

Keep AI under Human Control

VATICAN: Pope Leo XIV has called for artificial intelligence to be “disarmed” for the sake of humanity, warning of the growing dangers posed by autonomous weapons systems and unchecked technological power.

Speaking at a Vatican press conference on May 25 to present his first encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas: On Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence*, the Holy Father said his conversations with industry leaders, scientists, educators and families had strengthened his conviction that AI must always remain under human and ethical control.

Pope Leo signed *Magnifica Humanitas* on May 15, marking the 135th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII’s landmark 1891 social encyclical on labour and capital written during the Industrial Revolution. The timing underscored the Church’s effort to address the social and moral challenges posed by a new technological age.

“Artificial intelligence needs to be disarmed,” Pope Leo XIV said, describing how he had listened not only to enthusiastic tech innovators, but also to “very troubling voices” who warned of increasingly autonomous weapons systems “practically beyond any human reach to govern them effectively.”

The Pope also highlighted concerns about algorithms affecting access to healthcare, employment and security based on “data tainted by prejudice and injustice.”

“Magnifica Humanitas was born

from listening,” he said in the Synod Hall at the Vatican. “Parents and teachers are deeply concerned for the future of younger generations.”

Drawing a comparison between artificial intelligence and nuclear energy, Pope Leo stressed that both must serve the common good rather than become instruments of domination or destruction. Quoting St Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians — “Let us not sleep as others do, but let us keep awake” — the Pope urged vigilance in confronting the ethical challenges posed by AI.

A significant portion of the encyclical focuses on the use of AI in warfare, with Pope Leo calling for “the most rigorous ethical constraints” and proactive peacebuilding efforts to curb a growing technological arms race. He also stated that the traditional “just war” theory, which has often been used to justify conflict, is now outdated in an age of increasingly sophisticated weapons technologies.

The Pope’s appearance at the Vatican press conference was itself considered unusual, as pontiffs do not typically attend such presentations. Also present was Christopher Olah, co-founder of the AI research firm Anthropic, which developed the Claude AI assistant.

Olah warned that AI could potentially displace human labour on a massive scale and stressed the importance of having thoughtful critics outside the technology industry carefully monitor developments in the field.

“That is why, if we want this technology to go well, it is enormously important that there be people outside those incentives — people who care about things going well and insist on safety, who are paying close attention, who are willing to say hard things,” Olah said. “We need informed critics who will tell the labs when we are failing. We need moral voices that the incentives cannot bend.”

Though not a believer, Olah praised the Church for taking up what he described as

an important work of discernment on AI and called on religious communities, civil society, academics and governments to take the Pope’s concerns seriously and help “push events in a better direction.”

Pope Leo thanked Olah for participating in the launch of the encyclical, describing the exchange between the Church and the technology sector as “a great sign of hope.”

“What a great sign of hope that, with our differences, we can listen to one another,” the Pope said. “It clearly bespeaks the gravity of the moment.”

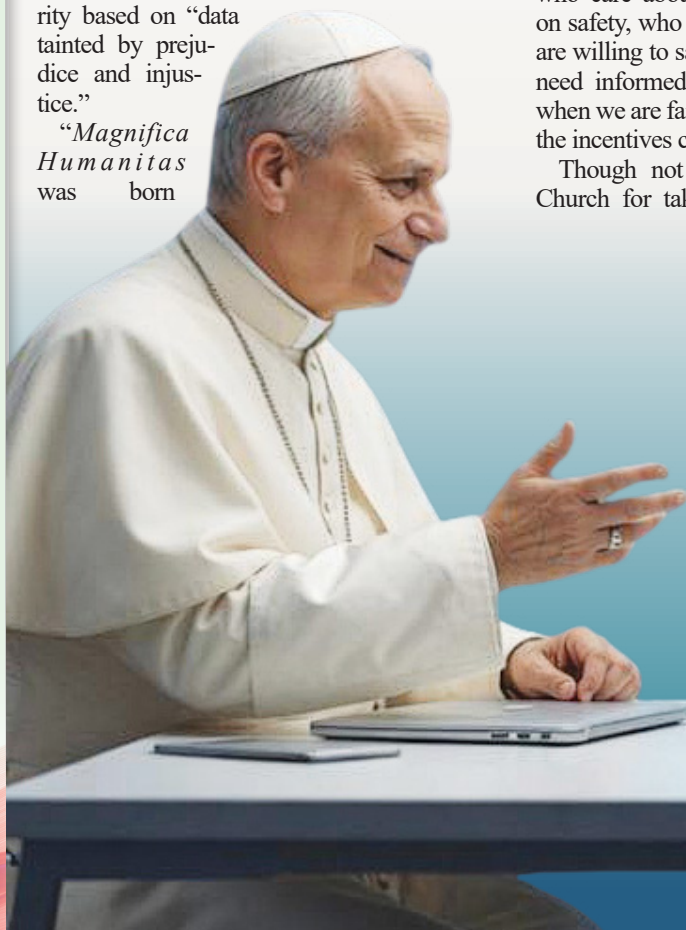
While warning about the dangers of AI, Pope Leo also emphasised the need to build a future rooted in human dignity and solidarity. Referring to the opening lines of the encyclical, he said humanity today faces “a pivotal choice: either to construct a new Tower of Babel or to build the city in which God and humanity dwell together.”

Reflecting on his missionary experience in Peru, particularly after the devastating 2017 floods, the pope said rebuilding society requires more than restoring physical structures.

“Rebuilding does not mean simply replacing what has been destroyed,” he said. “It means repairing bonds, restoring trust, and reawakening hope in the future.”

Pope Leo concluded by urging Catholics and people of goodwill to engage seriously with the challenges posed by AI, reminding the world that every human person remains “unique and irreplaceable.” **Agencies**

The full text of the encyclical can be accessed at: <https://sl1nk.com/1ddu3t9>



Prayer for the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 (MPC2026)

Lord God,
You call us to walk together
as Your People,
drawn into the life of communion
of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Guide us as we prepare for
the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026.

Teach us to listen deeply,
to discern faithfully,
and to trust where You are leading us.

We place before You the four areas we
are discerning together.

Bless our families,
that they may be places of love,
faith, forgiveness, and hope.

Renew our Church,
that we may grow in communion,
participation, and joyful witness
to the Gospel.

Open our hearts to the cry of creation,
that we may care for the earth
with reverence, responsibility,
and gratitude.

Guide our life in society,
that we may seek justice, promote
peace, and stand in solidarity with the
poor and the vulnerable.

As pastoral pathways emerge
from our discernment,
may they enrich and strengthen
our local faith communities.

With Mary, Mother of the Church,
who pondered Your Word and walked
in faith, teach us to walk together
in hope.

Keep us rooted in Christ,
attentive to one another,
and open to the work of
Your Holy Spirit.

May this Convention help us live more
faithfully as one Catholic Church of
Malaysia, serving in this land we love.

Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Returning home renewed in Spirit

Our bishops have returned home from their *ad limina apostolorum* visit to Rome. The meetings have concluded, the official photographs published, and the demanding schedules replaced once again by the familiar rhythm of diocesan life. Yet the deeper significance of the pilgrimage does not end with their return. In many ways, its true fruits are only now beginning to unfold within the life of the Church in this region.

While many may view the *ad limina* visit as a series of meetings and formal obligations in Rome, its deeper significance lies in reminding the Church that it journeys as one body in communion. In today's increasingly hurried world, where gatherings are often reduced to schedules, protocols and official photographs, it is easy to overlook the spiritual heart of such a pilgrimage. Yet for the Catholic Church, especially for local Churches like Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, the *ad limina* visit remains something far deeper, a reminder that the Church is not made up of isolated communities scattered across nations, but a people united in faith, mission and communion.

The very phrase *ad limina apostolorum* means "to the thresholds of the Apostles." Bishops travel to Rome not simply to attend meetings, but to pray at the tombs of Sts Peter and Paul and to renew their unity with the Successor of Peter. At its heart, the pilgrimage is a return to the roots of faith, communion and mission; a moment where local Churches reflect on the challenges they face and where the Holy Spirit may be leading them next.

For the Episcopal Conference of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, this year's visit carried particular significance. The Church throughout the world is navigating enormous transitions — rising secularism, rapid technological change, the growing influence of artificial intelligence, economic uncertainty, family struggles and increasing mental health concerns, together with the continued call to synodality. Families carry emotional and financial burdens, while many young people continue searching for meaning, stability and belonging in a world



shaped by digital culture, social fragmentation and constant online pressures.

Yet what stood out most throughout the six-day pilgrimage was not anxiety or fear, but fraternity.

The images emerging from Rome showed bishops walking together through the streets, praying side by side, sharing meals, laughing, reflecting and engaging deeply with one another. Some of the most meaningful moments unfolded away from official meetings, with bishops praying together before dawn and sharing moments of fraternity far from home. These scenes reflected something the Church, and indeed the world, urgently needs to rediscover: the importance of journeying together.

This spirit lies at the heart of synodality. Synodality is not merely about meetings or structures. It is about learning once again how to walk together as the People of God; listening attentively, discerning prayerfully and accompanying one another patiently.

For the Church in this region, that call carries particular significance. Catholics in Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei live within multicultural and multireligious societies where dialogue, coexistence and sensitivity are already part of daily life. The bishops brought to Rome experiences shaped by harmony, pastoral creativity and the realities of living among people of many races, cultures and faiths. In many ways, this region offers a

hopeful witness to a divided world, showing that unity does not require uniformity, and that diversity can become a strength rather than a threat.

Perhaps the most moving aspect of the pilgrimage was the bishops' encounter with Pope Leo XIV. For Catholics, communion with the Pope reflects unity in faith, mission and pastoral responsibility. Seeing the bishops gathered with the Holy Father reassured the faithful that the local Churches of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei remain deeply connected to the universal Church.

Ultimately, the *ad limina* visit reminds the faithful that the Church is never meant to become inward-looking or self-preserving. Every pilgrimage to Rome must eventually lead back outward — back to the people, parishes, schools, homes and communities entrusted to the Church's care. The true fruits of the pilgrimage will be seen in how the bishops return renewed — more attentive to the people they serve, more united among themselves, and more courageous in leading the Church through today's realities.

And perhaps that remains the true purpose of every pilgrimage — not simply to travel to a sacred place, but to return home carrying Christ more deeply into the lives of others.


Patricia Pereira

• See also back page

Reflecting on our
Sunday Readings
with Dr Steven Selvaraju

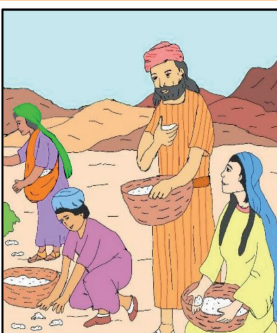
The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (A)
Readings: Deuteronomy 8: 2-3, 14-16 | 1 Corinthians 10: 16-17 | Gospel: John 6: 51-58

JESUS, SOURCE OF LIFE AND COMMUNION



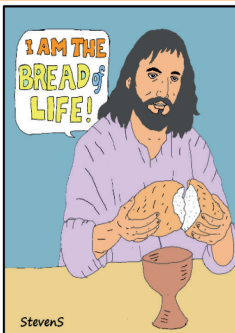
This Sunday the Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, also known as the Feast of Corpus Christi.

The scripture readings remind us that the Eucharist is not merely a liturgical ritual but a manifestation of God's constant and abundant love for His people, and is a source of living communion between God and all believers.



God's love for His people is seen by His provision of water and food, a miraculous source of nourishment for the Israelites, during the Exodus.


This is why Moses tells the people not to forget that it was God's gracious and salvific acts of love and mercy that ensured their survival in the wilderness.



I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE!


God's love for His people is most perfectly revealed in the Person of Jesus Christ. Jesus, the "new Moses" gave His flesh for the salvation of the world, and He continues to give Himself and to communicate His life in the Eucharist. He not only gives His flesh but is Himself the Bread of Life.

Stevens

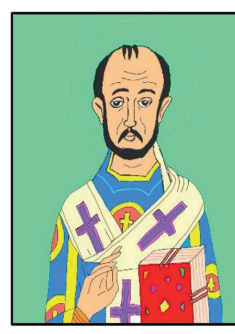


In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul speaks of the cup of blessing that makes them sharers in the blood of Christ. The bread they share binds them to Christ and to one another since "though there are many of us, we form a single body..."

As such, they are nourished by this sharing as the Body of Christ.



The celebration of Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, therefore, serves as a public profession of faith in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, who continues to nourish and sustain the faithful through His Body and Blood. It also reminds us of God's unconditional love for humanity.



"How many of you say: I should like to see His face, His garments, His shoes. You do see Him, you eat Him. He gives to you, not only that you may see Him, but also to be your food and nourishment!"

— St John Chrysostom.

Talk highlights fundamental rights and freedoms

MENTAKAB: The Catholic Lawyers' Society Kuala Lumpur (CLS) has in recent years been actively advocating for various causes affecting society and the wider community. Most recently, on May 16, the Society was invited to the Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help to deliver a talk on *Constitutional Safeguards* — an area of fundamental importance amid growing concerns over injustices, the increasing number of stateless children, issues related to conversion to Islam, and cases involving the deprivation of fundamental rights and liberties.

Recognising that knowledge is empowering, the CLS sought to create greater awareness on these issues while also addressing pertinent questions raised by participants. Many attendees appreciated the session as a safe and supportive space where they could openly share personal predicaments and seek clarification on matters affecting them and their families.

A similar talk had earlier been conducted at the Church of the Holy Family, Kajang on March 25, as part of the Society's continuing efforts to educate and empower the faithful on constitutional rights and legal protections.

The talk was held at the church itself, set amidst sprawling and scenic grounds that provided a peaceful setting away from the hustle and bustle of city life. Located in a quaint town with a warm and welcoming community, the venue proved ideal for meaningful dialogue and learning. Parishioners and participants were eager to deepen their understanding of their constitutional rights,

not only to safeguard their own liberties, but also to better assist others in their community who may be facing various challenges.

The session was conducted in both English and Bahasa Malaysia by five keynote speakers — Kevin De Rozario, Annou Xavier, Edwin Tan, Calista Chin and Cynthia Gnanasekaran. The crowd comprised individuals who were genuinely interested in the subject matter, as many found the issues discussed relatable to present-day realities. For some, the talk also served as a timely precautionary guide to avoid becoming entangled in situations, particularly those involving sensitive religious matters, where reversing one's actions may prove difficult, or even impossible.

Drawing from their extensive legal experience in handling such matters, the speakers were able to address participants' concerns comprehensively. Kevin De Rozario, the acting president of CLS together with vice president, Annou Xavier, responded thoughtfully to the many questions raised by the audience.

The session aimed to educate participants on freedom of religion and the relevant provisions within the Federal Constitution. Attention was given to Article 3(1), which upholds the right of non-Muslims to practise their re-

ligion peacefully and without interference in the country. Article 11(4), however, was also explained as providing restrictions against the propagation of other religions to Muslims.

The speakers also touched on past controversies involving raids on Christian places of worship and the confiscation of Bibles and Christian materials, noting concerns over the implications such incidents have on religious freedom and the ability of individuals to practise their faith without fear or intimidation.

The talk continued with a comprehensive overview of other constitutional rights and protections, including equality, freedom of speech, assembly and association, property rights, citizenship, and the registration of children. Special focus was given to citizenship provisions under the Federal Constitution, particularly Article 19B, which states that a child found abandoned or exposed in any place shall be presumed to have been born there to a mother permanently resident in that location. Participants were informed that greater awareness of citizenship laws and registration procedures under special circumstances could help reduce the growing number of stateless children in the country.

The speakers also highlighted provisions

concerning the special rights of *Bumiputera* as well as the natives of Sabah and Sarawak. Attention was further drawn to Orang Asli rights under the Aboriginal Peoples Act 1954, including landmark cases such as *Sagong Tasi v State of Selangor* [2002], which dealt with trespass and the destruction of customary Orang Asli land (*tanah adat*).

The final session was presented by young lawyer Cynthia Gnanasekaran, who addressed the topic of religious conversion. Several high-profile cases, including those involving Lina Joy, Sgt Moorthy and Shamala Sathiyaseelan, were discussed to illustrate the legal and social complexities surrounding conversion matters in Malaysia. The audience listened attentively as the speakers explained the far-reaching implications and legal challenges involved, particularly in cases concerning renunciation of religion and matters falling under the jurisdiction of the *Syariah* Court.

The session proved to be both educational and insightful for those present. At the conclusion of the talk, Fr Terrance Thomas expressed his gratitude to the speakers for sharing their expertise and presented them with tokens of appreciation on behalf of the parish.



KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

June

8	1st National Education Conference for Malaysian Mission Schools
13	BECCOT-BECAT Assembly
13	Feast – Church of St Anthony
14	Confirmation – Church of St Francis Xavier, PJ




PENANG DIOCESE

Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

June

8-10	Peninsular Malaysia Deacons' Gathering – Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam
11	Meeting with Seminarians Ashley Chau & Patrick Hilary at 4.00pm – Bishop's Office
12	Keynote Address at 9.00pm – Seeds Annual Conference
13	Final Profession of Sr Nantini Laurin Kowan, FSP at 11.30am



MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

June

10	Meeting – Diocesan Finance Council, MAJODI Centre
12	Mass – Opening for Burning Hearts 2026, Minor Basilica of St Anne, Penang
12-14	Feast – Church of the Sacred Heart, Kampar



Malacca Johore Diocese

News Update #274



Walking the cobbled stones!
Cobbled stones lead us to Rome. Some stick out. Others worn on the edges. But they are weathered, firm and enduring. The uneven road trips you. They are hard on the feet and are uncompromising. It hurts. It does not care if you are a traveller, a tourist, a pilgrim or a bishop on *Ad Limina* visit. The way is uneven, but firm and solid. Smooth, tightly packed and beautifully woven. Our faith journey is the way of the cobbled stones. Trodding carefully, stepping out determinedly and knowing where your heart is, the cobbled stones take you there.

The Timing was Superb. It was the week leading to the Pentecost, *Pentecost* in Rome.
It was a *pilgrimage* to the Basilicas of St John Lateran, St Paul Outside the Wall, St Peter's and St Mary Major. It was a time of reigniting one's love for the Church of Christ.
"Bishops, you are *Proclaimers* and never forget, that you are *Protectors* of the People of God like St Paul", Cardinal William Goh preached.
Selamat Hari Kaamatan, Gawai and Panen to the East Malaysians and Indonesian Catholics. It was a '*haj*' time too.
The Pope's first encyclical "*AI and the Dignity of Man*" took the world's stage.

Local takes! Providing and Protecting Times
The MCMC said that new measures, Online Safety Act (ONSA) will be introduced from June 1 to protect children and reduce their exposure to harmful content on online platforms.
Concerned: More and more young

workers, from the highly skilled, leave within two years.
Efforts to accelerate legislation to protect the *rights and welfare of older citizens* is underway in a rapidly ageing population.
The Police stated that a total of 35,470 *online fraud* cases and losses reaching RM1.5 billion were recorded throughout 2024.
World Schooling, beyond textbooks and four walls, that immerses children into different cultures, environments and everyday realities, is practised in Vietnam, Bosnia and Italy.

Reading the Signs: Our Humanity, God's Gift!
In the 2026 *World Communications Day* message, Pope Leo XIV reminded us that our faces and voices are sacred — not products to be replaced or simulated, but gifts that reveal our humanity and God's love. In a world shaped by AI and digital noise, may we never lose the courage to think, relate, and communicate with truth, wisdom, and love.


A Thought for the Week: My BFF!
Horror gripped the heart of the World War I soldier as he saw his lifelong friend fall in battle. Caught in a trench with continuous gunfire whizzing over his head, the soldier asked his lieutenant if he might go out into the "no man's land" between the trenches to bring his fallen comrade back.
"You can go," said the lieutenant, "but I don't think it will be worth it. Your friend is probably dead and you may throw your life away." The lieutenant's advice didn't matter, and the soldier went anyway. Miraculously he managed to reach his friend, hoist

him onto his shoulder and bring him back to their company's trench. As the two of them tumbled together to the bottom of the trench, the officer checked the wounded soldier, and then looked kindly at his friend.
"I told you it wouldn't be worth it," he said. "Your friend is dead and you are mortally wounded." "It was worth it, though, sir," said the soldier. "What do you mean; worth it?" responded the Lieutenant. "Your friend is dead." "Yes, Sir" the private answered. "But it was worth it because when I got to him, he was still alive and I had the satisfaction of hearing him say, "Jim..., I knew you'd come."

QnQ? Q asks? Why do people stay with (or leave) religion?
Interesting findings from a study: these findings depict a religious landscape marked not by sudden collapse but by gradual reconfiguration. *Belief, meaning, and personal experience remain central drivers of affiliation, while institutional credibility and cultural alignment increasingly shape decisions to stay or leave.*

The Spirit @ Work: "The Holy Spirit transforms and renews us, creates harmony and unity, and gives us courage and joy for mission." *Pope Francis*

Something to tickle you: "No sin, failure, humiliation, or exclusion can diminish the profound value of a human life that God has willed and called into being." *Pope Leo XIV*



Bishop Bernard Paul

Michaelians celebrate founders' day with faith, joy and Lasallian spirit

IPOH: St Michael's Institution came alive with joy, gratitude and Lasallian pride as students, teachers, alumni and guests gathered to celebrate Founders' Day in honour of St John Baptist de La Salle, whose vision of education rooted in faith and compassion continues to inspire generations.

The celebration began on the morning of May 14 with a vibrant assembly that set the tone for a day filled with reflection, unity and thanksgiving. Distinguished guests were warmly welcomed, including Chan Kok Keong, chairman of the Perak Regional Lasallian Education Council. Michaelians stood proudly together as the national and state anthems rang through the school grounds, followed by morning prayers that invited the community to reflect on the deeper meaning of their Lasallian heritage.

In an inspiring address, Chan reflected on the extraordinary life and mission of St John Baptist de La Salle, the French priest and educational reformer who transformed education by making quality schooling accessible to poor and underprivileged children. His courageous vision of forming hearts and minds through faith, service and community continues to shape the identity

and spirit of St Michael's Institution today.

One of the highlights of the morning was the unveiling of the Founders' Day banner by the school administration and invited guests — a symbolic gesture representing hope, resilience and the enduring unity of the Michaelian family. The celebration continued with a joyful cake-cutting ceremony, accompanied by cheers and laughter that echoed across the campus.

With great pride and enthusiasm, students and staff joined voices in singing the *One Lasallian* anthem, reaffirming their shared identity and mission. The celebration reached a spirited climax with the much-loved Michaelian Rally, where school spirit and fraternity shone brightly.

The spirit of thanksgiving continued on the actual Founders' Day, May 15, with a solemn Eucharistic celebration presided over by Fr George Vaithynathan. In a heartfelt homily themed *From Struggle to Joy*, Fr George reminded the school community that struggles and hardships are part of every human journey — whether faced by students, teachers or workers — but that no challenge is ever wasted in God's hands.

Drawing inspiration from the life of St



John Baptist de La Salle, Fr George reflected on how God often uses trials to mould character, deepen faith and strengthen perseverance. He reminded the Michaelians that De La Salle always placed young people at the centre of his mission, believing firmly that every student deserved dignity, opportunity and hope.

In that same spirit, Fr George encouraged the school community to continue building lives rooted in discipline, faith, compassion and service. Through these values, he said, individuals discover the strength to overcome difficulties and the courage to journey towards hope and joy.

The celebration concluded with a brief

but uplifting reflection by the chairman, who reaffirmed the school's unwavering commitment to the Lasallian mission. Echoing the enduring Lasallian call to care for "the last, the lost and the least," he reminded the Michaelians that true education is not merely about academic success, but about forming compassionate hearts willing to uplift and accompany others.

As the celebrations came to a close, the Michaelian family departed with renewed purpose and gratitude — inspired once more by the timeless vision of their founder and reminded that through faith, perseverance and service, every struggle can lead to joy, hope and transformation.

Christian educators celebrate vocation of teaching

KUALA LUMPUR: Christian educators from across denominations gathered in unity, faith and gratitude for the Klang Valley Christian Teachers' Day Celebration held at Stella Maris International School on May 16.

Organised and sponsored by the Catholic Teachers' Association Malaysia (CTAM) in collaboration with the Malayan Christian Schools' Council (MCSC) and Teachers' Christian Fellowship Malaysia (TCF), the celebration honoured the dedication and vital role of teachers in Christian education and nation-building.

The day began with a solemn Eucharistic celebration at the school chapel, presided over by Archbishop Julian Leow and celebrated by Fr Alvin Ho, the ecclesiastical assistant for the Catholic teachers association.

In a heartfelt and reflective homily, Archbishop Julian likened the vocation of teachers to that of priests, reminding educators that their mission extends far beyond academic instruction.

"Teachers are the pulse of the nation," he said. "The strength of that pulse depends on the values, example and dedication of our



educators, who help shape not only students, but the future citizens of our country."

He encouraged teachers to recognise the sacredness of their calling as formators of hearts, minds and character, especially in a world increasingly in need of compassion, wisdom and integrity.

After the Mass, participants were inspired by a motivational talk delivered by Nelson Renganathan, Executive Chairman of the Asia Pacific TVET Institute. Centred on the theme "Teacher Champions, the Nation's Pulse," his presentation highlighted the

transformative role of educators as mentors who integrate faith, values and learning in shaping the whole person.

Dato' Dr Nelson also drew a distinction between a teacher and an educator, noting that an educator embraces the broader responsibility of nurturing the holistic development of every child — intellectually, emotionally, morally and spiritually.

The celebration continued with an energetic session of games and team-building activities at the school's Sports Centre, fostering friendship, joy and

collaboration among participants. Activities such as Bible Charades, Scripture Puzzles, a "Faith Relay," and a lively Freeze Dance brought together teachers of all ages in a shared atmosphere of fun and fellowship.

Prizes and certificates were awarded for categories including Champion Team, Best Team Spirit, Most Creative Team, Most Fun Team and Best Dressed Team.

The event concluded with a fellowship lunch, offering participants an opportunity to reconnect, share experiences and strengthen bonds across Christian communities.

Also present were retired educators and distinguished guests from various Christian denominations. CTAM additionally sponsored a delegation from the Catholic Undergraduate Teachers' Society (CUTES) of Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI), who travelled from Tanjung Malim, Perak, to participate in the celebration.

Summing up the spirit of the gathering, Fr Alvin reminded participants that "teachers are not only educators of the mind, but formators of the heart and spirit," united in a shared mission to nurture faith, wisdom and compassion in future generations.



Positive response for St Jude parish's blood donation campaign

RAWANG: A blood donation campaign held at the Church of St Jude received a positive response from the local community. The annual event, jointly organised by the Parish Integral Human Development Ministry (PIHDM) and Pusat Darah Negara, took place from 8.30am to 1.00pm on May 17.

There was also a special Employees Provident Fund (EPF) enquiry booth to provide assistance to parishioners with account enquiries, contribution matters, withdrawal procedures and naming of nominees.

A total of 60 people responded to the call to donate blood, while another 20 visitors sought assistance and clarification at the EPF enquiry booth. One of the most encouraging sights during the campaign was the growing participation of youths, many of whom were seen registering and filling out forms to become blood donors.

The organisers described the campaign as a meaningful and worthwhile effort in serving the community. The annual event continues to play an important role in creating awareness

on the importance of blood donation and helping to save lives.

Parish priest, Fr Simon Labrooy, expressed his satisfaction and appreciation for the effort shown by the organising team, volunteers, and donors who contributed their time and support towards the campaign's success.

Meals were also prepared for all medical personnel and volunteers from the PIHDM team as a gesture of appreciation for their dedication and service throughout the event. **Mercy Almeida Stellus**

First Kenyah Capuchin makes final vows

CHERAS: Bro Pius Kallang made his perpetual profession as a Capuchin Friar on May 23. By taking his vows, he has permanently committed his life to the service of God, the Church, and the poor.

The Eucharistic celebration was held at the Church of St Francis of Assisi and presided over by Fr Gilbert James OFMCap, Custos of the Capuchin Custody of Malaysia and Singapore, with almost all the Malaysian Capuchin priests concelebrating.

Bro Pius, a native-born Kenyah from the Diocese of Miri, makes history as the first Sarawakian from the Kenyah community to join the Capuchin order. His solemn profession marks the culmination of nine years of rigorous religious formation undertaken across Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines.

Reflecting on the theme chosen by Bro Pius, "Lesser Brother," Fr Gilbert highlighted the deeply intercultural nature of the Capuchin vocation.

"In a world that constantly teaches us to rise higher, become more powerful, more visible, more admired... the Gospel invites us to become

smaller, humbler, and more available for others," Fr Gilbert declared.

Drawing from the Acts of the Apostles and the spirituality of St Francis of Assisi, Fr Gilbert explained that the Capuchin vocation is rooted in authentic fraternity.

"Fraternity is not just sharing a roof," he said. "It is sharing life, burdens, joys, weaknesses, prayer and mission." He added that the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience proclaim a radical truth to the world: "Christ is enough."

The Custos reminded Brother Pius that religious life requires continual self-emptying, mirroring the grain of wheat that must fall to the ground and die to bear fruit. "Your greatest witness will not be your words, but your joy," Fr Gilbert reminded him. "A joyful friar is one of the most powerful witnesses in the world."

Following the homily, Bro Pius underwent the formal examination of the candidate before publicly professing his solemn vows in the Seraphic Order. Despite the simplicity of the celebration, the Mass beautifully reflected Bro Pius' roots through traditional dances performed by his family members who

travelled from Sarawak to witness the milestone.

In his thanksgiving speech after the Mass, Bro Pius began with the words "Deo Gratias" (Thank God) and reflected humbly on his nine-year journey.

"I know very well that there are better candidates for this opportune way of life, more qualified than me," he shared emotionally. "But He has smiled at me."

He expressed deep gratitude to his parents, Peter Kallang and Maria Usul, whom he affectionately referred to as "Amma and Mami," for passing down "the greatest gift of all" — his faith. He also thanked his siblings, Pete, Paulina, and Priscilla, jokingly calling them his "first benefactors" who deserve a special place in heaven for bearing with him.

Bro Pius paid special tribute to several deceased mentors who were instrumental in his journey, including his aunt, Sr Celestine Ho, and Sr Jane Pui, SPS, who hosted him during his early days of discernment. He also extended his appreciation to the Capuchin friars in Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines, who guided him through every stage of



Friar Pius Joseph and Friar Michael Teng acting as witnesses as Friar Pius Kallang makes his vows in front of the Custos, Friar Gilbert James OFMCap.

formation, singling out his vocation directors, spiritual guides, and his companion, Bro Tony Bingkuan OFMCap.

Addressing the young people present, Bro Pius encouraged those discerning a religious vocation not to be afraid to surrender their lives fully to Christ. Quoting G.K. Chesterton, he urged: "Make your relationship with Christ less a religion, more of a love affair."

"If God is calling you, respond generously," Bro Pius said. "You may lose certain comforts and plans and securities, but you will discover joy and freedom that the world cannot give."

In his concluding remarks, Fr Gilbert thanked Bro Pius' parents for their immense generosity in offering their son to the service of God and the Church. He acknowledged the

many benefactors and parishioners whose financial and prayerful support sustain the formation of Capuchin friars, noting that "behind every friar stands a community of faith, love, sacrifice and prayer."

Fr Gilbert also hinted at an upcoming charity dinner this September aimed at supporting the custody's ongoing friar formation efforts.

"The Church still needs generous men and women who are willing to dedicate their lives completely to Christ and His people," Fr Gilbert concluded. "The world may promise success, comfort, but I can guarantee true joy comes from giving your life for something greater than yourself."

The celebration concluded with fellowship at the parish hall, marking a joyful new chapter for the Capuchin fraternity in Malaysia-Singapore.

Mary's message of peace and truth celebrated in Bagan Datuk

BAGAN DATUK, Perak: The 64th Feast of Our Lady of Fatima was celebrated at the Chapel of Our Lady of Fatima, Ladang Bagan Datuk, on May 16, drawing parishioners and pilgrims from near and far for the annual celebration.

The feast began with Rosary and novena prayers, followed by Mass, procession, benediction and dinner fellowship that brought together the faithful in prayer and fraternity.

The feast day Mass was celebrated by Fr George Vaithynathan, with chapel administrator, Fr Michael Dass, as concelebrant. Assisting was Deacon Anthony Michael.

Preaching in both English and Tamil, Fr George reflected on this year's theme, *Mary, Our Model in Communicating Genuine Truth*. He reminded the faithful that God is love and truth, without deception or duplicity, and that Jesus revealed the Father's love through both His words and His way of life.

"Jesus did not merely speak the truth — He lived it authentically," said Fr George, encouraging the faithful to examine whether their own words and actions reflect sincerity, peace and compassion.

Reflecting on the apparitions of Our Lady of Fatima, Fr George noted that Mary came not as a figure of power or fear during a time of war, but with a simple message of conversion, peace and spiritual renewal. He highlighted how Mary chose humble shepherd children rather than influential or learned individuals, reminding the congregation that God often speaks through

the humble and ordinary.

