

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.



Pope Leo XIV inaugurates pontificate with vision of unity and love

VATICAN: Pope Leo XIV officially began his Petrine ministry on May 18, with a powerful appeal for unity, love, and global fraternity during a Mass attended by over 100,000 pilgrims and dignitaries in St Peter's Square. The first American pope, formerly Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost, addressed the world with humility and conviction, setting a clear pastoral tone for his pontificate: "to be a servant of your faith and your joy."

Quoting the early Church Father St Augustine, a figure central to his spiritual heritage as a former head of the Augustinian order, Pope Leo opened his homily with words that echoed throughout the square: "Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." This sense of spiritual longing, he said, is precisely what the Church must respond to — not with power or control, but with love, humility, and a deep desire for reconciliation.

Pope Leo was elected on May 8 following the death of Pope Francis, whose passing he called "a moment in which we felt like sheep without a shepherd." He described the conclave that followed as being deeply moved by the Holy Spirit, "bringing us into harmony like musical instruments," and shaping a united decision for the future of the Church.

His first public Mass as Pope was attended not only by Catholics but by a wide array of religious representatives — from Christian denominations to Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Jain, and Zoroastrian traditions — a testament to his ecumenical and interfaith vision.

Pope Leo's core message was unmistakable: The Church must be a "sign of unity and communion, which becomes a leaven for a reconciled world." In a world wounded by "hatred, violence, prejudice, and economic systems that marginalise the poor," he said, the Church cannot be passive or divided. "We want to say to the world, with humility and joy: Look to Christ! Come closer to him! Welcome his word that enlightens and consoles!"

Drawing on the Gospel of John and its poignant scene between Jesus and Peter,

Leo emphasised the transforming power of divine love. When Jesus asks Peter, "Do you love me more than these?" he uses the word *agapáo* — a selfless, sacrificial love. Peter responds with *philéo*, the love of friendship. "Only if you have known and experienced this love of God, which never fails, will you be able to feed my lambs," the pope reflected. "Peter is thus entrusted with the task of 'loving more' and giving his life for the flock."

This theme of sacrificial love — a love that serves and does not dominate — emerged as a foundation for Pope Leo's understanding of papal authority. "The Church of Rome presides in charity, and its true authority is the charity of Christ," he said. "It is never a question of capturing others by force, by religious propaganda or power. Instead, it is always and only a question of loving as Jesus did."

He rejected any form of clericalism or autocracy within the Church, insisting that leadership must be marked by accompaniment and humility. "Peter must shepherd the flock without ever yielding to the temptation to be an autocrat... all of us are 'living stones', called through our baptism to build God's house in fraternal communion,

in the harmony of the Spirit, in the coexistence of diversity."

That diversity — among cultures, peoples, and religions — is not something to be erased, he insisted, but embraced. "True unity does not cancel out differences but values the personal history of each person and the cultural richness of every people." This, he believes, is the only path to real peace.

As he concluded his inaugural homily, Pope Leo issued a resounding invitation to Christians and people of all faiths: to join in building a Church that "opens its arms to the world, proclaims the word, allows itself to be made 'restless' by history, and becomes a leaven of harmony for humanity."

"Brothers and sisters," he declared, "this is the hour for love! The heart of the Gospel is the love of God that makes us brothers and sisters. Together, as one people, as brothers and sisters, let us walk towards God and love one another."

With these words, Pope Leo XIV stepped fully into his role as shepherd of over a billion Catholics, offering not only direction for the Church but hope for a fractured world in search of peace, purpose, and unity. **Agencies**

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.
Rev 21:10-11



United in Mission: Sabah's historic pastoral assembly celebrates synodality and shared journey ■ P4-5



Pauline Jubilee Week marks milestone for Daughters of St Paul ■ P7



Focusing on Jesus and hope beyond the prison ■ P8

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MY VIEW

Malaysia is steadily moving towards becoming an aged society. **By 2030, over 15 per cent of its population will be aged 60 and above.** The question we must ask is not just how we are preparing for this shift, but whether we are doing so with the moral clarity and compassion it demands.

Veteran social activist Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye has been a consistent and courageous advocate for a **Senior Citizens Bill**, a legislative framework that upholds the dignity, rights, and welfare of Malaysia's growing elderly population. His call is not simply a policy proposal; it is, at its heart, a moral imperative. The disturbing reports of elderly abandonment in hospitals, growing social isolation, and widespread financial insecurity among retirees are symptoms of a system unprepared for the realities of an ageing nation.

The proposed Bill aims to address these challenges through legal protections, improved health care access, financial safeguards, and mechanisms to prevent abuse and neglect. In light of Catholic social teaching, such a framework transcends political discourse. It becomes an act of justice and mercy.

The Catholic Church has always upheld the sanctity of life from conception to natural death. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC 1930) affirms that respect for human dignity requires that the elderly be honoured, supported, and protected, especially when they are vulnerable. "Honour your father and mother" (Exodus 20:12) is more than a family obligation, it is a divine command rooted in love, memory, and gratitude. This honour extends to all elders, whose wisdom and presence enrich our families, parishes,

and society.

The late Pope Francis was unwavering in his critique of the "throwaway culture" that marginalises the old. He called instead for a "culture of care" that sees the elderly as a blessing, not a burden. "Old age," he reminded us, "is not a disease, but a privilege." The Church echoes this in her preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, a call to protect those most at risk of being forgotten or devalued.

In our parishes across Malaysia, there are ministries dedicated to senior citizens. The elderly are not passive participants — they are pillars of faith: catechists, prayer warriors, community builders, and living witnesses to God's enduring love. They pass on stories of grace and resilience, shaping the younger generation in faith and wisdom. To forget them is to forget our roots. To abandon them is to deny a part of ourselves.

This same principle applies equally to those who have devoted their lives to God's service. Clergy and religious brothers and sisters, who have spent decades ministering to the People of God, also deserve to age with dignity and care. In fact, many dioceses in Malaysia have already begun building retirement homes for priests, recognising their service and ensuring they are not left in isolation or need during their later years. This is a powerful expression of both pastoral responsibility and Gospel compassion.

To be fair, Malaysia has made some commendable strides. Budget 2025 includes increased welfare aid for senior citizens. The i-Saraan EPF scheme now better supports informal workers and homemakers. Age-friendly infrastructure, from parks in Penang

to retirement housing under the KL Structure Plan 2040, reflects growing awareness. In the private sector, services like home healthcare and wearable tech are beginning to fill important gaps.

But serious challenges remain. The country has **only 60 geriatricians**, far short of what's needed. Digital illiteracy cuts many elderly off from information and services. Most urgently, retirement insecurity is widespread. Too many Malaysians face their golden years with anxiety rather than peace, due to insufficient savings and limited pension coverage.

Catholic social doctrine, particularly the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity, makes it clear: when families can no longer provide, the responsibility shifts to the wider community and the state. As *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (no. 222) notes, "The elderly must be able to find a suitable environment in which they can live with dignity and actively participate in the life of society." The proposed Senior Citizens Bill could be a turning point in realising this vision, by codifying protections, ensuring age-inclusive policies, and holding institutions accountable.

Let this be a national examination of conscience. How we treat the elderly reflects the soul of our society. Will we be remembered as a people who cherished our elders — or as one that turned its back on them in their most vulnerable years?

Let us respond to this challenge with compassion, foresight, and the justice our faith demands.

Sandra Ann

Unity and discernment in the Church

The readings for the Sixth Sunday of Easter offer us profound insights into the unity and guidance of the Church, especially as it faces new challenges and questions. One key theme that emerges is the role of the Holy Spirit in leading the Church towards truth, peace, and unity — especially when there are disagreements and uncertainties.

In the First Reading from Acts, we encounter one of the earliest crises in the Church: the question of whether Gentile converts must follow Jewish customs, particularly with regard to circumcision. This was not a small matter — it struck at the heart of identity, tradition, and the boundaries of belonging in the community. Some Jewish Christians insisted that adherence to the Law of Moses was necessary for salvation. Others, particularly Paul and Barnabas, recognised that salvation through Christ was not dependent on cultural or ritual observance but on faith and grace.

The early Church responded, not by conducting a poll or following majority opinion, but by gathering in discernment, prayer, and communal dialogue. This meeting — known as the Council of Jerusalem — is significant not because it resolved a doctrinal issue once and for all, but because it modelled how the Church should make decisions: under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Apostles concluded their letter to the Gentile churches with these striking words: "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us..." (Acts 15:28). This shows the central role of the Spirit in shaping the decisions of the Church. It was not a matter of majority rule but of spiritual discernment.

In this way, the Church is not a democracy, where each opinion carries equal weight

and the majority determines truth. Nor is it a dictatorship where only a select few make arbitrary decisions. Instead, the Church is a community of discernment, where leaders and faithful alike seek to align their will with God's, through prayer, consultation, and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The peace that comes from such decisions is not merely an absence of conflict but a deep inner harmony that flows from doing God's will.

This is the peace Jesus speaks about in the Gospel of John. As He prepares to leave His disciples, He promises them the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate who will teach them and remind them of everything He has said. Jesus knows that His physical departure will cause fear and confusion, but He assures them: "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you" (John 14:27). This peace is not circumstantial — it is not dependent on everything going right or everyone agreeing — but is rooted in the abiding presence of the Spirit. It is a peace that reassures, strengthens, and guides us amid uncertainty.

In today's world, the Church continues to face complex issues — moral, doctrinal, social, and pastoral. The temptation is often to appeal to popular opinion, political ideologies, or personal preferences. However, true discernment requires listening — deep, prayerful listening — to what the Spirit is saying through Scripture, tradition, the Magisterium, and the lived experience of the faithful. As Catholics, we are called to trust not only in human reason or institutional authority but in the living Spirit of God who speaks through the Church.

