

The Catholic Weekly HERALD

Mission Statement

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

TERHAD

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Having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.
Col. 2:12



Forming laity to be heralds of Christ

■ P5



Finding God through Arts

■ P6



Miracle or Masterpiece?

■ P10



(File pic)

VATICAN: As the global Church celebrates the 5th World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly on July 27, Pope Leo XIV delivered his inaugural message, urging a renewed culture of care, reverence, and intergenerational solidarity. In his address, issued in anticipation of the Jubilee Year, the pontiff stressed that “hope is a constant source of joy, whatever our age.”

The message, themed *Blessed are those who have not lost hope* (Sir 14:2), is deeply rooted in Scripture and pastoral care. It presents old age not as a period of decline, but as a sacred season of grace, witness, and spiritual richness. Drawing on the examples of Abraham and Sarah, Moses, and Zechariah and Elizabeth — each called to fulfill vital roles in their later years — Pope Leo reminds the faithful that God often chooses the elderly as key instruments in His saving plan.

“God thus teaches us that, in His eyes, old age is a time of blessing and grace,” Pope Leo writes. “The elderly are, for Him, the first witnesses of hope.”

The pontiff notes that the growing number of elderly people in society is a “sign of the times” and an invitation to discern a new approach to ageing — not as marginalisation, but as mission.

In an age marked by superficiality and fleeting connections, he asserts that the presence of elders reminds us of life’s enduring meaning. “If it is true that the weakness of the elderly needs the strength of the young,” he writes, “it is equally true that the inexperience of the young needs the witness of the elderly in order to build the future with wisdom.”

Highlighting the example of grandparents who often embody faith, devotion, civic virtue, and perseverance, the Pope describes this “precious legacy” as both a gift and a responsibility. “The legacy they have handed down to us with hope and love,” he writes, “will always be a source of gratitude and a summons to perseverance.”

In the context of the Jubilee — a traditional time of renewal and liberation — Pope Leo makes a passionate appeal

to combat one of the greatest afflictions facing the elderly: loneliness and abandonment. “Our societies, everywhere in the world,” he laments, “are growing all too accustomed to letting this significant and enriching part of their life be marginalised and forgotten.”

He challenges every parish, association, and community to become “protagonists in a revolution of gratitude and care.” This means forging real, personal relationships with older people; organising regular visits; creating networks of support and prayer; and ultimately restoring the dignity of those who feel overlooked.

Pope Francis’ initiative, mentioned by Pope Leo, allows for a special indulgence for those unable to make a pilgrimage to Rome — granted instead to those who spend time visiting elderly persons who are alone.

Speaking directly to grandparents and the elderly, Pope Leo acknowledges the temptation to dwell on the past or to feel diminished by physical limitations. Yet, he urges them to embrace their enduring purpose:

“We possess a freedom that no difficulty can rob us of: it is the freedom to love and to pray. Everyone, always, can love and pray.”

Quoting Pope Francis’s words during his hospitalisation, Pope Leo recalls, “Even when our bodies are weak, nothing can prevent us from giving ourselves, from being there for one another in faith, as shining signs of hope.”

He affirms that affection for loved ones does not fade with age, but often deepens: “Our energy is revived by the love of our children, our grandchildren. This affection brings us comfort and hope.”

As he closes his message, Pope Leo calls the elderly to remain active in spirit and mission. He invites them to press forward “with confidence in the Lord,” renewed daily through prayer and the Eucharist, and to share the faith they have lived for so long.

“May we always praise God for His goodness,” he concludes. “May we open our hearts to those who are far away, and especially to those in need. In this way, we will be signs of hope, whatever our age.” **Vatican News/CNA**

To read the full message, go to <https://bit.ly/3Uo2ppG>

Prayer for the Fifth World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly

Blessed are those who have not lost hope
(Sir 14:2)

How beautiful are these words of yours, Lord!
Help us to continue our pilgrimage through time, animated by the hope that comes from You!
Help us in this divisive world, to bring the hope of communion.
Help us in this world, wounded by wars, to bring the hope of peace.
Help us in this world, which is dehumanising, to bring the beauty of an ancient smile.
Help us to be, for our grandchildren, for our loved ones and for everyone we meet, the memory of your tenderness.
Help us to bring, in a world distracted from You, the Hope of a new life that only You can give!
For in You, Lord, nothing is lost
For in You, Lord, everything begins again!
Amen

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MY VIEW

When Pope Francis launched the synodal process in 2021, it ignited a spark of hope, a vision of a Church that truly listens, that walks together in communion, and that discerns the voice of the Holy Spirit in the voices of all the faithful.

Nearly four years later, we must ask ourselves: Are we living this spirit authentically, or is synodality at risk of becoming another well-intentioned but ultimately empty exercise in ecclesiastical reform?

The danger of empty ritual

Synodality is not the problem. It is a gift, a call to renewal, a return to the very essence of what it means to be Church. But like any great reform, it can be undermined not only by outright resistance but by half-hearted execution. We may use the language of "listening," yet carefully filter out uncomfortable or challenging voices. We may speak poetically of "walking together," yet retain decision-making behind closed doors, in the same clerical circles that have always held power. We may invite "participation," yet deny true co-responsibility, keeping the laity at a safe distance from real influence.

If synodality becomes mere bureaucracy — consultations without conversion, dialogue without discernment, process without prophetic openness — it risks betraying its own purpose. The faithful who have engaged sincerely, now wonder: Will our voices truly shape the Church, or are we merely being heard but ultimately dismissed?

A change of heart, not just structure

Pope Francis had repeatedly insisted that synodality is a culture, a way of being Church. This demands confronting deeply ingrained habits: the clericalism that

instinctively sidelines the laity, the fear of open disagreement that prefers harmony over honesty, the instinct to control rather than trust the unpredictable movement of the Spirit.

Synodality is not a customer satisfaction survey. It is a spiritual journey that requires patience, prayer, and even discomfort. It demands vulnerability — from bishops, priests, and laity alike. If we reduce it to administrative box-ticking, to carefully managed discussions where the outcomes are already assumed, we miss the point entirely. Worse, we risk disillusioning those who dared to hope that this time, things might be different.

Integrity demands courage

To avoid the charge of hypocrisy, we must ask hard questions of ourselves:

Have we truly listened to those wounded by the Church, or only to those whose wounds are already neatly bandaged?

Are we willing to be challenged by voices that disrupt the status quo, or only by those who reinforce what we already believe?

Do we trust the Holy Spirit enough to follow where we did not plan to go — even if that path leads to tension, conflict, or unexpected change?

Synodality is not a means to predetermined ends. If we "discern" only what aligns with our preferences, if we listen selectively to preserve our comfort, we are not discerning at all — we are manipulating. True synodality requires surrender, not strategy.

Reasons for hope amid the risks

Despite these dangers, signs of life abound. In parishes and dioceses around the world, lay Catholics are speaking with prophetic clarity, refusing to be reduced to passive

spectators. Religious sisters are modelling radical inclusion, often at the margins where the Church is most alive. Young people are demanding a Church that lives what it preaches — one that is authentic, transparent, and unafraid of hard questions. Pastors who once saw their role primarily as teachers and rulers are rediscovering the joy of walking with their flock, not ahead of them.

This is synodality in action — messy, grace-filled, and alive. It is happening in small faith communities that gather to pray and discern together, in diocesan assemblies where bishops and laity speak as equals, in the quiet courage of those who refuse to let the Church settle for less than what the Gospel demands.

Returning to the early Church's spirit

The early Church was synodal by nature. The Acts of the Apostles show a community wrestling with disagreement, discerning together, and being surprised by the Holy Spirit. We are not reinventing something new — we are returning to something essential.

If we are serious about being a synodal Church, then we must also be serious about honesty. That means naming the ways we fall short. It means calling out performative listening when we see it. And it means holding one another accountable, not with hostility, but with love.

Let us strive for a Church that listens with both ears and an open heart — a Church that trusts the Holy Spirit, even when it leads us into tension. Let us become a Church where everyone has a voice, and where discernment is not just a word, but a way of life.

Anything less would be an injustice to the People of God and to the Gospel we claim to serve.

Sandra Ann

Persistent prayer, gracious God

In today's readings, we are invited to consider the heart of prayer — not merely as words we offer, but as a transformative relationship with a God who listens, responds, and desires intimacy with His people.

The First Reading (Genesis 18:20–32) presents us with a strikingly bold interaction between Abraham and God. Abraham, upon learning of God's plan to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, begins a daring negotiation — almost a haggling — not out of arrogance, but out of compassion and a deep trust in the mercy of God. "Will you sweep away the innocent with the guilty?" he asks. This scene challenges us: are we as courageous in our prayers, especially when interceding for others? Do we approach God with the confidence that He is just, merciful, and always open to hearing us out?

Abraham models for us a kind of prayer that is both persistent and relational. He is not afraid to ask again and again, gradually moving from fifty to just ten righteous people. And what is even more profound is not the eventual destruction of the city (which happens later), but God's willingness to listen every step of the way. Abraham's dialogue reveals a God who is not distant, but who welcomes even the smallest voice that cries for mercy.

This theme finds a powerful echo in today's Gospel from Luke 11:1–13. The disciples, having seen Jesus at prayer, request, "Lord, teach us to pray." What follows is not just the familiar Lord's Prayer, but a whole lesson on the nature of prayer and the character of God.

Jesus invites His followers to call God "Father" — *Abba* — an intimate, tender term. It suggests not a fearful supplication to a distant deity, but the open-hearted trust of a child speaking to a parent who loves deeply.

When we say, "Give us each day our daily bread," we are not only asking for physical sustenance but for the grace to rely on God daily, to seek what we need rather than what we want.

The parable that follows — of the friend who knocks at midnight — further reinforces the call to persistent prayer. The man who keeps knocking receives not because of the other's friendship, but because of his persistence. Jesus drives home the point: "Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you." These are not vague reassurances but promises anchored in the nature of a good and generous God. If even flawed human beings give good things to their children, how much more will our Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit — the very essence of God — to those who ask?

Here lies the crux of our understanding of prayer. We often reduce prayer to a transactional exercise: we ask, and we expect to receive exactly what we asked for. But Jesus points to something deeper. Prayer is not a vending machine of blessings, but a school of trust, persistence, and formation. It draws us closer to God's will. In fact, the best outcome of prayer may not be the granting of our request, but the transformation of our hearts.

St Paul, in the Second Reading (Colossians 2:12–14), gives us the theological foundation for this confidence. Through baptism, Paul says, we have been raised with Christ. Our sins are forgiven, and the record against us has been nailed to the cross. This means we no longer approach God from a place of guilt or fear but from a place of grace. We pray not to change God's mind, but because we are already reconciled to Him. Our prayer springs from relationship, not performance.

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with Fr Ravi Alexander, OFM Cap

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

Readings: Genesis 18:20–32;

Colossians 2:12–14;

Gospel: Luke 11:1–13

What then do these readings collectively teach us?

First, that God is always listening. Like Abraham, we are invited to speak candidly with God, to plead, intercede, and wrestle with divine justice — always trusting in God's mercy.

Second, prayer must be persistent. Jesus doesn't promise that every prayer will be answered in the way we expect, but He assures us that God gives what is *good* — and what is ultimately best for our salvation.

Third, prayer is not a solitary endeavour. Like the disciples who asked Jesus to teach them, we too must be humble learners. And like Abraham who prayed on behalf of others, we are called to be intercessors — standing in the gap for our families, communities, and nations.

Finally, prayer is most fruitful when it leads us to greater trust, deeper surrender, and an openness to the Holy Spirit. The Father gives the Spirit to those who ask — not to manipulate outcomes, but to align our hearts with His.

As we reflect on these truths, may our prayer life be transformed — from duty to delight, from formula to friendship, from fear to faith. May we knock with persistence, ask with trust, and receive with gratitude, knowing that we are always heard by a God who is more ready to give than we are to ask.

Shanghai bishop visits Melaka's historic sites



Bishop Bernard Paul of Malacca Johore and Bishop Joseph Shen Bin of Shanghai with his delegation and Msgr Peter Ng and the MJD Museum committee.

MELAKA: The Vicariate of Melaka recently welcomed a distinguished visitor, Bishop Joseph Shen Bin, Bishop of Shanghai, China, on a cultural and pastoral visit aimed at strengthening ties between the Catholic communities of China and Malaysia.

Bishop Shen Bin was accompanied by two priests from China, Fr Joseph Yang Yu and Fr Joseph Zhang Qiulin. The visit was coordinated by Vicar General Msgr Peter Ng, who also accompanied the delegation throughout their stay.

During their visit, the group toured several of Melaka's iconic historical and religious landmarks, including the A' Famosa fortress, St Paul's Hill, and the tomb of St Francis Xavier. They also visited the Church of St Theresa and the Church of St Peter, both of which reflect the city's rich Catholic heritage and its enduring legacy of faith and culture.

The bishop later visited the MAJODI Centre, the diocesan headquarters of the Malacca Johore Diocese, where he was

warmly received by Bishop Bernard Paul and members of the local clergy. The visit provided an opportunity for meaningful dialogue, cultural exchange, and the strengthening of ecclesial fraternity between the two regions.

Bishop Shen Bin's visit underscores the historical connections and shared mission of the Church in both China and Malaysia, and reflects a mutual commitment to fostering unity, dialogue, and collaboration within the universal Church.



Bishop Shen Bin with the priests visiting A' Famosa fortress.

KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

July / August

- 30/7 Meeting – Archdiocesan Office of Human Development Board of Management**
- 2/8 KL Central District Confirmation – Cathedral of St John, KL**
- 2/8 Confirmation – Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe at Church of St Thomas More, Subang Jaya**
- 3/8 Confirmation – Church of Visitation, Seremban**

PENANG DIOCESE

Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

July

- 29/7 Book Launch of Sybil Kathigasu: A Heroine's Legacy – Church of St Michael, Ipoh**

MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

July / August

- 31/7 25th Sacerdotal Anniversary Thanksgiving Mass of Fr Simon Yong SJ – Cathedral of Sacred Heart, Johor Bahru**
- 5/8 Quarterly Team Meeting – Deliverance & Exorcism Office**

Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #232

Welcome dear friends,

The MJD's 37th Tamil Charismatic Rally was held at MAJODI Centre, with 630 attendees. It was a day of walking, working, worshipping and witnessing together. Great event!

The Professional Standards Office conducted the third *Safeguarding Minors and the Vulnerable* for English-speaking catechists. The 4D team, formed to spearhead the diocese's pastoral thrust and conversion to synodality, had a study day.

