

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



**VATICAN:** As conflicts continue to rage worldwide, Pope Leo XIV has issued urgent calls for peace, warning that humanity is entering a dangerous resurgence of war. Highlighting crises in Ukraine, Gaza, the Middle East, Iran, Sudan, Africa, and Latin America, the Pope emphasised that true security cannot be achieved through weapons or domination, but through justice, solidarity, and dia-

logue among nations.

“War is back in vogue, and a zeal for war is spreading,” he told diplomats in a major foreign policy address, cautioning against reliance on military power over diplomacy. He highlighted the human toll of conflict, including displaced communities, lost lives, and fractured societies, urging leaders to implement ceasefires, protect civilians, and pursue negotiations for a just and lasting peace.

The Pope warned that ongoing violence erodes respect for human life and international law, noting that peace is not merely the absence of war, but the active pursuit of justice,

dialogue, and reconciliation. He appealed to Catholics and people of goodwill to pray for peace and advocate for the vulnerable, emphasizing that every person has a role in building a world free from violence.

Concluding his remarks, Pope Leo XIV stressed that the world cannot grow accustomed to war and urged nations to prioritise human life over military ambitions. “Nothing is lost with peace; everything can be lost with war,” he said, calling on governments and citizens alike to work together so that future generations inherit a world marked by dialogue, solidarity, and hope.

## Prayer for Peace

Saint Francis, our brother, you who eight hundred years ago, went to meet Sister Death as a man at peace, intercede for us with the Lord. In the Crucifix of San Damiano, you recognized true peace, teach us to seek Him, the source of all reconciliation that breaks down every wall. You who, unarmed, crossed the lines of war and misunderstanding, give us the courage to build bridges where the world erects borders, In this time afflicted by conflict and division, intercede so that we may become peacemakers: unarmed and disarming witnesses to the peace that comes from Christ. Amen.



## Global flash points and crises today

### Ukraine – Ongoing war and humanitarian crisis

The conflict continues with widespread destruction, displacement, and civilian casualties. Critical infrastructure, including hospitals and energy systems, has been heavily affected.

### Gaza and Middle East – Escalating violence and civilian suffering

Prolonged hostilities have caused mass displacement, food insecurity, and severe disruption of basic services across the region

### Iran and Surrounding Region – Rising tensions and regional instability

Military strikes and retaliations have led to civilian casualties and damage to infrastructure, creating growing humanitarian and security concerns.

### Sudan – Civil war and mass displacement

Fighting has caused famine conditions, thousands of deaths, and millions displaced, while healthcare and essential services remain severely disrupted.

### Other parts of Africa – Armed conflicts and emergencies

Internal conflicts in Ethiopia, Somalia, and the Sahel have displaced civilians, disrupted aid, and created widespread humanitarian hardship

### Latin America – Violence, social unrest, and organised crime

Several countries face armed violence, drug-related crime, and political unrest, including Honduras, El Salvador, Mexico, and Colombia. Criminal gangs and ongoing conflicts threaten communities, with

many civilians caught in the crossfire. The Pope has called on governments to protect vulnerable populations, promote social justice, and seek peaceful solutions to reduce violence and build safer communities.

### Myanmar – Ongoing civil conflict and humanitarian crisis

Myanmar continues to face a severe humanitarian crisis following years of civil conflict and military crackdowns. Armed clashes, political instability, and persecution of ethnic and religious minorities have displaced hundreds of thousands of civilians and caused widespread suffering. The Pope has called for dialogue, protection of human rights, and humanitarian assistance for affected populations.

For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true).

*Ephesians 5:8-9*



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# From complaints to gratitude – a simple shift we all need

Ever catch yourself saying, “Why is it so hot?” “Why is the traffic so bad?” “Why is this queue so long?”

The words come out almost without thinking. We complain about the weather, delays, slow Internet, a long homily, or a meeting that runs overtime. In a world where we expect things fast and on demand, even small disruptions can feel like big problems.

Complaining has become normal. It fills conversations. It wins sympathy. On social media, it even gets attention. A small irritation can quickly turn into shared frustration. Yet, while we are quick to point out what is wrong, we often miss what is quietly going right.

We have become good at criticising our circumstances, but slow at practising gratitude.

Psychologists call this “negativity bias” — our tendency to notice the bad more than the good. One unpleasant moment can overshadow ten good ones. One harsh comment can stay with us longer than many kind words. This may be part of human nature, but it does not have to control us.

The real question is not whether inconveniences exist — they do. The question is whether we allow them to take over our hearts.

Think about it. We complain about standing during a long Mass, yet we would wait hours for a concert or a celebrity. We grumble about walking 500 metres in the heat, while many people walk much farther each day just to fetch water or go to school. We get upset about traffic, forgetting that having a car is already a blessing for many.

Often, the problem is not the situation — it is how we see it.

Changing our perspective does not mean pretending everything is fine. It means choosing to look deeper and ask: What is really happening? And even more importantly: What is happening inside me?

Every complaint says something about us. Sometimes it shows tiredness. Sometimes it reveals impatience. Sometimes it points to expectations that life should always be comfortable. Usually, the inconvenience itself is only part of the story.

That is why moving from complaining to gratitude is more than just “being positive.” It is a real change of heart.

Scripture reminds us to “do everything without complaining,” so that we may “shine like stars in the world.” This does not mean we ignore our feelings. It means we choose not to let small frustrations shape who we are.

Gratitude is not weakness. It is strength.

It says that even when things are not perfect, there is still something good. Even in delay, there may be protection. Even in discomfort, there can be growth.

So how do we begin?

First, *look beyond yourself*. When we remember that others are carrying heavier burdens — illness, job loss, grief, loneliness — our own frustrations become smaller. Compassion changes our focus from “Why is this happening to me?” to “How can I think of others?”

Second, *pray honestly*. Patience does not come automatically. When irritation rises, a simple prayer — “Lord, help me respond well” — can calm the moment. Prayer reminds us that we are not alone and that we do not have to react to everything.

Third, *offer the moment*. The next time

you feel like complaining, pause. Instead of saying it out loud, quietly offer that irritation for someone who needs prayer — a sick friend, a struggling family, a troubled nation. What would have been wasted in grumbling becomes meaningful.

Finally, *practise specific gratitude*. Not just a general “I’m thankful,” but clear, simple thanks. For your health. For your family. For your daily bread. For your faith. Gratitude grows when we name our blessings.

Change will not happen overnight. We will still slip. Some days we will complain before we even realise it. But growth is not about perfection — it is about direction.

Little by little, things shift.

Bitterness softens.

Impatience eases.

Negativity gives way to hope.

When we choose gratitude, the atmosphere around us changes. Our conversations become lighter. Our presence becomes steadier. People notice.

In a world that is quick to criticise, a grateful heart stands out. It brings calm instead of noise, hope instead of anger.

Gratitude does not deny that life is hard. It simply refuses to let difficulty have the last word.

So, the next time you feel like saying, “Why is everything so difficult?” pause for a moment and ask instead:

“What good is still here?”

“What is grace offering me today?”

You may discover that even in the middle of inconvenience, something beautiful is already at work.

*Amanda Mah*

## Choosing light over darkness

Plato once said that we can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light. For many people, the fear of the dark and darkness never leaves them. Personally, I still fear the dark. Once, when I was in Chang Mai for a retreat, I found myself being the only one left in the entire building. When I went for a shower in the evening, it was already dark and my imagination ran wild.

When I spoke to my Spiritual Director about it, he told me it was an irrational fear and it was because I could not see anything in the dark which is why I am afraid. Different people have different kinds of fear but I believe that for most people, they are afraid of what they cannot see or perceive and very often, this happens in the dark. We want or need the light so that we can see what is around us and what is ahead of us. This gives the sense of comfort and control. This is on the physical level. But what about on the spiritual level?

In today’s second reading, St Paul tells the Ephesians, and us, that although we were in darkness once, now we are light in the Lord. Of course, St Paul was not referring to physical darkness. Rather, he was referring to spiritual darkness that prevents us from discovering what the Lord wants of us. The sad thing is, sometimes we become too comfortable living in spiritual darkness that we no longer wish to approach the light. When we step into the light, we face another fear — the fear of having our deepest secrets being exposed for everyone to see.

This is precisely what St Paul is asking us to do — to wake up from our sleep, to rise from the dead and to allow Christ to shine on us. Only then will we be free of the darkness that engulfs us. We are afraid of the light for two reasons — we are ashamed of what we have done in secret and in the dark and we fear what the light will do to us. Many of us are like Bartimeus, the blind man in the Gospel today. We may not be physically blind but for the most part, we are somewhat spiritually blind. Bartimeus wanted to see again and Jesus, in His love, restored his sight.

The thing with this passage is the understanding of physical impairment and its connection to sin. The Pharisees believed wholeheartedly that the man’s blindness was the effect of sin. Of course, we know that sin has nothing to do with impairment. The bigger problem, however, is the refusal of the Pharisees to see the true nature of Christ and His works. Instead of focusing on the miracles, they only focused on Him breaking the Sabbath — you break the law, you are not from God. They were not able to see the love of God in these miracles.

This is why Jesus told the Pharisees that He had come so that those without sight may see and those with sight turn blind. He was not referring to physical blindness but spiritual blindness. When one is not able to see the love and goodness of God in a situation, even though they have physical sight, they will forever remain spiritually blind. Spiritual blindness will eventually

### Reflecting on our Sunday Readings with Fr Philip Tay, OCD

#### 4th Sunday of Lent (A)

Readings: 1 Samuel 16: 1, 6-7;

Ephesians 5: 8-14;

Gospel: John 9: 1-41

lead to spiritual death.

As we celebrate *Laetare* Sunday, we rejoice because, as children of God and children of the Light, we all have the light of life, the light that has been given to us by Christ. The choice is up to us, we either choose to remain in the dark or to step out into the light. The journey will not be easy. Think of how a person’s eyes react when they step out of a dark room and into a lighted room. The eyes need time to adjust to the brightness because it is more accustomed to the dark. Sometimes, the light will be painful to the eye. Gradually, however, the eyes will slowly adjust to the light and the discomfort will disappear.

This is how it is with the light of Christ. Initially it may cause us some discomfort but once we are accustomed to being in the light, we will wonder why it took us so long to step into the light. As Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.” Let us allow the love of God to shine in our lives so that we no longer live in darkness but in the light of Christ.

**KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE**

**Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow**

**March**

- 17 **Chrism Mass – Church of the Visitation, Seremban at 7.00pm**
- 17-18 **Clergy Monthly Recollection**
- 19 **Meeting – Archdiocesan Finance**

**PENANG DIOCESE**

**Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis**

**March & April**

- 17 **Caritas Cheque Presentation at 10.00am – Catholic Diocesan Centre, Penang**
- 18 **Meeting – Rev Fr Laurence Freeman, OSB of World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM) at 3.00pm – Bishop’s Residence**
- 22 **Confirmation – Church of St Joseph, Batu Gajah at 9.00am**
- 24 **Council of Priests at 10.00am**
- 24 **Chrism Mass – Church of Divine Mercy, Sg Ara, Penang at 8.00pm**
- 25-25 **Clergy Monthly Recollection**
- 26/3-5/4 **Masses for Holy Week and Easter – Church of Our Lady of Fatima of the Holy Rosary, Kota Bahru, Kelantan**

**MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE**

**Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul**

**March**

- 17 **Quarterly Meeting – MJD Deliverance and Exorcism Office (DEO), MAJODI Centre**
- 20-23 **Charisms Seminar and Workshop – MAJODI Centre**
- 24 **Chrism Mass – Church of St Peter, Melaka at 7.00pm**
- 24-25 **Clergy Month Recollection – Good Shepherd Seminary, Melaka**
- 26 **Meeting – MJD Young People’s Network (MJDYPN), GSS Melaka**
- 27 **Meeting – Melaka Vicariate Pastoral Council, Good Shepherd Seminary Melaka**
- 28 **Meeting – South Johor Vicariate Pastoral Council, MAJODI Centre**



**DIOCESE OF PENANG**  
PKK/BDN/2026/03/229

**Notifications and Updates**

**Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you Luke 1:28**

**1. Lenten Message**

I am pleased to share with you the Lenten message from the Holy Father <https://11nk.dev/PopeLent> and also the Lenten message from me in the various languages. <https://s11nk.com/LentPenang>

Wishing you a continued journey of Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving as you draw closer to God.

**2. Schedule of Penitential Services in the Diocese of Penang**

Please be informed on the schedule for confessions at the parishes in the Diocese of Penang. I pray for all of us to draw into a closer and intimate relationship with God through the gift and treasure of this Sacred Sacrament. <https://11nk.dev/confession>

**3. Annual Collection for Holy Land**

The annual collection for Holy Land is on Maundy Thursday. Parishes can make their contributions by cheque or online transfer. Payable to: DIOCESE OF PENANG, RHB Account No: 2-07082-0005132-4.

Kindly notify payment to: [trcfm@gmail.com](mailto:trcfm@gmail.com)

**4. Solidarity Fund for Penang Diocese**

The diocesan solidarity fund with the monthly percentage allocated by the diocese, from the

monthly collection of all weekend Masses of the parishes in the Diocese of Penang, can also be made following the same banking details and method. Payable to:

DIOCESE OF PENANG, RHB Account No: 2-07082-0005132-4.

Kindly notify payment to: [trcfm@gmail.com](mailto:trcfm@gmail.com)

**5. RCIA Elect for Baptism at Easter**

The Rite of Election for the Diocese of Penang took place on February 21 and 22 at the Church of Immaculate Conception, Penang and the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Silibin, Ipoh.

I am delighted to inform you that 230 Adult RCIA candidates will be baptised together with several other adults at Easter in our diocese. Please join me as I invite you to pray for them, every day until their Baptism.

**6. Chrism Mass 2026 For the Diocese of Penang**

At the Chrism Mass, the bishop consecrates the Sacred Chrism and blesses the Oil of Catechumens and the Oil of the Sick. The Clergy of the Diocese will gather with the bishop to renew their commitment to priestly service and their vows, symbolising unity.

This Mass represents the unity of the priests with their bishop and the sacramental life of the Church. I invite you to pray with me for the Clergy of the Diocese of Penang as we participate at the Sacred Mass on March 24

at 8.00pm, Church of Divine Mercy, Sg Ara Penang.

