

# HERALD

The Catholic Weekly

The Publisher, Editor and Staff of **HERALD** wish our Muslim friends **Selamat Hari Raya.**

There will be no issue on April 6, 2025. Our next issue will be on April 13, 2025.

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Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

2 Cor. 5:17-18



**Strengthening volunteer management for effective disaster response**

■ P4



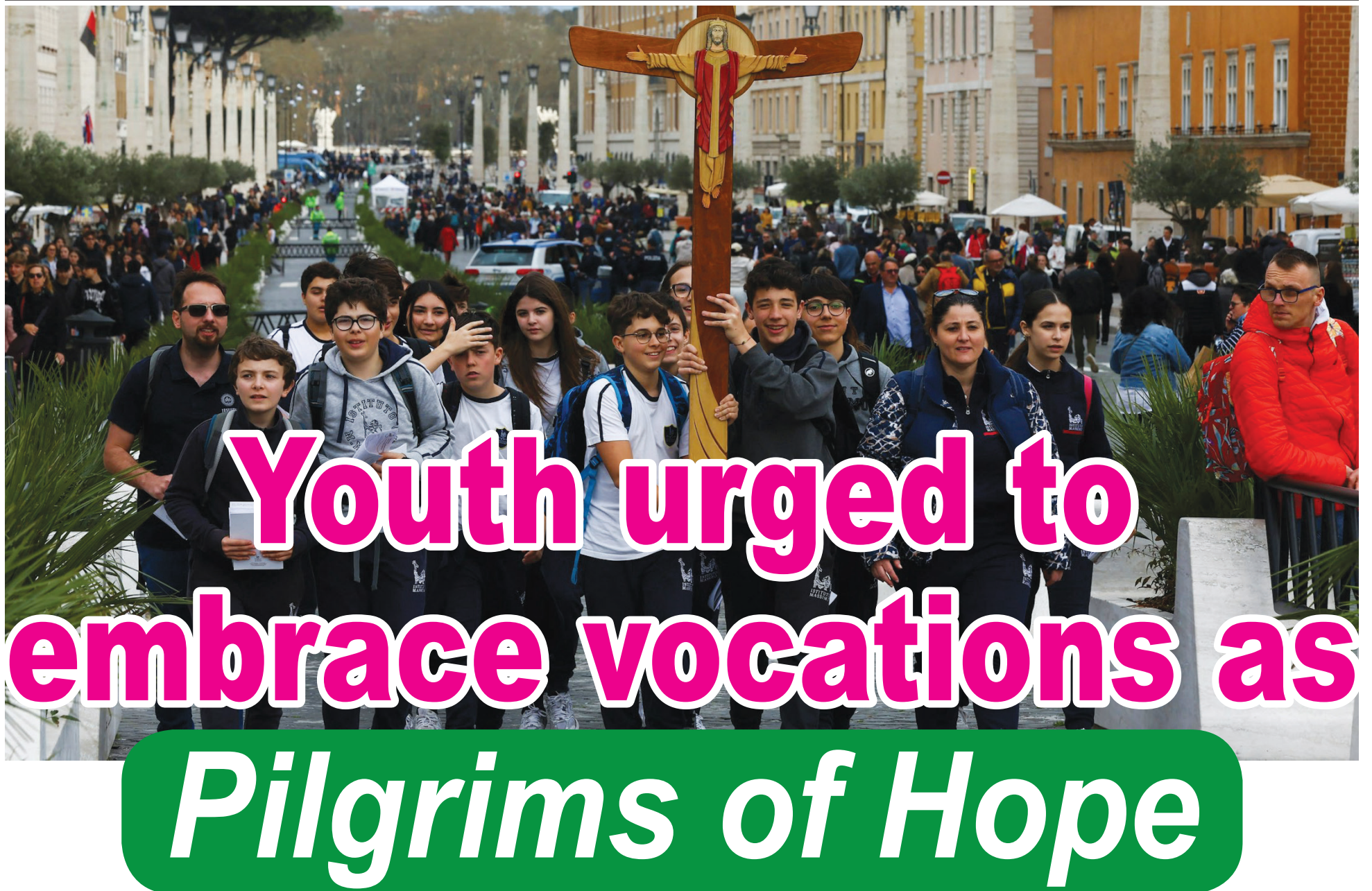
**Malaysian heroine honoured at Women's Day tribute in Paris**

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**Unloading the 'heavy bag'**

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## Youth urged to embrace vocations as Pilgrims of Hope

**VATICAN:** In his message for the upcoming World Day of Prayer for Vocations, Pope Francis calls on young people to courageously listen to God's voice and embrace their calling, offering their lives as "pilgrims of hope." The message, titled *Pilgrims of Hope: The Gift of Life*, was released on March 19, the feast of St Joseph, and invites the global Church to reflect on the vital role of vocations in a world troubled by uncertainty, social fragmentation, and a crisis of meaning.

The Pope emphasised that every vocation — whether to ordained ministry, consecrated life, or lay service — represents a sign of God's hope for the world. He described vocation as a precious gift, sown deep within the heart, urging young people to view their calling as an invitation to love and serve others. "A vocation is a call to go out of ourselves and begin a journey of love and service," Pope Francis wrote.

He reminded them that true service is not about self-promotion but about answering God's invitation to share His love with others.

This year's World Day of Prayer for Vocations, to be observed on May 11, falls on Good Shepherd Sunday — a day traditionally dedicated to praying for those discerning a call to ministry. Pope Francis' message is timely, addressing the struggles faced by today's youth. Many feel uncertain about their futures due to economic instability, identity crises, and the confusion caused by the digital age, war, and widespread injustice. Despite these challenges, the Pope assured young people that God does not abandon them in their moments of doubt. "He wants us to know that we are loved, called, and sent as pilgrims of hope," he said.

The Holy Father further explained that vocational discernment is not a solitary journey but one that unfolds within the Christian community. Young people are encouraged to seek prayerful reflection and listen to God's voice amidst the noise of daily life. "The world pushes you to make hurried decisions and fills your days with noise," he observed. "Have the courage to stop, to listen within, and to ask God what He dreams for you."

For the Pope, vocational discernment is about encountering God's call personally but also being open to the guidance of others. He called on pastors and vocation directors to support young people patiently, offering wise counsel and respectful listening. "A vocation is never a treasure stored away in the heart," Pope Francis reminded. "It grows and is strengthened within a community that believes, loves, and hopes."

The Pope also reflected on the lives of young saints, including St Thérèse of Lisieux, St Dominic Savio, and Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, as examples of how a vocation is rooted in love and service to others, not self-affirmation. Blessed Frassati, who will be canonised on August 3, 2025, during the Jubilee of Young People, is a prime example of how young people can live a vocation devoted to service and joyfully bear witness to Christ.

Central to Pope Francis' message is the importance of hope in vocational life. He stressed that vocations must be grounded in trust in God's providence, even amid personal and societal struggles. "Hope in God does not disappoint," he said. Young people who respond to God's call with hope and courage, the Pope added, will be the ones to lead the Church and

the world forward in faith. He urged them to be courageous in dedicating their lives to Christ and joyful in living as His missionary disciples.

In conclusion, Pope Francis called on Christians worldwide to pray for vocations and trust that the Holy Spirit will inspire young people to embrace their calling. "Let us never tire of asking the Lord for new labourers for His harvest, certain that with great love He continues to call them," he said. The Pope invited all to keep walking as "pilgrims of hope" on the path of the Gospel.

The message also serves as a reminder to all members of the Church — especially pastors and vocation directors — to offer their support and guidance to young people as they discern their vocations. Pope Francis emphasised the need for ongoing prayer for an increase in vocations, underscoring that the Church thrives when it generates new calls to serve. "The world often unwittingly seeks witnesses of hope," he said, "and those who dedicate their lives to Christ offer the joy and hope that the world so desperately needs." **Agencies**

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## What is the newly announced 2028 'ecclesial assembly'?

The Vatican announced on March 18, its latest plans for the Synod on Synodality's ongoing implementation — a multiyear "accompaniment and evaluation process" leading to a Church-wide assembly at the Vatican in October 2028. *CNA* explains more about the process and why it has been initiated.

**Implementation phase**

Initiated by Pope Francis in October 2021, the Synod on Synodality was a multiyear, worldwide process of the Catholic Church focused on exploring the question "What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our 'journeying together'?"

The synod went through diocesan, national, and continental stages in phase one, the "consultation" phase. Two global, month-long assemblies were held at the Vatican in October 2023 and October 2024 as part of the next "discernment" phase.

The 2024 synod gathering, which included for the first time both bishops and non-bishops as voting members, was largely focused on discussing the question "What processes, structures, and institutions are needed in a missionary synodal Church?"

At the end of the month, Pope Francis chose to ratify the assembly's final report rather than write his own post-synodal document, stating that "there are already very concrete indications in the document that can be a guide for the mission of the Churches, on the different continents, in the different contexts."

The third and final phase of the Synod on Synodality is the implementation phase, underway now.

Study groups examining 10 areas of possible reform, based on suggestions from the 2023 assembly, are part of the implementation of the synod. Some of the study groups are expected to deliver their final reports in June.

**Accompaniment and evaluation process**

On March 15, the Vatican's synod office

announced an additional initiative of the implementation of the Synod on Synodality: an over-three-year accompaniment and evaluation process that will begin in churches and dioceses, move to national and international gatherings, and eventually culminate in a global gathering at the Vatican in October 2028.

With the approval of Pope Francis, who signed off on the process from the hospital on March 11, the General Secretariat of the Synod sent a letter to all of the Catholic Church's Latin-rite bishops and Eastern-rite exarchs as well as to bishops' conference presidents explaining this next project.

The timeline of the accompaniment and evaluation process is as follows: This May will see the publication of a support document for the implementation phase, with guidelines for its use.

- From June 2025 to December 2026 there will be implementation paths in local Churches.
- In the first half of 2027 there will be evaluation assemblies in dioceses around the world.
- The second half of 2027 will see evaluation assemblies in national and international bishops' conferences.
- Evaluation assemblies at the continental level will take place in the first half of 2028.
- June 2028 will see publication of the *Instrumentum Laboris*, or guiding document, for the October 2028 assembly.
- Finally, in October 2028, the Vatican will host the ecclesial assembly.

According to Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary-general of the synod and the author of the letter about the accompaniment and evaluation process, "synodal teams" made up of priests, deacons, consecrated men and women, and laypeople — accompanied by their bishops — will organise and conduct the process in each diocese.

**What is it all about?**

Cardinal Grech said in his letter the implementation phase of the Synod on

Synodality should be understood "not as merely the 'application' of directives from above but rather as a process of 'reception'" of the suggestions made in the final document of the October 2024 synodal assembly.

"It is essential to move forward together as the whole Church," the cardinal emphasised, noting the importance of "harmonising" the synod's reception throughout the Church.

Pope Francis, in his final speech to synod participants on Oct. 26, 2024, said: "There are and there will be decisions to be made."

"I, then, will continue to listen to the bishops and the Churches entrusted to them," he continued. "This is not the classic way of postponing decisions indefinitely. It is what corresponds to the synodal style with which even the Petrine ministry is to be exercised: listening, convening, discerning, deciding, and evaluating."

"The process," he explained, "will also be an opportunity to evaluate together the choices made at the local level and recognise the progress made in terms of synodality. Thanks to this process, the Holy Father will be able to listen to and confirm the orientations deemed valid for the whole Church."

In an interview with Vatican News, Cardinal Grech explained the decision to introduce an "application and evaluation process" within the Church. He emphasised that simply publishing a document is insufficient to bring the outcomes of the synodal process to life; a synodal mindset is needed.

With Pope Francis adopting the 2024 assembly's final document into his ordinary magisterium, the entire Church is now called to embrace the third phase of the synod — its implementation. This process is seen as a roadmap for the Church's conversion and renewal, with the next three years focused on experimenting with and assessing the document's ideas to determine their practical application in Church life. **Hannah Brockhaus, CNA**

## A lenten journey of love and reconciliation

We are now entering the fourth week of Lent, a season traditionally marked by self-denial through fasting, almsgiving, and prayer. For many of us, Lent becomes an opportunity to engage in spiritual exercises aimed at becoming more Christ-like. Yet, if we are honest, we often find ourselves slipping back into old habits once the season ends. The question is: why do we so frequently revert to our pre-Lenten selves?

We all desire our Lent to be a time of penance, walking alongside our Lord on His journey to Jerusalem. For some, it's driven by a need for mercy, repentance, and forgiveness, while for others, it's about denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and following Christ. These are noble intentions, but are they enough to sustain us throughout the season? Often, we find ourselves faltering halfway through, lacking the strength or determination to continue our Lenten observances. To make these practices truly transformative, we must shift our mindset. Our motivation should not just be about obligation or self-discipline, but a deep and genuine love for God.

The parable of the prodigal son in today's Gospel beautifully illustrates the love story between us and God. When we think of God's mercy, this parable often comes to mind, influencing retreats, paintings, and songs. Yet, when we reflect on this story, we usually focus on the mercy and compassion of the Father, as well as the sincere repentance of the wayward son. However, it's important to recognise that without love, neither party would have acted

in the way they did. True repentance becomes deeper and more lasting when it is motivated by love for God, rather than merely the fear of punishment.

This should not come as a surprise to us, for this is what we were created to be. The Book of Genesis tells us that God created us in His image and likeness. And since God is love, we are all reflections of His love to one another. This means we are not only capable of receiving God's love but also sharing it with others. Unfortunately, due to life's challenges and experiences, we often forget this beautiful truth. The cares and worries of life wear us down, gradually leading us farther away from the source of Love itself. For many, the image of God becomes one of judgment, with a ledger in hand, meting out punishment for our sins.

While we know we must face the consequences of our sins, when we return to God like the prodigal son, we should do so with hearts filled with love for Him. It is only when we are deeply in love with God that we will earnestly strive to protect and nurture our relationship with Him. On a human level, when we are in love with someone, we naturally do our best to preserve the bond we share. The same applies to our relationship with God. True reconciliation between two people occurs when both set aside their differences and embrace one another in genuine, fraternal love.

This image of intimate reconciliation is beautifully captured in a song by the trio Phillips, Craig & Dean, titled "When God Ran," released

### Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with Fr Philip Tay, OCD

**4th Sunday of Lent (C)**

*Readings: Joshua 5:9-12;*

*2 Corinthians 5:17-21;*

*Gospel: Luke 15:1-3, 11-32*

in 1999. Part of the lyrics go like this: "The only time I ever saw Him run was when He ran to me. He took me in His arms, held my head to His chest... with forgiveness in His voice, He said, 'Son, do you know I still love you?' He caught me by surprise when God ran." How much more beautiful can God's love be? God, running toward us, full of love, to welcome us back into His embrace. This is the image of God we should carry in our hearts, not one of a distant, judging figure.

The intimate love of God for us is powerfully expressed in John 3:16, one of the most well-known verses about God's love: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." This is the ultimate expression of God's love — a love revealed through the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ. It is the journey we began on Ash Wednesday and will culminate on Easter Sunday. As we continue our Lenten journey, let us do so with hearts filled with love, always returning to the Father, knowing that we will always be met with His love in return.

*Fr Philip Tay is assistant priest at the Church of the Visitation, Seremban*

**KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE**

**Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow**

**March - April**

- 31/3-5/4 **Malaysian Catholic Youth Day 2025 – Kota Kinabalu, Sabah**
- 8/4 **Chrism Mass – Church of the Sacred Heart, KL**
- 8-9/4 **Clergy Monthly Recollection**

**PENANG DIOCESE**

**Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis**

**April**

- 1 **Meeting – Karmel Putri Sisters at 10.30am**
- 2-4 **Malaysian Catholic Youth Day – Kota Kinabalu, Sabah**
- 7 **Meeting – Taize Brother at Bishop’s Office at 10.30am**
- 8 **Council of Priests – Stella Maris at 10.00am**
- 8-9 **Clergy Monthly Recollection – Stella Maris, Penang**
- 8 **Chrism Mass – Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Penang at 8.00pm**
- 10-20 **Holy Week and Easter – Kota Bahru, Kelantan**

**MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE**

**Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul**

**April**

- 2-4 **Launching of Salib Malaysia – Kota Kinabalu**
- 8 **Penitential Service – Church of Divine Mercy, Skudai**
- 9 **Penitential Service – Church of the Immaculate Conception, JB**
- 10 **Penitential Service – Church of St Joseph, Plentong**
- 11 **MAJODI’s Outdoor Meditative Scriptural Way of the Cross followed by Mass – MAJODI Centre at 3.00pm**
- 15 **CHRISM Mass – Church of St Theresa, Masai**
- 15-16 **Clergy Monthly Recollection – MAJODI Centre**
- 19 **Easter Vigil Mass in BM – Church of St Joseph, Plentong at 8.30pm**

# FABC forms new commission for Synodality

KUALA LUMPUR: The Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) has appointed Cardinal Pablo Virgilio David of the Philippines as the Chairperson of its newly formed Commission for Synodality.

This move highlights Cardinal David’s extensive experience and dedication to fostering a synodal Church across Asia. The decision was made during the FABC Central Committee’s annual meeting from March 12-13 at the Camillian Centre in Bangkok.

Joining Cardinal David in leading the commission is Fr Dr Clarence Devadass, who has been appointed Executive Secretary of the commission. Fr Clarence brings years of experience from his work in the FABC Office of Theological Concerns. The commission’s primary goal is to advance the ongoing formation of bishops in synodality, facilitate resource-sharing among episcopal conferences, and collaborate with FABC Offices and other Continental Episcopal Organisations to implement the synodal way.