Local takes: Some hopefulness, a little hopelessness and simmering restlessness! The Department of Statistics Malaysia projects that Malaysia's population will grow from 32.45 million in 2020 to 42.37 million by 2060.

The Himpunan Turun Anwar rally is on. The Malaysian Bar marches for Judicial Independence. The Federal Court decided that a section of the Peaceful Assembly Act 2012 is unconstitutional. Rafizi Ramli said that Malaysia is a poor country, requiring foreign investment to stimulate growth. An online petition to safeguard the integrity of the country's judiciary has been announced.

Singapore's bold move to recruit local doctors may worsen the healthcare brain drain.

Heavier penalties for doxing, stalking, mental harassment as anti-bullying law takes effect.

The Forest Research Institute Malaysia's (FRIM) Selangor Forest Park has been officially listed as a Unesco World Heritage Site.

Trump's erratic trade policies

continue to baffle countries.

Awakening Times: Jesus saw God in all that He saw. What's wonderful about this is that it didn't matter whether Jesus saw His own mother or a prostitute, the joy of those gathered at a wedding or the sorrow of those gathered at the burial of a loved one. It didn't matter whether He saw His disciples or His executioners, or a bird or a tree — Jesus saw God in all that He saw. Jesus tells us, "You have eyes to see but you do not see" (Mark 8:18). You have not learned to awaken to your God-given capacity to see the God-given, godly nature of yourselves, others, and all things.

A Thought For The Week: The Flickering Lights
Moving into a new home, there were many things requiring maintenance and replacing. Not everything needed a change. It lacked the personal touch, which transforms a house into a home. He noticed many of the exterior lights were not working. He thought of doing it later, since he needed a ladder and effort. Another bulb blew then. One evening, as he flicked the kitchen light on, to his disappointment, the light came on for a second and went off. This continued for some time, until he switched off the light in frustration.

The lesson from the dark: The lights in our homes require regular maintenance. Without the lights, we end up walking into furniture and other items or end up in the wrong room. Likewise, the light within requires regular maintenance. Without it we could walk into all kinds of troubles, trials and tribulations or end up in the wrong place. Pay attention to the 'flickering', the 'faulty', the

'neglected' and darkening areas of your life.

QnQ! Q asks? Hard times? Bad times?

1. "Hard is not the same thing as bad." Abbie Halberstadt.

The above kind of "shakes" us to encounter the uncomfortable truth while some things are difficult, challenging, unpleasant and painful in the moment. it doesn't inherently make them negative or bad.

2. "Hard is not the same thing as bad." Whatever path we have chosen, whatever occupation or vocation we find ourselves in, whatever personal journey we are on - the "hard, challenging and unpleasant" will visit us. (But it's no indication of personal failure, error, badness or misfortune).

3. They are opportunities for growth, and facing and embracing them can lead to transformation. It's an invitation to foster a resilient mindset and a proactive attitude towards life's difficulties... pulling strength from others, grace and from oneself.

"All suffering is hard but not everything hard is suffering" encourages a shift in perspective...Philippians 1:6.

The Holy Spirit @work: Every time I take a step in the direction of generosity; I know that I am moving from fear to love. *Henri Nouwen*

Something to tickle you: Every crisis is a wisdom crisis. If you have no peace around you then you lack wisdom. *Patience Johnson*

Bishop Bernard Paul

Marriage, family and faith challenges

Neil Mah

SANDAKAN: The 11th annual meeting of the Episcopal Regional Commission for Family, Laity and Life (ERCFL) was held at the Diocesan Pastoral Centre from June 15 to 18. A total of 38 representatives from all the arch/dioceses across Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei participated in the gathering.

The meeting began with a fellowship dinner, graced by the presence of Bishop Julius Gitom of Sandakan. In his welcome address, he encouraged delegates to remain committed to serving the needs of families, who today face a wide range of challenges. Bishop Julius expressed hope that the annual gathering would serve as a meaningful platform for exchanging ideas and discerning the way forward in supporting families in today's context.

In his opening address on the second day of the meeting, Archbishop John Wong, President of the ERCFL and Archbishop of Kota Kinabalu, warmly welcomed all participants. He emphasised the importance of the gathering, stating, "Coming together to listen to one another, to share concerns, and to propose recommendations annually is a vital part of the Synodal Church. As Church, both locally and globally, we are called to seek the will of God in this present moment and for the future, especially for the well-being of Christian families in our region, that they may find hope and strength to face the challenges of our time."

Over the next two mornings, delegates took turns sharing key highlights of family programmes and activities carried out in their respective arch/dioceses between June 2024 and May 2025. Attendees listened attentively, engaging with questions and seeking clarification where needed. These sessions fostered meaningful dialogue, allowing important issues to surface and be thoughtfully discussed through the spirit of mutual listening.



Challenges in getting marriages blessed

Several dioceses reported a growing trend of couples entering into civil marriages first and only seeking a Church blessing years later. One of the main reasons cited is that many couples are living away from their home states and are heavily occupied with work commitments. As a result, they often find it challenging to make the necessary preparations for a Church wedding or to attend pre-marriage formation sessions.

Many overseas migrants face similar situations, with local churches encountering difficulties in obtaining their status liber (baptismal and sacramental records) from the migrants' home parishes due to limited communication and lack of established contact networks.

In some cases, couples who were civilly married already have children, yet have not received the Sacraments of the Church. Another complex pastoral challenge arises when a husband has more than one wife, presenting a serious dilemma when seeking a Church marriage blessing.

The meeting then highlighted the importance of networking and working together with other bodies e.g. Migrant Commission, Canon lawyers, etc.

Decline in marriage rates

It was highlighted that there is a declining trend in the rate of marriages. A recent survey revealed that while a significant percentage

of single individuals do desire to get married, many are held back by factors such as financial constraints, career priorities, and difficulty in finding a suitable partner.

Some singles shared that the high cost of living and the inability to afford a home are key reasons they choose to delay or avoid marriage altogether.

In other cases, young couples admitted they were pressured by their parents to marry, leaving them unprepared for the lifelong commitment that marriage entails.

It was also reported that, across different races and cultures, there is a growing trend among young couples who intend to marry but do not wish to have children.

Challenges in raising children

Some of the reports indicated a rise in mixed marriages, with many couples choosing not to enrol their children in faith formation programmes.

Another growing concern is the tendency of young parents to leave their children in the care of grandparents due to work commitments, often resulting in limited spiritual guidance at home.

Additionally, a noticeable trend of students abandoning the faith while studying away from home has raised alarms. This underscores the urgent need to increase parental awareness about the importance of consistent and early faith formation.

On a positive note, some encouraging de-

velopments were reported. Catechumenal pathways for married life have begun to take shape, especially during the first three years of marriage. More parishes have established Family Life Ministries to run faith- and family-based programmes, with priests playing a more active role. Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) also continue to play a key role in supporting and strengthening families at the grassroots level.

In his closing remarks, Archbishop John acknowledged that family issues are often complex and diverse, making the work of the Family Life Ministry a noble yet challenging mission. He encouraged delegates not to be disheartened by the lack of immediate results, but to remain steadfast and rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In supporting families, His Grace reminded everyone not to compromise the sanctity of marriage. He emphasised that the Catholic Church's teaching on marriage is strong and well-founded, and it is our duty to uphold and safeguard it.

The next annual ERCFL meeting in 2026 will be hosted by the Diocese of Miri. In addition to the usual reporting and discussions, the meeting will place special focus on two key areas: the challenges surrounding marriage blessings — particularly convalidation, related procedures, and networking — and the pastoral response to LGBTQ issues, with an emphasis on how the Church can better support parents navigating these situations.

Beauty and grace of ageing

JOHOR BAHRU: In recognition of Malaysia's status as a rapidly ageing nation and in conjunction with the Church's July focus on the elderly and grandparents, the Diocesan Family, Laity & Life Ministry of the Diocese of Malacca Johore organised a virtual conversation titled *Ageing with Grace* on July 13.

Hosted by Andrew Chew of the Diocesan Family Life Ministry, the session brought together three expert speakers who offered insightful perspectives on ageing as a journey of transformation, wellness, and meaning.

Gerontologist and dementia advocate Dr Cecilia Chan, who has over 20 years of experience in elderly care, highlighted the remarkable reality that people are now living longer, with some families spanning four to five generations. While ageing is often framed as a period of decline, she encouraged a shift in mindset — to see ageing as a time of growing in wisdom, authenticity, and acceptance.

"The happiest groups in surveys are the young and the elderly. The middle years are often the most challenging," she said. "Ageing can be a spiritual teacher — it invites us to embrace impermanence, to forgive our

past, and to come home to our truest selves. We are not merely the sum of our accomplishments or regrets."

She stressed that ageing can bring profound gifts such as freedom from comparison, clarity of values, deeper relationships, and greater appreciation of the present moment. Even amid physical and cognitive changes, the human spirit continues its search for meaning.

Dr Fabian Sunil Dass, psychiatrist and senior lecturer at Monash University Malaysia, echoed these sentiments, adding that ageing is an opportunity to grow in self-love and mindful living. "It's a time to care for your body — this temple that's evolving every day," he said.

Drawing from research, Dr Fabian noted that nearly 40 per cent of diseases can be prevented by addressing lifestyle factors. "A good diet, physical activity, social connection, continued learning, and mental wellbeing — these are all critical," he said. "Prevention is better than cure, but too many rely solely on medical advancement. We must be proactive."

He encouraged the elderly to seek counselling without shame, sharing how it helped him personally discover new layers of him-



self. "Even dementia fears can be lessened with early interventions — staying active, socially connected, and mentally engaged."

Justin Victor, counsellor and chairman of Befrienders Kuala Lumpur, shared a moving personal story about his late mother, Madam Philomena Victor, who passed away at age 94. A deeply faith-filled and community-oriented woman, she remained active in her BEC, kept in touch with a wide circle of family and friends, and adapted to digital tools during the COVID-19 lockdown to continue attending online Masses.

"She never stopped serving or loving," he said. "Even in her 90s, she read daily Scrip-

ture, used her sewing machine, and danced at family gatherings. In her final days, she radiated peace and joy. Her readiness to return to God came from a lifetime of love, service, and strong faith."

Summing up the session, host Andrew Chew reflected, "Ageing is a reality we all must face, but how we experience it is a matter of choice. Jesus came to offer us a grace-filled life (John 10:10). May we choose to embrace ageing as a beautiful and sacred journey." **Deacon Dr Leslie Petrus**

To view the session, go to: <https://bit.ly/4eTdDvX>



Forming laity to be heralds of Christ

KOTA KINABALU: A total of 225 participants were commissioned during the inauguration ceremony of the fourth Sabah Personal Evangelisation Course (KEP 4), held on July 12, marking the culmination of a nine-month journey of holistic faith formation.

The Personal Evangelisation Course (KEP) is a Catholic initiative aimed at forming lay faithful to be courageous, humble, and compassionate heralds of Christ. With its fourth batch now commissioned, KEP Sabah continues to play a vital role in supporting the evangelisation mission of the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu and beyond.

The ceremony was officiated by Archbishop John Wong, who exhorted the KEP 4 alumni to remain steadfast in

their mission of evangelisation. "God has a special plan for each person He has chosen," he reminded them, urging them to continue bearing witness to the Gospel.

Also present at the ceremony was Fr Patrick Erik Jerome, Spiritual Advisor to the Archdiocesan Catechetical Commission, who encouraged participants to boldly live out their Christian faith and to evangelise not only the wider community but especially among fellow Catholics.

Sr Dariah Ajap, Head of the Archdiocesan Catechetical Commission and Advisor to the KEP 4 Course, offered words of encouragement and congratulated the graduates for completing the intensive programme.

KEP 4, which began on October 7, 2024,

was a structured faith formation course designed to equip lay Catholics with the tools for personal and community evangelisation. The programme included three months of weekly lectures, home visitations, assessments, a sending retreat, and concluded with the inauguration ceremony.

Participants were immersed in Catholic teachings and practical experiences that aimed to deepen their personal relationship with Christ and prepare them as evangelisers within their communities.

KEP 4 course Chairperson, Anne Mahani Maliang, noted that 26 team members played key roles in the technical and logistical organisation of the course. In a notable show of solidarity and commitment, 114 KEP alumni from previous batches

returned as volunteer facilitators, reflecting the enduring spirit of the KEP mission.

Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, with many sharing how the course had deepened their faith, strengthened family relationships, and inspired greater involvement in parish ministries. The modules offered were praised for being relevant, spiritually enriching, and firmly rooted in Catholic doctrine.

The ceremony included praise and worship, a video presentation reflecting the course journey, and the presentation of certificates. The atmosphere was filled with joy and heartfelt applause as each participant was called forward — underscoring that every milestone in one's faith journey is a moment to be celebrated.

Widows find strength in sisterhood

PETALING JAYA: This year marked the third time the Church of St Francis Xavier commemorated International Widows Day, bringing together a circle of care, connection, and quiet strength. In collaboration with the AOHD Bereavement Support Group, the event's theme was *Together We Thrive*.

The day began with Mass by Fr Richard Anthonysamy SJ, who offered a special blessing for all widows present. After Mass, widows from various churches in the Klang Valley gathered for a fellowship meal, sharing stories, hobbies, and memories. These moments sparked new friendships and connections, with games helping create a warm atmosphere of understanding and support.

What made the fellowship truly special, as in previous years, was the presence of veteran widows — returning year after year, bringing with them a quiet strength that uplifted the entire gathering. Their presence served as a comforting reminder to newer widows that they are not alone on this journey of grief. As Juliet William shared, "This event shows us that while grief can feel isolating, we are not alone in our journey. It's a space for widows to come together, to share the unique burdens and joys that only we truly understand. This day is more than just a recognition of loss; it's an opportunity to create community — a place where we can grieve without judgment, heal together, and even find moments of laughter and joy."

For Marilyn Gerard, the gathering brought a sense of sisterhood and solidarity. She reflected, "I felt truly embraced and

uplifted. The world may call us widows, but I see warriors — women of strength, grace, and resilience. We are mothers, daughters, professionals, and caretakers — carrying much, yet pressing on with quiet courage. We've known love and loss, yet we choose to live fully, surrendering it all to Jesus — the only One who truly knows the depth of our hearts and the thoughts we dare not say aloud. And the most comforting truth? We are not alone. In this circle of strong women, we find not just companionship but sisterhood. A community reminds us that while the journey may be hard, we never have to walk it alone."

