to children aged 7 to 9 and their parents. It marks the first of a series of planned initiatives aimed at building Bible literacy among families in the parish.

Parish priest Fr Leonard Lexson led the session, addressing both children and their parents. He emphasised the importance of Scripture in daily life and the crucial role parents play in cultivating a faith-filled home environment.

Participants engaged in interactive Bible-themed games that encouraged parent-child collaboration. The children were especially energised by a lively Praise and Worship session, which set the tone for an engaging Bible storytelling segment featuring key lessons from both the Old and New Testaments.

Parents were also challenged with a Scripture trivia game, giving them the opportunity to reflect on their own knowledge and understanding of the Bible.

The programme concluded with a prize-giving ceremony for all participants, followed by a closing message from Fr Leonard, who reminded families of the importance of building Christ-centred homes grounded in prayer and the Word of God.

## Forming catechists for the Myanmar community

KUALA LUMPUR: The KL Archdiocesan Catechetical Ministry (KLACM) together with Ministry for Migrants and Itinerants (MMI) of the Archdiocesan Office of Human Development (AOHD) organised a formation programme for catechists from the Myanmar community. The programme known as "The Sower and the Seed" is a foundational certification course which is offered by the KLACM to catechists in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur. This is the first time it was organised for the Myanmar community. A total of twelve participants, both current and potential catechists, took part in the programme.

The formation took place on 5 and 6 July at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre, Kuala Lumpur. The sessions were presented by lay formators who have been mentored over the past six years by Dr Steven Selvaraju, Director of Archdiocesan Catechetical Centre. The topics include: *Vocation and Mission of the Catechist; Catechetical Process; Understanding Learners and Learning; Lesson Planning; Spirituality of a Catechist, Assessment and Reflection.*

The sessions encouraged the catechists to share their experiences and challenges they encounter in responding to their call as catechists, as well as, to gain new knowledge and skills that would help them share the faith more effectively and convincingly to children and teenagers. The highlight of the formation was when the participants were tasked with preparing and delivering lessons to their peers. It was a fun, dynamic and enriching experience both for the participants and the presenters, who witnessed the fruits of their labour being successfully put into practice.

On the whole, the eagerness and commitment shown by the participants during all the sessions demonstrated the seriousness with which they view their role as catechists in their community. Their hope is that through their commitment and efforts, the youth of the com-



The catechists during one of the sessions.

munity would remain faithful to the Catholic Faith, in the midst of various social, cultural and secular influences around them. The two-day formation culminated with the presentation of certificates to the delighted participants by Dr Steven.

According to Dr Steven, "I am grateful to Ms Josephine Tey, Coordinator of MMI, who approached me with the idea of having a formation programme for catechists from the Myanmar community. I am happy that we were able to collaborate in helping the participants become more effective catechists for their community. Dr Steven added that both KLACM and MMI are looking forward to further collaboration in this area.

### Sharing from participants:

**Raymond Thang:** "Over the past two days, I learnt a lot of new skills, methods and knowledge. I learnt the importance of proper and ongoing formation for catechists. I also realise that in catechesis, it is important connect life experience and the Word of God in every topic that I teach. I have to listen actively to the learners and adapt suitable communication methods to match their age and needs. I am going to apply what I learnt so that I can plan and teach the topics well. I am hopeful that I

can transmit the Catholic faith to my learners more effectively than I did prior to this session."

**Stephen Hung Ling:** "I have learned a lot. Mostly, about teaching techniques. I have come to know how different age groups need different approaches. Each child has a different learning speed and therefore, special care has to be given to those who are slow in learning. I will apply what I learnt in my future classes. I believe it will really work. I hope there will be more formations organised for us. I also want to encourage other members of my community, especially the youth, to join such formation courses in the future. I thank God for this wonderful opportunity I have received."

**Bosco Om Maung:** "I am really happy to have participated in the catechist's training course over the two days. In fact, I have never participated in such a training before. I am very grateful to the presenters for patiently helping me to know more about the catechetical process, the tasks of the catechist and the importance of spirituality in the life of a catechist. Moreover, I learnt about lesson preparation and how to teach creatively and effectively. The formation has made me more confident to share the Word of God to the people in my community." **Cecilia Pappu**

# Regional communicators meet in Brunei

Sandriana Anne

BRUNEI: The Episcopal Regional Commission for Social Communication (ERCSC) convened its Annual General Meeting and Formation 2025 from June 24 to 27 at the Church of Our Lady of the Assumption. The four-day gathering brought together 25 delegates representing nine dioceses across Malaysia, the Apostolic Vicariate of Brunei, and the Daughters of St Paul, with participants from Singapore and SIGNIS joining virtually.

Blending spiritual formation, collaborative discussion, and leadership transition, the gathering served as a meaningful platform for renewal and reflection. It was guided by the late Pope Francis' 2025 World Communications Day message, *Share with gentleness the hope that is in your hearts* (1 Peter 3:15-16), which urged Catholic communicators to proclaim the Gospel with humility, compassion, and conviction in an increasingly digital and divided world.

The meeting was opened by Cardinal Sebastian Francis, *pic*, President of ERCSC. In his keynote address, he encouraged participants to remain rooted in the Holy Spirit in every aspect of their mission and highlighted the forthcoming canonisation of Blessed



Carlo Acutis, who will be declared a saint on September 7 in Rome and known as the 'Cyber Apostle'. Cardinal Sebastian reminded delegates that although Blessed Carlo died at the age of 15, his legacy endures through the miracles attributed to him and his pioneering witness in the digital world.

Emphasising the spirit of synodality, Cardinal Sebastian reaffirmed that the Churches of Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei are equal partners, with no diocese being dominant. "All bishops are equal, and we all work as equals," he said. He also invited participants to embrace the missionary call to "Share Christ with Global Asians," echoing the vision of



A delegate presenting a report on the activities undertaken by his diocesan communications ministry.

Radio Veritas Asia. The cardinal also highlighted the vital role of young people in the ministry, acknowledging them as a driving force in today's digital mission. He commended their ease with technology and openness to innovation, including artificial intelligence, while reminding all present that at the heart of their work lies the Gospel. He added, "In this digital world of mission, there are no boundaries. The Holy Spirit is the ultimate influencer, not our personalities and the Holy Spirit never disappoints."

Cardinal Sebastian also announced that he had stepped down as Chairman of the FABC Office of Social Communication, officially passing the role to Bishop Marcelino Antonio "Junie" Maralit, Jr. from the Philippines. He expressed full confidence in Bishop Maralit's leadership and his ability to guide the regional Church through the ever-evolving media landscape.

Each day concluded with the celebration of a solemn Mass, allowing delegates space for spiritual reflection and thanksgiving. On the first day of the eucharistic celebration homily, Cardinal Sebastian presented a visual insight on Mission in the Digital World, highlighting the challenges Catholic communicators face today, particularly amidst misinformation,

polarisation, and media fatigue.

## Election of ERCSC Committee for 2025-2027

The election of new ERCSC office bearers for the upcoming two-year term was carried out during the meeting. Positions open for nomination included Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary, and Assistant Secretary. The current leadership was unanimously re-elected to continue serving in their respective roles: Daniel Roy Santiyagu from the Diocese of Penang as Chairman; Fr Sixtus Pitah Amit OFM from the Diocese of Malacca Johore as Vice-Chairman; Sandriana Anne from the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu as Secretary; and Rogena Roger Sining from the Diocese of Sandakan as Assistant Secretary.

Cardinal Sebastian expressed his hope that the reappointed team would continue to lead with commitment, unity, and a faith-filled spirit as the region navigates new opportunities and challenges in the social communication ministry.

## Formation Highlights

The formation segment began with a compelling session by Fr Dr Clarence Devadass, *pic*, Executive Secretary of the FABC



Commission for Synodality, who explored the synodal nature of communication and the evolving role of artificial intelligence in the Church's mission of evangelisation. He invited delegates to reflect on their own call to be digital missionaries, the importance of forming others for this mission, and the need to support and accompany those already serving in digital spaces. These reflections sparked meaningful dialogue and encouraged delegates to explore new ways of responding to the Church's call in a digital and interconnected world.

Later that afternoon, Albert Hwang, *pic*, of Brunei's Social Communication team led an interactive "communication bingo" activity, designed to encourage creativity, joyful engagement, and team bonding.



This was followed by a session titled "Hopes Resilient, Heart Restored", which allowed delegates to share personally and spiritually. Under the sub-theme "Seeking Within", participants examined the challenges faced by Catholic communicators, using scriptural examples such as the parable of the sower and Peter walking on water to draw parallels with their own mission journeys. Delegates also reflected on the theme "Seven Saints of Why Me?", connecting their experiences with those of biblical figures who resonated with their work in the Church's communication ministry.



The following day, Fr John Mi Shen, *pic*, newly appointed Executive Secretary of the FABC Office of Social Communication, spoke on the indispensable role of listening and observation in nurturing genuine and effective communication. As a gesture of encouragement, each delegate received a commemorative gift inspired by the Jubilee Year of Hope, symbolising unity and purpose in their shared mission.

Throughout the formation, delegates engaged in small group discussions and committee reviews, focusing on strengthening formation programmes, expanding digital presence, and cultivating deeper collaboration across dioceses.

Delegates provided updates on their respective diocesan communication ministries, reflecting on notable achievements, plans for the year ahead, and ongoing challenges. A significant regional highlight was the Archdiocese of Singapore's central role in coordinating media coverage during the historic visit of the late Pope Francis, demonstrating its capacity to manage large-scale ecclesial events with professionalism and care.

The Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur reported the successful implementation of its public webinar series and marked the opening of its purpose-built media facility, Cahaya Suara.

In the Diocese of Penang, investment in enhanced broadcasting technology enabled wider coverage of the annual feast of St Anne.

In East Malaysia, the Archdiocese of Kuching celebrated the soft opening of St Peter's Church, while the Diocese of Sibiu inaugurated the long-awaited shrine dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The Diocese of Miri was also recognised for its resourcefulness in launching a community radio station on a modest budget, an encouraging example of commitment and creativity in the face of limited resources.

Dioceses throughout Malaysia are actively engaged in *Perjalanan Salib*, a nationwide

## Progress, plans and challenges



Stations of the Cross pilgrimage that began during the Malaysian Catholic Youth Day in April 2025. Continuing until September 2026, it will culminate at the Malaysian Pastoral Convention, one of the largest Catholic gatherings in the country. The initiative stands as a profound expression of unity, faith, and collaboration, with all diocesan communication teams contributing to its success.

Despite encouraging progress, several challenges were acknowledged. Some diocesan teams remain small, comprised primarily of students or volunteers, while others rely

on just one individual to manage all communication efforts. Delegates from Brunei noted the legal and pastoral constraints they face, limiting broader evangelisation activities.

Delegates also reviewed their use of the World Communications Day kit, with many attesting to its usefulness in homilies, catechesis, and community engagement. These reflections fostered mutual learning and affirmed the collective resolve to grow as a regional Church united in digital mission.

The third day concluded with a final report presentation from the Daughters of St Paul in the morning and a city tour in the afternoon,

offering cultural enrichment and reinforcing fellowship among delegates. On the final day, participants joined the Global Rosary Relay and celebrated the closing Mass, bringing the event to a prayerful and hopeful conclusion.

The ERCSC Annual General Meeting and Formation 2025 ended with renewed unity, a deepened commitment to collaboration, and a shared resolve to communicate the Gospel with clarity, compassion, and hope. It was announced that the next ERCSC gathering will be hosted by the Archdiocese of Singapore, from June 15 to 19, 2026.

# We need to be an evangelising Church

**Bernard Anthony**

KUALA KUBU BARU, Selangor: The Church of St Paul the Apostle celebrated its parish feast on a grand scale this year, with a four-day celebration from June 26 to 29 that drew over 1,200 faithful from near and far.

Themed Masses, praise and worship sessions, and moments of fellowship marked the celebration, which culminated on the Solemnity of Sts Peter and Paul. The outdoor feast day Masses were held in the church grounds to accommodate the crowd — 700 attended the Tamil Mass at 8.30am and 500 at the English Mass at 11.00am.

Parish priest Fr VA Michael who turned 68 on June 29, led the celebrations with the message that the Malaysian Church must move from



Fr VA Michael

maintenance to mission, echoing the spirit of the parish patron, St Paul.

“We need to be an evangelising Church,” he urged in his homily. “Enough of just talking about synodality — if we don’t proclaim the Good News, we risk ending up like Turkey, where the Christian presence has nearly vanished.”



The faithful in prayer during the feast day celebration.

The cleric highlighted the lives of saints Peter and Paul as powerful witnesses of faith who spread the Gospel despite trials. “Peter was a simple fisherman, yet Jesus saw greatness in him. Paul travelled far and wide, proclaiming Christ boldly. We are called to do the same,” he said.

Quoting 1 Corinthians 9:16, “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel,” he called for a revival of missionary zeal. “We can’t just sit in faded pews. It’s time to walk out and share the faith, especially with those who are wounded, lost, or have drifted away.”

The celebration began on June 26

with Fr Michel Dass preaching on *St Paul, Proclaimer of the Gospel of Hope*, followed by Fr Jonathan Rao on June 27 with the theme *Sacred Heart of Jesus, Giver of Hope*. Both young priests engaged warmly with parishioners during post-Mass fellowship.

On the feast day itself, a praise and worship session, the Litany of St Paul, and a symbolic presentation of the Bible and a globe during the Offertory reminded participants of the Church’s global mission and the importance of God’s Word in evangelisation.

In his closing remarks, Fr VA Michael thanked parishioners and the many guests from the Church of Divine Mercy (Shah Alam), Our Lady of Lourdes (Klang), Our Lady of Fatima (Brickfields), and others for contributing to the liturgy, music, and preparations. Novena leaflets and books on the Gospel were also made available.