A key initiative under the commission’s mandate is to organise a seminar for bishops from across Asia, creating a platform to share experiences and best practices that will strengthen unity and participation within the Church. By bringing together Church leaders, the commission aims to cultivate an environment of collaboration and engagement, ensuring that both clergy and laypeople actively

contribute to shaping the future of the Church in Asia.

The commission’s membership includes a diverse group of leaders who have actively participated in the Synod on Synodality: Fr William LaRousse MM (FABC Central Secretariat); Dr Christina Kheng (Singapore); Fr Vimal Tirimana CSsR (Sri Lanka); Estella Padilla (Philippines); Momoko Nishimura SEMD (Japan); Fr Enrico Ayo (Philippines) and Sr Lalitha Thomas SJT (India).

Meanwhile, the Vatican has announced a significant ecclesial development. On March 11, it was revealed that Pope Francis has approved the convening of a special ecclesial assembly in October 2028 to evaluate how Catholic communities worldwide have implemented the recommendations from the recently concluded Synod on Synodality. Cardinal Mario Grech, Secretary-General of the Synod, explained in a letter to bishops worldwide that this assembly will not be a new synod but rather, the culmination of a structured three-year implementation process aimed at evaluating the synod’s impact.

“The goal is not to add work upon work but to help Churches walk in a synodal style,” Cardinal Grech emphasised. The process begins in May 2025 with the publication of detailed guidelines, followed by a “Jubilee of Synodal Teams” in October. Throughout 2027, diocesan, national, and international evaluation

assemblies will take place, with continental gatherings scheduled for early 2028.

Central to this process are local “synodal teams” made up of priests, deacons, consecrated men and women, and laypeople, who will work alongside their bishops. These teams, Cardinal Grech noted, should be “valued” and, where necessary, “renewed, reactivated, and appropriately integrated.” The cardinal also emphasised that while the process encourages co-responsibility across the global Church, it values the distinct role of local Churches in receiving and applying the synod’s fruits in ways that are appropriate to their unique contexts.

According to Fr Clarence, the formation of the FABC Commission for Synodality and the Vatican’s plans for the 2028 assembly both reflect a unified commitment to nurturing a synodal Church, centred on inclusivity, shared leadership, and open dialogue at every level.

“The phase of implementing the outcomes of the Synod on Synodality marks a significant step forward for the Church. This phase, leading towards the Ecclesial Assembly in 2028, focuses on translating the key insights and resolutions from the synodal discussions into actionable measures within dioceses and parishes,” Fr Clarence explained.

“We need to seek concrete ways of fostering a deeper spirit of collaboration, inclusivity, and discernment among clergy, consecrated men and women, and laity,” he added.

## Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #216



**Dear friends of MJD,**  
The Pope is well. He knows his time is up. The Church must prepare for the next pope. We have a role to play: Pray for the Church to listen to the Holy Spirit.

The Arctic is in trouble. Ceasefires forsaken. Religious killings are on the rise. Propaganda that divides riving. A nationalism that’s more homogeneous is taking the forefront. Unity, diversity, bridge-building, peacemaking and environment are ignored.

The media calls the Pope the D.E.I. exponent (Diversity, Equity, Inclusivity) warns about propaganda that instills hatred, divides the world into friends to be defended and foes to be fought. He calls for moral codes that focus on diversity, equity and inclusivity in the Church and in the world. The keys, humility and mercy, are essential for DEI agenda. Without these conversion keys, situations won’t change.

**“Only WE CAN” Times:**  
The Sultan of Pahang called on political leaders to serve as a bridge to unite the people, to stop being clowns fuelling and inciting communitarian conflicts.

The Mufti of Terengganu reminded that religious beliefs and fundamental principles should not be questioned nor debated to prevent unwarranted tensions.

The Prime Minister commented about the 10-year term limit for a PM in office: If it were up to me, I would not stay past 10 years in office.

The DoE DG said: Malaysia has become a dumping ground for foreign hazardous waste.

A football observer claimed: The quality

of Malaysia’s mixed heritage footballers has declined, and their standards are now nearly on par with the locals.

Another media comment: The country is no stranger to rackets, with new ones emerging as old ones are dismantled. The latest civil servants selling birth certificates to non-citizens, the massive Sapura scandal that’s waiting to happen and the many GLCs that are self-prospering rather than nation building.

**A Thought for the Week: The Cleaning Lady.** A beautiful, expensively dressed lady complained to her counsellor that her life was empty, meaningless and that she was seeking happiness. The counsellor called over the old lady who cleaned the office floors, and asked the rich lady to hear her story:

“Well, my husband died of malaria and three months later, my only son was killed by a car. I had nobody. I had nothing left. I couldn’t sleep, I couldn’t eat, I never smiled at anyone, I even thought of taking my own life.

Then one evening, a little kitten followed me home from work. Somehow, I felt sorry for that kitten. It was cold outside, so I decided to let the kitten in. I got some milk, and the kitten licked the plate clean. Then it purred and rubbed against my leg and, for the first time in months, I smiled.

Then I stopped to think, if helping a little kitten could make me smile, may be doing something for people could make me happy. So, the next day I baked some biscuits, and took them to a neighbour who was sick in bed. Every day I tried to do something nice for someone. It made me so happy to see

them happy.  
*The lesson from the cleaner:* She found happiness, by giving it to others. Money cannot buy happiness. It is about seeing how happy others can be because of you.

**QnQ! Q asks? “I am a successful young adult yet stressed, anxious and edgy. Why?”**

Anxiety is sometimes fuelled by self-importance.” T.S. Elliot wrote, “Half of the harm that is done in this world is due to people who want to feel important.” And, arguably, half of the harm *done to us is by us* not only because of our innate need for meaning but also due to our exaggerated drive for significance and greatness.”

Our anxiety is sometimes fuelled by self-importance, our pining for a “kind of reality” that does not exist, or our struggle to manage an underlying anxiety about being insignificant.

The temptations of Christ in Scripture in some measure embodies the quote of T.S. Elliot, and leaves us at an emotional, psychological and spiritual choice point. “Half of the harm that is done in this world is due to people who want to feel important.”

**The Holy Spirit @work:** Every divine action begins from the Father, proceeds through the Son, and is completed in the Holy Spirit. *St Basil*

**Something To Tickle You:** When you focus on being a blessing, God makes sure that you are always blessed in abundance. *Joel Osteen*

*Bishop Bernard Paul*



# Strengthening volunteer management for effective disaster response

GEORGETOWN: In conjunction with the Jubilee of the World of Volunteering (March 8–9, Rome), Caritas Malaysia, in partnership with Caritas Philippines, organised a Volunteer Management Training from March 7–9. The programme, attended by 23 staff and volunteers from all Diocesan Caritas offices in Malaysia, was a follow-up to the Disaster Response Training held in September 2024. It is part of Caritas Malaysia's ongoing efforts to enhance the capacity of diocesan staff and volunteers in responding effectively during crises, with the goal of building a stronger and more efficient emergency response team.

The training was facilitated by Cecilio "Ava" Guardian from Caritas Philippines, a seasoned expert in community development and humanitarian aid, and organised by Pauline Yeo, the Administrative Executive of Caritas Malaysia.

This initiative marks an important step in strengthening volunteer management systems within Caritas Malaysia. Participants were introduced to a structured, nine-step approach to volunteer management, covering the entire volunteer lifecycle — from recruitment and preparation to implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement. The sessions also emphasised the fundamental principles of volunteering and their significance in effective volunteer engagement.

## A call for structure and efficiency in volunteer management

In his opening address, Fr Fabian Dicom, National Director of Caritas Malaysia, underscored the need for a structured and efficient approach to volunteer management to ensure the timely and effective delivery of aid. He highlighted that the training focused on equipping participants with skills in rapid assessment, humanitarian aid delivery, and volunteer management, all of which are crucial in strengthening Disaster Response Committees within dioceses.

Fr Fabian urged participants to take the knowledge gained back to their respective dioceses and communities, emphasising the importance of preparedness, organisation, and compassion in volunteer management. He also encouraged the sharing of experiences and ideas to foster collaboration and enhance Caritas' disaster response capabilities across Malaysia.

## Recognising the invaluable role of volunteers

A key takeaway from the training, echoed by many participants, was a renewed recognition of the essential role volunteers play in the organisation. Clista Sintian from Caritas Kota Kinabalu emphasised that volunteers should be treated with the same respect and value as regular staff members.

"Volunteers are not to be exploited; rather, they should be seen as an integral part of the mission, deserving of appreciation and recognition," added Patricia Bai, Director of Caritas Keningau.

Many participants found the training invaluable in deepening their understanding of volunteer management. It provided clear methodologies, mechanisms, and guidelines for developing and sustaining a successful volunteer programme.

Fr Davie Entalai, Chairman of Caritas Kuching, noted that the knowledge gained would help address existing gaps and suggest ways to improve identified weaknesses.

"This knowledge is crucial in strengthening volunteer engagement, particularly within each parish Caritas," said Amado Degullacion from Caritas Sandakan.

Anna Amandus, Chairperson of Caritas Sandakan, further highlighted that volunteering is a calling in every ministry.

"Volunteers need to be guided, supported, and given opportunities to grow," she said. The training reinforced the idea that volunteering is not just about serving others but also about personal growth and transformation.

Francis Tan from Caritas Penang shared, "The training has helped his team to under-

stand the strategy in volunteer management. They are now better equipped and will be able to plan and manage a volunteer system that is more structured and organised. This training is invaluable and will benefit the Parish Caritas leaders in managing volunteers and programmes."

## Equipping volunteers for the future

By the conclusion of the training, participants had gained a comprehensive understanding of the essential organisational steps and key considerations required to establish a successful volunteer management system. They left equipped with the knowledge needed to develop a structured volunteer management plan, ensuring that processes and best practices are well-documented for future reference.

Additionally, participants were empowered to formulate actionable plans for establishing Volunteers for Disaster Response Committees and other related initiatives aimed at strengthening volunteer engagement.

As part of the ongoing capacity-building efforts within the Caritas Confederation, the facilitator will continue to support Caritas Malaysia in finalizing necessary mechanisms, including policies, guidelines, tools, and templates. This ensures that volunteer management remains a sustainable and integral part of the organisation's operations.

## A simple ritual to celebrate the Jubilee of Volunteers: A celebration of service and love

The closing ceremony of the Volunteer Management Training was marked by a deeply

moving and symbolic prayer ritual, celebrating the spirit of service and love that volunteers embody. This sacred moment, held on the final day of training, was a reflection of the Jubilee of Volunteers happening in Rome that same weekend. It served as both a moment of gratitude for the commitment of volunteers and a prayer for continued strength and guidance in their mission to serve others.

Participants were reminded that they are not masters but servants of love, called to be the hands and feet of Christ in the world. A moment of silence allowed everyone to reflect on their personal journey of service. Then, in a symbolic act, the three priests present blessed the palms of participants, signifying the sacredness of their work and the call to serve with love and compassion.

## Commitment and sending forth

At the end of the prayer ritual, Fr Fabian Dicom invited the participants to renew their commitment to serve with joy and dedication. He reminded them that, as volunteers of Caritas, they are called to be bearers of hope and witnesses of God's love, serving with humility and compassion.

This simple yet profound ritual was not just a conclusion to the training but a reaffirmation of the mission entrusted to each volunteer. It was a moment to recognise that their work extends beyond providing aid — it is about embodying love, solidarity, and a deep commitment to uplifting those in need. The ceremony served as both a blessing and a commissioning, sending them forth to continue their journey of service, bringing light and hope to the world.



The participants from the arch/dioceses of Malaysia with Cecilio "Ava" Guardian from Caritas Philippines, and the Caritas Malaysia team.



Fr Davie Entalai blessing and commissioning the volunteers.

# Elect encouraged to emulate Christ in facing challenges

KOTA KINABALU: A total of 1,125 catechumens, from parishes across the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu, gathered at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart on March 9 for the Rite of Election. Among them, 102 catechumens were part of the English, Bahasa Malaysia,

Chinese, and hearing-impaired RCIA groups from the cathedral.

During this rite, which marked the conclusion of the Period of the Catechumenate, Archbishop John Wong accepted the godparents' testimony and acknowledged the catechumens' affirmation of

their intention to join the Catholic Church. He received the names of the catechumens, as listed in the Book of the Elect, each presented by their RCIA representative and accompanied by their parish priest. At the climax of the ceremony, the archbishop declared the catechumens to be the elect of God, chosen for the Sacraments of Initiation. These catechumens, now known as "the elect," will enter the Period of Purification and Enlightenment — a final, intense stage of preparation for the reception of the Sacraments of Initiation.

In his homily, the archbishop encouraged all the elect to engage in deep introspection, reflecting on their readiness and faith as they prepare for the Sacraments of Initiation. Drawing from the Gospel of Luke 4:1–13, which recounts how Jesus resisted the temptations



Archbishop John Wong receiving the Book of Elect from the RCIA representative. (SHC Soccom)

of the devil, the archbishop emphasised that the catechumens should emulate Christ in facing challenges and hold steadfast to the Word of God as their strength in daily life.

The prelate reminded the catechumens that their spiritual growth and readiness must be nurtured through everyday practices — such as forgiving others, being

faithful in prayer, helping those in need, living in obedience, and maintaining a moral life grounded in Christ's teachings.

Lastly, he urged the godparents and all present to accompany the elect with their prayers and support during this important time of preparation. SHC Soccom/ Archdiocesan Media



Sponsors laying their hands on the elects. (SHC Soccom)

## Penang Diocese embraces synodal journey with initiatives leading to 2028

PENANG: On March 15, 2025, Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang, received a letter from the Vatican outlining the Accompaniment Process of the Synod "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission."

The letter marks the beginning of a journey that will culminate in the Ecclesial Assembly in the Vatican in October 2028. In response, Cardinal Sebastian has written to all the faithful of the Diocese of Penang, particularly those in leadership roles, to encourage participation in the Synodal process.

The Diocese of Penang is called to join the Universal Church in this significant journey, with a focus on communion, participation, and mission. The process will unfold over several years, integrating key initiatives planned by both the Universal and Malaysian Churches. Cardinal Sebastian emphasised that the challenges presented by this journey should not cause anxiety, as the Holy Spirit is guiding the Church forward under the leadership of Pope Francis.

Key events planned in the coming years include:

### 1. Clergy Conversion Experience Retreat:

From March 23-28, the entire clergy of Penang, including priests, permanent deacons, and retired priests, attended a Conversion Experience Retreat (CER) led by Cardinal William SC Goh from Singapore.

### 2. Malaysian Catholic Youth Day (MCYD):

More than 1,000 young people will gather in Kota Kinabalu from March 31 to April 6,

2025, with 125 participants from the Diocese of Penang.

### 3. Launch of Perjalanan Salib:

On April 3, 2025, the *Perjalanan Salib* will begin at the MCYD, with nine crosses representing the nine dioceses of Malaysia. These crosses will journey through each diocese until September 2026, culminating in a united cross at the Malaysian Pastoral Convention 2026.

### 4. Clergy Study on Synod Document:

On April 8-9, 2025, the clergy will engage in a study of the final document of the Synod, "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission," with Fr Dr Clarence Devadass.

### 5. Christian Ecumenical Service:

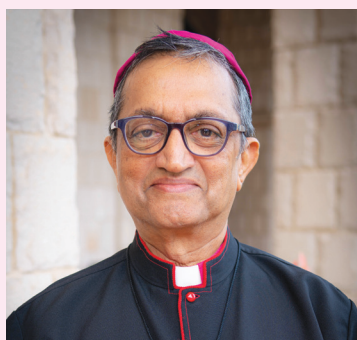
On May 12, 2025, the Diocese of Penang will host a Christian Ecumenical Service to commemorate the 1700th Anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, celebrating the unity of Christian denominations.

### 6. 360th Anniversary of College General Seminary:

The College General Regional Major Seminary in Penang will celebrate its 360th anniversary from September 28 to October 2, 2025, inviting alumni and formators to join in the celebrations.

### 7. Second Asian Mission Congress:

The Diocese will host the Second Asian Mission



Congress from November 27-30, 2025, with around 1,000 Catholic leaders from Asia participating.

### 8. Jubilee Year of Hope:

Throughout 2025, the Diocese will celebrate the Jubilee Year of Hope, beginning on December 29, 2024, and concluding on December 28, 2025.

### 9. First Malaysia Pastoral Convention (MPC2026):

From September 9-13, 2026, the nine Malaysian dioceses will gather in Plentong, Johor, for the First Malaysia Pastoral Convention.

### 10. World Youth Day 2027:

The Diocese will send a contingent to the World Youth Day in Seoul, South Korea, in 2027.

### 11. Ecclesial Assembly in Vatican 2028:

The Synodal journey will culminate in the Ecclesial Assembly in the Vatican in October 2028.

Cardinal Sebastian calls on all the faithful to join in prayer, fasting, and intercession, preparing themselves personally and as a Church to respond to the Holy Spirit's call. He encourages the community to stay healthy and committed to the mission ahead, emphasising that "Hope Does Not Disappoint" (Romans 5:5).

## Stella Maris students embark on spiritual pilgrimage

KUALA LUMPUR: Students from Stella Maris International School went on a spiritual pilgrimage as part of the Jubilee 2025 celebrations. The pilgrimage focused on fostering solidarity among students as they journeyed together as "pilgrims of hope."

This spiritual journey took them to two of the five church pilgrimage sites designated by the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur for the Jubilee Year.