The Second Reading from Revelation

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with Fr Andrew Kooi

6th Sunday of Easter (C)

Readings: Acts of the Apostle 15:1-2, 22-29;

Revelation 21:10-14, 22-23;

Gospel: John 14:23-29

gives us a glimpse of the heavenly Jerusalem, a symbol of the Church in its final, perfected state. In this vision, there is no temple, "for its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb." There is no need for sun or moon, "for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb" (Rev. 21:22-23). This is the destiny of the Church: not division or confusion, but unity and radiant communion with God. This vision encourages us in the present moment to work for unity — not superficial consensus, but deep spiritual unity grounded in truth and love.

Ultimately, each of us has a role to play in building and maintaining the unity of the Church. This unity does not mean uniformity but a shared commitment to seek God's will above our own preferences. As we reflect on our place within the Church, we are challenged to move beyond individualism and toward communal discernment. When we surrender our egos and opinions and open ourselves to the Spirit's prompting, we become instruments of peace and unity in a divided world.

Let us, therefore, continue to pray for the wisdom and humility to listen to the Spirit. May our decisions, big and small, reflect not merely our own judgments but the loving guidance of the Advocate, so that all we do may serve the good of the Church and bring glory to God.

KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

May / June

- 27/5 Annual General Meeting – Catholic Health Care Asia (CHCA), online
- 28/5 Board Meeting – Yayasan Tan Sri Vendargon
- 1/6 Confirmation – Church of the Sacred Heart, Bentong
- 7/6 Meeting – KLAPT
- 7/6 Confirmation – Church of the Divine Mercy, Shah Alam


MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

May / June

- 27/5 Quarterly Meeting – Deliverance & Exorcism Office Team, MPI
- 29/5 Mass, Ascension of the Lord (Trilingual) – Church of St Joseph, Plentong at 8.00 pm
- 31/5 Sunset Mass (Eng) – Church of St Joseph, Plentong at 5.00pm
- 1/6 Mass in BM – Church of St Joseph, Plentong
- 4/6 Meeting – Diocesan Finance Council
- 7/6 Confirmation – Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, Johor Bahru

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New diplomatic representative in Malaysia and Timor-Leste

KUALA LUMPUR: The Apostolic Nunciature in Malaysia and Timor-Leste has welcomed a new senior diplomat. Monsignor Marcel Šmejkal has been appointed as Counselor to the Apostolic Nunciature in Malaysia, while also serving as Chargé d’Affaires ad interim in Timor-Leste. He officially began his assignment on May 1, 2025, upon his arrival in Dili, East Timor, where he will be based.

Msgr Šmejkal succeeds Rev Monsignor Marco Sprizzi, who concluded his mission on March 8, before departing to assume his new role as President of the Labour Office of the Apostolic See in Vatican City.

Born on December 28, 1968, in Domažlice, Czech Republic, Msgr Šmejkal brings a wealth of experience from a distinguished ecclesiastical and diplomatic career spanning over two decades.

He holds advanced degrees in philosophy, theology, and canon law, having studied at prestigious institutions such as the Pontifical Lateran University and the Pontifical University of St Thomas Aquinas in Rome. He also completed diplomatic training at the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy between 1999 and 2003.

Ordained a priest in 1997, Msgr Šmejkal has served in various diplomatic capacities for the Holy See. His assignments have included postings in Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Brazil, Greece, and most recently France, where he served as First Counsellor at the Apostolic Nunciature.

Fluent in Italian, English, French, and Spanish, Msgr Šmejkal is well-positioned to navigate the multicultural and multilingual environment of Southeast Asia.

His arrival signals continuity and experienced leadership in the Vatican’s diplomatic presence in the region.



Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #223




Dear friends of MJD, we have a new Pope, His Holiness Leo XIV, from the US. It was a decisive conclave. Young, energetic, street and poverty-savvy. The new Bishop of Rome emphasised that *cardinals must move aside* so that Christ may remain, and should *make themselves small* so that Christ may be known.

Local takes: A lot of saying, only a little to see. The PM says that development projects, especially in major cities, must reflect the government’s policy of prioritising the needs of the general population. Malaysia allocates just 4.7 per cent of its GDP to health care — well below the OECD average of eight per cent to 10 per cent. Egg subsidy to end on August 1. A health care system stretched by inflation and frayed by mistrust, the new ruling on displaying drug prices, raises issues of fairness, access and survival in medicine. InDrive and Maxim has been ordered to cease operating illegally.

The Youth and Sports Minister has pointed to a gap in the sex education syllabus; that must be dealt with to curb social problems among youth; that most teenagers become sexually active before the age of 14, yet sex education in schools only begins at 15. The Kuala Terengganu City Council says that the signboard against homosexuality is to create “hatred” for the act among society, to educate the public to stay away from behaviour that contradicts religious values and societal norms.

The Judicial Appointments Commission (JAC), a panel which filters candidates to be judges based on their merits, ability and integrity, is a good step forward. It limits the role of the PM on appointments.

The Petaling Street homeless called out “Mummy is here. Mummy Cyndi is here.” No blood ties, but her presence was met with warmth as she is lovingly considered family.

Deepening Times: He is not Francis. He is Leo XIV. And this was what he said: *To all of you, brothers and sisters of Rome, of Italy of the wholly-owned world — we want to be a synodal Church, a Church that walks, a Church that always seeks peace, that always seeks charity, that always seeks to be close especially to those who suffer.*

This what others say: He does not arrive to restore power but to restore nearness. There is something unmistakable in his posture - less a ruler than a companion; not one who visits the poor, but one who understands what it means to be poor in spirit and circumstance. His papacy will speak in the language of humble witness, not clerical command. This is not leadership from above, but alongside.

A Thought for The Week: Church of the Dead
 Years ago, an elderly farmer, renowned for early rising, used to sit in the village church while waiting for the creamery to open. No doubt he used to pray a bit, but he also used to have a look at the newspaper. One morning the peevish curate found him there and protested loudly about the newspaper. “It’s ok, Father,” said the farmer, “I was reading the deaths column, here, look, this is the obituary page.” That stopped the priest in his tracks; he retreated with apologies. You can browse death in church, but not life.

Lessons from the pews: The Church is for the living to bring their lives, their daily concerns and the world they live in. The world keeps the church alive and relevant. *A man asked a gardener why his plants grew so beautifully. The gardener said: “I don’t force them to grow. I remove what stops them.”*

Something’s Happening Near You:
 1. The MJD prepares for the **Training of Trainers Programme on Synodality**, the changes that are expected, the conversions needed, the spirituality required to sustain this new Pentecost. Ignorance is not bliss.

2. The PSO MJD will be conducting a **“Safeguarding of Minors Workshop”** on July 5 (9.00am – 1.00pm) at MAJODI Centre for **Tamil-speaking** parents, youth leaders and catechists.

3. **Two Pillars, One Mission:** a stay-in camp exclusively for single men and women, aged 18 and above. At the Church of St Philip, Segamat, June 27-29. Contact: Kevin 017-7574490 or Clarence 017-7433817

QnQ! Q asks? How do we cope with our lows?



Acceptance is a key to emotional regulation. If you are low, accept the low; if you are up, be up. It’s the mental resistance to acceptance that has you in chains. **J Mike Fields**

The Holy Spirit @work: “The great gift of Easter is hope - Christian hope which makes us have that confidence in God, in his ultimate triumph, and in his goodness and love, which nothing can shake.” **Basil Hume**

Something to Tickle You: “Spread love everywhere you go. Let no one ever come without leaving happier.” **Mother Teresa**

Bernard Paul
Bishop Bernard Paul

United in Mission: Sabah's celebrates synodality



Bishop Cornelius Piong addressing the participants at the opening Mass.

Liza Magnus

KOTAKINABALU: “This is an extraordinary gathering! This is the first gathering that brings together the three arch/dioceses since Sabah was divided into three arch/dioceses,” said Bishop Cornelius Piong, during the opening Mass of the Sabah Regional Pastoral Assembly (PPWS) on May 11-13, 2025, at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart.

PPWS was attended by 700 delegates from three Sabah arch/dioceses who gathered together for three days to celebrate unity, while listening to the diocesan reports in four areas of pastoral concern: Church, Family, Society, and Ecology.

Bishop Cornelius, during the opening Mass, reflected on the early journey of the Church in Sabah, which initially had only one diocese, but eventually saw the establishment of the Diocese of Keningau in 1993 and the Diocese of Sandakan in 2007.

