

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



VATICAN: As the Church marks the 60th World Day of Social Communications on May 17, themed *Preserving Human Voices and Faces*, Pope Leo XIV has cautioned that artificial intelligence must serve humanity — not replace it — warning that unchecked technology risks eroding human dignity, creativity, and authentic relationships.

At the centre of his message is a simple but urgent reminder: the human face and voice are sacred. They are not just physical features, but expressions of identity and relationship. Drawing on ancient thought, the Pope noted that the Greek *prósōpon* refers to what stands before another, while the Latin term “person” (from *per-sonare*) reflects the distinct sound of a person’s voice — together revealing the human person as one made for encounter.

This identity, he said, is rooted in God. Created in His image, every person is called into relationship through the Word made flesh in Jesus Christ. “Preserving human faces and voices,” he stressed, “means preserving this reflection of divine love.”

However, in an age increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence, that identity is under pressure.

The Pope warned that technologies capable of simulating human voices, faces, and emotions are not only transforming communication but also reshaping relationships. “The challenge is not technological, but anthropological,” he said, emphasising that what is at stake is the very nature of being human.

He pointed to the growing influence of social media algorithms, which prioritise emotional reactions over thoughtful engagement. Such systems, he said, weaken critical thinking and contribute to polarisation by trapping users in cycles of instant reaction and outrage.

There is also a growing tendency to treat artificial intelligence as an all-knowing authority. Over-reliance on AI, the Pope warned, risks dulling creativity, weakening judgement, and reducing the human capacity to think independently.

The rise of AI-generated content further complicates the landscape. From text to music and video, human creativity risks being reduced to raw material for machines, while people themselves become passive consumers. “Renouncing creativity,” he said, is akin to “burying the talents” entrusted to humanity.

The Pope also raised concern over the blurring line between real and artificial interaction. Chatbots and “virtual influencers” can now simulate human relationships and subtly shape opinions, especially among vulnerable individuals.

“These systems,” he warned, “can become hidden architects of our emotional states,” influencing behaviour in ways that are not always visible or understood. Replacing real relationships with artificial ones, he added, risks deepening isolation rather than fostering connection.

Bias within AI systems presents another challenge. Since these technologies are shaped by human input, they can reproduce and amplify existing prejudices, distorting reality and reinforcing inequality.

“The stakes are high,” the Pope said, pointing to AI’s ability to generate convincing false realities, including manipulated voices and images. Without safeguards, such tools risk

fuelling disinformation and undermining trust in public life.

Despite these warnings, Pope Leo made clear that technological progress should not be feared, but guided.

“We are not called to stop digital development, but to guide it,” he said.

He proposed three key principles: responsibility, cooperation, and education.

Responsibility must be shared by all — from tech developers and media organisations to lawmakers and users. Platforms must prioritise the common good, while AI-generated content should be clearly identified to ensure transparency.

Cooperation across sectors is essential to ensure ethical development, bringing together governments, industry leaders, educators, and communicators.

Education, however, is the most urgent need. The Pope called for stronger media and AI literacy to help people think critically, discern truth, and navigate an increasingly complex digital environment.

“As the industrial revolution required basic literacy,” he noted, “so too does the digital revolution require a new form of literacy.”

Ultimately, the Pope’s message is a call to return to what is essential: authentic communication grounded in truth, dignity, and human encounter.

“We need faces and voices to speak for people again,” he said.

As the Church marks this year’s communications day, the message is clear: technology must remain a tool — never a substitute — for the human person.

The full message can be accessed at: <https://bit.ly/4tVksDQ>

But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

1 Peter 4:13-14



Labuan Catholics give thanks at church consecration

■ P3



Celebrating the Feast of St Joseph

■ P5



Holding the line between truth and noise

■ P12

The Catholic Weekly
HERALD

ESTABLISHED 1994

Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre
5, Jalan Robertson, 50150, KL
Tel / Whatsapp: 03-20268291

Jointly published by the
Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur,
Diocese of Malacca Johore,
Diocese of Penang and
Diocese of Keningau



EDITOR

Patricia Pereira
editor1@herald.com.my



ASSISTANT EDITOR

Sandra Ann Inbaraj
sandra@herald.com.my



JOURNALIST

Christina Lazaroo
christina@herald.com.my



GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Amanda Mah
amanda@herald.com.my



SOCIAL MEDIA

Kevin Francis
kevin@herald.com.my



BAHASA MALAYSIA

Melania Liza Magnus
liza@herald.com.my



MANDARIN

Adelina Wong
yin4482@gmail.com



TAMIL

Perzeus James
tamil@herald.com.my



ADMIN ASSISTANT

Rachael Sharma
admin@herald.com.my

ADVERTISEMENT/SUBSCRIPTION
advertisement@herald.com.my

MEMORIAM

memoriam@herald.com.my

LETTERS

letterseditor@herald.com.my

Social Media



www.heraldmalaysia.com



@heraldmalaysia



heraldmalaysia
Herald Snapshot



@heraldsnapshot

Disclaimer:

The publication provides a platform for diverse perspectives, and the inclusion of these contributions is intended to encourage dialogue and reflection within the Catholic community. The views and opinions expressed in the articles contributed are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the editorial policy or official stance of HERALD The Catholic Weekly.

Become a voice in the HERALD community

Capture and share the spirit and vibrancy of your parish or ministry life with our readers. We're looking for concise articles between 400 to 500 words, accompanied by high-resolution photos (300 DPI) in JPG or PNG format. Don't forget to include captions that bring your images to life. Your contributions are essential in keeping our faith community connected and informed. Send your articles to editor1@herald.com.my



In the age of AI, stay human

The 60th World Day of Social Communications invites us to reflect deeply on the theme given by Pope Leo XIV: *Preserving Human Voices and Faces*. In his message, the Holy Father reminds us that every human face and every human voice is sacred because they reflect the image of God. In a world increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence, algorithms and digital media, this message is timely and important.

Today, communication is happening faster than ever before. News spreads within seconds. Videos, comments and opinions can reach thousands of people instantly. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is now able to create texts, voices, images and even videos that look real. While technology brings many benefits, Pope Leo XIV warns that we must never allow technology to replace our humanity.

The Holy Father reminds us that communication is not only about information. It is about relationships, truth, understanding and encounter. Human communication carries emotions, compassion, sincerity and responsibility. A machine may imitate a human voice, but it cannot truly love, forgive, accompany or understand the pain of another person.

In Malaysia, we live in a multicultural and multireligious society. Communication plays a very important role in preserving harmony and mutual respect among our people.

Social media has become a powerful tool for evangelisation, education and outreach. Many

parishes and ministries today produce podcasts, create short videos and share reflections online. These are beautiful opportunities to bring the Gospel into the digital world. At the same time, we also witness the darker side of digital communication. False information, online insults, manipulation, cyberbullying and hateful comments are becoming common. Sometimes people speak harshly online in ways they would never do face-to-face. Pope Leo XIV reminds us that behind every screen is a real person, with a human face and voice deserving dignity and respect.

As communicators in the Church, we are called to promote truth, responsibility and compassion. We cannot simply chase views, likes and popularity. Our mission is to communicate hope, unity and the presence of Christ. The Holy Father strongly encourages media literacy and critical thinking, especially among young people. This is something very relevant for our region.

Pope Leo XIV also highlights the importance of protecting authentic human creativity. In recent years, AI-generated content has become increasingly common. While these tools can assist us in our work, they should never replace the human heart behind communication. A reflection written with prayer, a testimony shared with sincerity, or a story told with compassion carries a human spirit that no machine can fully reproduce.

Within the Church in Malaysia, we have witnessed many positive examples of authentic communication through livestreamed Masses,

reflections, videos and social media outreach. These efforts have helped spread hope, strengthened faith and keep communities connected. They remind us that technology can become a powerful instrument of evangelisation when guided by Gospel values.

The Pope proposes three important pillars for the future of communication: responsibility, cooperation and education. These three pillars are urgently needed in our society today. Responsibility reminds us to use media ethically and truthfully. Cooperation calls all sectors, governments, media organisations, educators, families and the Church, to work together for the common good. Education helps people develop critical thinking so they can distinguish truth from manipulation.

As we celebrate the 60th World Day of Social Communications, let us renew our commitment to become communicators of hope. Let us use our voices to build peace and understanding. Let us preserve the beauty of authentic human encounters in a world increasingly influenced by artificial intelligence. Most importantly, let us never forget that every human face reflects the face of Christ and every human voice carries a dignity given by God Himself.

May our communication always remain deeply human, truthful and filled with compassion.

Daniel Roy Santiyagu

Daniel is the Chairman of the Episcopal Regional Commission for Social Communication Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei.

Between promise and fulfilment

All of us have probably experienced what it feels like to look forward to something: a wedding, a graduation, a fresh start in a new job, and many more. The feeling is palpable and deeply engaging. The closer we get to the day, the more we grow excited, nervous, perhaps even a little anxious about what lies ahead.

Anticipation has a way of stretching time. The present moment feels fuller, almost charged, as though something is about to break open. We find ourselves living not only in the “now,” but also in the “not yet.” This Sunday places us precisely in that space. The Ascension has just taken place. The Lord has returned to the Father. Pentecost has not yet come. The Church stands in between — waiting, praying, watching. It is a moment suspended between promise and fulfilment.

In the first reading from Acts, the Apostles return to Jerusalem and gather in the upper room. There is no grand strategy, no immediate plan of action. Instead, there is something far more fundamental: they devote themselves to prayer. Together with Mary, they wait. This is not passive waiting, but one filled with trust and quiet hope. If we are honest, this is not always easy for us. We prefer clarity, timelines, and outcomes. We like to know what comes next; we do not like to be put on pause. Yet the Christian life often unfolds in this very rhythm — God gives a promise and then invites us to wait.

The Gospel today shows us what this waiting looks like from the heart of Christ Himself. Jesus lifts His eyes to heaven and prays to the Father, entrusting His disciples into His care. “Holy Father, protect them in Your name that You have given Me, so that

they may be one, as We are one” (Jn 17:11b). This is not just a prayer for the Apostles, but for us. In a world that is constantly shifting, where voices compete for our attention and truth can become divisive, Jesus prays that we remain rooted, united, and faithful. He knows that we will live in the tension between presence and absence — He is no longer visibly with us, and yet He has not left us alone.

The second reading from Peter adds another layer to this anticipation. It speaks not of comfort, but of participation in Christ’s sufferings: “If you can have some share in the sufferings of Christ, be glad.” At first, this sounds almost paradoxical. Yet St Peter reminds us that our present struggles are not empty. They are part of a larger story moving towards glory. The waiting of the Christian is not idle — it is a participation in the life of Christ Himself. Even difficulties or sacrifices borne for the sake of the Gospel become part of this journey toward fulfilment.

Anticipation, then, is not simply about looking forward to something pleasant. It is about trusting that God is at work, even when the path is unclear, and even when the waiting feels long. This becomes especially meaningful as we observe World Day of Social Communications this Sunday.

We live in a world saturated with messages. Notifications buzz, headlines compete, and opinions multiply. Information travels faster than ever before, and social media becomes an eager outlet to share and react. In such a landscape, anticipation can easily give way to anxiety. Instead of waiting with hope, we react with urgency, fear, or even noise. News of wars, conflicts, and disasters

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with Bro Ashley Stephen Chau

7th Sunday of Easter (A)

Readings: Acts of the Apostles 1:12-14;

1 Peter 4:13-16;

Gospel: John 17:1-11

can easily overwhelm us with worry about tomorrow.

The readings this Sunday gently challenge us: what kind of people are we becoming in the way we communicate? The Apostles, in their time of waiting, chose prayer, unity, and attentiveness to God’s voice. They did not rush ahead of the Spirit or fill the silence with unnecessary words. They allowed themselves to be formed in that space of anticipation.

At the heart of Christian communication is not merely the exchange of information, but the sharing of life, truth, and hope. We speak to God in prayer, and we speak to others through our words and actions.

As we await Pentecost, we are reminded that the Holy Spirit is the true communicator — the one who bridges hearts, heals divisions, and leads us into all truth. And so, we return to that image of anticipation: the Church gathered in prayer, hearts quietly waiting for what God will do next.

Here is the gentle but firm hope of this Sunday: the waiting is not wasted. God is not absent. The promise is already unfolding, here and now. Until then, we wait — not in fear, but in trust. Not in idleness, but in prayer. Not alone, but together. Because the Church continues to pray, as she always has, since that sacred day in the upper room.

Labuan Catholics give thanks at church consecration

Phil Gibson

LABUAN: The ringing of bells, the fragrance of incense and the prayers of hundreds of faithful marked a deeply significant day for Catholics in Labuan as the new Church of the Blessed Sacrament was solemnly consecrated on April 29. The long-awaited celebration brought together clergy, religious and parishioners in a joyful expression of thanksgiving as the new church officially became a sacred place dedicated to the worship of God.

The Rite of Consecration was presided over by Archbishop John Wong, together with priests from the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu, witnessed by hundreds of faithful who filled the newly completed church in prayer and gratitude.

The consecration marked a major milestone for the Catholic community following the rebuilding of the church on its original site. Constructed at an estimated cost of RM7.4 million, the new church now stands as a visible symbol of faith, hope and unity for the growing Catholic population in Labuan, which had long awaited a larger and more suitable place of worship to meet its expanding pastoral needs.

The Church of the Blessed Sacrament remains one of the oldest and most historically significant Catholic parishes in Labuan. The roots of the Catholic faith on the island trace back to the late 19th century, when Mill Hill missionaries first arrived to serve the small but



Archbishop John Wong unveiling the plaque at the Church of the Blessed Sacrament in Labuan.

steadily growing Catholic community. Over the decades, Blessed Sacrament parish became the spiritual heart of Catholic life in Labuan and played an important role in the growth of the Church throughout the region.

Before the establishment of the local Church structure in Brunei, the Catholic community there was also entrusted to the pastoral care of Blessed Sacrament parish in Labuan. This historical connection further highlights the parish's contribution to the development of the Catholic Church in Northern Borneo.

In his homily, Archbishop John reminded the faithful that a church is far more than a beautiful building. Rather, it is a sacred place where the People of God gather as one Body of Christ to worship, pray and encounter the living presence of God. He explained that the consecration of a church signifies the complete dedica-

tion of the house of worship to God, making it a holy place set apart for prayer, the sacraments and communion with Him.

The archbishop also encouraged the faithful to see the church as a spiritual home open to all, especially those who are weary, wounded, lost or searching for hope. A consecrated church, he said, should become a visible sign of God's presence in society where people may encounter mercy, forgiveness, healing and the peace of Christ.

Archbishop John further stressed that the building of the Church does not end with the completion of a physical structure. The faithful themselves, he said, are called to become "living stones" who continue building up the Church through holy living, mutual love and generous service. He reminded the congregation that the Church flourishes when its people

live in unity, humility and faithfulness to the Gospel.

Reflecting on the Eucharist, the archbishop noted that the very name "Blessed Sacrament" points to the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist. For this reason, he said, the church should become a centre of Eucharistic devotion, adoration, prayer and spiritual renewal — a sacred place where the faithful continually return to seek strength, peace and guidance from God in their daily lives.

He also called for greater participation of young people in the life and mission of the Church, emphasising that even the most magnificent church building would mean little without a living and active faith among the faithful, especially the younger generation who will carry the Church forward in the future.

The liturgy took on added significance as the Rite of Consecration unfolded according to the rich traditions of the Catholic Church, including the blessing and anointing of the altar and church walls — sacred signs that the building now belongs entirely to God. Liturgical hymns, communal prayers, incense and the lighting of the consecration candles further deepened the solemn and prayerful atmosphere of the celebration.

The occasion also became a moment of gratitude and remembrance for the long journey undertaken by the Catholic community in Labuan to make the new church a reality. Many faithful expressed heartfelt thanksgiving as they witnessed the fulfilment of a long-awaited dream — not merely the completion of a new building, but a living symbol of a faith that continues to grow and flourish within the community.

After the consecration Mass, the celebration continued in a joyful spirit of fellowship and thanksgiving at a gathering held in the parish hall.

Diocese of Keningau rejoices in growth with new parish declaration



Bishop Cornelius Piong with the UTK (Ulangtahn Keuskupan Keningau) flag.

KENINGAU: Thousands of Catholics from across the Diocese of Keningau gathered in a spirit of thanksgiving and celebration on May 1 for a historic four-in-one occasion — the 33rd anniversary of the Diocese of Keningau; the 33rd episcopal anniversary of Bishop Cornelius Piong; the elevation of the Church of Our Lady Help of Christians, Mission Kemabong as a new parish, and the Kaamatan Festival 2026.

The celebration marked a significant milestone in the history of the diocese, particularly with the official proclamation of Mission Kemabong as the 10th parish in the Diocese of Keningau — a reflection of the continuing growth and vitality of the Catholic community in Sabah's interior regions.

From early morning, the celebration grounds came alive with parishioners dressed in colourful traditional attire representing Sabah's diverse ethnic communities. Cultural performances, ethnic music and community booths added warmth and vibrancy to the gathering, which was attended by clergy, church leaders, community representatives and visitors from neighbouring districts.

The integration of the Kaamatan Festival into the diocesan celebration created a joyful atmosphere as the faithful celebrated not only the harvest of the land, but also what many described as a "spiritual harvest" — the growth of faith, unity and pastoral development within the diocese.