The pilgrimage coincided with the Solemnity of St Joseph, the husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to whom Stella Maris School is dedicated. Archbishop Julian Leow's call to deepen the understanding of the Jubilee Year emphasised the importance of pilgrimages as a reflection of life's spiritual journey, with the added blessing of a plenary indulgence for participants.

The students' first stop was at the Church of St Francis of Assisi in Cheras, where they participated in the Way of the Cross at outdoor stations, taking turns to "carry their crosses" and venerate religious relics within the church complex. A guided tour helped the students learn about the humble life and sacrifices of St Francis of Assisi. They also enjoyed a "Praise "

dance led by the Biblical Ministry of the church.

The group then participated at Mass at the Cappella Della Porziuncola before travelling to the next destination, Jesus Caritas Church in Kepong.

At Jesus Caritas, students visited the nearby St Jean-Marie Vianney Chapel for prayer and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Their pilgrimage was marked by excitement as they received stamps in their Jubilee "Passports" from both churches.

The following week, Stella Maris' secondary students embarked on their own pilgrimage to the Church of St Francis of Assisi, continuing the school's engagement with the Jubilee Year.

Fr Alvin Ho SJ, the school's chaplain, expressed that the pilgrimage was organised to provide students with a deeper understanding of the Jubilee Year's theme, *Pilgrims of Hope*. He emphasised that hope, rooted in God's love, does not disappoint. Fr Alvin also shared that other initiatives planned for the year include student performances and prayer sessions, all designed to bring the theme of the Jubilee Year to life for the Stella Maris community.



The students taking turns to carry the cross.

# A grace-filled experience for St Thomas parishioners

Dr Francis Leong

KUANTAN: In observance of the season of Lent, the parish of St Thomas the Apostle organised a three-day weekend retreat for its English-speaking parishioners, centred around the theme *Grateful for Grace, Living God's Promise*. The retreat was led by Alvin Teoh, *pic*, a charismatic leader from the Church of the Good Shepherd in Setapak, and was attended by approximately 80 parishioners of all ages.

The retreat began on Friday, March 14, with the Stations of the Cross, followed by Mass and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. On Saturday, the retreat continued with a session of Praise and Worship, followed by three talks in which Alvin shared real-life stories from his own experiences, highlighting moments when he encountered God's grace in various situations.

As part of the retreat, participants were asked to write down 10 negative aspects of themselves on one piece of paper, and 10 positive attributes on another. In the afternoon, a para-liturgy was held, where each participant



The participants listening intently during one of the sessions Inset: Alvin Teoh.

took turns nailing their paper with negative self-perceptions to a wooden cross, symbolising the surrender of these negative thoughts to God. The paper listing their positive traits was kept as a reminder of their intrinsic worth in God's eyes, to be referred to whenever feelings of self-doubt arise in the future.

On Sunday, during the final session, Alvin

cautioned against the practice of "Culture-Catholicism," which he identified as being ego-centred (politics), legalistic (focused on do's and don'ts), ritual-centred, and self-righteous. He emphasised that true personal growth and maturity can only occur in a "Trinitarian relationship" rooted in agape love — through knowing and loving God,

loving oneself, and loving others. His parting message was, "If ordinary Catholics realise they are the temple of the Holy Spirit and have faith, they can do mighty things."

This retreat was a true moment of grace, bringing faith to life in the hearts of all who participated, inspired by the powerful real-life stories shared by Alvin.

## Marriage Encounter Weekend 187 – a weekend to remember!

KUALA LUMPUR: The Marriage Encounter (ME) Weekend 187 was recently held at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre. Six couples from churches across the Klang Valley took part in this transformative experience which provided them with the opportunity to strengthen their relationships and deepen their connection.

The Worldwide Marriage Encounter Movement has enriched millions of marriages by teaching couples a simple, yet effective communication technique to explore key areas of their relationships. This method fosters love and understanding, allowing couples to deepen their bond.

The weekend event provided couples with the opportunity to focus solely on each other, free from daily distractions. By the end of the ME Weekend, many couples reported becoming better listeners and rediscovering the beauty of their relationship in a supportive, uninterrupted environment.

Here are some reflections shared by the couples who attended the weekend:

"The time we spent together in serene settings allowed us to reconnect. We engaged in heartfelt conversations, explored our feelings, and understood each other's perspectives in ways we hadn't before, reminding



Fr Gerard Theraviam with the six couples and the presenters.

us of the reasons we fell in love in the first place. It was a weekend of emotional honesty, mutual support, and reaffirmation of our commitment to each other. We emerged from the experience with a renewed sense of intimacy and feelings toward each other." **Vijay and Caroline Reddy, Cathedral of St John the Evangelist, Kuala Lumpur**

"Life's daily routines had made us drift into autopilot mode and we realised we hadn't taken the time to truly connect on a deeper level. The weekend gave us a safe and loving space to open our hearts, listen to each other without distractions, and express

our feelings more honestly. This experience has rekindled a sense of closeness and appreciation in our relationship. We now make a conscious effort to communicate with more understanding and patience. It has been a beautiful reminder that love is a choice we make every day." **Clement and Susanna, Church of the Holy Family, Kajang**

"It was a transformative experience for the both of us at the Marriage Encounter Weekend in which we were able to identify the core problems in our marriage. We also learnt to cultivate commitments by prioritising each other through open communica-

tion and fostering a foundation of trust and understanding. We know that we are truly compatible and love each other so much, and for us to rise in love again and again."

**Benedict and Sylvia, Church of the Divine Mercy, Shah Alam**

"We are so blessed to have attended the ME Weekend. Our love and passion for each other has been renewed, with God as the foundation of our relationship. Our love for each other is stronger and it is passed on to all those around us, especially to our son. We truly urge all couples wanting to renew and enhance their relationship to give the ME Weekend a chance to do just that. We are glad we said yes!" **Benny and Adeline, Church of St Ignatius, Petaling Jaya**

"We came to this weekend exhausted and disconnected. We are leaving renewed, refreshed and determined to continue the journey towards oneness. It has deeply impacted the quality of our marriage. We were so blessed!" **Mark and Angeline, Church of Holy Family, Kajang**

For details on upcoming Marriage Encounter Weekends, please contact James at 019-3562321 or Mandy at 012-3718756 or email us at [wwwmeselwil@archkl.org](mailto:wwwmeselwil@archkl.org) to register.

## Enhancing understanding of Church marriage law

KUCHING: The Christian Family Life Commission, in collaboration with the Metropolitan Tribunal of the Archdiocese of Kuching, organised a talk on Church Marriage Law and the Role of the Ecclesiastical Tribunal on February 22 at the ACCPC. The event aimed to enhance awareness among members of the parishes' family life ministry regarding the legal aspects of marriage within the Church.

The programme brought together over 70 participants from across the Archdiocese for a day of learning and discussion. The event commenced with a communal lunch, providing an opportunity for fellowship before transitioning into the main session.

His Grace Archbishop Simon Poh opened the session with words of encouragement,

emphasising the Church's vital role in upholding the sanctity of marriage and family life. Following this, Fr Joseph Liew delivered an insightful presentation on Church marriage law and the function of the Ecclesiastical Tribunal. His talk provided valuable perspectives on the canonical processes related to marriage, deepening participants' understanding of Church teachings and legal frameworks.

The interactive session fostered meaningful discussions, with participants actively engaging in questions and reflections on the topic. Many expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to gain deeper insights into the Church's legal provisions concerning marriage.

The programme successfully reinforced



Fr Joseph Liew speaking on Church marriage law and the function of the Ecclesiastical Tribunal.

the importance of faith, commitment, and legal clarity in marital life within the Church. It also underscored the Church's

ongoing efforts to support couples and families in their spiritual journeys. **Today's Catholic**

# Malaysian heroine honoured at Women's Day tribute in Paris

Christopher Kushi

PENANG: To commemorate International Women's Day on March 8, the Embassy of Malaysia in Paris celebrated the legacy of Sybil Medan Kathigasu (1899-1948), a Malaysian heroine of World War II. His Excellency Datuk Eldeen Husaini Mohd Hashim, Ambassador of Malaysia to France, opened an insightful talk on her memoir *No Dram of Mercy* (1954). Already available in Mandarin, Tamil, and Japanese, her memoirs have gained global recognition with their recent French translation, *Sans une once de miséricorde*. This year, the Bahasa Melayu translation has also been completed.

Sybil Kathigasu was a true heroine, renowned for her courage during the Japanese occupation of Malaya. Her resilience and sacrifice led her to become the only Malaysian woman awarded the British Crown's George Medal at Buckingham Palace. Her memoirs vividly recount her harrowing experiences and reflect her indomitable spirit.

Reflecting the solemnity of the



The participants of the talk on the memoir of Sybil Kathigasu, "No Dram of Mercy" at the Malaysian Embassy in Paris.

occasion, the conference focused on the contemporary research of Prof Elsa Lafaye de Micheaux (Inalco, Paris). She invited Dr Jean-Charles Khalifa, former senior lecturer of English and Linguistics at the University of Poitiers, France, and Madame Hélène Poitevin (Campus Condorcet Library's Asian Collection, France) to collaborate in presenting various aspects of Sybil Kathigasu and her memoirs. Together, they offered insights in Malay, English, and French. Prof Elsa's reading, which vividly

captured Sybil Kathigasu's detailed descriptions of the atmosphere and events in Japanese-occupied Perak, resonated deeply with the audience, filling the room with palpable emotion through her clarity and lucidity.

In the final segment of the talk, attention was drawn to Sybil's enduring legacy. The speakers paid tribute to her courage throughout her life, also acknowledging the bravery of her daughter, Dawn Kathigasu. They discussed the publication of Sybil's book and its editorial journey,



*Murphy*, a chapter is dedicated to Sybil, titled 'Seeking a Malaysian Saint.' On July 1, 2024, Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Penang, officially launched the process for Sybil Kathigasu's beatification and canonisation. In his remarks, Cardinal Sebastian highlighted that this marks a significant moment for the faithful to come together in reflection and draw inspiration from her Gospel-centred life.

Following its public launch in the Klang Valley by SIRD-Gerakbudaya, the Bahasa Melayu translation of the book, titled *Kenangan Luka* and authored by Fahmi Mustaffa, will be officially launched by Cardinal Sebastian Francis on July 29 at the parish hall of the Church of St Michael in Ipoh, Perak.

The choice of this venue honours Sybil Kathigasu's legacy of care, love, and compassion for the sick and suffering in the nearby town of Papan, Perak. Sybil Kathigasu passed away on June 12, 1948, in Scotland, and her body was later exhumed and reburied at the Catholic cemetery beside the Church of St Michael.

## Women entrepreneurs share their journey at Lenten campaign event

KEPONG: The Lenten Campaign 2025 KL North District, organised by the Women Ministry of AOHD, took place at the Church of Christ the Light on March 8. This year's event centred around the theme *Women Empowerment*, highlighting the achievements of women entrepreneurs and encouraging them to become Pilgrims of Hope.

The campaign aimed to inspire women who are starting out in the business world to harness their talents, create livelihoods, and expand their impact within their communities and beyond.

For Jeanne Pereira of the Church of Jesus Caritas (JCC), International Women's Day represents more than a celebration — it's a call to action, a reminder that when women thrive, entire communities and economies benefit. At 60, Jeanne started her venture, 'Tastebuds', and authored the cookbook *Cooking Without Borders*. Her story serves as a powerful example of perseverance and entrepreneurship.

As an advocate for women in business, Jeanne left the event feeling inspired to continue supporting, mentoring, and uplifting future female leaders.

Janet Ng, also from JCC, began her home bakery during the 2021 lockdown. With the help of her children, who designed the logo and assisted with photoshoots for "My Home Bakery" and "What's for Tea", Janet slowly grew her business with just a hand mixer and a small oven. She initially sold butter cakes to friends, family, and neigh-

bours, but business was slow. Janet shared, "On days when I felt discouraged, I would recite Philippians 4:13: 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.' And that kept me going."

With the support of her family, friends, and church community, Janet's business began to flourish. She also encouraged a neighbour, a single mother with three children, to sell her *murukku* at the church bazaar. Janet believes that empowering and inspiring other women is essential in fostering a church community where "Sharing is Caring."

Elizabeth Saro from the Church of Christ the Light (CTL) launched her business, 'Triple Three Stars Trading', eight years ago. What started as a simple gesture of sharing her home-cooked meals with a neighbour blossomed into a catering business serving ten families five days a week. Over time, Elizabeth expanded her services to cater for engagement and birthday parties. She proudly shared that the income from her business has been essential in supporting her household.

Helena Roberts, a fellow parishioner, began her entrepreneurial journey in 2020 with four friends, selling bottled sambal under the name 'Achik N Machik Food Products'. Reflecting on her success, Helena attributed it to the three Cs — Confidence, Commitment, and Consistency — values that have fuelled her growth in the business world.

Benedette Anthony from the

Chapel of Kristus Aman started selling banana chips in her hometown in Johor, eventually receiving orders from family and friends across other states. After relocating to Petaling Jaya, she expanded her business and founded 'Celine's Kitchen', where she now sells cookies and cakes. Benedette emphasised the importance of not only family support but also having a good mentor who can offer guidance and encouragement along the way.

The final speaker, Sandra Anne Ghouse, an experienced trainer specialising in empowerment, people development, and productivity improvement, congratulated the women entrepreneurs who had shared their inspiring stories. Sandra delivered an insightful talk on not only growing a business but also taking it to the next level by boosting sales and expanding its reach. She provided numerous examples of both local and international businesses that began from humble beginnings and became highly successful.

Sandra encouraged the entrepreneurs to step outside their comfort zones and explore new opportunities, such as setting up booths at malls or participating in exhibitions to market their products. She also invited aspiring entrepreneurs in the audience to learn from the experiences shared by the speakers and to take the first brave step towards starting their own ventures. Sandra emphasised the importance of believing in oneself and having faith in God.

After her talk, many participants



Top pic: The participants listening to a sharing from one of the entrepreneurs. Bottom pic: Some of the goods on sale.

approached Sandra for advice, seeking guidance on how to move forward with their business aspirations.

The bazaar buzzed with activity as participants mingled, chatted, and showed support for the entrepreneurs. New friendships were formed, and many attendees who had been hesitant to take the first step into business were inspired and emboldened after hearing the speakers.

Susan Thomas, Coordinator for the Women Ministry, expressed her joy at the overwhelming support from the KL North District

churches, as well as the participants who travelled from various districts, bringing the total attendance to over 80 people.

She also extended her heartfelt gratitude to Fr Peter Anthony, parish priest of CTL, who did the opening prayer and blessings, and stayed to enjoy the event with the participants. A special thanks was given to Dass Francis and the leaders in the KL North District, whose efforts were instrumental in organising the event, arranging the speakers, and encouraging their parishes to attend and support the gathering. **Women Ministry AOHD**

## Kindness Bazaar brings hope to Kota Tinggi Rohingya community

KOTA TINGGI, Johor: A Caritas Kindness Bazaar was held recently to provide new and preloved clothes, household items, and essential goods at minimal prices to the community in need. Organised by the Church of St Elizabeth's Caritas Parish Office for Human Development (POHD) Kota Tinggi, in collaboration with the Creation Justice Commission, Shechinah Association, and Sulaman Kaseh, the event was designed to extend care and compassion to vulnerable groups in the region.

Held at the Kota Kecil carpark and shop lots, generously made available by an individual, Mr Liong, the event became a beacon of hope, particularly for the Rohingya refugee community and local families facing financial difficulties. Volunteers, donors, and partners came together to transform the venue into both a lively marketplace and an information hub.

In collaboration with the Johor Outreach Community Centre (JOCC), under the UNHCR umbrella, a campaign was launched



Young and old browsing the items on sale at the Kindness Bazaar.

to raise awareness about the importance of health insurance for the Rohingya community. The initiative aimed to highlight the challenges refugees face in accessing affordable healthcare.

The Kindness Bazaar was especially significant for the Rohingya community, who were still recovering from the devastating floods two months prior. Many families had their homes

affected, and the event provided them with a chance to obtain essential items to help in their recovery.

The atmosphere was filled with joy and gratitude as families browsed through the marketplace, with volunteers offering support and assistance. The event also featured activities for children, including games and art sessions organised by the youth of St Elizabeth Kota

Tinggi, led by Shae Cha.

Many members of the community expressed hope that such events would be repeated before Hari Raya, highlighting the positive impact it had on those in attendance.

This successful initiative would not have been possible without the dedicated support of volunteers from Caritas POHDs in Kulai, Masai, Sacred Heart Church in Plentong, Creation Justice, and the involvement of Rohingya youth as volunteers.

Caritas Malacca Johore Diocese extended its heartfelt gratitude to everyone involved, acknowledging their selfless contributions that not only provided material support but also brought hope and encouragement to those in need.

The Kindness Bazaar stands as a testament to the power of community spirit, compassion, and solidarity, reminding everyone that even the smallest acts of kindness can make a significant difference in the lives of others.

## Sacred Heart Church becomes an ecological parish

Elena Shim

KUALA LUMPUR: On March 18, the Church of the Sacred Heart, officially launched its status as an ecological parish with a special Mass and an enlightening talk on ecological transformation and spirituality.

The Mass began at 9.00am with Fr Andrew Manickam, OFM Cap, serving as the celebrant. The choir sang the hymn *Listen to the Cries of Mother Earth*, which resonated with the church's new focus on environmental care and spirituality.

Following the Mass, Fr Andrew delivered an insightful talk on ecological transformation, drawing from the teachings of Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* encyclical, which was published a decade ago. The talk emphasised the importance of ecological awareness and spirituality in today's world.