For those just beginning this path, the support they receive is invaluable. Caroline Gomez, a new member of the community, shared how the group became a lifeline for her: "The bereavement support group and the Widow to Widow Ministry have been like a life jacket when I was drowning. It helped me stay afloat, and I learned to keep my head above water. My fellow widows guided me, showed me the shore, and helped me walk again. I feel the sand beneath my feet and God above me."

If you are a widow reading this and find your heart quietly stirred, know there is a place for you — a space held gently by others who understand. The journey of grief need not be walked alone. In time, and in good company, healing comes softly. Together, we thrive.

For more information, contact Caroline Tay, Coordinator of Widow to Widow Ministry at 012-6018185.



AMHM launches office and expands Life Journey Wellness Centre



Archbishop Julian (centre) unveiling the plaque with Dylan Tan and Fr Philip Chua looking on.

KUALA LUMPUR: On the milestone occasion marking a decade of compassionate service, the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur officially launched the new office of the Archdiocesan Mental Health Ministry (AMHM) and inaugurated a second branch of the Life Journey Wellness Centre at No 36C, Jalan Siput Akek, Taman Billion, Cheras.

Officially launched by Archbishop Julian Leow, the launch of the new centre is timely and reaffirms the Church's mission to be a place of healing, accompaniment, and refuge for all who struggle silently with mental health burdens.

Archbishop Julian emphasised in his address that mental health struggle is something that each of us experiences. "It's not something that affects only a few people; it's now nearly something everyone is affected by. The numbers have surged, especially post-COVID-19, and we all need accompaniment."

He urged society to recognise the need for trained practitioners who can offer help to navigate the growing tide of stress, despair, and depression. "No one is immune," he said. "Even those who counsel and listen need a place to unload. It is unhealthy to keep taking in and not having an avenue to let out."

The expanded facilities of the Life Journey Wellness Centre are open to all individuals regardless of faith, offering workshops, formation programs, and personal accompaniment.

Archbishop Julian lamented the hesitance among many to seek help: "We think we are okay, but often we are not. We all need someone to walk with us through life's journey, especially when it gets difficult with uncertainties or hurt."

Fr Philip Chua, ecclesiastical assistant to the AMHM, said the centre represents more than just a new building. "It's about creating space for healing." Reflecting on the minis-

try's humble beginnings 10 years ago, when mental health was still taboo, he spoke of how the pandemic forced a collective reckoning. "We saw the need, we listened, and we responded. God has been our guide through it all."

Quoting Matthew 11:28, "Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest," Fr Philip reminded all present of the spiritual foundation underlying the ministry's mission. Whether through trauma, family struggles, or marriage issues, individuals and families are welcomed to arrive as they are — broken, searching, and in need of someone who will listen.

AMHM chairperson Dylan Tan, a registered counsellor, shared his personal journey to the ministry: "In a very small way, we can each contribute to the well-being of our community. In giving, we receive joy. And sometimes, the smallest efforts can change someone's life." He added that the team is reachable via phone calls at 03-61888975 or even WhatsApp at 017-3586188

As the ministry celebrates its 10th anniversary, Archbishop Julian also encouraged the faithful to take ownership of their mental health, support their families and communities, and promote a culture of wellness, one rooted in balance, openness, and compassion.

"Let us be a Church that listens," he said in closing. "A community where people feel they belong. May those who walk through these doors know healing, wholeness, and the presence of someone who cares."

The first Life Journey Wellness Centre operated by Archdiocesan Mental Health Ministry is located at No 17-C, Jalan S10/2, (2nd Floor), Bandar Kajang. (Tel: 03-82118214/WhatsApp: 017-9156188). The ministry is also reachable via email at lifjourney@archkl.org. **Elvina Fernandez**

Finding God through Arts

Auxilia Rose Anak Boniface

PETALING JAYA: The Church of St Francis Xavier, hosted a creative series of art-inspired spiritual experiences from June 27-29 under the Ignatian theme *Finding God in Arts*.



Guided by Bro Howard Tu, SJ, *pic*, a permanent brother of the Chinese Province of the Society of Jesus (currently living in Taiwan), participants were invited into a series of talks and workshops where Bro Howard opened a space where faith and imagination could meet, reminding all that art is not separate from spirituality, it is a living expression of it.

The weekend began with a reflective talk exploring the relationship between art and Ignatian spirituality. In *Finding God in Arts*, Bro Howard shared how artistic expression — whether through painting, sculpting, knitting, crocheting or even music — can awaken the senses and draw the soul closer to God. It wasn't just a talk, but a lived moment of grace where participants felt encouraged to see art as more than creativity, but as prayer, presence, and spiritual insight.

During the mask-making workshop, partici-

pants created masks — not to hide, but to reflect. Through shaping the mask, they entered into a sacred process of self-discovery, prayer, and healing. A meaningful part of the workshop included making a mask that symbolically represented another person, which invited deep reflection on the dignity and beauty of others as God's creation.

What began as an art activity quickly became a space for vulnerability, awe, and grace. Many found themselves humbled by the creative process — recognising in it the tender hand of God, shaping and moulding each of us.

In the evening, Bro Howard shared his vocation story, reflecting on 25 years as a Jesuit brother. His sharing was marked by authenticity and quiet depth, showing how art, service, and Ignatian spirituality had shaped his journey. Rather than dramatic conversion moments, he spoke of how God moved through daily life, small obediences, and acts of love — which, in time, revealed unexpected blessings.

His story became an invitation: to live faithfully in the present, and to trust that God is always working in and through us — often in the simplest of ways.

This final creative workshop invited participants to mould clay with their own hands, reflecting on how we are each formed by God with purpose and love. As they pinched,



Some of the participants during the mask-making workshop which invited them to explore self-discovery, prayer, and healing through art.

shaped, and smoothed the clay, participants meditated on their identity as God's creation and envisioned the person they are being lovingly called to become.

Bro Howard's guidance was grounded, poetic, and spiritually rich. The clay became a symbol of our lives — soft, imperfect, and being shaped into something beautiful by the Divine Potter.

Each session throughout the weekend was unique in form but united in spirit — an invitation to encounter God in the brush stroke, the

pause, the silence, and the shaping of clay.

Bro Howard Tu, SJ did not just lead workshops; he created sacred spaces where art met prayer, and creativity became a doorway to grace.

As participants left Loyola Hall, they carried more than crafts or reflections — they carried an awakened awareness that God is present in all things — in colour, in texture, in vulnerability, in stillness.

And perhaps most importantly, in the quiet unfolding of our own stories.

DSP fundraiser garners generous support

PETALING JAYA: In a heartfelt celebration of six decades of faith-filled service and evangelisation through media, the Daughters of St Paul (DSP) hosted their 60th Anniversary Fundraising Gala Dinner on July 12 at the Kelab Golf Negara Subang. The evening brought together around 500 friends, benefactors, clergy, religious, and supporters, fostering a spirit of thanksgiving, joy, and hope for the congregation's ongoing mission in Peninsular Malaysia.

DSP Fundraising chairperson Mary Reggie opened the evening with words of gratitude and unity, warmly acknowledging the presence of clergy, religious guests, attendees, and her 19-member organising committee.

"Tonight, we celebrate generosity, community, and the extraordinary spirit that binds us in a shared mission. Your support will help the Daughters of St Paul Convent improve its facilities and strengthen its ministry. This evening is about more than fundraising — it's about fostering hope, building community, and proving that when we come together for a common purpose, remarkable things unfold," said Mary.

Sr Elizabeth Jothee, FSP, the local



The Daughters of St Paul performing a number during their fundraising dinner.

superior, affectionately known as Sr Liz, who recently celebrated her silver jubilee of Religious Profession in the Philippines, expressed profound gratitude to those who made the evening unforgettable. She acknowledged the parish priest of the Church of the Assumption, Fr Leonard Lexson, her fellow religious sisters, the dedicated Pauline Cooperators, as well as the generous benefactors, sponsors, donors, organising committee, family, and friends whose steadfast support and encouragement helped bring the celebration to life.

Quoting Matthew 5:16, Sr Liz remarked, "Everything you see this evening is a testament to the goodness of our God and the blessings He has bestowed on our congregation as we celebrate our 60th anniversary." She closed her welcome with the timeless words of St Paul: "I thank my God each time I think of you" (Philippians 1:3). We will always hold this jubilee and our anniversary close to our hearts."

The evening's energy soared during a lively auction featuring both sacred and secular artworks. Highlights included a watercolour

pastel painting of Pope Francis, a Divine Mercy painting by ML Casey — enthusiastically bid for by YB Teresa Kok — a finely embroidered cross-stitch of the Last Supper, a framed replica of the iconic Roman masterpiece, among others, each reflecting a sense of faith and artistry.

Parishioners and friends of the Church of the Assumption took centre stage for an unforgettable evening of vibrant entertainment. The night kicked off with comedian Andrew Netto as the charismatic emcee, setting a lively tone from the start. The lineup featured stirring musical performances by the Daughters of St Paul (DSP) sisters from both East and West Malaysia, Fr Leonard Lexson, Dato' Francisca Peter, Aaron Frankie, and the ever-energetic 53rd Street Band. Adding a fresh twist to the night, award-winning 16-year-old DJ Lollipop had the crowd on their feet, spinning electrifying tracks that kept the dance floor buzzing well into the night.

The Convent needs more than RM1 million to upgrade its facilities after 60 years. Kindly contact Sr Elizabeth (+6014-6044937) should you wish to donate in support of their work. **Gwen Manickam**

New grotto for Raub parish

RAUB: Following the completion of the new single-storey hall adjacent to the Church of the Annunciation in March 2025, a new grotto has also recently been completed.

Fr Clement Lim, parish administrator of the Church of the Annunciation and parish priest of the Church of the Sacred Heart in Bentong, said the total cost of the new grotto amounted to RM22,000. The entire project was fully sponsored. The grotto replaces a smaller, older structure that had to be demolished to facilitate the cutting of part of the hill for the hall's construction. The new grotto is now located next to the hall and the existing church building.

The Church of the Annunciation is perched atop a small hill near the town centre of Raub. It has been serving the local Catholic community since 1952 and continues to welcome a growing number of faithful, includ-

ing migrants from Indonesia who worship there on Sundays.

Fr Clement also shared that the statues of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Angel Gabriel—who announced to Mary that she had been chosen by God to be the mother of Jesus—were sent for refurbishment and will be reused in the new grotto. Additionally, the church has recently undergone repairs to a cracked main wall and the installation of new awnings.

Looking ahead, Fr Clement noted that the new grotto is expected to be officially blessed by Archbishop Julian Leow during the church's feast day celebrations next year.

In his efforts to grow the Catholic presence in this fast-expanding town, Fr Clement has been working tirelessly to reach out to lapsed Catholics and welcome new enquiries into the faith. **Bernard Anthony**



The fully sponsored grotto which cost RM22,000.

CDM holds first post-pandemic primary catechism camp

Dr Ivan Filmer

PENANG: At the start of 2025, the Year 2 catechists of the Church of Divine Mercy (CDM) approached parish priest Fr Michael Raymond OFM Cap, for permission to hold a primary school camp themed *God is with Me*. This was the first catechism camp since all such activities were suspended due to COVID-19.

In the months that followed, a detailed plan was developed to provide the children with an authentic faith experience. A camp t-shirt was designed, featuring the theme inspired by Psalm 18:2 — “God is my Fortress.” To encourage wider participation, a nominal registration fee of RM5 was set. To accommodate the broad age range from Year 1 to Year 6, students were grouped by similar ages to ensure a meaningful experience for all.

Five engaging activities were planned:

Music, Games, Prayer, Bible Stories, and Wellness. The children were divided into five age-based groups – Arise; Braveheart; Courage; Disciple and Everlight – each with a meaningful name and accompanying faith statements.

To accommodate the different age groups, each activity was conducted five times, with facilitators tailoring the content, language, and approach to suit the children’s ages. This proved to be a demanding and energy-intensive task, as each 45-minute session was repeated multiple times. To assist, a Youth ministry shepherd was assigned to each group, guiding the children between sessions and supporting the facilitators with the activities.

The camp began with an opening prayer led by Fr Michael Teng OFM Cap, who explained the significance of the Sign of the Cross. During the Games session, four team-building activities were organised. In the Music session,



The children doing an activity together.



The children during one of the group sessions.

the children were introduced to a rhythm song using various instruments to help them learn the names of their group members, followed by five lively action songs.

For the Bible Stories session, each child received a movie ticket as a fun entry pass. The stories of David and Goliath and Queen Esther were shared, complemented by short video clips streamed from the internet. In the Prayer session, the children explored the 4Ws and 1H of prayer: What, Why, Where, When, and How to pray. They then wrote their names on paper airplanes, threw them across the room, picked up a plane, and prayed for the person whose name they had caught.

The Wellness session, conducted by four guest facilitators from the Church of the Immaculate Conception, encouraged the children to express their feelings through drawing. They were then taught three techniques to manage their emotions: listing ten different thoughts, practising controlled

breathing, and praying.

At the end of each session, the children were given small gifts as tokens of appreciation for their participation.

At the end of the camp, a question-and-answer session was held to obtain the children’s feedback. The responses were overwhelmingly positive. By God’s grace, generous donations and sponsorships from parents and well-wishers covered most of the meals and supplies needed for the camp. Additionally, the committee members sponsored all the materials used for the activities.

We felt truly blessed by the support and kindness of everyone involved, experiencing the gentle guidance of the Holy Spirit throughout the camp. The 45 participants represented nearly half of all the primary catechism children at CDM. The camp’s lasting hope was to deepen understanding and strengthen the sense of community among the young parishioners of CDM.

Raising awareness, protecting the innocent

RAWANG: The Church of St Jude recently hosted a Child Protection (*Tutela Minorium*) talk, aimed at equipping parishioners with essential knowledge and best practices for safeguarding minors within the Church community.

Held on July 12, the session was organised by the Archdiocesan Professional Standards Office (APSO) and drew strong participation from members across various church ministries. The APSO team was represented by Fr Gregory Chan, accompanied by Edmund Balthazar.

Parish Pastoral Council chairman, Augustus Anand, described the session as “not just informative, but a spiritual awakening,” adding that “protecting the

young is at the heart of our mission as a Church.”

Participants were guided through ten key safeguarding policies developed by APSO, focusing on:

- Creating safe environments: Ensuring all parish activities meet safety standards.
- Proper screening and training: Applying rigorous procedures for volunteers and staff working with children.
- Clear reporting mechanisms: Establishing transparent and accountable systems for addressing concerns.
- Pastoral care: Providing support and accompaniment for victims and their families.