“This is an exceptional development. Since the 1950s, the Church has evolved significantly and, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, has developed in a better direction. For example, in the past, the liturgy for Mass was very different, with the celebrant facing away from

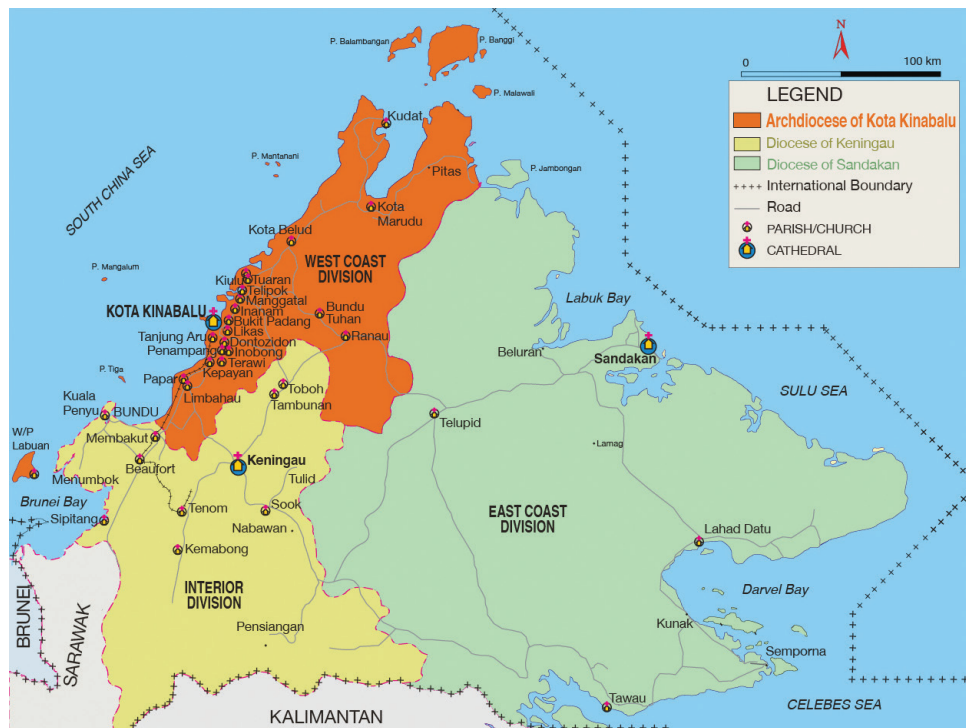


the congregation.

“However, the Holy Spirit inspired the pope at that time and the whole world, especially after the Second Vatican Council when many liturgical changes were made that led to the spirit of the Synodal Church.”

On the second day, in the morning, the delegates listened to the history of the arrival of the Good News in the three arch/dioceses, the process of revitalising the three arch/dioceses, the preparation process for PPWS, outreach programmes introducing the Malaysian Pastoral Assembly (MPC 2026), and how each diocese introduces and examines the four pastoral concerns of MPC 2026, namely Family, Church, Social, and Ecology.

In the afternoon, Fr Dr Clarence Devadass from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur delivered a session on *Synodal Spirituality*. He explained that “Synodality” is not a concept or programme but “a way of life as a Church”.



Fr Dr Clarence Devadass giving a session on Synodal Spirituality.

The Nine Mission Statements are the fruits of three Spiritual Conversations during the Sabah Regional Pastoral Assembly (PPWS) held from May 11-13.

The Main Organising Committee (MOT) outlined the Nine Mission Statements themed Remembering History, Continuing the Legacy, Building Together the Kingdom of God in a Synodal Spirit, which were the outcomes in the PPWS from May 11-13.

Archbishop John Wong emphasised that the Nine Mission Statements are not resolutions for the three arch/dioceses but rather serve as pastoral counsels or guidelines.

The prelate stressed that, “Each diocese has different needs and priorities. These Nine Mission Statements serve as guidelines and require more discernment at the arch/diocese level.”



The assembly presents

We, the people of God in Sabah, who inherit faith through the living testimony of the early missionaries, are called to build a living and united Church, rooted in history, acts in faith, and open to the work of the Holy Spirit. Through the spirit of synodality, we realise that:

- 1. Faith Is a Legacy and a Responsibility**
We value and revive faith’s legacy through gratitude, historical documentation, and the present evangelisation. We continue our legacy of faith not solely by remembering, but also by engaging with tangible acts of evangelism.
- 2. Family and Youth Are at the Heart of the Mission**
- 3. The Church is Built from the Grassroots:**
We build a community of faith that begins with the family, Basic Christian Communities (BCC), youth, schools, and all levels of the faithful, with everyone actively participating in a spirit of unity and brotherhood.
- 4. Synodality Is the Church’s Lifestyle**



The family is the primary school for the formation of faith and life’s calling, whereas youth are the Church’s future leaders. We are committed to empowering the institution of the Christian family and accompanying the youth so that they may personally experience Christ and become His witnesses in today’s world.

3. The Church is Built from the Grassroots:
We build a community of faith that begins with the family, Basic Christian Communities (BCC), youth, schools, and all levels of the faithful, with everyone actively participating in a spirit of unity and brotherhood.

4. Synodality Is the Church’s Lifestyle



We practise synodality — listening, dialogue, and walking together — at all levels of Church activity, taking into account every voice, especially those who are marginalised.

historic pastoral assembly and shared journey

Not a debate platform

The Sabah Regional Pastoral Assembly (PPWS) concluded with Mass on May 13, led by Archbishop John Wong.



Bishop Julius Dusin Gitom *pic* in his speech said, “The PPWS is a place for us to plant the seeds of walking together as a Church, not a place for us to debate like politicians.”

He was glad that the PPWS produced the nine Mission Statements, the fruits of Spiritual Conversations. “Looking at these nine Mission Statements, they have already been somewhat implemented in our Diocese and can be improved in each respective diocese, bringing us together as we prepare for the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 by relying on the Holy Spirit.

Jesus’ prayer for His disciples on the



Archbishop John Wong thanking the participants for their participation in the PPWS.

night of the Last Supper was emphasised by Bishop Cornelius in his speech at the PPWS’ closing Mass.

The three essential messages in Jesus’ prayer are:

1. Jesus prays for His followers, that is, us, to live in unity. This spirit of unity is known as the synodal spirit.

2. Jesus prays for us to be protected from the evil one.

3. Jesus prays for His disciples and us to live in holiness, always guided by the Word of God.

The prelate also hoped that the nine Mission Statements would not just be slogans but practised. “What we have set as our focus and direction during the Conversation in the Spirit, I have no doubt, but the implementation needs to be worked on together.

Archbishop John Wong expressed appreciation and gratitude for the success of the PPWS.

“I am sure that the PPWS brings sweet memories not only in the historical record but also as a large Catholic family in Sabah.

“This sweet memory will encourage us to become missionary disciples. You have spent three days here, especially yesterday (May 12), which was a public holiday. I believe God will bless you abundantly. The PPWS is not the end but the new chapter of continuing Christ’s mission in each diocese.”

The launch of *Perjalanan Salib*

The *Perjalanan Salib* for the Sabah Region was launched during the PPWS closing Mass, led by Archbishop John Wong on May 13, 2025.

In his prayer, the prelate prayed that the *Perjalanan Salib* would promote good deeds, the redemption of souls, consolation, protection, and serve as an armour against the forces of evil.

“May anyone who sees the *Salib* feel that they are not alone in their faith journey in this country...” said Archbishop John.

The representatives of each diocese then carried the *Perjalanan Salib*, followed by priests and the bishop, as a symbolic act of bringing the *Perjalanan Salib* to their respective dioceses.



The participants spending time in prayer.

the Nine Mission Statements

5. Service rooted in the Holy Spirit and Prayer

We serve humbly, invoking the power of prayer, the Word, and the sacraments. All of our planning and pastoral work are based on discernment and surrender to God’s will.

6. Recognising and Responding to the Call of Life

Shepherding and guiding the next generation to hear the Holy Spirit’s voice, so that

they will bravely respond to the Church’s holy ministry, whether as laypeople, religious, or priests, and do so willingly and faithfully.

7. Celebrating the Sacraments as a Source of Life

Appreciating and celebrating the Church’s sacraments as a tangible sign of Christ’s presence that accompanies, sanctifying and renewing our lives.



8. An Inclusive, Missionary, and Living Church that acts and proclaims the Gospel

We become a Church that is open and courageous in witnessing the truth on social, humanitarian, and environmental issues. Cultural diversity in each diocese is not an obstacle, but rather, a source of richness to complement each other and move towards a common mission.

9. Continuous repentance is the key to our synodal lifestyle

We understand that our journey together begins with repentance and self-renewal. We allow the Holy Spirit to touch our hearts so that we can walk together in unity, love, and faithfulness.



With burning love and hope, we walk together in the spirit of synodality to continue carrying on the living history of faith and shoulder the responsibilities of this era, facing the Church’s future with complete trust in the Holy Spirit.

The joy of love in the family

PETALING JAYA: The Church has consistently reaffirmed that the family is the foundational cell of social life. It is within the family that individuals first learn to care for and take responsibility for one another — especially the young, the elderly, the sick, the disabled, and the poor (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2207–2208). In this sense, every family holds a vital role in the health and stability of society.

However, this truth has increasingly been overlooked or dismissed in the face of rising secularism and self-centred ideologies driven by greed, which undermine the dignity and sacredness of family life. As the late Pope Francis warned, “[The Devil] attacks the family so much. That demon does not love it and seeks to destroy it.” In light of this, urgent action is needed to protect the family and preserve its essential role in shaping a just and compassionate society.

During the month of May, the Church of St Ignatius has dedi-

cated its Saturdays to nurturing family relationships and strengthening family bonds. This initiative includes a series of talks conducted in English and Mandarin, a Family Fun Day, SIC FamFest! featuring food and games, and a family rosary at parish level along with Mass to conclude the programme.

On May 10, the parish welcomed Fr Philip Chua as the main speaker, accompanied by his team from the Archdiocesan Mental Health Ministry (AMHM). Together, they presented a talk titled *The Joy of Love in the Family*, a session focused on spiritual formation in family life, enriched with insights from psychological principles.

The talk began by exploring the Church’s teachings on the family as a sacred institution, with love as its foundation. Drawing on resources such as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and apostolic exhortations, particularly *Amoris Laetitia* by the late Pope Francis, emphasising God’s vision for the



The participants learning to actively listen to each other.

Christian family: a life grounded in love, modelled after the Holy Family of Nazareth.

While this ideal offers a guiding light, the talk also acknowledged that no family is without its challenges. Emotional struggles, in particular, often surface in the dynamics of family life. The second part of the session focused on understanding these emotional experiences — their origins, development, interpretations, and

strategies for managing them.