“This may be a small parish, but God provided everything we needed for a beautiful celebration,” he said. “Let us, like Paul, proclaim Christ to the ends of the earth.”

## Senior parishioners on a pilgrimage of renewal

KUANTAN: In celebration of the Jubilee Year of Hope, 41 senior parishioners from the Church of the Visitation, Seremban, accompanied by Fr Christopher Loh OCD, embarked on a meaningful three-day pilgrimage to Kuantan.

The journey began with a visit to the Kuala Gandah Elephant Sanctuary, followed by a spiritual stop at the Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Mentakab. That evening, the group arrived in Kuantan, shared a hearty dinner at 888 Foodcourt, and checked into their hotel—resting in anticipation of the spiritual experiences that lay ahead.

The second day centred on prayer and reflection at the Church of St Thomas the Apostle. The morning was filled with sacred activities, including the Rosary, Litany, Confession, Holy Hour, Adoration, Mass, and fellowship. The sense of peace and unity was palpable as pilgrims lifted up personal intentions and prayers for a hopeful future. The celebration of Mass was made even more

special by the presence of Fr Simon Agbo, who concelebrated with Fr Christopher Loh.

As a token of appreciation, each pilgrim received a gift pack containing a certificate of participation, a holy picture, prayer cards, and a bottle of holy water. The day continued with visits to the Lao Zi Temple, the East Coast Mall, and a Rosary at the grotto of the Church of St Thomas, before ending with another joyful dinner. These stops reminded everyone that God is present not only in sacred spaces, but in the beauty of everyday experiences.

On the final day, the group visited the Church of the Sacred Heart in Bentong. As they made their way back to Seremban, hearts were full, grateful for the blessings received and inspired to continue walking together in hope.

This pilgrimage was a beautiful expression of the Jubilee Year’s call: to be pilgrims of hope — united in prayer, renewed in spirit, and joyfully journeying together in faith. **Audry Gonsalviz**



The pilgrims with Frs Christopher Loh OCD and Simon Agbo.

## Pilgrims flock to Jelapang chapel for blessings of health and peace

IPOH: The Chapel of Annai Vellaganny in Jelapang has become a vibrant spiritual hub, drawing pilgrims from across the country to the only chapel in Peninsular Malaysia designated as a Jubilee pilgrimage centre.

Dedicated to Our Lady of Good Health, the chapel has seen a steady stream of faithful arriving by the busload, especially on weekends and public holidays. Many leave with “joy in their faces,” said Xavier Arokiasamy, chairman of the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) of the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes Ipoh, which oversees the chapel.

“We are blessed to witness the joy and renewed hope that pilgrims experience after visiting the chapel,” Xavier shared. “They are often moved by the simple, prayerful atmosphere and the beautiful statue of Our Mother of Good Health.”

The chapel’s interior design, crafted by parish priest Fr Robert Daniel, reflects both devotion and attention to detail. Many visitors express awe at the peaceful ambiance and spiritual depth the space offers.

Zavier, who has served the chapel community for over a decade, said the designation of the chapel as a Jubilee pilgrimage site was unexpected but deeply welcomed. “We don’t know why it was chosen, but we open our hearts and arms to everyone who comes,” said the 69-year-old retiree.

During the dedication of the newly relocated chapel on September 1, 2024, the bishop of Penang Cardinal Sebastian Francis, highlighted its special charism as a place for “the gift of health—health of the body and, even more, health of the soul.” He prayed that all who come would receive this dual blessing and share it with others in their communities.

Currently, the chapel welcomes an average of two to three busloads of pilgrims each weekend. A recent pilgrimage brought 300 faithful from Penang and Kuala Lumpur in seven buses. Even larger numbers are anticipated



Zavier welcoming pilgrims from the Church of Divine Mercy, Penang.

during the Feast of St Anne in Bukit Mertajam this July, and the chapel’s double celebration in September — marking its 53rd anniversary (Sept 13) and the Feast of Our Lady of Good Health (Sept 8). Already, 300 pilgrims from Sarawak have registered to attend.

The Jubilee welcoming team has also seen growing interest in chapel merchandise, such as t-shirts, rosaries, and religious souvenirs. “The proceeds go toward the chapel’s upkeep,” noted Zavier.

The chapel’s journey began humbly in 1972, with a simple shed and cross erected by devotees on a tin miner’s land. Over time, the growing number of worshippers necessitated the construction of a permanent chapel in Taman Meru. In 2024, it was relocated to a new, purpose-built site at Lebu Jelapang 3. The new building seats 600 inside, with space for an additional 250 outside. Over 2,000 people attended the dedication ceremony last September.

Currently, Mass is held once a

month, in Tamil, on the third Sunday. However, there are plans to introduce a second multilingual weekend Mass to cater to a wider group of pilgrims.

In response to the growing number of requests for healing prayers, the chapel recently launched a Biblical Rosary initiative. Held monthly, this includes Scripture-based meditations focused on a particular illness, followed by Mass, the Anointing of the Sick, and Eucharistic Adoration. A priest from the Perak Deanery is invited to celebrate the Mass.

Pilgrim Leonard Pasqual described the chapel’s serene surroundings as ideal for reflection and prayer. “The peaceful neighbourhood and lush greenery offer a perfect atmosphere for seeking Mother Mary’s intercession,” he said.

Pilgrims may also request special Mass intentions, anointing of the sick, and confessions, subject to the availability of Fr Robert Daniel and assistant parish priest, Fr George Vaithynathan. Registration can be done online via this link: <https://bit.ly/4nTR12L>. **Bob Ho**

# Empowering eco-leaders for climate action

JOHOR BAHRU: The Ecological Pathways Training Workshop, a three-day programme aimed at equipping faith-based leaders with tools for climate advocacy, was held from June 27 to 29 at the MAJODI Centre in Plentong.

Organised by the Creation Justice Commission of the Malacca Johore Diocese (CJCMJD), the workshop was conducted under the guidance of the Episcopal Commission for Creation Justice of Malaysia, Singapore & Brunei. It brought together 26 participants from across Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Melaka, Ipoh, Johor, Singapore, and Sandakan.

The training sought to form “strong advocates and mobilisers who are courageous in confronting injustices and steadfast in offering true hope and robust ecological pathways that will advance hope, truth, resilience, justice, peace and compassion for all.”

Clare Westwood, Regional Director of the Episcopal Commission, facilitated most of the workshop modules over the three-day programme. On Day One, an additional resource speaker provided insights into the current state of energy transition in Malaysia and Singapore.

Clare opened the workshop with a session on the Global Climate Emergency. She highlighted that the average global temperature in 2024 had exceeded the Paris Agreement threshold of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels — a critical warning. If this trend continues, the world may permanently surpass this limit, resulting in increasingly severe and irreversible climate impacts.

Dr Maria Lee, Head of CJCMJD, aptly described the Earth as having a “fever that

must be cooled,” a timely analogy in light of the increasingly frequent extreme heat events experienced worldwide. Following this, participants explored three key modules: *A Just Transition and its implications, particularly for marginalised communities; Renewable Energy Alternatives; and Case Studies* examining energy transition plans and false climate solutions in both Malaysia and Singapore.

On day two, the workshop focused on modules covering the *Politics of Climate Justice, False Climate Solutions, and the Global Climate Emergency*, examined through the lens of Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si’* and Scripture. Participants explored the role of the UNFCCC and critically examined concepts such as net zero, carbon trading, and geoengineering, which were presented as false solutions that risk deepening vulnerabilities, inequalities, and injustices — particularly in the Global South.

The sessions encouraged participants to reflect on how faith can guide communities toward authentic ecological pathways rooted in justice and compassion. Group discussions, presentations, and a creative skit brought to life the real-world consequences of policies driven by greed and corruption, especially for indigenous communities impacted by misleading schemes like “nature-based solutions.”

Anna Teresa, from the Diocese of Sandakan shared how poverty can lead individuals and communities to make uninformed or harmful choices. The day concluded with evening Mass at Graceville, a home for retired clergy and the elderly, offering participants a moment of spiritual reflection.



The participants and facilitators of the Ecological Pathways Training Workshop.

On the third and final day, participants engaged with modules on *The Polycrisis and the Great Unravelling through the Lens of Faith, Ecological Pathways Forward, Community Resilience to Climate Impacts, and Permaculture*. These sessions underscored the urgent need for systemic change, emphasising that we can no longer continue with business as usual.

Participants gained a deeper understanding of ecology as inherently relational, highlighting the interconnectedness between humanity and our natural, social, and built environments. This awareness reinforced the importance of discerning between genuine and false climate solutions to avoid unintentionally causing further harm under the guise of sustainability.

In response to the climate crisis, the Church has launched initiatives such as the PROTEC Campaign (Protect Our Earth, Protect Our Children), a five-year nationwide effort endorsed by all Malaysian bishops in 2020. Each year has focused on a specific theme, including reducing electricity use, cutting meat and food waste, eliminating plastic pollution, and lowering fuel consumption. The current and final phase of PROTEC 1.0 (Sept

2024–Aug 2025) carries the theme *Use Less Paper and Wood*.

This campaign will transition into PROTEC 2.0 under the REGENERATE! initiative, which will run from September 2025 to August 2030. The theme for its first year will be *Regenerate Hope for Flora and Fauna*.

The Ecological Pathways Training Workshop reinforced the realisation that we have caused the current climate emergency as well as the biodiversity and plastic pollution crises. However, lively conversations among the participants proved how a change of lifestyle, among other ecological pathways at the micro and macro levels, can put us back on the right path.

Participants expressed that the workshop deepened their understanding of ecological justice and strengthened their confidence to share this knowledge within their families, parishes, and ministries. Youth voices highlighted ongoing conversations around over-consumerism and environmental responsibility, while others emphasised the urgent need for greater awareness and advocacy. The workshop concluded with a heartfelt Prayer for Our Earth, calling for the transformation.

## A green tribute in honour of Pope Francis

SHAH ALAM: On a recent long weekend break, 260 volunteers from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, embarked on a mission of planting 400 trees at Taman Botani Shah Alam (TBSA), as a ‘Tribute to Pope Francis’. This was a collaborative effort between the Archdiocesan Creation Justice Ministry (CJM) and Jabatan Perhutanan Semenanjung Malaysia (JPSM).

Nature enthusiasts from different parishes in the diocese, Sunday school children, learners preparing for Confirmation and First Holy Communion, the young and the ones willing to make a difference, volunteers from other faith groups, all got together to contribute to care for ‘Our Common Home’.

As the volunteers got off their buses, keeping carpool and fuel consumption in mind, they assembled at the open car park surrounded by huge trees. Fr Andrew Manickam, OFM, Cap, got the event started with a welcome note and everyone proceeded to board the trams. The volunteers enjoyed the view of the huge park while being transported to the planting site.

Archbishop Julian Leow offered a prayer for all the volunteers and the several efforts put in to ‘Care for Creation’. Amidst the trilling of insects, chirping of birds, squeals of laughter and chatter of the young ones, volunteers carefully picked up a couple of saplings. These were native species – Keranjii

also known as tamarind-plum (*Dialium indum*) and pokok Merbau, also known as the Borneo teak (*Intsia palembanica*).

The excited nature lovers planted these delicate saplings with care surrounded by the picturesque setting of two big lakes – one with white water lily blooms and the other pink. A prayer was whispered and a message uttered aloud, all as a sign of tribute filled with love for Pope Francis, recalling how ‘Care for our planet’ was dear to him. With grateful hearts, the volunteers gathered for lunch and fellowship.

We thank each and every volunteer for their

presence, enthusiasm and contribution. We also thank JPSM and TBSA for their collaboration as they commemorated World Forest Day.

*Laudato Si’* – the encyclical written by Pope Francis, completed its 10th anniversary this year, encouraging all to take small steps to care for ‘Our Common Home’ and to preserve this God given gift for future generations.

Ecological Spirituality and Ecological Leadership Sessions are being held at different parishes. Do watch out for the dates in your parish and come join us. **Marilyn Menezes**




A volunteer assisting a young girl to plant a tree at Taman Botani Shah Alam, as a tribute to Pope Francis.

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## Assunta Governors' Ball 2025

PETALING JAYA: The Board of Governors of SMK Assunta will host the Governors' Ball 2025, a black-tie fundraising gala, on Sunday, August 10 at The Majestic Hotel, Kuala Lumpur.

The event aims to celebrate the school's rich legacy and galvanise support for its future. It will bring together alumni, educators, parents, and supporters for an evening of reflection, reconnection, and renewed commitment to the school's mission.

The programme will begin with cocktails at 6.00pm, followed by a formal dinner at 8.00pm. Guests can expect heartfelt tributes, inspiring stories, and opportunities to contribute to Assunta's continued pursuit of educational excellence.

A key highlight of the evening will be a special tribute to Assunta's founding pioneers — Datin Paduka Sister Enda Ryan, FMM; Sister Letitia Yang, FMM and Sister Jane Koh, FMM — whose vision and dedication laid the foundation for generations of Assuntarians.

Fundraising efforts will take place through tiered table donations ranging from RM3,500 to RM10,000, with only 80 tables available.

Individual seats are also available at RM350 per person. Bookings can be made at: <https://tinyurl.com/3u5pn627>.

Additional contributions, including corporate sponsorships and lucky draw prizes, are also welcomed.

"As a mission school with limited government support, SMK Assunta depends on the generosity of the community to fund infrastructure upgrades, tuition aid, learning resources, and other essential needs," said Dato' Kathleen Chew, *pic*, Chairperson of the Board of Governors. "We invite all who share in Assunta's values of integrity, service, and unity to join us in shaping a better future for our students."

Peggy Liu, Fundraising Chairperson, added, "Let's bring Assunta back to academic excellence. Assunta Spirit Alive!"