**7. Training Session for Evangelising Catechists, Safeguarding Minors**

The Penang Diocesan Catechetical Commission (PDCC) will be conducting a *Safeguarding of Minors - Training Session for Evangelising Catechists* of the Penang Diocese who minister to minors (below 18 years). This formation will be held on Saturday, March 21, from 9.00am to 1.00pm via the Zoom platform, and will be offered in English, Bahasa Malaysia, Mandarin, and Tamil. Link for registration: <https://forms.gle/pAPVazFpaewqB1G9>

**8. Course for the Studium at the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, Rome**

In view of the application to Rome for the canonisation of Sybil Medan Daly Kathigasu, Fr Andrew Khoo who is now pursuing his doctoral studies in Philosophy in Rome at the Angelicum University after having just completed his Licentiate, is currently taking the Course for the Studium at the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, which is obligatory for those who are to engage in the work of Postulators for the Causes of Beatification and Canonisation.

*Sebastian Francis*  
**Cardinal Sebastian Francis**



**Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #263**



Welcome dear friends,

Coming next are the *Professional Standards Office’s Study Day*, the *Deliverance and Healing* programmes, *MJD’s Diocesan Priesthood Vocation Camp* and *Charism Rediscovery Retreat*. The Lord chooses, calls and commissions. He desires enlightened, enabled and equipped evangelisers. *Come and see!*

**Local Takes! Another war.** Destruction and death. Justified or not, wars are evil. *Iran* is attacked and leaders killed.

*Threats of* “topple government, foreign interference” and claims that “musang king belongs to Malaysia” are in the air. Temple desecrations continue.

*Bankruptcy* is highest among Malaysians aged 35 to 44.

The *Sandwich Generation*, adults (40-60) who are squeezed between caring for aging parents and dependent children, experience financial strains, time constraints and emotional burden.

*Suhakam* warns that inappropriate, misleading, unethical misinformation promotes *prejudice and a culture of discrimination*.

**The Church Reads Signs: Need for God-glorifying Leaders**

Bishop Erik Varden of Norway, a Cistercian, preached the Lenten Retreat to the Vatican: “Considering the problems of the Church, St Bernard of Clairvaux offers no institutional remedies. He rather advises Pope Eugene III to *surround himself with good people*. The better the Church’s central offices are run, the greater the benefit will be for the Church worldwide.

The qualities Bernard asks him to look out for and cultivate are immortal. *Needed are collaborators ‘of proven sanctity*, ready obedience, and quiet patience; Catholic in faith, faithful in service; inclined towards

peace, and desirous of unity; farsighted in counsel, industrious in organisation, modest in speech’.

Such people ‘habitually devote themselves to prayer, and in every undertaking, place more confidence in it than in their own industry or labour. *Their arrival is peaceful, their departure unassuming.*’

In so far as the Church operates in these terms, will she reflect the organisation of the angels’ hierarchies. Whoever considers her then will see her *principal mission: that of giving God glory*.

**A Thought for The Week: Divorcing after 35 years of Marriage**

An elderly man in Mumbai calls his son in New York and says, ‘I hate to ruin your day son, but I have to tell you that your mother and I are getting a divorce; 35 years of marriage... and that much misery is enough!’

‘Dad, what are you talking about?’ the son screams. The old man says: ‘We can’t stand the sight of each other any longer. We’re sick of each other, and I’m sick of talking about this, so you call your sister in Hong Kong and tell her!’

Frantic, the son calls his sister, who explodes on the phone. ‘Like heck they’re getting divorced,’ she shouts, ‘I’ll take care of this.’ She calls Mumbai immediately, and screams at the old man, ‘You are not getting divorced. Don’t do a single thing until I get there. I’m calling my brother back, and we’ll both be there tomorrow. Until then, don’t do a thing, DO YOU HEAR??’ and she hangs up.

The old man hangs up his phone and turns to his wife. ‘Okay! It’s all set. They’re both coming for our anniversary and paying their own airfare!!’ *The lesson from the parents:* The sky is not going to fall down if you take a few days LEAVE to make your parents or friends

happy. Charlie Chaplin once said: Nothing is permanent in this world, not even our troubles.

**QnQ: Q asks: I feel as if everything is against me, as if my life is rigged?**

*Rumi says: “Live life as if everything is rigged in your favour.”*

Imagine for a moment you’re looking back 10 years from now. From that vantage point, many things that once felt like cruel twists-lost jobs, ended relationships, failed plans-now reveal themselves as essential plot points that led to deeper fulfilment, stronger resilience, or unexpected opportunities you couldn’t have orchestrated yourself.

That *“rigged in your favour”* lens turns hindsight into foresight:

1. What if the current obstacle is secretly protecting you from something worse?
2. What if it’s quietly building the exact skills, connections, or clarity you’ll need later?
3. What if God is actually conspiring for you, not against you?

This invites a profound shift in perspective and trust as “life is rigged in your favour.” If you truly believed-right now — that everything unfolding in your life is *rigged in your favour*, what would you do differently today? Rom 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.

**The Spirit @ work:** “Nothing is so fundamental to the spiritual life as learning to give thanks.” *Gordon T Smith*

**Something to tickle you:** “Spiritual maturity is measured in terms of persevering faith, not perfect behaviour.” *Andy Stanley*

*Bernard Paul*  
**Bishop Bernard Paul**

# Two new permanent deacons for Penang diocese

Marlina Sara Sylvester

BUKIT MERTAJAM: The Minor Basilica of St Anne witnessed a joyful celebration on February 25 as Bro Anthony Michael and Bro Isaac Alfred Simbun were ordained to the Permanent Diaconate. Both chose as their ordination theme, *I am among you as one who serves*, from Luke 22:27, expressing their commitment to a life of humble service.

The Eucharistic celebration was presided over by Cardinal Sebastian Francis, with Msgr Jude Miranda, Msgr Stephen Liew, Msgr Henry Rajoo and Fr Nelson Joseph concelebrating and Deacon Lazarus Anthony assisting.

The rite began with the calling of the candidates, followed by Cardinal Sebastian's homily. Emphasising the essence of the diaconal ministry, he described it as the ministry of the servant, reflecting the image of Christ Himself.

"These men are now to be raised to the order of deacons," the cardinal said. "They will draw new strength from the gift of the Holy



Msgr Stephen Liew and Fr Nelson Joseph vesting the deacons.

Spirit. They will assist the bishop and his priests as ministers of the Word, of the altar and of charity. They are to make themselves servants to all."

He reminded the candidates of their responsibilities: proclaiming the Gospel to believers and non-believers alike, presiding over public prayer, baptising, assisting at marriages, bringing *viaticum* to the dying and leading funeral rites. Through the laying on of hands — a gesture handed down from the Apostles — they would be more

closely bound to the altar and entrusted with works of charity in the name of the bishop and parish.

"Serve God and humankind in love and joy," he urged, recalling that Christ Himself came "not to be served but to serve."

The rite continued with the commitment to celibacy made by Bro Isaac Simbun, who stood before the cardinal to declare his intention. This was followed by the promise of obedience and the Litany of the Saints, during which the elect prostrated themselves in a sign of total



Deacon Anthony and Deacon Isaac with Cardinal Sebastian Francis.

surrender and dependence on God.

During the investiture with the stole and dalmatic, Deacon Anthony's wife, Maria Aung, presented his vestments, while Deacon Isaac's mother, Madam Zainah Sallau, brought forward her son's vestments. They were then vested by clergy personally chosen by them — Msgr Stephen Liew for Deacon Anthony and Fr Nelson Joseph for Deacon Isaac.

The stole and dalmatic symbolise the deacon's ecclesial office and ministry of service. The dalmatic,

in particular, represents charity and justice — hallmarks of the diaconal vocation.

The newly ordained deacons then joined the cardinal at the altar for the Liturgy of the Eucharist. In their words of thanks, both expressed gratitude to family members, formators, clergy and parishioners who had accompanied them throughout their formation journey.

The celebration concluded with a fellowship dinner where clergy, religious and faithful gathered in thanksgiving.



PENANG: "Welcome. It is a favourable time...", Friar Michael Raymond OFM Cap, *pic*, greeted the 120 participants gathered at the Church of the Immaculate Conception (CIC) for a Lenten recollection: *Lent with St Francis - Healing What is Broken*.

Pope Leo XIV has declared 2026 the Jubilee Year of St Francis of Assisi, to commemorate the 800th anniversary of the saint's death. Fr Michael, therefore, asserted that Lent is a favourable time for introspection and transformation. How? Befriend St Francis. Initially a bearer of "a litany of restlessness," he learned to be still and know God through: "Silence, the first language of God" (said Thomas Keating, among others). We can learn from St Francis' austere yet prudent life about "divine/holy stretching; doing the abnormal — moving from shallow waters into deeper waters" for our spiritual growth and action, Fr Michael proffered. This resonates with our diocesan Lenten campaign *Hope in Action* (Matthew 25:34-40).

Fr Michael threw light on the Franciscan Order and its call to a "mission of the Cross, to propagate joy — a gift of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22) — through healing

## Recognising and healing the brokenness within us

broken and wounded hearts. When you are healed of your wounds, you can be a healer for others."

Fr Michael's context was "Addiction" to drugs, alcohol...and more. "Addiction is part of our lives — we suffer from all sorts of addictions." The way out is "Accompaniment through the three As: Awareness-Acceptance-Action and healing the brokenness through the three-Rs: "Realise-Recognise-Respond" to get the afflicted out of the mire.

His approach was psycho-spiritual. He cited disturbing snippets from real life, including his own. He posed reflective questions that prodded us to confront our hidden and unresolved objectionable 'addictions.'

Knowingly, he declared, "We all carry baggage, some painfully heavy. But you have to 'hug the cactus!' Become aware of your brokenness; your guilt from past mistakes; accept the painful process of healing. No easy way out. We are often at the crossroads of discernment..."

The choices we make have consequences. "Richard Rohr says pain that is not transformed is transmitted." It gets projected on others because of our lack of awareness and acknowledgement of it. "What you resist, persists. Unresolved issues get repeated and trigger you in life. How you respond to what triggers you is important." For a backdrop, he unravelled the story of the woman at the well and her healing process through awareness, acceptance, and responsible action. "Jesus engages her in her isolation and shame, with

an approach of grace and revelation." This helps her step into a space of silent encounter with God to begin her journey of healing.

Fr Michael nudged us, "Step into her shoes; reflect...You too might be 'sleeping with the enemy' — your hidden addiction to pain, problems, brokenness." Her transformation? She came with a bucket, then left it behind. Renunciation. "She returns to the community; gives testimony of her restoration through being accompanied by Jesus." The raising of Lazarus formed another restoration-to-life story. "Remove the stone...is the first thing Jesus commands them to do." The stone is a metaphor for our unresolved aberrations. "Sponsors (in RCIA) need to accompany and engage hearts." He also noted the four-Cs of therapeutic care for inner healing and spiritual growth: "Cause-Consequence-Cure-Cost. The cost can be painful. There is no cheap grace!"

Solution? He led us up Mt Tabor to receive God's sacred sound bite — LISTEN TO HIM. To navigate life in this rough spoken world, become transfigured through-with-in His grace and love.

In sending us off, CIC parish priest, Msgr Jude Miranda revealed, "In real life, we always uphold the perfect. Yet, we all carry cracks within us that need to be recognised. Only then, can we be mentors and accompany others in their brokenness. Opportunities not taken will be lost forever." **Lucille Dass**

## Giving up your sight: A Lenten experience in empathy

KUALA LUMPUR: The Ministry of the Poor under the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development (AOHD), organised a unique Lenten experiential session titled *Giving Up Your Sight* at the Church of St Joseph on February 28 as part of the Lenten Campaign 2026 themed "In the One, we are one."

The programme was jointly supported by the National Council for the Blind Malaysia (NCBM), Eagle's Wing Ministry and the Parish Integral Human Development Ministry (PIHDM) of the Church of St Joseph.

The session began with a sharing by Reena from the Eagle's Wing Ministry, who spoke about the daily challenges faced by the blind community and highlighted how people can offer assistance in more appropriate and respectful ways.

Participants were then introduced to Braille by Wong Yoon Loong, executive director

of NCBM, who guided them in deciphering simple words such as Love, Joy and Peace. They were also given the opportunity to touch and experience a Braille Bible, prompting reflection on the privilege many have of being able to read Scripture.

Wong also demonstrated how visually impaired individuals identify Malaysian banknotes using a Ringgit Cash Test Card to distinguish the different sizes of currency during daily transactions.

The session concluded with a lunch, where the 38 participants were blindfolded to experience dining without sight, relying instead on touch, smell and taste.

Many shared that the activity deepened their appreciation of the challenges faced by the visually impaired and fostered a greater sense of empathy and gratitude during the Lenten season.

**Christopher Victor Roch**



A participant identifying the currency difference of Malaysian banknotes using a Ringgit Cash Test card.



Fr Gerard Theraviam with His Excellency Hennadii Nadolenko, Ambassador of Ukraine to Malaysia flanked by some members of the Ukrainian community.

## Prayer service marks Ukraine war anniversary

KUALA LUMPUR: A special prayer service was held on February 27 at the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist to mark Ukraine's National Day of Prayer and the fourth anniversary of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia.

The gathering brought together members of the Ukrainian community in remembrance and solidarity. Prayers were offered for those who lost their lives in the war, including fallen soldiers, courageous defenders, and inno-

cent civilians affected by the conflict.

Participants also prayed for healing, justice, and a just and lasting peace for Ukraine, reflecting on the continuing suffering caused by the war and the resilience of the Ukrainian people.

In his address, Hennadii Nadolenko, Ambassador of Ukraine to Malaysia, spoke about the importance of remembrance, faith, and unity in the face of adversity. He expressed gratitude for the support and solidarity

shown by the international community, including people in Malaysia.

The ambassador highlighted the strength and perseverance of the Ukrainian people during the ongoing conflict and called for continued prayers and global support for peace and justice.

The prayer service served as a moment of reflection for those gathered, reinforcing the importance of compassion and solidarity with those suffering from the effects of war.

## Rite of Election

### Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur

KUALA LUMPUR: The Rite of Election in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur was held on Sunday, March 1, at the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist. There were almost two thousand people consisting catechumens, their godparents, RCIA facilitators-catechists and family members and friends, accompanied by their parish priests, in attendance.

The celebration brought together 687 catechumens from 32 parishes

in the archdiocese. The cathedral was at its full seating capacity and the atmosphere was reverend throughout the ceremony. The Rite of Election was presided over by Most Rev Julian Leow Beng Kim, Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur, and con-celebrated by Msgrs Stanislaus Soosamariam and Patrick Boudville, together with Fr Gerard Theraviam, parish priest of the cathedral.

In his homily, Archbishop Julian addressed the catechumens, who

had signed their names in the Book of the Elect, reminding them that their firm decision in seeking full initiation into the Catholic Church through the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist in the upcoming Easter Vigil, is only another step in a long journey of faith. He reminded the catechumens that this is only the beginning of a long journey which may be filled with wonderful experience but also has its challenges and uncertainties.