Drawing connections to the modern world, Fr George observed that although society today is saturated with news and social media, genuine truth has become increasingly difficult to find.

"Many communicate to manipulate," he said, adding that Mary instead teaches humanity to communicate with humility, honesty and love, always leading others closer to Jesus rather than to oneself.

He also stressed the importance of unity and reconciliation, reminding the faithful that Mary's mission continues to call people back to God and towards deeper communion with one another.

One of the highlights was the procession in honour of Our Lady of Fatima. A beautifully decorated four-wheel drive carrying the statue of Our Lady journeyed through the estate roads and past the homes of estate workers. Holding lighted can-

dles, the faithful prayed the Rosary throughout the 25-minute procession, creating a moving and peaceful public witness of faith.

Upon returning to the chapel grounds, benediction was held.

In his address, organising chairman John Joseph expressed gratitude to God for favourable weather and thanked all who had contributed towards the success of the celebration. He also welcomed visitors and pilgrims who had travelled from various places to participate in the feast.

Special appreciation was extended to Fr George, the clergy, liturgical ministers, donors, sponsors, volunteers and all those involved in preparing the shrine, tents and feast-day arrangements.

Senior parishioner Peter Aw later presented tokens of appreciation to the priests, deacon and altar servers in gratitude for their service. **Bernard Anthony**



Children experience joy of a Marian pilgrimage

PERMATANG TINGGI: Filled with faith, joy and devotion, catechism students and children from Risen Christ Catholic Church embarked on a Marian pilgrimage on May 16 to the Church of the Holy Name of Mary, deepening their love for God and the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The pilgrimage was a beautiful spiritual journey marked by prayer, reflection and fellowship as the children gathered to offer the Rosary to Mother Mary, seeking her loving intercession and blessings. In the peaceful atmosphere of the church, prayers were lifted up for families, studies and personal intentions, allowing the children to experience the comforting presence of the Blessed Mother.

For many of the students, the pilgrimage was their first such experience, making the occasion all the more memorable and meaningful. Their excitement and sincerity were evident as they participated whole-

heartedly in the prayers, reflections and activities throughout the day.

Beyond being a journey of devotion, the pilgrimage also became an opportunity for the children to grow in friendship, unity and community spirit. It reminded them that faith is not only learned in the classroom, but also nurtured through shared moments of prayer and encounter with God.

The experience left many spiritually enriched and grateful for the opportunity to deepen their relationship with Christ through the loving guidance of Mother Mary. They returned home with joyful hearts, renewed faith and cherished memories that will continue to inspire them in their spiritual journey.

As the pilgrimage concluded, prayers were offered that the Blessed Mother would continue to guide, protect and accompany all the catechism students and children as they grow in faith, wisdom and love for Christ. **Annic Maria**

Finding God in silence

KUCHING: Participants gathered at Greccio Retreat House in the Siburan area recently, for a grace-filled day of silence, prayer, reflection and fellowship, finding a peaceful sanctuary away from the busyness and demands of daily life.

Organised by the World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM) Kuching under St Joseph's Cathedral, the retreat invited participants to rest in the presence of God and rediscover the beauty of stillness and contemplative prayer.

WCCM promotes the ancient Christian practice of meditation as a simple yet profound path towards silence, prayer and deeper communion with God. In a world often marked by noise, distractions and constant activity, the gathering served as a gentle reminder of the Lord's invitation to "be still and know" His presence.



The day began with an opening prayer that set a reverent and peaceful tone for the retreat. Participants were later nourished by a reflection from Fr Laurence Freeman OSB, whose teachings have long inspired the global Christian meditation movement. His message centred on the beauty of silence — not as empti-

ness, but as sacred space where God quietly encounters the human heart with love and grace.

Throughout the retreat, participants entered into periods of meditation, personal sharing and quiet reflection. These moments of stillness became opportunities to surrender anxieties, silence inner distractions

and entrust daily burdens to God. In this way, the retreat reflected the Christian understanding of self-care — not self-indulgence, but allowing oneself to be spiritually renewed and restored by the Lord.

A shared lunch, lovingly prepared by the Sisters of St Francis, added warmth and hospitality to the gathering, while tea breaks provided moments for quiet conversation and fellowship.

Nestled amidst vegetable farms about 45 minutes from Kuching, Greccio Retreat House offered an ideal setting for contemplation and prayer. Surrounded by old trees, flowers and fruit trees across its peaceful 10-acre grounds, the retreat centre — under the care of the Sisters of St Francis — became a place where nature itself seemed to invite the soul into silence and rest.

The afternoon programme includ-

ed the Divine Mercy Chaplet, drawing participants into deeper trust in God's compassion and mercy. Blessed with beautiful sunny weather, participants later walked the outdoor Stations of the Cross, prayerfully reflecting on Christ's suffering and love amidst the serenity of the retreat grounds.

Though simple in structure, the retreat became a deeply meaningful experience of grace, renewal and spiritual nourishment. Through silence, prayer, fellowship and the beauty of creation, participants were reminded that true peace and rest are ultimately found in God.

The Spiritual Director of WCCM Kuching is Fr Mark Bonchol. Those interested in learning more about WCCM may visit the WCCM official website <https://wccm.org> or contact Alexandra Wong at +6011-3591 3159 (Kuching).

EOHSJ retreat encourages Christ-centred living

PENANG: The Lieutenancy of Malaysia Penang, of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem (EOHSJ), which is under the spiritual and pastoral guidance of our Grand Prior, Cardinal Sebastian Francis, held its annual retreat from May 15 to 17 at Stella Maris Retreat Centre.

A total of 55 members participated in this spirit-filled gathering, comprising 33 members from the English-speaking section and 22 members from the Mandarin-speaking section. The retreat sessions were led by Sr Margarete Sta Maria FdCC for the English section and Sr Theresa Chew FdCC for the Mandarin section.

The retreat proved to be a deeply enriching and grace-filled experience for all present. From the very beginning, participants were invited



to reflect on their wants and desires from God. Through the inspiring sessions, attendees were reminded that true growth in faith calls for the continual practice of humility, generosity, and gratitude.

Emphasis was placed on adopting a Christ-centred approach in our daily lives in order to attain authentic spiritual growth by walking in the footsteps of Christ. In doing so, our faith flourishes, enabling us to ex-

perience more deeply the meaning, purpose, and joy exemplified by the saints.

Participants were also encouraged to put aside our old selves and untoward habits, allowing the grace of God to transform and work actively in their lives. Reflection was made on how each person has been blessed with different gifts according to the grace bestowed upon them by God and on what stage we were at in

our spiritual journey.

Special attention was given to the role of Mother Mary in our spiritual journey. Her loving presence continually nurtures our desire to grow towards Christian maturity while reminding us of the primacy of grace in our lives.

As the retreat progressed, many participants found that the desires and intentions they had brought before God at the beginning of the

retreat were answered through the profound insights, reflections, and testimonies shared by Sr Margarete, as echoed in the written impressions and reflections of the retreatants.

The Holy Masses throughout the retreat were celebrated by our Grand Prior Coadjutor, Fr Michael Cheah. Retreatants were also blessed with moments of Eucharistic adoration and a meaningful penitential service, which brought about deeper reflection, reconciliation, and renewal.

Above all, the retreat was truly a time of togetherness, fellowship, prayer, and spiritual enrichment for all members present. Appreciation and gratitude to Fr Michael, all Council members and members of the EOHSJ who participated in this annual retreat, Sr Margarete and Sr Theresa for making it a resounding success.

Minor basilica hosts Police Day celebration for Penang contingent

BUKIT MERTAJAM: The Christian community of the Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) Penang Contingent gathered at the Minor Basilica of St Anne May 18 to celebrate the 129th Police Day in a spirit of thanksgiving, prayer and fellowship.

The celebration began with

Mass presided over by Fr Rudolf de Aquiviva, CSE, assisted by Deacons Lazarus Jonathan and Dave Kameron.

Superintendent Jay January Siowou, Chief of Police of the Seberang Perai Selatan District Police Headquarters (IPD), served as patron of this year's Christian

religious ceremony.

Close to 200 members of the PDRM Penang contingent, together with their families and parishioners of St Anne's, attended the celebration.

In his homily, Fr Rudolf reminded the police personnel that their profession is more than just an occupation, but a calling rooted in sacrifice and service.

"It's a sacrifice that each of you makes. When the rakyat faces difficulties, policemen and policewomen are often the brave ones who step forward," he said.

Reflecting on the significance of

Police Day, Fr Rudolf encouraged the officers to see their work as a meaningful mission of service to society.

"Hari Polis is a meaningful occasion to reflect on your role and calling in service to the community. Jesus reminds us that although life may be filled with challenges and difficulties, when we live according to His example, we are strengthened by hope and guided to live a life of purpose and meaning," he added.

He concluded by praying for the good health, safety and protection of all police personnel as they con-

tinue to carry out their duties faithfully and courageously.

Before the conclusion of the Mass, Superintendent Jay expressed his gratitude to all who had helped make the celebration possible and voiced his hope that the annual gathering would continue to strengthen fellowship and faith among the Christian members of the police force.

The celebration later continued with a cake-cutting ceremony and group photograph session at the church before attendees adjourned for dinner and fellowship at Green Hall. **Marlina Sara Sylvester**



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Sr Elizabeth Jothee fsp delivering her presentation.

The Holy Spirit didn't send a text!

PETALING JAYA: The Holy Spirit certainly did not send a text, but then, no text was necessary. True to the promise of Jesus, the Holy Spirit came down and continues to live within us, guiding us as children of God. *The Holy Spirit didn't send a Text* was an insightful programme, presented by the Daughters of St Paul (DSP) in collaboration with the Assumption Communications Ministry. Sub-themed *Becoming a Pentecost People in a Digital World*, the event was held in conjunction with World Communications Day (WCD), at the Church of the Assumption.

The programme, in three parts, first focused on AI, and its uses and

impact on the business world; how we interact with it in our homes and communities; and how to use it safely while enhancing our spirituality and understanding as we strive to be Pentecost People today. AI is a toolbelt, not a replacement. It should not be feared but understood as it can level the playing field and reduce societal and educational disparities when ethically applied.

In her presentation, Sr Elizabeth John Jothee fsp, local DSP superior, incorporated the message of Pope Leo XIV in conjunction with the 60th World Communications Day, on the theme *Preserving Human Voices and Faces*. Preserving human faces and voices means preserving God's love, she said, using the parable of the Good Samaritan as an illustration

of how the Holy Spirit moves us to identify and uplift our neighbours. A short skit, *Who is my Neighbour?* by members of the Assumption Youth Ministry enlivened the parable with contemporary dialogue, which was very well received — underscoring another example of successful collaboration and support among parish groups.

Sr Elizabeth also spoke of conversion and enlightenment, as embodied by Blessed James Alberione, founder of the Pauline family, and of personal encounters where, with divine inspiration, she reached out to communicate — including one which she would have rather avoided, but ended up experiencing a different kind of conversion herself, instead.

Expanding on the Pope's message

in the third part of the programme, Fr Leonard Lexson said that AI and the Holy Spirit cannot be compared as AI depends on mechanisms and gadgets whereas the Holy Spirit is alive all the time. No machine can replace a human being because we are made in God's likeness; AI is soulless. It cannot create emotions but it can stir emotional responses in humans, and is impairing the human capacity to do things. As a result, we are becoming unable to discern, and are becoming passive consumers with altered perceptions of reality.

This can ultimately damage the fabric of society. Acknowledging that we should not stop digital innovation but guide its use, he said this means we must be aware of its ambivalent nature and use AI tools

in an informed, responsible manner. The Church, he stressed, has a social responsibility to ensure the faithful use it correctly. Content generated by AI must be clearly identified and distinguished from content created by humans. All technology is from God, and must be used well. Technology is not the enemy of the faith. Exhorting parishioners to courageously engage with it, he said that even Jesus used what could then be considered 'new' media — parables — to spread the word of God.

We must approach technology, particularly AI, with caution, as it has long-term implications that can impact negatively on our lives. For this, a concerted and collaborative effort is needed. All stakeholders, from the tech industry to legislators; from the creative and communications industry, to academia; from artists, journalists and media practitioners, to educators and communicators in all fields, must work together to build and implement informed, responsible digital citizenship.

Cybersecurity talk encourages responsible digital living

CHERAS: In conjunction with the 60th World Day of Social Communications, the Multimedia Ministry of the Church of St Francis of Assisi organised a talk on *Cybersecurity Awareness* on May 17, bringing together parishioners for an engaging and timely session on digital safety in an increasingly connected world.

In line with this year's theme, the initiative reflected the Church's continuing mission to promote responsible communication, truth, and the protection of human dignity — not only in our physical communities, but also in the digital spaces we now inhabit.

The one-hour session was delivered by Kelvin Simon, *pic*, an experienced speaker and educator in the field of cybersecurity, who shared practical insights, real-world examples, and valuable guidance on how individuals and families can better

protect themselves online.

Addressing a highly attentive audience, Simon emphasised that cybersecurity is no longer just a concern for businesses or technology professionals — it is a responsibility shared by everyone. From personal devices and social media accounts to online banking and daily communication, our digital presence has become an extension of who we are.

"Protecting our online identity means protecting the voices, faces, and relationships entrusted to us," he reminded participants, highlighting how digital stewardship aligns closely with the values of responsibility and care.

Throughout the session, parishioners were introduced to several important cybersecurity concepts and practical strategies, including the importance of cybersecurity in today's digital world and the need to develop strong digital habits.

Among the key takeaways was the importance of creating secure and resilient passwords — moving beyond simple combinations to passwords that are unique, complex, and protected through additional layers such as multi-factor authentication.

Participants also learned how to identify and manage the growing number of online scams, including phishing emails, fraudulent phone calls, deceptive WhatsApp messages, and impersonation attempts that continue to target unsuspecting users.

Simon also shared essential practices for secure browsing and email security, while raising awareness about cyber threat actors operating across nations and the evolving landscape of global cybercrime.

The session further explored the importance of endpoint security — protecting laptops, smartphones, and other connected devices that form

the first line of defence in our digital lives.

A particularly engaging segment focused on the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in cybersecurity. Participants gained insight into how AI is now being used to detect threats, monitor suspicious behaviour, and strengthen digital defence systems. At the same time, Simon encouraged attendees to understand the rapid advancement of AI and to embrace its potential responsibly.

As World Communications Sunday reminds us of the power and responsibility of communication, this *Cybersecurity Awareness* talk served as a timely reminder that safeguarding our digital lives is also a form of stewardship — one that protects not only information, but the people and communities behind it.

The Multimedia Ministry was commended for organising a programme that was both relevant



and empowering, equipping parishioners with knowledge to navigate today's digital world with greater confidence, awareness, and wisdom.

St Thomas Catechism students enjoy beach fellowship

KUANTAN: The Catechetical Team of the Church of St Thomas the Apostle organised a fun-filled outing for Catechism students from preschool to Form 5, together with their parents and catechists, at ADENA Beach Resort on May 23.

Located about 20 minutes away from the parish, many participants carpooled to the beach resort, adding to the spirit of fellowship and togetherness. The outing proved to be a heartwarming day filled with joy, laughter and strong community spirit as families and students bonded

through shared activities and quality time together.

The day began with Mass at the church at 7.30am, a reminder that every gathering begins with God at the centre. After breakfast, the participants carpooled to the resort for a day of fun, fellowship, and togetherness.

The parish youth warmly kicked off the day with ice-breaking activities for the catechism students and led lively praise and worship songs. Dr Jassmine shared an inspiring session for the teenage students on

the importance of "standing up for Jesus against bullies." The teens then broke into small groups to perform sketches addressing current issues, fostering meaningful discussions. Meanwhile, the younger children below Standard 5 enjoyed their own praise and worship sessions and engaged in indoor activities in separate groups.

The weather was really pleasant after lunch, making it perfect for all the outdoor activities we had planned. The parish Catholic university students did a wonderful

job organising games and fun activities at the beach for the teenagers and young kids. Many of the younger children experienced simple beach activities, like building sandcastles, for the very first time, creating truly special and memorable moments in their lives. These outdoor games beautifully reminded us of how important it is to build a strong community. It was a time for families, children, and catechists to strengthen bonds of friendship, create joyful memories, and grow together in the spirit of faith and fellowship.

The programme concluded with a prize-giving ceremony for the catechism students, followed by words of thanksgiving and appreciation. Heartfelt gratitude was expressed to catechetical coordinator Dorcas Lee, event coordinator Sagaya Raj, and all the catechists for their dedication, hard work and teamwork in making the outing both meaningful and successful.