A highlight of the celebration was the formal declaration of the Church of Our Lady Help of Christians, Mission Kemabong — established on May 5, 1998 — as a parish. The announcement was met with thunderous applause and visible emotion from parishioners who had waited nearly three decades for the historic moment.

The proclamation fulfilled an announcement first made by Bishop Cornelius during the diocese's 32nd anniversary celebration in 2025 at the Church of St Theresa, when he revealed that Mission Kemabong would eventually be elevated to parish status. With its new designation, Kemabong parish will now function with its own pastoral and administrative structure, allowing for more focused ministry and closer engagement

with the local faithful.

In his homily, Bishop Cornelius reflected on the growth of the Diocese of Keningau, describing the establishment of a new parish as more than an expansion of church structures. Rather, he said, it was a visible sign of a growing and maturing faith community and a reflection of God's enduring presence among His people.

He reminded the congregation that the Church is not defined by buildings alone, but by communities united in prayer, service, love and mutual support. He encouraged the faithful to continue walking together as one family of God, especially during times of challenge and uncertainty.

Touching on the Kaamatan celebration, Bishop Cornelius said culture and faith can grow hand in hand when God remains at the centre of life. He described culture as a gift from God that should be appreciated and preserved, adding that traditions rooted in gratitude, unity and respect can become meaningful expressions of Christian faith and identity.

The bishop also emphasised the important role of families in nurturing faith, describing the

family as the "domestic church" where faith is first experienced, learned and lived before being shared with the wider community. He urged parents and children to strengthen harmony, prayer and spiritual life within the home.

The celebration also provided an opportunity for the faithful to express appreciation for Bishop Cornelius Piong's leadership since his episcopal ordination in 1993. Under his guidance, the Diocese of Keningau has continued to grow in pastoral outreach, church development, faith formation and active participation among Catholic communities, particularly in rural and interior areas.

Towards the conclusion of the celebration, it was announced that the Church of St Bede will host the 34th anniversary celebration of the Diocese of Keningau next year, drawing enthusiastic applause from the congregation.

The four-in-one celebration marked a new chapter for the Catholic community in Keningau — one rooted in faith, cultural identity and renewed hope as the Church continues its journey in Sabah.

KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE
Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow
 May
 17-25 Ad Limina Visit to Rome

PENANG DIOCESE
Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis
 May
 16-27 Ad Limina Visit to Rome
 24 Mass – Pentecost & Confirmation at Parrocchia Santa Maria Causa Nostrae Laetitiae, Roma

MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE
Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul
 May
 17-25 Ad Limina Visit to Rome

Finding God's strength in the midst of cancer

KUALA LUMPUR: The Cathedral of St John the Evangelist was filled with faith, hope and solidarity recently as Sisters in Christ, a support group comprising Catholic cancer survivors from various parishes, gathered to celebrate the Feast of St Peregrine, patron saint of those suffering from cancer, on May 2.

The day began with the recitation of the Rosary, followed by Mass celebrated by parish priest, Fr Gerard Theraviam.

In his homily, Fr Gerard reflected on his late mother's three-year battle with cancer, sharing how the illness affected not only the patient but the entire family and community around her. He described it as a journey that became a period of spiritual growth and deeper dependence on God.

He cautioned against falling into self-pity, encouraging those present instead to place their hope and trust in the Lord, allowing God to use their suffering for His glory. Quoting Isaiah 49:6, he reminded the congregation: "... I will make you a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."

Fr Gerard also spoke on the theme of *Redemptive Suffering*, drawing from St John Paul II's Apostolic Letter on *Salvifici Doloris* and Colossians 1:24, emphasising the call to unite one's suffering with Christ. Reflecting on Romans 8:16-17, he said: "The Spirit Himself joins with our spirit to bear witness that we are



children of God. And if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, provided that we share His suffering, so as to share His glory."

"The Cross is part of life," he said. "Let us embrace the Cross and discover Jesus in our lives, for God is always with us."

After Mass, members gathered for fellowship. The highlight was a sharing session where three women spoke about their cancer journeys and the strength they found through faith.

Emma (not her real name) recounted how her journey began in January 2023 following biopsy results that later confirmed metastatic cancer. Guided by Isaiah 41:10, "Fear not, for I am with you," she shared how surrendering her need for control to God brought her an unexpected peace.

Holding on to Proverbs 3:5, "Trust in the Lord," Emma said she experienced calmness

and strength instead of fear. Remarkably, she underwent chemotherapy without side effects, which she described as a testimony to the grace and strength she received through prayer and faith. Though still undergoing treatment, she continues to live with gratitude and unwavering trust in God, who, she said, "never left her."

Priscilla offered a different perspective as she spoke about accompanying her mother, Elizabeth Arokiasamy, through stomach cancer. The fear of losing her mother was overwhelming, especially after Elizabeth slipped into a coma following severe bleeding after surgery.

During that critical period, Elizabeth experienced a vision of a beautiful lady wearing a crown. Today, she is cancer-free. Their testimony highlighted how cancer is never faced alone, but becomes a journey carried by family, community and prayer.

Beatrice (Susie) Jacob shared how years of

caring for her sister during cancer treatment left her deeply fearful of the suffering associated with the illness. When she herself was diagnosed with cancer, her initial response was to refuse treatment entirely.

However, through prayer and surrender to God's will, she gradually found the courage to seek treatment and pray for her own healing. Like Emma, she too underwent chemotherapy without side effects and is currently doing well. Her testimony became a living reminder that "God is good all the time."

Cancer remains a frightening reality for many. From the moment of diagnosis begins a difficult journey filled with hospital visits, scans, surgeries, treatments and uncertainty. Yet within Sisters in Christ, many have discovered strength in walking together through shared experiences, anchored by faith.

The group continues to serve as a sanctuary where cancer warriors, survivors and caregivers can find spiritual support, encouragement and companionship rooted in the Catholic faith.

Those who are survivors, currently undergoing treatment, or caring for loved ones with cancer and wish to find a community of faith and support are welcome to join the group free of charge.

For more information, please contact Joyce Gayathree (016-6574146), Joyce Joseph (017-3284638) or Adeline Joseph (016-3789300)

Crime prevention talk makes strong impact

KUALA LUMPUR: The Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (SHC) hosted a *Crime Prevention Awareness* programme on April 26, organised by the Prison Ministry under the Parish Integral Human Development Ministry (PIHDM).

The programme was coordinated by Anne Elizabeth, coordinator of the SHC Prison Ministry, while Eric Anthony, chairman of PIHDM, facilitated the session. The initiative sought to raise awareness among students, parents, teachers, and parishioners about the growing social and criminal challenges today. Parishioners were encouraged to take part, recognising that vigilance and proactive engagement are key to navigating modern-day risks.

The invited speaker, Harjinder Singh Sindhu, an experienced legal practitioner, shared insights drawn from cases involving crimes in schools, homes, and public spaces. Addressing issues affecting both boys and girls, he emphasised the importance of awareness, personal responsibility, and sound decision-making, particularly among the young.

The speaker began with sexual offences, outlining the various forms and their lasting impact on victims. He emphasised the importance of creating safe environments, raising awareness, and understanding both the legal rights of victims and the support services available to them.

Participants were then briefed on Malaysian laws governing the possession, use, and trafficking of firearms, knives, and other prohibited weapons. Drawing from real-life cases, the speaker highlighted the severe penalties involved and underscored the need for responsible conduct.

The discussion also covered dangerous drugs, examining the different types and their harmful effects. Emphasis was placed on prevention, early intervention, and rehabilitation, with particular focus on the role of parents and youth in addressing the issue.

Attention was also given to gangsterism among youth, including methods of recruitment and group dynamics. The speaker highlighted the serious consequences of involve-

ment and urged participants to remain vigilant and informed.

A key takeaway from the programme was the need to avoid harmful behaviours. Many young people, often without realising it, can be drawn into risky activities due to peer pressure — such as substance use or carrying prohibited items — which may lead to serious legal consequences. The session also underscored the vital role of parental guidance and active involvement in safeguarding children.

Then, Audrey Freeman, President of the Catholic Prison Fellowship Association (CPFA) under the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development (AOHD), offered a compelling glimpse into life behind bars. Drawing from her team's weekly prison visits — where they meet inmates, offer support, and share the Word of God — she reflected on Matthew 25:36, "I was in prison and you visited Me."

She spoke candidly about the struggles faced by inmates. Once incarcerated, individuals are no longer known by name but by a number, of-

ten losing a sense of identity and dignity. They must adhere to strict regulations while enduring harsh conditions, with meals that are basic and repetitive, offering little comfort.

She concluded with a firm reminder that being "cool" or falling in with the wrong company is never worth the cost. Instead, she encouraged those present to follow the path of faith and values exemplified by Jesus. Her testimony offered a sobering glimpse into the consequences of poor choices and the human cost of crime.

Approximately 150 to 160 parishioners attended the programme. The hall was filled with attentive young participants, ranging from Standard 6 to Form 5, who were encouraged to reflect on their decisions and future paths. The session proved both educational and impactful, sparking meaningful discussions, with the lively question-and-answer segment drawing thoughtful and insightful queries from students.

The parish community expressed sincere appreciation to the speakers, organisers, and volunteers for their dedication and effort. The programme was a resounding success, leaving a lasting impression on all who attended. **Aneezlavet Stephen**

Letters to Editor

Men hurt too in broken families

Dear Editor,

I refer to the article *Broken Families and the Heart of Christ* by Dr Brendan Gomez published in *HERALD* on April 26.

I broke down in tears after reading it because, for the first time in a very long while, I felt seen. So much of what was written reflected my own painful reality. I am a father who has endured years of physical, emotional and mental abuse from my former wife. Due to her wealth and influence, I have also been deprived of seeing my

children, and the pain of that separation is something words can scarcely describe.

Society often assumes that men are always the stronger party in a broken marriage, but there are many fathers silently suffering behind closed doors. Many of us carry deep wounds, grief, shame and loneliness, yet remain afraid to speak because we fear ridicule, disbelief or being judged. We sit quietly in church, trying to hold ourselves together, while inwardly struggling with heartbreak and despair.

Dr Brendan's article courageously high-

lighted the hidden suffering of fathers who feel silenced, marginalised and invisible after divorce. I believe there are many men in our Catholic community who could identify with every word he wrote. We long not for pity, but for understanding, accompaniment and healing.

I sincerely hope the Church in Malaysia will take this issue seriously and consider establishing ministries or support groups for separated and divorced men and fathers. Even a small, confidential space where wounded fathers can pray, share and heal

without fear of judgment could become a lifeline for many. As Dr Brendan rightly pointed out, healing begins when broken hearts are allowed to grieve in the presence of Christ and a compassionate community.

The Church has always been called to be a place of mercy and refuge for the wounded. I pray that fathers who are suffering silently will no longer feel forgotten or invisible, but reminded that they too still belong within the heart of the Church.

CJF
Via email



Send your letters to ► letterseditor@herald.com.my

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

Celebrating the Feast of St Joseph

BATU GAJAH

PERAK: On a beautiful Friday morning, the Church of St Joseph slowly came alive. One by one, the faithful gathered. Hearts full, faces lit with joy and anticipation. Smiles were seen all around, for they had come together for one man... their patron, Saint Joseph.

As the church filled with thanksgiving and reverence, the community united in celebration of a humble yet powerful figure who continues to inspire generations. On May 1, we not only observe Labour Day but also commemorate the Feast of St Joseph the Worker, honouring his life of humility, dedication and faithful service.

This year's theme, *St Joseph the Worker: Serving with Love and Dignity*, beautifully reflected the spirit of the celebration, reminding



The statue of St Joseph being carried in procession.

us of the dignity of work and the call to serve one another with love.

In preparation for the feast, Novena Masses were held on April

29 and 30, celebrated by Fr Nelson Joseph and Msgr Stephen Liew. These moments of prayer allowed parishioners to prepare their hearts

and grow deeper in devotion to St Joseph.

The main celebrant for the feast day Mass was Fr Joseph Stephen, CSSR, with our parish priest, Fr Francis Andrew, concelebrating and assisted by Deacon Richard Wilson.

In his homily, Fr Joseph offered a meaningful reflection on the life of the Church today. While the Church was once often viewed as a hierarchy, it is now more beautifully understood as a circle, where everyone has a place. From the pope to priests, from men and women to youth and even children, each person plays a vital and active role in the mission of the Church. This powerful message reminded us that we are all called to serve, just as St Joseph did, with love, humility and dignity.

Adding to the significance of this blessed day was the dedication and blessing of the St Joseph columbarium

and funeral parlour. The funeral parlour was generously donated by John Woo Soon Fatt and family, who also undertook the role of contractor. The columbarium, which holds 230 niches, stands as a sacred space for prayer, remembrance and hope in the promise of eternal life. This meaningful contribution marks an important milestone for our parish, offering comfort and dignity to families while strengthening our pastoral care for the community. Enquiries on funeral parlour and niche bookings may be directed to the parish office at 012-619 2861.

As we celebrate St Joseph the Worker, may we continue to be inspired by his quiet strength and unwavering faith. May he guide us in our daily lives to serve with love and dignity in all that we do.

St Joseph, pray for us. **Monica Steffani**

TANJUNG KLING

MELAKA: Close to 470 parishioners and pilgrims gathered at the Chapel of St Joseph on May 1, to celebrate the Feast of St Joseph the Worker, marking not only a day of devotion but also the chapel's 115th anniversary (1911-2026).

The celebration began with prayers and the Litany to St Joseph, followed by the Mass and a time of fellowship.

The Catholic presence in Tanjung Kling dates back more than a century, with the first chapel established in 1911. The current fully concrete structure was completed in 2011, standing as a testament to the enduring faith of the local community.

The Mass was celebrated by chapel administrator Fr John Yoew, with Fr Joseph Heng from Krubong as preacher and concelebrant. He was joined by Fr Bartholomew KC Wong from Tangkak and Fr Lawrence Ng CDD.

Preaching in both English and Mandarin, Fr Joseph reflected on St Joseph's role in the life of the Church. He noted that in 1870, St Joseph was declared the Patron Saint of the Universal Church, recognised as a model of guardianship and labour. He described St Joseph as a man of steadfast faith, obedience, protection, and quiet strength.

Fr Joseph pointed out that although Joseph had the freedom to refuse when he discovered that Mary was with child through the Holy Spirit, he chose to trust God and say "yes" to His plan. This act of obedience, he

said, remains a powerful witness for all believers.

Describing St Joseph as humble and silent, yet deeply faithful, Fr Joseph highlighted his role as guardian of the Holy Family. In obedience to God's message delivered through an angel, Joseph led Mary and the Infant Jesus to safety in Egypt to escape King Herod's persecution. He later settled his family in Nazareth.

Turning to the congregation, he challenged parents to reflect on their own responsibilities. "Do we persevere in sending our children for catechism?" he asked, reminding them that they are guardians of their families, their vocations, and stewards of both body and mind.

He also spoke of St Joseph as a man attentive to God, one who listened in silence and responded with trust. Beyond being the guardian of the Holy Family, Joseph's mission, he said, was to bring Jesus into the world. In the same way, parents today are called to pass on the faith to their children.

Fr Joseph painted a tender image of St Joseph caring for Mary and the Infant Jesus, allowing Mary to rest while he took on the responsibility of caring for the child. He encouraged families to look to St Joseph for strength, especially in moments of fatigue, and to learn from his example of quiet love and sacrifice.

Fr Joseph then invited all present to welcome Jesus into their lives. "Trust in God's plan for your life, just as St Joseph did," he said, reminding the faithful that God should be at the centre of their lives. **Bernard Anthony**



The faithful praying during Mass.

PERAK: Despite being a small chapel tucked away in the quiet town of Bidor, the Chapel of St Joseph once again became a centre of prayer and fellowship as hundreds of parishioners and pilgrims gathered for its annual feast celebration. Rooted in faith, simplicity and devotion, the feast continues to draw people together each year in honour of St Joseph, the patron saint of the chapel.

This year's celebration, held from April 30 to May 3, centred on the theme *Missionary Discipleship*, reminding the faithful that through Baptism, every Christian is called to follow Christ actively and bear witness to the Gospel through daily words, deeds and actions.

Chapel administrator, Fr James Pitchay, was the celebrant and preacher throughout the four-day celebration, leading the faithful in prayer and reflection. His homilies focused on four themes: *Exemplary of the Workers, Exemplary of the Faithful, Leadership of Family and Missionary Discipleship*.

The feast culminated on May 2 with a candlelight procession in honour of the Lord Jesus Christ and St Joseph immediately after Mass. Despite a brief heavy downpour over parts of Bidor town earlier in the evening, the procession proceeded peacefully under clear skies.

The solemn 35-minute procession saw two pickup trucks leading the way — one carrying Fr James with the Blessed Sacrament

and the other bearing a statue of St Joseph. The faithful followed prayerfully behind, reciting the Rosary as they processed through public roads around the town. Along the route, Fr James lifted the monstrance containing the Blessed Sacrament to bless both the people and the town as the faithful paused in adoration of the Lord.

Though modest in size, the chapel was filled with a deep sense of togetherness as parishioners and pilgrims gathered in one faith to celebrate their patron saint.