Drawing reference from the First Reading, the archbishop said that God called Abram to leave his homeland and family to go to an unknown land and although it must have been full of uncertainties, Abram obeyed, and in his obedience, God opened the way for Abram and his descendants to experience God's promises and blessings. Reflecting on the Gospel of the day, the archbishop said that Jesus is revealed as God's son in the Transfiguration. He said that although Peter had wanted to prepare three tents to stay on the mountain, Jesus took him and the other disciples back down, and in this, Jesus teaches His disciples to move away from their "comfort zone" and go back to the reality of life and to be of service to the vulnerable. He fur-



Archbishop Julian Leow signing the Book of Elect. (HFK facebook)

ther added that, as Christians, we are to surrender totally to God, to allow Him to lead, transform and bless us.

The rite itself proceeded with the Presentation of the Catechumens, followed by the invitation and Enrolment of names. The bearer of the Book of Elect from each parish accompanied by the parish priest came forward and presented it to the archbishop for his ratification. After the rite of Enrolment, Archbishop Julian declared the catechumens as members of the Elect, to be initiated into the Sacrament of Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist at the upcoming Easter Vigil. The Rite of Election continued with the intercessory prayers, prayer over the Elect and recitation of the *Lord's*

*Prayer.*

Before the dismissal, Dr Steven Selvaraju, Director of the Archdiocesan Catechetical Centre, expressed his gratitude to Archbishop Julian for presiding over the celebration and to all the priests present. He also thanked the RCIA facilitators, catechists, godparents, sponsors and all who had journeyed with the Elect. He gave a special word of thanks to the organising team from the cathedral, and all who had assisted with the liturgy, and those who worked behind the scenes.

After the dismissal, the Elect and the members of the faithful were invited for light refreshments and fellowship. **Christine Lim**



Sponsors placing their hands on the Elect's shoulders. (Jason Silan)

### Diocese of Malacca Johore

major languages.

The whole cathedral was packed with the addition of family members and parishioners who came to witness the event. The Mass was celebrated by Rt Rev Bernard Paul, assisted by Permanent Deacons Dr Leslie Petrus and Arumai Dass. Priests from the diocese included Fr Paul Sia, Fr Simon Yong SJ, Fr Sixtus Amit Pitah OFM, Fr Leo Elias, Fr Matthew Bun, Fr Martinian Lee and Fr Paul Wong.

Bishop Bernard Paul, in his homily, focused on three words: *Content, Cohesion and Consolidation* using the illustration of an egg. He expressed that when the egg is whole, its content keeps it resistant. When we know ourselves, know our God, know our Church — we are filled with the word, enriched by the Church teachings and are led by the Holy Spirit — like Abraham. For *Cohesion*, the egg has the yellow and the white. They are different but live together.

Though the Church is one, there are many peoples, languages and cultures. For *Consolidation*, the shell of the egg keeps it compact, strong and enduring. We have to strengthen what we know to become unbreakable, unshakeable and enduring. To continue strong, we must have 3Fs (Faith, Family and Fitness). In conclusion, he persuaded that strong Christians are

like eggs that endure.

After the homily, the Rite of Election took place with the presentation of the catechumens, the address to the godparents, sponsors and assembly, the invitation and enrolment of names and finally, the presentation of the Book of Elect from the 18 parishes and outstation chapels.

Anna Cheng, who is one of the godparents, when asked about the weekend experience, shared that

her godchild felt wonderful when she attended the recollection. She had come from a Catholic background and had completed her catechism but did not get baptised. Anna felt heartened to witness her godchild finally joining the Catholic family.

As in previous years, a packed lunch was distributed to all the Elect after the Mass, especially those who had to travel back to Malacca. **Angila Yong**



Bishop Bernard Paul giving his homily.

JOHOR BAHRU: Over 539 catechumens, sponsors and RCIA facilitators from the Diocese of Malacca Johore filled the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on Sunday, March 1 at the 12.30pm Mass to celebrate the Rite of Election.

The 266 catechumens and their sponsors and RCIA facilitators had earlier gathered at MAJODI Centre in Plentong for a joint recollection which was conducted in the four



The Elect with their sponsors and RCIA facilitators. (SHC facebook)

# Transitus 800: Franciscan Jubilee 2026

Stephanie Cheong

PENANG: The Risen Christ Catholic Church hosted an exposition of the relic of St Francis of Assisi recently, drawing parishioners and visitors into a day of prayer, reflection and renewed commitment to Franciscan spirituality.

The parish, under the pastoral care of parish priest Friar Crispus Mosinoh OFM, assistant parish priest Friar Cosmas Francis OFM and pastoral assistant Friar John Soh OFM from the Order of Friars Minor (Custody of St Anthony, Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei), organised the programme in conjunction with the Franciscan Jubilee Year.

Earlier this year, Pope Leo XIV proclaimed the Jubilee Year from January 10, 2026 to January 10, 2027 to mark the 800th anniversary of the Transitus — the passing of St Francis of Assisi. The Jubilee calls the faithful to spiritual renewal, reconciliation and peace in a divided world, encouraging imitation of the saint's life of poverty, humility and devotion to Christ. The Apostolic Penitentiary has also granted a Plenary Indulgence to those who

make a pilgrimage to a Franciscan church or shrine dedicated to the saint.

The remains of St Francis are currently being displayed for public veneration in Assisi, Italy — the first time in 800 years — from Feb 22 to March 22, 2026.

At Risen Christ, the exposition was held on Feb 22 after the Mandarin Mass and continued throughout the day. The faithful prayed the Divine Office — *Sext, None, Vespers and Compline* — and spent time in silent adoration and contemplation. Many reflected on *The Canticle of the Creatures* and the life of St Francis, while others watched the documentary film, *A Sign of Contradiction*. Parishioners from neighbouring churches also attended.

Written in 1225 near the end of his life, *The Canticle of the Creatures* expresses St Francis' deep awareness of creation as one family praising God. Referring to "Brother Sun", "Sister Moon", "Brother Wind", "Sister Water", "Brother Fire", "Sister Mother Earth" and even "Sister Death", the saint revealed his vision of radical interconnectedness

and harmony within creation.

Participants were invited to reflect on how they might live out Franciscan spirituality today, moving beyond physical sight to cultivate what was described as a "contemplative eye", an inner vision that recognises the divine presence in all things.

Although not mentioned directly in the *Canticle*, three defining moments of the saint's life were also highlighted: the Nativity at Greccio, the Wolf of Gubbio and the reception of the stigmata. In 1223, St Francis created the first live Nativity scene to help people encounter the humility of Christ's birth. The story of the Wolf of Gubbio illustrated his conviction that all creation belongs to one family. In 1224, two years before his death, he received the stigmata on Mount La Verna — becoming the first recorded person to bear the wounds of Christ.

The film *A Sign of Contradiction* offered a deeper look at the "real" Francis — not merely the gentle lover of animals often portrayed in popular devotion, but a man who underwent profound struggle and conversion. Born to a wealthy mer-



The congregation including the friars spending time in prayer and reflection at the relic of St Francis of Assisi.

chant family, Francis once dreamed of knighthood and glory. Captured in battle and imprisoned for a year, he returned home disillusioned, entering a period of darkness that eventually led to his radical conversion.

A pivotal moment came when he embraced a leper — an act that transformed what was once bitter into sweetness. From then on, Francis understood penance not as punishment, but as a continual turning towards God. His life became marked by humility, joy, poverty and total surrender to Christ.

In his final years, despite illness and suffering, he composed the *Canticle* and welcomed death as "Sister", trusting fully in God's mercy.

Organisers expressed hope that the exposition would inspire deeper conversion among those present. Nearly 800 years after his passing, St Francis continues to challenge believers to live the Gospel with simplicity, courage and integrity.

The day concluded in the spirit of the Franciscan greeting: *Pace e bene* — peace and all good.

## Women gather for purpose and identity workshop



The women participating in a quick session of aerodance before lunch.

KUANTAN: The Women's Desk of the Church of St Thomas the Apostle, led by Georgina Wong, recently organised a half-day gathering for women both within and beyond the parish community. The event aimed to empower women to embrace their purpose and identity in today's world. Around 25 women attended, each bringing her own strength and presence to the gathering.

The central theme of the event was simple: empowered women empower other women. To enrich the session, two invited speakers shared their personal journeys and experiences as women navigating different life paths.

The first speaker, Mala Sundaresan, from the US, shared how she discovered her passion and calling to combat food waste here in Malaysia. Her session, titled *Reinventing Yourself*, encouraged women to continuously grow and redefine themselves at every stage of life. One particularly moving moment in her sharing was her reflection on her mother, now over 80 years young, who continues to strive to be heard and remains open to embracing change. Her story served as a reminder that growth and reinvention have no age limit.

The second speaker, Fara Diba Rosle, spoke about her lived

experience as an indigenous woman born and raised within her community. Her presentation, *The Unseen Life of Indigenous Women*, shed light on the often-overlooked struggles faced by women in indigenous communities. She shared how many women in her community strive to navigate modern expectations of success while facing economic, social, and political challenges that are rarely acknowledged.

The event concluded with a quick session of aerodance and a closing prayer led by a committee member of the Women's Desk, followed by fellowship over lunch.

## Faithful gather for *Light of the World* recollection

MELAKA: Parishioners of St Peter's Church gathered for a parish recollection themed *You Are the Light of the World* (Matthew 5:14) last month, drawing about 300 faithful, including participants from other parishes within the Malacca Vicariate.

The recollection was led by parish

priest, Fr Lionel Thomas, and began with the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, followed by a brief praise and worship session.

In his reflection, Fr Lionel focused on the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12), explaining that they reveal the path to true joy and happiness through hu-

mility, mercy and reliance on God. He encouraged the faithful to live according to God's will and allow inner transformation to guide their lives.

Mass followed at 8.40pm with the blessing of candles. Fr Lionel reminded parishioners that they received the Light of Christ at baptism and are called to let that light shine in their homes, Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) and the wider community.

The evening concluded with a candlelight procession through the streets of the settlement, as the faithful walked with lighted candles, praying and reflecting on their call to be the light of Christ to others. Bernard Anthony



The parishioners walking in candlelight procession around the settlement.

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# Mount Miriam Cancer Hospital

## Five decades of walking with the sick

Christopher Kushi and  
Madeline Ng

PENANG: Mount Miriam Cancer Hospital (MMCH) marked a historic milestone on February 20, 2026, celebrating not just 50 years of existence, but five decades of journeying with the People of God — accompanying countless patients and families through the anguish and uncertainty of cancer.

The Golden Jubilee celebrations were officially inaugurated with Mass at the Chapel of St Francis of Assisi, celebrated by Cardinal Sebastian Francis. Concelebrating were Fr Michael Raymond OFM Cap, Fr Edmund Woon and Fr Raymond Raj, assisted by Deacon Andrew Loh. Present were the Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood (FMDM) Sisters, OFM Friars, stakeholders, staff members, benefactors, volunteers and friends of MMCH.

In his homily, Cardinal Sebastian reflected on MMCH's five-decade journey through three simple yet

profound words: *To Live. To Bless. To Surrender.*

He invited the faithful to embrace the hospital's past, present and future with trust in God's providence — to live and relive all that has unfolded, to bless both joys and sorrows, and to surrender everything to the Trinitarian God without picking and choosing. Urging the community to “wait upon the Holy Spirit” in discerning the road ahead, he reminded all that Mt Miriam is not merely a place of medical treatment, but also a sacred space of dignity, preparation and hope in eternal life.

“We live, we bless and we surrender,” he concluded.

Officially inaugurated on Feb 21, 1976 by Bishop Gregory Yong, Mount Miriam was founded as a not-for-profit Catholic hospital dedicated to providing affordable cancer treatment to all, regardless of race, religion or income.

Its roots, however, trace back to 1963, when the late Bishop Francis Chan, himself battling terminal

cancer, was deeply moved by the holistic care he received from the Grey Sisters of France. Recognising the urgent need for compassionate cancer care in Malaysia, he inspired the establishment of a cancer care centre in Penang.

That seed of faith, reminiscent of the mustard seed in Matthew 13:31–32, blossomed into Mt Miriam Cancer Hospital, led in its early days by six sisters from the Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood (FMDM). Embracing the Gospel spirit of St Francis and St Clare of Assisi, the sisters undertook every task necessary — nursing, cooking, cleaning, gardening, maintenance and even going door-to-door to raise funds — ensuring that no one in need would be turned away.

Their guiding principle, *Serving with Love in Cancer Care – No One Shall Die Alone*, continues to define the hospital's identity.

In recent years, MMCH has been led back to its core calling in oncology palliative care — described as



Cardinal Sebastian Francis addressing the congregation.

a sacred duty — where hospice patients are accompanied with love, compassion and dignity until their final breath.

Despite rising cancer cases, costly treatments and operational challenges, the hospital remains steadfast in its mission-driven identity. In 2025 alone, 120 cancer patients received RM2.9 million worth of treatment and palliative care support.

Deputy Chair of the Board of Directors, Rita Chiam, acknowledged ongoing challenges, including shortages of oncologists and nurses, rising operational costs and the need for long-term sustainability. Among the strategies introduced is the Oncology-Palliative Hospice (O-PH) model, where oncology services help generate revenue to support hospice and palliative care. Together with the Endowment Fund and tax-exempt status, these initiatives aim to secure MMCH's future. Quoting Galatians 6:9, she encouraged perseverance: “Let us not grow tired of doing good.”

Speaking on behalf of the FMDM sisters, Sr Angelin

Gnanapiragasam began with the Franciscan greeting, “Peace and All Good,” paying tribute to the seven pioneer sisters whose sacrifices shaped the hospital's mission. She reminded those present that Mount Miriam's legacy is not measured by infrastructure, but by lives touched, wounds healed and hope restored.

Chief Operating Officer, Gemma Ong, echoed this gratitude, thanking clergy, religious, healthcare professionals, staff, benefactors, volunteers and supporters. “In your hands, God's work is done every day. You are the instruments of His healing love,” she said.

The celebration concluded with a simple fellowship gathering, where staff, patients, families and well-wishers shared stories and renewed bonds of friendship — a fitting beginning to a jubilee year that honours five decades of faithful service.

As Mt Miriam Cancer Hospital steps into its next chapter, the call remains clear: to live, to bless and to surrender — trusting that what may seem impossible by worldly standards becomes possible through God's grace.



The celebrants with the sisters of the Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood, staff and board members of Mt Miriam Hospital.

### Letters to Editor

## Silent cry of a cancer patient

Dear Editor,

I was deeply moved when I read the letter “Every church needs a cancer support group” (*HERALD*, March 1) by Percy Chiew.