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Faith flourishes quietly in Brunei

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN: The Catholic Church in Brunei Darussalam continues to quietly persevere in faith despite operating within strict limitations in the Muslim-majority nation, according to Fr Robert Leong Soon Choi, Apostolic Administrator of the Apostolic Vicariate of Brunei.

Brunei, a small Sultanate on the island of Borneo, has only three Catholic churches and three local priests, all born in the country, as government regulations permit only native citizens to hold pastoral leadership positions.

Speaking in an interview with *Fides News Agency* during the recent *ad limina* visit of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei to Rome, Fr Robert described the Church in Brunei as a small community that lives with "simplicity, serenity and a vibrant faith."

"We have neither nuns nor missionaries, because this is not

permitted by the government, which only allows local priests," said Fr Robert, who is also parish priest of the Church of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception in Bandar Seri Begawan.

Despite these challenges, the local Church recently celebrated a significant milestone with a diaconal ordination held two months ago. Fr Robert expressed hope that the deacon would be ordained to the priesthood in September, bringing much-needed support to the local clergy.

"There is also another seminarian from our community studying in Singapore, and a nun in formation with the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (FSIC)," he shared, adding that the faithful continue to pray for more local vocations.

The Catholic community in Brunei numbers approximately 14,000, with 60 to 70 per cent made up of migrant workers, particularly Filipinos. Christians, including

Catholics and Anglicans, comprise about 6.7 per cent of the country's population.

"Despite the diversity of our cultural backgrounds, we form a community of faith united around the Word of God and the Sacraments," Fr Robert reflected.

He also noted that while restrictions exist, Catholics are still able to practise their faith freely within church grounds.

"We can freely practise our faith and organise catechism classes and other activities inside churches, but not outside," he explained. "Sunday Mass, religious holidays and pastoral activities always attract large crowds."

The Church is not permitted to evangelise publicly, construct new churches or expand existing ones. Yet Fr Robert stressed that the community remains hopeful and steadfast.

"Our motto, inherited from Cardinal Cornelius Sim, is *Duc in Altum* — to put out into the



Fr Robert Leong with the altar servers. (Fr Robert Leong's facebook)

deep," he said, referring to the late Cardinal Sim, who once described Brunei as "the periphery within the periphery."

The Apostolic Vicariate also contributes to society through education, operating three schools — St George's School, St Angela's School and St John's School — serving approximately 2,000 students, most of whom are Muslims.

Fr Robert described relations with the government as stable, noting that Church representatives are oc-

asionally invited to interreligious gatherings.

"Brunei is a happy and peaceful country," he remarked, noting that citizens enjoy free education and healthcare with no income tax. He added that Catholics in the Sultanate live quietly "in a spirit of peace, harmony and goodwill toward all."

"We are well received by ordinary people, we experience neither hostility nor violence," he said. "With God's grace, we succeed. I want to say: we are happy." *Fides*

Chapel offers new vision of sacred architecture in Thailand

BANGKOK: In an era where religious architecture is often associated with grandeur and striking visual forms, the Divine Mercy Chapel on the eastern outskirts of Bangkok is drawing attention for a very different reason — its quiet simplicity and deep commitment to sustainability.

Located in Bang Bo District and designed by architectural firm all(zone), the chapel reflects the ecological vision of *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis' landmark encyclical on care for creation and social responsibility.

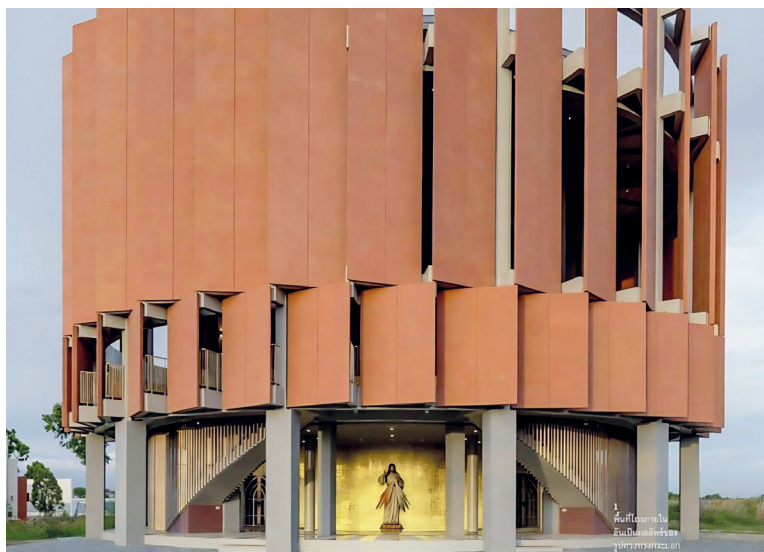
For Fr John Wirach, CSsR, the Redemptorist priest behind the project, sacred architecture should not be measured by extravagance but by how well it serves both people and the environment.

"The chapel is grounded in the principles of *Laudato Si'*," Fr Wirach explained. "Sustainability is not an image to be projected, but an ethic to be practiced."

After years of ministry at Holy Redeemer Church in central Bangkok, Fr Wirach was entrusted with land in Bang Bo to serve a growing suburban community. Rather than constructing a monumental church, he envisioned a community-centred development that would include a school for children, housing for the elderly, and a chapel integrated into a wider mission of care and outreach.

From the outset, the chapel was conceived not as a stand-alone architectural statement, but as part of a larger ecosystem of education, pastoral ministry, and social support.

Fr Wirach said his understanding of church architecture had been shaped by his travels in Europe and pastoral experience in Thailand.



After extensive studies of airflow, daylight, and rain protection, all(zone) developed a double-ring cylindrical structure. Photo credit: all(zone)

While traditional Catholic churches often emphasise domes and elaborate symbolism, he believes sacredness is expressed more through service and pastoral care than spectacle.

"Faith is not primarily declared through form, but practiced through action," he said.

The COVID-19 pandemic further reinforced his thinking about architecture and resilience. Churches dependent on enclosed, air-conditioned spaces often struggled during the crisis, while naturally ventilated buildings were able to continue functioning more effectively.

As a result, one of the chapel's boldest design decisions was made — the building would have neither conventional windows nor air-conditioning systems.

The choice was both practical and ecological. By reducing construction and operational costs, more

resources could be directed toward education and social programmes, while the open-air concept aligned closely with the environmental principles of *Laudato Si'*.

To address Thailand's tropical climate, all(zone) developed a double-ring cylindrical structure that maximises natural cross-ventilation. Soft daylight filters through elevated openings, creating a calm and contemplative interior.

The chapel is enclosed by 72 precast concrete panels positioned at carefully calculated angles to reduce heat, filter sunlight, and protect against rain while maintaining airflow throughout the building.

Rather than seeking attention through monumental design, the Divine Mercy Chapel offers a different understanding of sacred architecture — one rooted in care, responsibility, and community life. *LiCAS News*

Philippine bishops promote networks of women nationwide

MANILA: The Catholic bishops in the Philippines have established offices to create a network of women in dioceses nationwide, aiming to ensure greater participation of women in the Church.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) Office on Women launched this network in the conference's Manila headquarters on May 22.

Bishop Isabelo Abarquez, *pic*, who heads the conference's Office on Women, said they established this network because many dioceses lack women's offices or have limited coordination with the conference.

Of the 84 dioceses in the country, only 14 have fully or partially established women's offices, according to data the Office on Women shared with *UCA News* on May 25.

In other dioceses, similar ministries "are newly set up as separate offices or are temporarily included in other ministries also dealing with women," an official of the office said.

Women "have always carried a unique and indispensable role" in the Church and society, Abarquez said during the May 22 Mass that launched the network. But they face "painful realities" such as poverty, violence, and discrimination, he added.

"The future of our evangelisation requires the full participation of women," the 69-year-old bishop emphasised.

The Catholic-majority nation is the highest-ranked Asian country in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index 2025. It



is ranked 20 globally, well ahead of Singapore (rank 47), Mongolia (rank 65), and Thailand (rank 66).

Still, the status of Catholic women in the Philippines "is a mixed bag," said Stephanie Ann Puen, a lay theologian from the Jesuit-run Ateneo de Manila University, on May 25.

"In some pockets, women are treated quite well," and "it's just really, really bad" in others, she said.

Many cases of discrimination are "often very subtle" and "so ingrained," she said. She said some spaces in the Church are often perceived as "just spaces for women," and those spaces are often "seen as lower than other spaces in the Church," she added.

Puen said building the diocesan network for women "is a good approach."

However, the bigger questions concerned the kinds of women's roles the network would support and the resources allocated for the initiative. *UCA News*

‘Do not change the Mass’

Pope’s clear message to priests

VATICAN: At the general audience on May 27, Pope Leo XIV urged priests to respect the “norms of the liturgy” and not to make changes to the Mass “on their own initiative,” in order to avoid confusing the faithful.

“I encourage all priests to respect the texts and norms of the liturgy with openness, humility, trust in God’s greatness, and with sincere fidelity to ecclesial communion,” the Pope said in remarks in St Peter’s Square.

The Second Vatican Council “affirmed that legitimate progress in the liturgy must also preserve sound tradition and that certain elements of the liturgy can never change because they are divinely instituted,” he said.

Pope Leo’s catechesis on Wednesday continued his reflections on the magisterium of the Second Vatican Council, focusing on the constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, promulgated by St Paul VI on Dec 4, 1963. It is one of the most important documents to emerge from the council, since it trans-

formed the way Catholics celebrate the Mass.

The Pope offered a historical overview of the context in which Vatican II was convened, noting: “At that moment in history, there was a strong sense of the need for a renewal of the ritual forms through which, for centuries, the Church had glorified God and sanctified the Christian people.”

He also underscored that, thanks to the liturgical movement, the conviction had developed — later expressed by St John Paul II — that “a very close and organic bond exists between the renewal of the liturgy and the renewal of the whole life of the Church. The Church not only acts but also expresses herself in the liturgy, lives by the liturgy, and draws from the liturgy the strength for her life” (Letter *Dominicae Cenae*, 13)."

The pontiff reflected on *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, which he said sought “to encourage the access of the faithful to the richness

of the gifts of grace dispensed by the sacred liturgy.” The Pope highlighted the formula adopted by the council fathers: “That sound tradition may be retained, and yet the way remain open to legitimate progress.”

To deepen this idea, the Pope quoted Pope Benedict XVI, who explained that the council fathers’ “reform programme” sought “a balance between the great liturgical tradition of the past and that of the future.”

Pope Benedict XVI said that “tradition and progress are often clumsily opposed,” but the late pope noted that “actually, the two concepts merge: Tradition is a living reality, which therefore includes in itself the principle of development, of progress.”

Pope Leo XIV said the progress referred to by *Sacrosanctum Concilium* “in no way compromises ecclesial communion; rather, it seeks to confirm and foster it.”

He emphasised that “changes of this type have taken place constantly over the centuries in order to enable the faithful to partici-

pate fruitfully, through ritual actions, in the paschal mystery of Christ, the foundation of the Christian faith.”

“For the good of the entire Church, every reform must always be preceded by careful ‘theological, historical, and pastoral’ investigation,” the Holy Father said. “The council magisterium, in this way, thus calls for the avoidance of confusion amongst the faithful, discouraging anyone from adding, removing, or altering anything in liturgical matters on their own initiative.”

The Church’s worship, he added, has been “embodied” in the cultural forms of each age and has been able to influence them and even transform them.

“The liturgy has thus been, for centuries, a driving force for evangelisation. Today, this energy must be renewed in continuity with the authentic and living Catholic tradition, that is, in accordance with a dynamic aimed at introducing believers to the fullness of the truth,” he said. EWTN

Christianity must not be watered down

VATICAN: Pope Leo XIV warned against the temptation to make Christianity more appealing by diluting its message or softening its demands, insisting that the faith is best communicated through authentic Christian witness.

“It is certainly not by watering down the content or softening the demands that Christianity can be made attractive, but by bearing witness with humility and courage to ‘the way, the truth, and the life,’” the Pope said on May 28 during a meeting with members of the Dicastery for Evangelisation’s Section for Fundamental Questions Regarding Evangelisation in the World.

Reflecting on the crisis of faith, particularly in the West, Pope Leo noted the rise of religious indifference and warned that modern society risks losing sight of life’s deeper meaning. While technology promises to meet every need, he said many people are still searching for answers to fundamental existential questions.

Yet the Pope stressed that an encounter with Christ can restore meaning and purpose. He reaffirmed the Church’s missionary mandate, describing it as essential for building a future



Pope Leo XIV prays with members of the Dicastery for Evangelisation’s Section for Fundamental Questions Regarding Evangelisation in the World on May 28, 2026, at the Vatican. (Vatican Media)

rooted in peace, justice, freedom and fraternity.

Pope Leo also highlighted the continued relevance of Pope Francis’ apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, encouraging evangelisers to promote a mission that is Christ-centred and capable of transforming lives through a personal encounter with Jesus.

Pointing to a growing spiritual hunger among young people, evident during the Youth Jubilee, the Pope said many are not closed to the Gospel but are seeking something deeper and more meaningful. At the same time, he

acknowledged that the transmission of faith from one generation to the next has weakened in some parts of the world, creating what he described as a form of spiritual poverty among the young.

He cautioned that media-saturated and consumerist societies often reduce truth to just another opinion, making evangelisation more challenging. In response, he emphasised the importance of Christian communities whose joyful witness and Gospel-centred lives make the faith credible. EWTN

Cardinals, bishops kneel before *Sodalitium* victims

PERU: In a powerful gesture of repentance and reconciliation, a Vatican delegation joined Church leaders in Peru in kneeling before Indigenous farmers who suffered years of abuse, persecution, land seizures and harassment linked to members of the now-dissolved *Sodalitium* of Christian Life (SCV).

The symbolic act took place on May 23 at the Parish of San Juan Bautista in Catacaos,

northern Peru, during a Pentecost celebration attended by cardinals, bishops, civil authorities and members of the farming community.

The gesture followed years of appeals for justice from victims. In 2025, Pope Francis formally dissolved *Sodalitium* after confirmed scandals involving abuse and corruption.

Msgr Jordi Bertomeu, appointed by the



Cardinals and bishops of Peru on their knees before the campesinos, for years victims of abuses committed by members of the *Sodalitium* movement. (Vatican News)

Vatican to oversee the dissolution process, acknowledged the Church’s delayed response, telling the community: “We should have come twenty years ago; today we ask forgiveness.”

Cardinal Carlos Castillo Mattasoglio, Archbishop of Lima, described the gathering as a step on the path of renewal and reconciliation. He pledged the Church’s commitment not only to seek forgiveness but also to continue reform efforts initiated by Pope Francis and supported by Pope Leo XIV, who had long stood with victims during his ministry in Peru.

“We cannot forget, and we must not forget,” the cardinal said, stressing the need to remember past wrongs in order to correct them and prevent their recurrence.

Echoing Pope Leo’s call for “unarmed and disarming peace,” Cardinal Castillo urged dialogue, forgiveness and solidarity as the foundations for lasting peace and social renewal. He concluded by thanking the farmers for helping the Church move forward on the path of healing and hope. Vatican News

Synod outlines path to 2028 Ecclesial Assembly

VATICAN: The General Secretariat of the Synod has released a new document outlining the journey towards the Ecclesial Assembly scheduled for October 2028 in the Vatican, proposing four key stages: Remembering, Interpreting, Orienting and Celebrating.

Published on May 20, *Towards the 2027–2028 Assemblies: Stages, Criteria and Tools in Preparation for the 2027–2028 Assemblies* provides the calendar, methodology and criteria for local Churches, Bishops’ Conferences and continental bodies to evaluate and share the fruits of the Synod on Synodality.

The process begins in the first half of 2027 with *Remembering*, as dioceses and parishes review their experience of implementing the Synod’s Final Document. The second half of 2027 focuses on *Interpreting*, with national and regional Bishops’ Conferences preparing theological and pastoral reflections.

The *Orienting* phase, during the first four months of 2028, will see continental assemblies identify shared priorities and future directions. The journey culminates in *Celebrating* at the October 2028 Ecclesial Assembly in Rome, where representatives from across the Church will gather with the Holy Father.

The document stresses that these assemblies are not new consultations but opportunities to reflect on the fruits and challenges of synodal renewal and to share experiences among local Churches. A common guiding question will accompany the process: what concrete signs of a missionary synodal Church and what new paths of synodality are emerging within local communities?