Reflecting on the feast theme, Fr James reminded the congregation that all the baptised are called to become missionary disciples. "All who are baptised are given a mission," he said, encouraging the faithful to go forth and share the Good News from "heart to heart" and within their communities.

Speaking on St Joseph's role as leader of the Holy Family, Fr James said Joseph understood his mission because he listened attentively to God and obeyed His will. "Joseph heard and obeyed the will of God," he said. "We too can share in the mission of Christ if we listen to God's Word and seek His will in our lives."

Drawing parallels to family and community life, he challenged the faithful to reflect on whether they truly listen to one another — as husbands and wives, parents and children, and members of the Church. "If we do not listen to God, we end up following only

our own will," he said.

Fr James, who is also the parish priest of the Church of St Mary in Tapah, reflected on how St Joseph, though initially troubled upon learning of Mary's pregnancy, chose to trust God completely after listening to His voice. "Joseph became a witness of faith because he listened to the Lord," he said.

He concluded by reminding the faithful that their mission as Christians is to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to those who have yet to know Him. "Jesus calls all of us to be His disciples and spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth," he said, inviting the congregation to reflect on whether they are truly willing to listen to God and carry out His will.

In his closing remarks, Fr James extended feast day greetings to all present and thanked God that the rain had stopped in time for the procession. He also expressed appreciation to all who had contributed towards the feast preparations and fellowship meals.

The celebration concluded with fellowship on the chapel grounds, where parishioners and pilgrims shared food and strengthened bonds in a joyful atmosphere.

A specially prepared shrine of St Joseph at the chapel foyer also provided a quiet space for the faithful to reflect on the saint's virtues of obedience, humility and fidelity to God, while seeking his intercession. **Bernard Anthony**



Devotees lighting candles at St Joseph's statue.

Building a 'memory bank' for children's future

Dr Ivan Filmer

PENANG: Parenting today looks very different from what many grew up with. There was a time when discipline often came in the form of the cane (*rotan*). Today, the approach has shifted towards allowing children to think and decide for themselves. Navigating this changing landscape was the focus of a talk titled *Parenting 101*, organised by the Family Life Ministry at St Faustina Hall, Church of the Divine Mercy (CDM), and conducted by Alphonsus Ng, a parishioner and registered licensed counsellor.

The session was held on April 26 and drew parents who were waiting for their children attending catechism after Sunday morning Mass.

Alphonsus began by describing parenting as "on-the-job training," with no fixed syllabus or curriculum to follow. It is a lifelong responsibility that continues even after children have grown. He invited participants to reflect on a fond memory from their own childhood. While some were able to recall meaningful moments, others struggled to remember any significant experiences, despite remembering their parents.

He noted that this was not uncommon, sharing that similar responses often emerged during his counselling sessions with students. Many of these young people came from broken or emotionally distant family environments. This, he explained, highlights the importance of memories, as our past shapes our present and influences how we re-

late to others.

Drawing from his own experience of raising three sons over 35 years of marriage, Alphonsus emphasised that unclear or absent memories may reflect a lack of meaningful engagement or, in some cases, painful experiences that are suppressed. Our lives today, he said, are built upon these memories, whether they are of joy, loneliness, discipline, or hardship. Even simple childhood instructions — such as being told to finish everything on one's plate — can shape attitudes and behaviour later in life. The Bible itself underscores the significance of memory, as seen in the parable of the Prodigal Son, where remembrance plays a role in transformation and return.

He encouraged parents to be intentional in shaping positive experiences for their children. In an age where both parents are often working, meaningful connections are not built through material gifts, but through relationships. Simple acts — listening attentively, offering support during exams, or showing empathy in times of loss — leave lasting impressions.

Parents were also urged to share their own stories with their children — how they grew up, how they met their spouse, and the realities of family responsibilities. Transparency, especially regarding financial limitations and sacrifices made for the family, can help children develop understanding and maturity.

"The greatest gift you can leave your children is the memory of you," Alphonsus said, stressing that such

memories must be created deliberately. He shared the case of a student who, recalling the loving relationship between his parents, chose to abandon thoughts of suicide. It was a powerful reminder of how deeply family experiences can shape a child's sense of hope and worth.

He also emphasised that parenting must be rooted in selflessness. Discipline, for instance, should be guided by what is best for the child, not by a desire to avoid embarrassment. Every action, he said, should be directed towards the child's growth and future.

Alphonsus encouraged families to build what he termed a "memory bank" — consciously creating meaningful moments through shared experiences, especially during family gatherings and special occasions.

During the question-and-answer session, a concern was raised about the recent suicide of a 13-year-old girl and whether that age marks a particularly vulnerable period. Dr Stephanie Sardar, who was present, explained that early adolescence, especially for girls, is marked by hormonal changes that can heighten emotional sensitivity. Alphonsus added that while girls may show higher tendencies towards suicidal thoughts, boys tend to have higher completion rates.

The session concluded with a closing prayer, asking for the grace to reflect God's love in the lives of their children and to make their homes places of warmth, where the memories built today will guide families closer to Him tomorrow.



'Day of Discovery' explores Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

PENANG: In a world that often moves too quickly, a gentle and meaningful encounter took place recently, at the Church of the Immaculate Conception (CIC). Nineteen participants from seven parishes gathered for a half-day *Day of Discovery* into the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS). What began as a workshop soon became an invitation into a different way of seeing the child, faith, and God.

Led by Monica Dicom and Rosalind Simon from the Church of Our Mother of Perpetual Help (OMPH), Ipoh, together with catechists from CIC and the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Butterworth, the sessions offered a glimpse into the richness of CGS, alongside presentations such as the Altar, Epiclesis, Scooping, and the Good Shepherd. Participants were especially moved by the calm, reverent rhythm of the Atrium — a specially prepared space where children encounter God through hands-on materials, silence, and wonder. Many described it as "peaceful, intentional, and deeply respectful of the dignity of the

child."

Developed in the 1950s by Dr Sofia Cavalletti and Gianna Gobbi using Montessori principles, CGS recognises the unique relationship between God and the young child, particularly before the age of six. Here, catechesis is not rushed instruction, but a quiet unfolding, where children come to know they are loved, known, and called by name.

The morning was made even more memorable by the presence of Cardinal Sebastian Francis, who spent time encouraging participants and affirming the importance of this work.

CGS Level 1 for children aged 3 to 6 is currently offered in the Penang Diocese at CIC and OMPH, with hopes for expansion as more catechists are formed. Those inspired can take the next step at the upcoming CGS Level 1 Part 1 Formation, to be held from May 27 to June 1, at CIC, led by the team from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.

To register, scan here:



Called to live Christ's mission

SEGAMAT: The feast day triduum of the Church of St Philip began on May 1 with a Holy Hour, guided and concluded with Benediction by Fr Surain Durai Raj.

The following day saw the community gather for a multilingual con-

celebrated Mass, with Fr Surain as the main celebrant. The theme for the day, *Continuing the Work of Christ*, set the tone for a reflective and engaging liturgy.

In his homily, Fr Surain gently drew the congregation in as he en-

couraged them to remain vigilant in their spiritual lives. He reminded the faithful to discern carefully, ensuring that the delicate line between personal goodwill and God's will is not blurred or compromised.

He went on to reflect that just as Christ gave Himself fully to humanity, believers too are called to offer Christ to others through their lives. Drawing from St Paul's image of being "poured out like a libation," Fr Surain emphasised the need for self-emptying, so that Christ may become more visible — "that He may increase, and we decrease."

After the Mass, parishioners gathered in the parish hall for a gener-

ous fellowship meal, strengthening bonds within the community.

The triduum concluded on Sunday with the theme, "You are a people set apart." In his homily, Fr Surain offered a thought-provoking perspective, stating that there are no difficult people, only individuals longing to love and be loved. He acknowledged, however, that while this may be true, living it out remains a challenge.

He stressed that being "set apart" carries personal responsibility and calls for ongoing self-purification. Just as gold is refined through fire, he said, so too must individuals be shaped through trials and hardships

in order to grow in spiritual maturity.

Fr Surain highlighted that true conversion is rooted in prayer and a complete surrender to God. Faith and love of God, he noted, are not static but must be continually nurtured and deepened.

Throughout his reflections, the visiting priest captivated the congregation, seamlessly engaging them in four languages, leaving a lasting impression on all present.

The celebration concluded with another warm gathering over a shared meal at St Joseph's parish hall, bringing the triduum to a meaningful and communal close. **Philip Packium**



JOBITA HOME AN ASSISTED-LIVING (002748168-K)

CATHOLIC ELDERLY CARE HOME



The Spiritual needs of our Residents are met in a Fully-Catholic Comfortable environment by our Catholic Caregivers

- HOLY COMMUNION Every Sunday
- Occasional Mass is celebrated, Confessions and Anointing by Catholic Priests
- Hospital Accompaniment with Caregivers
- Healthy Meals
- Gentle Exercises
- Affordable & Reasonable Rates



No.140 Jalan 14/15, Section 14, 46100, Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia
For further enquiries:
Kindly Call John : 016-2167751

Interfaith visit to Buddhist Maha Vihara deepens understanding

Christina Susan Augustine

KUALA LUMPUR: The Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs ministries (PMEIA) of the parishes in the KL Central District organised a visit to the Buddhist Maha Vihara in Brickfields on May 2. About 40 parishioners, accompanied by clergy and parish leaders, gathered for the visit, which commenced at 9.30am and ended around noon. What was expected to be a simple educational trip soon unfolded into a deeply meaningful and reflective encounter.

Upon arrival, the group received a warm welcome and was led to an introductory session. There, participants were introduced to the core principles of Buddhism, including mindfulness, compassion, and the pursuit of inner peace through enlightenment. The speaker presented these teachings clearly and engagingly, while also explaining the significance of key symbols such as the pagoda, the Bodhi tree, and the lotus flower.

One message stood out with striking simplicity: "Do good, be good."



The visitors at the Buddhist Maha Vihara temple in Brickfields.

This takeaway resonated deeply with Christ's command to love one's neighbour. Mary Anne, coordinator of the PMEIA at the Church of St John the Evangelist, described the visit as both enlightening and humbling. She noted that participants gained insights into the temple's history, its service to the local community, and the values that guide Buddhist life.

After the session, the group explored the temple grounds. Among the most striking features was the pagoda, housing numerous Buddha statues of varying forms, each radiating a sense of calm and serenity. The quiet surroundings invited reflection, underscoring the importance of stillness in daily life. It brought to mind how Jesus often withdrew to quiet places to pray,

seeking communion with God.

Living in a multiracial country like Malaysia, the experience reaffirmed the beauty and strength of our unity. Our diversity is not a barrier, but a gift that calls us to deeper understanding and harmony. This echoes the words of Scripture, "that they may all be one" (John 17:21). The verse, which also serves as the theme of the Church of St Anthony's 115th anniversary celebration, resonated deeply throughout the encounter, reminding participants that unity is not about uniformity, but a conscious commitment to journey together in love, respect, and shared humanity.

Alexander, PMEIA coordinator from the Church of St Anthony, said the visit offered deeper insight into Buddhist beliefs and practices, noting that the temple, founded in 1894, has long served as a place of meditation and cultural activity.

Similarly, John Chuah, the Chinese Language Apostolate committee coordinator from the Church of the Holy Rosary, reflected on the meaningful interactions with the hosts, highlighting the humility

and compassion evident within the community. He described the visit as a valuable experience that fosters harmony in society.

The hospitality extended and the friendships formed during the visit stood as a testament to mutual respect and openness. As the celebration of Wesak Day approaches, the encounter affirms a shared commitment to continued dialogue and collaboration, especially in social and charitable initiatives.

Participants also reflected on the teachings of the Eightfold Path, recognising parallels with values found within the Catholic faith and other religious traditions. Such shared principles point towards a deeper truth — that unity can be found within diversity.

Ultimately, the visit was more than an educational outing. It became a journey of reflection, understanding, and faith. It served as a reminder that when we take the time to understand one another, we begin to build bridges instead of walls, and in doing so, discover that in diversity there is beauty, and in understanding there is peace.

Pilgrimage brings Sybil's witness to life

KUALA LUMPUR: The Golden Eagles from the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist braved an intense two-day pilgrimage across Perak, visiting five churches while reflecting on the enduring faith and sacrifice of wartime heroine Sybil Kathigasu.

The group of 41 senior parishioners journeyed to the Church of the Sacred Heart in Kampar, the Church of St Michael in Ipoh, and the Church of St Joseph in Batu Gajah, as well as two Marian churches in Ipoh — Our Lady of Lourdes and Our Mother of Perpetual Help.

At the Church of St Joseph, parish priest, Fr Francis Andrew, delivered a deeply moving account of Sybil's life and witness, stirring many among the pilgrims to deepen their faith and commitment to prayer. The 73-year-old priest went down on all fours in the aisle, re-enacting how Sybil crawled in thanksgiving to God in the same church after her release at the end of World War II. Though he crawled only a short distance, the

act evoked profound emotion among those present.

Sybil, whose cause for canonisation has been opened, had crawled nearly 50 yards (46 metres) from the church entrance to the sanctuary, where she prostrated before the Holy Eucharist in gratitude and devotion. She had been partially paralysed after enduring repeated torture by the Japanese military police, the *Kempeitai*. She died in 1948 at the age of 49, from injuries sustained during her imprisonment, despite undergoing multiple surgeries and treatment in London.

The pilgrims also visited the now dilapidated wooden shop house at 74 Main Street in Papan, where Sybil and her husband, Dr Abdon Clement Kathigasu, secretly treated guerrillas resisting the Japanese occupation. Both were eventually arrested and subjected to prolonged torture over two years.

Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang, who opened her

cause, once remarked: "Her example draws us to the fact that what motivated her is the faith instilled in her by her family, enabling her to live a life marked by a spirituality of dependence on God's grace."

Accompanied by their parish priest, Fr Gerard Theraviam, the Golden Eagles began their pilgrimage on April 28. During the journey, octogenarian Nancy Emaung read excerpts from Sybil's memoir, *No Dram of Mercy*, highlighting her deep trust in God.

Their first stop was the Church of the Sacred Heart in Kampar, where they animated the Mass celebrated by parish priest, Fr Simon Anand, with Fr Gerard as concelebrant. In his homily, Fr Simon encouraged the faithful to carry out God's will with courage, trusting in Christ's assurance: "I will be with you and give you strength."

After Mass, the group prayed a devotion seeking Sybil's intercession, recalling how she became a living



Fr Francis Andrew demonstrates how Sybil crawled to the altar.

instrument of God's hope, love, and mercy. They also prayed the devotion to the Sacred Heart, inspired by Sybil's own account of a vision in which she was told to "be ready to pay the supreme sacrifice," along with the promise of God's abiding strength.

The pilgrimage also brought them to the Marian churches in Ipoh. There, they reflected on a poignant moment in Sybil's life when she pleaded with Mother Mary for the safety of her six-year-old daughter, Dawn, who had been threatened by the *Kempeitai*. In what many regard as providential, a senior Japanese officer intervened and ordered the child's release.

At the Church of St Michael, the Golden Eagles were warmly received by the parish's Evergreens senior group. Together, they visited Sybil's gravesite, where they laid flowers, lit candles, and prayed. The devotion used was prepared by the parish's Sybil Kathigasu Prayer

Group, which has been gathering monthly at the gravesite since January 2025.

The pilgrims later joined the Chinese apostolate for the Rosary, leading two decades in English, before participating in a bilingual Mass celebrated by parish priest, Fr Aloysius Tan, with Fr Gerard as concelebrant.

On the return journey, seminarian Bro John Robertson Joseph, who accompanied the group, shared an inspiring reflection on his vocation. The pilgrims, in turn, spoke of the joy of fellowship and described the journey as an "amazing pilgrimage," made possible by God's grace.

Despite their age, the Golden Eagles embraced the physically demanding schedule, boarding and alighting from the bus multiple times throughout the trip. Their enthusiasm and perseverance stood as a testament to a faith that continues to grow stronger with time — truly ageing with grace. **Bob Ho**



Golden Eagles at Sybil's gravesite.

Church cannot remain aloof

MOZAMBIQUE: Gathering in Matola, southern Mozambique, for their Plenary Assembly, the bishops of the Episcopal Conference of Mozambique (CEM) reflected on the many pastoral and social challenges confronting both the nation and the Church.

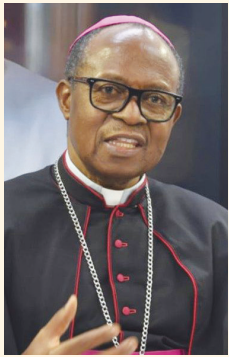
The bishops stressed that the Church in Mozambique must become ever more a visible sign of hope, reconciliation, and Gospel-centred compassion through a concrete and active presence among the people. They noted with concern that political divisions and social difficulties across the country have continued to deepen.

In a pastoral communiqué issued at the close of the assembly and signed by Archbishop Inacio Saure of Nampula, President of the CEM, the bishops said the population remains burdened by recurring natural disasters, the ongoing conflict in Cabo Delgado Province, and global instability, all of which have contributed to a rising cost of living and worsening poverty.

The prelates also highlighted the country's fragile public infrastructure, citing poorly maintained roads and an inadequate healthcare system as pressing concerns. The lack of employment opportunities for young people, they noted, has further fuelled frustration and discouragement among the population.