A key skill introduced was active listening, where participants were trained to attentively listen to others, reflect their emotions, and acknowledge their needs. Recognising that emotions are a fundamental part of the human experience, the talk stressed the importance of addressing them both individually and within the context of the family.

At the end of the talk, partici-

pants gave highly positive feedback, noting how effectively psychological principles were integrated into the context of family life. Many expressed keen interest in attending future sessions led by Fr Philip and the AMHM. The event was attended by 74 parishioners and ran from 9.00am to 12 noon. It concluded with a prayer to the Holy Family of Nazareth, followed by a final blessing from Fr Philip.

Returning to the Heart of Jesus

PETALING JAYA: Only hearts filled with God’s love can prevent artificial intelligence, algorithms, and science from eroding human relationships and leaving the world devoid of empathy, said Fr Francis Lim, SJ, Regional Superior of Malaysia-Singapore for the Society of Jesus.

Fr Francis called for a return to a God-centred heart, advocating for a “revolution of tenderness” through the humanities and arts. He argued that such a shift could soften the hardness in modern society, which is increasingly dominated by technology, consumerism, material wealth, and isolation.

The Jesuit priest was speaking on *Delixit Nos* (He Loved Us), Pope Francis’ fourth and final encyclical letter, during the fourth session of the *Journeying as Pilgrims of Hope* series. The series, which focuses on the encyclicals and pivotal papal documents of Pope Francis, is organised by the Firm Foundation Ministry at the Church of St Francis Xavier.

Drawing from Pope Francis’ teachings, Fr Francis reflected on the symbolic role of the heart as the centre of human emotions and intellect. The Pope, he noted, expressed concern over how the heart has been reduced in modern times to a fleeting gesture — a “like” or a momentary tap on screens — devoid of deep meaning or lasting connection.

“The heart now flits across our screens as a quick marker of approval, disconnected from the deeper truths it once conveyed,” he remarked, referencing the Pope’s words that the world might be “losing its heart” or has “grown heartless” in the age of artificial intelligence. The Pope emphasised the need for poetry and love



Fr Francis Lim, SJ, Regional Superior of Malaysia-Singapore.

to preserve humanity in this technological age.

Fr Francis underscored the importance of returning to the heart as the core of human desires, decisions, and relationships. He explained that the heart is where one’s true desires, sincerity, and capacity for love are formed. “We need to transfigure ourselves to what the heart is supposed to be,” he urged, describing the heart as the uniting force between rationality and instinct.

In his reflection, Fr Francis pointed to the Sacred Heart of Jesus as a source of healing and peace in a world that often feels heartless. He called on individuals to seek transformation through God’s love, which, he said, is essential for healing a fragmented

world. “True transformation begins when we encounter God’s love in the depths of our hearts,” he stated.

He also emphasised the role of the faithful in responding to the Heart of Jesus by building a “new civilisation of love.” This, he said, involves being more attentive to the sufferings of others, spreading God’s love, and being instruments of liberation and reconciliation.

The Jesuit priest highlighted the importance of self-reflection, urging individuals to remove obstacles such as mistrust, lack of gratitude, and selfishness, in order to experience the full transformative power of Christ’s love. He added that true forgiveness is not only about admitting guilt, but also about expressing a sincere desire to heal the hearts of those we have hurt.

“True forgiveness lies in touching the other person’s heart, not just asking for forgiveness,” Fr Francis concluded, quoting the pope, who said that a heart capable of compunction fosters fraternity and solidarity, both of which enable genuine reconciliation.

This year marks the 350th anniversary of the Revelations of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to St Margaret Mary Alacoque, an event central to the Catholic devotion to the Sacred Heart. **Bob Ho**



Women’s retreat fosters faith, reflection, sisterhood



KUALA LUMPUR: Fifteen women gathered for a weekend of reflection, connection, and spiritual renewal during a heartfelt women’s retreat centred around the Book of Jonah. Led by Sr Margarete Sta Maria, the Director of API, the retreat proved to be more than just a time of Bible study; it became a personal journey of discovery, deeper faith, and sisterhood.

Held at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre, May 9-11, the retreat gave us the opportunity to escape the distractions of daily life; a rare chance to step back, breathe deeply, and dive into one of the most compelling stories in the Old Testament. Over the course of three days, we studied the Book of Jonah together — drawing, reading, questioning, reflecting on who we are, the direction of our life’s journey and our outlook on life

Sr Margarete skilfully guided the group through the four short but powerful chapters of Jonah. With her calming presence and deep understanding of Scripture, she helped us explore the book as a mirror for our own spiritual journeys — Jonah’s reluctance and grumbings, his running away, his time in the belly of the fish, and ultimately his obedience and struggle

with God’s mercy — these themes opened up conversations about our calling, disobedience, forgiveness, second chances, and the mystery of God’s compassion.

Beyond the structured Bible study sessions, the retreat provided participants with moments of prayer and self-reflection to personally wrestle with the areas in our lives where we might be running from God, where we need to surrender, or where we need to reassess our outlook on life. The conversations often continued long after the official sessions had ended, with many of us sharing stories of personal struggles, triumphs, and how we saw ourselves in Jonah. There was no pretence — just the genuine company of women who, though different in background and age, had come to truly see and support each other.

Sr Margarete closed the retreat with an affirmation activity, encouraging us to see the positives in one another. The story of Jonah did more than teach us about obedience and God’s mercy — it brought us together. In the belly of life’s storms and in the sunshine of new connections, we grew more in love with God and found each other.

Pauline Jubilee Week marks milestone for Daughters of St Paul

Sr Anna Yap fsp

PETALING JAYA: In celebration of the 60th foundation anniversary of the Daughters of St Paul in Peninsular Malaysia, a Pauline Jubilee Week was held from April 22–26 at the Assumption Parish Hall, featuring a series of talks and Holy Hour.

The week began with a two-night talk on April 22–23 focused on St Paul. The sessions, titled *On the Road to Damascus (Divine Reversals)* and *Hope Does Not Disappoint* (the Jubilee Year theme based on Romans 5:5), were delivered by Sr Bernardita Dianzon. Sr Bernardita is an associate professor of New Testament at the Loyola School of Theology, Quezon City, and also teaches at Don Bosco Centre of Studies, Makati, and Divine Word School of Theology, Tagaytay, Philippines.

On April 24, the parish's regular Holy Hour was led by Sr Laura Anggie, Aspirant Formator (2018–2024), who holds a Master's degree in Sacred Scripture. Following the service, she shared the story of her vocation journey and encouraged the youth in attendance to reflect on how God may be calling them to serve.

The third event, held April 25–26, was a two-day seminar on digital communication. Sr Purificacion Barrientos, Provincial



The Daughters of St Paul with Archbishop Julian Leow and Fr Leonard Lexson.

Superior of the Daughters of St Paul for the Philippines-Malaysia-Thailand Province, spoke on *Digital Literacy and Critical Thinking in the Social Media Age and The Impact of Social Media on Relationships and Digital Well-Being*. Sr Purificacion holds a Master's degree in journalism and previously served as associate editor of the CBCP Monitor.

The Jubilee Week culminated on April 27, Divine Mercy Sunday, with Mass celebrated by Archbishop Julian Leow and concelebrated by Fr Leonard Lexson, parish priest of Assumption Church. A simple reception followed in the parish hall.

The Sisters expressed their heartfelt

gratitude to the parish priest and the Assumption parish committee for their support in making this celebration possible. They also thanked the Pauline Cooperators, benefactors, collaborators, friends, and well-wishers for their continued support. May the Lord bless you all abundantly.

Looking ahead, the Daughters of St Paul will host a fundraising dinner on July 12 at Kelab Golf Negara Subang, Petaling Jaya, to support renovation and repairs of their convent. Other fundraising activities include an ongoing T-shirt sale and a coffee morning on July 6 at the Church of the Assumption. The Sisters hope the faithful will continue to support these efforts

SIC launches month-long pastoral programme

PETALING JAYA: The Church of St Ignatius (SIC) will host a month-long celebration this June themed *Empowered by the Spirit and Grace, Bearers of Hope*. This is in response to the Jubilee Year 2025 with the theme *Pilgrims of Hope*.

The celebration forms part of the Petaling District Pastoral Programme 2025, a collaborative platform uniting six parishes, launched by Archbishop Julian Leow on February 19 at the Church of the Divine Mercy, Shah Alam.

This year-long initiative invites each parish to express its unique charisms while journeying together in deeper communion, renewed witness, and a shared mission of hope. SIC's celebration begins on Friday, May 30 at 7.30pm with a Pentecost celebration and Mass, inviting the community to open their hearts to the Holy Spirit and begin this sacred journey together.

Throughout June, the programme will offer a series of spiritual and formational events, including silent adoration, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and Mass for *Corpus Christi* with a solemn procession. An exhibition on the Sacraments will highlight how these sacred signs are enduring sources of grace, healing, and hope, often quietly at work in the rhythms of our daily lives.

In the spirit of outreach, SIC will also distribute Baskets of Blessings, filled with essential items generously contributed by parishioners, as a heartfelt gesture of love and solidarity to the underprivileged communities surrounding the parish.

Each element of the programme offers parishioners and visitors a sacred opportunity to encounter Christ, be renewed in grace, and carry hope into the world. In journeying together, SIC joins the universal Church in answering the call to be a Spirit-led people — sent forth as bearers of hope. All are warmly invited to join in these sacred celebrations and be part of this grace-filled journey.

For the full programme and exhibition times please visit: www.stignatiuspj.org

Letters to Editor

Youth must be agents of peace in Malaysia

Dear Editor,

Malaysia will soon take on a significant responsibility as it assumes the Chair of ASEAN. At present, the regional geopolitical landscape is becoming increasingly challenging, with tensions in the South China Sea, the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar, and the uncertainty in relations between major powers such as the United States and China, all directly affecting the stability of the region.