The document also calls for broad participation, ensuring representation across generations, cultures, vocations and states of life, including those living on the margins of society and the Church. Vatican News





Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Convention III



Richard Chia

Over the Merdeka Day weekend from August 30 to September 2, 2006, the Federal Hotel in Kuala Lumpur became a gathering point for the Church in Peninsular Malaysia to pause, reflect and discern its journey forward together. The Third Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Convention (PMPC III) brought together 550 participants comprising archbishops, bishops, clergy, deacons, religious and lay faithful from across the nation.

The numbers themselves quietly told a story. From 171 participants at PMPC I in 1986, to 390 at PMPC II in 1996, the remarkable increase at PMPC III reflected the growing participation and sense of ownership among the laity in the life and mission of the Church. This was no longer a gathering attended primarily by Church leadership. Every parish was encouraged to ensure representation from youths, women and the various language groups, giving voice to the richness and diversity of the local Church.

The theme chosen for the convention, *Sentire Cum Ecclesia* (To Think and Feel with the Church) invited participants into a deeper communion with the wider Body of Christ. Guided by the process of “Review, Renew, Relive,” the four-day, three-night assembly became a space for honest reflection, dialogue and discernment. Discussions centred on pressing themes such as “Facing New Realities,” “Our Vocation,” “Living Out a Spirituality of Communion,” and identifying the “Areas of Mission to Emphasise” in the years ahead.

In his keynote address, Archbishop Murphy Pakiam challenged participants to look honestly at how the Church had responded to the Core Need and Related Need first articulated during *Aggiornamento* 1976. These pastoral priorities, later reaffirmed during the First and Second Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Conventions in 1986 and 1996 respectively, continued to serve as a compass for the Church’s mission and identity in Peninsular Malaysia.

As the assembly progressed, participants were invited to look not only at the challenges before the Church, but also at the fruits that had quietly emerged over the years through the faithful efforts of clergy, religious and laity.

In his address, Archbishop Pakiam shared several encouraging milestones that reflected the steady growth of the Church in Peninsular

In this 19th article, and continuing in the next issue, we revisit PMPC III, a significant milestone in the journey of the Church in Peninsular Malaysia. It was a moment when clergy, religious and laity came together to reflect on their shared journey, renew their commitment to the Church’s mission, and prayerfully discern the path forward.



Bishop Antony Selvanayagam with fellow arch/bishops celebrating the opening Mass.

Malaysia since *Aggiornamento* 1976. One of the clearest signs of this growth was the expansion of Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) throughout the region.

“There are around 1,735 Basic Ecclesial Communities formed in the three dioceses in Peninsular Malaysia since 1976,” he said, noting that the process of restructuring and forming these small communities remained ongoing. With an estimated Catholic population of 200,000 at the time — comprising roughly 40,000 households — the Church had hoped to establish about 2,000 BECs across Peninsular Malaysia.

“Should we or should we not rejoice that we have achieved a status of 86 per cent?” he asked, drawing both reflection and quiet affirmation from the assembly.

He further pointed out that even if each BEC gathering drew an average of only ten people, this would still mean that some 17,000 Catholics were gathering monthly across Peninsular Malaysia to praise and worship God, reflect on Scripture and strengthen fellowship as brothers and sisters in Christ.

“Is there any other group in the Catholic Church that gathers regularly in such numbers, facilitated by lay leaders?” he asked.

The archbishop also expressed gratitude to the Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Team (PMPT), made up of representatives from the three dioceses including bishops, vicars general, pastoral directors, religious and lay leaders, particularly youth representatives and family life couples. He acknowledged

their dedication in driving pastoral planning, formation programmes and communication efforts that helped sustain the Church’s pastoral journey over the years.

Among the many milestones highlighted were the development of BEC reflection materials based on themes proposed by the PMPT, as well as the practice of conducting annual parish pastoral assemblies, culminating in diocesan pastoral assemblies every two years. These initiatives reflected the Church’s growing desire to become more participatory, reflective and mission-oriented.

He also recalled how, during the Jubilee Year 2000 which focused on prayer, the Church in Peninsular Malaysia actively promoted the official prayers of the Church among the laity, including Holy Hours, Lauds and Vespers. Over time, these prayers became deeply integrated into the spiritual life of many Catholics and were commonly used during retreats, formation sessions and Church gatherings.

Responding to one of the Related Needs first articulated during *Aggiornamento* 1976, each diocese in Peninsular Malaysia had also established an Office of Integral Human Development. The long-term vision was for every parish to eventually form its own parish-level ministry dedicated to integral human development, helping Catholics become more conscious of the Church’s social teachings while responding more effectively to the needs of the poor and marginalised.

Yet amid the many achievements, there was also an honest acknowledgement that not every pastoral initiative had borne the hoped-for results. The exercise on the Spirituality of Communion, inspired by Pope John Paul II’s *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (At the Beginning of the New Millennium), did not fully take root as envisioned. The Communitarian Spirituality Experience (CSE), despite its aspirations, failed to “catch fire” in many parishes. In response, some priests introduced the Parish Renewal Experience (PRE) as an alternative effort to renew parish life and deepen spiritual formation among the faithful.

One of the defining features of PMPC III was the extensive consultation process that preceded the assembly itself. Unlike PMPC I and PMPC II, the third convention drew its strength not only from discussions during the gathering, but from the voices, hopes and concerns of thousands of Catholics across Peninsular Malaysia who had participated in the preparation process leading up to it.

In the months before the convention, questionnaire surveys were distributed widely, inviting clergy, religious and lay faithful to reflect on the realities facing the Church and society. The response was overwhelming. More than 6,000 people took part in the consultation process, reflecting a growing sense that the Church’s journey and mission belonged to everyone, not merely to a select group of leaders.

Various Pre-PMPC III conventions were also organised to deepen the process of listening and dialogue. These gatherings saw the participation of 122 clergy, 168 religious and 1,372 lay faithful. Together, they generated more than 4,577 responses, providing the Drafting Team with a rich and diverse pool of reflections, concerns, hopes and recommendations to consider while preparing the Final Document of PMPC III.

The consultation process itself became a sign of the Church’s evolving pastoral approach — one that sought to listen more attentively to the lived experiences of the faithful and discern together the direction the Church was being called to take in a changing world.

● *To be continued in the next issue.*



Pope's prayer intention for June

Beyond the scoreboard



Prayer Prism

Fr Fabian Dicom

Going back to my seminary days at College General in Penang, one of the traditions we carried on each year was organising the College Cup football tournament. Looking back now, I realise it was far more than merely a sporting event.

The shared purpose of competition brought the seminarians together in a unique and almost rare way. Differences, tensions, personalities, and little camps among us seemed to fade whenever we gathered to cheer for the college team. In hindsight, perhaps there was something quietly educational about it all. And perhaps today, if we are still searching for creative ways to strengthen fraternity and unity within our presbyterium, maybe the answer may not always be a special programme at our clergy monthly recollection. A football field, a slightly controversial referee decision, ninety minutes of shouting at each other over missed passes, and then suddenly hugging one another after a last-minute goal, may occasionally achieve what long pastoral discussions cannot.

At the very least in the seminary, it reminds us that despite our differences, frustrations, and occasional disagreements, we are still ultimately on the same team. There was laughter, shouting, disappointment, celebration, and a collective spirit that united us beyond our differences.

What made it even more meaningful was that the experience extended beyond the seminary walls. Besides the college teams and clubs from around the College General area, there was also one team from the neighbouring fishing village, made up mostly of fishermen. Along with them came players and supporters from different cultures, races, religions, and social backgrounds. On the pitch, labels mattered less. What emerged instead was camaraderie, shared excitement, healthy rivalry, and solidarity.

Perhaps that memory explains why the prayer intention of the Pope for this month feels both simple and deeply relevant:

“Let us pray that sports be an instrument of peace, encounter, and dialogue among cultures and nations, and that they promote values such as respect, solidarity, and personal growth.”

At first glance, this intention may seem somewhat unusual. In a world struggling with wars, economic uncertainty, migration crises, environmental destruction, and increasing polarisation, one may wonder why sports would become a focus of papal attention.

Yet perhaps that is precisely why the intention matters. Sport remains one of the few universal languages humanity still shares.

A world pausing for a game

Very soon, the world's attention will once again turn towards football as the 2026 FIFA World Cup begins on June 11. The opening match between host nation Mexico and South Africa will take place at the historic Estadio Azteca in Mexico City. Like every World Cup before it, the tournament will gather not only nations and teams, but billions of viewers from across cultures, languages, religions, and political divides. Entire cities will pause. Families and strangers alike will gather before screens. For a few brief weeks, much of humanity will share the same



At Tokyo 2020, high jumpers Mutaz Essa Barshim and Gianmarco Tamberi chose friendship over rivalry — sharing Olympic gold in one of the greatest displays of sportsmanship the Games has ever seen.

emotions, conversations, celebrations, and disappointments.

Regardless of one's interest in football, events like these reveal how deeply sport continues to shape the emotional and cultural imagination of humanity. The Olympics, the Asian Games, Wimbledon, Formula One races, badminton championships, athletics meets, and regional tournaments continue to draw millions across continents. In a world where politics, race, religion, and ideology often divide people, sport still possesses a unique ability to gather them, even if only momentarily, around a shared experience.

The scoreboard doesn't tell everything

Most people naturally focus on the competitive aspect of sports. Attention is usually given to who wins, who loses, who scores, and who lifts the trophy. Modern sports culture is heavily influenced by rankings, statistics, sponsorships, branding, and commercial success. Athletes become celebrities and clubs become global corporations.

Yet beneath all of this lies another dimension of sports that is often overlooked.

Some of the greatest values sports produce cannot be measured statistically. Teamwork, discipline, perseverance, resilience, humility, trust, solidarity, and mutual respect rarely appear on scoreboards, yet these may ultimately be the most important achievements sports offer society.

Sport forms people in ways formal structures sometimes cannot. A team quickly learns that talent alone is insufficient. Success depends on cooperation, sacrifice, communication, and the willingness to work toward something larger than oneself. Defeat teaches resilience. Training teaches discipline. Competition teaches both confidence and humility.

These are not merely sporting values. They are human values essential for community life itself.

Pope Francis and a “Culture of Encounter”

This helps explain why Pope Francis consistently spoke about sports not simply as entertainment, but as spaces capable of promoting encounter, fraternity, and human growth. Throughout his

pontificate, he frequently emphasised the importance of building what he called a “culture of encounter.” He believed modern society is increasingly fragmented by political polarisation, individualism, racism, nationalism, and fear of those who are different.

Sport, at its best, interrupts these divisions.

On the field, social status matters less. Ethnicity matters less. Religious identity matters less. People become teammates, competitors, supporters, and fellow participants sharing a common experience.

This has particular significance in countries like Malaysia, where diversity remains both a richness and an ongoing challenge. Sporting events have often created moments where Malaysians temporarily transcend ethnic and cultural divisions through a shared sense of belonging and participation.

When sport loses its way

At the same time, sports, like every human institution, can fail.

The history of Malaysian football itself serves as a reminder of this reality. There was a time when Malaysian football united the nation during what many still nostalgically refer to as its “glorious days.” Stadiums became places where Malaysians from different backgrounds gathered with excitement, hope, and collective pride. The national team symbolised more than football; it represented a shared national imagination.

Over time, however, political interference, corruption, match-fixing scandals, poor governance, commercialisation, and controversies surrounding documentation and citizenship issues involving certain players gradually weakened not only the quality of the game, but also public trust in it. What once inspired unity became increasingly affected by the same problems shaping wider society.

This reveals something important about the Pope's intention this month.

Sports do not automatically create peace, solidarity, or unity. They remain vulnerable to greed, ego, unhealthy rivalry, exploitation, racism, violence, and obsession with success at all costs. Even young children today are often exposed to intense pressure to perform and succeed in increasingly competitive sporting

environments.

When winning becomes the only goal, the human person is eventually forgotten.

That is why the Pope's prayer intention is not sentimental or superficial. He is not romanticising sports. Rather, he is calling attention to the deeper human and social values sports can nurture when they remain grounded in respect, fairness, integrity, and community.

Lessons beyond the field

The true beauty of sports lies not merely in achievement or domination, but in what they can bring out in individuals and communities. Healthy sports encourage discipline without arrogance, competition without hatred, and excellence without dehumanising others. They remind people that success is rarely individual and that human flourishing is always connected to relationships, cooperation, and mutual support.

In many ways, sports also offer important lessons for society itself. A healthy team depends on participation, trust, sacrifice, accountability, patience, and shared purpose. No team functions well when every player seeks only personal glory. The same can be said of communities, nations, and even parishes.

Modern society increasingly promotes individual success, self-interest, and competition. Yet beneath all this, human beings continue to long for belonging, participation, and shared meaning. This may explain why sporting events evoke such strong emotional responses. They create moments where people feel connected to something larger than themselves.

Where humanity and spirit meet

There is also a deeper spiritual dimension beneath this prayer intention. Christianity has never viewed human life as disconnected from physical, social, and communal realities. The Incarnation itself affirms the dignity of ordinary human experience. Genuine spirituality is not an escape from life, but a way of living more truthfully and humanely within it.

Seen in this light, sports can become spaces where important Gospel values quietly emerge through ordinary human experience. Respect for others, self-sacrifice, reconciliation, discipline, perseverance, community, and shared joy are not only sporting virtues; they are also deeply human and deeply Christian values.

Beyond winning

The world will continue to remember champions, trophies, records, and scorelines. But perhaps the more lasting victories are often less visible: the child who gains confidence, the young person who learns resilience, the friendships formed across cultures, the communities brought together peacefully, and the athlete who chooses integrity over dishonesty.

These are victories no scoreboard can fully record.

And perhaps in a fractured and anxious world, these are precisely the kinds of victories humanity needs most today.

Fr Fabian Dicom is the National Director of Caritas Malaysia

Christina Lazaroo

In the rural heartlands of Malaysia, where roads turn to dust, and villages cluster around rubber estates and *kampungs*, missionaries have long walked among ordinary people. They celebrate Mass under zinc roofs, organise Christian communities in remote estates, visit homes, and build simple chapels. They listen more than they preach and often live with very little.

That same missionary spirit would one day take root in the life of Dr Charles Bertille, who recently completed a seven-year academic journey culminating in a doctorate in Theology with distinction from St Vincent School of Theology in Manila. With the steadfast support of his wife, Beatrice, he has devoted more than 33 years to full-time ministry, including 18 years serving in missionary work across Asia.

Charles did not grow up imagining a life in mission across Asia. His beginnings were simple. Faith first came through his family: a mother who taught them catechism, family Rosaries at home, and parents who shaped his values. Like many Catholics, his faith was first inherited before it became personal.

As a teenager in Tampin, Negeri Sembilan, something restless began growing within him. He no longer wanted to “borrow” faith through rituals and routines. He wanted to know whether God was truly real, personal, and worth giving his life to. That search led him into the rural outstations of Malaysia alongside the late Fr Peter Bretaudeau MEP and the Infant Jesus Sisters. He watched them travel through plantations and FELDA settlements, gathering families for Mass. What stirred him was not only their endurance, but their presence.

Fr Peter did not rush rituals. Before Mass, he would sit with people, listen, and speak with them about their struggles, marriages, children, debts, and fears. The Gospel entered lived reality. “Mass was connected to life,” Charles recalled, witnessing faith being lived and animated. He joined visits to outstations, helping form communities where laypeople sustained the faith between priestly visits, echoing St John Chrysostom: “The Church is not a place, but a way of life.”

He began to see that the mission was not about prestige or titles.

That conviction deepened through Fondacio, then known as the Christian Community of Formation (CCF). Through formation, prayer, and sharing with other young adults, Charles encountered Christ personally and discovered what he would later call “the inner life” of faith: not merely serving God externally but belonging completely to Him.

One day, while in the parish, a familiar voice pierced his heart: “I don’t need your money. I need you.” The call of John 21 echoed within him: “Do you love me... more than these others do?”

This call demanded a response.

When mission becomes a vocation

Charles had dreams like any young man. Coming from a modest background, success mattered. A career in banking and the corporate sector offered stability and the possibility of helping his family financially. Ministry, on the other hand, offered



Charles (left) during his work with Karuna Myanmar Social Services.

A lay missionary of the margins

uncertainty. With little support from the local Church, he travelled to France for formation, relying on small donations from colleagues, janitors, elderly women, and friends. There were “dark nights” when he did not know how he would eat or pay rent. “These experiences built my trust in God and helped me let go of the fear of not having enough,” he recalls.