Against this backdrop, the bishops insisted that the Church cannot remain distant or indifferent. Instead, it must deepen its pastoral outreach to those who are suffering, discouraged, and losing hope. At the same time, they urged the Church to work tirelessly in seeking practical and sustainable solutions to the challenges facing society.

The bishops also called for greater dialogue and civic engagement with state authorities in an effort to address the country's increasingly alarming socio-political situation. **Vatican News**



Vatican praises India's synodal assembly

BENGALURU: The Vatican has praised the National Synodal Assembly of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI) as "a powerful witness" for both the Church and society, as bishops, clergy, religious, and lay faithful gathered in Bengaluru for a landmark assembly focused on dialogue, discernment, and mission.

Held from May 1–3 at St John's Medical College under the theme "Synodal Pilgrims of Hope," the assembly brought together 220 delegates, including two cardinals, 25 bishops, 65 priests, over 20 women religious, and more than 100 lay faithful, among them youth and women leaders.

The gathering marked a significant stage in the global synodal journey initiated by the late Pope Francis in 2021, inviting the Church to walk together in communion, participation, and mission. In India, the process has unfolded through consultations at diocesan, regional, and national levels before culminating in the Bengaluru assembly.

In a message addressed to Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrão of Goa, President of the CCBI, Cardinal Mario Grech, Secretary General of the Synod Secretariat in Rome, commended the Church in India for embracing synodality through a spirit of listening, discernment, and communion.

Calling synodality "the walking together of Christians with Christ and towards God's Kingdom, in union with all humanity," Cardinal Grech said the willingness of bishops, priests, religious, and lay faithful to listen together to the Holy Spirit was itself "a sign of hope."

He stressed that the assembly was not merely an ecclesial event, but "a powerful witness" of the People of God journeying together towards the fulfilment of God's Kingdom.

"Synodality not only transforms ecclesial



Delegates engaging in spiritual conversations.

life, but also has a prophetic force for society, becoming a true antidote to polarisations and divisions," Cardinal Grech wrote.

He further noted that a community capable of "listening, discerning, and moving forward together can become a leaven of hope in a world that longs for reconciliation, justice, and peace."

The assembly opened with a solemn Eucharistic celebration presided over by Cardinal Ferrão, who described the gathering as "a moment of grace and discernment." In his homily, he urged delegates to become courageous witnesses of the Gospel through prayer, attentive listening, and missionary outreach.

Reflecting on the conversion of St Paul and the witness of St Joseph the Worker, Cardinal Ferrão highlighted both the dignity of labour and the universal call to holiness in daily life.

The formal inauguration included the chanting of the *Veni Creator Spiritus* and the ceremonial lighting of the lamp. Welcoming participants, CCBI Deputy Secretary General Fr Stephen Alathara described the assembly as "a spiritual journey" and "a moment of

God's grace."

In his presidential address, Cardinal Ferrão recalled the CCBI Pastoral Plan, *Journeying Towards a Synodal Church: Mission 2033*, and invited delegates to deepen the vision articulated during the 36th Plenary Assembly in Bhubaneswar in 2025.

Discussions centred on four pastoral priorities: interreligious dialogue and peacebuilding, inclusion of the excluded, poverty and integral ecology, and accompaniment of children and youth.

Proceedings were guided by the method of spiritual conversation, encouraging prayerful listening, dialogue, and communal discernment as delegates explored practical ways of embedding synodal principles at every level of Church life.

The assembly also situated its mission within the horizon of the Jubilee Year 2033, which will mark two millennia of Redemption. Further consultations are expected in September 2026, with recommendations to be presented at the 38th Plenary Assembly in January 2027. **CBCI/Matters India**



Papal Foundation announces record RM70 million in grants

VATICAN: The Papal Foundation has announced a record US\$15 million (RM70 million) in grants for 2026, supporting Church-run projects aimed at bringing hope and practical assistance to vulnerable communities across the world.

The announcement was made ahead of the Foundation's audience with Pope Leo XIV during its annual pilgrimage to Rome.

In a statement released on May 2, the Foundation said the grants will support 144 projects in 75 countries, making it the largest allocation in the organisation's 38-year history. The projects, identified in collaboration with the Vatican, focus on infrastructure, humanitarian aid, education, healthcare, and pastoral outreach in areas most in need.

Among the initiatives to receive support are the construction and renovation of Catholic schools, classrooms, monasteries, orphanages, and medical clinics in several developing nations.

Other projects include a dormitory in Tanzania aimed at protecting girls from early marriage, trafficking, and abuse while helping boys remain in school; a safe learning centre

for marginalised tribal children in India; a library and technology hub in the Central African Republic; professional IT training for vulnerable women in the Philippines; and the construction of a well and water tower in the Republic of Guinea.

Ward Fitzgerald, President of the Papal Foundation Board of Trustees, described the grants as central to the Foundation's mission of serving the poor and strengthening the Church's presence in struggling communities.

"These projects are signs of hope," he said, noting that they seek to respond to urgent hu-

man needs while uplifting Catholic communities in developing regions.

The grants were approved after a review process led by the Foundation's Grants Committee, chaired by Dr Tammy Tenaglia of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. The committee evaluated requests submitted by the Vatican in late 2025 before recommending the projects for approval.

The Board of Trustees authorised more than US\$15 million (RM58.5 million) in total allocations, including US\$12.5 million (RM48.8 million) in current grants and an additional

US\$3 million (RM11.7 million) to be distributed through the Foundation and its affiliates before the close of 2026.

The Foundation also reported continued growth in its Stewards of Saint Peter programme, with 25 new families joining following the election of Pope Leo XIV.

This year's pilgrimage to Rome gathered 56 Steward families and included visits to St Peter's Basilica, the Lateran Palace, the Angelicum, and a candlelight rosary at St Mary Major, culminating in an audience with the Holy Father.

David Savage, Executive Director of the Papal Foundation, said the organisation's growth reflects a shared commitment "to serve, to give, and to bring the Church's mission to life in meaningful ways across the globe."

Since its founding in 1988, the Papal Foundation has distributed more than US\$270 million (RM1.1 billion) in grants, scholarships, and humanitarian aid to over 2,700 projects supported during the pontificates of Pope Leo XIV, Pope Francis, Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope St John Paul II. **Vatican News**



New members of the Papal Foundation.

Discernment must guide selection of bishops

VATICAN: Discernment must remain at the heart of the process of selecting bishops, while the Church must adopt new theological and pastoral approaches to address complex contemporary issues, said Cardinal Mario Grech, Secretary General of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops.

The comments came following the release of preliminary sections of the Final Reports of Study Groups No. 7 and No. 9, which continue reflections on episcopal leadership, synodality, and the Church's engagement with emerging ethical and pastoral questions.

Study Group No. 7, which focuses on the role and formation of bishops, reaffirmed that "there is no shepherd without a flock, and no flock without a shepherd," stressing that discernment should guide every stage of episcopal selection.

The report outlined several "synodal competencies" expected of bishop candidates, including the ability to foster communion, engage in dialogue, understand local cultures, and integrate into them constructively.

It also called for Apostolic Nuncios to embody a "synodal and missionary profile" so that

they may seek the same qualities in those proposed for the episcopacy.

According to the report, dioceses should periodically undertake processes of discernment to evaluate their pastoral needs and determine whether their structures and practices reflect the standards of a synodal and missionary Church.

"As an episcopal succession approaches, the bishop is to convene the Presbyteral Council and the Diocesan Pastoral Council," the report stated, adding that members should submit, "in a sealed envelope," the names of priests they consider suitable for the episcopate.

Where possible, consultations should also involve cathedral chapters, finance councils, lay councils, consecrated persons, young people, and representatives of the poor.

The study group further encouraged what it described as "a formative investment" to help the People of God strengthen their capacity for discernment. It proposed the establishment of dedicated teams to support bishops in the ongoing formation of clergy.

In cases where a diocese becomes vacant, the report suggested forming a diocesan committee that could assist the Apostolic Nuncio in



Cardinals pray during Mass at the Vatican. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

assessing the condition of the diocese, identifying the qualities needed in a new bishop, and discerning possible candidates.

The group also recommended that consultations include not only clerics, but an equivalent number of consecrated men and women, as well as lay men and women, in order to arrive at "the truth as fully as possible."

The report additionally urged dicasteries of the Roman Curia to review their procedures in a more synodal direction and proposed periodic independent evaluations of episcopal selection processes.

Meanwhile, the Final Report of Study Group No. 9 explored how the Church might approach difficult doctrinal, ethical, and pastoral questions in a more synodal manner.

Drawing inspiration from chapters 10 to 15 of the Acts of the Apostles, the report highlighted how the early Church embraced cultural diversity without compromising the Gospel message.

The group proposed a "change of paradigm"

in addressing difficult issues and recommended using the term "emerging" rather than "controversial" when referring to such questions.

"The aim is not merely to resolve problems but to build the common good through relational conversion, shared learning and transparency," the report stated.

Central to this approach is what the document described as the "principle of pastorality," which recognises that the Holy Spirit is already at work in those with whom the Church engages.

The report identified three methodological steps for discernment: listening to oneself, listening to reality, and bringing together different forms of knowledge.

It reaffirmed that "Conversation in the Spirit" remains the preferred method for fostering a synodal culture within the Church.

The guidelines, the report said, should be applied concretely in areas such as the pastoral experience of homosexual Catholics and the practice of active nonviolence. **Vatican News**

Thai Church renews priestly formation for pastoral leadership

BANGKOK: Thailand's Catholic bishops are reshaping the formation of future priests by investing in the training of seminary formators, emphasising accompaniment, emotional maturity, and pastoral leadership in response to the challenges of a rapidly changing world.

The renewed approach marks a shift from models focused mainly on academics and discipline toward a more holistic framework rooted in the Vatican's 2016 document, *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*.

Church leaders in Thailand said formators must be equipped to guide seminarians through changing social realities, digital culture, and the demands of transparent and accountable ministry, while deepening their own spiritual and human formation.

The initiative seeks to transform formators — those responsible for training seminarians — into "shepherds" capable of guiding with empathy and discernment rather than functioning merely as administrators or lecturers.

Central to the approach is the call for formators to become true spiritual guides who understand the personal journeys of seminarians and accompany them in their vocation. Church leaders also stressed that formators themselves must undergo continual conversion, deepening their human and spiritual maturity.

The renewed vision was reflected in a recent training course held at Baan Phu Waan, west of Bangkok.

Organised by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand, the programme brought together formators from diocesan seminaries and religious congregations, including participants from Dominic Savio Seminary.

The course, directed by Fr Peter Chetha Chaiyadej, rector of Saengtham Major Seminary, focused on strengthening four key dimensions of formation: human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral.

The human dimension emphasised personal

growth and relational skills, including psychological understanding, emotional awareness, and the art of accompaniment. Participants were encouraged to develop attentive listening and counselling skills suited to the needs of young candidates.

The intellectual dimension explored the pedagogy of discipleship, drawing from the example of Jesus and the role of Mary in formation. Discussions also addressed responsible freedom and vocation as a gift.

The spiritual dimension centred on deepening the interior life of formators and seminarians through prayer, devotion, and the liturgical life that sustains priestly identity.

Meanwhile, the pastoral dimension highlighted mission, ecumenical engagement, and cultural sensitivity, while underscoring the importance of community life in nurturing authentic priestly vocations.

A distinctive feature of the programme was its use of the See-Judge-Act method, a pas-

toral approach developed by Belgian Cardinal Joseph Cardijn and widely used in Catholic social teaching.

The method encourages participants to engage reality through observation, reflection, and concrete action. It begins with examining real-life situations and their underlying causes, followed by reflection in the light of Scripture and Church teaching, before leading to responses aimed at promoting justice and transformation.

Organisers said the training goes beyond theoretical instruction. Through active participation and shared reflection, the programme seeks to foster deep personal transformation among formators themselves.

Ultimately, the initiative aims to renew formation processes in seminaries and religious communities across Thailand, ensuring they remain relevant, responsive, and faithful to the Church's mission in today's world. **LiCAS News**

New Cambodian Church 'a testament to the growth of faith'

PHNOM PENH: More than 2,000 Catholics gathered for the inauguration of a new church in the Cambodian capital, Phnom Penh, hailed as a testament to the growth of faith nearly five decades after the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime.

Bishop Olivier Schmitthausler, MEP, Apostolic Vicar of Phnom Penh, consecrated the Church of St Joseph on May 2.

The celebration began with a procession around the new church. Inside the church, Bishop Olivier placed relics of saints into the altar stone before the consecration.

"This magnificent building is more than brick and cement. It is a testament to the growth of our faith, the solidarity of our community, and Divine Providence," the Apostolic Vicariate of Phnom Penh said in a Facebook message after the ceremony.

"This sacred site will be a place where we gather to pray and encourage one another."



Church leaders and lay Catholics join a procession to mark the consecration of St Joseph Church in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, on May 2, 2026. (Photo/Apostolic Vicariate of Phnom Penh)

In his homily, Bishop Olivier described the new church as "the joy of God's people in Cambodia."

He reflected on a glass mosaic behind the altar depicting angels "who today dance and sing with joy with all the generations

of Christians who have preceded us in the Vicariate of Phnom Penh."

"It is the history of our Church that we see, with its first stirrings, its hours of glory, and its dark hours," he said.

The bishop also spoke about the diocesan inquiry documents for the beatification cause of the twelve martyrs of Cambodia — Bishop Joseph Chhmar Salas and his eleven companions who were killed by Khmer Rouge soldiers.

"I will personally present them to the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints on May 27, during our *Ad Limina* visit to Rome," he said.

He noted that following the ordination of Cambodia's first native bishop since the Khmer Rouge era, — Bishop Pierre Suon Hangly, the consecration of the new church was "a further sign of the growth of the small Cambodian Church." **ucanews.com**



PMPA III Renewing the Church, reaching the world

Richard Chia

In August 2001, the Church in Peninsular Malaysia gathered at a significant crossroads in its journey of renewal. Twenty-five years had passed since *Aggiornamento* 1976, the landmark moment that set the local Church on a path of *aggiornamento* — renewal, reflection, and mission. Now, the faithful came together once more, not merely to commemorate the past, but to discern the road ahead.

Held over two days and one night at the Mint Hotel in Kuala Lumpur, the Third Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Assembly (PMPA III), drew an unprecedented 530 participants. Bishops from across the Peninsula, clergy, religious brothers and sisters, and lay leaders gathered as one body — a visible expression of a Church seeking to listen, to evaluate, and to respond. The assembly was aptly described as the “First Assembly in the Third Millennium,” carrying the evocative theme, *Restore My Church*. Inspired by the divine call received by St Francis of Assisi to “rebuild my Church,” the theme echoed with both urgency and hope.

Yet PMPA III would take on a deeper resonance in the light of events that followed. Barely two weeks after the assembly concluded, the world was shaken by the September 11 attacks. The tragedy cast a long shadow across nations, exposing the fragility of human security and the unpredictability of history. For the Church in Peninsular Malaysia, the timing prompted a sobering reflection. The entire leadership of the local Church — its bishops, clergy, and key lay figures — had, just days earlier, been gathered under one roof during the *Merdeka* weekend. In hindsight, it became a moment marked not only by gratitude, but by a profound awareness of divine providence. Many would later reflect that the Holy Spirit had, in a quiet yet unmistakable way, watched over the Church.

At the heart of the assembly, however, was not fear, but purpose. In his opening address, Auxiliary Bishop Murphy Pakiam, chairman of the organising committee, articulated the dual intent of the gathering. It was, he said, first a celebration of the Silver Jubilee of *Aggiornamento* — a moment to give thanks for the journey thus far. But more importantly, it was a call to recommit. The Church was invited to renew its identity as a BEC-based community, deepening its life as a “Communion of Communities,” and to chart a pastoral strategy for the years ahead.

Deepening the journey

If PMPA III in August 2001 marked a

In this 17th instalment, we revisit PMPA III — a defining moment marking 25 years since *Aggiornamento* — where the Church in Peninsular Malaysia renewed its BEC vision, confronted pastoral realities, and embraced a broader mission of dialogue, unity, and engagement in a changing world.



The delegates during one of the group discussions.

moment of remembrance, it was equally a moment of honest reckoning. Beneath the celebratory tone of the Silver Jubilee of *Aggiornamento* 1976, the assembly unfolded as a reflective examination of the Church’s identity, mission, and future.

Structured around three key movements — “Our Journey as Church,” “Our Self-Understanding as Church,” and “Our Projection for the Church in the Next Few Years” — the sessions invited participants to look back with gratitude, inward with clarity, and forward with renewed purpose. It was not merely a programme of talks, but a collective discernment of where the Church stood, and where it was being called to go.

What emerged was both affirmation and unease.

The assembly revisited the long-standing challenges surrounding the implementation of Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), echoing concerns already raised during PMPA II. Despite years of effort, the vision of a BEC-based Church remained uneven in its realisation. Structures had been established, directives issued, and recommendations carefully crafted — yet the lived reality on the ground revealed gaps between aspiration and practice.

Still, the commitment to the BEC vision remained firm.

Such contemplation, he stressed, is what nourishes and sustains the life of faith.

Yet it was perhaps the more provocative voices that stirred the deepest reflection.