I am a Stage 4 kidney cancer patient from Lahad Datu, Sabah. Each week, I attend Mass, and quite frequently, I have to travel

to Kota Kinabalu for my cancer treatment. As I read Percy's letter, I felt that she was expressing exactly what I carry within me.

The fear, worry, pain, exhaustion and mental breakdowns — these are burdens I often cannot share with my family or close friends. I fear that doing so may discourage them. There are moments when I try to hide my tears, but it is not always possi-

ble. There is nowhere else I can truly speak freely about what I am going through, except to hold firmly to my faith in God and pour out my heart to Him.

How I wish there were a community where cancer patients could come together to share, listen and encourage one another, just as Percy is doing. Such a support group would mean so much to those of us

who walk this difficult journey, often in silence.

May God bless Percy and the churches that have taken the initiative to form communities for cancer patients. I remain hopeful that one day, my own parish will also have such a ministry.

Vera Yap  
Lahad Datu, Sabah

## Books, silence and the lost art of attention

Dear Editor,

Marge Martinez's reflection, “Books... balm for the soul” (*HERALD*, March 1) resonated with me not only for their eloquence, but because they echo my own conviction that reading is far more than a pastime — it is a companion, a refuge, and at times, a lifeline.

Like the writer, I grew up in a home where books were treated with reverence. They were not decorative objects but trusted

friends, always within reach. Reading was never imposed; it was absorbed naturally through example. That, I believe, is one of the most powerful insights in her piece — that a love for books is formed gently and consistently, not forced.

I was especially struck by her description of shared silence, with family members immersed in their own books. In today's world, such moments feel increasingly rare. Silence is now filled with scrolling and notifications

that fragment attention and erode patience. In contrast, reading teaches us to slow down, to listen, and to engage more deeply with ideas and emotions.

This is why reading must once again be intentionally cultivated among the young not as an enemy of technology, but as a counterbalance. Books train the mind to focus and the heart to empathise. They offer depth in a world saturated with noise.

Ms Martinez's account of how books ac-

companied her through grief was particularly moving. It affirmed my own experience that words, absorbed in silence, can heal in ways conversation sometimes cannot.

In an age obsessed with speed and distraction, this reflection is a timely reminder that reading remains an essential nourishment for the soul.

Deborah Gomes-Hillman  
Melaka



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

# BIM interpreters commissioned for Deaf Ministry

KAJANG: A meaningful milestone unfolded at the Church of the Holy Family recently as 13 *Bahasa Isyarat Malaysia* (BIM) church interpreters were commissioned and recommissioned in a special rite presided over by Fr Michael Chua.

Four interpreters were commissioned for the first time, while nine others renewed their commitment to serve. The ceremony marked the Church's public recognition of their responsibility to interpret Scripture, prayers and liturgical texts faithfully, ensuring that Deaf Catholics are able to participate fully and actively in the Eucharistic celebration.

The newly commissioned interpreters were

prepared through the Church Interpreting programme conducted by Joseph Loh. The formation went beyond technical accuracy in signing. Participants deepened their understanding of the spiritual responsibility entrusted to them — learning that facial expression, body language and clarity are essential in conveying the richness and nuance of Scripture readings and homilies.

For Fabian, the Mass was a defining moment. "When I heard the words of the rite, I felt the weight of responsibility," he shared. "It made me realise that I am entrusted with interpreting the Word of God." For him, interpreting is not merely about translating speech



but faithfully transmitting a sacred message.

Caroline, who previously learned American Sign Language (ASL), spoke about her initial struggle transitioning to BIM. "At first it was challenging," she admitted. "But once I understood the concepts properly, everything began to make sense." She noted that one of the most important lessons she learned was that expressions often communicate greater depth and storytelling than signs alone — an insight that transformed her approach to liturgical interpreting.

Pamela reflected that the journey reminded her that interpreting is not simply about skill, but about humility and clarity in service. "We walk together with the Deaf community as one family," she said. Yvonne echoed this sentiment, describing her commissioning as a humbling experience and affirming that serving the Deaf community is truly "a service of love."

The presence of trained interpreters is vital because the liturgy stands at the heart of Catholic life. Without interpretation, Deaf Catholics may find it difficult to follow the readings, understand the homily or participate fully in communal prayer. With dedicated interpreters, they are able to engage more deeply in worship and experience their rightful place within the Body of Christ.

The celebration resonated with the Lenten theme, *In the One, We Are One*. Unity in Christ challenges the Church to ensure that no one is left on the margins. When Deaf and hearing Catholics worship together in mutual understanding, the Church more visibly reflects that unity.

Congratulations to all 13 interpreters, especially the four newly commissioned. May their faithful service continue to strengthen communion, deepen faith, and make the Word of God accessible to all.



The 13 *Bahasa Isyarat Malaysia* interpreters being commissioned

## Young innovators from Stella Maris excel on global stage

KUALA LUMPUR: Sekolah Rendah Stella Maris has once again made the nation proud, shining on the international stage at the Bangkok International Intellectual Property, Invention, Innovation and Technology Exposition (IPITEx) 2026, held at the Bangkok International Trade and Exhibition Centre (BITEC) earlier this year.

Organised in conjunction with Thailand Inventors' Day, IPITEx is a global platform that brings together inventors, researchers, institutions and organisations to showcase innovation, exchange ideas and foster international collaboration in science and technology.

Competing alongside participants from numerous countries, Sekolah Rendah Stella Maris stood out for its creativity, scientific discipline and practical ingenuity. The school was awarded the Gold Medal for its project Pawtomatic Rescue and the Silver Medal for Solar Backpack at the Thailand Inventor's Day STEM Competition.

The Pawtomatic Rescue project also received a Special Award for Research and Innovation from the Corneliugroup Association, recognising its originality and potential real-world impact. The accolade highlights not only the depth of research undertaken, but also the students'

thoughtful approach to addressing real societal needs through innovation.

Further affirming their achievement, the school received recognition medals from the National Research Council of Thailand, as well as commendations from representatives and organisations from Laos, Romania, Hong Kong, South Korea, Indonesia and Macao. Such broad international acknowledgment reflects the global relevance of the students' work.

These accomplishments testify to the school's unwavering commitment to nurturing curiosity, critical thinking and innovation from an early age. Guided by dedicated educators and supported by a strong academic foundation, the students have demonstrated that meaningful contributions to science and technology are not defined by age, but by imagination, perseverance and purpose.

The success at IPITEx 2026 represents a generation of young minds daring to dream, explore and create solutions for a better world. Sekolah Rendah Stella Maris remains steadfast in its mission to provide holistic education that harmonises academic excellence with creativity and research, shaping future innovators who will serve both nation and humanity with integrity and vision. **Audrey Fernandez**



## Sharing hope and compassion at Sungai Buloh's Valley of Hope

KUALA LUMPUR: Thirty-five volunteers from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur visited Valley of Hope, a former leprosy settlement, on February 28. The visit was organised by the Archdiocesan Prayer Ministry in collaboration with the Archdiocesan Creation Justice Ministry during the ongoing Jubilee Year of St Francis of Assisi.

Nurses on duty guided the volunteers to four wards where residents, neatly dressed and welcoming, greeted them warmly. Conversations were exchanged and bags containing toiletries, oranges and Chinese New Year ang pow packets were distributed. Through these simple gestures, the volunteers shared companionship and presence with the residents.

Some residents reflected on their long journey in the settlement, having lived there since the 1960s and witnessing its many changes over the decades. Nurses also shared the history of the Valley of

Hope, which was established in the 1930s by the British administration to address rising cases of leprosy and once housed nearly 2,000 residents. The surrounding nurseries, which still exist today, once provided residents with opportunities to garden, contributing to both their well-being and a modest income.

Although the volunteers were unable to visit residents staying in the chalets within the compound, they assured staff that another visit would be arranged.

The visit also echoed the encounter of St Francis of Assisi with a leper, inspiring volunteers to reflect more deeply during the Lenten season on reaching out with compassion to those who are often forgotten.

Grateful for the experience, the volunteers said the gentle interactions with the elderly residents reminded them that compassion and love continue to bridge the gaps of time, illness and isolation.



The young innovators with their gold and silver awards.

# Synod reflections highlight digital mission and priest formation

VATICAN: The General Secretariat of the Synod has released the first two Final Reports from study groups established after the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

Published with the approval of Pope Leo XIV, the reports focus on *The Mission in the Digital Environment* and the formation of priests in a missionary synodal Church. The reports are being shared with the wider Church to promote transparency and participation in the synodal journey.

According to Cardinal Mario Grech, Secretary General of the Synod, the work reflects an au-

thentic process of listening, reflection and discernment among Vatican dicasteries and experts. He said the collaboration represents “synodality put into practice.”

The first report examines how the Church can carry out its mission in an increasingly digital culture. It highlights the need to integrate digital evangelisation into normal pastoral structures and calls for greater formation of clergy and pastoral workers in digital culture.

The second report focuses on priestly formation. Rather than revising the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (2016), the group proposes guidelines to

implement it within a missionary and synodal framework. The document stresses that priests are formed within the People of God, encouraging closer interaction with parish communities, collaboration with lay faithful and religious, and the involvement of qualified women in formation teams.

The reports are considered working documents and will guide further proposals by Vatican dicasteries. Additional reports from other study groups are expected to be released in the coming weeks.

**Vatican News**

To access the reports, go to: <https://bit.ly/4raaGeZv>



Participants pray in the Vatican's Paul VI Audience Hall at the beginning of a working session of the assembly of the Synod of Bishops. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

## Vatican hosts seminar on AI and ethics

ROME: The Vatican hosted a seminar on the potential and ethical challenges of artificial intelligence, highlighting the Church's role in promoting responsible and ethical technological development.

The event, titled *Potential and Challenges of Artificial Intelligence*, was organised by

the Secretariat for the Economy and the Office of Labour of the Apostolic See at the Salone San Pio X in Rome, with the appreciation and encouragement of Pope Leo XIV.

Opening the seminar, Professor Pasquale Passalacqua said the Pope hoped the initiative would

promote deeper awareness of the complex issues surrounding AI. The discussion was moderated by Alessandro Gisotti of the Dicastery for Communication.

Speakers included Bishop Paul Tighe, Paolo Benanti, and Professor Corrado Giustozzi, who explored the social, ethical and technological implications of Artificial Intelligence.

Bishop Tighe noted that modern technological developments unfold within geopolitical rivalries and commercial pressures, stressing the need for ethical reflection. Fr Benanti highlighted how technology can shape power structures in society, while Professor Giustozzi warned that algorithms can carry biases if built on incomplete or distorted data.

The seminar emphasised the importance of ethical oversight in AI development and the Church's role in fostering dialogue and responsible governance in the digital age.

**OSV News**



(Vatican Media)



## Myanmar junta frees prisoners amid ongoing military attacks

YANGON: Myanmar's military ruler Min Aung Hlaing, *pic*, announced the release of more than 12,000 prisoners on March 2 to mark National Farmers' Day. State media presented the move as an act of clemency, but human rights groups say it is aimed at improving the regime's international image while military operations against civilians continue.

Among those released were journalists, activists and student leaders. However, detained democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi remains imprisoned after her arrest during the 2021 Myanmar military coup. She has been sentenced to 27



Prisoners were bussed out of the Insein Prison facility. (DW/Thein Zaw)

years in prison on charges widely criticised as politically motivated.

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, more than 30,500 people have been arrested since the coup, with over 22,800 still in detention.

Regional leaders from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) responded cautiously to the amnesty, reflecting divisions within the bloc on how to deal with Myanmar's military

government.

Meanwhile, reports say the army has continued bombing operations across several regions, including Rakhine State, where an air strike on a bus station reportedly killed at least 30 civilians.

Analysts say the prisoner release may be an attempt by the junta to ease international pressure while consolidating power through political reshuffles and new governing structures. **AsiaNews**

## Nigeria faces escalating religious violence, US report warns

WASHINGTON: Nigeria is facing a “terrifying crisis of religious violence,” according to the 2026 annual report of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), released on March 4.

USCIRF chair Vicky Hartzler said Nigerians continue to endure serious religious freedom violations and widespread violence carried out by non-state militants promoting a violent interpretation of Islam. She noted that the Nigerian government has been negligent in adequately addressing the crisis and its complex causes.

The report highlighted several violent incidents, including the killing of Catholic priest Fr Matthew Eya of St Charles Catholic Church in Enugu State. According to the report, unidentified gunmen on a motorcycle shot out his vehicle's tires before executing him as he was returning from pastoral duties.

Violence linked to extremist groups such as Boko Haram has escalated in recent years, particularly in northern and central parts of the country. While Christians have been frequent targets of attacks, Muslim communities have also been severely affected. Con-

flicts between farmers and herders have further intensified violence and displacement across several regions.

USCIRF recommended that Nigeria be designated a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act. The administration of Donald Trump recently redesignated Nigeria under this category, which is applied to nations where governments either perpetrate or tolerate particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

The report also warned that cuts to programs funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) could weaken protections for vulnerable communities. Some of the affected initiatives included projects aimed at combating blasphemy laws, promoting interfaith dialogue, documenting religious freedom violations, and providing early warning systems to prevent attacks on religious minorities.

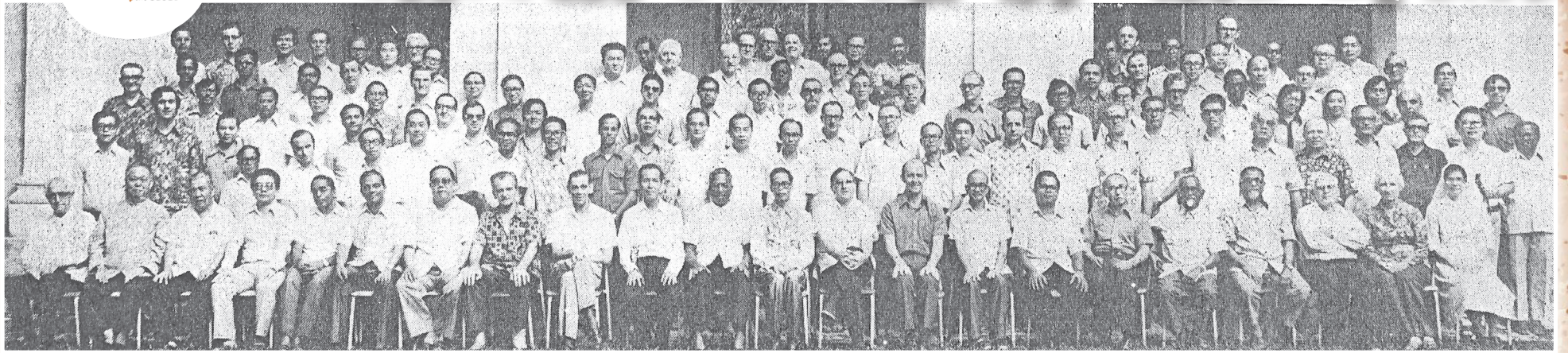
USCIRF commissioners also called for stronger international action to defend religious freedom and urged policymakers to reduce barriers for refugees fleeing religious persecution. **ucanews/OSV**



Schoolchildren from St Mary's Catholic School in Papiri, Nigeria at the Niger State Government House December 8, 2025, after being freed from captivity following their abduction by gunmen November 21, 2025. (OSV News photo/Marvellous Durowaiye, Reuters)



# A Church stirred by the Spirit



Richard Chia

By the early 1970s, the Church in Peninsular Malaysia stood at a threshold. Three new dioceses had been established in 1972, and with new ecclesial structures came deeper questions of identity and mission. How was the Church to embody the vision of the Second Vatican Council in a society undergoing rapid social and cultural change?