For table bookings or sponsorship enquiries (deadline: 24 July 2025), contact Caroline Lam (+6016 260 8000) or Chris Chan (+6012 216 7181) via WhatsApp only. **Gwen Manickam**



# The Sacred Heart overflows with grace

**Bernard Anthony**

KUALA LUMPUR: The Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Jalan Peel, celebrated its 65th parish feast with nine days of novena and Masses from June 21 to 29, centred on the theme "The Heart of the Master", drawn from Luke 10:1-42. This year's focus invited the faithful to reflect deeply on the compassionate nature of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Parish priest Msgr Stanislaus Soosamariam said the theme called parishioners and pilgrims to emulate the heart of Christ — one overflowing with mercy, love and healing. "Compassion is the core of the Gospel and the foundation of Christian behaviour," he said.

Fr Francis Xavier Selvarajoo, parish priest of the Church of Our Lady of Fatima in Kangar, was the preacher for the nine-day celebration. With 42 years of priestly ministry, he guided the faithful through daily reflections that highlighted various aspects of Christ's heart, calling for spiritual renewal and a commitment to living out compassion in daily life.

Each day focused on a unique theme: *A Missionary Heart, A Painful Heart, A Joyful Heart, A Child-like Heart, A Fortunate Heart, A Loving Heart, A Compassionate Heart, A Devout Heart, and A Silent, Listening Heart*. On

day 4, Fr Francis emphasised the importance of cultivating humility, purity, courage, and total dependence on God in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. On day 6, he reminded the faithful to let their hearts mirror Christ's love: "May we reflect daily on His heart and become hearts that love others. Jesus is our sunshine — go and be the sunshine of God to others."

On the actual feast day, June 27, some 1,200 faithful gathered for the evening Mass. Fr Francis expounded on *A Compassionate Heart* reminding the congregation that Jesus' heart beats with mercy for every soul, including the one lost sheep. "The Sacred Heart overflows with grace, extending forgiveness and solace to those who suffer," he said. He also reminded the faithful of the importance of devotion to both the Sacred Heart and the Holy Rosary, two of the Church's most treasured devotions.

"If you have a heart, love someone. If you have a big heart, love everyone," he added.

That evening, Msgr Stanislaus made a significant announcement: the parish — including the Chapel of Our Lady in Kampung Pandan — has been officially designated an Ecology Parish. By signing the 'Ecological Pledge', the community committed to concrete actions such as discontinuing the use of plastic and styrofoam, maintaining



The Blessed Sacrament being carried during the procession.

cleanliness, and planting trees. "We must listen to the cries of Mother Earth," Msgr Stanislaus said, urging parishioners to integrate care for creation into their spiritual life.

On June 28, the eighth day, approximately 1,300 people participated in a candlelight procession, during which the Blessed Sacrament was carried through the church grounds by the two priests. The evening concluded with Benediction.

The feast concluded on Sunday,

June 29, with the reflection "*A Silent, Listening Heart*", calling all believers to interior silence, attentive listening, and a heart open to God's promptings.

In closing, Msgr Stanislaus thanked God for a spiritually enriching celebration and expressed gratitude to Fr Francis for his powerful and thought-provoking homilies. He also commended the tireless efforts of all ministry and BEC leaders who helped bring the feast to life.

## St Jude's parish celebrates month of the Eucharist

RAWANG: The Church of St Jude concluded a spiritual month of the Eucharist in June, bringing together various ministries and parishioners with the theme *Do this in remembrance of Me*.

The month-long activities, designed to foster a profound understanding and appreciation for the Body and Blood of Christ, culminated in a special recognition for dedicated long-serving parishioners.

The month-long initiative was aimed at focusing on the importance of the Eucharist as a sacrament of love as well as to encourage service to others.

The activities began on June 6 with a Holy Hour animated by the three Legion Of Mary language groups.

The Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) and Family Life Ministry actively participated in a Divine Mercy Devotion. Each family within the

BECs took turns praying the Divine Mercy Chaplet for their fellow members throughout June in a powerful initiative designed to deepen trust in Jesus' mercy through His ultimate sacrifice.

Monthly reflections by the BEC and BECAT groups focused on the theme *Church Is Merciful*, encouraging parishioners to "see the Face of Jesus in each other". This theme underscored the objective of integrating the importance of the Body and Blood of Christ as a sacrament of love, emphasising that receiving the Eucharist demonstrates a commitment to serving others.

The Spirituality Cluster organised a Pentecost Vigil, where the community was called to "experience the works of the Holy Spirit and to renew our faith, love, and amazement concerning Christ in the Eucharist".

The Youth and the Catechetical

Clusters engaged students from Form 1 to Form 4 in *Teen's Life @ Corpus Christi*. As a whole-class project, students designed vibrant banners expressing their understanding and love for the Holy Eucharist. These meaningful banners were proudly displayed on the church pillars, adding a visual testament to the young parishioners' faith.

The celebrations culminated with an extended Holy Hour on Friday, June 20, which was animated by the senior and new extraordinary ministers, followed by a multilingual Mass the next day at 6.00pm. During the Mass, eight individuals were honoured with long-service awards for their dedicated commitment to various ministries within the parish over many years.

One recipient, recognised for her remarkable 47 years of service, humbly attributed her dedication to her

late father, a pioneer of the church. Other recipients, who had served under various priests and in diverse ministries, unanimously expressed that their service was purely "to answer the call of Christ to serve him".

The Mass concluded with Adoration and Benediction.

The spiritual month concluded on Sunday, June 22 with Mass animated by children from Year 3 to Year 6. This Mass was specially tailored to cater to young children's mental and spiritual levels, with a focus on the Body and Blood of Christ, ensuring the youngest members of the parish also experienced the profound significance of the Eucharist.

The Month of the Eucharist in the parish truly began and ended on a high spiritual note, reinforcing the community's faith and commitment to Christ's call to serve. **Mercy Almeida Stellus**



Banners on the Holy Eucharist designed by the Catechism students.



Parishioners in quiet devotion during the Holy Hour.

# Guidelines for local implementation of Synod on Synodality

VATICAN: The Vatican has released new guidelines outlining how local churches and bishops around the world should begin implementing the final proposals of the Synod of Bishops on synodality, with a strong emphasis on inclusivity, collaboration, and mission.

The 24-page document, titled “*Pathways for the Implementation Phase of the Synod*”, was published July 7 by the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops. It marks a new phase in the Church’s ongoing synodal process, first launched by Pope Francis in 2021. The focus now turns to practical, local-level application of the synod’s conclusions.

The implementation phase, which began in late 2024 and will run until 2028, is intended to foster new structures and practices that deepen the Church’s commitment to synodality — a model of Church life that emphasises shared responsibility, discernment, and participation among all the baptised.

According to the guidelines, the diocesan or eparchial bishop carries primary responsibility for oversee-



ing this process. Bishops are called to set clear objectives, timelines, and methods while encouraging broad engagement across the Church. They are also reminded to exercise authority “in a synodal way,” involv-

ing clergy, religious, and laity alike. Participation is not to be limited to churchgoers or synod supporters. The Vatican stresses the importance of reaching marginalised groups, young people, and those sceptical of

the synodal approach. The goal is to ensure the Church “walks together” and integrates the voices of all, especially those who have been under-represented.

The guidelines call for involvement beyond the traditional parish setting. Catholic schools, hospitals, prisons, and digital spaces should also be engaged. Relationships with religious communities, ecclesial movements, and lay associations are to be strengthened as part of the Church’s evangelizing mission.

A key message throughout the document is that synodality is not a one-size-fits-all model. Sr Nathalie Becquart, undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops, said the guidelines are meant to help dioceses creatively and contextually apply the synod’s final document. “The best way to start the implementation phase is really to read the final document of the synod,” she told Vatican News.

To support coordination, each diocese or eparchy is asked to register its synodal team with the Vatican via a central database. Existing synodal teams should be reactivated or re-

freshed, and new ones created where needed.

The three-year phase of implementation and reflection will culminate in an international assembly in Rome in October 2028. This gathering will serve as both a celebration and an evaluation of the synodal journey’s progress.

Ultimately, the mission of proclaiming the Kingdom of God remains at the heart of the synodal process. The guidelines reaffirm the synod’s call for a Church that is outward-looking, dialogical, and committed to social justice and care for creation — a Church rooted in listening, collaboration, and the exchange of spiritual gifts across communities.

As Sr Becquart emphasised, “You can’t just do your synodal conversion alone. It’s very important to work together as different local churches.”

The full text of *Pathways for the Implementation Phase of the Synod* can be found on the website of the Synod on Synodality, [www.synod.va](http://www.synod.va). **Agencies**

## Ecological crisis requires contemplative gaze

VATICAN: Just a few days after beginning his summer holidays in Castel Gandolfo, Pope Leo XIV celebrated the first Mass for the Care of Creation,” a new formulary of the Roman Missal.

The Mass took place at the *Laudato Si’* Village, an educational centre located in the Papal summer residence near Rome, and was attended by the center’s staff.

In off-the-cuff remarks at the start of his homily, the Holy Father said the Mass was being celebrated surrounded by beauty in “a kind of ‘natural’ cathedral.”

He noted that the layout of the *Laudato Si’* Village, which has an altar in the front and a water basin nearby, recalls the ancient Christian churches, which placed the baptismal font near the entrance to symbolise that Christians have passed through water to be cleansed of our sins and weaknesses.

Pope Leo lamented the many natural disasters that afflict people around the world, which are “often caused — at least in part — by human excess and our way of life.”

“We must also pray for the conversion of many people, both inside and outside the Church, who still do not recognise the urgency of caring for our common home,” he said.

Turning to the prepared text of his homily, Pope Leo XIV noted the tranquil setting of the *Laudato Si’* Village stands in contrast to the global warming and armed conflicts that afflict our world.

“Yet, at the heart of the Jubilee we confess: there is hope!” he said. “We have encountered it in Jesus, the Saviour of the world. He still, sovereignly, calms the storm.”

Reflecting on Jesus’ calming of the storm on the sea, the Pope said Jesus’ parables of the Kingdom of God frequently pick up the rhythms

of life and seasons inherent in nature.

In rebuking the wind and sea, Jesus “reveals His power of life and salvation, which towers over those forces before which creatures are lost.”

Pope Leo said our mission as Christians to care for creation was entrusted to us by the Lord, so that we might bring peace and reconciliation to our troubled world.

“We hear the cry of the earth and of the poor,” he said, “for that cry has reached the heart of God. Our indignation is His indignation; our work is His work.”

The Church is called, therefore, to speak truth to nations in order to turn evil into good, injustice into justice, and greed into communion, since the Church bears witness to the “indestructible covenant between Creator and creatures.”

He recalled St Francis of Assisi’s focus on God’s love for all of crea-



Pope Leo XIV celebrates Mass for the Care of Creation on the grounds of the Borgo *Laudato Si’* ecology center in Castel Gandolfo, Italy, July 9, 2025. (CNS photo/Cristian Gennari, pool)

tion, which gives everything life.

“Only a contemplative gaze can change our relationship with created things and lead us out of the ecological crisis caused by the rupture of relationships — with God, with our neighbor, and with the earth — resulting from sin,” he said.

Pope Leo XIV said Pope Francis wanted the *Laudato Si’* Village to be “a laboratory” in which to embody

harmony with creation, while finding new ways to safeguard nature.

In conclusion, Pope Leo invited Christians to spread harmony throughout the world, drawing inspiration from St. Augustine.

“O Lord, your works praise you so that we may love you, and we love you so that your works may praise you.” **Devin Watkins, Vatican News**

## Tanzanian bishops call for prayer day, issue new liturgy rules

VATICAN: As Tanzania prepares for general elections set for October 28, 2025, the country’s Catholic bishops have called for a National Day of Prayer and fasting amid growing concerns over the political and democratic climate.

The call comes in response to ongoing reports of abductions, violence, and allegations of misconduct by government and security forces — issues that have fuelled debate over electoral integrity and democratic reforms.

In a Pastoral Statement issued following their recent plenary assembly held in Kurasini, Dar es Salaam, the bishops of the Tanzania

Episcopal Conference (TEC) urged all Catholics to participate in a day of prayer and fasting on August 23. The day will include Eucharistic adoration and acts of repentance, with each diocese, parish, and Catholic institution expected to organize appropriate observances.

“We ask all the faithful in our Church to participate in this prayer and fasting,” the statement reads, emphasising unity and reflection as the nation approaches a critical moment.

In a separate directive, the bishops also released a new set of liturgical guidelines aimed at enhancing reverence during Catholic

worship and curbing practices they view as detracting from the sacredness of the liturgy.

The guidelines, issued on behalf of TEC by Bishop Simon Chibuga Masondole of Bunda Diocese — chair of the TEC Liturgical Commission — call for greater discipline in liturgical celebrations. Among the changes:

Announcements and speeches during Mass are to be significantly shortened, especially at festive liturgies where lengthy updates on food or entertainment arrangements often occur.

Introductory remarks and explanations at the beginning of Mass or

before readings should be avoided. Any necessary catechesis should be offered outside the Mass setting.

Political figures and dignitaries attending liturgical events should receive only a brief acknowledgment from the presiding priest. Speeches from such guests, particularly after Communion, are strongly discouraged.

On special occasions such as ordinations, jubilees, and religious professions, only a short word of thanks is permitted, and only from the individual being celebrated.

The bishops emphasised that after the Communion Prayer, the Mass should proceed directly to

the final blessing, without interruption.

These guidelines are to be implemented immediately across the Catholic Church in Tanzania. The bishops hope the measures will help reinforce the spiritual integrity of liturgical celebrations while also fostering a spirit of unity and reflection during a politically sensitive time for the nation.