Fr O.C. Lim, SJ, speaking with disarming candour, challenged the assembly to confront an uncomfortable truth. While many BECs had been established in the years since *Aggiornamento*, he questioned how many remained active. Were they truly vibrant communities, or had some become, in his stark words, “stillborn”? Drawing from his own pastoral experience, he observed that many BECs had lapsed into dormancy, and warned against what he described as “flogging a dead horse — not one that is dying, but one that is already dead.”

His critique was not without hope. Rather, it opened the door to new possibilities. Fr Lim proposed a reimagining of the BEC model — one that could move beyond strictly neighbourhood-based groupings to include communities formed around shared interests, workplaces, or common life experiences. Such a shift, he suggested, might better reflect the realities of contemporary life and offer renewed vitality to the vision.

Beyond these discussions, the assembly echoed familiar yet urgent calls. There was a renewed emphasis on engaging the youth — not as future members of the Church, but as active participants in its present life. The need for ongoing formation and leadership training for the laity was underscored, recognising that a truly participatory Church depends on well-formed and committed faithful. Equally pressing was the call to reach out to those who had drifted from the faith, inviting them back into the life of the community.

In many ways, the spirit of the assembly was captured in the words of La Salle Bro Anthony Rogers, who offered a fitting synthesis of the Church’s mission. “Our readiness to take up our responsibilities as Christians called to holiness,” he said, “brings upon us the joy of being witnesses to the love of Jesus in our lives and through our Christian communities.”

Thus, PMPA III did not offer easy answers. Instead, it held together vision and vulnerability, conviction and critique. It was a moment in which the Church dared to ask difficult questions of itself — and in doing so, took another step forward in its journey of renewal.



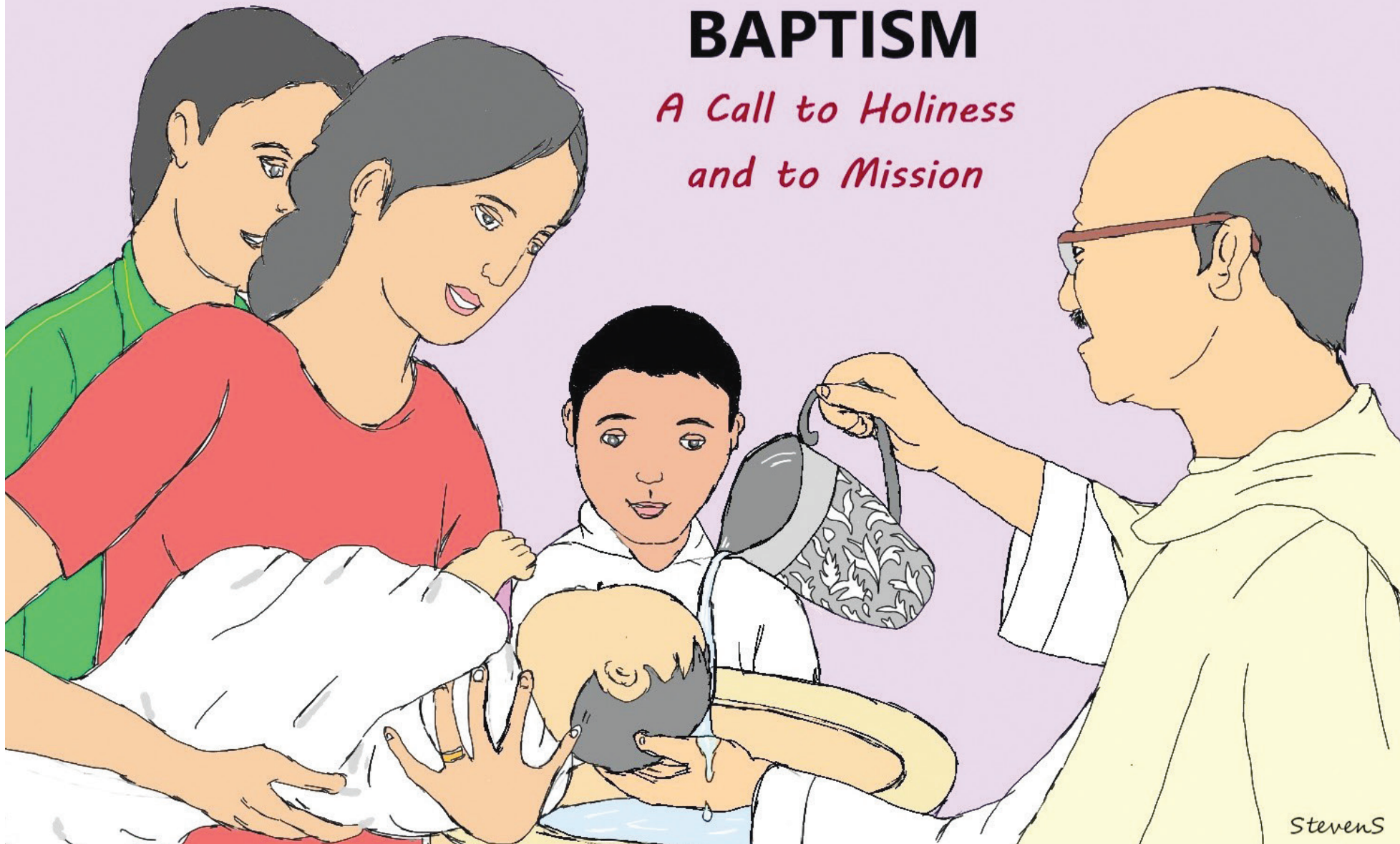
Fr Sebastian Francis with the Peninsular Malaysia arch/bishops.



The young people including the seminarians at the assembly.

BAPTISM

*A Call to Holiness
and to Mission*



In the last article, I discussed the relationship between the Christian community and the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). I pointed out that the Church leaves no doubt that the responsibility for the RCIA is that of the entire Christian community. But why should it be so? Should not the responsibility for initiating new members be that of the parish priest or those specially assigned to this task, namely, members of the RCIA team?

Let us recall what the Church says about this matter. That is, "... the people of God, as represented by the local Church, should understand and show by their concern that the initiation of adults is the responsibility of all the baptised" (RCIA, 9). The key words here are "all the baptised". By virtue of the sacrament of Baptism, all baptised members of the Christian community should be aware and be involved in the adult initiation process. The involvement of the community is not an option but an obligation. This is because Baptism places upon members of the community two major imperatives. They are baptised to be holy and to be on mission.

To be holy

Baptism entails upon members of the Christian community the vocation to live a life of on-going conversion and holiness. When a person is baptised, he or she is "immersed" into the baptismal water which symbolises his or her burial into Christ's death, from which he or she rises with Him as a 'new' creature to become a child of God. To be a child of God compels the baptised person to live a holy and blameless life (Eph. 1:4). Although faith is ultimately a gift from God, every member of the Christian community has the responsibility to grow in holiness in his or her life.

By striving to be holy, members of the community, in turn, witness their own lived faith experience to those seeking initiation into the Church. As stated in

the RCIA, "By joining the catechumens in reflecting on the value of the Paschal Mystery and by renewing their own conversion, the faithful provide an example that help the catechumens to obey the Holy Spirit more generously" (RCIA, 4). By seeking constantly to grow in holiness, members of the community can serve as examples and as witnesses to the catechumens.

To be on mission

The RCIA also states that, "... the community must always be fully prepared in the pursuit of its apostolic vocation to give help to those who are searching for Christ" (RCIA, 9). It means that all baptised persons are called to be ready at all times to partake in the mission that Christ mandated to the Apostles. Before His ascension, Jesus commanded the Apostles to preach the Gospel to all the nations (Mt. 28:19-20). From her beginning the Church has remained faithful to this command. In present times, through their baptism, in communion with the Holy Spirit, the baptised also have the mandate to proclaim and to witness the Gospel to all, including those journeying in the RCIA.

Through baptism, they also become members of the People of God of whom Christ is the Head and High Priest. They are established as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation ... who at times were not a people, but now are the People

of God" (1 Pet. 2:9-10). As such, they share in the three-fold ministry of Christ as prophet, priest and king. The Second Vatican Council states that every member of the Church is to carry out these offices entrusted to him or her by God so that, "in this way the Christian community will become a sign of God's presence in the world" (*Ad gentes*, 15).

Through exercising their priestly ministry, the baptised "present themselves as a sacrifice, living, holy and pleasing to God" (Rom 12:1). As a people sharing in Christ's prophetic ministry, they proclaim the Good News and "bear witness to Christ and give an answer to everyone who asks a reason for the hope of an eternal life which is theirs" (*Lumen gentium*, 10). As sharers in the kingly mission of Christ, God makes "them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church" and to serve human society as leaven and salt (*Lumen gentium*, 12).

To be in community is to be on mission

Precisely because the call to mission is derived from being members of the Christian community, the participation of the faithful in the mission of the Church has to be realised within the community and for the good of the community. The sacrament of Baptism, while incorporating an individual into a local Christian community, also obliges him or her to be

concerned for the whole community, as well as, for those who wish to become her members. Their participation in RCIA, therefore, is for the benefit of the entire community.

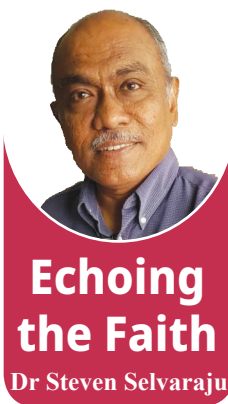
Ultimately, it is God who takes the initiative to call, convert and form those wishing to be initiated into the Christian community. However, God does this within and through a human community. The members of the community are to help individuals to hear God's call, to discern and support their readiness to respond to this call. The call to participation in the RCIA also signifies that God wants to use the Christian community as His instrument through which He continues the act of calling and saving all humanity.

Conclusion

Participation in the RCIA is a call to a life of holiness and to mission on the part of all members of the Christian community. Through their involvement in the initiation process, members are to live and share their faith by exercising their priestly, kingly and prophetic roles. As baptised members, they can share and witness to the Good News of salvation to those who wish to know Christ. In this way, God can use them as His primary agents of the RCIA.

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

Why is the community responsible for the RCIA?



**Echoing
the Faith**

Dr Steven Selvaraju

Holding the line between truth and noise

Christina Lazaroo

In a media industry that prizes speed and volume, Melissa Fernando has taken a more deliberate path. With over two decades as a Malaysian journalist, she sees communication not merely as a profession.

"I would say journalism is very much a calling," she reflects. "What first drew me to it was the power of stories, the ability to give voice to those otherwise unheard."

Today, as a multiformat journalist with Astro AWANI, Melissa works across platforms, covering everything from national developments to intimate community stories. Her Master's in Television Journalism from Goldsmiths, University of London, strengthened her editorial skills, but she returns to something more humbling.

"There's something deeply meaningful about standing at the intersection of truth and humanity, and helping others see the world more clearly."

"What matters more is the trust people place in me to tell their stories with honesty and dignity."

Identity as a foundation

A parishioner of the Church of St Francis of Assisi, Cheras, Melissa shares that being a Catholic in the workplace is less about outward expressions but more about how she approaches people with respect, empathy, and a genuine desire to listen. "Listening is not just a professional skill — it's a moral one," she says. "It means recognising that every person carries a story that deserves to be heard fully, not just efficiently."

Journalism often brings Melissa into close contact with human vulnerability. Covering



Amid a media landscape driven by speed and technology, this World Day of Social Communications feature reflects on a journalist's vocation to safeguard truth, compassion, and the human dignity behind every story.

stories of loss, crisis, and conflict requires more than technical skill. It demands compassion.

"Some of the most challenging moments have been covering stories where people are at their lowest," she reflects. "In those moments, you are constantly balancing the need to report with the need to be humane."

She is also aware of the risk of reducing people's lives into content. For Melissa, staying grounded means never losing sight of the human being behind the story.

Beyond the secular newsroom

Her understanding of communication as a vocation has been deepened through years of involvement with SIGNIS, the global Catholic association for communication professionals. It began during an internship at the Cahayasuara Communication Centre. In 1999, she represented Malaysia at the Asian Women in Communication Conference in Bangkok, where she helped form the Women in Communication Asian Network (WECAN).

Over the years, her involvement has expanded across local and international platforms — from Catholic newsroom discussions and workshops in Malaysia to conferences and initiatives across Asia and Europe. She has served as a video journalist trainer and, most recently, as a panel moderator at the SIGNIS Asia Assembly in Tokyo.

"SIGNIS brings people together to use media for a greater purpose," she says. "It's not just about creating content, but using communication to promote human dignity, justice, and peace."

Truth as an anchor

This foundation resonates strongly with the Church's vision for communication. As the Church marks its 60th World Communications Day with the theme "Preserving Human Voices and Faces," Melissa's approach feels especially timely. In an era dominated by digital platforms and artificial intelligence, the challenge is to keep



storytelling human at its core.

"I don't think storytelling will lose its humanity, but it will require more intentionality from journalists to preserve it," she says. "Technology can assist, but it cannot replace empathy, intuition, or moral judgment."

In an age of misinformation and deepfake, credibility matters more than ever.

"Integrity is your greatest currency. Be accurate, be honest about what you know and don't know, and never compromise truth for speed or virality," she emphasises.

So, what does it mean to be a Catholic communicator in today's world? As Pope Leo XIV reminds us, communication must always remain at the service of the human person. In Melissa's daily work, this is a lived reality — in how she listens, how she tells stories, and how she honours the individuals behind them.

Her message to young Catholics considering this field is clear: "If you feel that call, don't ignore it. The world needs voices that are truthful, compassionate, and grounded in purpose. Journalism is not always easy, but it is deeply meaningful. Stay rooted in truth. Stay curious. Stay human."

"Behind every story is a real person who trusted you with their voice. Honour that trust."

As Scripture reminds us in Ephesians 4:15, "Speak the truth in love." In a media world often driven by speed and noise, Melissa Fernando's journey is a witness that it is possible to be in the world of media, yet not be defined by it, but anchored in truth, where faith, integrity, and humanity shape how stories are told.

It had been years since I last attended a Life in the Spirit Seminar (LSS). Even when my own parish, the Church of St Thomas More, announced it would be hosting one from April 24 to 26, I had no intention of going.

But I talked myself into it — quite literally.

When my wife mentioned she was considering a silent retreat, I casually suggested, "Why don't you go for this instead?" referring to the LSS announcement made after Mass. Her response was immediate: "I will go if you go." And just like that, I found myself signed up as a participant.

When the organisers saw my name, they invited me to serve as a group facilitator. I declined. Truth be told, I had been struggling with certain aspects of my faith, and did not feel I was in the right place to guide others.

Walking into the seminar on the opening night, I was met with a crowd of more than 200 participants — far more than I expected. The three-day programme, organised by the Servants of Yahweh and Covenanted for Christ Community, the two covenant communities under the STM Commission of Prayer and Devotion, drew people from all walks of life, including some from as far as Seremban.

Each session began with praise and worship, creating a prayerful atmosphere that gently prepared hearts for what was to come. The talks by Barbara Neoh, Abbot D'cruz, Tony and Ann Felix, Christopher and John Paul Felix as well as Justin D'Souza, followed a clear spiritual journey — beginning with God's love, then moving through sin and salvation, new life, repentance and forgiveness, baptism in the Holy Spirit, and finally, growth and transformation.

You are not here by accident A Life in the Spirit Seminar reflection

Like many others, I came carrying my own questions and struggles. The sessions on repentance and forgiveness challenged me to confront them honestly, while the emphasis on new life reminded me that faith is never static — it is always calling us forward.

From conversations during the breaks, many participants spoke warmly of the speakers, appreciating the clarity with which each topic was presented. Several shared that they experienced a deep sense of renewal, healing, and a stronger connection with the Holy Spirit. While some hoped for more time in group discussions, many said it was the personal testimonies that truly touched their hearts.

It was this same sense of personal encounter that drew me in from the very first talk on God's Love, delivered by Barbara. When she said, "You are not here by accident," it sounded like something often said at such seminars. But as the weekend unfolded, I began to realise — she was right.

What struck me most was not just what Barbara said in her talk — but our personal chat when she agreed to an interview.



A convert to Catholicism and a teacher from Penang, Barbara

Neoh, now 81, was first drawn to the faith through a Charismatic prayer group near her home. Together with her husband Barnabas, she has served in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal for 48 years.

For Barbara, her journey began after a life-changing experience — surviving a serious car accident linked to sleep apnea, a condition that can cause breathing to stop during sleep.

But it was when she spoke about her mother that something within me shifted.

She recounted how her mother, during a cardiac arrest, was prompted by Barbara to call on the name of Jesus in what appeared to be her final moments. In that encounter, her mother came to embrace the faith and went on to live for another nine years.

Hearing that story struck deeply personal chords. Just six months ago, I lost my own mother to cardiac arrest. In her final moments, I struggled with a quiet regret — not having been able to consciously bring the Lord into that moment of departure.

What followed was not part of the programme, but it felt deeply personal. In

a quiet moment, Barbara spoke to me — not just with words of comfort, but with a reminder to trust in Jesus, even in loss. She gently encouraged my wife and I to begin a more intentional, prayerful routine in our daily lives and quoted the prophet Jeremiah 29:11-13.

"For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart."

In that moment, I realised this was the message I needed to hear.