Parish priest Msgr Stanislaus Soosaimariam, addressed the congregation, highlighting that the journey toward becoming an ecological parish is not an immediate change but rather a

gradual transformation in habits and lifestyle. He stressed the importance of consistent effort in making environmentally conscious decisions.

As a follow-up to *Laudato Si'*, the *Laudato Deum* encyclical was published in 2023, offering a reflection on the progress made since 2015 and outlining the continued actions needed to address environmental issues.

Around 70 attendees participated in a talk and recycling session hosted by the Tzu Chi Foundation. The session was led by Jessica, a presenter from Tzu Chi, who shared her personal journey toward embracing a minimal and zero-waste lifestyle with her household of seven. She discussed the 5 Rs — refuse, reduce, repurpose, repair, and recycle — and emphasised that recycling should be the last resort.

Jessica highlighted the challenges of recycling, noting that only about 20 per cent of materials intended for recycling actually get processed due to factors such as contamination, economic constraints, and insufficient



Fr Andrew Manickam OFM Cap speaking on ecological transformation.

infrastructure. She also provided a fascinating example of how 62 Coca-Cola bottles can be recycled into an emergency blanket, which Tzu Chi distributes as part of its flood relief missions.

A key part of Tzu Chi's efforts involves using recycled plastic bottles (PET) to create T-shirts through their DA.AI Technology. Volunteers play an essential role in collecting and sorting PET bottles, which are then transformed into yarn and woven into fabric to create these sustainable garments.

The presentation also featured the emotional song *Kita Satu Keluarga*, written and performed by Dato' Sri Hajah Siti Nurhaliza, about the Batu Pahat flood in

March 2023. The video, accompanied by hand-sign language performed by Tzu Chi volunteers, powerfully conveyed the impact of climate change and the importance of collective action.

Jessica also shared information about recycling centres across Malaysia, providing the audience with valuable resources on how to engage with local recycling efforts. For more information on these centres, go to: <https://www.tzuchi.my/en/join-us/recycling-centres>

The session concluded with a lively Q&A segment, where attendees discussed various recyclable materials and saw examples of how they are repurposed into useful products such as t-shirts and emergency blankets.

PETALING JAYA: The Church of St Ignatius, (SIC) has dedicated March as a BEC Month to bring awareness to the importance of the Basic Ecclesial Community.

Parish priest Fr Thomas Koo, CDD, initiated the one-month programme filled with activities organised by the BEC Coordinating Team (BECCOT) and BEC Animating Team (BECAT). He reminded everyone the importance of BEC, living in community to support each other and grow in spirituality together.

A series of 15 sharings by BEC leaders — themed *What is BEC? Why join the BEC?* and *Experiencing BEC* — was held at weekend Masses. There was also a one-day formation for BEC coordinators and core teams entitled *Pastoral Dynamics Towards Communion of Communities* by Fr Mitchel Joseph, the Ecclesiastic Assistant of the Archdiocesan Basic Ecclesial Communities Animating Team with his team.

Fr Mitchel emphasised the importance of knowing the origin and theology of BEC as crucial in the development of the communities.

BECAT coordinator Rita Krishnan led the first five sharings, giving her insight on *What Is BEC?* Rita called the BEC the expression of the Catholic faith in her smallest units. Together they are the heart of the church vital for the laity to be active participants in ministries and

## SIC dedicates March as BEC Month



Participants working on designing a coat of arms to reflect their values as a community.

evangelisation, she said.

*Why BEC?* was covered by coordinators Francis Rasiah (St Valentine), Vikram Pio Martin (St Joachim), Reneboy Bautista (St Emmanuel), Thomas Lee (BEC Coordinator of Mandarin group) and Susie Lim (St Helena).

*Experiencing BEC* began with Bernie Wong (St Faustina). He shared the joy of transition from virtual meeting over zoom to physical gathering "where we pray together, share God's

word, listen to one another and lend support in the hour of need". He felt that having a potluck united the community through the sharing of meals. Joshua Lee (St Luke/St Matthew) advised the congregation not to take the BEC for granted. "Yes, the BEC will always be there for you in good times and bad ... but if you find it boring, do take the initiative to revitalise it by introducing new and creative activities". After all, he quipped, the BEC did not belong solely

to one person but to everyone.

Mary Elizabeth Cheng, the Asst Coordinator of St Mother Teresa, aptly described the BEC as "a calling to journey together as a family in faith walking together with Christ". She encouraged everyone: "The Lord has given us His love. Let's come together to share and to love one another in our BEC." She added that the BEC was a reminder that she was not alone in her journey.

Jesus too was not alone, taking Peter, John and James up to mountain to pray, said assistant parish priest Fr Martin Then in his homily on the Transfiguration (Luke 9: 28-36) at the 6.45am Mass on March 16. He urged the parishioners to keep striving to be a community of Christ and participate in transforming each other to be more Christ like.

BECCOT coordinator Lelia Chan was happy BEC leaders and members stepped forward to help man the info desk at every weekend Masses and to share with the congregation about their respective BECs. She said: "We are also getting encouraging response from parishioners wanting to know more. Indeed the awareness month is a timely effort to nip in the bud the waning interest in BEC."

A fellowship and potluck by BECCOT and BECAT for all parishioners was held after Mass on the Third Sunday of Lent. **Bob Ho**

# Pope Francis wants to oversee implementation of synodality

VATICAN: Pope Francis is at work, and although he has been hospitalised for a month, business continues to move forward. This is the message coming from Rome in recent days and the reason behind the decision to publish a March 15 letter signed by Cardinal Mario Grech, Secretary General of the Synod, addressed to all the world's bishops.

The letter specifies that “on March 11, the Holy Father gave his final approval” to the timeline of a new phase aimed at completing this major reform — both spiritual and governance-related — launched by Francis in 2021.

When he approved the sending of this document, the 88-year-old Pope had been hospitalised for 26 days and had just gone through several acute respiratory crises. Nevertheless, for a week, doctors had been saying that his condition was “stable” and showing “slight improvement.” His possible discharge from the hospital was even mentioned March 14 by the Vatican’s second-in-command, Secretary of State



*Pope Francis meets with other delegates of the Synod on Synodality at a roundtable discussion in Paul VI Hall at the Vatican on Oct 17, 2024. (Vatican Media)*

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, who had gathered the ambassadors to the Holy See that morning, delivering this message at the opening of a Mass celebrated in the Pauline Chapel: “We gather in prayer this morning for the health of the Holy Father, so that he may recover and return soon among us.”

After this reassuring message to the political world, this letter on synodality, intended for the church, is anything but insignificant, especially as doubts still linger over Francis’s health and speculation about a possible resignation fre-

quently appears in the press. When the final document of the Synod on Synodality was published on October 26, 2024 — immediately approved by the Pope, which is rare — several observers noted that this initiative, launched to de-clericalise and make the Church more horizontal, had something of a testamentary nature for Francis.

The message, sent March 15, aimed to ensure that this long and sometimes complex-to-understand process is not ignored. “This is not a phase of implementing synodality as such — many things are al-

ready in place locally. Rather, it is a way to help those who don’t know where to start,” a Vatican source diplomatically explained.

The letter outlined a very detailed timeline extending until October 2028 — when an “ecclesial assembly” is expected to be held in Rome — and states that this phase is meant to “accompany and evaluate” what has actually been put in place in dioceses. This includes, for example, women’s access to leadership positions, the establishment of financial transparency rules and abuse prevention measures, and the

creation of councils around priests and bishops.

Cardinal Grech described this period of accompaniment and evaluation in the letter as “a process of consolidating the path taken.” It also served as a firm reminder that by approving the Synod’s final text, the Pope has given it magisterial authority. This means that its content is binding on local churches and bishops as if the pope himself had written it.

And even though the requested governance changes have sparked some opposition within the church, this new process “will offer dioceses that have been less engaged in the synodal path so far the opportunity to catch up on the steps not yet completed and to form their own synodal teams,” the letter insists.

As a sign of this directive’s obligatory nature, Cardinal Grech, its signatory, asked the various dioceses to submit to Rome “the composition and references of [their] synodal team” via a dedicated form accompanying his message. **Mikael Corre, LCI** (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)

## Indian bishops chart future of synodality with ‘Pilgrims of Hope’ document

BHUBANESWAR, Odisha: The Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI) has released a new document titled *Pilgrims of Hope: Discerning the Synodal Path*, a product of broad-based consultation within the Church aimed at deepening synodality across India.

According to Fr Stephen Alathara, Deputy Secretary General of CCBI, the document is the culmination of an extensive participatory process involving the lay faithful, clergy, religious, and bishops.

It evolved through a preparatory phase, a working document, and was finalised during the CCBI’s 36th Plenary Assembly, held in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, recently.

The Assembly gathered 145 bishops, archbishops, and cardinals from 132 dioceses across India, along with 55 clergy and religious representatives.

The gathering focused on the theme *Discerning Synodal Pathways for Mission*, and reaffirmed the Church’s commitment to

communion, participation, and mission.

Aligned with the CCBI’s overarching Pastoral Plan: Mission 2033, the document offers strategic directions to address emerging challenges and revitalise evangelisation efforts.

The document highlights sixteen key themes for reflection and action, focusing on inclusivity, social justice, and spiritual renewal. These themes cover a wide range of topics, including faith formation, family, youth, marginalised groups (such as migrants, refugees, Dalits, tribals, and women), social and economic justice, digital technology, ecology, interreligious dialogue, and peacebuilding.

These areas of focus, according to the document, are “rooted in prayerful reflection and guided by the Holy Spirit,” and align with the broader Pastoral Plan, *Journeying Towards a Synodal Church: Mission 2033*.

In a circular accompanying the release, Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrão,

President of the CCBI, called on dioceses to actively engage with the document’s contents.

He said, “Together, a clear vision for a truly synodal Church has been outlined.” Emphasising the collective pastoral responsibility, he added, “As Shepherds of the People of God, we have a collective responsibility to animate this process at every level, ensuring that all members of the Church actively participate in this sacred journey.”

*Pilgrims of Hope* outlines essential pathways for the Church’s future, including the strengthening of shared baptismal responsibility, fostering of lay leadership, promotion of collaborative governance, and an embrace of the spiritual and cultural richness of the Indian and Asian context.

The CCBI urged all faithful to embrace this synodal renewal and “walk together as pilgrims of hope, led by the Holy Spirit, towards a more inclusive, participatory, and mission-driven Church.” **LiCAS**



*Bishops from across India gather in Bhubaneswar for the 36th Plenary Assembly of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI). (CCBI General Secretariat photo)*

## Catholics reclaim their churches in Shanghai Diocese



*One of the churches reconsecrated in the Shanghai diocese.*

SHANGHAI: Catholics in Shanghai celebrated the restoration and reconsecration of two historic churches dedicated to St Joseph as Bishop Joseph Shen Bin urged the faithful to deepen their faith and service to each other.

“Since the visible temple has been rebuilt, we must now also make the interior temple of our heart more spiritually alive,” Bishop Shen Bin told Catholics gathered in joy as two historic churches — one in the Tianma area of Songjiang district and another in Beitaowan, Baoshan district — were reconsecrated after restoration efforts, *Fides* reported.

On March 16, the Second Sunday of Lent, Bishop Shen Bin led the consecration of Tianma Church in Songjiang, where more than 1,000 people attended the Mass. In addition to blessing the newly restored church, he administered the sacrament of Confirmation to more than 200 adults.

During his homily, he expressed gratitude to clergy, religious sisters, and parishioners who worked to restore the church, as well as civil authorities, for their support. “May this temple of God’s grace be a welcoming house of faith for all so that

we can walk together towards holiness under the guidance of the Holy Spirit,” he said.

A day earlier, on March 15, Bishop Shen Bin consecrated Beitaowan Church in Baoshan district. Thirty diocesan priests concelebrated Mass with over 300 parishioners, and seventeen Catholics received the sacrament of Confirmation during the liturgy.

Both churches have deep historical roots. Beitaowan Church, built in 1650 during the Qing dynasty and rebuilt in 1875, was the first in the Baoshan district to reopen for worship in 1989. Tianma Church, dating to 1850, once had a hospital run by Canossian nuns.

China Church observers said that Catholics in China, whose devotion to St Joseph has endured for generations, see these restored churches as signs of faith’s resilience. Celebrations marking St Joseph, the patron saint of China, are renewed every March. Many churches, seminaries, religious congregations, charities, and schools bear his name, with shrines welcoming pilgrims from across China and abroad. **LiCAS** (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)

# Christ's light overcomes all inner darkness



Fr Dr John Singarayar SVD

The journey inward is perhaps the most challenging pilgrimage we will ever undertake. “Do not just look around. Look within.” These words call us to a deeper examination than our usual outward glances. We are invited not merely to observe the world around us but to turn our gaze inward to those shadowed corners we so often avoid.

What do we see when we look within? Not the carefully curated versions of ourselves we present to others, but the raw, unfiltered reality of our hearts. The Psalmist understood this when he prayed, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any of-fensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23-24). This prayer acknowledges that true self-examination requires divine illumination, for we are often blind to our own darkness.

How do we see? Through what lens do we examine ourselves?

Too often, we look through the distorted glass of self-justification or harsh condemnation. Neither offers clarity. Scripture offers us the perfect lens — truth tempered with grace. As John writes, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5). When we allow God’s light to illuminate our inner landscape, we begin to see as we are seen.

The mud of darkness takes many forms in our lives. For some, it is pride, that ancient sin which first caused Lucifer to fall and Adam and Eve to stumble. For others, it is fear that paralyzes and prevents us from walking in faith. Still others find their mud in resentment, greed, lust, or apathy. These are

the realities we must name — specifically and honestly — if we hope to be cleansed.

The biblical narrative is filled with individuals who confronted their mud of darkness. Consider David, whose moment of reckoning came through the prophet Nathan’s pointed declaration: “You are the man!” (2 Samuel 12:7). After months of hiding his sins of adultery and murder, David finally acknowledged his reality: “I have sinned against the Lord” (2 Samuel 12:13). This naming of his darkness was the first step toward restoration.

Peter faced his mud of darkness in a courtyard as the rooster crowed. His threefold denial of Jesus revealed a weakness he had refused to acknowledge. Luke tells us, “The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter... And he went outside and wept bitterly” (Luke 22:61-62). In that moment of recognition, Peter named his reality — his cowardice, his betrayal, his failure of loyalty.

The Samaritan woman met Jesus at a well, where He gently but directly exposed the mud of her life. “You have had five husbands,” He told her, “and the man you now have is not your husband” (John 4:18). Rather than turning away in shame, she acknowledged this reality and was transformed, becoming one of the first evangelists who

brought others to Christ.

Acknowledging our darkness is necessary but insufficient. The invitation continues: “go wash.” This echoes Jesus’ instruction to the blind man: “Go, wash in the Pool of Siloam” (John 9:7). It recalls Naaman’s healing from leprosy after washing seven times in the Jordan River (2 Kings 5). Washing implies both action and submission—we must participate in our cleansing, yet recognise that the power to cleanse comes from beyond ourselves.

Paul describes this washing as transformation: “You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:11). This is not

a one-time event but a continual process. As we daily bring our darkness into God’s light, we experience ongoing renewal.

The promise that concludes this invitation offers hope: “The mud of darkness always gives way to the light of Christ.” This is the testimony of Scripture from beginning to end.

In creation, God’s first recorded words were “Let there be light,” dispelling the darkness that covered the formless earth (Genesis 1:3). In Isaiah’s prophecy, “The people walking in darkness have seen a great

light” (Isaiah 9:2). In the Gospel’s declaration, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5).

The apostle Paul experienced this transformation dramatically on the Damascus road, where the light of Christ literally blinded him before bringing new sight (Acts 9). From persecutor to apostle, his mud of darkness — religious zealotry that led to violence — gave way to the light of Christ’s love.

The early disciples, huddled in fear after Jesus’ crucifixion, saw their darkness dispelled when the risen Christ appeared among them. Their grief turned to joy, their confusion to clarity, their cowardice to courage. As John would later write, “God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5).

This pattern continues in our lives today. When we honestly name our darkness, when we bring it to the light rather than hiding it in shame, when we submit to the washing of God’s grace, transformation follows. Our failures become testimonies. Our weaknesses become channels for God’s strength. Our sins, once confessed and forgiven, become platforms for ministry to others struggling with similar darkness.

It is the practical, lived experience of every person who has honestly confronted their darkness and submitted it to the transforming power of God’s light.

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Fr Dr John Singarayar, SVD



## SOCIAL JUSTICE



### Making a Difference

Tony Magliano

## Sin does not have the final word

Leviticus calls us to reflect on sin — my sin, your sin, the nation’s sin, the Church’s sin, the world’s sin.

Sin may seem attractive when we’re committing it but afterwards, we often would rather not think about it, examine it, or humbly admit it. Because doing so brings us to the truth that our sin is ugly and hurtful, it causes suffering not only to ourselves, but also to others, to our world, to our Church, and especially to God.

In his theology of the Mystical Body of Christ, St Paul, with deep original insight, instructs the Church of his day, and our day, that when one part of the body is suffering, the whole body is suffering. Paul writes, “If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with; if one part is honoured, all the parts share its joy” (see: 1 Cor. 12:26).

The very first words of the Second Vatican Council’s highly prophetic document *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern

*World*) powerfully echo for modern ears and hearts the Apostle Paul’s theology of the Mystical Body of Christ in declaring: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.”

Here the Church fathers at Vatican II made clear for us that the Mystical Body of Christ extends in mystical and yet concrete ways to the whole body of humanity.