As the 2025 elections approach, the Church’s leaders have positioned themselves not only as spiritual shepherds but as advocates for peace, justice, and responsible participation in national life. **Vatican News**

# Caritas Malaysia leaders united in mission, rooted in love

Jubili Anilik

In a spirit of profound discernment and collaborative growth, leaders from Caritas Malaysia gathered in Miri, Sarawak from June 30 to July 3, for a transformative Leadership Development Programme. Held under the theme *The Caritas Way: United in Mission, Rooted in Love*, the retreat fostered deeper connections, strategic visioning, and a renewed commitment to the Church's social mission.

The four-day programme, hosted by Caritas Miri at St Francis of Assisi's Seminary and St Dominic & the Rosary Church, was a rich tapestry of prayer, theological reflection, and

practical exercises, designed to re-align Caritas members across Malaysia in their shared mission.

The retreat commenced on June 30, with an opening session led by trainers Alfred Netto and Helena Michael. The session explored the powerful influence of perception, highlighting how our individual experiences shape our understanding of the world. This foundational discussion set the stage for participants to open themselves to new ideas and perspectives, crucial for collaborative ministry. The day concluded with a reflective night prayer, supper, and fellowship at St Dominic Church, fostering initial bonds among the delegates.



Fr Fabian Dicom with Alfred Netto and Helena Michael.



## Faith, vision and systemic change

The second day began with a touching opening Mass celebrated by Bishop Richard Ng at the St Francis Seminary Chapel. His homily underscored the indispensable role of faith in Caritas work, reminding attendees that while preparation is vital, it is our faith that truly distinguishes Caritas from mere charity. "We must be a community of Faith," Bishop Ng exhorted, emphasising that this spiritual bedrock is what sets the Church's charitable arm apart.

Following the Mass, participants returned to St Dominic for the first session of the morning, facilitated by Alfred. He conducted the "Number Game," a dynamic team activity that illustrated the importance of strategy, adaptation, trust, and clear roles within a team – principles directly applicable to the collaborative nature of Caritas.

Fr Fabian Dicom then guided participants through a session titled *Where Are We Now? + Caritas Malaysia's 10-Year Vision*. He traced the history of Caritas Malaysia, established by the Bishops' Conference in early 2020 as the overarching body for Catholic charitable and development organisations in Malaysia. Fr Fabian stressed the critical need for Caritas to be "rooted in Jesus," lest its efforts falter. Among the main Caritas principles he highlighted was the principle of sub-

solidarity, which fosters trust in members from diocesan to BEC levels, and called for collaboration, solidarity, and patience as Caritas continues to grow, discerning the signs of the times with the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

The afternoon saw participants engage in group work, envisioning the "current" and "future" states of Caritas Malaysia. Common themes emerged, including the desire for increased funding, volunteers, and partnerships, alongside a strong Caritas brand. Yet, even in envisioning success, the groups emphasised the continuous need for growth and perseverance, acknowledging that the mission would still demand "blood and tears". Subsequent discussions on "Challenges and Roadblocks" identified common needs across dioceses, such as human resources, dedicated staff, logistical support, episcopal endorsement and support, and capacity building.

The day concluded with an "Empathy Circle" led by Helena, differentiating empathy from sympathy. Drawing on Brene Brown's four traits of empathy – recognising perspective, non-judgment, acknowledging emotions, and communicating those emotions – the session highlighted empathy as a vulnerable yet essential choice for genuine connection in ministry.

## Servant leadership and immersion

Day 3 commenced with Mass celebrated by Fr Simon Anand. His homily offered a profound reflection on "personalism," reminding participants that in the pursuit of results, the unique dignity of each person must remain at the centre. "It is not the end product alone that matters... it is the means and the person, and it is each person that primarily matters," Fr Simon preached, echoing the synodal Church's emphasis on journeying together.

Fr Alvin Ng SJ then presented on *Pastoral and Servant Leadership*, dispelling misconceptions that servant leadership equates to being a pushover. Through the lens of Jesus' parables, Fr Alvin illustrated how Christ's

teachings were innovative acts of non-violent resistance, empowering the oppressed while maintaining their dignity. True servant leadership, he explained, is rooted in self-awareness and trust, cultivating an approachable presence that inspires confidence and offers support.

After that, Sarah Chou, a Caritas Malaysia Board member, led a session, guiding participants to transform identified work areas into realistic, actionable goals achievable within five years – an exercise in concrete planning for the Caritas vision.

The afternoon was dedicated to a "Community Immersion Trip," organised by Caritas Miri. Participants, divided into groups,

## Discernment and connection

The final day began with Mass celebrated by Fr Sylvester. His homily thoughtfully connected the bishop's opening homily on faith with the day's Gospel, which featured Thomas' doubt. "On the first day we heard about how important Faith is to our work. Today the Gospel asks us to confront the barrier to Faith, Doubt." Fr Sylvester reflected that in Caritas work, doubts may arise; will there be enough volunteers? Do we have enough money? Will the community support the project? But he stressed that dependence on God enables us to overcome them.

Fr Fabian returned to lead a session on the "See, Judge, Act" methodology, a vital tool for communal discernment. He revealed that the original plan for the immersion trips included distributing food baskets, but it was changed to the "bring nothing" approach by the Caritas Miri team, after prayer and listening to the Spirit, and inspired by Jesus' sending of His disciples. Fr Sylvester on behalf of Caritas Miri, shared his conviction that often, we approach such visits with a

"saviour" mentality, bringing what we think others need, rather than truly encountering them. This shift allowed the opportunity for genuine empathy and listening. Fr Fabian then guided participants in applying the "See, Judge, Act" methodology to their immersion experiences.

The retreat culminated in "Closing Reflections from Facilitators," again led by Fr Fabian. Participants formed a circle, sharing key insights from the past days. In a symbolic act of unity, they tied rubber bands, connecting each person's insight to the next. This simple yet meaningful exercise illustrated that despite diverse takeaways and perspectives, all were "connected in the Caritas mission."

The Caritas Malaysia Leadership Development Programme concluded with a final lunch and closing prayer by Fr Frederick Joseph, leaving participants with hopefully a renewed sense of purpose, deeper connections, and practical tools to further *"The Caritas Way: United in Mission, Rooted in Love"* across Malaysia.



Participants envisioning the "current" and "future" states of Caritas Malaysia.

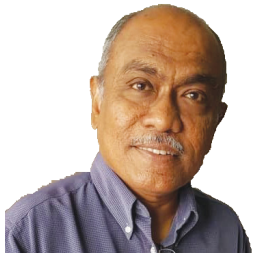
visited families in need. In a pre-visit briefing, Fr Sylvester Ngau gave a counter-cultural instruction: "Bring nothing, no phones or bags or other distractions, and just go there and listen." He drew parallels to Jesus' instructions to His disciples to carry only sandals and a walking stick, emphasising the need to encounter others without the pretence of being "saviours" with material aid. This practice of empathy, of simply listening, proved to be a deeply moving experience for all.

The day concluded with a joyous fellowship and solidarity barbeque at St Francis Seminary, a testament to the growing camaraderie among the delegates.



Fr Alvin Ng SJ presenting on "Pastoral and Servant Leadership".

# RCIA – a treasure “re-discovered”



## Echoing the Faith

DR STEVEN SELVARAJU

### Introduction

In the previous article, I mentioned that the main agent of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) is the Christian community. It means that all the baptised are responsible for initiating new members into the Church. Before I discuss how members of the community can become involved in the RCIA, I think it would be useful for us to understand the origin and present structure of the RCIA. This will be my focus in the present and the next few articles.

### Origins of RCIA

The RCIA, we have it today, has its roots in the early church. Known then as the “catechumenate”, its history is a fascinating one. It began in the first century, reached its most authentic form in the third and fourth, but declined in the fifth and sixth centuries. It was an initiation process that developed in different cities and regions, such as Alexandria, Antioch, Carthage, Jerusalem, Milan, Rome, and in parts of North Africa and Asia. It evolved in diverse cultural, political, social and religious contexts, as Christians attempted to respond to the mandate of Jesus to initiate men and women into the Church.

### The emergence of the catechumenate

The first three centuries were challenging times for the Church. Christians lived in a largely pagan world that often conflicted with Christian beliefs and values. Also, Christians were sporadically persecuted by the Romans. However, it was precisely in the midst of these and other difficult circumstances that the catechumenate emerged. During the first two centuries, there came into being a basic structure of initiating non-believers into the Church. Basically, the adult converts had to profess their faith in Christ and demonstrate that they were to transform their lives as believers of Christ. For its part, the Christian community used certain methods to verify the seriousness and sincerity of conversion in the candidates before accepting them for baptism.



The ancient catechumenate emerged and evolved within diverse cultural, political, social and religious contexts

### Towards a more structured process

By the end of the second century, the leaders of the Christian communities, namely the bishops, decided that a more structured initiation process be put in place. This was to prevent cases of apostasy or lapses among new Christians, especially in the face of persecution by the Romans. The bishops wanted to admit only those who



“I am God’s wheat, and I am to be ground by the teeth of wild beasts, so that I may become the pure bread of Christ.”

– St. Ignatius of Antioch, a martyr of the faith (died c. 110)

were able to give guarantees of a sufficient preparation and proof of courageous perseverance in the face of difficult circumstances. As such, the candidates were required to live up to the strict moral demands.

For example, candidates for baptism were expected to abandon their profession if it was contrary to Christian morals. These included those working as sculptors or painters of idols, gladiators, prostitutes, soldiers and other professions that contradicted the life of the Christian. Furthermore, they were expected to keep away from spectacles such as the theatre, the racetrack and the gladiator fights, which were common forms of entertainment during that period.

As the number of people seeking baptism increased, the bishops wanted to test more seriously their sincerity and preparedness. Candidates had to find someone from the Christian community who would ‘sponsor’ them or speak on their behalf. The role of the sponsor was to ascertain whether the candidate was serious about transforming his or her way of life. Only after this was determined was the candidate introduced to the community. Gradually, from the end of the second century, a more organised catechumenate, containing a series of stages, developed. By the third century there was a greater institutional definition to the process of initiation. By the mid-third and fourth centuries, it had become an essential part of the Church.

### Enriched by contributions from diverse personalities

The development of the catechumenate was also due to the efforts of a number of individuals. Usually known as the Fathers of the Church, they include Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, Hippolytus, Ambrose, Augustine and John Chrysostom, and others. Through their writings, homilies and teaching, each of them played a role in the theological and liturgical development of the catechumenate.

### Shrouded in secrecy and mystery

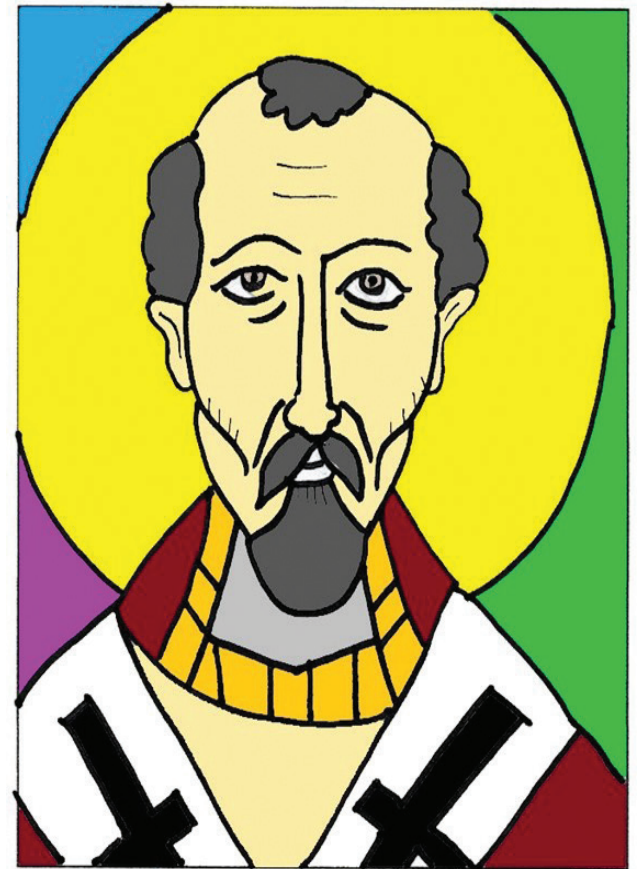
One of the most interesting aspects of the catechumenate is that it was filled with a sense of secrecy. It consisted of mysterious rites and ceremonies, and signs and symbols that had meaning only to Christians. There were several reasons for this. Firstly, by creating a sense of mystery, Christians hoped to attract people who were ‘curious’ about the faith. Secondly, the Church had to rival for converts, with the existing pagan religions which had their own mysterious and secret initiation rites. Thirdly, faced with sporadic persecution by the Romans, a sense of secrecy had to be maintained by the Church for her self-preservation.

### Goal is to lead to conversion

The atmosphere of mystery was especially maintained to invoke a sense of religious awe among the candidates. It was intended to inspire in them a profound and life-long conversion. The sense of mystery was intensified as the initiation process reached its climax, that is, when the catechumen received baptism at Easter Vigil. In his book, “The Awe-inspiring Rites of Initiation”, Edward Yarnold, a scholar on the catechumenate, states, “the ceremonies took place at night, some of them in the dark, after weeks of intense preparation; they were wrapped in secrecy, and the candidate knew little about them until just before, or even after, he had received them. Everything was calculated to inspire religious awe, to make these rites the occasion of a profound and life-long conversion.”