This seminar has shifted my perspective and renewed my faith in ways I did not anticipate. While the spiritual elements of the LSS — praise and worship, the talks, speaking in tongues, and the testimonies — brought about a deep renewal of hearts, it was also the encounters with fellow parishioners and the wider community that made the experience truly fulfilling.

The seminar concluded with Holy Mass celebrated by Fr Gerard Theraviam, bringing the entire experience to a prayerful close. It was followed by fellowship, as new friendships were formed and old ones renewed.

Looking back, what began as a reluctant decision turned into something far more meaningful. The Life in the Spirit Seminar once again proved to be a powerful platform for renewal — an invitation not just to attend, but to encounter, to reflect, and ultimately, to be transformed.

And no — it was not by accident. **Kevin Francis**

Can the Church stay holy in a political world?



...The Church Mouse

The Catholic Church finds itself at a crossroads as the world becomes increasingly polarised.

With politicians from various parties seeking to align themselves with the Church, often through financial contributions, it's crucial to examine why maintaining a distance from politics is essential for the Church's spiritual mission.

The Church's primary role is to provide spiritual guidance, promote the teachings of Christ, and serve the community. By entangling itself with politics, the Church risks compromising its core values and alienating its followers.

Accepting financial contributions from political parties or politicians can create the perception that the Church is biased or endorses specific ideologies.

This can lead to a loss of credibility, as the Church's message may be seen as politically-motivated, undermining its moral authority. The issue of divided loyalties may also arise, as parishioners may feel torn between their faith and political affiliations. Compromised values are another concern, as the Church may be pressured to support policies contradicting its teachings.

The optics of Church-politics alliances can be damaging and prove to be a slippery slope.

Public perception of the Church's involvement in politics can undermine ecumenical efforts, distract from the Gospel, and alienate the faithful.

History shows that Church-state ties can lead to disastrous consequences. Examples include the Inquisition, when Church involvement in state affairs led to persecution and suffering, and fascist regimes, where Church support for authoritarian governments tarnished its reputation.

Instead of seeking financial support from politicians, the Church should speak truth to power by addressing social issues, advocate for justice, and promote peace without fear or favour. It should focus on community service, channelling resources into education, healthcare, and social welfare initiatives.

The Church should maintain neutrality, engaging with all parties, but remaining committed to the Gospel, not politics.

The Church's strength lies in its prophetic voice, not in political alliances. By maintaining neutrality and focusing on spiritual guidance, the Church can uphold its teachings without compromise or perceived bias.

It can serve the community effectively, addressing social needs without political agendas. Additionally, it can preserve unity, fostering a sense of belonging among diverse parishioners.

In a world divided, the Church must be a beacon of hope, not a player in politics. By rejecting financial contributions from political parties and politicians, the Church can preserve its integrity and continue to spread the Gospel message.

The Church's true power lies not in politics, but in its unwavering commitment to the Gospel.

So, how can we move towards remaining neutral?

Establish clear guidelines and develop policies for interactions with politicians and political parties.

Diversify funding by seeking support from parishioners and organisations aligned with the Church's mission, and prioritise spiritual focus by regularly assessing and reaffirming the Church's core values and purpose.

By adopting these principles, the Church can maintain its prophetic voice, serve the

community effectively, and uphold the teachings of Christ without the pitfalls of political entanglements.

The Church's mission is to spread the Good News, not to engage in political manoeuvring. As we navigate these complex times, let's remember the words of Pope Francis: "The Church is not a political party, but a community of faith."

The Church must be a place where all feel welcome, regardless of political affiliation or ideology. It must be a place of healing, reconciliation, and peace. By focusing on its core mission, the Church can transcend the divisions of politics and offer a message of hope and redemption to a world in need.

Let us strive to keep the faith pure, untainted by the allure of power and influence.

May we, as the Church, remain steadfast in our commitment to the Gospel, and shine forth as a beacon of hope in a world that desperately needs it.

By doing so, we can build a stronger, more compassionate Church, guided by the principles of love, justice, and peace.

The path forward is clear. The Church must choose between the ways of the world and the ways of Christ. It must decide whether to be a player in politics or a prophetic voice in the wilderness. The choice is ours, but one thing is certain: the Church's true power lies in its unwavering commitment to the Gospel.

Churches should avoid financial support from political parties or politicians to maintain their neutrality and integrity. By remaining neutral, the Church can uphold her prophetic voice, serve the community effectively, and preserve her integrity.

The consequences of Church-politics alliances can be severe. The Church may

lose its ability to speak truth to power, and its message may be dismissed as politically motivated.

The Church's relationships with other faith communities and ecumenical partners may also be strained, and its ability to build bridges between different communities, impaired.

In contrast, a neutral Church can engage with all parties, advocating for justice and peace without fear or favour.

It can address social issues, promote human dignity, and provide spiritual guidance without being seen as partisan or biased.

The Church's neutrality is not a sign of weakness, but of strength. It is a commitment to its core values and mission, and a recognition that its true power lies not in politics, but in the Gospel.

As the world becomes increasingly polarised, the Church must be a beacon of hope and a voice of reason.

By remaining neutral and focused on its core mission, the Church can transcend the divisions of politics and offer a message of love, justice, and peace to a world in need.

The Church's true power lies in its unwavering commitment to the Gospel, and its ability to inspire and transform hearts.

By rejecting financial contributions from political parties and politicians, the Church can preserve its integrity, maintain its prophetic voice, and continue to spread the Good News.

Ultimately, the Church's decision to remain neutral is not a rejection of politics, but a commitment to its core values and mission.

It is a recognition that the Church's true power lies not in politics, but in the Gospel, and that its greatest strength lies in its ability to inspire and transform hearts.

There are moments when life feels uncertain. In recent months, news of war and rising tensions between nations has unsettled many. The ongoing conflict in the Middle East has driven up oil prices, affecting economies around the world and bringing a renewed sense of instability.

Here at home, we feel it in very real ways. Concerns about petrol prices, the rising cost of daily essentials, and recent changes to fuel subsidies have become part of everyday conversation. What happens far away does not remain far away. It finds its way into our homes, our plans, and our sense of security. At first, it feels like passing concern. But over time, it settles into a quiet uneasiness about what lies ahead.

And in this month of May, when the Church invites us to turn to Mary, we are gently drawn back to the Rosary and to a prayer we have long known.

In these moments, when the mind grows tired and the heart seeks steadiness, we often find ourselves drawn back to the Hail Mary, as we seek some consolation, some clarity, or simply a sense of peace.

Hail Mary.

We say it so often. Yet how often do we pause to consider how this simple beginning is shaping us?

A word that echoes

When the angel Gabriel appears to Mary, his greeting is anything but ordinary. "Hail, full of grace." In Scripture, this "hail" is not just



Encountering Faith

Thomson Emmanuel

How the Hail Mary shapes us in difficult moments

a polite greeting. It carries the sense of rejoicing, a declaration that something extraordinary is unfolding in God's plan.

This becomes even more striking when we recall the words of the prophet Zephaniah, "Rejoice... the Lord is in your midst."

What was once spoken to a people now finds its fulfilment in a person. Mary becomes the living response to that call. The joy of God's presence is no longer distant. It is here.

And the first word spoken to her is not fear, but joy.

What does it mean that this same word has now become part of our own prayer?

More than a greeting

When we say "Hail Mary," we step into that same invitation to rejoice. Not because everything is going well, but because God is present.

Mary does not begin the encounter. God speaks first. The angel comes to her with a greeting she did not expect.

Each time we begin with "Hail," we are entering that same movement. We are not so much starting the prayer as responding to a God who has already come near. Mary is called "full of grace", a life completely open to God.

And through this prayer, we are formed in that same direction, becoming more open, more receptive, more willing to let God work within us.

Prayer is not merely something we recite. It shapes us. Not by giving immediate answers, but by teaching the heart to receive, especially

when everything in us wants to take control.

Joy in uncertainty

It is easy to speak of joy when everything is in place. But what about when work becomes uncertain? When the cost of daily life rises? When the future feels unclear?

And in moments like these, a quieter question emerges.

Do we still rejoice?

Not as a feeling, but as a way of standing before God, remaining open to Him even when everything within us feels unsettled.

And yet, His presence is not always something we feel.

At times, it may seem distant. But the Church continues to make His presence known in prayer, in the Word, and in the sacraments.

Sometimes, it is in the very act of turning to Him, in choosing to pray when everything feels unsettled, that we begin to glimpse that He has not left us.

The desire to pray, the quiet return to familiar words, may itself be a sign that we are not as alone as we think. What we seek as a "feeling" of God may already be present in a quieter form, in the strength to say the next word of the prayer, in the decision to remain turned towards Him.

In a world that pulls us into worry about what lies ahead, this brings us back to the present moment, the only place where we can encounter God.

A prayer that steadies

Perhaps the Hail Mary is not meant to change our situation immediately. But in difficult

moments, it steadies us from within, even when nothing around us has changed. Over time, what once felt like repetition becomes something deeper, a quiet return.

Letting the word sink in

The next time we begin the Hail Mary, it may help to pause, even briefly. Not to rush through the words, but to become attentive to what we are saying, and to what God may be quietly doing within us.

Hail Mary.

Words we have said so many times. Yet within them, something deeper is unfolding.

Perhaps, without realising it, we have been responding all along, being gently drawn into a God who has already come near.

In a world that feels uncertain, this simple beginning remains.

Not asking us to have everything figured out.

But inviting us, quietly, to trust.

And as we gather in church, in our BECs, or in the quiet of our homes, perhaps this is something we can carry with us. Not just the words, but an awareness of what they are shaping within us. And somewhere in that quiet space, something begins to change.

Not dramatically. But gently. A steadiness begins to take root.

And perhaps that is where true joy begins.

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



Fr Dr Clarence Devadass

The anonymous Christian in the parish pew

In the seminary, while studying the topic on salvation, I came across Karl Rahner's notion of the "anonymous Christian". His idea was that those who, without explicit knowledge of Christ or formal adherence to Christianity, nevertheless live in God's grace by following their conscience, could be considered Christians in an implicit sense. Recently, I found myself reflecting on Rahner's phrase in a much simpler, more practical, and perhaps more sobering way.

During a short Easter break, I attended weekday Mass at a suburban parish in another country. As is often the case in smaller parishes, weekday Mass congregations are small and familiar. The regulars know one another; the rhythm of attendance is steady. A newcomer stands out. I was that newcomer, seated in the pew. I expected, perhaps naively, that someone might approach me afterwards, extend a welcome, or at least offer a friendly word. But no one did. I was "anonymous". More than that, I was invisible.

Walking back afterwards, I reflected and asked myself: if I were someone who had just moved into that neighbourhood, searching for a parish community to belong to, my experience would have been decisive. Would I return? We often speak of the Church as communal, as the Body of Christ, as a family of believers. But what does it mean to be communal if our communities fail to notice, welcome, or embrace the stranger in their midst? Christianity is inherently communal. From

the Acts of the Apostles, where believers shared everything in common, to Paul's letters describing the Church as one body with many members, the faith is not meant to be lived in isolation. The Eucharist itself is a communal act: we gather, we share, we become one in Christ.

Yet, paradoxically, many parish communities today risk becoming insular. We gather together, but we do not always gather with one another. We sit side by side, but we do not always see each other. The stranger in the pew becomes invisible. The newcomer remains anonymous. And the communal dimension of faith is reduced to ritual participation rather than relational belonging.

Rahner's theological construct was meant to be inclusive, expansive, and hopeful. But my experience gave the phrase a different resonance. In that suburban parish, I was an "anonymous Christian" not because I lacked explicit faith, but because a faith community failed to recognise me as part of them. My anonymity was not theological but social. It was not about salvation but about belonging. And yet, the irony is sharp: If the Church is to be a sacrament of communion, then anonymity in this sense is a failure of witness.

This experience raises uncomfortable questions. Have our parish communities become so self-absorbed that we have grown cold? Have we reduced our faith to personal devotion, forgetting its communal dimension? Have we allowed routine to dull our awareness of the stranger among us?

It is easy to blame modern life: busyness, individualism, the erosion of neighbourhood ties. But the Gospel calls us to something more radical. "I was a stranger and you welcomed Me," says Jesus in Matthew 25. Hospitality is not optional; it is constitutive of Christian identity. To fail to welcome is to fail to recognise Christ Himself.

If I were truly new to that neighbourhood, searching for a parish to call home, my experience would have shaped my decision. And that is the test of a parish: not merely the beauty of its liturgy, not the eloquence of its homilies, not even the fervour of its devotions, but the warmth of its welcome. A parish that fails to notice the stranger fails in its mission. We often speak of evangelisation as programmes, strategies, or catechesis. But evangelisation begins with hospitality. It begins with seeing the person in front of us, acknowledging them, and making them feel that they belong here. Without that, all our talk of communion becomes hollow.

In the encounter at the home of Martha and Mary, many emphasise Mary because Jesus had said she had chosen the better part. Yet Jesus did not dismiss Martha's generous hospitality or loving service. Hospitality itself is an integral part of Christian discipleship, reflecting love, welcome, and care for others.

To be communal is more than to gather. It is to recognise, to welcome, to embrace. It is to live out the truth that we are one body, and that no member can be forgotten or invisible. It is to resist the temptation

of anonymity by practicing intentional hospitality. Being communal means noticing the stranger, extending welcome, building relationships, and sharing burdens and joys. Without these, our communities risk becoming clubs of the familiar rather than signs of God's kingdom.

My experience reminded me that I, too, as a priest, must be vigilant. How often have I failed to notice the stranger in my own parish? How often have I remained in my comfort zone, speaking only to those I know? How often have I allowed routine to blind me to the presence of Christ in the newcomer? The challenge is not only for others but for me too. If I lament being invisible, I must also commit to making others visible. If I felt anonymous, I must resolve to ensure no one else feels that way in my community.

My experience of anonymity in a parish was a sobering reminder of how easily communities can fail to embody communion. The Church is called to be a family, a body, a communion. But that calling requires vigilance, hospitality, and intentionality. We cannot afford to let strangers remain invisible. We cannot allow newcomers to walk away feeling anonymous. To be communal is to see, to welcome, to embrace. Anything less might be a betrayal of the Gospel!

Fr Clarence serves as the parish priest of the Church of St Anthony and is also the Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.



Fr Ron Rolheiser

Science and Christian faith – friends not foes

During most of the two thousand years that Christianity has existed, it has not been friends with science, and science has not been friends with it. From the Church condemning Galileo, to the Enlightenment thinkers declaring faith "a spent project," science and Christian faith have been more foe than friend. Happily, this has changed.

Today Christian theology has been able to not only accept the legitimate findings of science but it has been able to integrate them healthily into a vision of salvation history.

As a salient example of this we might look at the theological synthesis given us by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955).

Teilhard was a prominent scientist, a paleontologist recognised internationally for his scientific work. He was also a person of exceptional faith, a mystic, a Jesuit priest, and a gifted spiritual writer.

At the time he was doing his scientific work and writing his first theological treatises, the concept of evolution was still almost universally rejected by all the Christian churches, who saw it as in opposition to the story of creation in Genesis. Indeed, the Roman Catholic authorities forbade Teilhard from publishing his theological writings, and for several decades his theological writings were circulated only privately among his Jesuit colleagues. Eventually, with the advent of Vatican II and a general (cultural and religious)

softening of resistance to the concept of evolution, Teilhard's theological treatises were allowed by Church authorities to be published; albeit they still came with a warning label as dogmatically unsafe.

What is that worldview? To my mind, it is one of the great syntheses of science and Christian faith that has yet been written. In essence, what Teilhard did was to take the findings of science, particularly the concept of evolution, and meld it with a Christian vision of salvation history to produce a framework within which to more deeply understand science, the Christian faith, and the place of Christ in history.

In brief, he fused, as a perfect fit, the scientific notion of creation and evolution (what we might today call the *Big Bang hypothesis*) with a Christian vision of salvation history and the place of Christ in that history.

Here, in brief, is his synthesis: God is love and fifteen billion years ago, God created the universe (*ex nihilo*) out of love. However, God didn't create it as a finished product, as described in Genesis, but as a cosmic infant that would evolve and grow through some billions of years to reach maturity.

Biblically, initial creation, as described in Genesis, was a "formless void." In an evolutionary view, it took more than six days for human beings to appear; it took fourteen to fifteen billion years. And

creation unfolded this way: After the initial creation (*the Big Bang*), God, at the centre of everything, began to draw all things to Himself through love, and through billions of years, as creation responded to that invitation, it increased continually in complexity, consciousness, and unity, moving freely in love towards God.

And this went through four stages, always with God at the centre, drawing creation into the mystery of love:

First, geology, earth, rocks, and water formed ("*Geogenesis*"). *Second*, from these, eventually life comes forth ("*Biogenesis*"). *Third*, some millions of years later human beings with self-reflective consciousness and free will emerge ("*Noogenesis*"). But, for Teilhard, there is still a *fourth* stage, the coming of Christ ("*Christogenesis*").

For Teilhard the birth of Christ is the penultimate culmination (spiritually and cosmically) of the evolutionary process. The unfolding of evolutionary history eventually brings us Christ, not just as the historical Jesus but also as a cosmic reality. For Teilhard, Christ is both a person and a cosmic structure within the universe which, like the person of Jesus, invites everything (humans, animals, plants, rocks, water) to an "omega point," namely, to a community of love inside of God.