But since we tend to run from suffering, we often look the other way when other parts of the body are in pain. This sad reality is what Pope Francis calls the “culture of indifference.” And this sinful culture of indifference infects not only the larger global society, but sadly, to a large degree, the Church itself, the Mystical Body of Christ.

But despite the pain, the Church of God, the Mystical Body of Christ, cannot look

the other way. We must embrace the overflowing painful suffering of countless fellow human beings — near and far.

Even a cursory view of our hurting world cannot shield us, nor should it, from the sinful, inhumane realities of hunger, poverty, homelessness, human trafficking, closed borders and migrant deportation, abortion, euthanasia, embryonic stem cell research, environmental degradation and climate change, corporate greed, sweatshops, labour abuses, racism, drug gangs, arms sales (see: <https://bit.ly/4h9z8rW>), and war suffered by countless fellow human beings.

The Church — the Mystical Body of Christ — cannot, must not, be indifferent to our suffering brothers and sisters. On the contrary, we must tirelessly do everything we can to ease and eliminate their suffering with direct service, education, public witness, accompaniment, and advocacy.

We, the Mystical Body of Christ, are the

physical body of Christ on earth today. In the words of St Teresa of Avila “Christ has no body but yours”. (*listen: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wZL19OpG\\_NQ&ab\\_channel=JohnMichaelTalbot-Topic](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wZL19OpG_NQ&ab_channel=JohnMichaelTalbot-Topic)*).

It can often look and feel like sin has conquered, but not so, for “however much sin increased, grace was always greater” (see: Romans 5:20).

For those of us with faith in Christ Jesus, we know that by carrying the cross with Jesus and our suffering brothers and sisters, we are being instruments of God’s saving grace; we are helping advance the Kingdom of God which leads to the final word — the Resurrection and the destruction of sin and death!

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## Pope's prayer intention for April

# Technology and humanity: A call for ethical responsibility

I must admit, I'm quite old school. I have not fully embraced the latest technological advancements, and writing this article feels like a tremendous challenge. But then again, this is the reality we live in. Technology is advancing at an astonishing pace, changing how we connect, work, and even think. Whether we like it or not, it shapes the world around us. Every day, we wake up to the glow of our screens. Before we even greet the people in our homes, we are already checking messages, emails, and social media updates. Technology has become such a big part of our lives that it is hard to imagine a day without it. But Pope Francis' prayer intention for April reminds us of something crucial: technology should serve humanity, not replace it.

In his words, we pray that "the use of new technologies will not replace human relationships, will respect the dignity of the person, and will help us face the crises of our times." This is not just a futuristic concern - it is already happening. From artificial intelligence (AI) and automation to social media and biotechnology, new technologies are rapidly transforming every aspect of life. While this article focuses on a few key areas - such as AI, digital communication, and automation - many other emerging technologies also demand our ethical discernment and prayer.

### When Connection Becomes Disconnection

We have more ways to connect than ever before - WhatsApp, Zoom, Instagram, and countless other apps. But how often do these actually deepen our relationships?

A mother recently shared how she and her teenage son, though living under the same roof, barely spoke anymore. "We message each other more than we actually talk," she said with a laugh — but sadness lingered in her eyes. "Even at dinner, he's scrolling, and I'm answering emails."

Technology, meant to bring us closer can, ironically, create distance. It replaces the warmth of a conversation with the coldness of a text. It makes us present everywhere but absent in the moment. As Pope Francis emphasises in *Fratelli Tutti* (43), "Digital connectivity is not enough to build bridges; it is not capable of uniting humanity."

Beyond texting and social media, other digital interactions shape our relationships in unexpected ways. Online gaming and virtual spaces create new social circles, yet many friendships exist almost entirely in these digital worlds, raising the question of whether they provide the same depth as face-to-face relationships. Similarly, dating apps and online communities have become avenues for connection, but they can also encourage a culture of fleeting interactions, where relationships become transactional rather than deeply rooted. With all these ways to stay in touch, we must ask ourselves: Are we truly engaging with others, or are we just communicating at the surface level?



**PRAYER  
PRISM**  
Fr Fabian Dicom



### The Hidden Cost of Convenience

Beyond AI, which often dominates discussions, other technologies are quietly "reformatting" our daily lives in ways we may not fully grasp. E-commerce has made shopping effortless, but it often comes at the cost of workers' well-being, forcing them to meet harsh demands for faster deliveries. Social media keeps us informed, yet it also fuels addiction, anxiety, and the rapid spread of misinformation. Streaming platforms provide endless entertainment but can lull us into passive consumption, weakening our ability to reflect and engage meaningfully with the world around us.

Technology itself is not the problem; it has brought undeniable benefits - lifesaving medical advancements, greater access to knowledge, and instant global communication. But the challenge lies in how we use it. The Pope urges us to reflect: Are we in control of technology, or is technology controlling us?

### A Crisis of Dignity

One of the Church's greatest concerns is that technology should respect human dignity. But in many cases, the opposite is happening. Social media, for example, can dehumanise individuals. In Malaysia, we see online bullying, public shaming, and the amplification of racial and religious tensions through viral posts. It takes mere seconds to forward a damaging rumour, but the harm it causes can last a lifetime.

Beyond this, digital surveillance is expanding, often at the expense of privacy and human rights. Even in education, there

is a rush to implement online learning, but what about children who lack access to devices or a stable internet connection? Are we truly creating equal opportunities, or are we merely widening the gap between those who have access and those who do not?

### Automation and the Changing Nature of Work

Technology is changing the way we work, and not always for the better. One of the biggest concerns today is automation — machines and AI replacing human workers. While automation can make businesses more efficient, it also has real consequences for workers, especially those in lower-income jobs.

We see this happening across industries — factories using robots instead of human workers, self-checkouts replacing cashiers, and automated systems taking over roles that once provided people with steady incomes. In Malaysia, factory workers, delivery riders, and service staff are especially at risk. Large corporations save money, but for those who lose their jobs, finding new work is not always easy. The gap between the wealthy and the struggling only grows wider.

Pope Francis reminds us in *Fratelli Tutti* (162) that work is about more than just earning a wage - it gives people dignity, a sense of purpose, and a place in the community, especially the poor. If automation keeps advancing without safeguards, we risk turning work into something purely mechanical, losing the human connection that makes it meaningful. That is why businesses and governments must take responsibility by ensuring fair policies, retraining programmes, and economic systems that put people before profit. *Laudato Si'* also warns against the mindset that treats technology as the solution to everything, without thinking about its impact on society.



*Antiqua et Nova*, a document exploring how AI compares to human intelligence. It points out that while AI can process massive amounts of data and perform incredible tasks, it lacks wisdom, conscience, and the moral responsibility that only humans have. That is why, no matter how advanced technology becomes, people must always remain accountable for the decisions made using AI.

Pope Francis has been clear: technology should never control human progress. We must think carefully about the kind of world we are creating. Are we using technology to serve people, or are we letting it replace them? The Church reminds us that every advancement — whether in AI, automation, or digital communication - should help build a society that respects human dignity and the common good. If we don't stop and reflect, we risk losing something deeply human along the way.

### Finding the Balance

Pope Francis is not against technology. The Church has always embraced innovation when it serves the common good. But the message is clear: we must not allow technology to strip away our humanity.

So how can we integrate technology into our lives in a way that fosters rather than hinders our relationships, dignity, and faith? We can begin by reclaiming real conversations, setting aside phones during meals, and giving our full attention to those around us. We must also use social media responsibly, asking ourselves whether what we share builds others up or tears them down. As Ephesians 4:29 reminds us, "Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up."

Moreover, we must advocate for fair treatment of workers in the digital age, supporting businesses that prioritise human dignity over profit. Balancing online and offline life is also crucial — spending time in nature, engaging in face-to-face community, and, like Jesus Himself, withdrawing to quiet places for prayer. Lastly, educating ourselves and others about digital literacy will ensure that we use technology wisely and ethically.

### A Prayer for Our Times

This reflection is not just about the future - it is about today. It is about how we, as individuals, families, and communities, choose to engage with technology. Above all, it is about ensuring that, in this digital age, we do not forget what truly makes us human: love, relationships, and the dignity of every person.

Humanity stands at a crossroads. The future will depend on whether wisdom, responsibility, and love guide our advancements. Let us pray and act so that technology serves us - never the other way around.

### A Call for Ethical Responsibility

These concerns extend beyond automation to the broader role of artificial intelligence. In January 2025, the Vatican released

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# We call him Pope Francis, but she calls him 'cousin Giorgio'

In the quiet Italian town of Portacomaro, nestled in the rolling hills of Piedmont, Carla Rabazzana, 93, sits in her modest home, her television flickering with updates from the Vatican. She is not just any viewer — she is the cousin of Pope Francis, or as she has called him since she was in her 30s, "Giorgio."

She sighs, talking about her beloved cousin's health conditions after a recent concerning report from the hospital. "We hoped the Pope wouldn't have any more relapses, but unfortunately, things always happen. These things probably happen as the illness progresses. We have to wait for him to recover. For now, he hasn't recovered yet," she said in a telephone interview with the *National Catholic Reporter*.

For Rabazzana, these days are filled with anxiety as she rides a roller coaster of emotions as the pope improves, then relapses and improves again. Over the weekend, the Vatican news releases took an optimistic turn as the Holy See Press Office issued positive reports about the pontiff's improving health condition and released a photo of him in the chapel that is part of his suite of rooms at Rome's Gemelli Hospital.

While the Pope's health struggles have left her uneasy, the lack of direct contact has also heightened her anxiety. She watches the news diligently, hoping for updates, but, early on, each report only reinforced her fears.

His illness, she believes, follows an inevitable course, and all she can do now is wait for his recovery.

What troubles her most right now is the silence. Unlike in the past, when the Pope would call her frequently, now the family must rely on public news broadcasts for information. His demanding schedule and the restrictions placed on him during his hospitalisation make communication nearly impossible. Even his nephew — a Jesuit priest and the son of his sister — was only allowed one brief visit before being told that the pope needed rest and had to limit his interactions.

Still, that visit brought a small consolation. Francis has personally asked his nephew to relay a message to Rabazzana and the rest of the family, assuring them that he was being well cared for at Gemelli Hospital in Rome, and that as soon as he returned to Casa Santa Marta, he would call them. But since then, there has been only silence.

It wasn't always this way. In the early years of his papacy, Francis made a point to stay in touch with his family, calling Rabazzana at least once a month. Over time, as his responsibilities grew, the frequency of their conversations dwindled, though he never failed to check in on special occasions. Birthdays, Easter, Christmas — he always remembered.

"He never forgets my birthday, not only mine but also those of my cousins. I asked him, 'Giorgio, do you have a calendar where you write down all our birthdays?', and he replied, 'No, no, I have them all here in my head.' He has a

phenomenal memory."

She laughs heartily recalling their conversations over the phone. "I couldn't even tell you, because on the phone we talked about everything except current affairs. We used to have a wonderful



Pope Francis and his cousin Carla Rabazzana sit down for lunch in her home in Portacomaro, near Asti, November 19, 2022. (CNS/Vatican Media)

time laughing. Every time he had a new joke. Every now and then he would come up with a new one and then he would tell it to me and then he would tell me some oddity that had happened there at Casa Santa Marta."

"I would say, 'Be careful, Giorgio, there's someone who wishes you ill,' and then we would laugh out loud together, like the usual things between relatives."

Her fondest memory of him remains the day he visited her in Portacomaro in November 2022. That day, she recalled, was a whirlwind of excitement. The entire town was in a frenzy — some playing music, others making endless phone calls, and she herself scrambling in the kitchen, overwhelmed but overjoyed. When Francis arrived, he greeted her in his usual playful manner, giving her a light slap on the face.

"Listen, you're not going to heaven!" he said to Rabazzana. "Why not?" she responded.

"Because you're a sinner!" he said, before hugging her for a few seconds.

"He always did that as a joke. Giorgio has a wonderful personality, he's cheerful, always ready with a joke, he never takes anything seriously," she said.

Their bond was strong long before Francis' papacy. Rabazzana first met him when she was 38, and he was a young Jesuit studying in Frankfurt, Germany. Whenever he travelled there for exams, he would carve out time to visit her. From Frankfurt, he would journey to Turin, Italy, and then to her home in Portacomaro, where he would stay for a few days.

Together, they explored basilicas and historic churches. Later, as his career in the Church progressed, his visits became less frequent, limited to occasions when he had business in Rome. But whenever he could, he made the effort to stop by, gathering with family for meals, catching up on stories, and sharing in the joy of their company.

Her voice softens as she

recalls the moment Francis became pope. That day remains etched in Rabazzana's memory, though the way she found out still makes her laugh. The evening before the conclave, Francis had called to bid her farewell, explaining that once inside the Vatican and the Sistine Chapel, he would no longer be able to communicate. He had no expectation of being elected and had already planned his return to Buenos Aires, Argentina. Rabazzana had no reason to think otherwise.

"I'm calling to say goodbye because tomorrow I'll enter the conclave and won't be able to call you anymore," Francis said to her on the night of March 11, 2013.

"He was a thousand kilometres away from becoming pope, he wasn't even remotely thinking about it. So, I said, 'Okay Giorgio, see you whenever you can.' I was also sure that they wouldn't make him pope," Rabazzana said.

Then came the news. She was in the middle of washing dishes when she heard that the conclave had reached a decision a few minutes after 7.00pm on March 13. Curious but unconcerned, she casually wondered who the new pope might be.

Then the announcement came: "*Habemus papam. Georgium Marium ...*" The shock was so great that she nearly collapsed, dishes still in hand, she said. The next morning, Francis called her immediately.

But for Rabazzana, her cousin's elevation to the papacy was bittersweet. While the world celebrated, she felt a personal loss. "Let me tell you something," she said with a sweet, melancholic voice. "It may be an honour to be a relative of a pope, but in my heart, if they hadn't made him pope, I would have been happier."

The reason is simple. "Because before that he used to come and visit us, he came to our house, we spent time together, we had a wonderful family life. Now he's far away and we can't go and see him when we want to. He's no longer ours, he belongs to everyone!"

"Giorgio has such a wonderful personality. When he left my house, I would cry for two days. He was exceptionally good company. He could cheer you up with just a few words. I may be biased, but that's how it is for me."

Her closeness to the Pope is why she said she was worried again and "not doing too well," after his respiratory crises on March 3. But she maintains her focus on steady prayers now, as her cousin continues to recover.

"I say prayers for him every night as always. He always tells me, 'Pray for me!' Now I've increased the number of prayers, but I always say, 'Lord, thy will be done.'" **Camillo Barone, NCR**



Pope Francis greets his cousin Carla Rabazzana before celebrating Mass November 20, 2022, in the cathedral of Asti, Italy. (CNS/Vatican Media)

# Laetare – Rejoice always!

This weekend, the universal Church celebrates *Laetare* Sunday, the fourth Sunday of Lent. The entrance antiphon for all Masses this weekend starts with “Rejoice Jerusalem, and all who love her. Be joyful, all who were in mourning” (Isaiah 66:10-11).

Rejoice, we are called to rejoice! A simple request actually, yet how many are able to do so? Pause a moment to reflect on the many times in our life when we fail to rejoice in small things, but complain of big things. Think of the many sweet moments when we are joyful, happy and feel blessed. Think of the people we have made happy, touched their lives and even helped uplift their spirit.

On a personal level, rejoice every morning as we awake, for we are still alive another day. Anything could have happened to us while we sleep. Such are the uncertainties of life. Count our blessings, and live each day as if it is our last.

Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate (Rejoice and Be Glad)*, tells us that “The Lord asks everything of us, and in return he offers us true life, the happiness for which we were created. He wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence”. He further adds “The call to holiness is present in various ways from the very first pages



## Reminiscing Church

RICHARD CHIA

of the Bible” to that of our daily lives. God wants us to open our eyes to see, our ears to listen and our mind to be opened to always receive.

Reminiscing the Catholic Church in Malaysia, we have many moments to rejoice. At the highest level of Church, Malaysia has seen the ordination and appointments of two Cardinals, eight Archbishops and thirteen Bishops since the inception of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Malaysia in

1967. We have come a long way from the colonial days when missionary priests and apostolic delegates were sent to lead the Church in Malaysia.

At the Catholic population level, according to the Catholic Directory publication, the Church has grown from an estimated 503,322 in 1990 to 1,132,649 in 2020, an increase of 125 per cent in a span of 30 years. This works out to approximately 21,000 new Catholics joining the Church yearly. Something to rejoice as many Catholic churches in the western world are on the decline.

At the local diocese level, many new ministries have sprung up in response to the needs of the people. In the early days it was the presence of the foreign missionary religious brothers, priests and sisters that initiated laity organisations that catered to

the spiritual needs of the children, teens, youths, parents, adults and seniors. These have now evolved into many specialised ministries focused on the differently-abled, various phases of family life, social and spiritual needs. Not counting the development and growth of the language apostolates, we now have new ministries of evangelisation, creation justice (*laudato si*), integral human development, ecumenism and inter-religious, and many more.

At the regional and national level, we have had four Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Conventions, three Regional Pastoral Assemblies, and are now preparing for the first ever Malaysian Pastoral Convention scheduled for September 2026. The number of participants for each convention and assembly has exceeded thousands for each assembly, with many attending for the first time. The joy and feeling of Being Church, the solidarity and oneness in One Faith is indescribable.

In this Jubilee Year of Hope, Pope Francis reminds us not to be complacent. Of course there are many moments of disappointments in our everyday lives. It is normal in life to have its ups and downs. We need to rise above this and see beyond. To emulate Jesus in his earthly ministry. The Holy Father in his document *Spes Non Confundit*, the Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee of the Year 2025, says “During the Holy Year, we are called to be tangible signs of hope for those of our brothers and sisters who experience hardships of any kind”. He quoted Apostle

Paul who encourages us to “rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, and persevere in prayer” (Romans 12:12).