### The importance of rituals, symbols and signs

Accompanying the initiation process was a series of rites and ceremonies rich in rituals, symbols and signs. These too were developed so as to lead the candidates towards sincere conversion and to provide them a sense of belonging to the community. According to T.M. Finn, an expert in the history of the catechumenate, in his book “From Death to Rebirth - Ritual and Conversion in Antiquity”: “The rites distinctive of the journey to Christianity developed quickly into a rich, extended, and dramatic liturgical journey. Perhaps more than any other possession of the Church, they account for the early Christian Church’s survival and spread...”. In other words, it is the liturgical rites and ceremonies that ensured the survival and spread of the Church in the “challenging” early years of its existence.



“Fearful and most awesome were the rites before the coming of grace”

– St. John Chrysostom (c. 347 - 407)

### Conclusion

That the present RCIA is founded on the ancient catechumenate should make us realise that it is not a modern or new development. Instead, it is the re-discovery of a ‘treasure’ that had lain ‘hidden’ in the Church for hundreds of years. In future articles, I wish to explore further the ancient catechumenate with the hope that it will lead us to a greater appreciation of the current RCIA process.

The illustrations are by Dr. Steven Selvaraju.

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

Vincent D'Silva

In conjunction with his 80th birthday recently, former Malaysian ambassador to Italy, Dato' Ramanathan Vengadesan published his autobiography, *Triumphs and Tragedies: Village Boy to Globe-Trotting Ambassador*.

It is a fascinating account of how a young boy lived through the final months of the Japanese occupation of Malaya, the Communist Emergency, the Confrontation and the 1969 racial riots to play his part in building a new nation.

Vengadesan served as Malaysia's ambassador to Mali, Senegal, Namibia and Italy. He was in the latter post from 1997 to 2000 and actually met the famous Pope John Paul II during that time.

A member of Malaysia's small Brahmin community, he tells of the challenges of the era in which he grew up: how his family briefly moved back to India and then back again; how, like other Malaysians, they had to face up to the incredible hardships of the Emergency, and the 1969 race riots.

Vengadesan married Christie Gonzales, a devout Roman Catholic, and he developed a keen interest in interfaith understanding.

"There was much negotiation about our marriage, and we decided that both of us would retain our individual religions but even though we had a 'mixed marriage' we would marry in church and the children would be baptised Catholics and raised in that faith," he told *Herald*.

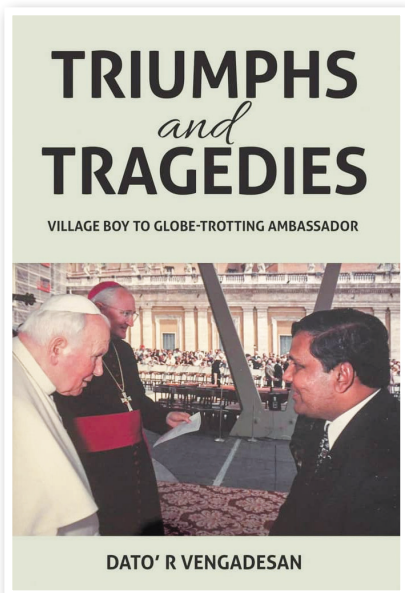
"In the end, there was a church wedding on April 5, 1972 at St Francis Xavier, Petaling Jaya. Both families were fully in attendance, although I always joked that Christie and I were the only ones smiling on the occasion! There was no denying that the overall mood of the families was one of reluctant acceptance," recalled Vengadesan.

He writes that the marriage was solemnised by the kind-hearted Jesuit priest, Fr John Wood who gave the full Mass ceremony, choicest marital blessing, select sacred hymns, organ music and placed the young couple at the high altar, which was not usually allowed for mixed marriages such as theirs.

"In keeping with my promise to Christie, the children were baptised in their infancy. Martin's baptism was performed by Fr Richard Hope, the Catholic chaplain of the American Embassy, at his simple office in Moscow in the presence of my mother-in-law Victoria, Christie and myself.

"In Belgium, we were also part of the

# Faith, diplomacy and a papal blessing



The book cover.

Roman Catholic community through the Church of St Anthony in Kraainem which had a predominantly Irish population and thus was English-speaking unlike the majority of churches which held Mass in French or Flemish," he said.

The couple's three children also attended Sunday school there, with Sharon receiving her First Holy Communion and Martin and Joanne receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation.

He said he had no problems reconciling raising a family with two religions.

"My religious beliefs are rather unique, but they make sense to me. I am comfortable going to both the church and the temple. I am grateful to God for His many blessings and have a strong faith, but am fully accepting of both Hindu and Christian teachings. Maybe it is a reflection of my diplomatic mindset that I came to settle on a middle ground on a topic that usually polarises other people," he said.

An undoubted highlight was the meeting with Pope John Paul II when Vengadesan was ambassador to Italy.

"This was not a private audience but one in which myself, Christie, Victoria and Sharon were presented to His Holiness on his Wednesday public appearance at St Peter's Square.

"It was the highlight of Victoria's visit to Rome; indeed, a highlight of her life, as a devout Roman Catholic.

"What I recall was the look of kindness, tenderness and love as he raised his eyes to look at mine. His Holiness was already suffering from severe Parkinson's disease but he had a clear intellect and sharpness



The family at Sharon's First Holy Communion at St Anthony's church in Brussels, Belgium in 1987.

of mind; a special interest in Malaysia was evident in his conversation, as Malaysia was not officially accredited to the Vatican yet," said Vengadesan.

He also recalled the beautiful churches in Rome, saying that the one that he admired most was San Giovanni in Laterano, a historical part of Rome.

"Another one was the Santa Maria Maggiore which is one of the Seven Pilgrim Churches of Rome, and where the late Pope Francis chose to be buried. And, of course, in the heart of the Vatican is the monumental St Peter's Basilica, which displays Michaelangelo's Pieta.

Another notable church, said Vengadesan was the Basilica of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, which is believed to hold precious remnants of the true cross and nails. So apart from the grand and bountiful display of architectural styles, there are sacred relics and miraculous icons in these basilicas which are revered by Catholics.

"Another which I must hasten to mention is the Scala Santa (Sanctuary of the Holy Stairs), where pilgrims and devotees go on their knees to the top of the steps, symbolic of the stairs that Jesus Christ climbed to appear before Pontius Pilate before being sentenced to death," said Vengadesan.

Another interesting aspect was how differently Mass was celebrated when the family was in Africa.

"As a non-Catholic I admired the fact that wherever we lived and worshipped, it was the one and same liturgy of the Holy Mass; the only uniqueness was in the music which had a distinct local flavour.

"While we lived in Dakar, Senegal and Windhoek, Namibia we enjoyed sacred African music on the drums during Mass. The beat was always joyful and lively and the congregation wore colourful native African attire which had large prints of Jesus or Mary.

"The liturgy was invariably that of the universal Church; the language English or Italian or French; although the Gloria, or Sanctus and Agnus Dei might be sung in Latin," he said.

He said that his wife Christie also had a voluntary, part-time radio show on Radio Ecclesia Namibia, which would broadcast children's stories. She used to read folktales from native West African writers which taught young children morals and values.

Vengadesan who just turned 80 had a heart procedure in 2022. He has had to slow down and is no longer able to attend a full Mass.

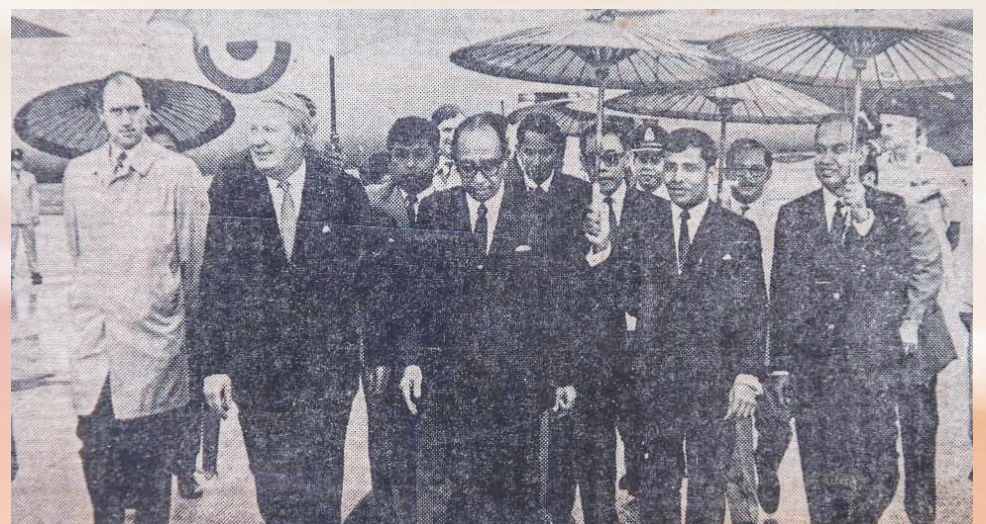
"For around 50 years, I was able to attend weekly mass, usually on Sunday mornings. However, in recent times I found that I was only able to sit down as kneeling and standing became difficult.

"Nowadays I only attend on special feast days but it has always meant a lot to me," he added.

Aside from this, there were many close friendships formed with those in the Church. said Vengadesan, pointing to Christie's former principal the late Sr Enda Ryan, FMM, her mentor at Sentul Convent Sister Elizabeth, former parish priests the late Frs Peter Kim, SJ and Paul Decroix, MEP and Archbishop Tan Sri Murphy Nicholas Xavier Pakiam.



Vengadesan presents his credentials as Malaysia's ambassador to Italian president Oscar Luigi Scalfaro in April 1997.



Vengadesan (second from right) accompanying Malaysian prime minister Tun Abdul Razak and UK premier Edward Heath in January 1971.

Interreligious dialogue is a sacred calling, powerfully embodied in the *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together* — widely known as the Abu Dhabi Declaration — issued on February 4, 2019, by His Holiness Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Tayyeb. More than a statement, it is a clarion call to all who believe in God to unite, walk as brothers and sisters, and live in the awareness of the divine grace that binds humanity in shared dignity. It serves as a blueprint for global coexistence — rooted in faith, strengthened by mutual understanding, and inspired by hope.

One such event took place on August 5, 2022, in Kangar, Perlis, where a *Mahabbah – Fratelli Tutti* dinner brought together Catholic and Muslim communities. The theme, *Bersama Menyuburkan Kehidupan Aman dan Sejahtera* (Together We Nourish a Peaceful and Tranquil Life), captured the spirit of fraternity and shared hope. The evening was graced by prominent religious leaders, including Dato' Tuan Guru Hj. Hashim Jasin, Mursyidul Am PAS, and Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang—whose diocese includes the states of Perak, Penang, Kedah, Perlis, and Kelantan.

Cardinal Sebastian, in his candid and heartfelt style, shared the Malay phrase “Tak Kenal, Tak Cinta” (To not know is to not love), affirming, “We are all brothers and sisters — *Kita semua adalah saudara*.” His words captured the evening’s spirit of unity. Tok Guru Hashim echoed this message, urging everyone to embrace the shared



**Turun Padang**

CHRISTOPHER KUSHI

# Inter-Religious dialogue: Bridges to human fraternity

values that unite us across faiths. The emcee, Tuan Haji Abdul Rahman, added to the warmth by encouraging attendees to exchange contacts and continue building these newfound

friendships.

Personally, I connected with three individuals, and to this day, we continue sharing stories, videos, and well wishes — a small, living example of the Abu Dhabi Declaration in action. One elderly participant in his seventies remarked that he had never interacted so closely with Christians before. “I never thought I would sit and chat like this,” he said. That simple moment — filled with understanding and goodwill — Another meaningful milestone took place on February 28, 2023, during a state-level meeting at the Perlis Menteri Besar’s Office. In a memorable moment, the Speaker of the State Assembly, YB Tuan Rus’ele Eizan, offered a message not of policy, but of prayer. With quiet conviction, he urged, “Let us all become a prayerful people,” adding that “a prayerful society is one that radiates goodwill, harmony, and compassion.” Cardinal Sebastian and his delegation responded with greetings of *Salam Damai*, *Salam Harmoni*, and *Salam Harapan* to all present.

Each year during the holy month of Ramadan, the *Buka Puasa Muhibbah* at Masjid Melayu Lebuah Acheh in Georgetown brings Muslims and non-Muslims together

to break fast, sharing not just food, but also fellowship and friendship. This year, Cardinal Sebastian, in his address, reflected on *Fratelli Tutti* — Italian for “We are all brothers and sisters” — and extolled the gathering’s spirit with the words: *mahu kenal, mahu cinta, mahu rindu, mahu peduli, mahu berkat* — a heartfelt desire for understanding, love, compassion, care, and blessing within our society, reflected the quiet beauty of genuine human encounter.

Datuk Seri Dr Mujahid Yusof Rawa urged all present to carry the spirit of friendship and unity from the Iftar gathering into the wider world, to help silence the voices of intolerance. Meanwhile, Prof Dato’ Seri Dr Anwar Fazal shared a pamphlet on the Taiping Peace Initiative, *The Culture of Peace – 99 Ways to Make It Happen*, which promotes peace on three levels: inner peace, peace with others, and peace with the environment.

On November 1, 2023, we journeyed to Kota Bharu for a meaningful dialogue with the Menteri Besar of Kelantan and his delegation. The encounter brought together a diverse group of East Malaysian Catholics, representing higher education institutions, military camps, police departments, and more.

At the Kelantan Mahabbah – *Fratelli Tutti* dialogue, Cardinal Sebastian Francis expressed the Diocese of Penang’s position on various issues through a phrase familiar to Christians in both personal and communal prayer: “*Jadilah Kehendak Tuhan di atas*

*Bumi sebagaimana di Syurga*” — “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” In response, the Menteri Besar of Kelantan, YAB Dato’ Panglima Perang Ustaz Dato’ Haji Mohd Nassuruddin bin Haji Daud, affirmed that Kelantan’s PAS-led administration serves as a model of harmony, understanding, and tolerance among Malaysia’s diverse communities, in line with the State’s motto: *Membangun Bersama Islam* (“Developing with Islam”).