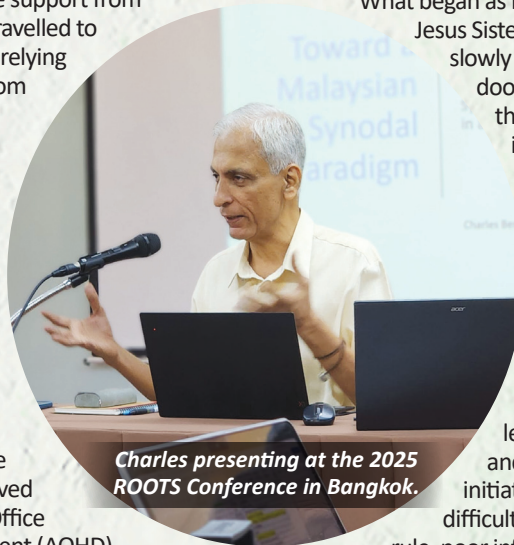
Back in Malaysia, he became actively involved in the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development (AOHD), formation work, ASAYO, youth ministry, and regional Church initiatives connected to Asian Youth Day. At a time when youth ministry structures in the Malaysian Church were still emerging, Charles helped organise the country’s first National Young Leaders Forum, along with various formation programmes and training initiatives that continue serving young people today.

During his formation in France, he met his wife, Beatrice, whose liveliness and care captured his heart. After Charles returned to Malaysia, they remained connected through handwritten letters across continents for four years before she moved to Malaysia to begin their shared mission. They married in 1992 at the Church of St Anthony, Pudu.

Since then, Beatrice has been his helpmate, “bone of my bone,” as Charles describes her. “Without her shared commitment, I would not have been able to live out this vocation,” Charles says gratefully. Together, they raised three children who grew up experiencing mission life firsthand, and today they are also grandparents to two grandchildren.

Crossing borders

The doors opened unexpectedly in Myanmar.



Charles presenting at the 2025 ROOTS Conference in Bangkok.

What began as helping the Infant Jesus Sisters prepare for mission slowly opened unexpected doors with the bishops there. Soon, Charles was invited by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Myanmar to serve as the national adviser and help establish Karuna Myanmar Social Services (KMSS), by strengthening pastoral structures, leadership formation, and social mission initiatives under extremely difficult conditions of military rule, poor infrastructure, and ongoing conflicts. He served there for 6 years from 2000 to 2006.

During one of those travels on dusty, bumpy roads with military checkpoints, he heard the words of Ruth to Naomi: “Wherever you go, I will go; your people shall be my people, and your God will be my God.” He began to realise that Christ was calling him in a new way – a call within a call to walk with the poor.

The decision to move as a family was not easy. Beatrice initially was reluctant. They had children, and no certainty of schooling or assurances given the situation.

Then, during prayer while Charles was away, she experienced what she later described as a profound encounter or her “annunciation” with God – and her ‘yes’. She became certain this was their shared path.

For three years, the family lived a missionary life together in Myanmar. Their children adapted to new cultures and schools. Charles travelled constantly, helping dioceses organise ministries, train leaders, develop formation programmes, and rebuild systems weakened by years of hardship and isolation.

There were moments of exhaustion and uncertainty. Times when the local Church could not raise the needed support or finances. Times when the future felt fragile. Yet again and again, they discovered that God goes ahead of them.

On Pentecost Sunday this year, the Karuna Myanmar Social Services (KMSS) celebrated their Silver Jubilee, where Charles was invited as a guest of honour. What began with two staff in an old wooden building and uncertain finances, today KMSS employs 1,182 staff across 17 dioceses and plays a significant role in the country.

After Myanmar, there was an unexpected invitation to develop the mission in the Philippines. Charles helped to co-found the Institute of Formation for Fondacio Asia (IFFA), which continues to form young Asian leaders

for pastoral and social mission work today. He also played a key role in setting up the regional and mission coordination structures, including fundraising, and expanding Fondacio Asia’s presence across 15 countries and 45 dioceses throughout the region — all while pursuing theological studies, serving communities, and raising a family.

His service would eventually bring him into closer collaboration with the wider Church in the region. From 2019 to 2023, Charles served as Executive Secretary of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei (CBCMSB), helping coordinate key regional initiatives, including the Synod process, the development of the National Seminary Charter, the establishment of Caritas Malaysia, and efforts to strengthen communication and archival systems within the bishops’ conference.

Even in administrative leadership, he remained convinced that Church structures must ultimately serve the people of God and strengthen the Church’s missionary and synodal life.

Theology of the margins

But beyond all the titles, programmes, and achievements, his life tells a simpler story — the indispensable role of the laity. Again and again, whether in the villages of Myanmar, the youth communities of Malaysia, or the Indigenous longhouses of Borneo Malaysia, he saw ordinary people carrying the life of the Church forward.

This conviction shaped his academic work. His Master’s and doctoral research (PhD) focused on the theology of the laity and synodality in the Asian Church, especially Malaysia. Yet theology was never merely academic. He travelled widely, listening to bishops, priests, religious, migrants, indigenous communities, and ordinary Catholics across Sabah, Sarawak, and Peninsular Malaysia.

What moved him most was the wisdom already alive among the people. In longhouses and Basic Ecclesial Communities, he encountered ways of listening, discerning, and walking together that the wider Church still needs to learn.

For him, some of the deepest theology is found not in books, but in lived faith and struggles.

“Synodality is not a new programme but a conversion of how we live as Church, together,” he emphasises.

In Malaysia’s multi-ethnic context, he believes this listening Church is urgently needed: one that moves beyond symbolic consultation toward authentic participation, where the voices of Indigenous peoples, migrants, youth, and lay communities shape the Church’s journey.

“Be opened!”

After more than three decades of mission work across Asia, Dr Charles Bertille continues to offer his gifts wherever needed, without making demands.

He still sees hope in the same Spirit that first stirred his heart as a young man in the Malaysian margins: alive among young people, small Christian communities, ecological movements, indigenous communities, and the “little flock” of believers who continue serving faithfully at the margins.

His life stands as a witness to a generation increasingly paralysed by fear: fear of uncertainty, of commitment, of not having enough, and of missing out on a more comfortable life.

“Faith comes from hearing,” he reminds the Malaysian Church, echoing Romans 10:17 and the Shema Israel. “*Ephphatha* — be opened!” (Mark 7:34), a call he extends to the Malaysian Church today: to remain attentive to the voice of the Spirit in unexpected places, and to continue building a more participatory and synodal Church rooted in the lived experience of its people.



Charles and Beatrice with their three children during their younger days.

Fifteen minutes into a call to my bank. 15 agonising minutes of “If you need X press 1, for Y press 2,” and my work colleagues are sharing in my angst as I have put the call on speaker mode. When I finally connect to a human, the cubicles near me burst into a cheer. “17 minutes, 42 seconds,” announces the ad hoc timekeeper.

The call centre person asks me if I am in a public place, and if I could please go somewhere private because she needs to verify my identity. As I move into a room, the timekeeper resets his timer. My issue is resolved in four minutes and six seconds after speaking to an actual person.

For all the PR spin on automation, chat bots and AI supposedly making communications more accessible and efficient, I, and many others – even millennials and Gen Zs – are finding dealing with machines a tiresome, uphill task. While they are unfailingly good tempered, they are also pedantic to the point of idiocy. Corporations soothe customers with assurances that their AIs are ‘learning more every day to better serve you’, but while that happens, thousands of call centre employees are made redundant. Unlike the unjust steward in Luke 16:3, these terminated workers are collateral damage in an escalating technological war where the price is ultimately a breadwinner’s ability to keep providing for their family.

A Filipino friend who is a veteran call centre associate, and winner of over 20 awards for outstanding service and recovery turnaround was recently let go from his job of 22 years. At 50 he echoes the words of the dismissed steward, “What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I’m not strong enough to dig, and I’m ashamed to beg.”



Word in Progress

Karen-Michaela Tan

Situations like these bring the Bible uncomfortably close to home. As a Catholic, I am far more used to lifting passages of comfort and guidance from the good book and than I am in seeing mankind’s future predicted in it.

I forget sometimes that the Bible does not only present a retrospective look on humanity, but is also filled with cautionary advice even if mankind has moved from an agrarian society into a digital world.

Pope Leo XIV’s first encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas*, has ignited much discussion and provoked many commentaries since its release on May 25. The papal letter addresses the safeguarding of the human person in the time of artificial intelligence, and touches on Catholic social teaching as a response to the massive cultural change brought about by technological development. His Holiness, in his blunt, Chicagoan way condemned giving smartphones to young children without adult supervision, citing digital dependency, removal from real-world engagement, and the risk of isolation from devices hitherto touted as opening the world to people.

To hear the leader of the Catholic Church echo what psychiatrists have been warning about is to live in a time where the religious and secular intersect. Now more than ever, as Catholics who are in and of this world, we are called to be more on-guard than at any other time in history.

Technology which was supposed to

unite now drives people into worlds of their own. The current epidemic of loneliness has its nucleus in technology designed to connect. Free international phone calls which allowed families to stay in touch, now become avenues for scams and romance traps.

Capitalists and journalists may present Pope Leo’s words as an attack on big tech, as they zoom in on phrases like ‘disarming artificial intelligence’ but they neglect to see that his warnings and exhortations come firstly from a place of care.

There is so much sense and inspired thought in *Magnifica Humanitas*, from how technology should not be considered a force antagonistic to humanity, while delving into the greater question of the ownership and motivations of those who control proprietary technologies.

There are multiple discussion tangents to this encyclical, but perhaps the aspect that speaks most tenderly to me is the reminder that God, the creator of the world, and giver of all good gifts, has seen fit to give the world, in this time, the gift of technology.

It is, however, up to us to draw upon the gifts of the Holy Spirit to truly discern the nature of this technology. Pope Leo does not call us to regress and become luddites. He acknowledges the roles of technology in life and science, but he underscores that nothing can or should rob mankind of its great gift of humanity.

Jesus did not willingly become fully man and die humiliated and scorned so that we who live today give up autonomy

of thought and action to artificial intelligence. As we walk the tightrope of the times we live in, we are called to be real and authentic. In our persons, and in our loving.

To do this, we need to check that we are celebrating and mourning true relationships, not just social media ones. Even on platforms known for artifice, we need to strive for real goodness. Charity, integrity and godliness need to be demonstrated both online and in real life, with Catholics called to kindness not just because it may be captured on camera, but because God, the great judge, sees everything that the media doesn’t show.

It is our very human-ness which reminds us to look for those who are lonely at celebration time, to give from both our largesse and lack, to stand up to injustice, to become the equaliser in unfair circumstances, and to be bread for the hungry, salt to the depleted and light to all.

While it is irrefutable that God created man in His own image, mankind must be aware that not all creators of AI reflect the true God. The question we need to ask ourselves as Catholics in the age of artificial intelligence is not “Is it right if everyone is doing it?”, but rather, “Will I continue to be right with God if I do as the world does?”

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

Recently, I spoke with a fellow parishioner, a woman over sixty, who had just retired and radiated enthusiasm as she shared her plans, dreams, and projects. She wanted to do this and that, to strive for more. I listened quietly, then responded with honesty: “I have reached a stage of life where I have no more dreams, no more desire.” She was taken aback. “How can that be?” she asked. “You must live and strive for more!” But I could only smile. For me, the restless pursuit of “more” has ended, and in its place has come a quiet peace. At every age we face different challenges, but at this stage of my life — over sixty years old — I find myself reflecting on desire, fulfilment, and peace.

In my travels with Cardinal Sebastian Francis, our conversations range over everything except Church matters. I shared this story with him, and he offered a profound insight: “This peace is not resignation, nor despair. Desire-lessness is not the absence of longing, but the purification of it. It is the transformation of desire into something higher, something eternal.” What began as a simple statement has now deepened into a spiritual journey. I asked for it, and now I must understand the purification of desire.

From the reflections of St Augustine of Hippo, the lesson is clear: desire itself breeds restlessness. St Augustine, in his *Confessions*, wrote: “You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” He likened the soul to an empty vessel: to be filled with sweetness, one must first pour out the sour distractions of worldly pleasures.



A journey into desire-lessness

The goal is not to have zero desires, but to purify them into something spiritual.

This theme of detachment runs deep in Christian mysticism. Thinkers like Meister Eckhart and John of the Cross spoke of emptying the soul of worldly attachments to make room for God. I now find myself journeying into this realm of desire-lessness. Each morning, I wake without particular interest in anything. I read the news, I do my work, I contact friends. All is routine, yet within that routine I find contentment. With humour I can say I look forward to nothing.



Turun Padang

Christopher Kushi

This peace is nourished by spiritual gifts: the daily meditation of *The Word Among Us* sent by Fr Anthony Liew, the thoughtful posters of Fr Leonard Lexson which are funny and the same time thought-provoking, Sr Theresa Chua’s meditation group with *Catholic Daily Reflections*, Fr Patrick Massang’s weekly novena devotions, Fr Edmund Woon’s daily reflections and Sr Maria Lau’s Tuesday night *Infant Jesus Family Prayer*.

These offerings are spiritual manna that fill the void left by worldly pursuits. No more the politics of Trump, Putin and Xi.

In this state of desire-lessness, when friends send me videos on social media with themes like “How to Stay Healthy after 60,” “How to be Happy and Contented in Retirement,” “What Healthy Foods to Eat,” “Mobility Exercises for the Legs” — I thank them, but am not overly interested in the videos. At this age, nothing matters, we don’t need change but continuity. Nothing more needs to change.

There comes a time when the restless pursuit of “more” gives way to a quiet contentment in “enough.” What I have been given — it is enough. This stage of life has unfolded as a season of grace, a season of desire-lessness. It is not indifference, nor apathy, but rather, a deep surrender to life as it is.

Desire-lessness is not withdrawal from life, but a peaceful engagement with it. Without the noise of desires, I hear more clearly the quiet rhythms of existence. Without the burden of striving, I can live more freely. It is a stage in life where gratitude blossoms, where peace deepens, and where one awaits the coming of the end of life with no fear. Nothing dramatic, as I stand here, over sixty years old, desire-lessness, a life being refined!

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



Fr Philip Chua

The silent emotional toll of elderly caregiving

As Malaysia gradually moves toward an ageing society, more and more families are facing the realities of eldercare. Many people who care for ageing parents, dementia patients, or chronically ill family members, quietly carry immense physical, emotional, and financial burdens. Yet compared to the needs of the elderly themselves, the psychological well-being of caregivers is often overlooked.

Research shows that long-term caregiving can lead to anxiety, depression, insomnia, emotional exhaustion, and even “caregiver burnout.” In particular, family caregivers of dementia patients often live in a prolonged state of heightened alertness and psychological stress. A study involving dementia caregivers in Asia and New Zealand found that long-term caregiving significantly increases the risk of stress, social isolation, and emotional exhaustion.

Local studies in Malaysia also show that many family caregivers experience significant psychological burden, reduced quality of life, decreased self-efficacy, and prolonged emotional strain.

In many Asian cultures, filial piety is regarded as a core value. However, this cultural expectation can also make caregivers reluctant to express fatigue or emotional distress. They fear being judged as “not filial enough,” and thus choose to suppress their feelings and shoulder responsibilities alone. Over time, many develop emotional numbness, chronic fatigue, insomnia, anxiety, and even mild

depression.

Research in the United States indicates that 40 to 70 per cent of caregivers show significant depressive symptoms, and prolonged stress may also affect memory, concentration, and overall health.

Neal K. Shah, a scholar who has written extensively on eldercare and family caregiving, emphasises that modern society often underestimates the psychological, relational, and economic impact of caregiving. He highlights that caregiving is not only an act of love but also a long-term consumption of time, emotional energy, and life resources. Without adequate support systems, caregivers can easily fall into isolation and emotional breakdown.

In reality, many caregivers’ deepest suffering is not simply the workload, but loneliness. They feel that no one truly understands them. Siblings may offer advice but rarely share the burden; friends gradually drift away because caregivers no longer have time for social life. Some even quit their jobs and become fully absorbed in caregiving, slowly losing their own identity and personal life.

Psychological research shows that caregivers who consistently neglect their own emotional and physical health are prone to chronic stress. The body remains in a prolonged stress response, leading to weakened immunity, high blood pressure, emotional instability, sleep disorders, and exhaustion. Some caregivers eventually experience emotional numbness — not

because they feel nothing, but because they are too overwhelmed to process their emotions.

Therefore, caregivers’ mental health should not be seen as a luxury, but as an essential part of long-term care.

Mental health professionals increasingly encourage caregivers to practise self-care. Self-care is not selfish; rather, it is what enables a person to continue loving and caring for others in a sustainable way. Caregivers can begin with simple but meaningful practices:

- Maintain regular sleep and basic nutrition
- Take short daily breaks
- Engage in light exercise or walking
- Avoid carrying all responsibilities alone
- Learn to express emotions and stress
- Stay connected with friends, family, or support groups
- Seek counselling or professional help when needed
- Preserve personal interests and individual space

Sometimes, even one hour of rest, a sincere conversation, or a short walk outside can help restore emotional strength.