As we approach Easter this year, the Church rejoices yet again for the many elect preparing to receive the Sacraments of Initiation on Easter Vigil night. Though our numbers have not returned to pre-COVID 19 days, the number of soon-to-be converts are impressive. For every new person joining the Church, another three to four more family members may follow suit someday. This keeps the Church alive and vibrant, something else to rejoice about.

For anyone who have ever attended the Easter Vigil service in Malaysia, you will know that you need to get into the church at least half an hour early, else there is no seating space available. This is because many of the front seats will be reserved for the elect, the confirmands and those who will be received from other Christian groups, plus their godparents, sponsors and family members.

For these elect, it will be a night of joy and forever etched in their memory. The Church rejoices with them as they join the family, the greater community and the universal church. We continue to pray for them and for the many more who follow every year. Rejoice in Hope!

**Richard Chia** shares his experiences on the journey of the Church in Malaysia in the past forty years. Its challenges and achievements as it moves toward synodality.

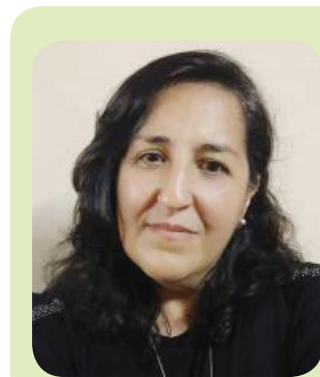
## Mary, companion of my new ‘yes’ in Argentina

What does it mean to find a spiritual home in the midst of uncertainty? In my small community in northern Argentina, Mary has become a beacon of hope in the darkest moments. When the journey becomes overwhelming, I look to Mary, the small, strong woman who, with her “yes,” changed history. Capable of holding everything in her heart, she inspires me and encourages me to continue. My path has not been easy, but Mary has always been my faithful companion.

I arrived here as a Sister of the Congregation of Our Lady of the Rosary of Buenos Aires, with 10 years of consecration and very happy on the road I have travelled. I have served as a missionary, community animator, teacher of postulants, legal representative of schools, and general councillor. Our Lady of the Rosary, my “mother” from the beginning, was the one who formed me. My vocation was born in one of the sisters’ schools, and I embraced the pillars of the spirituality: Christ as centre, Mary of the Rosary as mother, and preferential love for the poorest.

In January 2012, we arrived at this mission with the scorching sun and constant heat. The children were the first to welcome us with smiles. Poverty in this place was evident, but hope was being born, free and tiny, in every corner. I did not imagine then the impact that this mission would have on my consecrated life. The experiences and challenges, over time, shaped my heart and prepared me for a new call that I could not ignore: to leave everything and start anew. In this process of discernment, Mary was at my side, giving me strength. The rosary and the Gospel of the poor were my shield at every step.

I began a new journey of consecration in 2017, moving from the Sisters of Our Lady



**Sr Elsa Porcario finds in the Virgin Mary a steadfast spiritual presence in her consecrated life. After serving as a missionary and formator in the Congregation of Our Lady of the Rosary in Buenos Aires, Argentina, she embarked on a new path as a Servant of the Poor. In Mary, she discovers the strength to navigate uncertainty, fear and solitude, learning to trust, hope and love without knowing what lies ahead.**

of the Rosary to the Fraternity of Servants of the Poorest. This small community, marked by austerity, simplicity and service to the most excluded, was born out of the desire to listen to the cries of the people. I experienced firsthand the redemptive power of losing in order to win. I anchored my consecrated life here and burned my boat in a leap of faith. This journey has made me embrace the unknown, uncertainty and lack of recognition. I found comfort and strength on dark nights in Mary’s lap, and through her I received the motivation to respond to God’s new call in my life.

Like many, I have gone through times of fear, uncertainty, loneliness and discouragement. However, when I look at Mary, I see a woman who went through everything God put in her path without faltering. When I feel that I am in darkness, I return to her and find the hope that drives me on. Her “yes” encourages me to say “yes” every day, loving without knowing what is to come, trusting in strength in the darkness that brews.

Mary inspires and sustains me. Her littleness and her daily life reflect the immense power of God. She teaches me to transform the humble into fertile ground for

hope. Looking to her, I learn to live in love, to trust and hope, even when everything seems unfavourable.

I remember one day in particular when I was working with the sisters on a project to celebrate Children’s Day in the Wichí community where we were doing our pastoral service. The idea was to find a sponsor who could give a toy to each child, in addition to providing them with games and a snack. At that moment, I approached Mary in an image that accompanies us: a small Mary, made of clay, dark, with the features of the local women, with the little child in her arms and a tiny rosary in her little hands. “Our little Mother,” moulded by the hands of men deprived of their freedom, dreamed especially to be the patroness and companion of our small community. I contemplated her in her humility, and she reminded me to trust, believe and hope for the impossible. I was amazed as I saw how people began to arrive, each gesture of love and solidarity making the miracle possible: a sponsor, a toy, a friend, and more than 150 smiles illuminated that day. Since then, we are able to repeat this activity every year, and more people are encouraged to share.

Recovering hope in the seasons when I

feel that I lack strength is essential to move forward. My heart is filled with confusion and impatience when God’s times and rhythms do not coincide with my own. I wonder if my steps are what God really expects, and if this response hides the novelty that will make the difference. And then I return to Mary, the woman who, with her “yes,” not only embraced a divine mission, but also accepted human frailty. She reminds me that love and faith will show me the way, and that God is not looking for perfection in me, but for a heart willing to be transformed.

Mary’s example of living hope constantly challenges me as a consecrated woman. Despite the darkness, she trusted in God’s promises and never doubted that God would keep his word. Holding in her heart every detail of what she experienced, she has become my teacher, showing me that everything, even the incomprehensible, is part of God’s plan. Every experience in my life is like a piece of a puzzle that, in God’s time, will find its place. Mary’s hope enkindles mine. Her active waiting, full of faith and love, invites me to believe that it is worth hoping against all hope.

Along the way, I have learned that hope is not passive; it is active, like the confident leap of a child into its mother’s arms. Mary lived that hope, and her example urges me to move forward, celebrating what is, and trusting in what is yet to come.

I invite you to look to Mary in your daily life, to let her accompany you in every challenge, and to walk by your side to teach you to trust. Like her, trust! Keep a grateful memory and believe that every story has a happy ending in God’s hands. Mary reminds us in the midst of trials that love sustains hope, and that every action done in faith can become a sign of the reign of God. **Global Sisters Report (NCR)**



Fr Ron Rolheiser

# The person of Jesus and the mystery of Christ

I was raised a Roman Catholic and essentially inhaled the religious ethos of Roman Catholicism. I went into the seminary, earned theological degrees, and taught theology at a graduate level for a number of years before I ever started making a distinction between 'Jesus' and 'Christ'. For me, they were always one and the same thing, Jesus Christ.

To my mind, Jesus Christ was the second person of the Trinity who took on flesh in the incarnation and is still now our God, our advocate, and our friend in heaven. I didn't distinguish between Jesus and Christ in terms of whom I was praying to, speaking about, or relating to. Indeed, for many years in my writings, I simply used the words Jesus and Christ interchangeably.

Slowly, through the years, this changed and I have begun to distinguish more between Jesus and Christ. It began with a deepened understanding of what the Gospels and St Paul mean by the reality of Christ as a mystery which, while always having Jesus as its centre, is larger than the historical Jesus. This distinction, and its importance, became clearer to me when I began to have more contact with Evangelicals, both as students and as colleagues.

In faith fellowship with various groups of Evangelicals, I began to see that one of the ecclesial differences between us, Evangelicals

and Roman Catholics, is that we, Roman Catholics, while not ignoring Jesus, are very much about Christ, and Evangelicals, while not ignoring Christ, are very much about Jesus.

How we understand the Church, how we understand the Eucharist, and how we understand the primary invitation given us in the Gospels are coloured by how we perceive ourselves in relationship to Jesus and to Christ.

What's at stake here?

What's the difference between saying 'Jesus' and saying 'Christ'? Is there any difference between praying to Jesus and praying to Christ, between relating to Jesus or relating to Christ?

There's a difference, an important one. Christ is not Jesus' second name – as in Jack Smith, Susan Parker, or Jesus Christ. While it is correct to use the two names together, as we do commonly in our prayer (*We pray through Jesus Christ, Our Lord*), there is an important distinction to be made.

*Jesus is a person*, the second person in the Trinity, the divine person Who became incarnate, and the person Who calls us to one-to-one intimacy with Him. Christ is a mystery of which we are a part. *The mystery of Christ includes the person of Jesus but also includes us*. We are not part of the body of Jesus, but we are part of the body of Christ.

As Christians we believe that Jesus is the body of Christ, that the Eucharist is the body of Christ, and that we, baptised Christians, are also the body of Christ. St Paul states clearly that we, the Christian community, are the body of Christ on earth, just as Jesus and the Eucharist are the body of Christ. And Paul means this literally. We (the Christian community) are not like a body, or some mystical or metaphorical body; nor do we represent or replace Christ's body. Rather, we are the body of Christ on earth, still giving physical flesh to God on earth.

This has implications for Christian discipleship: Jesus is a person, the person who invites us to one-to-one intimacy with Him (which Evangelicals see as the goal of Christian discipleship). Christ is part of a larger mystery which includes Jesus but also includes each of us. In this mystery we are called to intimacy not just with Jesus, but also with each other and with physical creation. In Christ, the goal of Christian discipleship is community of life with Jesus, with each other, and with physical creation (since the mystery of Christ is also cosmic).

At the risk of huge oversimplification, allow me a suggestion: Roman Catholics and Evangelicals can learn from each other on this. From our Evangelical brothers and sisters,

Roman Catholics can learn to focus as much on Jesus as we do on Christ, so that, like Evangelicals, we might realise more explicitly (as is clear in the Gospel of John) that at the very heart of Christian discipleship lies the invitation to a one-to-one intimacy with a person, Jesus, (and not just with a mystery).

Conversely, Evangelicals can learn from Roman Catholics to focus as much on Christ as on Jesus, with all this implies in terms of defining discipleship more widely than personal intimacy with Jesus and Church more widely than simple fellowship. Relating to Christ points to the centrality of the Eucharist as a communal event. As well, it implies seeing Christian discipleship not just as an invitation to intimacy with Jesus, but as an incorporation into an ecclesial body which includes not just Jesus but the community of all believers as well as nature itself.

We can learn from each other to take both Jesus and Christ more seriously.

**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)

There are moments when I pause and marvel at the richness of the Catholic faith. It is something I have always admired, not just for its depth and beauty, but for its unshakable foundation, spanning centuries and touching the lives of millions. Yet, I sometimes wonder if we truly see the treasure we have.

For as long as I can remember, I have been drawn to the Catholic Church in ways I cannot fully explain. It is not just a place of worship or a set of beliefs, but something far greater. It is a home, a family, and the fullness of faith itself. The more I learn about it, the more I realise that Catholicism is not a faith we create to suit our preferences. It is a faith given to us by Christ Himself.

And yet, in a world filled with noise and distractions, it is easy to overlook the beauty of what has always been right before us.

**A faith that stands the test of time**  
History has always fascinated me. Civilisations have risen and fallen, cultures have shifted, and ideologies have come and gone. But through it all, the Catholic Church has remained, unchanged in her essence and unwavering in her mission.

There is something profoundly humbling about knowing that the faith I profess today is the same faith handed down by the Apostles. The prayers I say at Mass have been echoed by saints and martyrs before me. The teachings I hold dear are not shaped by human opinion but by divine truth.

No other institution or Christian tradition can claim such an unbroken lineage. To be Catholic is to be part of something much larger than oneself. The Church has withstood the test of time, not by human strength, but by the grace of God.

At the same time, I recognise that the Church has not always been perfect in its human leadership. History reminds us that while there have been moments of weakness, they have never shaken the truth of her teachings or the power of the sacraments. Christ did not promise us perfect leaders. He promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against His Church.

## The beauty of the Catholic faith A treasure hidden in plain sight

### More than just 'Me and Jesus'

It is common today to hear the phrase that faith is personal. While this is true in one sense, Catholicism reminds us that faith is never meant to be private.

When I walk into a Catholic church, I am not just stepping into a building. I am stepping into a reality where heaven and earth meet. The Mass is not just about my personal prayers. It is a participation in something far greater, something eternal. It unites us not just with fellow Catholics around the world, but with the saints and angels in heaven.

This is something I have always found deeply moving. The Catholic faith is not about an individual journey. It is about communion. It is about being part of the Body of Christ, connected to those who came before us and those who will come after us.

In a world that often glorifies individualism, the Church reminds us that we are never alone.

### The power of the sacraments

Some years ago, I found myself contemplating the sacraments in a way I never had before. What a gift they are, visible signs of God's grace, not just symbols, but real encounters with the divine.

The Eucharist is not just a remembrance of Christ's sacrifice. It is Christ Himself, fully present, body, blood, soul, and divinity. Every time I receive Him in Holy Communion, I am reminded that my faith is not just based on words or feelings. It is rooted in a tangible reality.

And then there is Confession. I have always been struck by the mercy of a God who not only forgives but allows us to hear those words of absolution. "I absolve you from your sins." It is not a priest acting on his own, but Christ Himself, working through His Church.

There is no greater peace than knowing that no sin is too great for God's mercy. And there is no greater privilege than receiving His grace through the sacraments He instituted.

### Truth that does not change with the times

We live in an age where everything seems uncertain. Morality is subjective and truth is often shaped by popular opinion. Yet, the Catholic Church remains steadfast, holding firm to the teachings of Christ, even when they are unpopular.

This is something I have always admired. While the world constantly shifts its values, the Church does not waver. Not because she is rigid, but because she is faithful. The truth does not change to fit the times. It is the times that must conform to the truth.

Of course, there have been moments in history when people within the Church have failed to live up to the faith they professed. We cannot deny that there have been scandals, corruption, and times of darkness. But just as individuals need conversion, the Church, too, has undergone renewal and reform, always guided by the Holy Spirit. It is not human perfection that sustains her. It is Christ Himself.

### A faith rich in beauty

Beauty has a way of stirring the soul and pointing us toward something beyond ourselves. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Catholic Church.

From the grandeur of Gothic cathedrals to the quiet reverence of Eucharistic Adoration. From the poetry of the liturgy to the wisdom of the saints. Catholicism is rich in beauty, not for the sake of aesthetics, but because beauty leads us to God.

I have always been drawn to the lives of the saints, real people who struggled, suffered, and persevered, showing us that holiness is possible in every vocation. And

then there is Mary, our Mother, who always leads us closer to Christ. There is something profoundly comforting in knowing that we do not walk this journey of faith alone.

The Church, in all her splendour, reflects the reality of heaven. The more I immerse myself in her richness, the more I see that this beauty is not superficial. It is sacramental. It is a glimpse of the divine.

### Why look elsewhere?

I often wonder how many people leave the Catholic Church without fully realising what they are leaving behind.

Some search for a faith that feels more engaging, more emotional, more convenient. Others may not even realise what the Church truly teaches, having only scratched the surface. And yet, I cannot bring myself to look elsewhere because I have come to believe that Catholicism is not just one way among many. It is the fullness of faith.

This is why I love being Catholic. Not because it is easy, but because it is true. Not because it makes me feel good, but because it draws me deeper into Christ. Not because it aligns with my preferences, but because it transforms me into something greater than myself.

There is nothing lacking in the Catholic faith. Nothing missing. Nothing incomplete. It is the Church Christ Himself established, the faith that has endured for over two thousand years, the place where heaven meets earth.

So why look elsewhere? Why settle for less when the fullness of truth is already here?

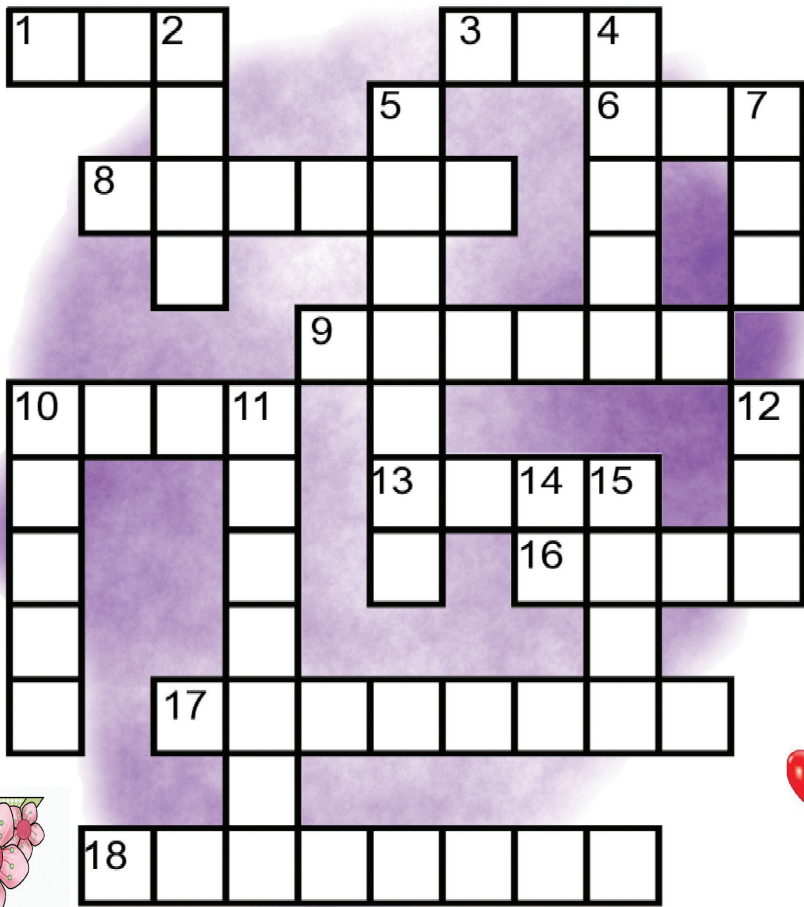
For those who may not have explored it deeply, I say this. Look again. Step into the mystery, the beauty, the depth of Catholicism. The Church is not just an institution. It is home. It is not just a religion. It is the path to eternal life.