Archbishop Dominic Vendargon, Metropolitan Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur and a Council Father at the Second Vatican Council, felt a growing unease. Years after the Council, its call had been carefully studied but only cautiously implemented. Renewal, he sensed, had stalled at the level of theory. What was needed was not further discussion, but conversion — a renewed way of being Church.

This conviction was shared by Bishop James Chan, newly ordained and deeply influenced by his post-Vatican II renewal experience at the East Asian Pastoral Institute (EAPI) in Manila. He was convinced that genuine reform could not be legislated into existence. It had to be lived, beginning with the clergy and flowing outward to the People of God.

## Towards *Aggiornamento* 1976

The wider Asian Church was also awakening. In 1970, Pope Paul VI made his historic visit to Manila, where he met the bishops of Asia. That encounter proved pivotal. It gave birth to the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) and crystallised a shared awareness that Asia was entering "its hour of awakening."

This moment resonated deeply with the spirit of Vatican II, particularly its call for a Church rooted in communion (*koinonia*), attentive to the Word of God, and engaged with the lived realities of its people. The Church in Peninsular Malaysia, too, sensed that the time for decisive action had arrived.

In 1975, a bold proposal was placed before the Bishops' Conference of Malaysia and Singapore: to invite EAPI staff to Malaysia and initiate a nationwide renewal programme. The task of preparation was entrusted to Fr Anthony Soter Fernandez, later Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur and Malaysia's first Cardinal. Together with six members of the "Five Loaves and Two Fishes" team — five religious and two priests — he was charged with facilitating what would become a landmark moment in the Church's history.

The vision was audacious. All priests across the three dioceses of Peninsular Malaysia would leave their parishes for an entire month to undergo a renewal programme at College General. August was chosen, when seminarians would be away in their own dioceses. For one full month, every parish in Peninsular Malaysia would

*In this issue, we take a brief pause from our journey with the Church in East Malaysia to turn our gaze towards Peninsular Malaysia — to a defining moment when the local Church, stirred by the Spirit, boldly renewed itself from within.*



Mass in the chapel of the College General to mark the opening of *Aggiornamento* Malaysia.

be without a resident priest, entrusted instead to prepared lay leadership.

It was a decision that carried real pastoral risk. There were no guarantees, no precedents, and no assurances of success — only trust that the Spirit who called the Church to renewal would also sustain it in its vulnerability.

## The month that changed the Church

In August 1976, the *Aggiornamento* became a reality. A total of 126 priests — including three bishops — representing more than 90 per cent of the clergy in Peninsular Malaysia, participated. Initial apprehension soon gave way to openness as the programme unfolded. What some had feared as an imposition became an experience of deep listening, honest sharing and communal discernment.

Living together for a month fostered fraternity rarely experienced before. Priests who seldom met discovered companionship, shared prayer and mutual support. For younger clergy, the openness and wisdom of their senior brothers proved both disarming and deeply formative.

Meanwhile, parish life continued — and even flourished. Attendance at liturgical services remained steady. Lay leaders led prayer services, preached, and brought Holy Communion to the sick and homebound. The feared pastoral vacuum never materialised. Instead, the Church discovered a quiet but profound truth: the People of God were ready.

More than a programme or policy shift, the *Aggiornamento* emerged as a collective act of ecclesial discernment. It asked

not only what the Church should do, but who the Church was called to become — a pilgrim people, listening before speaking, serving before organising, and trusting the Spirit to lead where certainty was absent.

From this experience arose a clear pastoral vision: the building of Christ-centred communities at every level of Church life. Four interrelated priorities were identified — unity among bishops, clergy, religious and laity; ongoing formation for all; dialogue with Christians and people of other faiths; and integral human development, especially for the poor. These commitments were communicated to the faithful through a pastoral letter at the conclusion of the *Aggiornamento*.

## Renewal takes root

When the clergy returned to their parishes in September 1976, the real work began. Renewal now had to be translated into daily pastoral life. Parish leaders were engaged, hearts were opened, and communities slowly learned to walk together in a new way.

Visible changes soon followed. Sanctuaries were reordered: altars were turned to face the congregation, altar rails removed, lecterns brought to ground level. Choirs descended from lofts to join the assembly, accompanied by organs, pianos and guitars. For some, these changes were disorienting. Familiar rhythms were altered, long-held practices let go. Yet this very discomfort became part of the journey — an invitation to move from habit to intention, from routine to participation.

Behind the scenes, immense work was underway. Liturgical texts were translated

from Latin into English and vernacular languages, carefully reviewed and approved. Hymns were compiled and shared — all in an era long before digital tools, when communication relied on typewriters, telegrams and telex machines.

At the heart of this renewal was the laity. Parish priests began identifying and forming readers, commentators, musicians, catechists and pastoral workers. With catechism no longer conducted in Catholic schools, Sunday classes emerged in parish halls and makeshift classrooms. Faith was no longer confined to receiving the sacraments; it extended into proclaiming the Word, teaching the young, leading prayer and serving the vulnerable. The Church was no longer something "done for" the people, but a mission entrusted to them.

Parish structures also evolved. Large, unwieldy parish councils gave way to Parish Pastoral Councils focused on discernment and pastoral planning rather than administration. Implementation was entrusted to coordinating bodies, allowing councils to remain attentive to the deeper needs of the community.

## A living, participatory Church

The impact on the faithful was unmistakable. People began entering churches for Mass rather than remaining outside. Worship was no longer something merely "heard" but something understood and embraced. Congregational singing flourished, and hymn books became well-worn companions, guiding the rhythm of the liturgical year.

In the decade that followed, lay and youth participation surged. Mass became more meaningful as Scripture, prayer and preaching spoke directly to daily life. Challenges remained — overcrowded catechism classes, limited facilities, logistical constraints — but the Church had come alive.

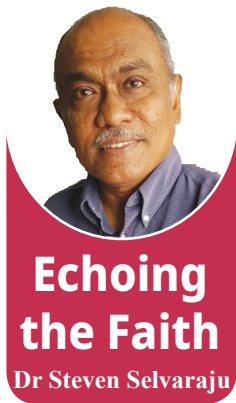
At its heart, the *Aggiornamento* revealed a simple but demanding truth: the Church renews itself not by perfecting structures, but by deepening relationships — with Christ, with one another, and with the world it is sent to serve.

Nearly five decades on, the Church in Peninsular Malaysia continues to draw from this wellspring. Synodality, co-responsibility, dialogue and mission — themes resonating strongly in the Church today — were already being lived, imperfectly yet courageously, in those formative years. The questions may have changed, but the posture remains the same: to listen attentively, discern together, and walk forward in faith.

*This series is not intended as an academic or historical study, nor does it attempt to provide an exhaustive account of events, but rather offers a narrative reflection of the Church's lived experience.*

# Final preparation and initiation rites

In the last article, I examined the RCIA process from the Rite of Election to the Period of Purification and Enlightenment. In this article, I will share the rites of the final stage of preparation and the third step of the RCIA, that is, Reception of the Sacraments of Initiation, namely Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.



**Echoing the Faith**  
Dr Steven Selvaraju

## What are the preparation Rites?

There are a number of rites that may be celebrated to help the Elect to make the final preparations for the reception of the Sacraments of Initiation. Usually, these rites take place on the morning of Holy Saturday, where the Elect gather with the celebrant, usually the parish priest, and some members of the community.

### Recitation of the Creed (RCIA, 193-196)

In this rite, the Elect recites the Creed before the celebrant and the community. This prepares them for the profession of faith that they will make just before they are baptised. Prior to the recitation, the celebrant says a prayer for the Elect, after which they recite the Creed.

### Ephphetha Rite (RCIA, 197)

The Ephphetha rite, also known as the rite of opening the ears and mouth, is celebrated to impress upon the Elect their need for the grace to hear the word of God and to profess it to others. The rite has two parts. Firstly, the Elect listen to the Gospel reading and an explanation of the passage as found in Mark 7: 31-37. Then, they come before the celebrant, who touches the right and left ear and the closed lips of each elect with his thumb, and says: "Ephphetha: that is, be opened, that you may profess the faith you hear, to the praise and glory of God."



### Choosing a baptismal name (RCIA, 200)

The rite of choosing a baptismal name may also be celebrated on Holy Saturday if it was not done so in the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens.

The priest concludes the preparation rites with the prayer of blessing and dismissal of the Elect. The Elect are then asked to spend the rest of the day in quiet reflection and prayer as they look forward to the celebration of the Easter Vigil.

## What are the rites belonging to the Reception of the Sacraments of Initiation?

At the Easter Vigil, the Elect enter the third step in the Christian initiation of adults, where they receive Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist.

### Celebration of Baptism

The rite of Baptism, takes place, after the homily at the baptismal font. It begins with the presentation of the

candidates, where they are called forward one by one, and are accompanied by their godparents. After which, the celebrant invites the community to pray for the Elect. Then, the litany of the saints is sung.

### Prayer over the water

The prayer over the water declares the religious meaning of water as God's creation and the sacramental use of water in the unfolding of the Paschal Mystery. It is also a remembrance of God's wonderful works in the history of salvation. Therefore, it also introduces an invocation (a calling upon) of the Trinity at the very start of the rite of Baptism.

### Renunciation of Sin and Profession of Faith

The renunciation of sin and the profession of faith are a perfect prelude to baptism. By their own personal act in the rite, the Elect renounce sin and Satan. By professing their faith, the Elect express that they will not be baptised passively but will receive this sacrament with the desire to renounce error and to hold fast to God.



### Baptismal washing

Immediately after their profession of faith, the Elect come forward to be baptised. The celebrant baptises them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, as the Elect had earlier professed their faith in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, invoked by the celebrant, the Holy Trinity now act on those who are being baptised. From now on, the baptised person is called a "neophyte", a Greek word that means, "newly planted" or "newly converted".

The baptismal washing is followed by certain rites that give an expression of the sacrament the neophytes have just received.

### Clothing with the baptismal garment

It signifies the new dignity the neophytes have received. In his prayer, the celebrant says to each of them, "(Name)... you have become a new creation and have clothed yourselves in Christ. Receive this baptismal garment and bring it unstained to the judgement seat of our Lord Jesus Christ so that you may have everlasting life. At the words "Receive this baptismal garment", the godparent places the garment on the newly baptised.

### Presentation of a lighted candle

This rite shows that the neophytes are called to walk as children of the light. The celebrant takes the Easter Candle in his hands or touches it, saying to the godparents: "Godparents, please come forward to give to the newly baptised the light of Christ". The godparent of each newly baptised goes to the celebrant, lights a candle from the Easter candle, and then presents it to the neophyte.

### Celebration of Confirmation

In line with an ancient practice, adults who are baptised will receive Confirmation immediately afterward, unless some serious reason stands in the way. The celebration of the two sacraments one after the other signifies the

close link between the saving mission of the Son and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, whom come with the Father to those who are baptised.

### Invitation

At the start, the celebrant says to the neophytes: "My dear newly baptised, born again in Christ by baptism, you have become members of Christ and of His priestly people. Now you are to share in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit among us, the Spirit sent by the Lord upon His apostles at Pentecost and given by them and their successors to the baptised." After this, he addresses the rest of the assembly, asking them to pray for the newly baptised and later, prays with his hands outstretched over those to be confirmed.

### Anointing with chrism

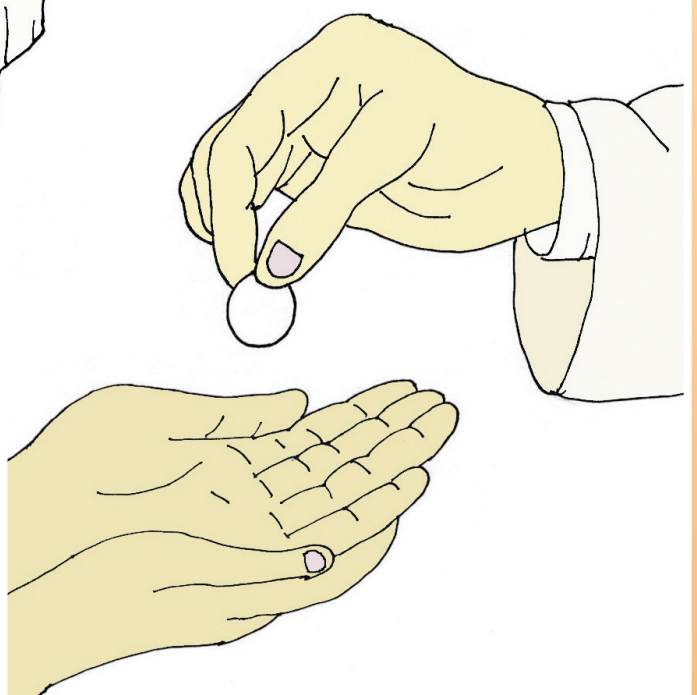
Then, the celebrant dips his thumb into the chrism and makes the sign of the cross on the forehead of the one to be confirmed saying: "[Name]... be sealed with the Holy Spirit." The newly baptised responds "Amen".

### Renewal of baptismal promises

The celebrant invites the community and neophytes to join together in the renunciation of sin and profession of faith, after which, he sprinkles the entire assembly with the blessed baptismal water, while all sing an appropriate song. The rite concludes with a prayer by the celebrant.

### Liturgy of the Eucharist

Finally, in the liturgy of the Eucharist, the newly baptised reach the culminating point in their Christian initiation. Now raised to the ranks of the royal priesthood, they take an active part in the prayer of intercession. With the entire community they say the Lord's Prayer and receive Holy Communion for the first time.