Augustus expressed gratitude for the diverse and committed attendance, which

included representatives from the PPC, Parish Coordinating Council, Parish Finance Committee, BECOT, Catechetical and Liturgical Ministries, Youth Ministry, PIHDM, parish staff, parents, and the various language apostolates.

“This shows our community takes this responsibility seriously,” he said.

Parish priest, Fr Simon Labrooy, urged all ministry leaders, parents, and volunteers to prioritise attending such sessions in the future.

“Child protection is not optional —

it’s a Gospel mandate,” he emphasised. “Jesus said, ‘Let the children come to me’ (Mt 19:14), and we must ensure they come into spaces that are safe, holy, and loving.”

Fr Simon concluded by thanking the parishioners for their participation and commending the session’s success.

The talk served as a timely reminder of the Church’s responsibility to move beyond good intentions, advocating instead for clear policies, continuous vigilance, and collective action in safeguarding children.

Mercy Almeida Stellus




Fr Gregory Chan explaining to the participants the importance of protecting the young.

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OMPH parish walks in hope with Mary

IPOH: The parish of Our Mother of Perpetual Help (OMPH) experienced an outpouring of grace during a nine-day novena, centred on the theme *Walking in Hope with Mary*, in spiritual preparation for its feast day. Held from June 20 to 28, the novena brought the community together in deep reflection and prayer.

Each evening brought together parishioners, visitors, and clergy for a time of worship, reflection, and communion with a different theme. A unique aspect of the Christian journey was addressed each day with homilies by invited clergy from across the causeway as well as members of OMPH's very own Redemptorist community.

Fr Eugene Lee, CSsR, the preacher on opening night, invited the faithful to embrace the theme *Missionary Discipleship: Bearers of Hope*. Over the following days, the faithful reflected on enriching themes such as *Mary, Mother of the Eucharist*, *Anchored in Christ*, and *Mary, the Hope of All Nations*, presented by



The congregation listening intently to the preacher.

a diverse group of clergy including Fr Paul Kee, CSsR, Fr Antony Prabhu, CSsR and assistant parish priest, Fr Patrick Massang, CSsR.

The novena was further graced by the presence of Fr Victorino Cueto, CSsR, Vice Provincial of the Redemptorists. Known as Fr Ino, he joined the community for the final two evenings, offering a stirring message "We are the Pilgrims

of Hope" — a call to continue journeying forward in faith and mission.

Various lay ministries participated with special activities throughout the nine days, leading reflections, testimonies, videos, music, prayers, and hospitality each night. In the days leading up to the celebration, the Chinese and Tamil-speaking communities also held their own triduum

of novena Masses, uniting in prayer and reflection.

Attendance grew steadily, with many parishioners sharing how the novena deepened their faith and renewed their spiritual commitment. After each Mass, the parish grounds came alive with fellowship and conversation. For many, it was a cherished time to reconnect with old friends, welcome new faces, and strengthen the bonds of community that make parish life so vibrant.

On the morning of June 21, a special healing service was held for the sick and elderly of the parish. Carefully organised, the liturgy included the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, administered individually to all present. It was a moving sight as many elderly and infirm parishioners, some accompanied by caregivers or family, received not only the grace of the sacrament but also the warmth and support of the community. The service concluded with breakfast fellowship, continuing the spirit of care and connection.

The parish feast day was graced by the beauty of creation itself. As parishioners gathered, a radiant rainbow stretched across the sky — widely seen as a sign of God's promise and abiding presence. Later, as the sun slipped behind the hills, it bathed the scene in golden light, setting a serene and prayerful tone for the evening celebration. Just before the Mass began, the atmosphere was uplifted by the soulful voice of Fr Patrick, whose singing, accompanied by Fr Eugene Lee on guitar, added a moving prelude to the liturgy.

Fr Ino reminded us that in life's trials and in our mission, we must remain steadfast in faith, rooted in trust that God is with us, even when the way is unclear. Like Mary, we must choose trust over fear and stay anchored in God's love, no matter the storm.

After the spiritual celebrations, all stayed on to enjoy a sumptuous dinner generously hosted by the parish — a fitting and joyful end to a grace-filled event.

Church of St Henry commits to eco mission

BATU PAHAT: The Church of St Henry celebrated its 99th parish feast with a spiritually enriching programme, including a triduum from July 9–11 and Feast Day Masses on July 12 and 13.

Preaching during the triduum, Fr Aaron Alammalay from Muar reflected on fear, mission, and trust in the Holy Spirit. He explained that fear of God should be seen as reverence, not punishment. Drawing from Isaiah 61, he urged the faithful to serve others freely and wholeheartedly.

On the final night, he reminded the community that the Holy Spirit speaks through them and encouraged perseverance in faith despite life's challenges.

Parish priest, Fr Patrick Tyoh, presided over the Feast Day Masses, with the church packed to capacity on July 13, the actual feast of St Henry.

In his homily, he posed the Gospel question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25–37), re-

minding the faithful that Mass and prayer must be accompanied by compassion and action.

He challenged parishioners to appreciate God's blessings and care for the Earth, warning against a fixation on worldly achievements while neglecting spiritual growth. "Deepen your faith and care for our common home — God's gift to us," he said.

A key moment during the feast was the formal pledge to become an ecological parish in perpetuity, read in four languages by lay leaders, reflecting the parish's unity in diversity.

Fr Patrick also commissioned the newly formed Creation Justice Committee, introducing its members to the congregation.

The Mass concluded with a Prayer to St Henry, followed by a fellowship lunch at Dewan St Henry, bringing together parishioners from various backgrounds, including over 60 from the Borneo states and several migrants from Myanmar. **Bernard Anthony**



Fr Patrick Tyoh commissioning the newly formed creation justice committee.

Showers of blessing on Mt Carmel feast day

CAMERON HIGHLANDS: The Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel celebrated its feast from July 11 to 13 with Novena, Chaplet of the Divine Mercy, Mass, and a 1.1km procession around Tanah Rata town, where parishioners braved the rain.

Many onlookers from the surrounding eateries witnessed the act of public devotion of the community who took turns carrying the statue of Our Lady of Mt Carmel and the Child Jesus. The Chaplet of Divine Mercy was sung multilingually throughout the procession. This hill station church, which was established by the MEP Fathers, also marked its 90th anniversary.

Fr Nicholas Hoh, OCD, a Carmelite priest, celebrated the triduum Masses with parish priest, Fr Augustine Lee concelebrating. On the first day of the triduum, which also coincided with the Memorial of St Benedict, Fr Nicholas delivered a sermon touching on the Rule of St Benedict, *ora et labora* (pray and work). "For a Benedictine, prayer is the core. St Benedict significantly promoted and integrated *Lectio Divina* into monastic life, making this form of contemplative prayer a central practice for Benedictine monks while drawing themselves closer to God. We, likewise, ask ourselves what God is speaking to us when we pray the *Lectio Divina*."

He further explained the second part of the Rule of St Benedict, which is to work to sustain their community and the Lord uses work to make them holy. "We look at Our Lady who also practises the concept of prayer and work. She pondered the words of God and her life was a perpetual yes to God. She



The statue of Our Lady of Mt Carmel and Child Jesus carried in procession.

also ensured that her household ran smoothly. Through work, we glorify God and the Lord makes us holy as we grow in patience and perseverance. In order that our work transform us, we need to pray," summed up Fr Nicholas.

On the second day, Fr Nicholas spoke about blessings, linking them to the story of the prophet Elijah from the First Book of Kings, which was read during the Solemnity Mass of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. He explained that the drought in Israel symbolised a lack of blessings due to sin, while the cloud rising from the sea represented the Virgin Mary, pure and chosen from sinful humanity, to bring forth Jesus, the Saviour, symbolised by the rain. Mary, as the bearer of blessings, brings God's grace through her lifelong "yes" to God, even to the foot of the cross. Fr Nicholas emphasised that if we seek blessings, we must invite Mary into our lives, families, and communities, take a leap of faith, and be open to God. He encouraged the faithful to reflect on how Mary could be more present in their homes and how they could listen more deeply to God.

Dinner was provided after the

procession and fireworks were let off to mark the memorable occasion.

On the final day of the triduum, Fr Nicholas preached on loving God and neighbour which forms the basis of the parable of The Good Samaritan, the Gospel reading of the day. "When we entrust ourselves to God, everything will turn out well. Mary is the disciple and never puts attention to herself. Having said yes to God's plans, her mission continues. Pilgrimages to Fatima, Lourdes and Medjugorje continue to bring us to Jesus. He then asked the congregation, "Do we stop altogether from helping others when people take advantage of us?" When we are filled with abundance, we do not count the cost. When we assist others, God sees our intentions and brings conversion to that person," summed up Fr Nicholas.

Fr Augustine expressed his appreciation to all the ministries who had helped to make the celebration a success. Breakfast was served after Mass and parishioners mingled during the fellowship.

A spiritual talk was given by Fr Nicholas after the fellowship on the subject of the Holy Cross. **Cynthia Baring-Gould**

Pope renews call for ceasefire in Gaza

VATICAN: Pope Leo XIV has renewed his urgent appeal for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza following a deadly Israeli military strike on the Holy Family Catholic parish — the only Catholic church in the war-torn enclave. The attack, which left at least three people dead and several others wounded, including parish priest Fr Gabriel Romanelli, has drawn widespread condemnation from the Catholic Church.

In a telegram sent on behalf of the Holy Father by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican Secretary of State, Pope Leo XIV expressed deep sorrow over the loss of life and injuries caused by the attack. He extended his spiritual closeness to the wounded, especially Fr Romanelli, and to the entire parish community.

The Pope commended the souls of the deceased to “the loving mercy of Almighty God,” offered prayers for the recovery of the injured, and conveyed his heartfelt condolences to the grieving families. “The Holy Father renews his appeal for an immediate ceasefire,” the telegram stated, “and expresses his profound hope for dialogue, reconciliation, and enduring peace in the region.”

The Holy Family Church compound in Gaza, which currently shelters around 500 displaced Christians, was struck on the morning of July 17 by what the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) claim was a tank shell fired in error. However, Church officials remain sceptical.

Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, confirmed in an interview with Vatican



Damage can be seen next to the cross on the roof of the Holy Family Church in Gaza after it was hit in an attack July 17, 2025. (CNS photo/courtesy Aid to the Church in Need, UK)

News that the church was directly hit, resulting in serious casualties. “There are four people seriously wounded,” he said, “and among these, two are in very critical condition.” He added that Fr Romanelli, though lightly injured, was inside the church during the attack.

Communication with Gaza remains difficult, complicating efforts to obtain precise details about the incident. However, the Patriarch stressed that the church will continue to stand by the community. “We will never leave them alone,” he affirmed, adding that efforts are underway to ensure protection for civilians and sacred spaces alike.

The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem issued a strong statement condemning the raid, describing it as part of a wider tragedy engulfing Gaza. “This targeting of innocent civilians and a sacred

place is humanly and morally unjustified,” the statement read. “This tragedy is not greater or more terrible than the many others that have befallen Gaza. Death, suffering, and destruction are everywhere.”

Appealing to world leaders, the Patriarchate called for urgent international action to end the violence. “The time has come for leaders to raise their voices and to do all that is necessary to stop this tragedy,” it said. “This horrific war must come to a complete end, so that we may commence the long work of restoring human dignity.”

Since the outbreak of war on Oct 7, 2023, over 60,200 people have been reported killed, including more than 58,000 Palestinians and nearly 2,000 Israelis, according to figures from the Gaza Health Ministry. **Vatican News**

Debt relief for developing nations a ‘moral responsibility’

NEW YORK: Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, the Holy See’s Permanent Observer to the United Nations in New York, addressed two UN panels on the implementation of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals.

The archbishop affirmed that the international community bears the “moral and political responsibility” to help countries achieve sustainable development.

He focused especially on small island developing states, African countries, and developing nations in a pair of speeches in New York on July 16.

“The persistent and widespread reality of poverty,” said Archbishop Caccia, “continues to afflict millions of people, denying them material wellbeing and undermining their God-given dignity, while stifling their integral human development.”

The Holy See, he added, believes firmly that the international community must remain focused on the goal of eradicating poverty, which he called both a “moral imperative” and an economic exercise.

Many developing countries struggle with the burden of repaying unbearable sovereign debts, he said, noting that

3.4 billion people live in nations that spend more on interest payments than on healthcare and education combined.

“Providing debt relief is not an act of generosity,” he said, “but a necessary step towards creating the fiscal space countries need in order to invest in integral development.”

Archbishop Caccia therefore called for “immediate debt relief, including cancellation, and debt restructuring,” as well as access to grants to countries struggling with unsustainable debt levels.

Focusing on small island developing states, he said their debt burdens remain one of the biggest obstacles to the world achieving the UN’s 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

Around 40 per cent of these countries are in debt distress, and bear a heavier burden from the ecological debt and environmental disasters that overwhelmingly affect developing nations.

“Debt relief alone is not a panacea,” said Archbishop Caccia. “However, it has the potential to transform the development prospects of [small island developing states] by providing them with the fiscal space to invest in es-



Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations.

sential pillars, such as infrastructure, climate adaptation, health systems and education.”

In conclusion, the Holy See’s representative at the UN called for renewed urgency in dealing with the debt crisis facing developing nations.

“As Pope Leo XIV powerfully stated,” he said, “the Jubilee, which is being celebrated this year by the Catholic Church, ‘asks of us the restitution and redistribution of unjustly accumulated wealth, as the way to personal and civil reconciliation.’” **Devin Watkins, Vatican News**

NEWS IN BRIEF

Clergy seminar charts AI-age pastoral priorities

BANGKOK: Four dioceses from the Gulf of Siam in Thailand held their annual clergy seminar from July 14–17, at Baan Phu Waan, a Catholic Pastoral Centre run by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Thailand.

The participating clergy included priests from the Archdiocese of Bangkok, the Diocese of Surat Thani, the Diocese of Ratchaburi, and the Diocese of Chanthaburi.

The seminar, organised under the theme *Priests: Bearers of Hope in the Age of AI*, featured several resource persons, including bishops, priests, and lay experts.

The seminar focused on nine major pastoral and social priorities: migrants, refugees, indigenous peoples, family, women and gender issues, youth, digital technology, economy, climate crisis, and interreligious dialogue.

In addition to updating clergy from the four dioceses on these pressing concerns, the seminar provided a road map for action and implementation for the coming year, helping clergy respond more effectively to challenges in the context of rapid technological change. **RVA**

Chinese archbishop urges end to dowry practice

SHANXI: Archbishop Paul Meng Ningyou of Taiyuan has called on Chinese Catholics to reject the traditional practice of dowries in marriage, describing the sacrament as a gift rooted in gratuitous love and faith.