Fr Dr Clarence Devadass, a member of the Asian delegation, speaking at the Synod on Synodality in Rome, October 2024, said that in Asia dialogue is not an option but a necessity and is part of the experience we live daily with a pluralist society.

At every inter-religious gathering, the Abu Dhabi Declaration document is shared—bringing smiles and breaking the ice. Each encounter and shared meal lays another stone in the bridge of fraternity that unites us as one human family.

On July 20, Cardinal Sebastian will lead a delegation on a courtesy visit to the Menteri Besar of Kedah in Alor Setar.

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

## My toughest job - being Jesus’ disciple

I had never thought of myself as a disciple. A disciple seemed like a very ‘serious’ vocation, meant for the likes of priests, saints, and theologians, people who are more holy and knowledgeable about God and His word... and I felt that wasn’t quite me.

Yet over the years I have come to embrace this word ‘disciple’ for myself for it is truly what we are called to be as Catholic brothers and sisters. I have come to learn and understand that discipleship isn’t reserved for the super religious folks, it is a personal call for each of us in all of our different roles; for me mother, godmother, aunty, sister, daughter, employee, community member, church goer and more.

The word ‘disciple’ in Latin, *discipulus*, means student or learner and that is part of what being a disciple is, someone who follows, who learns from and lives according to the teachings of their master. So, the heart of being a disciple is essentially about following Jesus not just in belief, but in action and in lifestyle and to build a relationship with Him.

Discipleship to me is about making that choice to walk daily in His footsteps, to grow in knowledge of Him, to learn from Him, to love as He loved, to serve as He served and to live as He lived (so very tough!). Being a disciple is also about sharing God’s Word and His teachings with others, to spread peace, kindness, truth, and hope to those that are searching, those who are lost and are in need. Disciples of Jesus live not for themselves, but we are created to serve God and His creation.

A disciple of Jesus also goes beyond the weekly attendance at Mass (if we go at all) and following His commandments... it is about having a personal relationship with Him. Just like the essence of any relationship or friendship we cultivate, it requires listening, talking, opening up one’s heart and trusting. It is also an internal journey of cultivating the

fruits of the spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control – Galatians 5:22-23) and growing in our prayer life.

Discipleship, for me, is also about saying “yes” to Jesus daily - when I’m helping my kids with homework when what I want to do is binge on Netflix after a long day at work, participating in my church activities and being a catechist rather than having a Sunday brunch with friends, it is the gifting of time and help to those in need when I really want to look the other way, it is pausing and keeping quiet when I want to argue and retaliate, and more - it is trying to be like Jesus not just in moments of prayer but in every choice, action, and person I encounter.

However, saying ‘yes’ isn’t easy for me. Discipleship as a whole isn’t easy – in fact it is one of the hardest and most painful things we are all called to do. True discipleship involves giving up parts of yourself to serve God’s Kingdom and that can be painful. It may mean going against the norm, giving up our dreams and letting go of our comfortable lifestyle, living a life that is not about the constant pursuit of wealth and security but, instead pursuing a life that is lived by the values of God, it is about doing the hard things instead of what’s easiest.... and yes, it may also mean carrying our crosses and that of others.

Jesus said in Luke 9:23, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.” This is not just a saying but it is a challenge, a mission, and a lifestyle – one I don’t always succeed in. However, I am reminded that when we love God, carrying our crosses becomes a journey and not a burden.

And then there are the internal struggles I face; the temptations, the doubts, the conflicting values I wrestle with and those

seasons where I feel that God is not listening... times of spiritual dryness. And gosh, it is so hard to truly place our trust in God and wait on Him. But it’s during these seasons that I find myself thirsting to seek God’s grace, to go closer to Him, to claim His promises and to remind myself of His unfailing goodness and plans for me... and most times, I find that it is during these dry seasons that I have grown in faith and knowledge of Him the most.

Another thing that I find challenging as I journey to be God’s disciple is about my misunderstood identity. The world and people around me often confuse being a disciple of Jesus with being perfect or self-righteous. I am being held at a higher standard and when I stumble (often), most would usually say “But I thought you were Christian”. So, it’s been tough representing Christ when I am so very human... I still make mistakes but I am still growing and learning, and trying my best to become more like Him.

Fr Michael Payyapilly, VC, in one of the formations I attended, said that everything we do should come out of prayer and that prayer is the foundation of everything. Prayer is a two-way conversation with God and is a way to have communion with God. Just as we need food and clothes daily for physical nourishment, so too do we need prayer for spiritual nourishment as we journey as disciples of Jesus.

He also said that we need to live the Gospel in our parishes and communities and to have a heart that resembles Christ and live that outside of church. Even the late Pope Francis emphasised frequently on the importance of missionary discipleship — that the Church exists not to stay within its walls, but to go out and share the Good News of God.

Reflecting on Fr Michael’s sharings, I know I am not excelling as a disciple. I don’t think

I am sowing enough seeds, nor doing a stellar job as a role model nor building a strong foundation for my children and those in my care and not strengthening my own prayer life. My life often is very much entrenched in the everyday world full of noise, distractions, fears, conflicting noises and more. Without me knowing, I am sometimes swept away by what’s ‘important’ according to the world and I become very inward looking, giving into my needs and wants. I put everything else first, and God gets the dregs of my day.

The good part about all this is that I get to start over again, every moment I recognise that I am falling short. I get to come to God and receiving His forgiveness and grace. I get nourishment from His Word and the Eucharist. And there are always things that people say or moments that just ‘wake me up’, that remind me to come back to Him, to continue my mission as His disciple. In a world of chaos and change, God is my one true constant. And because of my union with Him I can always find my way back to Him and start living out my discipleship, the hardest, yet the most rewarding job that I have ever had.

**Joanne Wong** is on a journey towards *having faith the size of a mustard seed*. She welcomes thoughts and suggestions on how to have a closer walk with God. Email her at [joanne.wpm@gmail.com](mailto:joanne.wpm@gmail.com)



**Mustard Seed Journeys**

JOANNE WONG



Fr Ron Rolheiser

# Poetry and spirituality

Who still reads poetry? In a digital age and in a time when the empirical has for the most part replaced the spiritual, what's the value of poetry? What does it bring to the table?

One of the intellectual giants of our generation, Charles Taylor, in a recent book *Cosmic Connections, Poetry in the Age of Disenchantment*, answers that question. Poetry is meant to re-enchant us, to help us see beyond the tedium of everyday ordinariness, to see again the deep innate connections among all things.

For Taylor, as children, we are in touch naturally with the deep innate connections among all things; however our normal growth and development work away at dissolving our original inarticulate sense of cosmic order. But we sense this loss and have an inchoate longing to recover that sense of wholeness.

And that's where good poetry can help us.

When we experience something, we don't simply receive it, like a camera taking a photo, we help define its meaning. In Taylor's words, "We do not just register things; we re-create the meaning of things." Thus, like any good work of art, the function of poetry is to transfigure a scene so that the deeper order of things becomes visible and shines through. The French poet, Stephane Mallarme, suggests that the function of art is not to

paint something, but to paint the effect it is meant to produce.

For Taylor, a good poem can do that. How? By helping us see things from a bigger perspective.

Wrapped up in our own lives, we are too close and so absorbed that we cannot properly name what we are going through. "Poetry gives it a plot, a story, and this in a way that gives it a dramatic shape. We can now see our life as a story, a drama, a struggle, with the dignity and deeper meaning that it has. For example, by giving poetic expression to a distressful emotion, poetry allows us to hold it at a distance. The business of the poet is to make poetry out of the raw material of the unpoetical. As William Wordsworth once said, poetry is "emotion recollected in tranquillity."

And to do that, the poet needs to employ a different language.

Here's how Taylor puts this: "Poetry is the 'translation' of insight into subtler languages.

What cannot adequately be understood in instrumental language, namely, value, morality, ethics, love, and art, require explorations which can only be carried out in other vocabularies. The language of empiricism is essentially an instrument by which we can build a responsible and reliable picture of the world as it lies before us, but that world is no longer seen as the site of spirit and magic forces.

Rather the universe is now understood in terms of laws defined purely by efficient causality."

And he goes on: "So a crucial distinction comes to the fore, between ordinary, flat, instrumental language which designates different objects, and combines these designates into accurate portraits of things and events, all of which serve the purpose of controlling and manipulating things. ... [while] on the other hand, truly insightful speech [good art] reveals the very nature of things and restores contact with them. Poetic language gives us a sense that we are called, we receive a call. There is someone or something out there."

Poetry parallels music as a paralinguistic practice. But what has any of this to do with spirituality, not least Christian spirituality? Aren't poetry and art purely subjective and, as such, often amoral? Taylor would sharply disagree in so far as this pertains to good poetry and good art. Good art, he suggests, is never a matter "of shifting taste".

Taylor suggests that the meanings we experience in good poetry and art have their place alongside moral and ethical demands. Why? Because, for Taylor, in good poetry and good art "the experience is one of joy and not just one of pleasure." The difference?

"You experience joy when you learn or are reminded of something positive,

which has a strong ethical or spiritual significance, whereas intense pleasure tends to enfold you even more in yourself." For Taylor, joy awakens a "felt intuition" which is not merely subjective. It is an opening to the ontological, to God.

Finally, quoting Baudelaire, Taylor leaves us with this insight: "It is both by poetry and through poetry, by and through music, that the soul glimpses the splendour beyond the grave; and when an exquisite poem brings tears to the edge of the eyes, these tears are not the proof of an excess of enjoyment, they are rather the testimony of an irritated melancholy, of a postulation of the nerves of a nature exiled in the imperfect and which would like to seize immediately, on this earth, a revealed paradise."

So, what has poetry to do with spirituality?"

To recast St Augustine: *You have made us for Yourself, Lord, and when poetry and music stir our hearts with irritated melancholy, we recognise that ultimately our rest lies in You alone.*

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

Nothing good in life is easy. Good things come with great effort.

This is true of many things, including prayer. If we want to develop a life of prayer, then we need to be willing to put the work into it. In our hubris, however, we don't think we need prayer. We want to figure things out on our own and do things our way. We don't think we need God's grace or wisdom. We live in a fast-paced world that rewards independence. In such an arena, there's no room for prayer (or for God).

Nevertheless, as believers, we know that we are called beyond our hubris. We are invited to follow a path of humility, and that path begins with prayer. We are beckoned to acknowledge our true spiritual poverty and our authentic need for God. We are led to break from our pride and seek divine assistance that is beyond and above us.

The response to the call of prayer does not simplify or make things easy. The response is just a willingness to get into the ring and start the fight.

As we try to pray, we find various objections in our fallen hearts and in our popular culture. There are many incomplete or erroneous ideas of prayer that weaken our resolve and make us question the importance of praying.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states it boldly: "In the battle of prayer, we must face in ourselves and around us erroneous notions of prayer."

There are some who dismiss prayer as merely a psychological or mental activity. It doesn't really change anything. It's just an esoteric path into nothing. The *Catechism* observes: "Some people view prayer as a simple psychological activity, others as an effort of concentration to reach a mental void."



(PEXELS/Photo by RDNE Stock project)

And, on the other side, there are some who relegate prayer solely to the external. It's merely about spoken words or mindless actions. The *Catechism* also observes: "Still others reduce prayer to ritual words and postures."

In addition to this mental and external challenge, there is the very predominant objection that prayer isn't worth our time. It doesn't fit into our schedules. The *Catechism* notes: "Many Christians unconsciously regard prayer as an

occupation that is incompatible with all the other things they have to do: They 'don't have the time.'"

In response, spiritual wisdom tells us if "you're too busy to pray, then you're too busy to pray, then we are pushing ourselves too far, stressing ourselves out, and not giving ourselves the peace we need to flourish.

The objections, however, continue. There are many who have become

discouraged with prayer. They have presumed that prayer means God does what we tell him. They have prayer and not received what they wanted. They "don't believe in prayer" anymore. Such views of prayer are profoundly incomplete. Prayer is about our union with God. It is about dwelling in his presence and receiving his strength to fight the good fight and run the race well.

Once we begin to understand the full nature of prayer, we can still struggle with discouragement as we find ourselves impatient, restless, and wondering why we can't simply rest in God.

This level of discouragement occurs because we have enclosed ourselves within our own powers and abilities. In order to pray, we need the help of God. Saint Paul reminds us that we do not know how to pray as we ought. We need the help of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who prays through us.

By surrendering ourselves and opening our hearts to the Holy Spirit, we can begin to pray and grow in our understanding of prayer. As we mature in this way, we can begin to go deeper into the mystery of prayer, which is the mystery of our union with God.

The *Catechism* observes: "Those who seek God by prayer are quickly discouraged because they do not know that prayer comes also from the Holy Spirit and not from themselves alone."

As believers, we need to readily avail ourselves of the power of the Holy Spirit and allow him to come into our hearts and teach us how to pray. There is no prayer without the Holy Spirit. There is no fighting the discouragement or objections to prayer without the Holy Spirit. **Fr Jeffrey F. Kirby, Crux**

# Little Catholics' corner

Hello children,

Jesus went to Martha and Mary's house for dinner one day and while Martha got the food ready, her sister Mary just sat near Jesus to listen to Him.

Martha was upset because she had so much work to do and Mary wasn't helping at all.

It doesn't sound quite fair, does it?

But Jesus told Martha that there was only one thing that was important, and that Mary had chosen it.

Mary had chosen to be with Him and listen to Him. Martha was concerned about all the details - making good food and setting things out nicely, but she wasn't thinking about Jesus.