## Conclusion

With this, the neophytes enter the final period of the catechumenal process, that is, the Period of Mystagogy. This is a period which extends through the entire Easter season and concludes on Pentecost Sunday. It is "devoted to the post baptismal catechesis or mystagogy" and is a time "for deepening the Christian experience, for spiritual growth, and for entering more fully into the life and unity of the community" (RCIA, 7.4). (For Period of Mystagogy: see my article entitled "Mystagogy – Experiencing the Mystery", *HERALD*, May 18, 2025).

*The illustrations are by Dr Steven Selvaraju*

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# The winds of change



*"The sea was never the destination; it was the teacher. You don't need to have the whole route mapped out to leave the dock. You only need to take the next faithful step."*

Fabian Fernandez

## Christina Lazaroo

What does it take to leave everything you've built behind and trust in a journey that defies logic, comfort, and certainty? For circumnavigator Fabian Fernandez, the answer was faith.

Growing up the middle of three brothers in a working-class family in Perak, Fabian's life was initially shaped by practicality. His father, a school clerk, and his mother, a homemaker, worked hard to provide, but resources were lean.

As a boy, Fabian dreamed of the clouds, fascinated by jets and the Air Force. That dream ended at thirteen when he started wearing glasses. He considered law, but with an elder brother already in university, the financial strain on his parents would have been too great. He was suggested marine engineering as it was a path that offered a scholarship and a guaranteed job.

"At that point, it sounded like the sensible choice," Fabian recalls. Little did he know, it was a choice that would define the next thirty years of his life, until a quiet whisper and a thirty-year-old memory of a star-lit sky called him to something greater. "It was born of my wish to do something audacious," he recalls. "I was at a point where I was looking for something spiritual."

That "something" led him to the sea.

### The engineering of faith

As a trained marine engineer, Fabian approached the ocean with both skill and a plan. But unlike his professional work, he was largely alone. With little local maritime precedent, he spent years gutting and rebuilding *Destiny 12*, learning through long-distance calls and emails with experts and strangers around the world.

"My training as an engineer prepared me more than I realised," he says. "I broke the impossible into manageable parts. But I learned a hard and lasting lesson: shortcuts on land become dangers at sea. Planning can reduce arrogance, but it can never eliminate risk."

The lessons in reliance began long before he hit the open ocean. During a "dry run" near Sumatra, Fabian

encountered a 600-mile window of absolute stillness — no wind at all. While he could have relied on his engine, he realised that to truly complete his mission, he had to stop trying to force his own way.

"I was trained to read the wind," he says. "But I quickly realised I could not control it. I had to learn to trust it to move forward."

This realisation became the heartbeat of his 35,000-mile journey and made him one of the few Malaysians ever to sail around the world solo.

### Silence and signs

There were two stretches during the voyage where God's presence became undeniable. The first came in Knysna, after rounding the tip of South Africa. Fabian arrived exhausted and overwhelmed, met with a warmth and sense of presence so intense that he broke down and sobbed for nearly four hours. The second occurred during a violent storm in the Pacific, where five successive fronts threatened to sink his vessel. "I thought I was going to die," he later recounted. "I surrendered. And then, the storm didn't just fade, it stopped instantly. "I knew then, in a way beyond reason, that I was not alone. God had calmed the storm, just as He had once calmed it for His disciples."

He reflects on how God chose to guide him and show him signs, much as He once did with the Apostle Paul. Some of those signs had been present long before the journey began. He recalls meeting a priest who, without knowing him, spoke at length about the Apostle Paul. Only in retrospect did Fabian recognise the significance of that encounter. In hindsight, God had been speaking to him all along, he had simply not noticed.

### Kindness across borders

The journey also revealed the presence of humanity in unexpected ways. Fabian recalls his encounters with strangers and fellow sailors who offered assistance without expectation. In distant ports and unfamiliar cultures, help arrived at precisely the right moment—sometimes through fellow sailors, sometimes through

complete strangers. These acts of generosity reinforced that faith is not confined to rituals or places of worship, it exists wherever compassion is practised. He witnessed generosity without expectation, kindness without recognition, and hospitality offered simply because it was right.

Distance from family was the hardest sacrifice. Being away for long periods was a challenge, yet Fabian learned to entrust his loved ones into God's care. Faith did not remove the ache, but it gave it meaning and fostered trust even in separation, making the distance worthwhile.

### Beyond the horizon

Now home, Fabian returned to Port Klang not for the fame of being a circumnavigator, but to fulfil a purpose that reaches far beyond the dock. He believes that periods of isolation and silence, much like the deserts and mountains sought by prophets — and Jesus Himself — are where God's voice becomes clearest.

He is adamant that he is not a "perfect believer" but a "sinner" who was shown mercy. He compares his transformation to that of St. Paul, noting that God often chooses flawed, ordinary people to carry a message. His mission now is to share this "lived theology" with seekers and young Malaysians, reminding them that faith does not guarantee safety, but it promises presence.

"The sea was never the destination; it was the teacher," Fabian says. "You don't need to have the whole route mapped out to leave the dock. You only need to take the next faithful step."

Fabian's story is a testament to the power of trust, perseverance, and divine guidance. It reminds us that preparation, humility, and compassion often reveal themselves under challenge, and that ordinary people can become instruments of extraordinary purpose when they follow God's call.





# The sanctity of Mass

## A plea for reverence and respect

As we gather in the house of God, we are reminded of the sacredness of the Eucharistic celebration. Yet, in recent times, we have witnessed a disturbing trend that undermines the very essence of our worship: the incessant snapping of photos during Mass.

Is the reverence we owe to the Lord compromised by our obsession with capturing the perfect shot?

Let us ask ourselves, what is the purpose of snapping photos of the clergy in procession, at the altar, or during the consecration?

Are we truly present in the moment, offering our worship and adoration to God, or are we more concerned with sharing our experience on social media? The answer, sadly, is often the latter.

Even if we are not part of the parish social media team or reporters, our actions can still be a distraction to others and disrupt the sacred atmosphere of the Mass.

We must remember that the Eucharist is not a spectator sport, but a participatory celebration of our faith.

We are not mere observers, but active participants in the Body of Christ.

Instead of taking photos during the Mass, let us focus on the true meaning of our worship, and instead, immerse ourselves in the prayers, the readings, and the Eucharistic sacrifice as we gaze upon the Lord, present in the tabernacle and on the altar, with the eyes of faith.

If we truly want to share our experience with others, let us do so after Mass, outside the church, with the permission of the clergy and the individuals involved.

We can take photos with cardinals, archbishops, bishops, or clergy, but let it be done in a spirit of joy and gratitude, not as a means to seek attention or validation.

To address this issue, perhaps some clear

guidelines on photography and social media usage during Mass and other liturgical celebrations should be developed.

All parishes and churches should communicate these guidelines to their faithful, emphasising the importance of respectful silence and participation in the Eucharist.

We should prioritise our worship and participation in the Eucharist, rather than capturing the perfect shot.

Let us be present in the moment, offering our prayers and adoration to God, and be reminded that the Mass is a sacred celebration, not a photo opportunity.

The Church is a place where we come to encounter the Living God, to seek forgiveness, to receive nourishment, and to be sent forth to love and serve.

In that spirit, we must treat this sacred space with reverence and respect.

As we navigate the complexities of modern life, we must remember the importance of silence and stillness in our worship and devotion. Let us cultivate a culture of silence, of stillness, and of reverence, that we may truly encounter the Lord in the Eucharist.

But the issue of camera phones goes beyond the walls of our churches.

When did we become so obsessed with capturing every moment, every event, every person, without giving a thought to the consequences?

We see it at funerals, where grieving families are often confronted with camera phones, capturing their pain and sorrow without their consent.

We see it at accident scenes, where the victims are often photographed and videotaped without regard for their dignity or privacy.

We also see it in public places, where people are taking photos and videos of

others without their permission, often causing embarrassment or distress.

What's driving this obsession with camera phones? Is it a desire to share our experiences with others, to prove that we were there, or to seek validation through social media?

Whatever the reason, it's clear that we've lost sight of what's truly important: respect for others, respect for ourselves, and respect for the moment.

And let us not forget the legal implications of simply taking photos without consent, especially in church when it involves children and those who are very private people.

In Malaysia, the law recognises the right to privacy, and taking photos of individuals without their consent can be considered an invasion of their privacy.

This is particularly sensitive when it comes to children, who are vulnerable and unable to give informed consent.

As Catholics, we must be mindful of these concerns and respect the rights and dignity of all individuals, especially in a place of worship.

As we reflect on this issue, we also humbly suggest that the clergy, too, must be mindful of their role in this digital age.

While it is understandable that the Church wants to reach out to the faithful through social media, it is equally important that the clergy maintain a level of decorum and reverence, especially during live-streamed events or when cameras are trained on them.

Let us not forget that the clergy are shepherds of the flock, not media personalities seeking to go viral. Let us encourage our clergy to focus on their sacred duties, rather than pandering to the camera or seeking to become overnight content creators.

## ...The Church Mouse

In this regard, media training for the clergy would be a step in the right direction. We need to sensitise them to the pitfalls of social media, and help them understand that their role is to serve the Gospel, not to seek popularity or validation through "likes" and "shares".

Let us leave the content creation to the professionals, who are mindful of the ramifications of allowing things to go viral. Unfortunately, we have seen instances where the clergy have been tone-deaf to the negative publicity they generate, only to scramble for damage control once the media "disaster" has struck.

Let us pray that our clergy will be guided by wisdom and prudence in their use of social media, and that they will always prioritise the dignity and reverence of the Church.

As for the laity, they should come to Mass with humble hearts, seeking healing and redemption, not photo opportunities, as they approach the altar with reverence, respect and grateful hearts.

As we strive to create a culture of reverence and respect in our churches and in our daily lives, we also need to prioritise our relationships, our values, and our faith, rather than our camera phones.

May our worship be guided by love, reverence, and a deep desire to encounter the Living God, as we look to be transformed by the Eucharist, and be sent forth to love and serve.

As we reflect on our actions, let us ask ourselves: what's truly important? Is it the perfect shot, or is it the presence of God in our lives? May we choose wisely, and may we always prioritise what truly matters.

Infant baptism has long been one of those Catholic practices that quietly puzzles many. Some wonder why the Church remains so concerned about baptising children who cannot yet understand what is being done in their name. In a world that prizes choice and personal freedom, it is common to hear the view that faith should be something one decides only when ready, when mature enough, when able to choose for oneself. To some, infant baptism feels old-fashioned. To others, it feels unnecessary or even forceful.

Yet this question does not stand alone. It sits among many other teachings of the Church that gently resist the rhythm of modern thinking. The belief that life is received before it is shaped. That love is given before it is returned. That grace comes before effort. Infant baptism is not an isolated idea, but part of a wider vision of how God works quietly, patiently, and often before we are aware.

It is within this larger understanding that the beauty of infant baptism begins to unfold.

### A gift before understanding

The Church does not see baptism as an imposition. She sees it as a gift.

There are many important things in life that are given to us long before we understand them. A name is chosen for us before we can speak. Love is shown to us before we can respond. A language is taught to us before we realise how deeply it will shape who we become.



### Encountering Faith

Thomson Wong

## When faith is given before it is chosen

Long before a child can choose their values or beliefs, they are already being formed by the world they are born into. They inherit a family name, a culture, a way of speaking, even a sense of what feels safe and familiar. None of these are imposed by force. They are

received through love, presence, and care.

Faith follows this same pattern. It is why Catholic parents, moved by love rather than certainty, choose to entrust their children to God from the very beginning.

Infant baptism is not about making a decision on behalf of a child. It is about offering them a beginning in grace. Grace, in the life of an infant, is not something felt or recognised. It is God's life freely given, quietly present, working beneath the surface long before the child can name it or respond to it. Baptism opens the door to this grace. It marks the start of a relationship, not its completion.

No one would say a child is forced to live simply because they are fed and cared for. Growth takes time. So does faith.

### The seed that is planted

A seed does not announce its future the moment it is planted. It lies hidden beneath the soil, unseen and fragile, dependent on those who tend it. Yet within it is life waiting to unfold.

Through baptism, the Church entrusts a child to God in a special way. She believes that grace is already at work, even when it cannot be measured or felt. Faith does not begin with understanding. It begins with belonging.

When parents bring their children for baptism, they are not claiming certainty. They are making an act of trust. Trust that their child ultimately belongs to God before belonging to them. Trust that God's grace can work quietly, patiently, across the years.

### Freedom grows with the gift

Some fear that baptising a child removes their freedom to choose later in life. Yet the Church has never believed that freedom begins with absence.

As the child grows, they are invited again and again to respond to the faith they have received. Through teaching, through witness, through questioning and even doubt, the faith slowly becomes personal. At Confirmation, the Church explicitly calls the individual to affirm for themselves what was first given to them in love.

Freedom is not weakened by being given faith early. It is deepened by being given something meaningful to either embrace or walk away from knowingly.

The Church knows that not every baptised child will remain faithful. She understands human freedom too well to pretend otherwise. But she also knows that a gift

never given cannot be chosen later.

### Faith is handed down

Faith is never meant to be invented from scratch. It is received, lived, tested, and handed on. Just as families pass down stories, values, and traditions that shape identity, so too the faith is handed down across generations.

Infant baptism reflects this quiet confidence. That God is already present before we seek Him. That grace precedes effort. That love comes before understanding.

It is not an act of control. It is an act of hope.

### A quiet beginning

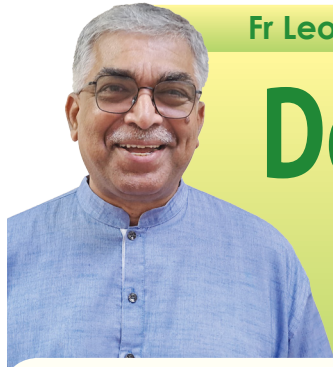
Baptism is rarely dramatic. A little water. A few words. A child who may cry or sleep through it all, unaware of what is taking place. Yet the Church dares to believe that something eternal happens in that quiet moment.

Not because the child understands. But because God acts.

Perhaps this is why infant baptism feels uncomfortable to modern sensibilities. It reminds us that not everything meaningful begins with choice or clarity. Some of the most important things in life begin as gifts we slowly grow into.

Faith, like life itself, is first received. And only later, through the long journey of living, loving, struggling, and returning, does it become something we freely and consciously call our own.

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



Fr Leonard Lexson

# Do Catholics understand the importance of celebrating the Eucharist?

“The celebration of Mass, as the action of Christ and the People of God arrayed hierarchically, is the centre of the whole Christian life for the Church, both universal and local, as well as for each of the faithful individually.... In it is found the high point, both of the action by which God sanctifies the world in Christ and of the worship that the human race offers to the Father, adoring Him through Christ, the Son of God, in the Holy Spirit”. (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal* 16)

The Eucharist being the source and summit of our Christian lives is God’s call for us to participate in His divinity through Christ the one true mediator between God and man. For, in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ Himself, our Pasch.