In a homily delivered during a church wedding recently, the archbishop said marriage should be understood as “a gift characterised by gratuitousness.”

He invited the faithful to “free themselves from the custom of demanding a dowry for marriage,” a practice still widespread in many parts of Chinese society.

The dowry system — involving the transfer of money, real estate, jewelry, or cars from a bride’s family to the groom — remains a major burden, especially in rural areas.

“The practice... continues to be a burden for young future spouses and their families of origin, causing the union to break up for many young couples,” the archbishop noted. “Families often go into debt to comply with the custom.” **LiCAS News**

Pakistani court recognises Christian convert’s rights

LAHORE: A Pakistani court has granted relief to Tabish Naz, a former Muslim woman who converted to Christianity in 2009, directing authorities to issue her a national identity card recognising her new faith.

The Lahore High Court’s July 1 ruling marks a landmark moment in Muslim-majority Pakistan, where religious conversions from Islam are rare and often met with hostility. Naz, now 35 and married to a Catholic man, had faced repeated refusals and public rebuke from NADRA officials when trying to update her documents.

She described the decision as “a blessing from God” after years of struggle, which included difficulties enrolling her five children in school. Her attorney, Lazar Allah Rakha, hailed the ruling as a milestone for religious freedom, affirming constitutional protections under Article 20.

Religious leaders and rights advocates hope this sets a precedent for others, though they remain concerned about ongoing risks. Past incidents, including deadly violence against converts, highlight the dangers faced by those who leave Islam in Pakistan, where blasphemy laws and social stigma remain severe. **ucanews.com**

Major seminary celebrates 25 years

DILI: The Sts Peter and Paul Major Seminary in Dili, East Timor, recently celebrated its 25th anniversary, highlighting its role in priestly formation in one of the world’s most Catholic countries. Since its founding, 989 young men have studied at the seminary, with 118 ordained as priests. Currently, the seminary hosts 245 seminarians.

The anniversary celebration included a solemn Mass concelebrated by Fr Alessandro Brandi of the Pontifical Society of St. Peter the Apostle (POSPA), alongside Bishop Norberto do Amaral of Maliana and Bishop Leandro Maria Alves of Baucau. Fr Brandi also met with seminarians from Dili’s two other seminaries: St John Mary Vianney Propaedeutic Seminary (106 students) and Our Lady of Fatima Minor Seminary (195 students). **Fides**

Miracle or Masterpiece?

The Shroud that stuns the world



Fr Andrew Dalton giving his talk on 'Who is the Man of the Shroud?'

Tianne Pereira and Kevin Francis

It isn't every day that one finds themselves up close and personal with a man whose life is dedicated to unlocking the mysteries of one of the most enigmatic and controversial artifacts in history — the Shroud of Turin. Yet there we were, eyes wide in awe, sharing an unforgettable hour with Fr Andrew Dalton, a Catholic priest of the Legionaries of Christ, native of Atlanta, Georgia and a globally renowned Shroud scholar. In that time, we witnessed something far beyond academic brilliance — we encountered passion set ablaze by faith and purpose.

Fr Dalton is currently an Assistant Professor of Theology at the Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum in Rome, where he teaches Biblical Theology on the Passion of Christ. He holds degrees in Philosophy and Theology and a Postgraduate Certificate in Shroud Studies from the International Center of Sindonology in Turin, Italy. This remarkable priest has taken his insights across the globe, from the US to China, the Philippines, and now Malaysia, before continuing his whirlwind tour to Singapore, Hong Kong and beyond. Despite the gruelling schedule, Fr Dalton is magnetic, charismatic, humble, and grounded. A priest with a scholar's mind and a contagious joy. We especially loved that he never let go of his rosary, gently rolling it between his fingers as we spoke.

The most studied object in history

We began with the question that likely follows him everywhere: What is the Shroud of Turin? Without hesitation: "The Shroud is believed to be the burial shroud of Jesus Christ, that which shows the image of a man that has been crowned, scourged, crucified and pierced on the side. It is the most prized relic in all of Christendom. It's the most studied archaeological object in the history of the world. It's the face of God."

He emphasised that the Shroud doesn't just fascinate Catholics, it captivates the world. Its universal allure lies in its mystery. Despite hundreds of thousands of hours of scientific scrutiny across dozens of disciplines, the image on the cloth defies explanation. "Scientists," he said, "if they're honest, have to shrug their shoulders." Could it be the natural effect of a supernatural event? The Resurrection itself? The image isn't painted, burned, scorched or photographed. It is something else entirely.

An image that defies Science

In 1976, two US Air Force scientists placed a photo of the Shroud under a VP8 image analyser. To their amazement, the image contained encoded three-dimensional information. It revealed the precise contours of a man lying horizontally, chin close to the sternum, knees bent; details consistent with a body hanging vertically on a cross. How is such data possible from a burial cloth?

Fr Dalton shared how modern physicists, attempting to replicate the effect, concluded it would take a burst of 34 trillion watts of radiant energy, in a pulse lasting just 1/40th of a billionth of a second. This conclusion, published by physicist Paolo Di Lazzaro, remains unchallenged. Even with a \$1 million (RM4.2 million) prize offered, no one has successfully recreated the image.

The Shroud as silent witness to the Resurrection

That mystery is where faith finds its stage. "If you remember the Transfiguration," Fr Dalton said, "His face shone like the sun, and His garments became white as light. The Shroud might just be the echo of that luminous moment — the silent witness to the Resurrection." Quoting the Gospel of John, he added, "John saw and believed." For him, the Shroud is not just a relic, but a tool of evangelisation. "Try giving a hom-



An audience member asking a question during Fr Dalton's talk at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Penang.

ily over seven minutes, people check their watches. But talks on the Shroud go on for hours and still people stay."

Why? Because the Shroud invites us to take the Gospel seriously. "This isn't fable or fairytale. These are cold, hard facts," he said. "It's like the line in the Creed about Pontius Pilate. Why is a Roman procurator in a theological statement? Because it grounds the Jesus event in history."

Fr Dalton described how the Gospel of John mentions the discovery of burial cloths — the Shroud and the Sudarium. Both exist today. The Sudarium, preserved in Oviedo, Spain, bears bloodstains that, when superimposed onto the Shroud, match perfectly. What deepens the significance is that the blood composition points to lung edema — a water-to-blood ratio typical of someone brutally beaten. Christ was beaten. Unless another explanation arises, this evidence strongly supports authenticity.

A photograph before photography

In 1898, the Shroud was photographed for the first time. The photographic negative revealed a detailed positive image, mimicking technology that didn't exist for 18 more centuries. Then came the 3D discovery in 1976. How many burial cloths leave a photo-negative image of an anatomically perfect man?

Fr Dalton addressed the infamous 1988 carbon dating that suggested a medieval origin. That study is now widely discredited. The sample came from a contaminated corner of the cloth. More recent techniques, like wide-angle X-ray scattering, place the fabric in the first century. Art, like the 12th-century Hungarian Pray Codex, even depicts Shroud-specific details decades before its alleged European debut.

"This is not just science," he said, "this is faith and reason together. They are the two wings on which the human spirit soars to the contemplation of truth." Quoting St John Paul II's encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, Fr Dalton reminds us the Church never asked us to choose between science and faith.

A personal encounter with the face of Christ

It wasn't until after ten years in seminary that he first encountered the Shroud. When he did, it left a lasting impact. "We need archaeological testimony that substantiates our faith," he said. "It's both faith and reason." Belief should never be blind, but informed and awakened by truth.

Fr Dalton keeps the face of the man on the Shroud in his own prayer corner. "It summons me," he said. "It invites me to prayer. I believe this image is special, known as *Acheiropoietos*, or 'not made by human hands.' I think it's God's own portrait." All Christian art, he said, merely imitates the Shroud. It is the normative image of Christ.

He further explained the Church's call to meditate deeply on the Passion. "The crucifix isn't just a symbol, it's the centre of our faith. When we meditate on the Passion, we are meditating on the very heart of Christianity." The Shroud, he believes, reveals not just theological truths but physical evidence of divine love.

Apart from the light-hearted ice-breaker about whether Fr Andrew had tried durian, almost all our carefully prepared questions ended up taking a back seat. From the moment he began speaking, the conversation took on a life of its own, flowing with such energy, depth and passion that it naturally steered us away from the script. What began as a structured Q&A quickly became something much richer.

As our hour together ended, we asked how this study has shaped his soul. He quoted St Paul to the Corinthians: "And we, with unveiled face, beholding the image of the Lord, are being transfigured from one degree of glory to another." "We become what we behold," he added. "And we need to behold this sorrowful and glorious mystery." The Shroud brings us face-to-face with the cost of divine love. "They shall gaze upon the one they have pierced," Jesus said. "But I think we have looked too little, we have pondered not nearly enough."

The challenge of the Shroud

In the end, the Shroud presents a question to every Catholic, Protestant, agnostic, and atheist: to explain it. Explain the anatomical precision, the 3D data, the negative image, the bloodstains, the energy burst. Explain how it maps perfectly onto Scripture, how it predates photography by 18 centuries, and how no one has replicated it. As Fr Dalton says, quoting Sherlock Holmes: "Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth." And what remains is Resurrection.

We are living in a time of extraordinary grace, where the unveiling of truth through science and faith allows us to witness what can only be the burial cloth of Jesus of Nazareth. How blessed we are to live in such a time, when doubt meets discovery, and an ancient cloth speaks louder than words.



The writers introducing Fr Andrew Dalton to durian ice cream.

Brewing dignity: A café where dementia finds its voice



Dancing with Dementia

DR CECILIA CHAN

After a long wait, the staff of the café were eager to finally welcome guests to their unique establishment. The excitement was palpable and contagious.

“The Forgotten Mutiara” is more than just a café; it’s a groundbreaking initiative in Malaysia, likely the only one of its kind, run entirely by individuals living with dementia and their care partners. Its name, “Mutiara” (meaning pearl), beautifully encapsulates its core message: to reclaim the inherent worth and potential of those with dementia, often hidden beneath societal misunderstandings.

This isn’t your typical coffee shop. It’s a transformative space where the daycare centre morphs into a vibrant café for a day. Here, our friends with dementia and their care partners work side-by-side, preparing delicious food and drinks, and even crafting thoughtful door gifts for their guests. This collaborative effort, supported by dedicated volunteers, vividly showcases the abilities, warmth, and invaluable contributions of Malaysians living with dementia.

“The Forgotten Mutiara” café is a powerful celebration of inclusion, dignity, and community connection. It brings together diverse groups—individuals with dementia, volunteers, students, and the public—to co-create a joyful and respectful environment. The café directly challenges stereotypes surrounding dementia, sparking crucial conversations about aging and memory loss. It aims to prove that a



diagnosis of dementia doesn’t diminish a person’s capacity to give and share.

The atmosphere at “The Forgotten Mutiara” was electric with joy and genuine smiles, making it a truly unforgettable experience. Lives were profoundly touched and transformed through shared moments of dancing, singing, playing, and laughter. Above all, it was a powerful celebration of love — a palpable presence that couldn’t be faked and was deeply felt by everyone.

The impact of this unique café is profound. Attendees describe the experience as truly magical and transformative, fostering genuine human connection and a rare display of pure affection, which is particularly noteworthy

in Malaysian culture. It’s a testament to the authentic power of human love and a reminder that when we open our hearts, wounds can heal, bridges can be built, and the incredible power of humanity can shine through.

This unique gathering allowed participants to see the beauty and inherent meaning in each individual, shifting focus away from cognitive decline. Tears flowed, but they were tears of happiness, reflecting the profound impact of collective creation and the experience of poignant beauty despite the challenges of dementia. The power of collectively creating meaning is truly elusive; it’s something that must be experienced to be fully understood, and

the “small tribe” at the café felt it deeply.

The event is part of our movement to promote dementia-friendly communities, where people living with memory loss are not excluded, but embraced. There’s an urgent need to spread this powerful message. With nearly everyone knowing someone living with dementia and an unprecedented era of longer life expectancy, society must adjust to the realities of an aging population, which will inevitably include changes. The question then becomes: how will we navigate these changes as neighbours, as a society, and within Malaysian culture?

Dementia is heavily influenced by the social constructs surrounding it. “The Forgotten Mutiara” demonstrates that we can choose to see beyond the diagnosis and experience the profound interconnectedness among us. Through joy, love, and the pure delight of shared engagement, as vividly shown at the café, we can reshape our understanding and response to dementia, fostering a more inclusive and compassionate future. Let us build bridges instead of walls.

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

Pope Francis’ prayer intention for the month of July focuses on the formation of discernment — a practice deeply rooted in his own Jesuit background. As a member of the Society of Jesus, Pope Francis was formed in the tradition of St Ignatius of Loyola, whose Spiritual Exercises place great emphasis on discernment as a way of seeking and responding to God’s will. Jesuits are often regarded as masters of this practice, having been trained to listen deeply, reflect prayerfully, and act with clarity of conscience.

Before we journey further into this theme, I’d like to highlight an excellent article by Fr Fabian Dicom titled *Formation in Discernment: Listening, Reflecting, and Acting*, featured in the July 6 issue of *HERALD*. His insights offer a rich theological and pastoral perspective. What follows here, however, is a personal reflection on discernment from the viewpoint of a layperson.

In the beginning

“The child Jesus grew and became strong, increasing in wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him” Luke 2:40

The *Our Father* was taught to me at the age of five. Like many other children my age I said the prayer by rote. I lacked the understanding of the words - Thy will be done.

I was 13 when Fr Maurice Joseph encouraged me to consider the Catholic



Informed Opinion

PROF XAVIER V. PEREIRA

A journey in the formation of discernment

priesthood. He also appointed me head altar server. In retrospect I realise that being in leadership in the Catholic Church requires one to collectively discern God’s will. I was too young to understand this in 1974.

When I turned 16, Fr Lucien Catel, the parish priest of the Church of Christ the King, Sungai Petani, also encouraged me to consider the priesthood. He gave me a book to read - the life of St John Don Bosco.

I was encouraged to read, reflect, and pray. This was the beginning of the formation of discernment in my life, though the term discernment was still unfamiliar to me. I was later elected the president of the Catholic Youth Fellowship, and was president of a very good youth group from January 1978 to June 1981. Fr Catel coaxed me to join the parish council in 1979 to voice out the concerns of the youth. Although I was in leadership at a young age, both in the church and in school, I made many decisions, individually and collectively, without discerning God’s will, mainly because I was not taught to do so.

The formation in discernment in our teenage years narrowly focussed on God’s call to the priesthood or religious life.