And once you see it for what it truly is, you will never desire anything else.

**Thomson Emmanuel Wong**, a parishioner of the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes in Klang, is someone who deeply appreciates the beauty and richness of the Catholic faith.

# Little Catholics' corner

## Psalm 34 Cross-Word Puzzle



\_\_\_\_\_ (10D) and \_\_\_\_\_ (12D)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (10A) the Lord is good.  
 I will bless the Lord at all \_\_\_\_\_ (4D), His  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (9A) is always \_\_\_\_\_  
 (14D) my lips; In the Lord my \_\_\_\_\_ (2D)  
 shall \_\_\_\_\_ (15D) \_\_\_\_\_ (6A)  
 boast. The \_\_\_\_\_ (8A) shall hear  
 and be glad.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (5D) the Lord with me.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (17A)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (3A) us praise \_\_\_\_\_ (1A)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (16A),  
 I sought the Lord and he \_\_\_\_\_ (18A) me,  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (13A) all my \_\_\_\_\_ (11D)  
 he \_\_\_\_\_ (7D) me free.

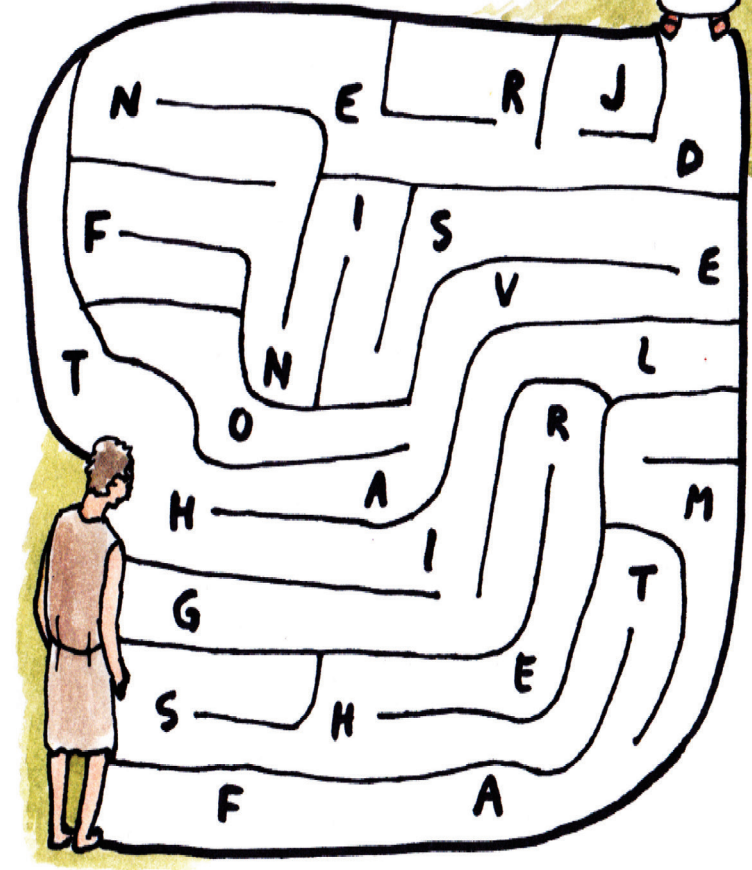
Use these words to fill in the blanks for the crossword puzzle.

- FROM
- TERRORS
- PRAISE
- SET
- GLORIFY
- LET
- HIS
- ANSWERED
- NAME
- ON
- SEE
- TASTE
- THAT
- HUMBLE
- ITS
- TIMES
- SOUL
- MAKE
- TOGETHER

ACROSS: 1.His 3.let 6.its 8.humble 9.praise 10.that 13.from 16.name 17.together 18.answered DOWN: 2.soul 4.times 5.glorify 7.set 10.taste 11.terrors 12.see 14.on 15.make

What did the son in today's Gospel reading say to show his father he was sorry?

Luke 15.1-3, 11-32



As you go through the maze, use only the letters in the right path to fill in the blanks:

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: Father I have sinned.

Dear children,

Today's Gospel reading tells us about God's forgiveness.

We are like the son who ran away and wasted all his money whenever we don't use our gifts or talents to serve God or others.

God is like the father in this story. He lets the younger son do whatever he wants but he loves him even when he chooses to be bad.

All he wants is for his son to come home and be sorry.

He is ready and waiting to forgive the prodigal son.

God is waiting to forgive us too, in the sacrament of Confession.

He wants us to be sorry for our sins and to tell Him we are sorry for our sins so He can take them away.

Try to make sure you go to confession before Easter so your soul will be clean and ready for the great celebration!

Love  
Aunty Eliz



# Unloading the 'heavy bag'

PARIT BUNTAR, Perak: In a heartwarming and reflective event held during the season of Lent, the Church of Our Lady of Good Health Youth Ministry hosted a meaningful programme called "The Heavy Bag." The event focused on the spiritual theme of forgiveness, an essential aspect of the Lenten season, which encourages reflection, penance, and reconciliation.

The activity aimed to help participants understand the burden of unforgiveness and how it weighs heavily on our hearts, hindering spiritual growth and peace. During the event, attendees were invited to carry a symbolic "heavy bag," in which stones were placed. Each stone represented a sin, grudge, or unresolved hurt, symbolising the emotional and spiritual burden we carry when we choose not to forgive.

As participants walked with the heavy bag, they were reminded of how unforgiveness can make life feel unbearable. The exercise helped attendees reflect on the importance of letting go of grudges, for-

giving others, and experiencing the peace that forgiveness brings to the soul.

The parish priest, Fr Martin Arlando shared an insightful reflection on the importance of forgiveness, reminding everyone that God forgives us daily, and we, too, are called to forgive those who wrong us. His words were a powerful reminder that forgiveness is not just an act of kindness towards others but also a means of healing for our own hearts.

The light of each candle served as a reminder that even in the darkest moments of life, God's light is always present, offering us hope and guidance. The flickering flames symbolised the small but powerful steps we take towards personal transformation, as we strive to reflect the love and mercy of Christ. As the candles were lit, it was a collective act of faith, where every participant shared in the hope that Christ brings to our lives.

The lighting of the candles also carried a deeper meaning tied to the themes of forgiveness and healing. During Lent, we are called to forgive others as God has forgiven us. The act of lighting the candle was a representation of how forgiveness can illuminate our hearts, clearing away the burdens of anger, resentment, and unforgiveness. Just as the candlelight dispels darkness, forgiveness dispels the heavy weight of sin and guilt, bringing peace and reconciliation to our souls.

Moreover, the lit candles stood as symbols of renewal. Each flame represented a new beginning, a chance to turn away from past mistakes, and to embrace a path of transformation. Just as the wax

of the candle melts and is reformed into a new shape, we too are invited to melt our hardened hearts and allow God's grace to reshape us during this Lenten season.

The event was followed by a prayer session, where participants offered prayers for healing, reconciliation, and strength to forgive those who had hurt them. The community gathered in unity, reflecting on how forgiveness strengthens not only personal relationships but also our connection with God and others.

"The Heavy Bag" programme was a beautiful and impactful experience for all who attended, providing an opportunity to reflect on their Lenten journey and deepen their faith through the transformative power of forgiveness.

The Church of Our Lady of Good Health continues to offer opportunities for spiritual growth and reflection during the Lenten season, with plans for more enriching programs in the coming weeks.



## Perjalanan SALIB towards MPC2026

The Perjalanan SALIB will begin on April 3, 2025, during the Malaysia Catholic Youth Day 2025, with a special cross blessed for public veneration. The cross will be divided into nine salibs, one for each diocese, and travel across Malaysia until August 2026.

At the inaugural Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026, the salibs will be reunited, symbolising the unity of the Church in Malaysia.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia has appointed coordinators in each diocese to oversee the Perjalanan SALIB and ensure its smooth running. Below are the thoughts of the coordinating teams.

### Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur

The team hopes that the *Perjalanan SALIB* will instil a greater sense of co-responsibility between the clergy, the religious and the laity and to promote authentic relationships.

### Diocese of Penang

As we reflect on Christ's final words on the cross, 'It is finished' (John 19:30), let us journey together in faith toward the victory of His resurrection. The Diocese of Penang hopes that the *Perjalanan Salib* will deepen the faith of both clergy and laity, strengthening unity, inspiring repentance, and renewing our commitment to Christ's ultimate sacrifice. May this sacred journey uplift small church communities, empower families, enrich society, and awaken a greater sense of care for God's creation.

### Diocese of Malacca Johore

May the *Perjalanan Salib* instil in us the spir-

itality of friendship, communion and discipleship by adhering to our Lord's call "To deny ourselves, pick up the Cross and follow Him"

### Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu

The team hopes that the *Perjalanan Salib* will inspire repentance at all levels of society and among the servants of the Church, rooting them in faith in Jesus Christ. Through this, may the Church become a living, active, and courageous witness to the proclamation of God's love, especially within families and communities, serving as a symbol of unity and strength in the life of the Church amidst the problems and challenges of today's world.

### Diocese of Keningau

*Semoga melalui Perjalanan Salib ini membawa semua umat untuk berjalan bersama dan memupuk semangat kesatuan,*

*kesetiaan dan kekudusan.*

### Diocese of Sandakan

The Sandakan Diocese committee hopes to encourage active participation from the clergy and laity regardless of age, race and multicultural differences, to inspire Christ-like features and to further answer the calls of the Vision and Mission of the Diocese through the *Perjalanan Salib*.

### Archdiocese of Kuching

The team hopes that the *Perjalanan Salib* gives everyone the opportunity to encounter God's love and be renewed and empowered to be His witnesses.

### Diocese of Sibiu

Let the *Perjalanan Salib* be our shared dream and hope, inspired by the words of Jesus in John 12:32: "When I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all men to Myself."



### Diocese of Miri

As we prepare to celebrate our diocese's 50th anniversary in 2026 and in addition to that, we eagerly await the ecological journey of the *Perjalanan Salib* in our midst to "berjalai segulai" among clergy, religious and laity to advance "peace and salvation of all the world", building relationship with our triune God, with each other and with mother earth. All these combined celebrations give us a sense of our perfect unity with God and Creation. God bless us all.

# A journey of interfaith understanding

SHAH ALAM: Confirmation students from the Church of the Divine Mercy recently embarked on a meaningful trip to visit three places of worship. This provided a wonderful opportunity for our young people to witness firsthand how individuals of different faiths practise their beliefs. In our multi-religious and multi-racial society, this experience holds special significance.

Some of these students may one day find themselves engaged in interfaith relationships, and this visit offered them a valuable chance to develop a deeper understanding and respect for other faith traditions. Over the past ten years at catechism, they have studied our Catholic faith in depth, and this visit gave them a brief yet enlightening glimpse into the religious practices of others in our community.

## Sri Maha Mariamman Temple, Sri Muda

Our first visit was to a Hindu temple, where we were warmly welcomed with great hospitality. The building was vibrant and colourful, with stunning architecture that depicted various Hindu deities. A guided tour was arranged by the temple management, and the leader took time to explain the significance of the deities and the rituals practised there. As teachers are highly respected in the Hindu faith, the catechists were honoured with garlands and shawls as a mark of respect. We were also fortunate to witness a Hindu catechism session in progress, showcasing the temple's role as a vibrant and central hub for the Hindu community. Light refreshments were served at the end of our visit.

## Masjid Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz, Shah Alam

Our next stop was the majestic mosque in the



The confirmation students with the Muslim delegates at the Masjid Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz.

heart of Shah Alam, the largest mosque in Malaysia, featuring four beautiful minarets. It has the capacity to accommodate 24,000 worshippers at once. Our visit began at the education centre, where we were warmly greeted by an African staff member who had converted to Islam from Christianity. A truly special moment occurred when one of our students beautifully explained the story of Jesus' resurrection at Easter. It was a privilege to witness this touching moment, which reinforced the importance of educating our children about the Catholic faith, as they will be the future witnesses for Jesus Christ.

During our visit, we also received a brief explanation about the Friday prayers, along

with a demonstration of the prayers performed.

## Gurdwara Sahib Guru Nanak, Shah Alam

Our final visit was to the Sikh Temple, where we learned about the origins of the Sikh faith. The word "Sikh" means disciple, and the faith was founded by Guru Nanak in the Punjab region during the 15th century. Sikhs believe in one God, equality, social justice, and service to humanity. We were graciously treated to a vegetarian lunch, and some of the boys even enjoyed a friendly game of football with members of the Sikh community before returning to CDM.

The visit was an eye-opening experience, offering us insight into the other religions in Shah Alam. It was a privilege to witness how other faiths worship and praise God. We realised that, despite our differences, we have much in common. Faith teaches us to respect and understand others' perspectives, fostering peace and harmony in our communities.

One of our students, Daniel Aidan Soosay, shared as follows:

"It gave me a better understanding how other people worship God. No matter how other religions picture God or practise different rituals, we all love God the same way. Everyone in each place was so friendly, and that's what God created us for; giving or sharing our love." **Tom Martin**



Sri Maha Mariamman Temple.

## Interfaith youth meeting promotes tolerance through shared fasting experiences

YOGYAKARTA: Youth representatives from six religious traditions gathered on March 15, for an Interfaith Youth Meeting hosted by the Interfaith Relations Team of Paroki Maria Marganingsih Kalasan (GMMK) to explore the spiritual meaning and practices of fasting across different faiths.

Held under the theme *Fasting from the Perspective of Different Religions*, the event brought together young people from Catholicism, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Confucianism.

Members of the Srikandi Interfaith Community (SriLi) also took part in the gathering, which forms part of GMMK's Community Program.

Bernardus Purnama of GMMK's Interfaith Relations Team said the initiative aims to promote interreligious understanding and tolerance among youth.

"The interfaith youth gathering serves as a platform for dialogue, knowledge-sharing, and understanding of fasting traditions. Through this initiative, it is hoped that young people can gain a deeper understanding of one



Participants of the Interfaith Youth Meeting on the meaning of fasting pose for a group photo on March 15, 2025, at St Mary's Marganingsih Kalasan Church in Yogyakarta. (Photo/CB Ismulyadi Cokro)

another and foster tolerance," he said.

Karolina Ratna from the Srikandi Interfaith Community welcomed the initiative, emphasising its potential for future collaboration. "Through meetings like this, we can develop other collaborative activities, such as inter-

faith visits and social service projects," she claimed.

The event reflects ongoing grassroots efforts in Yogyakarta to foster interreligious harmony through shared dialogue and engagement among youth. **LiCAS News**

Youth-led Lenten vigil promises an immersive spiritual journey



PETALING JAYA: This Lenten season, the Church of St Francis Xavier invites all youth to partake in a transformative overnight vigil, *John 3:16', Will You Stay Awake with Me?* from 9.00pm on Thursday, April 11, to 7.00am on Friday, April 12. Inspired by the renowned Oberammergau Passion Play, this unique event marks a first as it brings together all youth ministries of the parish in a powerful, unified experience.

The vigil will immerse participants in the final hours of Jesus Christ's life, as they witness the Last Supper, Passion, Death, and Entombment, brought to life across the church grounds. This interactive and visually captivating journey promises to stir deep reflection and emotional connection, inviting all to walk alongside Christ during His final moments.

Led entirely by the youth, this initiative showcases the remarkable dedication and talent of the parish's young members. From organising to executing every detail, the youth have crafted an event that promises a stunning experiential vigil with costumes, life size set, dynamic lighting and sound to create a truly unforgettable experience.

Offered free of charge, *John 3:16', Will You Stay Awake with Me?* aims to ensure that all youth, regardless of background, can participate in this meaningful spiritual journey. Designed to inspire reflection, prayer, and growth, the vigil offers a profound opportunity to deepen one's faith during the sacred Lenten season. Don't miss this chance to be part of something truly special — an unforgettable night of spiritual renewal and community.

This vigil is open to all youths aged 16-25. Sign up today via the QR code

For enquiries, please contact:  
Email: [memoriam@herald.com.my](mailto:memoriam@herald.com.my)  
Tel: 03-2026 8291

MEMORIAM

Requiescat in pace



**Donald De Cruz**  
9th February 1929 –  
2nd April 2021  
**(4th Anniversary)**

**Theresa Danker**  
1st December 1933 –  
13th January 2015  
**(10th Anniversary)**

“If we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we belong to God.”  
ROMANS 14:8

Deeply missed by children, in-laws, grandchildren and only great grand-daughter.



**15th Anniversary  
In Loving Memory of**  
**ANTHONY  
SATHIAWAN S/O  
R. P. ALWAR**  
19 August 1949 to  
8 April 2010

“Miss you Pappa”  
I miss you more than ever..  
Your guidance and your love.  
But, I know you’re still watching silently from above  
The love you gave still warms me the way it always will  
But leaving left an empty space that time can never fill  
From heaven you’re still giving the love you always had.  
I know you hear me talk to you.  
I will always love you Pappa.