In this context, the leadership of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim is eagerly anticipated to steer regional interests in a principled and fair manner. Malaysia's approach, based on the MADANI values — especially the principle of *Ihsan* — can provide a more humane and inclusive foundation for peaceful resolutions.

Youth, who are now recognised as leaders in various layers of society, must play a more active role in supporting the peace

agenda. The value of *Ihsan* must be translated into action, not just a slogan. This includes empathy for the oppressed, intercultural understanding, and openness to dialogue and finding common ground rather than focusing on differences.

However, today's generation of youth also faces significant challenges. The emergence of Generation Alpha — who are growing up with technology but becoming increasingly distant from family and religious values — is concerning. Distracting social media content, excessive viral culture, and an identity crisis that is not well addressed pose threats to the development of youth character.

It must be acknowledged that youth are synonymous with progressive ideas and the courage to try new approaches. In this regard, they are valuable assets in driving fresh changes aligned with principles of peace and harmony.

Among the practical steps that can be taken are direct involve-

ment of youth in social services and volunteer programmes. Consistent interfaith dialogue is also crucial in building understanding between communities. Additionally, houses of worship — whether mosques, churches, temples, or shrines — should not only be seen as places of worship, but also as youth empowerment centres, social service hubs, and platforms for fostering unity among people of diverse backgrounds.

Great hopes are placed on the shoulders of youth to become peace agents who not only understand the challenges of the modern world, but also carry forward the values of compassion and humanity. May Malaysian youth not merely be passengers in the wave of change, but become the main rowers, steering the nation and region towards a more peaceful, united, and humane future.

Amiruddin Ahmad bin
Abdul Jalil
Secretary-General of
Khuddam Malaysia

Landing at the feet of the Lord

Dear Editor,

When Fr Gregory became the parish priest at the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes in Klang, he introduced a programme called *Landings*. Around the same time, my old colleague Bala Shanmugam from the Church of the Assumption also spoke about it. They had already started a few *Landings* sessions, but to be honest, I really enjoyed my Sunday afternoon naps, so I didn't pay much attention. Even when others encouraged me to join, I kept saying no.

One Sunday during Mass, a *Landings* participant shared her experience. Her testimony touched my heart deeply. That moment made me think seriously. So, I signed up and began the 10 week journey. That decision changed my life.

I was born Catholic and served in the church from a young age. Back then, I was more playful. I was involved in youth ministry and the Lectors team. But my connection with Christ wasn't deep; it was more about ticking the checklist that I attended Sunday Mass.

But once I attended *Landings*, I felt like I truly landed at the feet of the Lord. I learned about the faith

and the sacraments more deeply. Through *Landings*, I became more patient, kinder, and more careful with my words. I started thinking before speaking. I didn't want to hurt anyone with my words. Even when I felt like arguing, I learned to stay calm and speak gently.

Landings helped me realise that everyone has their own struggles. We are often too quick to judge people without knowing their story. Now, I try to see others with more understanding and love.

The sessions were simple but profound. We listened to each other without judgment. We prayed together, shared our stories, and supported one another. That feeling of acceptance and love helped me reconnect with God in a real way.

Landings was more than a programme, it was a journey back to God, back to peace, and back to myself. It's not just for lapsed Catholics; it's for anyone seeking to renew or reconnect with God. If you're looking to deepen your faith and find a supportive community, I encourage you to take that step. It might just change your life too.

Nesa Dhevasahayam
Klang

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.*

Focusing on Jesus and hope beyond the prison

Chan Lilian

PENANG: Easter 2025 brought profound spiritual meaning and joy to inmates across nine prisons within the Diocese of Penang. For the first time in several facilities, the celebrations included not only Mass and Confession, but also the deeply moving and humbling ritual of the washing of feet. This powerful gesture brought many to tears, stirring hearts in unexpected and transformative ways.

At Jawi Prison, Msgr Henry Rajoo, accompanied by ten faith sharers from the Penang Diocesan Prison Ministry (PDPM), led a heartfelt Easter celebration. The inmates — referred to as prospects — were visibly moved during the Sacrament of Reconciliation, as hymns of repentance resonated through the hall. Many were especially touched by the song *As I Have Done for You*, a powerful reminder of Jesus' boundless love and compassion.

Before the washing of the feet, a PDPM faith sharer explained in Bahasa Malaysia: We are here today to remember the final days of Jesus Christ. When the priest washes your feet, remember that Jesus also knelt to wash His disciples' feet in love and humility. God loves you that much. So, pray for strength and



Msgr Henry Rajoo with the faith sharers and Deputy Director of Penjara Seberang Jaya after the Easter celebration at Jawi Prison.

hope — not only for yourselves but for your families too.”

Msgr Henry delivered his homily in English, Bahasa Malaysia, Mandarin, and Tamil, ensuring every one of the fifty Christian and Catholic inmates could fully receive the message. His words of hope rang clear and true: “If you focus only on your struggles, nothing changes. But if you focus on Jesus, everything changes. Jesus gives you a new beginning. He was crucified but is risen. He

is our Hope — and hope does not disappoint.”

The Easter celebration concluded with a joyful rendition of *Yesus Bangkit Soraklah* and a warm “Easter Share-A-Meal” with the inmates. They were treated to a delicious spread of *nasi tomato*, *ayam masak merah*, traditional kuih, and more — generously provided by the Penang Diocesan Prison Ministry (PDPM).

Adding a special touch, lovingly handcrafted herbal soaps from the Church of the Risen Christ, the Church of St Anthony in Nibong

Tebal, and the Chinese CEC children of the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit were presented to prison officials for the inmates' use.

Easter Masses were also celebrated throughout April and May in several other facilities, including: Taiping Prison (Perak); Kamunting Prison (Perak); Arau Correction Centre (Perlis); Tapah Prison (Perak); Penang Remand Prison; Batu Gajah Prison (Perak); SP Juvenile Prison (Kedah); Alor Setar Prison (Kedah), and Pokok Sena Prison (Kedah).

For the past ten years, the Penang Diocesan Prison Ministry (PDPM) has journeyed weekly with inmates across Perlis, Kedah, Penang, and Perak — bringing the light of Christ into places often marked by darkness. Having celebrated their 10th anniversary in June 2024, the ministry is now preparing for the Jubilee of Prisoners in November 2025, trusting in the Lord to continue guiding their mission of love, healing, and transformation.

PDPM extends its heartfelt gratitude to the Malaysian Prison Department for its support and collaboration in making the Easter celebrations possible. Together, they remain steadfast in their commitment to walk alongside inmates, offering hope, dignity, and the promise of a life beyond the bars.



Fr Desmond Jansen at remand prison, Penang.



Fr James Pitchay at men's prison, Batu Gajah.



Fr Michael Dass at ladies prison, Batu Gajah.



Fr Vincent Paul at Tapah prison.

OLF celebrates feast with prayer, outreach and devotion

KUALALUMPUR: The Church of Our Lady of Fatima celebrated their feast day with holy hour and Novena from May 5 to May 13.

Themed *With Mary, We Are Pilgrims of Hope*, the Masses during the nine days were celebrated in English and Tamil by parish priest Fr Andrew Manickam, OFM, Cap, followed by Fr VA Michael; Fr Jonathan Rao; Fr Peter Anthony; Fr Christopher Soosaipillai; Fr Clarence Devadass; Fr Gerard Theraviam; Fr Gnana Selvam Berentis; Fr Ferdinand Magimay and Archbishop Julian Leow.

The parish also organised an outreach event, the Kasih Meal #4 on May 12, food distribution to the poor, as well as targeting pilgrims visiting the Buddhist Maha Vihara temple in Brickfields during their annual Wesak Day celebrations, with 300 packets of food distributed to devotees, fostering unity and mutual understanding among people of diverse faith backgrounds. This initiative not only brought cheer to the pilgrims but also strengthened communal harmony, exemplifying the true spirit of compassion and unity across different faiths.

The Kasih Meal #4 also apprised that the poor, marginalised and unemployed were not left behind but with the belief that they will turn to our Blessed Virgin Mary to encounter abundant graces, to be their hope and comfort as we journey with them in their struggles.

It was a moment to reflect on how the Lord remains close to those who are suffering and as the Church invites us as Pilgrims of Hope, the Word of God guides us and provides us, in the words of our Holy Father Pope Francis, a heartening message: “Be Pilgrims of Hope and Builders of Peace”, in caring for those around us and for the environment we live in.

The peak of the event was the Mass, on the feast day, which began with holy hour and novena prayers to Our Lady of Fatima, followed by Mass. Archbishop Julian Leow presided over the Mass, with Fr Andrew Manickam and Fr VA Michael concelebrating.



Fr Andrew Manickam OFM Cap with his parishioners visiting the Buddhist Maha Vihara temple.

In his homily, Archbishop Julian emphasised that Our Lady is our Mother of true hope and we are fortunate to have a Mother who truly loves and cares for us through the darkest moments of human history as happened in the brief story that took place in the village of Fatima, Portugal on May 13, 1917. The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, appeared to three young shepherd children, foretelling world events each time she appeared, and asking them to pray the Rosary daily for world peace, emphasising the necessity of devotions to her Immaculate Heart in order for souls to be saved. She also

told them that God would perform a miracle on October 13 so that people would believe.