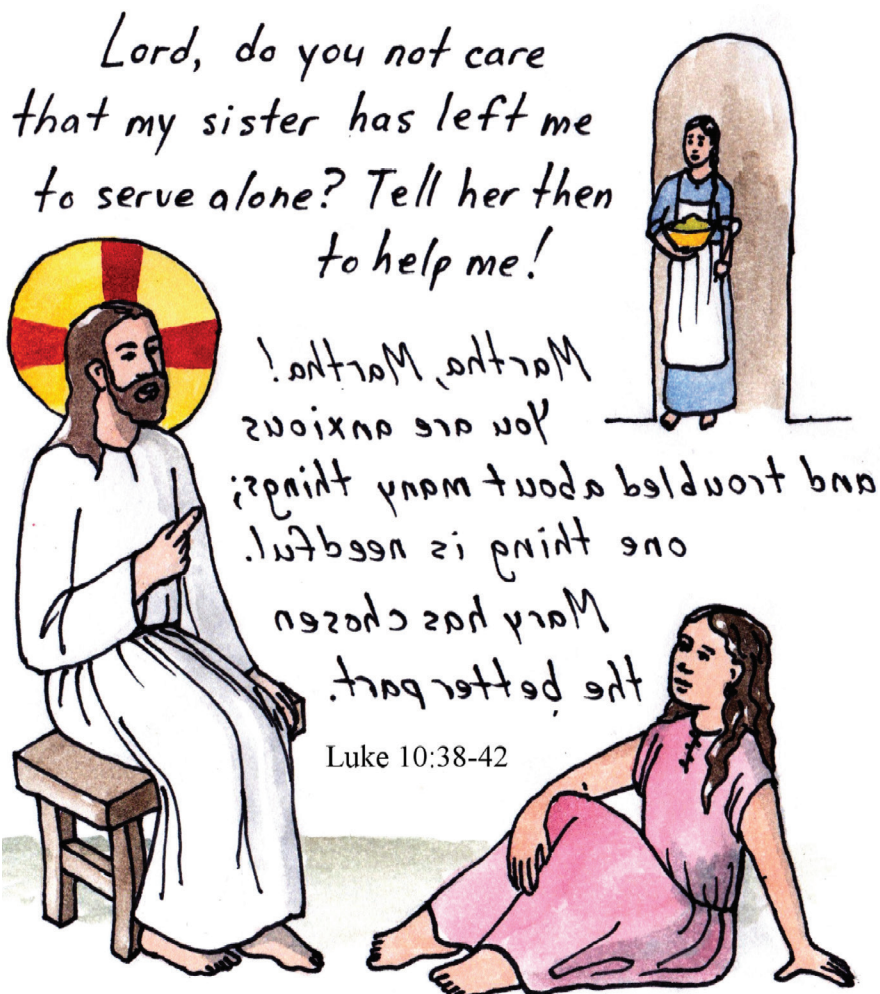
Jesus was not saying that cooking or working in the house is bad.

He was only showing Martha and Mary that we need to put God first in everything.

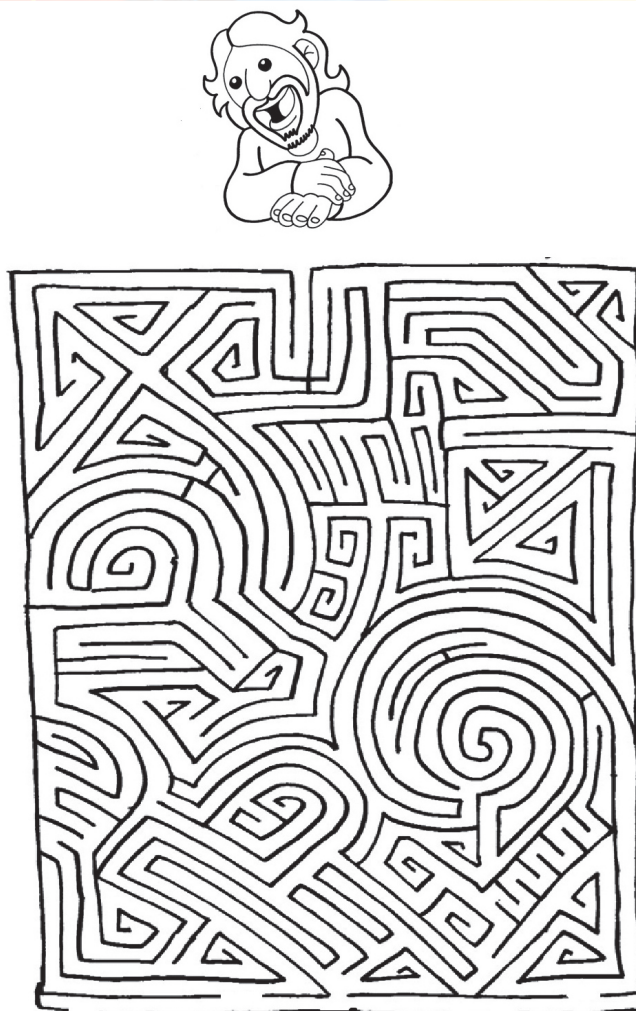
Here are a couple of ways you can keep God first:

1. Always make sure that things like going to Mass and saying your prayers are more important to you than things that are fun.
2. Whenever you do something, say a prayer first. Offer your game or work or whatever you are doing for the glory of God. Till we meet again, be good okay?

Love  
Aunty Eliz



Martha was so busy in the kitchen but her sister wasn't helping! What did Jesus say to her when she complained to Him?  
Look in the mirror to find out!



**CAN YOU HELP  
MARY AND  
MARTHA FIND  
THEIR WAY  
THROUGH THE  
MAZE TOWARDS  
JESUS?**



**Jesus At  
the  
Home of  
Martha  
and  
Mary**

Lc. 10,38-42

**Can you  
spot TEN  
differences  
between  
the two  
pictures?**





# BEYOND 2025: Chart Your Future

## A day of insight and inspiration!

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The BEYOND team — an initiative by the Church of the Sacred Heart that offers sessions for young adults on diverse social and current global issues — recently brought together students, working adults, and parents for an enriching session on *Higher Education & Career Pathways*.

The event featured insightful talks and open conversations with professionals from a broad range of fields, including medicine, law, IT, hospitality, education, finance, and allied health.

From opening insights by Assoc. Prof. Dr Pauline Leong on media and higher education, to eye-opening reflections from medical doctor and licensed counsellor, Dr Deborah Vasanthi on the realities of medicine and mental health, a fascinating sharing by Chef Krishnan from EQ Hotel and a candid legal career overview by Advocate Emma Morgan — participants were treated to a dynamic afternoon of learning, sharing, and networking.

Participants even travelled from as far as Melaka to attend, and many expressed gratitude for the rare opportunity to speak one-on-one with industry experts. One student shared that the event was very eye-opening



and provided an understanding on the real working world. A parent who attended expressed that they too, learned a lot about the different fields of study and work. The event concluded with personal reflections, an interactive Q&A session, and meaningful conversations that left attendees inspired and informed.

A huge thank you to all our speakers, volunteers, and participants for making this event a success. Stay tuned for more sessions from BEYOND as we continue empowering individuals to be informed, aware of the world around them, and equipped to make thoughtful, values-driven decisions about their futures! **Dr Melissa Shamini**



Some of the parents, students and working adults who attended the BEYOND 2025 session.

## Two Pillars: One Mission

### Tamil Youth Step Forward in Faith at Historic Vocation Camp

**SEGAMAT:** The first-ever Tamil Vocation Camp in the Malacca Johore Diocese took place from June 27-29 at the Church of St Philip, uniting over 60 Tamil-speaking young adults for a weekend of discovery, faith, and purpose. With the theme “Two Pillars; One Mission,” this milestone initiative was inspired by Fr Adrian Francis and supported by Sr Evelyn Elyas, FdCC, marking a new chapter for vocation awareness among Tamil-speaking Catholic youth.

Organised for single men and women aged 18 and above, the camp focused on helping participants reflect on the lives of St Peter

and St Paul, and to ask: What is God calling me to do with my life?

The entire programme was successfully led and coordinated by Kevin Raj Brutus from the Church of St Louis Kluang, whose youthful leadership and spiritual focus brought energy, structure, and heart to the camp.

#### A Weekend That Changed Lives

Sr Evelyn gave a moving sharing about the life of a Canossian Sister, while introducing the roles of Friends of Canossa and Canossian Lay Missionaries. Fr Adrian walked the young men through the beauty and sacrifice of

Diocesan Priesthood, answering their honest questions with love and clarity.

One participant shared, “I thought I was just coming for a camp. But I left with a clearer heart, a stronger faith, and new friends who also want to follow Jesus seriously.”

#### Mission, Friendship, and Faith

The highlight for many was the gotongroyong service at the Canossian Convent: washing, scrubbing, gardening, a simple act that opened hearts. In the evenings, praise and worship, rosary, and Eucharistic Adoration created space for a personal

encounter with Jesus.

The camp closed with a beautiful Mass and a deep sense of hope. Participants didn’t want to say goodbye because something new had begun inside them.

#### Your Invitation

This camp was just the beginning. A spark has been lit in the hearts of many. If you are 18 years and above, single, and searching for direction, keep your heart open, your moment may come.

Come and see. Come and hear His call. **Nesri Manoharan**



# PILGRIMS @ HEART & MIND: Preparing for a Journey of Faith

SELAYANG: The Archdiocesan Single Adults and Youth Office (ASAYO) hosted a special gathering titled *Pilgrims @ Heart & Mind* at the Chapel of Christ the King on June 28. The event was designed to spiritually and mentally prepare young pilgrims travelling to Rome for the Jubilee Year of Hope 2025.

The idea was conceived through the collaboration of ASAYO and Fr Michel Dass, who envisioned a space for reflection and renewal before the pilgrimage. The choice to host it at

Christ the King Chapel allowed the involvement of youths from the parishes of Christ the King (CTK) and Christ the Light (CTL), adding a vibrant local flavour.

The response was overwhelming — nearly 100 young people took part in the day-long event, including over 30 pilgrims from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, as well as the dioceses of Penang and Malacca-Johor. They were joined by more than 60 youths from the CTK and CTL communities.

The day began on a high note with lively praise and worship led by the CTK youth, setting the tone for a joyful and spirit-filled experience. This was followed by engaging and thought-provoking sessions by Fr Michel and ASAYO leaders Jacinta Fernandez and Josephine Tan, who guided participants to reflect more deeply on their personal journeys of faith.

In the evening, the CTK and CTL youth came together once again to lead a meaningful



Mass. The event concluded with a serene and reflective Taizé prayer and Adoration. The gentle chants and stillness of the moment offered all present a chance to quietly encounter God and prepare their hearts for the road ahead.

Special thanks go to Fr Peter Anthony, parish priest of Christ the King, for his unwavering support and encouragement of youth-led initiatives. The CTK community was delighted and honoured to host the pilgrims and be part of such a significant moment.

*Pilgrims @ Heart & Mind* was more than just a pre-pilgrimage event—it was a powerful reminder that every journey of faith begins from within. As these young pilgrims prepare to step into a global celebration of hope, they carry with them the prayers, unity, and support of their local Church community. Together, they walk in hope and faith.



## MEETING THE CARMELITE SISTERS

KUCHING: St Teresa's Secondary School students and young ladies aged between 15 to 37 years were very honoured and blessed to be able to meet the Sisters at the Carmelite Monastery visitors' parlour from 3.30pm – 5.00 pm, and pray the Vespers from 5.00 – 5.30 pm at the Carmelite Chapel recently.

The girls were enlightened about the life of the Carmelite Sisters in the monastery. Throughout the meet session, Sr Dominica Chai and Sr Karen Emmanuel of Jesus on

the Cross shared how they were called to be Carmelite Sisters.

Through the Q & A, students learnt that Carmelite sisters dedicate their lives to a contemplative life focused on prayer, spiritual reading, and manual labor, living in community and following vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. They spend significant time in silent prayer and meditation, engaging in the Liturgy of the Hours and daily Mass. The Carmelite nuns

withdraw completely from the world and dedicate themselves entirely to a life of prayer and penance. But their sacrifices and their prayers reach out to the world they have left behind.

They have not fled the world because they did not enjoy the life they had there. They love the world – they love life – and they have found it in all its richness and beauty...by giving themselves to God.

According to Sr Karen, her greatest joy and peace is to spend personal time praying and having personal relationship with the Lord.

A question was also asked regarding the length of formation to become Carmelite Sister, to which Sr Karen explained that it ran from 9-12 years.

- Aspirancy: 1-2 years
- Postulancy: 1-2 years
- Novitiate: 2 years

Temporary professed nun (with temporary vows) – 5 years or more until a minimum of 9 years of formation is completed.

Solemn professed nun (with lifelong vows) – lifelong formation.

The earliest stage is a time to get to know the candidate and for the candidate to be

exposed to some experience of stay-in with the community inside the monastery.

Interested candidates usually meet a few times with Mother Prioress or the nun who is appointed for formation, and eventually meet the whole community 2-3 times before applying for stay-in.

Candidates are to write a letter to apply for stay-in. Then wait for approval.

Duration of stay-in depends on the candidate's choice, but generally, a longer stay-in period is recommended to better experience the Carmelite life (maximum length of stay-in period is three months).

For enquiries, candidates may come to the Turn at the monastery.

The teachers and students would like to take this opportunity to thank the Carmelite Sisters for their warmth and kindness in sharing their vocation. We pray more young ladies would respond to God's calling and seek divine guidance and inspiration to answer God's call to a life dedicated to serving the Church. We pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance in discerning and following one's true vocation and for the strength and perseverance to live faithfully within that vocation. **Today's Catholic**



## Becoming "Salt of the Earth" for the nation

YOGYAKARTA: In a world filled with uncertainty, young people often wonder: Will the path we walk lead us to the dreams we have envisioned?