In retrospect, and armed with the knowledge of human developmental theories, I believe that the best age to introduce the formation of discernment is sixteen. This would fit in nicely with the preparation for the sacrament of Confirmation. Sixteen is often the age which ushers in critical and analytical thinking, and concurs with the wisdom that Jesus was observed to develop.

Understanding discernment

I was formally introduced to the term discernment in the 1980s when I was a medical student. Fr Gino Henriques, the chairperson of the Indian Catholic Charismatic Renewal in the 1980s, organised a national seminar on discernment. This was much needed, especially in the discernment of the manifestation and utilisation of God given gifts (1 Corinthians 12)

Fr Gino also mentored members of the National Youth Pastoral Team (NYPT). I was allowed to join the NYPT in 1987. The formation by Fr Gino was very good focusing on holistic development including discernment. We were trained to become disciples of Jesus and missionaries of the Good News.

My formation in discernment during this period was supplemented with weekend retreats at Mount St Joseph, Bangalore guided by Jesuit priests. I also was a member and leader of a very good prayer group of medical students in St John’s Medical College. Collective discernment revolved around prayer, the bible and ‘spiritual conversations’

It is essential that the formation in discernment should be accompanied with the holistic formation of self.

The Jesuit formation

I was briefly a Jesuit novice in 1990. This period was a time of intense formation in discernment. The novices were taught the Spiritual Exercises by one of the best, Fr Hilario Fernandes. I took notes in every class, and remember being teased by my fellow novices who are now Jesuit priests. Fr Hilario’s statement, that the confirmation

of good discernment is the outcome, will always remain with me.

The 30-day retreat based on the Spiritual Exercises was crucial in the knowledge and praxis of discernment.

I learnt that discernment is a process and being in prayerful silent solitude supports the process.

Formation from books

I discovered that some priests wrote excellent books on prayer and discernment. One such author was the late Fr Thomas H. Green SJ. His first book *Opening to God* emphasised the need to have a relationship with God. This was a prerequisite to understanding God and God’s will. His classic book on discernment was *Weeds Among the Wheat* based on the parable of Jesus in Matthew 13: 24-30.

Both my spouse and I used this book to help us discern our calling to marriage. I highly recommend this book.

Formation as a spiritual guide

At the turn of the century, I was invited to join the formation of a group of lay spiritual guides. The formation in discernment was headed by Fr David Townsend SJ, with some support by other Jesuits.

Over the years I have been able to incorporate guidance, discernment and decision making into the work I do with people as a healer, teacher, and mentor. I am thankful to all who have contributed to my formation in discernment.

Xavier V. Pereira is a medical doctor, psychiatrist and psychotherapist, and Professor of Psychiatry at Perdana University, Malaysia.

Multilingual 88-year-old catechist ministers to 'neglected' elderly

Christopher Khoo

He speaks seven languages and dialects, and zips around Singapore on his scooter to teach catechism to elderly and housebound people. He is also 88 years old.

Meet Andrew Goh, who has been teaching catechism for the past 34 years to Singaporeans who speak mainly dialects or are illiterate.

Andrew was in the insurance line for many years but decided to do this special ministry full-time after he was baptised in 1991. "God is so kind, so good," he said of

his faith experience, adding that he felt he had to "repay" God's goodness.

After his baptism, he began to hear stories about how some adults, who were Catholic, had elderly parents who were not. Furthermore, these children were somehow uncomfortable to ask for religious instruction for their parents.

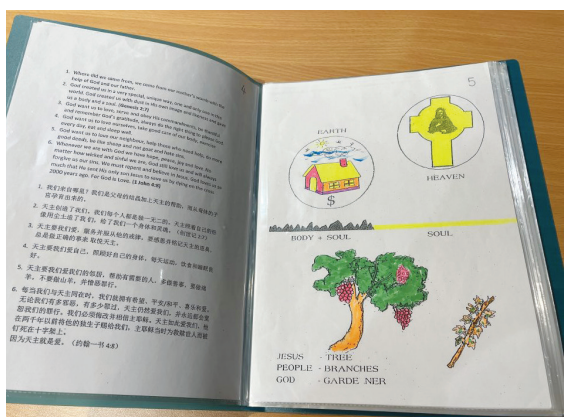
Andrew noted that the RCIA conducted in Singapore is mainly in English and Mandarin, catering largely to adults and youth who speak these languages. However, for the elderly who speak only dialect, "they are neglected", he said.

He then decided to start a ministry catering to them, such as praying for elderly people in hospitals, visiting those who are housebound, and holding catechism classes in parishes.

Andrew speaks English, Mandarin, the Chinese dialects of Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese and Hainanese; and Peranakan (a fusion of Malay and the Hokkien dialect). He comes from a Hokkien-Peranakan background, which makes speaking certain Chinese dialects easy for him. For other dialects such as Cantonese and Hainanese, he took the trouble to learn from others.



Andrew Goh uses children's books to teach catechism to the elderly. (Photo/Christopher Khoo)



Some of Andrew Goh's lesson materials for people from different language groups. (Photo/Christopher Khoo)



Andrew conducting a catechism class at Novena Church. (Photo/Christopher Khoo)

Catechism lessons for his elderly catechumens, most of whom are in their 70s and 80s, are simple affairs, focusing on the main tenets of the faith.

Andrew uses children's books with their large colourful pictures to make certain religious concepts easy to understand, such as the Sacraments of the Church, the story of Adam and Eve and Jesus' miracles. He has also come up with his own set of printed materials which contain instructions in Mandarin and English and easy-to-understand diagrams.

Andrew, who receives stipends for his work, has been performing his ministry in as many as five parishes over the years. He currently teaches catechism weekly at the Church of the Holy Family and the Church of St Alphonsus (known popularly as Novena Church). A total of about 30 people attend these classes, including some who were previously baptised through his instructions.

In addition to this, he makes eight house visits weekly to teach the housebound.

Over the decades, Andrew has helped more than 2,000 people get baptised and has gained more than 560 godchildren.

However, this ministry is not without its challenges. Andrew shared that some people leave after two or three lessons. There were also others who later decided

to join other Christian Churches.

Andrew, who still enjoys robust health, zips around Singapore on his trusty scooter to perform his unique ministry. Currently, he has a few assistants helping him in his weekly classes but he acknowledges that help can be hard to come by.

What will happen if one day he becomes too weak to continue this ministry?

"There are already people who can speak dialects," Andrew notes, adding that they can be attracted to join this ministry if the Church pays them a regular allowance. "They will come in, those who are retired," he said.

In the meantime, Andrew's catechumens shared that they are learning much from the sessions.

Betty Tan, 76, who attends the classes at Novena Church with her 85-year-old sister, said she is "learning how to pray, how to make the Sign of the Cross, and about how Jesus helped others".

Simon Low, 75, who attends the sessions at the Church of the Holy Family, said he looks forward to "going deeper" into learning the faith, and also to being baptised.

The writer is a Singapore-based freelance journalist and educator.

Blessings from my pilgrimage journey

The Family Life Ministry (FLM) of the Church of St Ignatius, Petaling Jaya, organised visits to the Jubilee churches of Jesus Caritas (JCC), Kepong and Cathedral of St John the Evangelist (CSJE) on July 5. When notice of the visits was officially posted on my parish group's chat group, I wasted no time in signing up as I was looking forward to these visits as part of my pilgrimage journey as a Catholic.

In preparation for the pilgrimage, I received the Sacrament of Reconciliation a week earlier. The other more difficult issue was to get my spouse to join me. I prayed about it and miraculously, without hesitation, he agreed to come along. Praise be to God!

We were very warmly received by the parishioners who served as guides from the moment we stepped into JCC. We viewed



Parishioners of St Ignatius at the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist.

a video presentation on the history of JCC, the highlight of which was the work of Fr Pierre Decroocq MEP and the donation by a philanthropist that enabled a proper church to be built to cater to the growing Catholic population in Kepong. We venerated the first-class relic of St Maria Goretti in the

Church and our tour would not have been complete without a visit to our Lord at the St John Vianney Chapel, with its beautifully designed artwork and Crucifix. All in all, kudos to JCC for the commitment, ever-welcoming, smiling tour guides who made our visit so memorable.

At CSJE, friendly volunteers were on hand to screen a video presentation on the history of the Cathedral. Also highlighted to us were the evocative Jubilee 2025 Murals, 'Hues of the Call', and the tombs of Archbishop Dominic Vendargon and Cardinal Soter Fernandez. We said a prayer to St John the Evangelist at the beautiful main altar and prayed the rosary at Our Lady's shrine indoors.

All in all, it was indeed a memorable and prayerful Saturday for me, not only to gain a Plenary Indulgence, but also to know and learn about the two churches, which would not have been possible without this trip.

My appreciation, gratitude, and thanks to FLM for the planning, preparation and clockwork precision that went into carrying out the itinerary of this pilgrimage. God bless the Committee. **Tay Pek Choo**

In a recent mission trip to Cambodia, one of the mission participants asked me why the Cambodian children seem so open to giving us hugs and high-fives, even when we are only meeting them for the first time, and have not done anything for them yet. Indeed, such has been my experience over the last 15 years of doing mission in Cambodia, where the children are so eager to run up to you, a random stranger, but shower you with love and affection as if they were meeting a long-time friend.

“Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children.” (Mark 10:14)

Perhaps their outward actions reveal the God-given internal desire found in every person for real human connection, connections not just for personal gain or a mutual exchange of benefits, but out of a pure, simple gift of love and presence within a common bond that goes beyond nationality, personality or social status. Perhaps such is the way God’s kingdom is meant to be experienced, where everyone is loved and welcomed simply for who they truly are, God’s children, and not for anything they have done ‘right’ or performed ‘well’, for love was never meant to be earned or given as a reward.

Still, I admit that I am not always so forthcoming as these children to own and act upon my internal desires for such



Word Made Fresh

NICHOLAS LYE

What I learnt from hugs and high-fives

connections. Like many people, I have been disappointed, hurt, and even rejected in some of my attempts to reach out. Some of my genuine efforts to extend love and affection, through

my own unique way, have not always been well received. Either because of a certain bias towards my vulnerability or creativity, or a misunderstanding and misreading of my true intentions that eventually got misjudged and condemned. This has resulted in me sometimes suppressing such desires for connection, and choosing to remain in my shell for fear of making the ‘wrong’ connections.

Even as a spiritual director for this recent mission trip, where I was tasked to lead the mission participants in daily spiritual reflections, I faced initial fears of whether people would take well to my creative activities and unique style of facilitation. I have heard comments from previous mission trips that my sessions are not ‘spiritual’ enough, or have received complaints that people were too tired to reflect or share. Such reactions have actually dissuaded me from making connections with some of the mission participants, for fear that they might reject me or think poorly of me.

“I tell you the truth, anyone who does

not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.’ Then He took the children in His arms and placed His hands on their heads and blessed them.” (Mark 10:15-16)

But when I looked to the Cambodian children once again, and recalled how unconditional and accepting their love is, I began to desire to learn from them how to continue reaching out and making connections, regardless of how others might respond. I desired to continue being myself and dancing myself silly even if it only attracts a small group willing to connect with me through dance or my unique ways. I desired to listen to my internal desires for connection and continue seeking people who might appreciate such connections without me realising.

Sure enough, in the recent mission trip, as I plucked up my courage to show up as I am, and be a unique gift just as I am, I chose to welcome all the mission participants the way the Cambodian children have welcomed me. I chose to bless them with my unique gifts, just as the Cambodian children blessed me with their simple hugs and high-fives. In the end, people did truly appreciate the unique gift that I am, and the real human connections that I offered them through my stories, vulnerability, and unique style

of facilitating the spiritual reflections.

Did I have reached out to everyone the same way? Probably not. Might everyone have liked everything that I did? Not likely. But did the spiritual sessions serve as a platform for mission participants to make real human connections with one another, through their honesty in how they were feeling, their learnings through their mission experiences, and their encounters with the Cambodians and fellow mission participants? I believe so. For that, I believe we experienced a foretaste of what the Kingdom of God would be like.

And so, through the Cambodian children and my fellow mission participants, I learnt in a deeper way to see everyone as part of God’s larger family offering a hug or high-five; I learnt to see myself as worthy of connection in the way that the children and others see in me; and I am inspired to contribute to a kingdom mindset and culture where we can all fearlessly approach anyone we meet, even for the first time, and offer real human connection just as God does.

Nicholas is a lay missionary and creative evangelist who loves to use creativity and various art forms to share the faith and help people encounter God’s truths in a fun and meaningful way

BE OUR GUEST

Catholic Spotting: Signs and symbols of the brotherhood



By Ann Teoh

If we meet in church, I can make a good guess that you are Catholic. But if I met you at a client’s meeting, or at a restaurant, would I be able to recognise you as a Catholic?

I often play *Spot the Catholic* while I am out and about. It’s this brotherhood thing as Catholics are the minority here in Malaysia, a bit like Malaysian-spotting when we are abroad.

My observation is that many Catholics are understated in proclaiming their faith in secular settings. Rare is the Catholic who is ostentatious in his or her Catholic identity.

You can guess with some names. John Paul, Xavier, Ignatius, or Mary Lourdes are overtly Catholic. While I know several Aarons and Isaacs who are Catholics, you can’t really tell. Likewise, with John, David, Patrick, Michael, or Elaine or Jessica.

An easy way to wheedle out a confession is to uncover your crucifix, miraculous medal or scapular, if it is hidden under the shirt. Admittedly, this trick is easier for a woman, who can pull out her chain and expose the pendant. Assuming you can pull this trick off in a first-time meeting, if the other party is Catholic, it is likely his Catholic antenna will beep, and he will whisper, “You Catholic, ah?” “Yes.” “Me, too!”

Other ways of extracting confessions of

being Catholic:

This is much like the crucifix one but louder. **Wear your Pilgrims of Hope T-shirt, or that faded ministry T-shirt**, for your walk in the park or grocery shopping. It’s also known as proclaiming Christ.

I taught my son this trick when he went to university in London. I told him, “Wear your Catholic T-shirt, they will crawl out of the woodwork.” It’s bait. It always works. “I am Catholic too,” they tell him.

Of course, most people can’t wear the Pilgrims of Hope T-shirt to the office, but this leads me to the second method.

Casually drop words like Mass, BECs, homilies, or Feast days, when talking to new colleagues or acquaintances, where appropriate. Most Catholics in hiding would identify themselves, followed by “Where do you go for Mass?”