Research also shows that community support, counselling, peer support groups, respite care services, and shared family responsibility can significantly reduce caregiver burden. Even having someone listen, accompany, and show care can help

caregivers regain strength.

From a societal perspective, eldercare is no longer just a family issue but a public concern. As population ageing accelerates, societies need more comprehensive community care services, more affordable professional support, and more open conversations so that caregivers are not afraid to seek help.

From a Catholic perspective, caring for the elderly is a profound act of love and a lived expression of compassion and filial responsibility. However, the Church also reminds us that human beings are limited. Jesus once said to His disciples:

“Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.” — Mark 6:31

This reminds us that before caring for others, human beings also need rest, renewal, and care. Healthy love is not about self-destruction, but about learning to care for others while also caring for oneself.

Caregivers hold up the later years of the elderly, but society must also hold up those who quietly give so much of themselves.

Because often, the one thing they most need to hear is simply: “You have done enough. Thank you. You are not alone.”

Fr Philip serves as the ecclesiastical assistant for the Archdiocesan Mental Health Ministry. He is also a registered and licensed counsellor, as well as a certified counselling supervisor with Lembaga Kaunselor Malaysia.



Fr Ron Rolheiser

Feeding off sacred fire

There’s a lyric in a song by Gordon Lightfoot which tries to interpret the struggle going on in the heart of Miguel de Cervantes’ mythical hero, Don Quixote. His goodness separates him from the world, even as he understands that wickedness has the same source, namely, that both “the wise and wicked feed upon life’s sacred fire.”

And there’s perplexing irony here; both the wise and wicked, saints and sinners, feed off the same sacred source. The same energy that fuels the dedicated selflessness of the saint who dies for the poor, fires the irresponsible acting-out of the pop star who proudly boasts of thousands of sexual conquests. Both feed off the same energy which, in the end, is sacred. Godliness in this world is used for very different purposes.

For example, one of the major criticisms made of religion and the churches is that they frequently use God to justify every kind of war and violence. We commonly see terrible violence being fuelled by faith and religion.

And Christianity is hardly exempt. In the Crusades and the Inquisition, we have our own history of violence in God’s name, and there is more violence than we dare to admit being justified today by Christians who draw from their faith both their motivation and their energy to justify violence, racism, and inequality in

the name of Jesus. We can protest that, in these cases, their energy is misguided, perverted, or usurped for self-interest, but the point remains the same. It’s still sacred energy, even if it is being perverted.

John Lennon, in his song *Imagine*, famously suggested that we would move more easily towards love and peace if religion were eliminated (“*Nothing to kill or die for, and no religion too*”). There’s a dangerous naiveté in that, though he’s right in saying that the sacred energy found in religion often works against peace and love in this world.

Misguided religious zealots also feed upon life’s sacred fire.

However misguided, misused, or perverted, religious energy does not witness against God’s existence. The opposite: The very awfulness of its power, its blind grip, its capacity to totally take over someone’s life, and its sick overconfidence, point precisely to its godliness, its awe, its sacredness, and its roots within a reality and energy that dwarfs our own.

Sick religion is so powerful precisely because it’s real, not a fantasy. It may be sick, but it’s real. That’s why religious cults are dangerous. They’re dangerous because they’re real, monstrously so. People often die in cults because the divine fire that its misguided leaders channel is as real as the electricity that burns up a body when someone sticks a knife into a high

voltage electrical outlet. Metaphorically, that’s what cults do: they feed off sacred fire, off divine energy, but without the proper precautions and filters that the great spiritual traditions have taught are necessary in accessing the divine. Cults are dangerously naïve as to why Scripture warns us to approach the divine with care: “*No one can see the face of God and live!*”

What we see in bad religion is mirrored in our personal lives. This is sometimes hard to admit, but what seems wild and wicked inside us is also fuelled by life’s sacred fire. Our over-restless energies for creativity, for sex, for achievement, for enjoyment, and to know and be known within human community, are often used irresponsibly, excessively, narcissistically, manipulatively, and destructively. Moreover, those with sufficient nerve and insufficient conscience, the wild and wicked ones, often simply take what they want from life, without regard for morality or consequence. Their lives are often driven by wild, powerful, creative, and erotic forces that can look like the very antithesis of sacred energy.

But, again, the very power, seeming irresistibility and wildness of this energy is not an indication that these narcissistic, sexual, and seemingly self-centred energies are secular and devoid of holiness, or, worse still, at odds with what is holy and sacred within us. The opposite

is true: Their very power and seeming irresistibility lie precisely in their godliness and sacredness. Their fire is so powerful because it is sacred, divine, God’s energy inside of us.

Scripture tells us that we carry within us the image and likeness of God and that this is really our deepest identity and the source of our deepest energies. But we should not picture God’s image within us as some beautiful Andrei Rublev-like icon stamped inside our souls. God is fire, infinite energy, infinite creativity, infinite freedom, wildness beyond our imaginations, and an energy that is boundless and fuels everything that is, that lives, that breathes, that searches for meaning, that loves.

There is only one source of energy. Sacred fire fuels all of life and infuses everyone, saint and sinner alike. And God has given us the freedom to use it as we choose, wisely or wickedly. Feeding on the same sacred fire, we can become a warmonger or a peacemaker, a killer or a martyr, a hedonist or a saint.

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

LITTLE CATHOLIC'S CORNER

Dear children,

Have you ever felt hungry after a long day of playing, studying, or helping at home? Usually, we eat food to make our bodies strong again. In today's Gospel from John 6:51-58, Jesus speaks about a different kind of hunger: the hunger in our hearts. Jesus tells the people, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven," teaching them that He came to give love, hope, peace, and life to everyone. He was not speaking about ordinary bread, but about the Eucharist, where Jesus gives Himself to us so that we will never feel alone. Some of you may already have

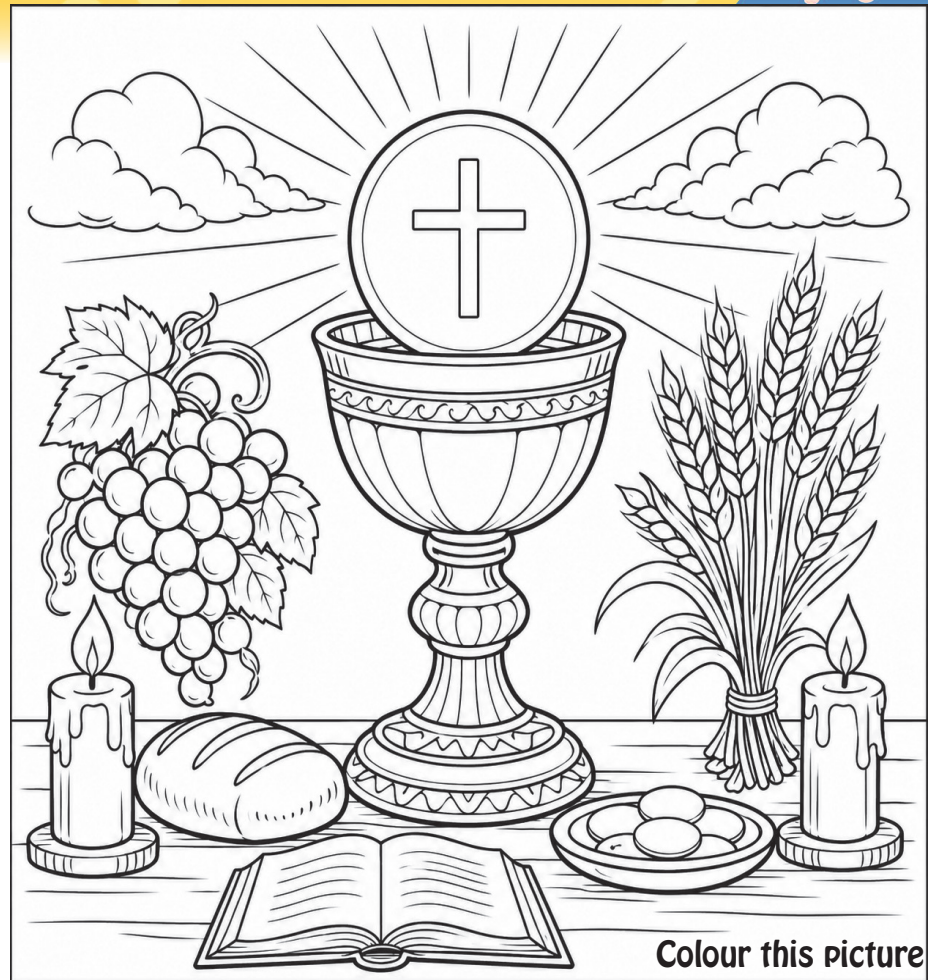
received Holy Communion, while some may still be waiting for that joyful day. No matter our age, Jesus invites each of us to stay close to Him.

We can do this by praying, listening during Mass, learning about Jesus, helping those in need, and showing kindness wherever we go. Every loving action, big or small, helps us grow closer to Jesus and become little lights of His love to others.

Remember that every time we receive Jesus in the Eucharist, we are never alone because Jesus is always with us.



Love,
Aunty C



Colour this picture

EUCHARIST VOCABULARY MATCHING

Directions: Match each word to its meaning.

- | | | | | |
|----------|-------------------|---|--|--|
| 1 | CORPUS CHRISTI | • | | Prayerful worship of Jesus in the Eucharist |
| 2 | EUCHARIST | • | | The Catholic celebration where the Eucharist is received |
| 3 | BLESSED SACRAMENT | • | | Another sign of God's grace |
| 4 | MASS | • | | The Body and Blood of Jesus Christ |
| 5 | ADORATION | • | | A feast that means "Body of Christ" |
| 6 | PROCESSION | • | | A prayerful walk, often with the Blessed Sacrament |
| 7 | SACRAMENT | • | | Jesus fully present in the consecrated host |

CORPUS CHRISTI

UNSCRAMBLE THE WORDS

to reveal words related to the Feast of Corpus Christi.

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| 1. UEASCRHTI _____ | 11. WPRHOIS _____ |
| 2. BGESINSL _____ | 12. ACEGR _____ |
| 3. DASCER _____ | 13. CSIEIFACR _____ |
| 4. HYLO _____ | 14. LRTUIA _____ |
| 5. CPNOEOSIRS _____ | 15. IEOGRNFF _____ |
| 6. AHTIF _____ | 16. SMAS _____ |
| 7. AYPERR _____ | 17. CACHELI _____ |
| 8. TRALA _____ | 18. SHRCTI _____ |
| 9. UHCRHC _____ | 19. CEVRENREE _____ |
| 10. OMMNUIONC _____ | 20. ECMOSNTARN _____ |

Answers:
1. EUCHARIST 2. BLESSING 3. SACRED 4. HOLY 5. PROCESSION 6. FAITH 7. PRAYER 8. ALTAR 9. CHURCH 10. COMMUNION 11. WORSHIP 12. GRACE 13. SACRIFICE 14. RITUAL 15. OFFERING 16. MASS 17. CHALICE 18. CHalice 19. CHRIST 20. MONSTRANCE

CORPUS CHRISTI

Jesus is the Bread of Life!



- | | | |
|----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| CORPUS CHRISTI | BODY OF CHRIST | COMMUNION |
| JESUS | BLOOD OF CHRIST | CHALICE |
| EUCHARIST | BREAD | BLESSING |
| REAL PRESENCE | WINE | MYSTERY OF FAITH |



YOUTH

“Come and See” Young men explore priestly calling

PENANG: Answering the call to “come and see,” 25 young men from the three dioceses of Peninsular Malaysia took part in a vocation stay-in experience in April at College General Regional Major Seminary. The four-day programme provided a prayerful and structured environment for aspirants to encounter seminary life firsthand while deepening their discernment of the priestly vocation.

The programme began on Thursday evening with Vespers, followed by an ice-breaking session and a welcome by the Rector, Fr Ryan Innas Muthu. In his address, Fr Ryan introduced the seminary and emphasised the four pillars of priestly formation which are human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral, highlighting the need for a balanced and integrated formation.

The days that followed reflected the



rhythm of seminary life, beginning with morning prayer, meditation, and the Eucharist. Fr Cyril Mannayagam led a session on the diocesan priesthood, offering clarity on its mission and responsibilities, and helping aspirants better understand what it means to serve as a diocesan priest.

This was followed by an input on Ignatian discernment by Fr Larry Tan, SJ,

who explained how emotions and interior movements can play an important role in recognising God’s call, drawing from the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola. His session gave practical guidance on approaching discernment with greater awareness and openness.

A highlight of the programme was the Q&A session, where aspirants engaged

with Fr Surain Durai Raj, Dean of Studies, together with several seminarians. The session was marked by honest sharing, as the panel spoke openly about their own experiences, offering encouragement and insight into the realities of seminarian and priestly life.

The stay-in also included a pastoral exposure with a visit to the Little Sisters of the Poor (LSP), Home for the Aged, providing a glimpse into the pastoral dimension of formation. Through their time with the residents, the aspirants experienced the joy of service. Sr Jessica encouraged them to take the next step in their journey, while Fr Ryan shared light-hearted yet meaningful memories from his own pastoral experiences.

Alongside these activities, the aspirants joined the seminarians in community life, including prayer, manual work, and recreation, fostering fraternity and a deeper appreciation of seminary formation. Enriched by the experience and renewed in spirit, the aspirants returned home with a deeper understanding of the priestly vocation and a greater openness to God’s call.



Below are a few testimonials from the aspirants

“My recent stay-in experience offered a glimpse into the life of a diocesan priest, balancing prayer, study, and service. Spiritually, the rhythm of Evening Vespers and Adoration felt truly divine. This was complemented by intellectual growth through clear, engaging talks on Ignatian discernment, Sacred Scripture, and the practical realities of the priesthood.

The fraternal aspect brought a sense of joy and humility; whether we were working together during manual labour or laughing through a competitive game of football, it was clear that we were brothers. Finally, the pastoral visit to the Little Sisters of the Poor was deeply touching, reminding me that at the heart of this calling is humble, compassionate service to those most in need.”
Uriahs Richard, Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Ipoh (Diocese of Penang)

“My journey began from my hometown, stepping into something new and unknown. Along the way to College General, I felt a bit

afraid, wondering how it would be. Would it be strict like a boarding school? Would I be able to adjust? But when I arrived, I experienced a deep inner peace. It felt like I was in the right place. Meeting the aspirants and beloved brother seminarians brought me comfort and joy. Life there was beautiful. We prayed, played, studied, and worked together. More than that, we shared our stories and built a strong brotherhood. Visiting the Little Sisters of the Poor in Penang was a meaningful experience. As a pastoral worker, I learned a lot about love, care, and

service.

“My simple message: Don’t be afraid to try, and don’t be afraid to fail.

“I am thankful to the Rector, Fr Ryan, and all the formators: Fr Cyril, Fr Surain, Fr Larry, Fr Stephen, and Fr Joachim for their care and guidance. A special thanks to my vocation director and parish priest, Fr Simon, for leading me on this journey. *Deo gratias.*” **Jeshua Raphael, Church of St Jude, Rawang (Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur)**

“The stay-in programme at College General was a

happy, joyful and educational experience, one soaked in God’s word and in His love. I learned discipline, teamwork, and how to adapt to a new environment. It was an important step in my personal growth as an aspirant, and with God’s grace, for my entry to become a seminarian. Our time at the Little Sisters of the Poor was a really touching moment for me. I look forward to continue serving the elderly in a pastoral capacity.” **Roberto Henry Christo, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Georgetown (Diocese of Penang)**

“In my four days at the seminary, I learned obedience, time management, and discipline, while meeting some truly great like-minded individuals. The teachings and guidance I received in this short time were so valuable that I am sure it will go down as a truly significant moment in my life. My discernment journey is not over — it continues, and the itch grows stronger the more I try to suppress it.” **Aaron Dass, Church of the Good Shepherd, Setapak (Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur)**



PLUG IN



ASAYOKL

KL CAMPUS GATHERING BRINGS CATHOLIC STUDENTS TOGETHER

KUALA LUMPUR: On May 16, Catholic university and college students from across the Klang Valley gathered at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre (APC) for the inaugural PLUG IN: KL Campus Gathering, organised by the Archdiocesan Single Adults & Youth Office (ASAYO KL) in collaboration with the KL Central District.

Held under the theme, "I am with you always" (Mt 28:20), the gathering sought to provide students with a welcoming space to pause amidst the busyness of campus life, reconnect with their faith, and journey alongside young fellow Catholics.