The Eucharist is indeed Christocentric. God in Christ Jesus has given us the Eucharist as a perfect and pure gift beyond compare. Any fundamental ambiguity about man’s identity and purpose in life has been resolved in Christ Jesus through His incarnation – “only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light” (*Gaudium et Spes* 22). Christ is the perfect man and the image of the invisible God, and Christ “makes man fully manifest to Himself and brings to light his exalted vocation. (*Catechism*

*of the Catholic Church* 1701). Through Christ’s passion, death and resurrection, man is freed from the bondage of sin, reconciled to God and ennobled to live a life of holiness in the Spirit – the ultimate fulfilment in Christ. “Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations, which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people (1 Pet. 2:9; cf. 2:4-5), is their right and duty by reason of their baptism.” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 14)

Liturgy foremost is the work of God calling us to be in communion with the divine self through the person of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. At every celebration of the Eucharist, the action of God transforms us into being the Body of Christ. On our part, as stewards of liturgy, our worship of God must be one of total surrender and a willingness to submit in loving obedience by immersing ritually in the Paschal Mystery, for “the Paschal mystery of Christ’s cross and Resurrection stands at the centre of the Good News that the Apostles, and the Church following them, are to proclaim to the world.” (CCC 571). The paschal mystery is our mystery, and it is the only theme in every liturgical celebration. For each

time we immerse ourselves ritually in the Paschal Mystery, we are proclaiming the mystery of our faith, and we are echoing the wonderful works of God.

Liturgy is not about us but about the Trinitarian God. We are stewards of liturgy. We do not shape liturgy, rather, liturgy shapes us. As such we do not plan liturgy since the structure of liturgy is already laid out for us. From the greeting to the final blessing, from the presider to the gathered assembly, the rituals are interwoven to unfold our dying and rising in Christ. We are summoned to participate fully, consciously and actively in these rituals, by taking on the various roles and responsibilities within liturgy.

We are not spectators of liturgy “watching Mass” and waiting for a “feel good” experience. In the entertainment world, when spectators enter the “arena of stars,” they pay a price to be present to watch their favourite group or celebrity entertain them for the “feel good” experience. The spectators can never have a real or personal connection with the stars. When we gather to celebrate Mass, only one person had paid the price for us, Jesus Christ, and through Him, with Him and in Him, we are partakers in the celebration by the very fact of our baptism. We are the children of God; we are the Body of Christ; we are brothers and sisters in the Lord.

If ever there is a “spectator – audience”

at liturgy, there is only one, and it is God and I pray that God is pleased with our participation, that is, with our worship of praising, glorifying, and thanking God.

Liturgy is not about pleasing man nor is it about accommodating the likes of men. It is not about personal likes and dislikes, emotions and feelings. While these may be part of our human make up, liturgy is not meant to entertain but to sanctify us and prepare us for the day of days to be wedded to the Lamb of God. We enter the spirit of the liturgy by preparing ourselves to worship God through Christ’s sacrifice, for “Our earthly liturgy is a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem”. (SC 8). Each time we enter the house of God to celebrate the Eucharist, we enter the sacred realm of the heavenly Jerusalem. What a beautiful description of a supernatural encounter that we can touch heaven and celebrate with all the angels and saints, the glory of God in Christ Jesus.

**Fr Leonard** is the parish priest of the Church of the Assumption. He also serves as the ecclesiastical assistant to the Kuala Lumpur Archdiocesan Liturgy Commission and is the chairperson of the Liturgical Music Committee of the Episcopal Regional Commission for Liturgy for Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei.



Fr Ron Rolheiser

## Storms we cannot weather

In the musical *Les Miserables*, there’s a particularly haunting song, sung by a dying woman (Fantine) who has been crushed by virtually every unfairness life can deal a person. Abandoned by her husband, sexually harassed by her employer, caught in abject poverty, physically ill and dying, her main anxiety is about what will happen to her young daughter after she dies, she offers this lament:

*But there are dreams that cannot be  
And there are storms we cannot weather  
I had a dream my life would be  
So different from this hell I’m living  
So different now from what it seemed  
Now life has killed  
The dream I dreamed.*

For centuries, in our popular mind, despair was understood as the ultimate and unforgivable sin against God and against nature. We weren’t always sure how exactly to define despair, but we saw it as someone giving up on life, on God, on love, and on meaning. Suicide was often seen as its prime analogate, ultimate despair.

This notion needs to be radically rethought, not just for our own consolation when we see loved ones collapse into seeming despair, but also because it belittles God.

The popular notion that someone who seemingly gives up on life and God and dies

in that state is guilty of a sin that cannot be forgiven and is condemned to an eternity outside the community of love, is based on some serious misunderstandings. What are those misunderstandings?

First, what’s best in us doesn’t believe this at all. What’s best in us understands human weakness and the anatomy of a collapse of soul. And what’s best in us reaches out in empathy to those who collapse in this way, not least because we understand their weakness.

Second, the notion that a certain collapse of soul (seeming despair) is somehow an act against life itself and against the God who gave us life, is theologically false. It goes against the foundational principle running through all of Scripture, namely, that God has a special, preferential love for the weak, for those not strong enough to stand, for those who have collapsed under the burdens of life.

Even more important, the notion that someone who collapses in this way puts himself or herself irrevocably outside of God’s mercy is an insult to God, a belittling of God’s person and God’s love. It’s predicated on the misguided belief that *if we do not hang onto God, God will not hang on to us. If we give up on God, God will give up on us.* That’s utterly false, and a belittling of God’s person and God’s fidelity.

At the very heart of what Jesus incarnated and revealed about the heart of God lies the truth that God does not abandon us, particularly when, crushed in body and spirit, we give up on God. God will never abandon us because we are too weak and wounded to hang on to God.

Moreover, as Christians, we believe (as we affirm in the Apostles’ Creed) that Jesus descended into hell, not just once after His death on Good Friday, but forever afterwards. Whenever Christ sees someone whose circumstance and wound have landed him or her in a private hell from which he or she can see no way of escaping and instead surrenders to hopelessness, Christ never says, *since you gave up on Me, I give up on you!* No, that’s not the God we believe in. Rather Christ descends into that hell and breathes out forgiveness and peace. There is no hell, no collapse of soul, no despair into which Christ cannot penetrate and breathe out peace. If there is anyone in hell, he or she is there because of arrogance, not because of weakness.

It’s not incidental that the Church canonises certain people and declares them, by name, to be in heaven, whereas it has never, by name, declared anyone to be in hell, not even Judas, who betrayed Jesus with a kiss and then (seemingly in despair) died by suicide.

In a book entitled *Peculiar Treasures*, the renowned novelist and spiritual writer Frederick Buechner reflects on the death of Judas. Buechner, who had lost his own father to suicide, speculates on the reasons Judas dies in what outwardly looks like despair. He suggests that perhaps Judas chose suicide out of hope instead of despair, that is, he felt damned and counted on Jesus’ mercy after death, thinking that perhaps “hell might be his last chance of making it to heaven.”

Imagining Jesus meeting Judas after death, Buechner writes: “It’s a scene to conjure with. Once again, they met in the shadows, the two old friends, both of them a little worse for wear after all that had happened, only this time it was Jesus who was the one to give the kiss, and this time it wasn’t the kiss of death that was given.”

Passing strange, for someone utterly crushed by life, hell might be his or her last chance of making it to heaven.

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



# YOUTH

## Decoding the science of Struggle



Laurien Antony

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Addiction is a reality that touches lives in ways often unseen, weaving through our communities with complex and painful threads. To address this pressing issue, the youth of the Church of St Anthony recently organised an insightful session titled *Navigating Life: A Talk on Addiction*.

Around 40 young people from the parish and neighbouring churches gathered to explore the various facets of addiction, delivered by guest speaker, Dr Shane Varman, *pic*. The message shared through the session was clear: addiction is rarely a simple choice or a moral failing but rather, a struggle shaped by numerous factors, from peer influence and family dynamics to cultural pressures and socio-economic challenges.



Dr Shane shared that teenagers and young adults are biologically at a higher risk. During these formative years, hormonal changes increase impulsivity, while the brain's reward system becomes deeply sensitive. Likening the dopamine release from a substance to the intense rush of a "first love", he explained how the brain remembers that high, quickly spiralling into a cycle of tol-

erance and dependency.

In the Malaysian context, the sheer availability of substances heightens this vulnerability. He noted how trends have shifted towards cheap, accessible threats, from vaping to inhaling "gam basikal", which remains a dangerous yet incredibly low-cost option for those looking for an escape. Dr Shane cautioned that we must not be complacent about global trends because powerful synthetic chemicals are increasingly surfacing internationally, and these trends often cross borders, requiring the youth to remain vigilant.

The deep human desire for acceptance also drives this crisis. Dr Shane pointed out that peer pressure often begins subtly; marginalised groups may offer a sense of belonging while introducing harmful habits under the guise of them being harmless. This social modelling is powerfully amplified by modern media.

Dr Shane highlighted how

streaming platforms and certain films frequently feature cannabis use because it has been legalised in certain parts of the world. A dangerous disconnect is created among youth when such shows or films are consumed, resulting in confusion and the perception that the behaviours portrayed may be acceptable or morally permissible. Without a consistent message about the actual medical and legal dangers, young people are easily misled into normalising destructive habits.

At the heart of many addictions, however, is a profound lack of connection. Dr Shane observed that individuals struggling with dependency often come from backgrounds of trauma, such as households fractured by conflict where children feel neglected. Without a supportive environment, they may resort to negative behaviour simply to gain attention.

In such cases, he emphasised the importance of finding a

"second family".

This is exactly where the Church comes in – acting as a community where young people can find genuine connection and meaning. Healing truly begins when we create spaces where people feel safe, accepted, and loved.

During a candid Q&A, Dr Shane addressed how to help our loved ones. While acknowledging that genetics can play a role in addiction, he stressed that personal resilience and boundary-setting are our ultimate shields. For those trying to help an addicted family member or friend, he encouraged a non-judgemental approach rooted in understanding, urging individuals to help loved ones seek medical treatment, which is readily available at government clinics (Klinik Kesihatan) and specialised hospital addiction units via referral letters.

As a faith community, we are called to respond with compassion and forgiveness rather than judgement. We are invited to listen with open hearts, to walk alongside those who struggle, and to extend mercy instead of stigma. Just as Christ leads us, we too are called to lead by example, showing that freedom is possible, that grace is stronger than shame and that hope can be restored. We are deeply grateful to Dr. Shane Varman for facilitating this talk and to everyone who joined in reflecting and journeying together. May we continue to grow as a community that embodies mercy and love. And the courage to lead by example.



**KUALA LUMPUR:** Defining the nature of love is a complex undertaking. While examples of affection are visible in daily life, articulating a precise definition often proves elusive. However, for my confirmation class, clarity has emerged after participating in the first of three mandatory camps.

Held from February 28 to March 1 at the OLOG Pastoral Centre, the two-day session was on the Theology of the Body. Canossian Sr Retta Savarianan and her team opened with "Created for Love" by affirming that we are, in fact, worthy of love as children of God. Then they laid out God's plan for us: to love each other, and to be loved by Him. That's it. Sounded surprisingly simple, honestly — almost too good to be true, but that's God for you. So good we can't understand Him at times.

The next session went a little deeper. Going back to that question from the beginning, this one delved into what exactly love meant. They laid out four key aspects, in an easy-to-remember mnemonic: FTFF — "Free, Total, Faithful and Fruitful". Sur-



prisingly simple, and it formed the basis for everything else to come in TOB.

Next up, we were taught the difference between love and lust. I can't say this was a particularly easy session to sit through. My fellow confirmands were either laughing or feeling a little uncomfortable to hear the more "taboo" topics talked about rather candidly, but it was sort of refreshing to hear, in a way. Too often, because of

the stigma around sexual topics, teenagers aren't properly educated on them.

The second day transitioned into the practical application of these values within the context of dating. How to apply FTFF to it, with some personal experience from a married couple. This session challenged our worldly values, asking us to reevaluate our ideas and thoughts about dating and love. While my classmates and I were

listening, our parents were attending a parallel session. They too were challenged in their worldly ways of thinking, reminded of FTFF and called to be good examples to us, their children.

To sum it all up, I walked away with a deeper understanding of love. God's love for me, and the love we're called to give to others. So, let's go out and show that love in our daily lives. **Mark Charles**



Mark Charles

There are times we all feel alone. Even when we're surrounded by friends and family, it can seem like something is missing. For some people, though, loneliness wasn't just a feeling, it was their reality. Orphans with nothing to their name and no family to turn to.

I only learnt about this recently when I attended a talk by Dr Marc Sebastian Rercerretnam about his book, *A History of Immigrant Roman Catholics and Converts in Early Singapore (1832–1945)*. By studying church records and baptism registers, he pieced together a compelling picture of a flourishing, tightly knit Catholic community.

In the early 19th century, the death rate was high, and many children were left without parents. Some were the children of migrants who had moved to Singapore hoping for a better future. Priests and nuns established orphanages, some of which still exist today, and took these children under their care, baptising them into the Catholic faith.

At a time when literacy and formal education were rare, the Church also founded convent schools alongside these orphan-

# Not just a Sunday thing

ages. Children were given not just shelter, but the opportunity to learn to read and write. Some were even adopted by prominent Catholic families. The Church didn't just offer charity; it offered belonging and a future.

Orphans weren't the only ones who found refuge in the Church. Many Teochew Chinese migrants arrived poor and indebted, having paid for their passage to Singapore. They often worked as indentured labourers and relied on their clans (or "kongsi") for protection. But some, weary of being overworked and underpaid, chose to leave these arrangements. Without clan protection, they were vulnerable.

Many turned to the Church. Some married local Catholic women — something Dr Marc traced through marriage records, noting that these men did not retain their clan names. The Church became more than a place of worship; it became a space where new identities and communities were formed.

To understand this even better, we must look further back. Catholicism arrived in the region in the early 16th century with



Dr Marc Sebastian giving a talk on his book.

the Portuguese. From intermarriages came the *Kristang* community. There were also the *Baba Nyonya (Peranakan)*, descendants of early Chinese settlers. Dr Marc explained that racial divisions became more structured under British administration, but the Church continued to provide a shared platform where different cultures could coexist through faith.

role in enabling this, offering a common ground where multiple cultures could meet peacefully.