This might sound complex, but perhaps it can be explained more simply by folding Teilhard's vision of creation into the early

Christian hymn in Ephesians, 1,3-10. Here science and Christian faith (not least about the centrality of Christ) blend seamlessly:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. ... In love He predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ ... God has given us the wisdom to understand fully the mystery, a plan He was pleased to decree in Christ. A plan to be carried out in Christ, in the fullness of time, to bring all things into one in Him, in the heavens and on earth.

Salvation history and evolutionary history both point to the *unfolding mystery of how God is bringing all things into unity through Christ*. Teilhard wonderfully folded the cosmic history of this planet into the mystery of Christ.

Science and Christian faith are friends, not foes.

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

LITTLE CATHOLIC'S CORNER

Dear children,



In today's Gospel, Jesus spent time with His disciples after rising from the dead, teaching and encouraging them. After that, He went up to heaven to be with God, the Ascension. Before He left, He gave them an important mission: to share His love with everyone and help others follow Him. He also made a special promise —

that He would be with them always. It does not mean Jesus left us alone. It means He is with us in a new way, even if we can't see Him. He is our King in heaven, and He trusts us to continue His work here on earth by loving others and doing what is right. How can we live this out in simple ways every day? When you help a classmate who is struggling, you are sharing Jesus' love. When you include someone who feels left out, you are doing His work. When you forgive, tell

the truth, or choose to be kind even when it's difficult, you are living out the mission He gave you. Even small acts, like sharing your food, listening to a friend, or praying for someone, can make a big difference. The Ascension reminds us that yes, Jesus is in heaven, but He is also with us every day, guiding us, loving us, and helping us to bring His light into the world.

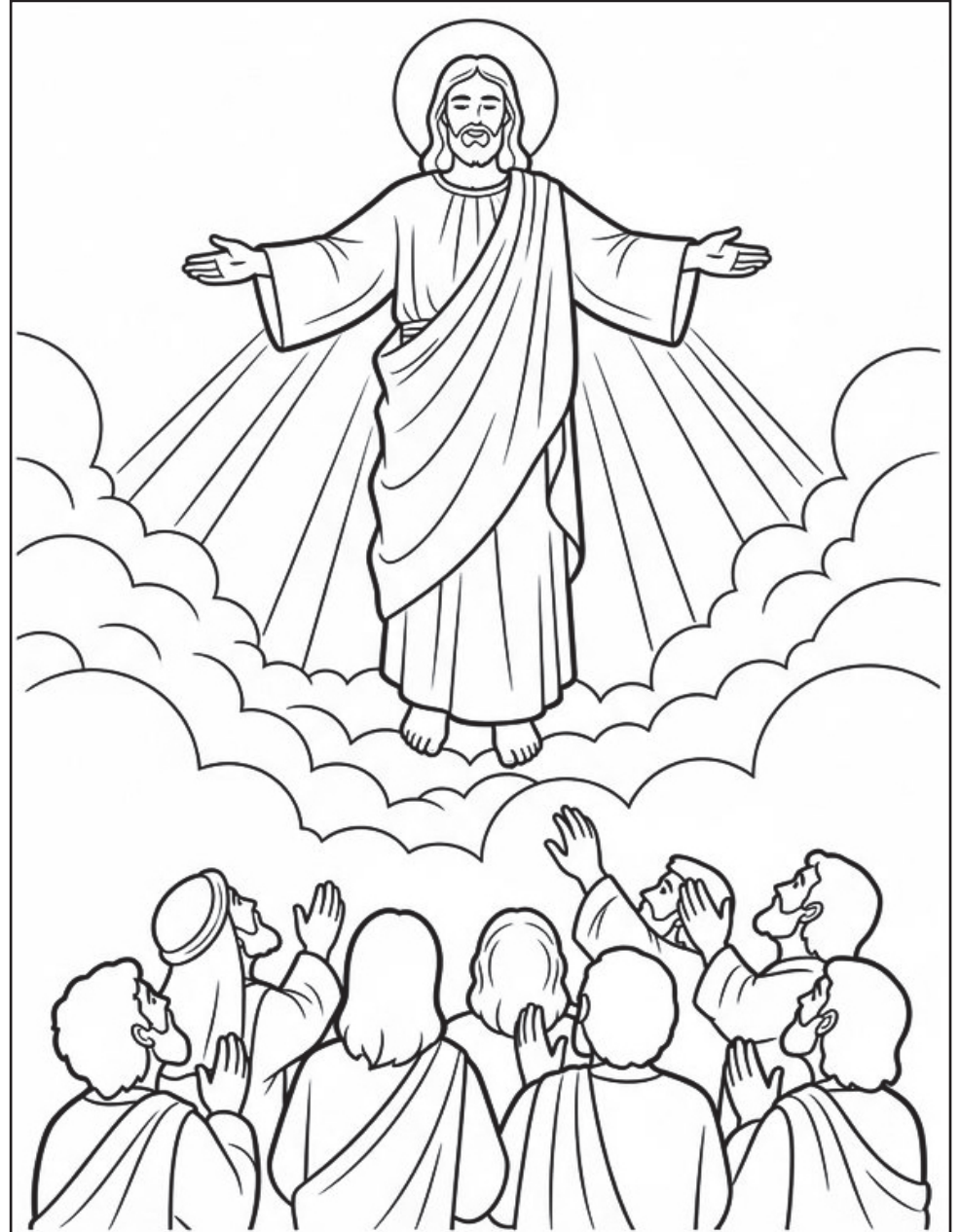
Love,
Aunty C

Ascension of our Lord

Find and circle the words hidden in the puzzle!

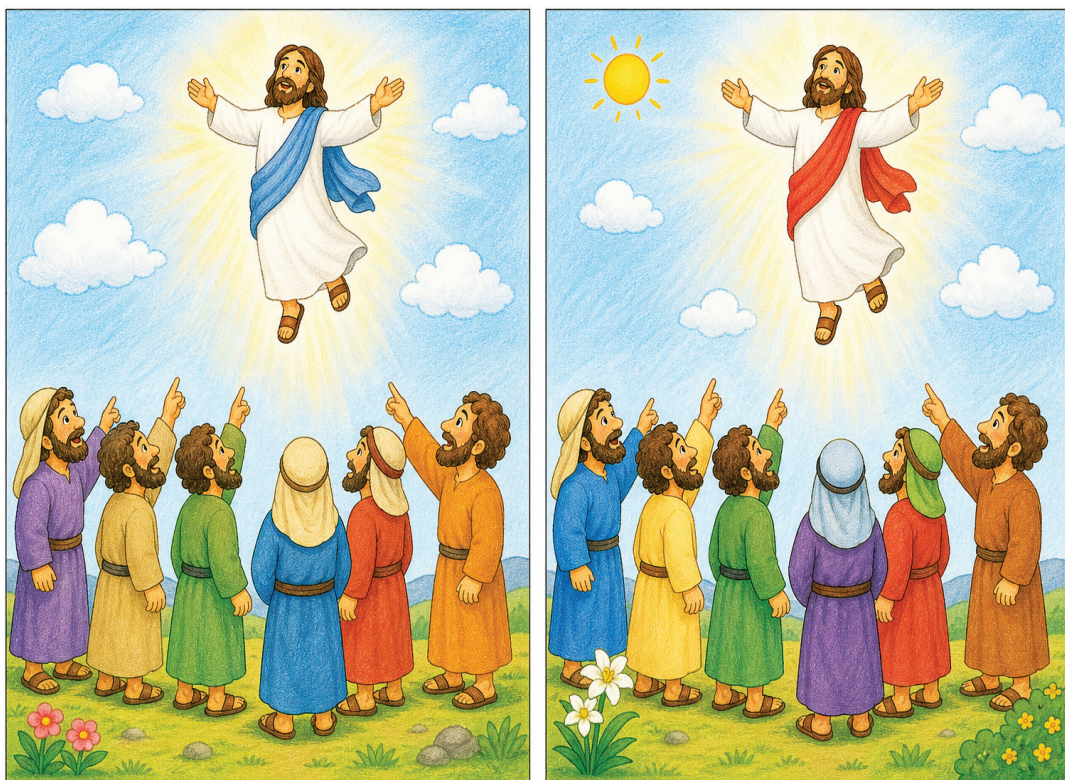
I	C	E	R	F	A	W	H	M	O	L	I	V	E	T
A	E	M	V	H	K	A	G	S	H	Y	J	X	Y	H
P	S	O	C	M	H	E	A	V	E	N	E	G	C	B
V	Z	U	B	K	A	A	G	H	Y	K	R	J	O	D
I	Q	N	A	S	K	Y	W	J	Q	E	U	U	U	I
Z	V	T	S	K	F	Q	T	E	H	N	S	I	B	S
K	P	A	C	S	J	L	R	S	F	D	A	H	Q	C
H	Z	I	E	L	I	W	J	U	U	C	L	C	L	I
V	U	N	N	M	S	W	R	S	V	J	E	B	G	P
H	G	C	S	M	C	I	N	A	K	Y	M	Y	R	L
V	Z	X	I	D	I	T	B	P	O	W	E	R	L	E
B	D	D	O	K	H	N	O	Q	T	G	H	C	A	S
H	M	X	N	E	M	E	C	L	O	U	D	S	S	P
J	E	F	P	H	G	S	X	M	A	T	T	H	E	W
J	Q	P	K	D	Z	S	D	Y	I	N	P	E	S	C

WITNESS	OLIVET	MATTHEW	POWER
DISCIPLES	MOUNTAIN	JERUSALEM	JESUS
ASCENSION	HEAVEN	SKY	CLOUDS



SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

Can you spot 10 differences in the picture?



SAY A PRAYER TO JESUS TODAY

Dear Jesus,
You went up to heaven
to be with the Father,
but You did not leave me alone.

Help me to remember
that You are always with me
and that You love me very much.

Teach me to pray
like Your friends did,
and to follow You every day.

Help me to be kind,
to share Your love,
and to trust that
You are always with me.

Amen.

YOUTH

ACUTIS AI Meets a Digital Generation Searching for Faith

KUALA LUMPUR: We live in an era where questions of faith are no longer first brought to a priest, catechist, or classroom, but to a search bar. Gen Z and millennials have grown up in a digital culture shaped by instant access to information, algorithm-driven content, and an overwhelming range of competing worldviews. While this has made knowledge more accessible, it has also created confusion, particularly when it comes to moral and existential questions.

With this reality in mind, two brothers from Texas, Peter Cooney, 21, and Thomas Cooney, 19, developed *Acutis AI*, a faith-based chatbot grounded in 2,000 years of Catholic teaching. Both students at the University of Dallas and Baylor University respectively, they recognised a gap in how existing systems approach questions of faith and morality.

Acutis AI was inspired by St Carlo Acutis, an Italian teenager who died at just 15. Often referred to as "God's Influencer," he was known for using technology as a tool for evangelisation, most notably through a website he created documenting Eucharistic miracles. His approach to the digital world was marked by intention rather than attention, using technology to point others towards faith.

St Carlo famously limited his screen time while using

it purposefully, most notably by creating a website on Eucharistic miracles. *Acutis AI* echoes this discipline. Built on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, papal encyclicals, and St Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, it answers questions on faith and morality with consistency rather than compromise.

"We'll make sure that it's always answering through Catholic perspectives, no matter what the question is about," the brothers told *EWTN*.

The platform includes built-in safeguards such as parental monitoring, time limits, and alerts for sensitive topics, practical features that address growing concerns about AI dependency among young users. Its visual identity features the Star of Bethlehem, symbolising a guide that leads users not merely to information, but ultimately toward Christ.

Having personally tested *Acutis AI*, I found a clear distinction in the way it approaches sensitive moral questions.

When asked about issues such as abortion or suicide, the responses were firmly rooted in Catholic teaching, offering clarity rather than ambiguity. This stands in contrast to many mainstream AI platforms, which often prioritise neutrality or affirmation over moral guidance.

However, it is important to note that *Acutis AI* is not positioned as a replacement for the Church's authority. The Magisterium remains the authentic interpreter of

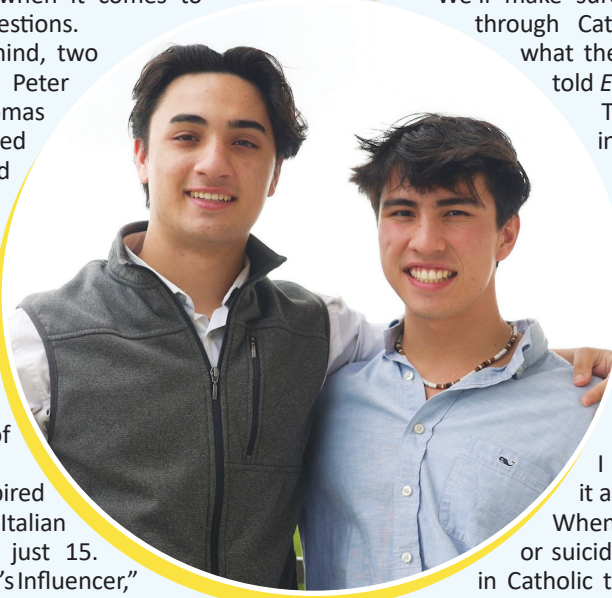


doctrine. Instead, it serves as a tool that meets young Catholics in their familiar digital space.

At the same time, the question of how artificial intelligence should be used responsibly sits at the centre of *Acutis AI*'s design. While the platform offers a structured way of engaging with Catholic teaching, it also reflects a broader concern about the role of technology in shaping human thought and relationships.

In this context, recent Vatican document, *Antiqua et Nova*, highlights this balance, noting that, "like any product of human creativity, AI can be directed toward positive or negative ends. When used in ways that respect human dignity and promote the well-being of individuals and communities, it can contribute positively to the human vocation."

As technology continues to shape how people think, search, and form opinions, tools such as this raise a deeper question: not just what artificial intelligence can do, but what it should be used for. For a generation navigating faith in an increasingly digital world, *Acutis AI* represents one approach to ensuring that technology remains aligned with truth rather than detached from it. **Christina Lazaroo**



KG SEROMAH YOUTH RISE TO GOD'S CALL

Evisdateh Paul

BAU, Sarawak: A Vocation Awareness Seminar was successfully held at St Peter Damian's Church in Kampung Seromah, on April 18. A total of 94 participants,

comprising youth and parents, were present. Facilitating the programme were Fr Abel Madisang, Deacon Addie Frank, as well as 13 seminarians from St Peter's College Seminary in Kuching, Sarawak.

The programme was organised by the

Seremba zone of St Stephen's Parish (Bau), on the initiative of seminarian Freddoline Ahsiong and seminarian Dennis Raj who is currently undergoing pastoral training there. The main objective of the programme was to raise awareness and provide exposure to the faithful particularly youths and parents regarding different vocations in life. The participation of a child as young as nine years highlighted the importance of nurturing vocation awareness from an early age.

Throughout the programme, various sessions were conducted. Among them was a talk titled *What is a vocation?* delivered by Fr Abel, who is also a lecturer and spiritual father at St Peter's College Seminary. In addition, several seminarians shared their personal experiences in responding to their vocation, followed by a question-and-answer session that allowed participants to engage more deeply.

The programme also provided exposure to the diocesan priesthood and life in a formation house, namely the seminary, thus helping participants to better understand the process of discernment.



Bro Majoery Simon assisting the youth.

The seminar concluded with a Mass, presided by Fr Abel. In the homily delivered by Deacon Addie, he emphasised that although there are various forms of vocation in the Christian life, the primary vocation of every Christian is to holiness. The presence of the parish priest, Fr Peter Liston, during the Mass, clearly demonstrated his support for the programme.

It is hoped that this programme will help the young people present realise that every person is called by God, and in turn encourage participants to respond to His call with openness and courage. May such efforts continue in the future for the development and growth of the Church.



PAPAR, Sabah: Confirmation candidates from the Church of St Joseph, went on a pilgrimage to the Church of the Holy Rosary, Limbahau recently.

The church is one of the seven designated "Seven Sacraments Pilgrimage Centres," with a particular focus on the Sacrament of Confirmation. For the candidates, the visit went beyond a simple excursion — it became a moment of spiritual encounter, reflection, and renewal.

Throughout the pilgrimage, the candidates engaged in prayer, guided reflections, and faith-sharing sessions. These activities helped them deepen their understanding of Confirmation — not merely as a ritual, but as a personal commitment to live out their faith more fully. They came to recognise that the sacrament strengthens them through the Holy Spirit, calling them to grow in courage, responsibility, and witness as members of the Church.

Accompanying catechists emphasised that through Confirmation, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are awakened in a new way, enabling the faithful to stand firm in their beliefs and to respond to life's challenges with wisdom and trust in God. Away from the busyness of daily life, the candidates were invited to listen more attentively—to God, to one another, and to the stirrings within their own hearts.

One candidate shared that the pilgrim-

St Joseph's confirmands' pilgrimage to Limbahau



age helped them see Confirmation in a new light. "Before this, I thought Confirmation was just something we had to complete," the candidate said. "Now I understand that it is about choosing to follow God more seriously. I feel more ready to trust Him, even when things are difficult."