He expressed that Mary doesn't point us to herself but always points us to Jesus. It is never about her but about the need and concern of God's presence in each one of us. He highlighted that Pope Leo the XIV also spoke about the Church being the mother who is truly there, caring for her children. Mary is the Mother of the Church who is a life-giver. Let the word be life giving. We are privileged to follow our Messiah, our Saviour, to carry our crosses faithfully and to pray unceasingly to God. God knows the journey of faith that each one of us is going through and never abandons us. May the Holy Spirit enkindle the faith in us as we look towards Jesus, as Mary leads us to her Son and may we see Mary as our true hope who will continue to see us through, just as she stood by at the foot of the cross.

The pinnacle of the celebrations was the outdoor candlelight procession, with priests and the faithful following the adorned statue of Our Lady of Fatima, reciting the Rosary and asking Our Lady to intercede for us before her Son for our needs, our families and community, bringing together all the prayers, reflections, and celebrations of the previous days in a unified offering of gratitude to God. The evening's celebration concluded with a fellowship meal. **Kristen Priya Krishnan**

“We need you,” Pope Leo tells Eastern Churches

VATICAN: On May 14, Pope Leo XIV addressed thousands of representatives from the 23 Eastern Catholic Churches, gathered at the Vatican’s Paul VI Hall in a historic moment of unity and hope. These communities, many from regions deeply affected by war and persecution such as the Middle East, Ukraine, Lebanon, Syria, Tigray, and the Caucasus, embody a remarkable perseverance in faith. The pope opened with heartfelt gratitude for those Christians who remain steadfast in their native lands despite immense hardship, emphasising the Church’s commitment to ensuring they can live with dignity and security.

This jubilee celebration honoured the rich diversity of the Eastern Catholic rites, Byzantine, Coptic, Armenian, Syro-Eastern, Syro-Western, and Ethiopian, highlighting the beauty and spiritual depth of these traditions. Pope Leo XIV underscored the vital importance of preserving these ancient liturgical and theological heritages, warning against any erosion caused by modern pressures or assimilation into the Latin Rite. He called on all faithful to cherish and uphold these traditions as essential treasures of the universal Church.

Reflecting on the legacy of Pope Leo XIII who first emphasised the dignity of the Eastern Churches over a century ago, Leo XIV reiterated that these Churches are not merely peripheral but integral to the life of Catholicism. Their unique spiritual perspectives offer a profound witness to Christ, especially through the mysteries of the cross and resurrection. The pope urged Eastern Catholics to continue living their faith vibrantly, drawing strength from saints such as Ephrem the Syrian and Isaac of Nineveh, who taught hope in the face of suffering.

The pontiff did not shy away from addressing the brutal realities confronting many



“He’s the most important American in the world,” said Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk of Kyiv, the primate of Ukraine, of Pope Leo XIV. (Vatican Media)

Eastern Christian communities. From the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East to the violence in Tigray and the Caucasus, he mourned the countless innocent lives lost to war. Yet his message was one of unwavering hope: Christ’s resurrection brings the promise of peace — not simply as an absence of war, but as reconciliation, forgiveness, and renewed fraternity among peoples.

Pope Leo XIV called on global leaders to embrace dialogue and diplomacy as the only true path to peace. He made a powerful appeal to end the cycle of violence, emphasizing that weapons only deepen wounds rather than heal them. “Let us meet, talk, and negotiate,” he implored, reminding all that humanity’s true neighbours are fellow men and women with whom peace is always possible.

Throughout his address, the Pope expressed solidarity with those who quietly labour for peace through prayer, sacrifice, and courage. He especially praised the Christians of the Middle East who continue to live as witnesses of faith despite adversity. Their

presence, he said, is a vital sign of hope and a call for the entire Church to support them in every way possible.

In concluding, Pope Leo XIV exhorted the Eastern Churches to remain vibrant “lights in our world” through faith, hope, and charity, maintaining their distinct traditions without compromise. He called on their pastors to foster genuine communion and fraternity within the Church, warning against anything that threatens unity. Their spiritual heritage, he said, is a shining example that enriches the universal Church and the whole of humanity.

The message resonated deeply with those present, including Archbishop Borys Gudziak and Metropolitan Sviatoslav Shevchuk of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, who recognized the pope’s words as a profound encouragement amid ongoing struggles. Pope Leo XIV’s address reaffirmed that the Eastern Churches are not relics of history but living witnesses to Christ’s victory over suffering — an enduring hope for a fractured world. **Vatican News/CNA**

Holy See urges global action to end child labour, protect children’s dignity

VATICAN: The Holy See has reiterated its commitment to eliminating child labour and upholding the rights of every child to dignity and development.

According to a report by *Vatican News*, Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, delivered the remarks on May 13 during the informal interactive dialogue “On Childhood with Dignity: Eliminating Child Labour in All Its Forms, Including Forced Recruitment and Use of

Children in Armed Conflict.”

Caccia opened his address by quoting Pope Leo XIII’s 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum*: “For, just as very rough weather destroys the buds of spring, so does too early an experience of life’s hard toil blight the young promise of a child’s faculties, and render any true education impossible.”

With one in ten children globally still trapped in exploitative situations, he said, there is an urgent need for international action.

“Every child is a unique gift of God to the human family,” Caccia said, stressing that each must “grow up in an environment that respects the dignity, protects the fundamental rights, and promotes the integral development of the child.”

He condemned the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts as “a grave violation of their inherent human dignity” and “a direct affront to their fundamental rights.” He also cited other abuses, including forced marriage and sexual exploitation.

Caccia called for “the immediate and unconditional release of all children” in such situations and said they must be treated “first and foremost as victims in need of compassion, care, and hope.”

He added that children with disabilities face heightened vulnerability and require “inclusive and comprehensive protective measures.”

The archbishop concluded by affirming the Holy See’s support for global initiatives that ensure “sustained access to health care, quality education and opportunities that enable each child to thrive and contribute meaningfully to society.” **LiCAS News**



Child labourers engaged in a mine in the Philippines.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Pakistan passes landmark Minority Rights Law

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan’s parliament passed the National Commission for Minority Rights Bill 2025 on May 13, creating a long-awaited independent body to protect the rights of religious minorities. The commission will have the authority to conduct inquiries, inspect detention facilities, summon witnesses, and issue binding recommendations. It will operate with its own budget and report directly to parliament, signalling a shift toward rights-based governance.

Christian leaders and rights activists, who campaigned for over a decade for such a body, welcomed the move as historic but cautioned against complacency. “This is the beginning of a long journey toward justice and equality,” said Peter Jacob of the Centre for Social Justice. Concerns remain about the commission’s ability to function independently and avoid political interference, a challenge that plagued earlier government-appointed minority panels. **ucanews.com**

Church, activists decry Philippine poll irregularities

MANILA: Church leaders, poll watchdogs, and civil society groups have condemned the violence, vote-buying, and alleged fraud during the May 12 midterm elections in the Philippines. Archbishop Socrates Villegas called the polls “tainted by money and blood” and urged Filipinos to remain critical, noting that while no election is perfect, much improvement is still needed. Despite the Commission on Elections (Comelec) claiming it was among the most peaceful elections to date, watchdog Kontra Daya reported widespread machine errors, illegal campaigning, and voter disenfranchisement.

Protests erupted in Manila, with groups demanding a hybrid manual-automated system to ensure transparency. Activists criticised the reliability of automated counting machines, calling for a serious audit and prosecution of election violations. Reports from Vote Report PH cited malfunctioning machines, disenfranchisement, and red-tagging as major concerns. The European Union Election Observation Mission also raised issues about limited access to polling precincts, affecting their ability to observe the voting process comprehensively. **ucanews.com**

Taiwan reviews Nuclear Energy Bill amid rising tensions

TAIPEI: Taiwan’s parliament has reviewed a bill that could revive its nuclear energy sector, allowing decommissioned plants to restart and licenses to be extended for up to 20 years. This marks a major policy shift as Taiwan faces rising energy demand and growing tensions with mainland China. The review comes just days before the shutdown of the island’s last active reactor.

Lawmakers confirmed operators could apply for license renewals even after expiry. Premier Cho Jung-tai said the government won’t block restarts if the law changes but noted safety reviews could take at least three and a half years. Despite the bill’s passage, the government says detailed rules are still pending and no restarts are planned yet.

Taiwan hopes nuclear power will ease its reliance on imported gas, which is vulnerable to disruption during conflict. With energy use expected to grow 13 per cent by 2030, nuclear energy is seen as a low-carbon, stable alternative to meet industrial needs and strengthen national security. **AsiaNews**

Sistine Chapel: How it spoke to me

Cardinal Pablo Virgilio David

After that unforgettable, once-in-a-lifetime experience of being a participant in a conclave with 132 other brother cardinals from all over the world, I understood why the election of a pope should take place nowhere else but in the Sistine Chapel.

Imagine 133 cardinals in red choir dress, processing at the start of the conclave to swear an oath before the open Book of the Gospels — not all at once, but one by one. I waited patiently for my turn as our row began to move forward toward a table set in the middle of the aisle. Standing before the Sacred Book, I recited the solemn formula aloud:

“Et ego, Paulus Virgilius Cardinalis David spondeo, voveo ac iuro...”

(And I, Pablo Virgilio Cardinal David, do so promise, pledge, and swear...)

Then, touching my hand to the open Book, I continued:

“Sic me Deus adiuvet et haec sancta Dei Evangelia, quae manu mea tango.”

(So help me God and these Holy Gospels which I touch with my hand.)

That oath-taking ritual alone lasted about an hour and a half. And since I am bound by perpetual secrecy — under pain of excommunication — I cannot speak about numbers, personalities, or the dynamics that led to the election of a new pope. (Please don't bother asking the electors; our lips are sealed.) But I can share the aesthetico-spiritual, almost mystical experience of letting my eyes feast on the masterpieces of Michelangelo that adorn this sacred chapel, the timeless stage for the conclave.