If the other party says instead, “Oh, you are Catholic?” followed by “Where do you worship?” you can almost be certain he/she is Christian but non-Catholic because we almost never use worship in reference to Mass, even though it is true worship.

Abstain from meat on Fridays. Many non-Catholics, including Christians, don’t know that Catholics practise abstinence, possibly because those who do, practise it discreetly.

I would like to share two recent incidents, where I was tempted to not abstain.

I was given a treat one Friday at Ippudo, a Japanese restaurant known for its ramen. On the evil menu, the *chashu*/pork slices looked succulent, and the broth, heavenly. A colleague prodded me to pick the most expensive ramen with the *chashu* and egg. I wanted to say yes; moreover, there weren’t any other Catholics at the table to judge me. However, against my will, I mumbled that I don’t eat meat on Fridays, to which another colleague chimed in with “Catholics don’t eat meat on Fridays”. It was the Holy Spirit who saved me from causing a scandal!

The following Friday, there was another lunch invitation. This time, I pre-empted any awkward situation by texting my friend that I don’t eat meat on Fridays. At the fish noodles shop, my friends turned up with another lady, who, after casual conversations asked if I was Catholic, and then identified as one. She said she guessed I was a Catholic when my friend told her I don’t eat meat on Fridays, admitting too, that she doesn’t normally abstain. Perhaps, she will in future.

Of course, **say grace with the sign of the cross.**

But truly, while these sacramentals are important, they remain superficial. People should guess we are Catholics or Christians, by our joy, kindness, and right action and words, all of which we may

sometimes find far harder to express than donning a T-shirt or a crucifix, if you don’t invoke the Father, Son and Holy Spirit regularly.

Two decades ago, someone who didn’t know me identified me as a Christian, not by pendant or T-shirt, or any visible signs at my house then, but because I refused to pay a bribe.

This man found aedes larvae in one of my flower pots. I thanked him for discovering something that could endanger my family, but also said I would prefer to get a summons than to bribe him, while appealing to be given a chance. To my surprise, he then asked me if I was a Christian. I replied yes, and asked how he knew. He said that Christians usually won’t give bribes!

How does a man or woman who believes he or she is so loved by God behave on a daily basis? With the Catholic badge comes responsibility.

Maybe that’s why we Catholics prefer to hide in the woodwork. It’s less scandalous, at least for me, but how long should you hide His light under the bushel?

Ann Teoh knows she exists purely by God’s will but indulges in the illusion of control by hoarding books that she’ll read, someday. She may be contacted at ann.teoh@gmail.com.



Fr Ron Rolheiser

Purgatory as purification through love

Imagine being born blind and living into adulthood without ever having seen light and colour. Then, through some miraculous operation, doctors are able to give you sight. What would you feel immediately upon opening your eyes? Wonder? Bewilderment? Ecstasy? Pain? Some combination of all of these?

We now know the answer to that question. This kind of sight-restoring operation has been done and is being done, and we now have some indication of how a person reacts upon opening his or her eyes and seeing light and colour for the first time. What happens might surprise us. Here's how J.Z. Young, an authority on brain function, describes what happens:

"The patient, on opening his eyes, gets little or no enjoyment; indeed, he finds the experience painful. He reports only a spinning mass of light and colours. He proves to be quite unable to pick up objects by sight, to recognise what they are, or to name them. He has no conception of space with objects in it, although he knows all about objects and their names by touch. 'Of course,' you will say, 'he must take a little time to learn to recognise them by sight.' Not a little time, but a very long time, in fact, years. His brain has not been trained in the rules of seeing. We are not conscious that there are any such rules; we think we see, as we

say, naturally. But we have in fact learned a whole set of rules during childhood." (See: Emilie Griffin, *Souls in Full Sail*, p. 143-144)

Might this be a helpful analogy for what happens to us in what Roman Catholics call purgatory? Could the purification we experience after death be understood analogously in this way, namely, as an opening of our vision and heart to a light and a love that are so full so as to force upon us the same kind of painful relearning and reconceptualisation that have just been described? Might purgatory be understood precisely as being embraced by God in such a way that perfect warmth and light so dwarf our earthly concepts of love and knowledge that, like a person born blind who is given sight, we need to struggle painfully in the very ecstasy of that light to adapt to a radically deeper way of thinking and loving? Might purgatory be understood, not as God's absence or as some kind of punishment or retribution for sin, but as what happens to us when we are finally fully embraced, in ecstasy, by God, perfect love and perfect truth?

Indeed, isn't this what faith, hope, and charity, the three theological virtues, are already trying to move us toward in this life? Isn't faith a knowing beyond what we can conceptualise? Isn't hope an

anchoring of ourselves in something beyond what we can control and guarantee for ourselves? And isn't charity a reaching out beyond what affectively comes naturally to us?

St Paul, in describing our condition on earth, tells us that in this life, we see only as "through a mirror, reflecting dimly" but after death, we will see "face to face". Clearly in describing our present condition on earth, he is highlighting a certain blindness, a congenital darkness, an inability to actually see things as they really are. It is significant to note too, that he says this in a context wherein he is pointing out that already now, in this life, faith, hope, and charity help lift away that blindness.

Of course, these are only questions, perhaps unsettling to Protestants and Roman Catholics alike. Many Protestants and Evangelicals reject the very concept of purgatory on the grounds that, biblically, there are only two eternal places, heaven and hell.

Many Roman Catholics, on the other hand, get anxious whenever purgatory seems to get stripped of its popular conception as a place or state apart from heaven. But purgatory conceived of in this way, as the full opening of our eyes and hearts so as to cause a painful reconceptualisation of things, might help make

the concept more palatable to Protestants and Evangelicals and help strip the concept of some of its false popular connotations within Roman Catholic piety.

True purgation can happen only through love because it is only when we experience love's true embrace that we see our sin clearly for what it is and are empowered with the grace to move beyond it. Only light dispels darkness, and only love casts out sin.

Therese of Lisieux would sometimes pray to God: "Punish me with a kiss!" The embrace of full love is the only possible purification for sin because only when we are embraced by love do we actually understand what sin is and, only then, are we given the desire, the vision, and the strength to live in love and truth.

But that inbreaking of love and light can be, all at the same time, delightful and bewildering, ecstatic and unsettling, wonderful and excruciating, euphoric and painful – nothing less than purgatory.

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

SOCIAL JUSTICE



Making a Difference
Tony Magliano

The green encyclical is alive and well!

Ten years ago, Pope Francis wrote the first environmental encyclical letter in the history of the Catholic Church. As he was writing it, so many of us who were, and still are, concerned about the sickening state of our wonderful earth home, waited with hopeful anticipation. And when it was finally completed and released to the world, I wrote a column with this lead paragraph: "It's courageous, it's prophetic, it's challenging, it's holistic, it's wonderful: That's what I think of Pope Francis' environmental encyclical "*Laudato Si'*, on Care for Our Common Home!"

And today, my admiration for *Laudato Si'* is stronger than ever. Because its message is needed now more than ever!

Quoting his patron saint, Francis of Assisi – who is also the patron saint of ecology – Pope Francis began his papal letter with a beautiful verse from the saint's *Cantic of the Creatures*: "Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs."

"This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her.

We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will."

Pope Francis explained, "Each year hundreds of millions of tons of waste are generated. ... The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth."

Siding with 97 percent of climate scientists he wrote "A very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system" (see: <http://climate.nasa.gov/scientific-consensus/>).

Pope Francis fully endorsed ongoing calls for worldwide conversion from the use of global warming fossil fuels – oil, coal, gas – to "clean renewable energy" found in wind, solar and geothermal. (see: <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/raising-ambition/renewable-energy>).

Pope Francis wrote, "The warming caused by huge consumption on the part of some rich countries has repercussions on the poorest areas of the world, especially Africa, where a rise in temperature, together with drought, has proved devastating for farming. ...

"Many of those who possess more resources and economic or political

power seem mostly to be concerned with masking the problems or concealing their symptoms, simply making efforts to reduce some of the negative impacts of climate change."

Pope Francis added that in political and economic discussions the poor seem to be brought up as an afterthought. "Indeed, when all is said and done, they frequently remain at the bottom of the pile. ...

"Today, however, we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*."

Pope Francis firmly instructed that the Church "must above all protect mankind from self-destruction."

Our late Holy Father prophetically saw the environmental problem as part of a much larger, more serious problem: Our failure to consistently recognize the truth that everyone and everything is interconnected.

He explained, "When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities – to offer just a

few examples – it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected."

However, because we continue to ignore the vital necessity of nurturing this interconnectedness, the ecological, social and spiritual web of life is tearing.

But if we care at all, we still have a little time to mend the tears.

For anyone interested in being a part of the solution, "*Laudato Si'*, on Care for Our Common Home" is a must read! And here it is https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html!

Also, check out *Laudato Si'* Movement: Catholics for Our Common Home (see: <https://laudatosimovement.org/>).

And here is a link to a wonderful follow-up video featuring Pope Francis titled "The Letter" that will surely inspire you to faithfully respond to "both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" <http://bit.ly/44EwJbf>.

● **Tony Magliano** is an internationally syndicated Catholic social justice and peace columnist. He is available to speak at diocesan or parish gatherings. Tony can be reached at tmag6@comcast.net.



Maria Robert

KUANTAN: The Church of St Thomas came alive with energy and purpose on July 12 as over a hundred young pilgrims from all over the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur gathered for a special spiritual journey. This wasn't just a road trip — it was a heartfelt pilgrimage to grow in faith and community, held in celebration of the Jubilee Year. As a designated pilgrimage centre for the East Coast, St Thomas was the perfect place to come together and encounter God in a deeper way.

This inspiring event was made possible through the collaboration between the Archdiocesan Single Adults and Youth Office (ASAYO) and the St Thomas Youth Ministry. Whether they arrived by bus or car, every young pilgrim brought with them a spirit of unity, joy, and openness, filling the church with excitement and anticipation for the day ahead.

The day kicked off with a warm welcome at the parish hall, where friendly faces and a hearty lunch set the tone for what was to come. The energy only grew as the St Thomas Youth Ministry lit up the room with an exciting



Pilgrims of Hope

Youth celebrate Jubilee Year



welcome session full of laughter, connection, and powerful Praise and Worship. Voices rose in unison, filling the hall with songs of faith and the joy of being together on this sacred journey.

Next up: games! But not just for fun — these icebreakers brought strangers together, helping everyone bond through teamwork, smiles,

and maybe even a little friendly competition. Led entirely by the St Thomas youth team, this part of the day was a true display of joyful service and heartfelt hospitality, rooted in the love of Christ.

ASAYO then took the stage for a short but meaningful input session, diving into the story of St Thomas the Apostle. His journey of doubt and belief became an invitation for everyone present to reflect on their own faith. Right after, a creative treasure hunt kept spirits high and brought a sense of adventure to the day.

As the afternoon mellowed, all gathered in the church for a deeply moving session with Fr George Packiasamy, the parish priest of St Thomas. With warmth and wisdom, he shared the story behind the church and the legacy of St Thomas, reminding us of the power of faith lived out boldly. A guided tour followed, giving everyone a chance to soak in the sacred atmosphere and pray at the beautiful spaces of the church grounds.

Then came a quiet, holy pause — Adoration and Novena before the Blessed Sacrament.

In that stillness, hearts were stirred, prayers whispered, and a deep sense of peace settled in, preparing everyone for the highlight of the day: the Jubilee Youth Mass.

Frs Simon Lau and Michel Dass from ASAYO, together with Fr George, led a beautiful Eucharistic celebration filled with spirit and sincerity. With uplifting music, heartfelt prayers, and full participation from the youth, the Mass became a powerful encounter with Christ—alive in Word, Sacrament, and community.

As twilight fell, the day ended with a group photo and a delicious dinner shared in true fellowship. Smiles were everywhere, hearts were full, and memories were made that will last a lifetime.

To everyone who made the journey to Kuantan, and to the ASAYO team and St Thomas Youth Ministry who gave their all — *thank you*. Your energy, faith, and love made this pilgrimage unforgettable. When young hearts chase after Christ together, something truly beautiful happens.



SMIS students earn global recognition



From Left to Right: Elizabeth Koh Suek Kew (Examination Officer, SMIS Secondary), Hayley Gan's Parents, Madhu Singh (Principal, SMIS Secondary), Ng Kim Huat (Cambridge International Education, Country Director, Malaysia and Brunei), Hayley Gan Shin Hui, Luke Joel Sta Maria, Ethan John Goh, Luke Sta Maria's Parents, and Ng Kai Che (Senior Assistant - SMIS Secondary)

KUALA LUMPUR: At Stella Maris International School (SMIS), achievement often grows quietly, nurtured by steady dedication and a sincere sense of purpose. This year, four students were recognised in the 'Outstanding Cambridge Learner Awards 2024' — an honour that acknowledges the top IGCSE

performers around the world. These awards represent more than academic success; they speak to the determination, resilience, and genuine love of learning that shape the school's community.

Among this year's recognised students, Joel Mok Wen Xuan and Hayley Gan Shin

Hui received Top in the World awards. Joel earned a perfect A* in Foreign Language (Mandarin Chinese) during the June 2024 exams. Hayley matched this with a flawless A* in Mathematics in November 2024, and was also honoured at SMIS with the Archbishop Dominic Vendargon Award, which

recognises a student who shows excellence in academics, leadership, co-curricular activities, and character. Their achievements reflect not only talent but also humility, discipline, and a heartfelt commitment to learning and growth.

From the November 2024 cohort, Luke Joel Sta Maria and Ethan John Goh were also named Top in Malaysia for their outstanding results. Luke's A* in Economics revealed sharp thinking and a genuine interest in understanding the world, complemented by his leadership and sporting contributions recognised through the Chairman Award at SMIS. Ethan's A* in Environmental Management showed both strong academic ability and a sincere concern for the environment. Their accomplishments highlight a balanced pursuit of knowledge, responsibility, and service — qualities deeply valued at SMIS.

These honours are not just individual milestones but reflections of a collective journey marked by perseverance and support within a community that values character as much as achievement. As these students continue their journeys, their accomplishments remind us all that true greatness is often humble—it may not call attention to itself, but it leaves a lasting and meaningful impression.

CARDINAL SEBASTIAN CALLS YOUTH TO MISSION

St Jude's confirmands experience transformative retreat



Confirmands with Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Msgr Henry Rajoo and the catechists.

KULIM: Fifteen young students received the Sacrament of Confirmation at the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus recently. The sacrament was administered by Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of the Diocese of Penang, with Msgr Henry Rajoo concelebrating.