The communal aspect of the pilgrimage also left a strong impression. Praying, reflecting and walking together strengthened bonds among the candidates, reminding them that faith is lived not in isolation, but within a community.

The St Joseph Catechetical Committee

expressed hope that the experience would leave a lasting impact as the candidates prepare to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. They are encouraged to move forward with renewed faith, ready to live as witnesses of Christ, guided and strengthened by the Holy Spirit in their daily lives. **Aaron D'Sazo**

CVS WELCOMING GATHERING 2026

SHAH ALAM: The Catholic Varsity Students (CVS) Welcoming Gathering is an annual event that is eagerly awaited by students studying around Shah Alam. This event aims to welcome and celebrate the new students from various campuses as the new semester begins.

Organised by the CVS community, the gathering carries the theme from Ezekiel 34:16, "The lost I will seek out, the strayed I will bring back, the injured I will bind up, the sick I will heal." It was successfully held on Sunday, April 26 at the St Faustina Hall in the Church of the Divine Mercy (CDM), Shah Alam.

Over 200 students from UiTM Shah Alam, UiTM Puncak Alam, UiTM Puncak Perdana, Xiamen University, Centexs, MSU, and other universities around Shah Alam gathered, making it the highest number of participants who have ever attended. This year, new faces from MSU were welcomed into the family, particularly students originating from Timor-Leste.

Franscoelo Carvalho Soares, one of the new students from Timor-Leste, said, "Joining the Welcoming Gathering was truly a heartfelt experience for me. At first, I felt a little shy, but through the warmth, kindness, and Christ's love shown by everyone, I quickly felt welcomed and connected, reminding me of the beauty of unity in Christ. It made me grateful to be part of a Catholic community that feels like a second home."

The event began with an opening prayer and a montage video, followed by an opening address by Parish Pastoral coordinator for CVS, Joseph Asim, alongside UiTM's senior lecturer, Dr. Lovelyna Benedict Jipiu. Subsequently, parish priest of CDM, Rev Fr George Harrison, addressed the participants. After the speeches, each speaker was presented with a token of appreciation—a self-portrait and family portrait, hand-illustrated by two



talented members of CVS.

Next, there was an ice-breaking session by CVS Xiamen. This was their first time co-organising the programme, and many students enjoyed it, happily taking photos with their friends.

Caroline Rachel, a student from Xiamen University, said, "Welcoming Gathering is a place where students can feel at home, especially those who are far away from their hometown. It is enjoyable and entertaining, but also strengthens our sense of spirituality towards Jesus Christ. The CVS community is like a second family to me. I can't wait for further CVS activities."

The event continued with a 'Get to Know Us' session. This session aims to introduce students to the CVS activities and committee members. Despite our diverse backgrounds, we came together as a unified community. CVS offers an inclusive environment in which students can deepen their faith, build relationships, and maintain ties with the church. This event serves as an opportunity for participants to connect and offer mutual support.

The event continued with Praise and Worship, followed by games. Students had fun



everyone on my team was happy."

Towards the end of the gathering, students convened in smaller groups for a structured sharing session. This session involved two questions focused on reflecting upon the presence of God in their lives, in accordance with this year's theme. Participants discussed factors that enhance their connection to God and explored their personal aspirations in life. The session was designed to foster a support-



sive environment, encouraging students to thoughtfully express their perspectives and emotions within their groups.

The sharing session was my favourite part of the programme. I appreciated listening to the personal stories shared by my group members. It was a meaningful moment where we learned from one another and strengthened our bond as children of God", said Judnelleon, a senior student from UiTM Puncak Alam.

The gathering ended with a group photo and tea time before students returned to their campuses. **Destiny N. S Galawis**

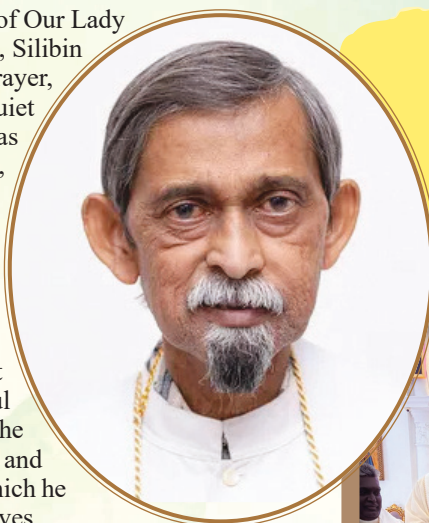
ing, dancing, and playing together, making new friends and creating new bonds with other students from different universities.

Joelsne Dealdery Johnny, a Semester 1 student from UiTM Puncak Perdana, said, "This is my first time joining Welcoming Gathering, one of the sessions I enjoy the most is Praise and Worship. I find the session really heart-touching as we glorify and lift up the beautiful name of God."

Felix from Xiamen University also added that "Out of all the sessions, my favourite was the games as I got to know all of my group members. All the games were enjoyable and

A faithful servant returns home

IPOH: The Church of Our Lady of Lourdes (OLOL), Silibin was filled with prayer, gratitude, and quiet sorrow on May 6 as clergy, religious, parishioners, family members, and friends gathered to bid farewell to Fr Anthony Pillai Thomas — a priest remembered not only for his faithful ministry, but for the warmth, humility, and compassion with which he touched countless lives.



In loving memory of Fr Anthony Pillai Thomas

Fr Pillai, who passed away on May 3 at Hospital Fatimah, Ipoh, was described by many as a gentle shepherd who carried both suffering and service with remarkable grace throughout his priestly life.

The funeral Mass, which began at 11.00am, was celebrated by Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang, and concelebrated by Archbishop Julian Leow of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, Msgr Stephen Liew, and Fr Peter Tan from the Archdiocese of Singapore, Fr Pillai's seminary classmate. Also present were priests from various dioceses, deacons, and religious from communities he had served over the decades.

The initial rites were conducted by the parish priest of OLOL, Fr Robert Daniel, symbolising the place where Fr Pillai's journey of faith first began through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation.

In his homily, Cardinal Sebastian reflected deeply on the connection between identity and mission. He reminded the congregation that Fr Pillai's priestly vocation flowed from his identity in Christ — first received through Baptism and Confirmation at OLOL, and later sealed through the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

The cardinal spoke movingly about how Fr Pillai faithfully lived out his calling as disciple, deacon, and priest despite quietly battling numerous medical conditions over many years, doing so with cheerfulness and perseverance.

Drawing from the Gospel account of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, Cardinal Sebastian reflected on the inner journey of the soul — the temptation to walk away in disappointment, and the grace-filled decision to return to Jerusalem. He challenged the faithful to reflect on their own spiritual journey by asking: "Are we running away, or are we returning?"

Cardinal Sebastian also noted that Fr Pillai had now left the Pilgrim Church on earth and entered the Suffering Church, where he would be purified and prepared to meet the Father. He invited all present to continue accompanying Fr Pillai with



prayers and Masses as he journeys toward the Triumphant Church in heaven.

As the choir sang *You Shall Be Holy* as the final hymn — echoing Fr Pillai's ordination theme, "Be holy for I am holy" — many were visibly moved, sensing how fittingly the words reflected the quiet witness of his life and ministry.

During the eulogy, Fr Pillai's cousin shared heartfelt memories of growing up together as "more than cousins." From a young age, Fr Pillai was deeply involved in church life, especially in the choir, and his calling to the priesthood was already evident.

He also recalled Fr Pillai's unwavering devotion to his mother, whom he brought from Sri Lanka to Malaysia and cared for personally with deep love and dedication.

Despite being born with a serious heart condition and not expected to live beyond the age of 10, Fr Pillai lived to 72 — spending his life faithfully serving God and His people.

Francis Martin, a childhood friend of 66 years, fondly remembered their early years around the OLOL parish community. "He was in the choir and I was an altar boy," Francis recalled with a smile.

As a youth, Fr Pillai formed and led the junior choir with his strong singing voice. Together with friends, they established the Church Rangers Club, organising home visits, assisting at funerals, and arranging trips to religious sites to strengthen faith and friendship among the youth.

Francis also spoke of Fr Pillai's gift for mathematics and how he patiently tutored many children in the community. "He always made time to reconnect with me whenever he was in

town. To me, he was more than a friend — he was a brother," he said.

Many others echoed similar sentiments, describing Fr Pillai as approachable, fatherly, always smiling, and ever willing to listen and help despite his own illness. His quiet witness left a lasting impression on communities throughout the Diocese of Penang.

Born on Dec 1, 1953 in Klang, Fr Pillai entered formation at College General in Penang before continuing his theological studies at St Francis Xavier Seminary in Singapore. He was ordained deacon in 1989 at the Church of St Mary, Tapah and ordained priest on Feb 14, 1990 at the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Ipoh.

Over 36 years of priestly ministry, he served faithfully in numerous parishes across the Diocese of Penang, including Butterworth, Bagan Serai, Nibong Tebal, Tapah, Kampar, City Parish Penang — where he also served as director of the Diocesan Pastoral Institute — Ipoh, Sungai Siput, Kuala Kangsar, Tanjung Malim, Taiping, Sungai Petani, and Parit Buntar.

Though Fr Anthony Pillai has completed his earthly pilgrimage, the legacy of his priesthood lives on in the many lives he touched. His was not a life marked by grandeur or recognition, but by steadfast fidelity — a priest who quietly embraced both suffering and service, and who remained faithful to the mission entrusted to him until the very end.

May his soul rest in the peace of the Risen Lord whom he served so faithfully.

Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him. May he rest in peace. Amen.

For enquiries, please contact:
Email: memoriam@herald.com.my
Tel: 03-2026 8291

MEMORIAM

In Loving Memory of



Anastasia Tham
Poh Choo

Age: 97 Years

Called to the Lord on
29th April 2026

"The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want."

Fondly remembered by
Loved Ones.

*This is my
comfort in my
affliction,
that your
promise gives
me life.*

Psalm 119:50

NOTICE

The cost for
placing a
memoriam
is RM150 per
column.

For enquiries,
please contact us:

Tel/WhatsApp:
03-2026 8291

Email: memoriam@herald.com.my



Photos courtesy of Francis Martin and Bernard Anthony.

Researchers name moth species after Pope Leo XIV

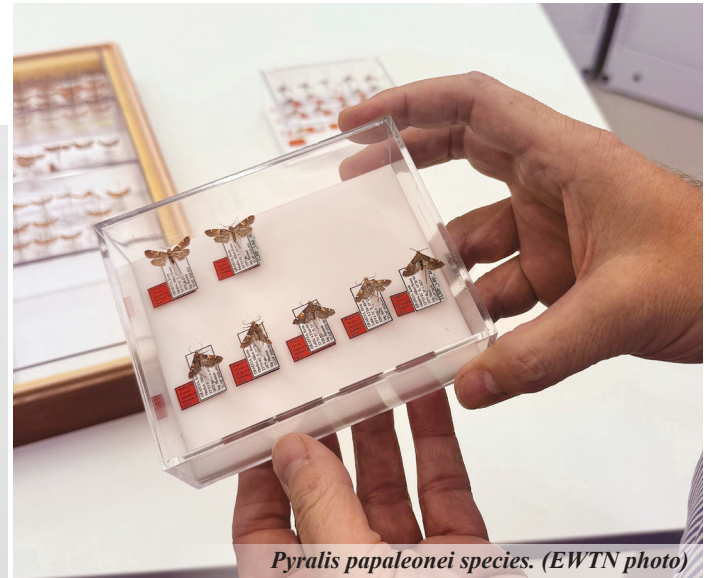
VATICAN: Researchers have named a moth species *Pyralis papaleonei*, or “Pope Leo moth,” in honour of the Holy Father.

“The new species is dedicated to the head of the Catholic Church, Pope Leo XIV,” authors Peter Huemer, Lauri Kaila, and Andreas H. Segerer wrote in a research article on the species. “The pontiff is a strong advocate of climate and environmental protection, and we hope that his voice may serve as an example for humanity.”

In the journal, *Nota Lepidopterologica*, the entomologists said the species was discovered on the Mediterranean island of Crete. It is a medium-sized species with a two-centimetre wingspan, gold spots, and prominent white bands.

“Furthermore, due to its distinctive colouration and overall appearance, the new species belongs to a group of Pyralidae whose species names refer to high secular or ecclesiastical offices including *Pyralis regalis*, *Pyralis imperialis*, *Pyralis princeps*, and *Pyralis cardinalis*,” they wrote.

Butterflies are often named after external characteristics, geographical locations, or in honour of distinguished individuals, according to a press release from *Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum*, or the Tyrolean State Museum, located in Innsbruck, Austria.



Pyralis papaleonei species. (EWTN photo)

Within the *Pyralis* genus, a different tradition has emerged. As early as 1775, Austrian naturalists and Jesuits Michael Denis and Ignaz Schiffermüller described the first species of the group as *Pyralis regalis*, or “royal,” due to its colouration.

This prompted similar names including *Pyralis princeps* and *Pyralis cardinalis*, which belong to the superfamily *Pyraloidea* comprised of 16,000 described species worldwide.

In the Old Testament (Genesis 2), Adam is instructed to name all animals. According to the museum, this led to the action of taxonomy — the science of classifying,

naming, and categorising organisms — to often be considered, “in the biblical sense, the oldest task of humankind.”

According to Huemer, head of studies at the Tyrolean State Museum, the naming process is more than a scientific act but a symbolic gesture. For the Pope Leo moth, it is an appeal to the head of the Catholic Church and to draw attention to humanity’s central responsibility for the preservation of creation.

“We are facing a global biodiversity crisis, yet only a fraction of the world’s species has been scientifically documented,” Huemer said in a statement. “Effective

conservation of biodiversity requires that species are first recognised, described, and named.”

Huemer’s call echoes the Pope’s “call for conversion” at a 2025 international conference on climate justice, celebrating the 10th anniversary of Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si’*.

“It is only by returning to the heart that a true ecological conversion can take place,” the Holy Father said. “We must shift from collecting data to caring, and from environmental discourse to an ecological conversion that transforms both personal and communal lifestyles.” Tessa Gervasini, EWTN



Vatican releases Pope’s Spain itinerary

VATICAN: The Holy See Press Office on May 6, confirmed the schedule for the Pope’s upcoming Apostolic Journey to Spain, which will feature twelve speeches, four Masses, and around ten meetings with political, ecclesial, and civic leaders.

There will be three main stops: Madrid, Barcelona, and the Canary Islands.

Pope Leo XIV will arrive in the Spanish capital on June 6, and be welcomed by King Felipe VI at the Royal Palace. He will then meet with government authorities, civil society representatives, and the diplomatic corps. That evening, he will lead a prayer vigil with young people in central Madrid’s Plaza de Lima.

The following day, on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, the Pope will celebrate Mass in the iconic Plaza de Cibeles, meet privately with members of the Order of Saint Augustine, and later take part in a gathering with representatives of culture, the arts, business, and sport at Madrid’s Movistar Arena.

On Monday, June 8, the Pope will meet Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez in the morning, before addressing members of parliament at the Congress of Deputies. He will then meet with bishops at the headquarters of the Spanish Bishops’ Conference and, in the evening, join the local diocesan community at the Bernabéu Stadium.

The Pope will travel to Barcelona on June 9 for one of the central moments of the trip: the inauguration and blessing of the Tower of Jesus Christ, part of the Basilica of the Sagrada Familia.

The tower, the tallest in the basilica, crowns the landmark church, which was consecrated 16 years ago by Pope Benedict XVI. Often described as a “Bible in stone,” the basilica was designed by the renowned Catalan architect Antoni Gaudí, whose legacy is being commemorated this year on the centenary of his death.

Alongside liturgical celebrations and official ceremonies, the Pope will once again highlight his concern for marginalised communities. In Madrid, he will visit a homeless shelter, and in Barcelona, a prison facility. Then, during the final leg of the journey, migration will take centre stage.

On June 11, the Pope will fly to the Canary Islands, volcanic islands off the northwest coast of Africa that serve as a major maritime entry point for migrants heading to Europe. In both Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and Santa Cruz de Tenerife, he will celebrate Mass and encourage those working on the front lines of migrant reception and assistance.

Fifteen years after Pope Benedict XVI’s visit, Pope Leo XIV is eagerly awaited by the Church in Spain. When the trip was first announced in late February, the president of the Spanish Bishops’ Conference, Archbishop Luis Argüello, expressed the bishops’ joy in a video message, and invited the faithful to “open their ears and hearts” to welcome the Pope. Leo XIV’s visit, he said, is meant “to confirm the brothers and sisters in the faith of the Church, which then becomes hope and charity in the concrete life of our communities.” **Vatican News**

SANCTUM PILGRIMAGES

CAMINO PORTUGUESE

7 - 20 SEP 2026

sanctumpilgrimages.com

LITHUANIA & POLAND
16 - 26 AUG 2026

PORTUGAL + FRANCE
25 OCT - 05 NOV 2026

CHENDU + CHONGQING
18 - 25 OCT 2026

SOUTH KOREA
9-14 NOV 2026

MARCH 2027 TAIWAN

JULY 2027 KENYA

AUGUST 2027 WYD, SEOUL

NEW

Anthony Chan +6012-428 8977

Thomas Yap +6012-308 8676

Capricorn Travel Services Sdn Bhd 201201004133 (977658-X) - MOTAC License Number: KPL/LN 7550