With our cellphones confiscated, there was no way to “kill time” digitally as many people do nowadays — no screens to scroll, no notifications to check. And so, as we waited for our turn at the oath, the most natural thing to do was to lift our gaze toward the towering painted retablo of Michelangelo's Last Judgment, covering the entire altar wall.

All the figures are rendered naked — except for Mama Mary. Draped modestly in blue, she sits beside Christ, but slightly withdrawn. Her head is turned, as if she cannot bear to look directly at the scene. It is as though she, too, is overwhelmed by the unfolding drama.

This is no gentle Nativity. It is the thunderous climax of time. Michelangelo, already in his sixties when he painted it, gives us not pious serenity but terrifying truth. Christ stands at the centre — not crucified but glorified. No longer only Saviour, but Judge. His arm is



Book of the Gospels.

raised — not to bless, but to decree.

Around Him, the saints orbit in motion. Peter holds the keys. Bartholomew holds a knife — and on his flayed skin, Michelangelo has painted his own face, as if to confess that he, too, has been stripped bare before the gaze of eternity. Catherine clutches her broken wheel. Sebastian grips the arrows of his martyrdom.

And around them, the human race — naked, twisting, rising, falling.

To the right, the blessed are drawn upward into light. Angels grasp their wrists and waists, lifting them toward the eternal. Some are pulled upward by the rosary. Others are carried by sheer grace.

To the left, the damned tumble into chaos — dragged downward by demons, contorted by fear and shame. In the lower corner, Charon ferries the lost across the River Styx — borrowed from Dante's *Inferno*. And there, grotesque and coiled by a serpent biting into his groin, is Minos, the infernal judge. Michelangelo gave him the face of a Vatican official who once criticised the nudity of the painting. His revenge, rendered in fresco, would last forever. But it still was not spared by a later order to cover some private parts.

But this is not nudity meant to seduce. It is nakedness meant to reveal. Every layer of illusion peeled away. No robes. No titles. No masks. Just the truth of who we are, body and soul, when we stand before the eyes of God.

Even the angels strain. One tugs a man by the wrist. Another hauls a struggling woman by the hips. It is not easy, this ascent to glory.

Above us, the ceiling is no less astonishing. Michelangelo, we are told, painted it decades earlier, under Pope Julius II. He worked for years on scaffolding he designed himself, with paint dripping into his eyes, his body bent in pain, his hands blistered by the labour of beauty. And yet what he left us is nothing

less than Genesis in motion. (My own neck began to strain after a while. I had to stretch it in circular motions, first clockwise, then counter-clockwise whenever I felt the apparent onset of a stiff neck — perhaps making my neighbours wonder what I was doing — only to find them doing the same thing!)

Let's continue. There is the Spirit hovering over the waters. The firmament splitting. The sun and moon summoned into being. And there — Adam, reclining, his finger reaching toward the outstretched hand of God. That millimetre of space between them: the very breath of life about to be given.

Surrounding them are the *ignudi* — twenty nude male youth, twisting and muscular. Mysterious. Decorative. And yet, they hold up the story of salvation, as if divine beauty must be borne on the shoulders of fragile flesh.

The side walls, often forgotten, tell the paired stories of Moses and Jesus, painted by great Renaissance masters — Perugino, Botticelli, Ghirlandaio. On one wall, Moses leads the people, receives the Law, and dies on the mountain. On the other, Jesus is baptised, calls the Apostles, and entrusts the keys to Peter — an image that echoes in the authority we now exercise.

Above them, painted between the windows, are the ancestors of Christ — names most pilgrims forget in Matthew's genealogy: Azor, Eleazar, Shealtiel, etc. And yet here, they are given flesh and face, reclining or conversing, seated with weariness and hope. The Word became flesh through them.

Beneath our feet lies a floor of inlaid marble. No one speaks of it. And yet it bears the footprints of centuries — popes and pilgrims, saints and sinners. The patterns are geometric, ordered, unchanging. A foundation for a Church that still walks forward.

As we neared the hour of voting, the iron grills caught my eye — remnants of an older

ritual that once separated clergy from laity, sacred from profane. Now, they seem symbolic of a deeper divide: not between classes of people, but between hesitation and decision.

Then the voice rang out: “*Extra omnes!*” Everyone not part of the College was ushered out. The door was closed. The key turned.

We were alone.

Conclave. Cum clave. With a key.

Silence fell like a veil.

Even the pens for voting had been provided. And a scarlet red folder which could be used as a cover as we wrote down a name — just a family name preceded by his number as it appears in the list of 133. We stood and began to line up again. This time, not for the oath, but for the vote.

The Latin formula left each cardinal's lips in a murmur before he cast his ballot:

“Testor Christum Dominum, qui me iudicaturus est, me eum eligere, quem secundum Deum iudico eligi debere.”

(I call as my witness Christ the Lord who will be my judge, that my vote is given to the one who before God I think should be elected.)

Each one placed his folded ballot on a small silver plate. Then gently tilted it into the urn — an unusual metal vessel that looks like two basins welded together and shaped like a little flying saucer, with a circular metal paten serving as an inverted lid. It sits atop the altar like a silent guardian of destiny.

What name is to be whispered at that moment?

What longing? What fear?

I looked up once more — one last time. The naked figures. The ascending saints. The reaching hand of Adam. The withdrawn gaze of Mary.

I felt the weight of the moment. The fire of the Spirit.

And then I whispered mine.

I placed the ballot gently on the plate, let it slide into the urn, and put back the paten on its mouth.

And entrusted it to God.

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/pablovirgilio.david>

Cardinal Pablo Virgilio David of Kalookan, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines and vice president of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, was among the 133 cardinal-electors in the 2025 conclave that elected Pope Leo XIV.



Beyond self, embracing the golden rule

Last week, a visitor came to our centre to record conversations for her podcast on dementia. She expressed surprise at how “normal” my friends living with dementia appeared.

Sadly, this reaction is all too familiar. While disheartening, it’s not unexpected. Many visitors are taken aback by a simple truth: people living with dementia (PWD) are vibrant, relational, and fully capable of experiencing joy. Their surprise reveals a deeply ingrained societal bias — one that too often renders those with dementia invisible, reducing them to harmful stereotypes or portraying them as the “living dead.”

As a society, we’ve been conditioned to view dementia as something that displaces a person — transforming them into “blank stares” and “empty shells.” It’s often portrayed as a thief, a kidnapper, a slow-motion murderer — robbing individuals of their memories, their minds, their personalities, even their very sense of self.

Dementia is uniquely burdened with the label of “the living dead.” People with dementia are frequently seen as already gone — or in the process of vanishing — caught in a relentless, terrifying decline. This perception reveals a deep cultural anxiety that goes beyond our usual fears of illness or death.

So, when visitors encounter people living with dementia who defy these grim



Dancing with Dementia

DR CECILIA CHAN

expectations — who are joyful, expressive, and present — they are understandably, though sadly, shocked.

Our former Prime Minister, Abdullah Badawi, passed away on April 14 at the age of 85, after living with dementia in his final years. In the same week, reports emerged that *Die Hard* actor Bruce Willis, who has been diagnosed with Frontotemporal Dementia, has lost his ability to speak.

Understandably, such news can feel unsettling. It reminds us that dementia does not discriminate — it can affect anyone, regardless of status, fame, or background. But while the disease itself doesn’t discriminate, society often does.

People living with dementia frequently face stigma, prejudice, and social exclusion, all of which can severely impact their quality of life and access to support. The reactions we sometimes witness from visitors — surprise that individuals with dementia can still be expressive, joyful, and present — reveal just how deeply this stigma is ingrained.

So, while dementia may touch anyone, how we respond — as individuals and as a society — makes all the difference.

People may live with various illnesses, but they are never solely defined by them. Yet, individuals with dementia are often reduced to just that — “people with dementia.” The diagnosis becomes a label, a box, a brand that assigns them a fixed and often

diminished social identity.

Unlike those without dementia, who are rarely judged so harshly — no matter how disruptive their behaviour may be, whether it’s outbursts of temper, boisterous laughter, or quirky social interactions — people with dementia are held to a different standard. The same kinds of noise or expression, though equally disruptive, are somehow more socially acceptable when they come from someone without the label.

And yet, when it comes to people with dementia, society often responds with containment — literal or figurative — assuming it’s acceptable to isolate or sideline them. But we wouldn’t dream of doing the same to others. So why is it different here?

A friend of mine — let’s call her Nancy — lives with Alzheimer’s. One day, she pointed at a cat and exclaimed with delight, “Look, the dog is so ripe now!” At first glance, through the lens of dementia, her words might seem incoherent or meaningless. But because we know Nancy as a person, not just a diagnosis, we understood what she meant.

She was referring to the kitten that had been at our centre weeks earlier — now grown significantly. Her words may have been unconventional, but they carried intention, memory, and a desire to connect. Nancy was using the abilities she still had to reach out and communicate. That moment wasn’t meaningless — it was deeply human.

This doesn’t make her one of the “living dead.” On the contrary, Nancy thrives and lives well because she is surrounded by a supportive environment — one that includes understanding, patience, and people like you

and me.

Our discomfort often stems from what we perceive as “abnormal” — behaviours that are loud, strange, or disjointed. We fear what we don’t understand or cannot easily explain. But perhaps the real challenge isn’t in their behaviour — it’s in our ability to see the person behind it.

The label “dementia” often carries with it a sense of discomfort — even revulsion. This reaction, whether conscious or not, can give rise to a kind of quiet cruelty: a societal disregard that leads to neglect, exclusion, or dehumanisation. And yet, someone like Nancy could be your mother, your sister, your neighbour — or perhaps, one day, even you.