During his homily, Cardinal Sebastian delivered a stirring message focused on discipleship. He reminded the confirmands that they are now disciples of Jesus Christ, entrusted with continuing His mission. Drawing from Scripture, the Cardinal reflected on the period following Christ's Ascension — how the disciples, initially afraid and uncertain, were transformed by the coming of the Holy Spirit on the tenth day into bold witnesses of the Gospel, many of whom gave their lives for Christ.

He emphasised the importance of embracing this missionary spirit, urging the newly confirmed, and all faithful present,

to "Turun Padang", meaning to go forth and live out the Gospel in the world. He reminded everyone, regardless of age or condition, that each person is called to be a witness of Christ in daily life.



Adrian Raj Alberth Elvis, *pic*, speaking on behalf of the confirmands, expressed heartfelt gratitude to Cardinal Sebastian, Msgr Henry Rajoo, the liturgical group, catechists and coordinators, and parents who supported and guided them in preparation for this sacred occasion. "Please keep us in your prayers as we continue the mission," he added.

The Mass concluded with the final blessings, marking a joyful and spirit-filled milestone in the lives of the young confirmands.

RAWANG: The Church of St Jude recently organised a Confirmation Camp from June 6 to 8 at Villa Dominic, Genting Highlands, offering 23 young confirmands a spiritually enriching experience as they prepared to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation.

The retreat was led by Kevin Pathinathan and the St Jude Praise and Worship team, who created an atmosphere of deep reflection, healing, and faith formation.

The camp aimed to help participants strengthen their relationship with God and embrace their true identity in Christ.

One of the confirmands, Veronica Mary, described the camp as "amazing."

"I got to know my real identity, and I truly grew closer to God. Thank you, Kevin and team, for guiding me throughout this journey. I hope I will always remain close to Jesus," she shared.

Catechist and Confirmation coordinator Diana Rayan commended the retreat's overall success.

"The retreat was impactful — the venue was ideal, the food was great, and most importantly, the confirmands really benefitted spiritually. Many were able to let go of their emptiness, brokenness, and false identities,

and seek the Holy Spirit."

Confirmand Emmanuel Ashwin Aaron also experienced a personal transformation.

"I didn't expect the camp to turn out this way," he admitted. "It helped me grow emotionally and find peace with my family. The fake identity I had before this camp is gone — I feel like a whole new person."

Diana expressed deep gratitude to Kevin and the Praise and Worship team for their commitment, and suggested that the parish should consider organising more retreats for various age groups in the future.

"This kind of experience allows parishioners to encounter God personally and seek the help they need. It's essential for building our Church's future."

The confirmands' spiritual journey culminated in the Confirmation Mass on Saturday, June 28, at 6:00pm at the Church of St Jude. The Mass was held in conjunction with another milestone celebration: the installation of the new parish priest, Fr Simon Labrooy, and his assistant, Fr Jonathan Rao.

The dual celebration was presided over by Archbishop Julian Leow, marking a joyful and momentous occasion for the entire parish community. **Mercy Almeida Stellus**



The confirmands renewing their baptismal promises.

'MISSION POSSIBLE' concludes with innovation, compassion, and synodal spirit

BANGKOK: The second season of the MISSION POSSIBLE Youth Social Hackathon concluded on Sunday, July 13, with powerful pitches, proud mentors, and a renewed sense of hope in the capacity of young people to shape a better world.

Held at the Baan Phu Waan Pastoral Training Centre and co-organized by the Catholic Education Council of Thailand (CECT) and LICAS News, the three-day event brought together students aged 13–19 from 12 Catholic schools across Thailand.

Guided by the Church's synodal call to "journey together," participants tackled some of the most pressing issues in Thai society and beyond — from migrant labour and climate change to family dynamics and the use of technology.

Though most students are Buddhists, they embraced the synodal spirit of collaboration and listening to one another. Each team spent the weekend immersed in intensive "hacking" sessions, assisted by industry-leading mentors and coaches.

For the last two days, students received inspiration from mentors who shared their experiences, challenges, and the secrets to their success in fields as diverse as environmental changemaking and national-level social entrepreneurship.

Once their ideas matured, they received further coaching from nationally renowned public speakers to perfect their pitches and make the most convincing case for funding.



A team of student hackers collaborates with their pitching coach during an intensive hacking session at MISSION POSSIBLE Youth Social Hackathon Season 2. (LICAS News Photo/MISSION POSSIBLE)

On the final day, the energy soared as students took the stage to pitch their projects in tightly timed five-minute "mic-off" presentations. With almost US\$10,000 of seed funding on the line, the teams showcased solutions designed not for profit, but for the common good — offering real tools for social transformation in their communities.

Rooted in Synodality

Framed by the weekend's theme — *Together We Make a Better World Possible* — the hackathon was inspired by Pope Francis' call to embrace synodality: a way of being Church that listens deeply, walks together, and acts in hope.

Cardinal Francis Xavier Kriengsak Kovithavanij, retired Archbishop of Bangkok,

opened the final day with a Liturgy of the Word, urging the youth to be "salt of the earth and light of the world," preserving what is good and illuminating the way forward for others.

The prelate shared with the students that "in the universe, sources of light give part of themselves away. A sacrifice is made to bring light to darkness"—a poignant reflection for students challenged to bring hope to the world.

"This was not just an event," said one of the mentors. "It was a living experience of Church that listens, trusts, and empowers the young."

Ideas that bridge generations

Among the standout pitches that received

seed funding was the team from Regina Coeli College in Chiang Mai, a school run by the Ursuline Sisters about 700 kilometers north of Bangkok. Comprised entirely of girls, the team focused on family disconnection — a subtle but painful personal challenge for boarding students separated from their loved ones at home.

They opened their pitch with a powerful question: "When was the last time you communicated with your parents?"

Their pitch was for a mobile app called Bear Bridge — a digital platform to strengthen family ties through real-time communication, shared calendars, photo exchanges, and time-shifted note-to-self features. The idea touched the judges deeply for its simplicity, technological ingenuity, and emotional resonance.

"We did not expect to get the funding," said team member Thanyarat Thammikom, speaking to *LICAS News*. "But we are truly overjoyed. After listening to the mentors and our coach, we completely rewrote our pitch late into the night and didn't get any sleep. We really tried to be synodal — listening, reflecting, and acting together."

Thanyarat said that with the funding, the team now plans to consult professionals to bring their app to life. "We hope it will help families communicate better and ease suffering in countless homes," she added. **Chainarong Monthienvichienchai & June Nattha Nuchsuwan, LICAS News**

Thirty five children killed in recent attacks in North Kordofan

SUDAN: More than 450 civilians, including 35 children and two pregnant women, were killed in attacks on communities near Bara in Sudan's North Kordofan State recently. Dozens have been injured and many are still missing.

According to the human rights group Emergency Lawyers, militants of the Rapid Support Forces, a paramilitary group in Sudan, have been identified as the perpetrators behind the raids.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) director Catherine Russell, released a statement on July 16 to bring awareness to the situation in Sudan.

She described these attacks as "an outrage," saying they "represent a terrifying escalation of violence and a total disregard for human life, international humanitarian law, and the most basic principles of humanity."

UNICEF expressed their condolences to families and to those affected by recent events, saying that "civilians – especially children – should never be targeted."

It also urged that all violations against the people of North Kordofan should be independently investigated and that "those responsible must be

held accountable."

In recent weeks, the situation in North Kordofan has worsened, increasing displacement, civilian casualties, and restrictions on humanitarian access.

In April 2023, the RSF began its civil war against the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), which extended into Kordofan territory. The attack this past weekend was one of many in the past years.

These attacks are severely threatening the safety of children in North Kordofan, and as of 2024, 6% of violations against children in Sudan occurred in North Kordofan.

These violations, which include the killing and maiming of children, also extend to sexual violence and abduction. As of this year, these trends have only increased, becoming even more alarming.

UNICEF describes this violence against children as "unconscionable" and something that "must end now."

In her statement, Russell called for all parties involved in the conflict to end the violence they are responsible for to protect the civilians, including young children, from any further damage. **Grace Lathrop, Vatican News**



Internally displaced people from Khartoum gather at their shelter in South Kordofan, Sudan.

MEMORIAM

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2nd Anniversary
In Loving Memory of



Martin Loo Yew Phin
Born : 14.11.1932
Departed : 31.7.2023

*"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love.
But the greatest of these is love."
(1 Corinthians 13:13)
Forever in our hearts.*

16th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of
Gurunathan Selbadurai
7th March 1944 – 29th July 2009

*"For we are well aware
that when the tent that
houses us on earth is
folded up, there is a house
for us from God,
not made by human
hands but everlasting,
in the heavens"
2 Cor 5: 1*

May you rest in the arms
of the Lord who formed
you from the dust
of the earth.

Deeply missed by
wife, children,
grandchildren, all family
members and friends.



4th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of Our Beloved Pa



Mr Michael Joseph
Departed: 25.07.2021

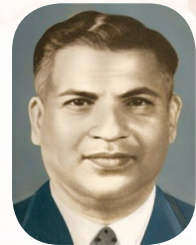
*Dearest Pa
It has been four years
since you left us.
Yet your presence
still lingers
in every corner
of our lives.
We feel you in our
thoughts, our prayers,
and the quiet
moments.
Your love, strength,
and wisdom
continue to guide us
each day.*

Deeply missed
and forever loved.
Rest in Peace.

In Ever Loving Memory of

66th Anniversary

25th Anniversary



VICTOR MARIE AIME
Departed: 13.9.1959



JOSEPHINE AIME
Departed: 31.7.2000

'He that endureth to the end, shall be saved.'
Matt 10:22

*Though the years have passed, not a day goes by
without thoughts of you.*

Deeply missed and fondly remembered all your
loved ones who hold you dear in hearts and prayer.

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30th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of



**Mejar (Rtd)
Christopher
Ratnasingam KAT, psc**
Departed: 22-07-1995

*In thoughts, dad,
you are always near,
still loved, still missed,
still very dear.
But happy memories
we keep forever
Of days when we
were all together.
In heaven you rest,
no worries, no pain
but in our hearts
you will always remain.*

Always loved
and missed by
Wife, children,
daughters-in-law,
son-in-law,
grandchildren
and loved ones.

47th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of



Saurimah De Cruze
Departed: 24-07-1978

*Though the years
have passed by, Mum,
you are always
remembered in our hearts
and, most of all, in our
prayers.*

Always remembered
and missed by
your loved ones.

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Youth's 'Walk of Hope' an inspiration to all

BUKIT MERTAJAM: A young pilgrim's remarkable journey of faith and compassion has captured hearts across Malaysia. Jownathan Roy Michael, a youth from Seremban, completed a prayer-filled pilgrimage on foot to the Minor Basilica of St Anne in Bukit Mertajam, Penang — a journey of over 300 kilometres — in time for the Feast of St Anne 2025.



He also expressed deep gratitude to those who supported his journey through companionship, prayer, and charitable donations. "Your generosity gave this journey even deeper meaning. You helped turn prayer into action, and hope into help."

In a message welcoming Jownathan and all pilgrims to the annual feast, Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang, praised the young man's witness of faith and solidarity.

Dubbed the "Walk of Hope," Jownathan's pilgrimage was far more than a physical feat. At every step, every church and rest stop along the way, he lifted up prayers for those most in need — the sick, the dying, the hungry, the orphaned, the forgotten, the barren, and victims of injustice.

"This pilgrimage was not just a physical act, but a spiritual offering," Jownathan shared. "Faith isn't just something we carry — it's something we walk out, every day, together."

Calling him a true grandson of St Anne, the cardinal highlighted the purpose behind Jownathan's pilgrimage: to walk on behalf of the oppressed and victims of corruption and exploitation — a powerful reminder of the Church's call to be a voice for the voiceless.

Cardinal Sebastian also warmly welcomed all pilgrims to the Feast of St Anne, extending his blessings with a heartfelt message: "You are all pilgrims of hope."

2026 PILGRIMAGES

EX KUL

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14D Marian Shrines

Italy - France - Spain - Portugal

Highlights:

- Papal Blessings
- St. Peter's Basilica
- Fly from Rome to Lourdes
- Shrine of Lourdes
- St. Ignatius Sanctuary
- Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela
- Douro River Cruise
- Port Wine Tasting
- Lucia's Memorial
- Shrine of Fatima
- Eucharistic Miracle of Santarem

03 MAY

20 SEP

04 OCT



RM 15,900 p/p

15D Medjugorje + Eastern Europe

Croatia - Bosnia - Hungary - Poland - Czech R.

Highlights:

- Mostar
- Apparation Hill, Medjugorje
- Danube River Cruise
- Matthias Church & Fisherman Bastian
- Divine Mercy Sanctuary
- House of St. John Paul II
- Prague Castle
- Jasna Gora Black Madonna Monastery
- Auschwitz-Birkenau
- Wieliczka Saltmine

24 APR

16 OCT

RM 16,900 p/p



11D El Camino Walk - Portuguese Route

Lisbon - Fatima - Porto - Tui - O Porrino - Pontevedra - Redondela - Caldas De Reis - Santiago De Compostela - Padron - O Milladoiro - Muxia - Costa Da Morte - Cee - Fisterra - Santiago De Compostela

What is the Camino Walk?

Also known as "The Way of Saint James", it is a network of trails that lead to the Shrine of St James the Apostle and Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela (one of the three most holiest Catholic sites)

17 MAR



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TRIDUUM & SOLEMNITY OF St. Pio of Pietrelcina 2025

St. Pio
A SERVANT OF MERCY



HOLY TRIDUUM

Church of the Holy Family, Ulu Tiram

- Thursday | **18 September 2025** | 8PM
Theme | **A MAN OF PRAYER**
- Friday | **19 September 2025** | 8PM
Theme | **A MAN OF HOPE**
- Saturday | **20 September 2025** | 6PM
Theme | **A MAN OF TRUST**

SOLEMNITY OF ST. PIO OF PIETRELCINA

St. Pio's Spirituality Centre, Ulu Tiram

- Sunday | **21 September 2025** | 10:30AM
Theme | **GOD'S MERCY AND LOVE**

Divine Mercy Devotion And Healing Prayers | 3PM

PREACHER
Friar Michael Raymond, OFM Cap.
Parish Priest of Divine Mercy,
Penang



Donations and contributions are most welcomed to defray the cost of the celebration of the Feast of St. Pio. Thank you for your generosity.

For directions to the Centre, kindly use Waze, come first to the Sanctuary Memorial Park, Ulu Tiram, and then to St. Pio's Friary & Spirituality Centre.



For More Information Contact Us: ☎+6012-290 0547 ☎+6016-850 8002