Fondly remembered by your daughter, Maggie S.



**1st Year Anniversary**  
In Loving Memory of



And everyone  
who lives and  
believes in me  
shall never die

John 11:26

**Samuel Martin Devadas**  
13-Nov-1933 to 04-Apr-2024

Dearly missed and forever cherished by wife,  
daughter and relatives.

Mass will be offered on 6th April 2025 at 7am  
at Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Ipoh.



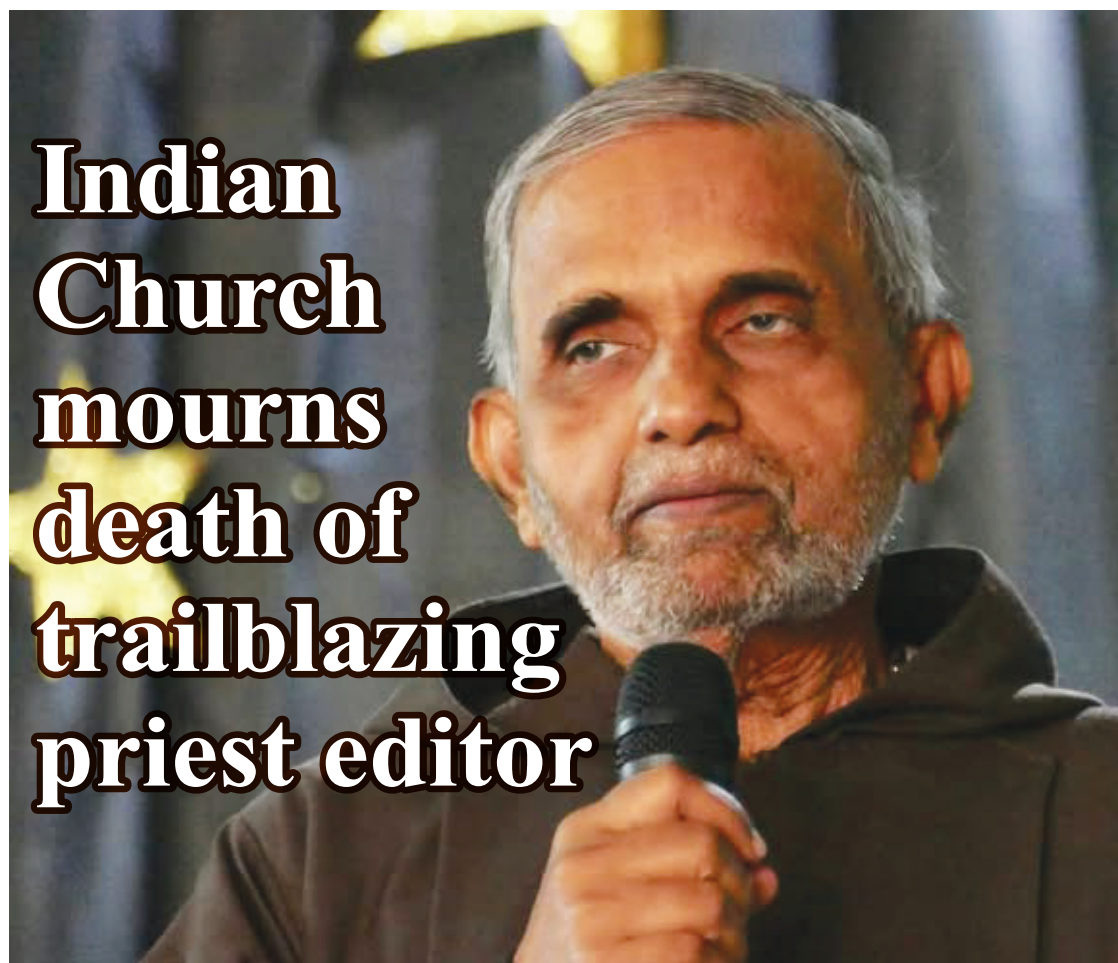
**6th Anniversary  
In Loving Memory of**



**Fitzgerald Kennedy s/o  
Assirvatham**  
Passed away too soon on  
**29th March 2019**  
‘Forever on our minds  
and in our hearts.

Sadly missed by  
Brother: Richard Stevenson &  
family, Sister: Jackqueline  
Bubenheim & family,  
relatives, ex-colleagues  
and friends.

# Indian Church mourns death of trailblazing priest editor



NEW DELHI: Capuchin Friar Fr Xavier Vadakkemkara, who braved partial blindness to inject new life into India’s leading Church weekly, *Indian Currents*, and mentor many young journalists, died on March 16. He was 72.

He passed away at Holy Family Hospital New Delhi, where he was admitted for the treatment of acute respiratory insufficiency.

Fr Xavier, as he was popularly known, was “a trailblazing Capuchin priest, journalist, and media leader who left an indelible mark on the Catholic media landscape in India,” says confrere Fr Suresh Mathew, another former *Indian Currents* editor.

“He was a driving force behind the Catholic Church’s efforts to engage with the world through the media. His visionary leadership, intellectual curiosity, and passion for social justice inspired a generation of Catholic journalists, writers, and thinkers,” Fr Mathew said in his condolence message.

A.J. Philip, a veteran journalist associated with Fr Xavier for years, says the Catholic priest injected new life into *Indian Currents*, founded by the late Fr John Vallamattom as a Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India publication.

Fr Xavier became its editor when his congregation took over the weekly in the early 1990s when it was on the verge of closure.

Fr Mathew’s message said the weekly, under his editorial guidance, “became beacons of progressive Catholic thought, tackling tough issues, and providing a platform for marginalised

voices.”

He had done the same to *Assisi*, a Malayalam monthly magazine he edited earlier based at Kerala’s Bharananganam town.

Fr Xavier’s “commitment to excellence, accuracy, and fairness earned him the respect and admiration of his peers and readers alike,” Fr Mathew added.

Fr Xavier was also the director of Media House in Delhi, playing “a pivotal role in shaping the Catholic Church’s publishing strategy in India. He was a master strategist, able to navigate the complexities of the media landscape with ease,” Fr Mathew said.

“He never shied away from confronting the government or exposing fundamentalist elements in the country through his work at *Indian Currents* weekly.”

Fr Xavier also addressed issues within the Church. “I recall a particularly striking cover page of *Indian Currents* that highlighted the denial of a funeral for a Catholic in a Kerala diocese, while also commending a bishop from North East India for his peace-building efforts among warring groups. His commitment to truth and justice was unwavering, and his legacy continues to inspire.”

Philip noted that Fr Xavier had nine siblings, of whom only two chose to become householders. The rest dedicated their lives to priesthood or religious service. “Few families,” he remarked, “have contributed as much human capital to the Church as his.” **Matters India**

**Remembering you  
on your 40th birthday  
Sherril Louisa Netto-Vijayan**

On April 4th, you would have turned forty,  
A milestone marked, a life full of stories.

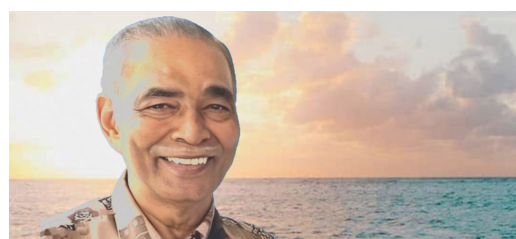
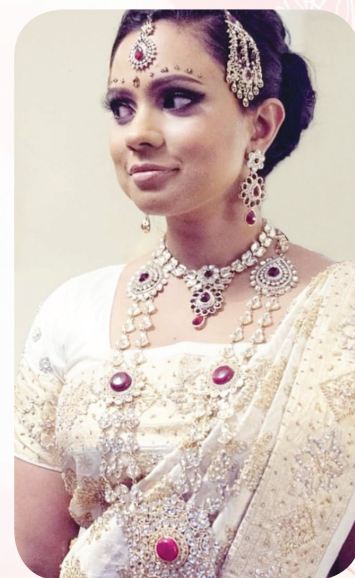
Though you’re not here,  
your memory stays,  
A light in our hearts,  
through all of our days.

Your laughter still echoes,  
your kindness still shines,

In every memory, your love intertwines.  
Though you’re not here to share this day,  
Your light guides us, in every way.

We miss you, Sherril, more than words say,  
But your love and your legacy  
will never decay.

Happy birthday in heaven, forever you’ll be,  
A part of our souls, for eternity.



*In Loving Memory*  
9th March 1943 - 28th February 2025  
**ANTHONY  
FRANCIS LOPEZ**

40th Day Prayers Saturday,  
5 April 2025 Church of Our Lady of  
Lourdes, Klang. Mass at 6:00 pm  
followed by fellowship at Lourdes  
Community Hall

*Father, how wonderful your care for us!  
How boundless your merciful love!  
To ransom a slave you gave away  
your Son. - the Exultet*

**14th Anniversary**



**In Ever Loving Memory  
of Louis Danasamy**  
13th February 1935 -  
1st April 2011

*Sadly missed along life’s way,  
quietly remembered every day.  
No longer in our life to share,  
but in our hearts,  
you’re always there.  
We love you, we miss you and  
wish you are here with us*  
Your loving wife Rose,  
daughters, sons-in-law &  
grandchildren.

**NOTICE**

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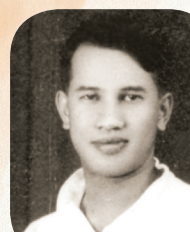
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**03-2026 8291**

Email: [memoriam@herald.com.my](mailto:memoriam@herald.com.my)

*“It is the Lord  
who goes before  
you. He will be  
with you; he will  
not leave you or  
forsake you.  
Do not fear or  
be dismayed.”*

Deuteronomy  
31:8

**40th Anniversary  
In Loving Memory of**



**Emile Victor Lessler**  
Departed: 07-04-1985

*“Give thanks to the Lord,  
for he is good; his steadfast  
love endures forever.”*

Lovingly remembered by  
children - Julie, Rita, Bunny,  
Linda, Hazel, Gerard, Kelly,  
Selena, their spouses,  
grandchildren and  
great-grandchildren.

# Avoid duplicating Good Friday's pontifical collection for the Holy Land

VATICAN: The prefect of the Holy See's Dicastery for the Eastern Churches, Cardinal Claudio Gugerotti, asked bishops to avoid promoting fundraising events that would duplicate the Pontifical Collection for the Holy Land taken up on Good Friday.

"Please, avoid our churches promoting similar collections for this same purpose, so that the meaning and effectiveness of your charity, which responds to the universal initiative of the successor of Peter, the bishop of Rome, are not undercut," the cardinal stated in a letter released March 17.

"Everything you have collected can be sent directly to this dicastery by the commissariats of the Holy Land in your country," he added in the letter, which was also signed by the secretary of the Holy See's Dicastery for the Eastern Churches, Archbishop Michel Jalakh.

The goal of the annual collection is to raise funds to sustain the holy sites and the charitable works carried out there. Ultimately, it aims to alleviate the suffering and needs of those Christians who, despite the difficulties, remain in the Holy Land.

"I feel a great responsibility to address the Catholic bishops, in the name of the Holy Father, to convey to you the call of the Church in response to the cry of those who are suffering terribly," wrote Gugerotti, who also said he is

"encouraged" by the recent truce between Israel and Hamas.

The prelate noted that with the truce there are no new explosions and unconsolable anguish is not being perpetuated.

The cardinal said the ceasefire, which has allowed the entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza and the West Bank, is "fragile" and "will not suffice to resolve the problems" and "extinguish hatred."

Gugerotti pointed out that this year the collection has become an "essential resource," especially after the pandemic, which caused the "almost complete interruption of pilgrimages" and led to many Christians leaving the Holy Land.

"If we want to strengthen the Holy Land and ensure living contact with the holy places, it is necessary to sustain the Christian communities that, in their diversity, offer perennial praise to God-with-us, also in our name. But for this



to be realised, we absolutely need the generous gift of your communities," he urged.

The prelate reiterated that those living in the Holy Land, "beginning with the children, have the right to live in peace" and to once again "have homes and schools, to play together, without the fear of seeing the satanic smile of death again."

"For us Christians, the holy places have a particular value: They are the incarnation of the Incarnation. They have been protected since the beginning by Christian communities, in the variety of their diverse traditions, and for centuries the Friars Minor of the Custody have cared for them with admirable fidelity," he pointed out.

After more than a year of conflict, Gugerotti lamented "we have seen tears, despair, and destruction everywhere."

The prelate said his hope is that "the triumph of inflicted death will not become an eternal

victory" but that "the hope will return to us of seeing the Risen One, Jesus Christ Our Lord, who, precisely on that land, showed, alive, the wounds of his passion."

The cardinal also cited the letter Pope Francis addressed to the Catholics of the Middle East on Oct. 7, 2024, encouraging them not to "let yourselves be engulfed by the darkness that surrounds you. Planted in your sacred lands, become sprouts of hope, because the light of faith leads you to testify to love amid words of hatred, to encounter amid growing confrontation, to unity amid increasing hostility."

For Gugerotti, helping them is a duty of all Catholics. "Immediately comes to mind our duty — and I use this term with trembling, but decisively — to hasten, as soon as possible in a concrete way, to help life be reborn."

"The Holy Land, the holy places, the holy people of God are your family, because they are the heritage of all of us. I ask you to consider the collection as one of your pastoral priorities: The survival of this precious presence of ours, which dates back directly to the time of Jesus, is at stake here," he explained. **Victoria Cardiel, CNA**

**Note: For Malaysia and Singapore, the Collection for Holy Land is on Holy Thursday.**

## Shroud of Turin to be digitally showcased during Holy Year

VATICAN: The Shroud of Turin, one of Catholicism's most valued devotional items, will be digitally showcased during the Holy Year 2025, allowing visitors to engage with the revered relic like never before.

The shroud, a linen cloth many believe is the burial shroud of Jesus Christ and bears his image, traditionally draws thousands of pilgrims during rare public displays.

While there will be no physical exposition of the shroud in 2025, the Archdiocese of Turin unveiled plans March 15 for a multimedia initiative featuring a full-scale digital version of the cloth to offer the faithful a new way to explore its image and mystery.

"In this Jubilee Year, we have sought a new approach to the shroud, focusing on new digital technologies," said Cardinal Roberto Repole of Turin at a news conference in Turin announcing the initiative while virtually linked to the Vatican press office.

"That cloth, the shroud, is an invitation to live life with hope, because it is also the imprint of the Resurrection — of someone who is no longer in death," the cardinal said, connecting the shroud to the Jubilee theme of hope.

Visitors to the northern Italian city can experience the "Tent of the Shroud" in Turin's main square, Piazza Castello, April 28-May 5, where the life-sized digital replica will be displayed on an interactive table. The installation allows viewers to illuminate and explore key details of the cloth, such as the



**Pope Francis touches the case holding the Shroud of Turin after praying before the cloth in 2015 at the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Turin, Italy. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)**

face, the crown of thorns and the marks of crucifixion. The digital replica of the shroud will be made available online after its exhibition in Turin.

The tent will also host a photographic exhibit titled "Faces in the Face" — a collection of portraits and images that explore the face of Christ as reflected in the Shroud of Turin and in the faces of people both throughout history and in present day.

Daily talks on faith, youth and hope also will be offered in the tent.

A major goal of the initiative, organisers said, is to engage young people in the mystery and message of the shroud. On May 3, the feast of the Shroud of Turin, hundreds of young people from the dioceses of Turin and Susa will gather at the tent for a day of prayer and reflection as part of local Jubilee celebrations.

Organisers also are planning for the young people to join for a moment of prayer in front of the digital shroud while connected live with Pope Francis.

Cardinal Repole said he hoped the new way of engaging with the shroud "will draw new people who are interested in the shroud, in its vision and particularly what it represents to younger generations."

Especially at a time marked by war, economic insecurity and social isolation, "the shroud, as a mold of the Resurrection, is hope," the cardinal said, "because it opens us up to contain all the good that we experience in this life, but also to redeem all the bad."

The Shroud of Turin has been venerated for centuries as a relic of Jesus' passion and resurrection. While its authenticity remains a topic of scientific debate, the shroud holds deep devotional significance to many Catholics and has inspired pilgrimages and extensive research.

It is housed in the Cathedral of St John the Baptist in Turin, and due to its fragile condition is only occasionally displayed to the public during special events. The last time the shroud was on display was in 2015. **Justin McLellan, CNS**

## Indian canonist joins International Scientific Committee

ROME: Fr Dr Merlin Rengith Ambrose *pic* has been nominated by the Pontifical Urban University in Rome to serve on the International Scientific Committee and Editorial Board of *Ius Missionale*, a prestigious Italian canonical journal published by the university. In this newly acquired role, he will represent Asia while also continuing his important work as a faculty member of Canon Law at St Peter's Pontifical Seminary in Bangalore and as the Executive Secretary of the Commission for Canon Law within the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI).



This appointment complements his existing *docens stabilis* (*Missio Canonica*), granted by the Dicastery for Culture and Education at the Vatican in 2023. His academic contributions are well-documented through a wide array of publications, including authored books and peer-reviewed articles in both Indian and international academic journals. Additionally, he is an executive committee member of the Canon Law Society of India (CLSI).

Fr Dr Merlin's profound loyalty to the Church, his committed approach to research, and his passion for teaching, coupled with a pastoral heart, are truly commendable. It is anticipated that his contributions — rooted in his experience within the Indian ecclesiastical context — will significantly enhance the academic standing of *Ius Missionale* and further advance the field of canonical studies within both the Indian Church and the universal Church.