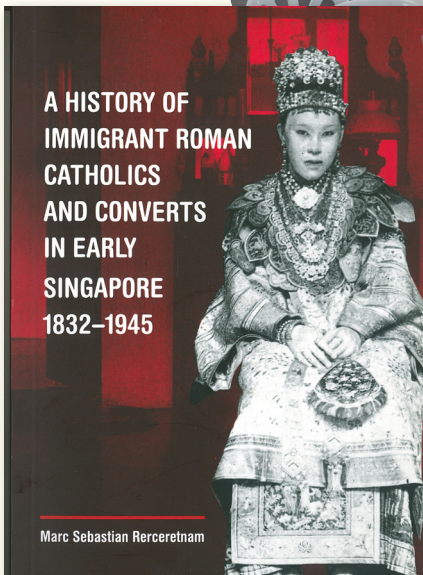
In that era, the Church was not only an institution of faith, but a united community that cared for its members. It was shelter, education, protection and belonging.

The point is, it's a whole lot more than just our Sunday obligation.

I think many young people today haven't fully seen or recognised the larger role the Church can play, even in a country like Malaysia, where we are a minority. If the Church could unite migrants, orphans and strangers in the 1800s, surely it can unite us today.

As we grow in our faith, maybe we should ask ourselves: are we helping to build that kind of Church, one that looks out for everyone?

**Mark, a 17-year-old, is currently gaining valuable experience through an immersion programme with HERALD.**



## Education and faith help rural Thai youth BREAK CYCLE OF POVERTY

BANGKOK: In the quiet stretches of Baan Na, the culmination of the academic year marks more than a seasonal transition; it represents a hard-won triumph over the systemic cycles of poverty.

Among the 61 high school graduates celebrating their commencement this week at Mala Sawan Pitthaya School, six students stand as living testaments to the power of resilient faith and "pastoral sensitivity."

These graduates hail from several communities across Thailand, including marginalised hill tribes—often relegated to the fringes of the nation's educational and economic progress.

### Sanctuary of Grace

The Congregation of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Bangkok (SHB) has long served as a "humanistic lens" through which the forgotten youth of Thailand are seen and valued.

Operating Baan Nazareth (Nazareth House), located approximately 100 kilometres northeast of the capital, the Sisters provide a comprehensive sanctuary.

For children born into destitution, the house is not merely a residence but a rigorous formation centre where the "spirit of Jesus" translates into full board, lodging, and a pathway to dignity through education.

"I am very attached to them, always thinking that these children were sent by Jesus to be cared for," says Sr Nongnapas Suwanajai, SHB, superior of Baan Nazareth and the school director.

"They are everything to me. I dedicate my heart and soul to wanting each of them to have a proud place in society."

### Cultivating Stewardship and Spirit

The formation at Nazareth House balances spiritual nourishment with practical life skills.

Sr Nongnapas shared with *LiCAS News* a unique financial literacy programme that fosters independence: while students receive a modest monthly allowance of 500 baht (RM62.40), they are required to deposit 100 baht (RM12.50) into a personal savings account at the Government Savings Bank.

At the end of each month, the house holds an announcement ceremony to celebrate their growing balances. For this year's seniors, these savings became the "loaves and fishes" that funded their graduation ceremonies and eased the transition into higher education.

Beyond the ledger, the students engage in a "magisterium" of service — visiting the sick, singing for the elderly, and leading funeral prayers — thereby weaving themselves into the communal fabric of the parish.

Among the graduates is Jiranai, 18, a member of the Hmong ethnic group in the North and an extraordinary scholar who consistently defied the odds of her birth. Through the steadfast support of the SHB Sisters, she has secured a full scholarship to pursue higher education, transforming a once-impossible dream into a tangible future.

Her peer, Jirawan, reflects on her time at



the house with profound gratitude.

"Being a resident at Nazareth House was a precious gift," Jirawan says. "It wasn't just a place to live, but a place that shaped my heart and taught me to grow in attitude, responsibility, and faith. I learned that I wasn't alone; I had friends who are brothers and sisters to me, and the Sisters who encouraged me to practise forgiveness and sacrifice."

Joining them is Santipap, of the Karen ethnic group from the remote Huai Manaw village in Chiang Mai. Raised by a struggling mother, Santipap admits to a turbulent past before arriving at Nazareth House.

"There was a period where I lived without a future, doing reckless things," he recalls.

For him, Nazareth House was a sanctuary for spiritual restoration.

"I now understand that my past mistakes were lessons intended to shape me into a stronger person. I have regained a clear view of my dreams."

As the graduates prepare to leave the sheltered halls of Baan Na, they carry with them symbolic "garlands made from milk cartons" — hand-woven tokens of gratitude they offer to God in the chapel.

These recycled offerings represent the Sisters' philosophy: that nothing is wasted and everything can be made beautiful through perseverance. As these six young graduates step into the world, they do so not as victims of their past, but as empowered citizens ready to "give back to society," guided by the light of the Sacred Heart. **Chainarong Monthienvichienchai, LiCAS News**

# Christians most persecuted religious community in world

GENEVA: Nations have a responsibility to protect, respect, and guarantee freedom of religion, said Archbishop Ettore Balestrero, the Holy See's Permanent Observer to the United Nations and other international organisations in Geneva, during the event Standing with Persecuted Christians: Defending the Faith and Christian Values on March 3.

Archbishop Balestrero noted that almost 400 million Christians worldwide face persecution or violence, making them the most persecuted religious community in the world. "This means that one in seven Christians is affected," he said, adding that nearly 5,000 Christians were killed for their faith in 2025 — an average of 13 each day.

He explained that for Christians, those killed for their faith are considered martyrs, witnesses to their beliefs who embody values that challenge the logic of power. However, from the perspective of international law, they are victims of serious human rights violations, and their suffering highlights the responsibility of states that failed to protect them.

The Archbishop stressed that states have the duty to protect freedom of religion or belief, including preventing attacks by third parties and ensuring the safety of believers before, during,

and after such incidents. He also warned that impunity remains one of the most serious problems in the global landscape of religious persecution.

Beyond physical violence, Archbishop Balestrero pointed to more subtle forms of persecution, including social marginalisation, discrimination in professional and public life, and legal restrictions that limit the ability of individuals or communities to openly practice their faith.

He also noted that anti-Christian incidents continue to occur in Europe, including attacks on churches, physical assaults, and vandalism, as well as legal actions against Christians for expressing their beliefs in public spaces.

Emphasising that freedom of religion is a fundamental human right, he urged nations to respect and safeguard the right of individuals and communities to profess and practice their faith both privately and publicly.

Concluding his remarks, Archbishop Balestrero reflected on the symbolism of the Cross, explaining that its vertical line represents humanity's openness to God, while the horizontal line symbolizes relationships with others. Attacks on faith, he warned, risk undermining both the relationship with God and the bonds that hold communities together. **Vatican News**

## Church marks 10th anniversary of Yemen martyrs



Clergy celebrate a memorial Mass honoring the four Missionaries of Charity sisters — Judith, Anselm, Reginette, and Marguerite — who were killed on March 4, 2016, during an attack on the Home for the Aged in Aden, Yemen. (LiCAS News/Apostolic Vicariate of Southern Arabia)

ABU DHABI: Ten years after four members of the Missionaries of Charity were killed in Yemen, Church leaders in the Gulf are remembering their witness and renewing calls for peace.

To mark the anniversary of the March 4, 2016 attack in Aden, Bishop Paolo Martinelli, Apostolic Vicar of Southern Arabia, celebrated a commemorative Mass at St Joseph's Cathedral, inviting the faithful to remember the sisters' sacrifice and pray for peace.

"The testimony of the Missionaries of Charity Sisters killed in Aden continues to nourish the life of our Church," he said, adding that their

witness encourages Christians to live their faith with joy and commitment and to become builders of peace.

On March 4, 2016, armed men stormed a home for the aged run by the congregation founded by Mother Teresa in Aden, killing four sisters and twelve lay collaborators. Two days later, Pope Francis described them as "martyrs of today."

Despite years of conflict in Yemen, the Missionaries of Charity continue their service there, caring for the poorest regardless of religion or nationality. Their witness, Church leaders say, remains a powerful call to live the Gospel through love, service, and peace. **LiCAS News**

### MEMORIAM

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#### In Memoriam Beautiful Memory of Mum



**Kamala Das**  
Departed: March 17th, 2024

*"To Live with God Through Eternity"*

From: Loving children,  
sons-in-law, daughters-in-law,  
grandchildren/spouses  
and great-grandchildren.

#### 1st Anniversary In Loving Memory of



**AUGUSTINE RAJ**  
17.11.1957 – 14.03.2025

Your life was a blessing,  
your memory a treasure.  
You are loved beyond words  
and missed beyond measure.

Deeply missed by sisters, brothers-in-law,  
nephews, nieces, relatives and loved ones.



In Ever Loving  
Memory of  
**JOSEPHINE  
NICHOLSON**  
(Called to the Lord:  
18 March 2016)

*Ten years have woven their way through our lives,  
Since we saw your smile, since we said our goodbyes.  
A decade has passed, yet it feels like yesterday,  
Since the light of our world went so softly away.*

*We see bits of you in the lives that we lead,  
In every kind word and in every good deed.  
Only you could make Heaven brighter than before,  
As you wait for us there on that beautiful shore.*

*Today we are grateful, today we give thanks,  
For the heart of our family, the gift of you.  
Though the years fly by quickly, our promise stays true:  
To live every moment in honour of you.  
Our mother, our angel, forever missing you.*

#### 4th Anniversary In Loving Memory of



**WONG NYUK YEE**  
Called home to the  
Lord on 9th March 2022

Lovingly remembered and  
memories deeply cherished  
by her children,  
grandchildren,  
great-grandchildren,  
relatives and loved ones.

#### 10th Anniversary In Loving Memory of



**Julian Themudu**  
Departed: 17.3.2016

Ten years have passed,  
yet your love remains as close  
as ever. Not a day goes by  
without remembering your  
kindness, your smile,  
and the warmth you brought  
into our lives.

Lovingly remembered by  
Wife, Son, family,  
friends & Fur kid.

#### 2nd Anniversary In Loving Memory of



**Nesaraj Julian  
Lourdes**  
Born: 3/6/1939  
Called to the Lord: 5/3/2024  
Ex Staff  
[GHKL /IMR/PPUM]

*Surely goodness and mercy  
shall follow me all the days  
of my life: and I will dwell in  
the house of the Lord for  
ever. Psalm 23:6*

#### In Loving Memory of



**Celestina Lawrence**  
5th June 1951 – 30th January 2026

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

Deeply missed by  
children Benedict, Amala & Albert, grandchildren,  
Son-in-law (Damian), Daughter-in-law (Jayn) and  
the Lawrence siblings.

#### 27th Anniversary In Loving Memory of



**Departed:  
15 March 1999**

*27 years have gone by  
in a blink of an eye.  
We love and miss you.*

Deeply missed and  
fondly remembered by  
family, loved ones  
and friends.

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# FABC appeals for peace, diplomacy in Middle East crisis

**BANGKOK:** The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) has expressed deep concern over the escalating conflict in the Middle East, warning of "incalculable human and economic consequences" if the violence continues.

In a statement issued March 3 during a meeting of its Central Committee in Bangkok, the FABC said the renewed cycles of bombardment and retaliation involving major global and regional powers risk plunging the region, and the wider world, into a broader and more devastating conflict.

Quoting Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God," the bishops emphasised the urgent need for dialogue and restraint. The statement was signed by Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrao, president of the FABC; Cardinal Pablo David, vice president; and Cardinal Isao Kikuchi, SVD, secretary general.

The Asian bishops echoed the appeal of Pope Leo XIV, who has stressed that peace cannot be built on threats or weapons that bring destruction, pain and death. "Stability cannot arise from fear, nor can justice be secured through violence," the statement said, underscoring that only sincere and sustained



*Smoke billows March 3, 2026, after an Israeli strike on Beirut's southern suburbs, following an escalation between Hezbollah and Israel amid the US-Israeli conflict with Iran. (OSV News/Reuters/Mohamed Azakir)*

dialogue can lead to a just and lasting peace.

Speaking from Asia's context of religious diversity, cultural traditions and widespread poverty, the FABC noted that war disproportionately harms the most vulnerable,

including the poor, displaced communities, children and future generations. Peace, the bishops said, is not merely the absence of war but "the fruit of justice, the work of dialogue, and the patient building of trust

among peoples."

The FABC called for an immediate cessation of hostilities and urged all parties to exercise moral responsibility and resist further escalation. It also appealed for the restoration of diplomacy as the primary means of resolving conflicts, stressing that dialogue — however difficult — remains the only path that respects human dignity and national sovereignty.

In addition, the bishops encouraged inter-religious solidarity among leaders of the region's major faith traditions to bear common witness to the sacredness of life. They renewed their commitment to stand with the poor and victims of war, insisting that their suffering must remain central in all peace efforts.

The FABC also invited local Churches across Asia to intensify prayer, fasting and acts of solidarity for peace during the Lenten season. Expressing hope amid the crisis, the bishops said they refuse to "surrender to despair," trusting that reconciliation remains possible, even in the darkest hours.

The statement concluded with a prayer entrusting the peoples of the Middle East to Mary, Queen of Peace, and seeking her intercession for a wounded world.

## Archbishop Zaluski appointed new Apostolic Nuncio to Malta

**VATICAN:** Pope Leo XIV has appointed Archbishop Wojciech Zaluski as the new Apostolic Nuncio to Malta. The appointment was announced on February 28.

Archbishop Zaluski is currently serving as Apostolic Nuncio to Malaysia and East Timor, and as Apostolic Delegate to Brunei Darussalam. He also holds the title of titular Archbishop of Diocleziana.

Born in Poland on April 5, 1960, he was ordained to the priesthood in June 1989. He holds a doctorate in Canon Law and entered the Diplomatic Service of the Holy See just one month after his ordination. Over the years, he has served in various diplomatic missions, including Burundi, Malta, Albania, Zambia, Sri Lanka, Georgia,



Ukraine, the Philippines and Guatemala.

In July 2014, he was appointed Apostolic Nuncio to Burundi and titular Archbishop of Diocleziana. On September 29, 2020, he was named Apostolic Nuncio to Malaysia and East Timor, and Apostolic Delegate to Brunei Darussalam.

As Apostolic Nuncio to Malta, Archbishop Zaluski

will represent the Holy Father and the Holy See to both the Catholic Church in Malta and Gozo and to the civil authorities of the Republic. He will also serve as Dean of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to Malta, assist the Bishops of Malta and Gozo in their pastoral responsibilities, and work to strengthen and promote relations between Malta and the Holy See.



*The Church of St Mary of Jesus in Valletta, Malta. (NCR/Courtesy photo / EWTN News)*

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