The initiative prioritised students who are currently studying or residing within the KL districts — particularly those who may not yet be connected to a Catholic community on their campuses or in their parishes. By bringing together students from different campuses and districts, the gathering hoped to help participants recognise one

another, build friendships, and begin forming support networks during their university years.

The programme began with a reflective activity centred on the realities of campus life. Through a series of prompts at different reflection stations, students were invited to anonymously share their experiences, struggles, hopes, and sources of strength using post-it notes. Responses touched on themes such as academic stress, loneliness, uncertainty about the future, and the search for belonging.

Participants were later invited to respond to one another's reflections through words of encouragement, practical advice, and short prayers — creating a quiet but meaningful experience of accompaniment and solidarity among the students.

The gathering also introduced the vision of Campus Line ArchKL, an initiative aimed at renewing and

strengthening Campus Ministry across the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur. The initiative seeks to bridge students with parish communities, campus ministries, and fellow Catholic students so that young people may feel accompanied throughout their campus journey.

During the input and sharing sessions, students reflected on Jesus' promise in Matthew 28:20 and how His presence can be experienced through friendships, community, and the people who walk alongside them. In small groups, participants shared openly about their personal struggles, hopes, and moments where they recognised God's presence in their lives.

The gathering concluded with presentations by various Catholic Students Societies (CSS), Catholic Varsity Student (CVS) groups, and campus ministries, allowing students to discover communities and support systems available within their respective campuses and districts.

As part of the ongoing Campus Line ArchKL initiative, similar Plug In gatherings are planned to take place in other districts across the archdiocese. Campus Line ArchKL roadshows and outreach initiatives will also continue throughout the year, culminating in an Archdiocesan-level Campus Gathering in November in conjunction with the local World Youth Day celebration. **ASAYO KL**



KUALA LUMPUR: In the midst of the city's pace and noise, young adults were invited to pause, listen, and rediscover what it means to be seen.

From May 1 to 3, the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre hosted SEEN: A City Retreat for Young Adults, organised by the Archdiocesan Single Adults & Youth Office (ASAYO KL) under the Catholic Young Adult Network KL (CYAN KL), in collaboration with the KL Central District.

The retreat gathered young adults aged 24 and above for a contemplative experience grounded in John 14:9: *To have seen Me is to have seen the Father*. Drawing from the writings of St Teresa of Avila, participants were invited to explore the relationship between knowing God and knowing oneself; a journey that begins not in activity, but in attention.

ENTERING THE INTERIOR LIFE

The retreat unfolded through a rhythm of input, silence, prayer, and personal reflection. Participants were first invited to consider a simple yet searching question: What am I really searching for?

For some, this became a moment of personal encounter. One participant shared that it felt as though "God was asking back... what do I really want?"

Through the lens of St Teresa's *Interior Castle*, the retreat explored the "rooms" within the human person, including those often avoided. Participants reflected on themes such as busyness, identity, and the pressure to perform, recognising how easy it is to remain outwardly engaged while being inwardly distant.

"It made me realise there are many aspects of my life that I consciously avoid," one participant noted.

A SPACE OF OPENNESS

Many participants spoke of the retreat as a safe and welcoming environment. It was a

SEEN: A CITY RETREAT FOR YOUNG ADULTS



space where they could "truly be who we are and express our thoughts freely without being judged".

This sense of openness was shaped not only by the programme, but also by the attentiveness of the facilitators and team. Through shared prayer, accompaniment, and simple acts of care, participants encountered not only themselves more honestly, but also the presence of God through others.

LEARNING TO BE PRESENT

A key theme that emerged was the distinction between "doing" and "being." In a culture that often measures worth through productivity, participants were invited to rediscover prayer as a way of remaining, rather than performing.

For many, this required a conscious slowing down. "Slowing down from everyday life to notice God's presence... is something we rarely do," one participant reflected.

Through silence, Eucharistic Adoration, and guided reflection, participants experienced a more grounded way of relating to God that is marked by presence rather than effort.

Encounter in the city

A highlight of the retreat was the Urban Pilgrimage, where participants were sent out into the surrounding city to observe and reflect.

In this simple exercise, the city became a mirror of the interior life. Participants began to notice how their patterns of distraction, restlessness, or attentiveness reflected deeper movements within themselves.

For one participant, the experience became deeply personal: "During the pilgrimage, I could hear His voice... His love, and that He will never leave me".

SENT FORTH

The retreat concluded by inviting participants to identify one simple, faithful next step in their daily lives. Rather than making large resolutions, the emphasis was on small, concrete movements; whether in prayer, relationships, or daily habits.

CONTINUING THE JOURNEY

While the city remains unchanged, many participants left with a renewed awareness of God's presence in the ordinary.

As one reflected, "God is always with us... even when we are too busy to notice".

The journey continues through the Catholic Young Adult Network KL (CYAN KL) and the KL Central District Young Adults community, which offer ongoing spaces for prayer, formation, and accompaniment.

For young adults seeking to remain grounded in faith amid the realities of city life, these communities provide a path forward, one step at a time.

"Over the first weekend of May, I attended the SEEN retreat organised by ASAYO Kuala Lumpur at APC KL. I went in with no expectations, simply wanting a break from my busy life, but what I experienced was so much more," said Felicia Albert from the Church of St Thomas More.

"From the very beginning, the retreat challenged me with deep questions about what I want in life and why. It made me realise that what I think I need is not always what I truly need.


"One of the most eye-opening moments for me was during the urban pilgrimage. I became aware of how often I move through life with tunnel vision, so focused on my own goals that I fail to notice what is around me, including God's presence.

"I also realised how distracted I've become, especially by my phone, and how easily I disconnect from the present moment. This retreat reminded me to slow down, to become more attentive, and to recognise that God has always been there. I just have not always noticed.

"Overall, the retreat was a deeply meaningful and grounding experience. I not only encountered God in a new way, but also found a community of people I can journey with. I am truly grateful for this experience and leave with a renewed heart and perspective on life," she added. **ASAYO KL**

MEMORIAM

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**4th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of
Utiramary P. Thomas @ Jothi**
Returned to the Lord on
10th June 2022

Your Love
is always in our hearts
Your Kindness
is fondly remembered
Your Faith
has shown us grace and mercy
Even though you are now
in God's Kingdom
The memory of you is
always beautifully near

Dearly missed and fondly remembered
by Husband, Daughters, Sons-In-Law,
Grandchildren, Relatives
and Friends.

**THIRD ANNIVERSARY
IN LOVING MEMORY OF**




**James Tharumathungam Bonney
With Christ on 12 June 2023**

Three years have gone by! We feel your caring presence each day.
It helps us to talk and pray that you intercede for us also.
We thank The Lord for your life, which taught us
To love and care selflessly.
Thank you for loving us as you did, Dad.

Preciously loved for your big heart, humour and wisdom.
Affectionately treasured always and forever by
Helen, Glenn, Evelyn, Germaine, Christopher,
Edison, Jemima, George, Ava and Oliver.

**10th Anniversary
Sugumarun Kunjan
6th June 2016**



*Eternal rest grant unto
him, O Lord and let
perpetual light shine
upon him.*

Deeply missed
and forever loved by
wife Sylvia Carvalho,
children Mary-Ann &
Peter, grandchildren
Gabrielle, Michael &
Sarah and loved ones.

**1st Anniversary
In Loving Memory of**



**Tressal Addan Pereira
@ Edna**

**From the Lord:
17th August 1959
With the Lord:
7th June 2025**

*"I have fought the
good fight,
I have finished the race,
I have kept the faith."*

Deeply missed and
cherished by loved ones.

The gentle evangelist who led thousands to Christ

Fr Gino Henriques, CSsR (1937-2026)

SINGAPORE: The passing of Fr Joseph Hygino Henriques, CSsR, fondly known across Asia as Fr Gino, marks the end of an extraordinary chapter in the life of the Church, but the memory of the beloved Redemptorist priest continues to live on in the countless hearts he touched through his ministry of healing, evangelisation and prayer.

Fr Gino died on May 12 at Woodlands Hospital in Singapore at the age of 89, leaving behind a legacy that stretched across Asia and Oceania. Yet those who knew him best insist that his life was never about fame, crowds or recognition, but about leading people gently and tirelessly to Christ.

Born in Goa, India, on Sept 30, 1936, Fr Gino joined the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer and was ordained a priest in 1963. Over the decades, he would become one of the region's most recognisable Catholic evangelists, especially during the rise of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement in the 1980s and 1990s. Churches, parish halls and convention centres across Malaysia, Singapore, India and the Philippines

were often filled beyond capacity whenever he conducted healing rallies, retreats or missions. He was also known as a spiritual adviser to Mother Teresa of Kolkata.

In 1986, he was appointed to lead the Asia-Pacific office of Evangelisation 2000, a movement aimed at renewing missionary outreach ahead of the Great Jubilee. Based in Singapore, Fr Gino travelled tirelessly throughout the region preaching to bishops, priests, religious and laity alike. He later continued this missionary work as International Director of Evangelisation 2033, remaining deeply committed to spiritual renewal and discipleship. Following Fr Gino's passing, the movement continues its worldwide mission in the lead-up to the 2000th anniversary of Christ's resurrection in the year 2033.

To many, however, Fr Gino's greatest gift was not simply his powerful preaching, but the gentle holiness that radiated through his life.

Some 800 faithful joined about 40 clergy and religious at the Church of St Alphonsus (Novena Church) on May 15 to bid farewell to the



Fr Gino during one of his overseas missions. Over decades of ministry, he travelled extensively across the Asia-Pacific region preaching retreats and conducting healing services. Photo: Linus Koh.

priest many affectionately called "an anointed servant of God."

During the funeral Mass, fellow Redemptorist Fr Simon Pereira described him as "the most anointed, charismatic priest" he had encountered. Yet beneath the travelling, preaching and large public gatherings was a deeply prayerful man anchored in devotion to the Eucharist and Our Lady.

"He was a man of prayer," Fr Simon said. "He may have been moving around in many parts of the world, but he was deeply devoted to Our Lady and the Eucharist, and that kept him going."

Fr Simon reminded mourners that Fr Gino's ministry always pointed beyond himself to Christ and the promise of eternal life.

"Today is a day of hope, joy, and thanksgiving," he said. "Thanking God for the gift of Fr Gino in our faith journey."

Among those most deeply moved

was Christian Kwan, who had accompanied and cared for Fr Gino for more than three decades. Having first met him shortly after becoming Catholic in 1990, Kwan would go on to assist him in missions, retreats and overseas travels.

He recalled how Fr Gino would painstakingly adapt every talk to the people before him, often staying up late into the night revising retreat materials so they would better speak to the needs of those attending.

More than his preaching, however, Kwan remembered his gentleness.

"His gentleness, his demeanour, his care and love for people... He was truly a living Christ to me," he said.

Even in his final months, Fr Gino's quiet witness continued to touch lives. Kwan recounted how the Muslim nurses who cared for him at an assisted living home attended his wake in tears, a testament to the compassion and kindness he

showed to everyone he encountered.

Jerome Chang, Executive Director of the Catholic Spirituality Centre, said Fr Gino remained a beloved figure within charismatic and retreat communities.

"He had such a gentle way about him, even as he preached God's truths with unwavering zeal and fire," Chang said.

On the eve of the funeral, Cardinal William Goh visited the wake and offered prayers of thanksgiving for Fr Gino's life.

He described the late priest as one who had "inspired many lives, brought many conversions and most of all, brought many people to Christ."

For many Catholics across Asia, that may well remain the enduring memory of Fr Gino, a missionary priest whose magnetic spirituality, humility and unwavering love for Jesus quietly transformed countless lives. RVA/catholicnews.sg



Fr Simon Tan CSsR incensing the coffin of Fr Gino at the Mass. (Catholic News SG)

FOR THE VALUES OF SPORTS
We pray that sports be an instrument of peace, encounter, and dialogue among cultures and nations, and that they promote values such as respect, solidarity, and personal growth.

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TOGETHER, WE MAKE EACH DAY DIFFERENT

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From L-R: Archbishop Emeritus John Ha, Fr Robert Leong, Bishop Joseph Hii, Bishop Julius Dusin, Bishop Richard Ng, Archbishop Julian Leow, Pope Leo XIV, Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Cardinal William Goh, Archbishop Simon Poh, Bishop Bernard Paul and Archbishop John Wong.

CBCMSB's *Ad Limina* visit to Rome 2026



Holy Mass at the Basilica of San Giovanni in Laterano was celebrated by Cardinal Sebastian Francis, assisted by Archbishop Julian Leow and Bishop Joseph Hii.



Meeting with the Dicastery for the Clergy, chaired by the Prefect, Cardinal Lazzaro You Heung-Sik.

ROME: After six spiritually enriching and eventful days in the heart of the Catholic Church, the bishops of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei concluded their *ad limina apostolorum* visit carrying home more than reports and recommendations — they returned renewed in fraternity, strengthened in communion and inspired with a deeper sense of mission for the Church in the region.

Held from May 18 to 23, the pilgrimage brought together the bishops of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei (CBCMSB) for a series of meetings with Pope Leo XIV, Vatican dicasteries and Church leaders, while also fulfilling the centuries-old tradition of praying at the tombs of Saints Peter and Paul.

From the very beginning, the pilgrimage was marked by prayer and anticipation. As the bishops travelled to Rome in separate groups for logistical and safety reasons,

Catholics throughout the region spiritually accompanied them through special intentions and prayers offered in parishes and communities.

What unfolded over the following days was far more than a routine ecclesiastical obligation. The pilgrimage became a deeply meaningful spiritual and pastoral journey marked by dialogue, fraternity, reflection and encounters that touched on every aspect of Church life.

The bishops quickly entered the demanding rhythm of the Roman Curia. Meetings at the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments focused on liturgy, pastoral realities and the unique challenges faced by Churches serving multicultural and multireligious societies such as Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei.

On another day, the bishops walked through the streets of Rome to the General Secretariat of the Synod, a symbolic reflection of the synodal journey the universal Church

continues to emphasise. Discussions with the Dicastery for Evangelisation and other Vatican offices highlighted the missionary identity of the Church and the importance of walking together as the People of God.

The pilgrimage was not without moments of warmth and familiarity. On one of the afternoons, the bishops were hosted to a Malaysian meal by Ambassador Hendy Assan at a restaurant that has served authentic Malaysian cuisine in Rome for nearly three decades. Amid laughter, shared memories and familiar flavours from home, the gathering became a gentle reminder that faith, culture and identity remain deeply connected even thousands of kilometres away.

Yet the spiritual high point of the pilgrimage came on Day Five. Before dawn broke over Rome, the bishops crossed St Peter's Square to celebrate the Eucharist at the Tomb of St Peter himself — the fisherman chosen by Christ to shepherd His Church. Later that same day came the long-awaited

private audience with Pope Leo XIV, regarded as the highest expression of communion between local bishops and the Successor of Peter.

For many of the bishops, the encounter with the Holy Father was marked not merely by formality, but by genuine fraternity, encouragement and pastoral closeness.

The final day of the pilgrimage unfolded in a quieter and more reflective atmosphere. At the Basilica of St Mary Major, Cardinal William Goh presided over Mass near the tomb of Pope Francis, whose humility and simplicity continue to leave a lasting impression on pilgrims visiting the basilica. The bishops later completed their final Vatican meeting before visiting the L'Opera Della Chiesa community, which had generously assisted them throughout the week.

As the pilgrimage drew to a close, there was a visible sense of both exhaustion and gratitude among the delegation. Beneath the formal meetings and carefully planned schedules

lay something far deeper — a reminder that the Church remains both universal and deeply personal, united not merely through institutions and structures, but through prayer, communion and shared mission.

For Catholics in Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, the *ad limina* visit also served as a visible sign that their local Churches remain closely connected to the wider universal Church. Amid cultural diversity, social challenges and rapidly changing realities, the pilgrimage reaffirmed that the mission of the Gospel continues to move forward with hope.

Having returned to their dioceses, the bishops now carry with them not only the experiences of Rome, but also renewed spiritual strength, deeper unity and a clearer sense that the journey of the Church is one that must always be walked together.

HERALD Malaysia
To read the full reports, go to: <https://bit.ly/3PQUDGh>



Taking a joyful pause to enjoy the refreshing taste of gelato in the heart of the Holy City.



Mass celebrated in solemnity at the tomb of St Peter, remembering the priesthood and episcopal ministry founded upon the faith and witness of the first Pope of the Church.



Fellowship with the Ambassador of Malaysia to the Holy See, His Excellency Hendy Assan (in orange) together with the clergy, religious and laity currently studying/working in Rome.