For Bhumiksara Foundation's scholarship recipients, its second national gathering in Central Java's Yogyakarta last June was much more than just a meeting-cum-gathering. It was a moment of growth, reflection, and renewed commitment to become light for others and for Indonesia.

The national gathering commenced with an invitation to look inward. In sessions on personal branding, scholars learned that building one's image is not about appearances alone but about harmonizing values, identity, and purpose.

It challenged these university students from across Indonesia to embrace authenticity, recognising both strengths and areas for growth while preparing to enter the profes-

sional world with integrity. The act of crafting CVs and cover letters was not merely technical but deeply personal—an exercise in narrating their journeys clearly and confidently.

The gathering also opened their eyes to Indonesia's current realities. Keynote speaker, Yanuar Nugroho encouraged participants to discuss structural poverty, environmental degradation, and the erosion of moral values. They were reminded that while darkness exists, hope persists. Criticism of systemic injustice is not an act of hostility but a form of sincere love for the nation — a prophetic call for transformation.

Beyond intellectual enrichment, the gathering became a space for spiritual renewal through Ignatian spirituality. Participants learned about the Principle and Foundation, the Discernment of Spirits, and the Examen, recognising that all their studies, future plans, and services are pathways to love and serve



God in all things.

In exploring consolation and desolation, they discovered that choosing wisely and acting with integrity are what guide their paths, even amidst life's uncertainties.

The Yogyakarta-based spiritual experience was not without emotion. Joy from reunions, new friendships, and insights was accompanied by the bittersweet reality that this was their final national gathering as a cohort.

Yet, stories from alumni and organisers re-

minded them that Bhumiksara Foundation's national gathering is not merely about annual meetings — it is a spirit that lives on, calling each scholar to continue walking with others in hope, faith, and service.

In a world where digitalisation shapes career opportunities, the gathering underscored the importance of adaptability and a growth mindset. Leadership, they learned, is not a single moment but a lifelong journey of bringing positivity and light into the world. **LiCAS News**

# Faith communities hold memorial services for flood victims in Texas



Camp Mystic alumnae sing songs after a memorial service at the Church of St John the Divine in Houston on July 7, 2025. (CNA/Amira Abuzeid)

HOUSTON, Texas: The faith communities of the Texas Hill Country flood victims are rallying in support of the families with Masses, rosaries, and memorial services.

The Fourth of July flood disaster near the central Texas town of Kerrville, where the Guadalupe River rose 35 feet in the early morning hours, has claimed over 100 lives so far, including more than 30 young children, with many more still unaccounted for.

Especially affected was Camp Mystic, the 100-year-old Christian girls' camp in Hunt, Texas. At least 27 campers there perished, with several more, including a counsellor, not yet recovered.

Over the last few days, schools and churches in Houston, where many current and former Camp Mystic families reside, have held prayer services and Masses for the victims and their families.

A filled-to-overflowing memorial service for Camp Mystic families took place on July 7 at the Church of St John the Divine, an Episcopal church with deep ties to the camp. Buried there is Anne Eastland Spears, former Camp Mystic chairman of the board and mother of camp director Dick Eastland, who lost his life while rescuing campers from the flood.

The ministers spoke of Jesus' love for his children, especially when they suffer. St. John's rector, Rev. Leigh Spruill, encouraged those in mourning to "have hope. Keep talking to God ... He may seem absent now, but he hears everything and he is present."

Youth ministry director Rev. Sutton Lowe referred to the Gospel story of Jairus and his little

girl, who died and whom Jesus raised from the dead.

"When we die, Jesus is there to touch us and say 'arise,' and there is new life beyond our imagining," he said.

Rev. Libby Garfield told mourners that "there is a path forward that is lined with the life and death and resurrection of Jesus."

After the service, Camp Mystic alumnae of all ages gathered on the lawn north of the church, forming a large circle in the grass and singing camp songs, many of which were Christian hymns.

Ashley Emshoff, an alumna who spoke to CNA after the memorial, said that the camp forges bonds between campers that are lifelong and are "as strong as family."

Mystic alumna and St John parishioner Alafair Hotze told CNA the Eastland family, who run the camp, became like family to generations of campers.

Emshoff and Hotze said that many Camp Mystic alumnae are so eager for their daughters to become part of the Mystic community that they write to the camp as soon as they find out they are pregnant with girls. The Eastlands respond with a Camp Mystic infant onesie for their newborn and a letter of congratulations (along with a place on the waitlist).

Hotze said that Dick Eastland's death, while tragic, aligned perfectly with the man he was: "He taught us to be selfless and love as Christ loves," Hotze said.

"He died as he had lived," Hotze said: "Giving his life for those he loved." **Amira Abuzeid, CNA**



Trees emerge from flood waters along the Guadalupe River on July 4, 2025, in Kerrville, Texas. (CNA/Eric Vryn)

## MEMORIAM

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**In Loving Memories of**

<p>25th Anniversary</p>  <p><b>Michael Stanislaus</b> 09.05.1925 – 16.07.2000</p>	<p>2nd Anniversary</p>  <p><b>Philomena Mariadoss</b> 09.06.1935 – 10.01.2023</p>	<p>2nd Anniversary</p>  <p><b>S. Wilfrid Chelvam</b> 24.07.1957 – 15.05.2023</p>
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*In our hearts you will always live  
Your love, your voice, and your smile  
Are forever imprinted in our minds  
and all the beautiful memories of you held deep in our hearts  
will be kept, loved and cherished always.*


*"Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Psalms 23:6)*

Forever loved and dearly missed by family, relatives and loved ones.

*Eternal rest  
grant unto them,  
O Lord, and let  
perpetual light  
shine upon  
them. May their  
souls and the  
souls of all the  
faithful  
departed,  
through the  
mercy of God,  
rest in peace.  
Amen.*

*Like the seed  
buried in the  
ground, you  
have produced  
the harvest of  
eternal life for  
us; make us  
always dead to  
sin and alive to  
God.  
Amen.*


**12TH ANNIVERSARY**



**KOLANDASAMY GNANAMUTHU**  
Born: 26.12.1944 Departed: 16.07.2013

*Always in our Thoughts,  
Forever in our Hearts...*

Always loved and remembered by beloved wife, son, daughters, sons-in-law, daughter-in-law, grandchildren, relatives and friends.



**15th Anniversary  
In Loving  
Memory of  
Susai Issac  
Arokiam**  
8.01.1927 – 14.07.2010

*In our hearts, Aiya,  
you're forever close, always loved, always missed,  
your presence we cherish the most.  
The memories we hold remain with us always,  
of the times we shared in brighter days.  
Now you rest in heaven, free from sorrow and strife,  
but in our hearts, you'll live on for life.*

Fondly remembered by wife, children, grandchildren, in-laws, relatives and friends.  
Paul A. Raj (+6012-3073790)

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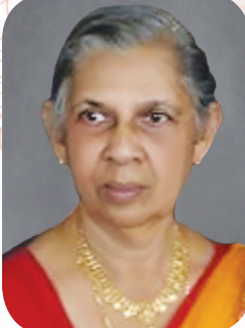
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*Ever full of joy and laughter  
Caring and easily moved to  
compassion  
Beloveds and strangers alike  
No one did she turn away;  
Through the weave of years  
Weathering storms and joys  
All that Jesus gave her  
She gave to all in turn;  
From infants to the bent  
and broken  
Into every heart in need  
She tucked her special light.*



**May Florence  
Gomez**  
w/o the late Simon  
Fernandez (Temerloh)

Gifted from heaven:  
1 Feb 1936  
Returned to her eternal  
rest: 6 July 2025

*God is the rock of my  
heart, my portion forever.  
~ Psalm 73: 26*

# Korean Church marks centenary of martyrs' beatification

SEOUL: On July 5, the Archdiocese of Seoul, South Korea, marked the 100th anniversary of the beatification of the 79 Korean martyrs of the Gihae (1839) and Byeong-o (1846) persecutions with a Mass, the release of a new report on their martyrdom and a special exhibition, a press release of the archdiocese's website states.

"Even in the trials of persecution, these martyrs never abandoned their faith in the Lord. Their endurance deepened their faith, which ultimately bore fruit as true hope that overcame even death", said the Archbishop of Seoul, Peter Soon-taick Chung, during his homily.

The 79 Korean martyrs of the Gihae and Byeong-o persecutions were beatified by Pope Pius XI in St. Peter's Basilica on July 5, 1925. Paul VI then beatified a second group of 24 martyrs in 1968, and



The celebrations for the 100th anniversary of the martyrs' beatification (Archdiocese of Seoul)

both groups, totalling 103 people, were canonised collectively by Pope John Paul II in 1984.

More than 1000 faithful gathered for the liturgy at the Seosomun Shrine History Museum in Seoul, where 41 of the 79 martyrs lost

their lives. According to the *Fides* news agency, in the 19th century the Korean Church estimates that approximately 16,000 Catholics were killed. Religious freedom was not granted to Catholics in Korea until 1895.

The press release explains that during the Mass a new report titled "The Documentation of the Gihae and Byeong-o Persecutions" was also published by the Martyrs Elevation Committee of the Archdiocese of Seoul. This work drew

from the royal chronicles, judicial records and state archives of the Joseon Dynasty who ruled at the time of the persecutions. The official documents and data from the time featured in the report have also been translated into Korean to make this information more accessible to scholars and the Catholic community.

"This is the first time that historical facts from official records — interrogations, reports, and directives from institutions like the Royal Secretariat and the State Council — have been carefully extracted, translated, and compiled, rather than relying solely on testimonies," said Archbishop Chung. "Even though these were records written by the persecutors, the courageous faith and deep conscience of the martyrs stand out all the more clearly within them". **Vatican News**

## Philippine bishops push for peace and moral leadership

MANILA: The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), through a pastoral letter released during its 130th Plenary Assembly, called on Filipinos to uphold justice, peace, and accountability amid growing challenges in the country and across the world.

Signed by CBCP President Bishop Pablo Virgilio S. David of the Diocese of Kalookan, the letter urged the faithful to respond with prayer, solidarity, and responsible citizenship in light of ongoing struggles both at home and abroad.

Condemning the violence in Gaza and the suffering of innocent civilians, the CBCP called for prayers, fasting, and sacrifices for peace, and appealed for an immediate ceasefire to allow serious negotiations and humanitarian aid. "We advocate for a sustained culture of peace rooted in justice, mercy, and our shared humanity transcending race, religion, and politics," the letter stated.

Addressing domestic concerns, the bishops highlighted the plight of Filipino workers whose wages remain below the living wage

threshold. The CBCP emphasized the Church's responsibility to "lead by example in ensuring fair salaries, benefits, and dignified treatment of workers in our Church institutions."

"We appeal for dialogue among employees, employers, and the government to arrive at mutually acceptable solutions," the bishops said, encouraging open conversations to secure just compensation and job security, in line with the Church's social teachings.

The CBCP also expressed alarm over what it described as

"delays" in the Senate concerning the impeachment proceedings of the Vice President. The letter reaffirmed that impeachment, when pursued in truth and justice, is a constitutional and democratic tool for ensuring accountability in government. The bishops urged the public to reject indifference, engage in honest dialogue, and promote a culture of responsible citizenship rooted in faith.

As the Catholic Church observes the Jubilee Year, the CBCP invited clergy, laity, workers, and political leaders to collaborate in the pursuit

of justice and peace. Quoting the prophet Micah, the letter called on all to "do justice, love goodness, and walk humbly with God."

"Let us rekindle our hope, strengthen our solidarity, and remain vigilant in our stewardship of truth, justice, and the dignity of every human person," the bishops wrote.

The pastoral letter concluded by invoking the intercession of Our Lady of Peace and entrusting the country and the world to God's justice and love. **Leahna Villajos, RVA**

## Historic St Thomas Shrine elevated to minor basilica

INDIA: In a significant moment for the Catholic Church in India, the National Shrine of St Thomas in Chennai, southern India, was solemnly elevated to the dignity of a Minor Basilica by the Holy See on July 3.

The historic event, held on the Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle, honoured the sacred memory of the Apostle who brought the Gospel to Indian soil and was martyred there.

The Apostolic Nuncio to India and Nepal, His Excellency Archbishop Leopoldo Girelli, presided over the ceremony, conveying the joy, blessings, and paternal affection of the Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV.

Thousands of pilgrims, along with Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops, priests, religious, civil leaders, and lay faithful, gathered in a spirit of faith, heritage, and

national pride.

The celebration began with the blessing and opening of the magnificently renovated Main Church, home to the Bleeding Cross of St. Thomas, a relic traditionally believed to have been carved by the Apostle himself.

According to local tradition, this Cross miraculously oozed blood on December 18th commemorated as the date of St Thomas's martyrdom, for 150 consecutive years.

During the Mass, the decree of elevation, issued by Cardinal Arthur Roche, Prefect of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, was read aloud in English by Archbishop George Antonysamy, Archbishop of Madras-Mylapore and President of the Tamil Nadu Bishops' Council, and in Tamil by Bishop Neethinathan.

As the Gloria resounded in the newly declared Basilica, the Apostolic Nuncio handed over the decree to the diocesan bishop, marking the culmination of years of vision, prayer, and collaboration.

In his homily, Archbishop Girelli extended the heartfelt blessings of the Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, expressing confidence that this new Minor Basilica "will bring nourishment and peace to all those who have faith in the Lord and come here as pilgrims."

The event drew a diverse and distinguished gathering, with politicians, ministers, government officials, and dignitaries attending alongside thousands of faithful.

For the Catholic Church in India, this day reaffirmed the nation's apostolic roots, anchored in the blood of St. Thomas and nurtured through generations of witness. **RVA**



The clergy walking in procession into the National Shrine of St Thomas in Chennai on July 3, 2025. (RVA photo)