That’s why we must return to something profoundly simple and deeply human: the Golden Rule — treat others as you would want to be treated.

The beauty of the Golden Rule lies in its clarity and universality. It doesn’t demand philosophical depth or legal complexity. Its power is in its accessibility — guiding everyone from young children learning empathy to leaders making difficult ethical decisions.

Let this be the cornerstone of our approach to dementia: compassion, dignity, and respect for every person, regardless of their diagnosis.

“Let us build a culture where we value diversity and the inclusion of each other.”
Pope Francis

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The life and lifestyle of a disciple

The late Pope Francis brought to the papacy a lifestyle that drew widespread attention. Many were surprised when he chose to forgo the traditional papal palace in favour of a modest residence within Vatican City. His preference for simplicity marked a clear contrast to his predecessors. Notably, he was also the first Jesuit ever elected pope. The Jesuits, formally known as the Society of Jesus, are a Catholic religious order whose members — including priests, brothers, and nuns — take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. These vows are collectively known as the evangelical counsels.

During my time as a Jesuit novice in 1990, I was introduced to this concept. The evangelical counsels are more than external commitments; they represent a deliberate and mindful choice — a cognitive decision to embrace a particular way of life. In what follows, I offer some personal insights into these counsels and explore their relevance for lay Catholics today.

Poverty and Simplicity

Biblical scholars, through their study of the Gospels, have concluded that Jesus lived a life marked by simplicity. This reality is vividly portrayed in the popular series *The Chosen*. Jesus deliberately embraced a simple lifestyle — He is believed to have owned only two sets of clothes, travelled on foot, and had no permanent home (Matthew 8:20). In a culture that often glorifies luxury — designer clothing, expensive cars, and sprawling homes — the call to live simply as disciples of Christ is both countercultural and challenging. Like the rich young man who longed to follow Jesus but struggled with his attachment to wealth (Mark 10:17–31), many today find it difficult to detach from material possessions. Yet, this choice becomes more attainable when we keep our eyes fixed on the One we have encountered — God made

human, who walks with us and serves as our model.

Choosing the simple life of a disciple also implies a preferential option for the poor. Jesus came to bring good news not only to the spiritually poor but also to those who suffer materially, emotionally, and socially (Luke 4:18–19).

An authentic option for the poor must include a commitment to justice — addressing the deep inequalities between the very rich and the very poor. It involves striving to ensure that everyone has access to basic necessities: food, clean water, shelter, education, and healthcare. Living simply, then, is not just a personal choice; it is a form of solidarity with those who are most in need.

Chastity and Purity

Living a life of purity is no easy task in a world filled with temptations. Even Jesus faced temptation and resisted the lures of Satan (Matthew 4:1–11). I recall reading a news article in which Pope Francis voiced concern over the number of priests and religious visiting pornography websites — an activity that clearly contradicts the vow of chastity and the pursuit of a pure life. Today, access to pornography, video games, and gambling platforms is easier than ever, and addiction to such content is becoming alarmingly common.

Jesus offered psychologically sound principles for resisting temptation. One key strategy is to avoid visual stimuli that trigger harmful desires. When Jesus spoke of plucking out a sinful eye (Matthew 5:29; 18:9), He wasn’t advocating self-mutilation, but rather emphasising the need for radical action in avoiding occasions of sin. Similarly, His



Informed Opinion

PROF XAVIER V. PEREIRA

reference to cutting off a sinful hand (Matthew 5:30) points to the importance of removing ourselves from compromising situations that threaten our integrity.

Purity goes beyond avoiding lust — it encompasses living a life of integrity. Yet, in many social and political environments today, integrity has been severely compromised, particularly by those in positions of power. Unfortunately, this erosion of values often trickles down and shapes societal

norms, fostering a culture where dishonest personal gain is not only tolerated but expected.

In contrast, the disciple of Christ is called to be different — transformed by the Spirit of Jesus and renewed in mind and heart. As Paul exhorts in Romans 12:2, we are not to conform to the patterns of this world, but to be continually renewed, living lives marked by purity, integrity, and inner freedom.

Obedience and Humility

“But Peter and the Apostles answered, ‘We must obey God rather than men.’” Acts of the Apostles 5:29

Of the three evangelical counsels, obedience is often the most challenging. In religious orders and congregations, members are expected to obey their superiors — a practice that demands trust, surrender, and a deep sense of discipline.

At its core, obedience is about aligning ourselves with God’s will. While obedience to God can be rooted in faith and love, obedience to other human beings is more complex. It involves relationships, vulnerability, and, importantly, humility.

Humility, like obedience, is inherently

interpersonal. It’s not about self-deprecation or denying one’s worth, but about recognising our equal dignity with others. Healthy humility neither elevates us above others nor diminishes our self-worth. Instead, it positions us to collaborate openly, to listen sincerely, and to remain accountable in our relationships.

Such humility fosters a spirit of cooperation. It allows us to share responsibility, engage in honest dialogue, and discern together. When humility and obedience work in tandem, they help form communities rooted in mutual respect, trust, and a shared pursuit of the common good.

The Greatest of These is Love

“And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love”
1 Corinthians 13:13

A true disciple is marked by faith, hope, and love — but also by simplicity, purity, and humility, all grounded in love for God and for others. The ultimate litmus test of discipleship is love.

Following Pope Francis’ passing, numerous tributes and obituaries praised his life and legacy. He was remembered as a man of deep simplicity and humility, someone who embodied honesty and courage. As a reformist pope, he challenged the status quo, yet always with compassion at the centre. Above all, he was a man who genuinely loved people. That love was visible — in his words, his actions, and even the expression on his face.

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Remembering Carmel Dominic

A journey of faith, suffering and redemption

On May 12, we lost not just a gifted writer, but a luminous soul—Carmel Dominic, aged 39. Known for her poignant contributions to the HERALD, Carmel's words carried the rare power of truth — unflinching, grace-filled, and brave. But more than a writer, she was a witness: to pain, to hope, to faith, and ultimately, to transformation.

Diagnosed in her early thirties with neuropathy caused by diabetes, Carmel's body became a battleground. The condition ravaged her nerves, attacking her heart, kidneys, vision, stomach, and more. She endured violent acid reflux, chronic nausea, severe fatigue, and subsisted for years on porridge, coconut water, and oral salts. A large uterine fibroid only deepened her suffering. Confined to her room, often too weak to stand, she fought a war few could see — but one she courageously documented.

Her most painful wounds, however, weren't physical. They were spiritual.

In a brutally honest reflection published three years before her death, Carmel confessed the anguish of feeling abandoned by God. "I wished for death," she wrote. "Every day I woke up, I was disappointed, because I had to live through another day of hopelessness and immense physical pain."

Her faith, once vibrant, was eclipsed by silence. Prayers ceased. Despair swallowed light. She tried, twice, to end her life.

But God was not done with Carmel. In what she described as a grace-filled moment, a quiet word from her aunt broke through the darkness: "The world would lose a great listener, and I would miss you." That single sentence stirred something deep within her — a glimmer of purpose, a fragile ember of hope. From that moment, Carmel began the slow, painful journey back to life.

She didn't return with polished piety. She returned with honesty. She began speaking to God again — not with scripted prayers, but with raw, unfiltered emotion. She raged, she wept, she questioned. "He was my only friend at the time," she wrote. And slowly, the silence turned to communion. Her questions — some playful, some profound — were met with divine presence, if not always clear answers. When told she needed dialysis, a devastating prognosis, she heard only one response from God: "Trust Me." And so, she did.

Dialysis, once feared, became her unexpected salvation. Her health improved. Her vision, once down to 30 per cent, returned to 75 per cent. Her skin healed, her strength grew, and her spirit — battered

but resilient — began to flourish. Carmel saw these changes not as luck, but as divine mercy. "God is indeed good and faithful," she wrote. "He gave me the best medical care, and parents who could withstand every storm."

Through the long valley of suffering, Carmel discovered something profound: that faith forged in fire is a faith that endures. She learned to love herself. She chose gratitude over bitterness, trust over fear. Her prayers shifted — from desperate pleas for healing to quiet intercessions for others. Her relationship with God matured into a friendship marked by intimacy, not certainty.

Carmel never saw herself as a hero. She remained honest about the bad days, the doubts that lingered, the fragility of recovery. "The battle is always internal," she wrote. "But with every ounce of strength I gained from God, I found courage to fight, even on the bad days."

And that is what made her extraordinary.

She didn't shine despite her suffering — she shone through it. In her vulnerability, she gave others permission to hope. In her darkness, she pointed to light. And in her quiet faith, she revealed a strength that the world rarely sees.

Carmel Dominic's story is not just one of



survival. It is one of resurrection. Her words remain — steadfast reminders that even when all seems lost, grace can find us, and lead us home.

Today, we remember Carmel not only for the battles she fought, but for the light she chose to shine even in her pain. In a world so often afraid of vulnerability, she gave us the gift of truth — truth that does not deny suffering but transforms it through the grace of God.

Rest now, dearest Carmel. Your journey, your faith, your voice — still speak. And your light, unwavering, remains.

A nomadic pilgrim's jubilee journey through love and suffering

The year 2025 is a triple jubilee year for me: the silver jubilee of my religious vows, my parents' golden wedding jubilee and the biblical Jubilee.

Biblically, a jubilee is a special year mentioned in Leviticus 25:8, occurring every 50th year. It is a time to celebrate the mercies of God — forgoing debt, forgiving grievances, letting the fields be vacant, not burdening animals and even forgiving oneself. I began celebrating my jubilee by counting God's mercies.

In her article *Hope is dancing when you can't hear the music*, Benedictine Sr Joan Chittister writes, "Hope is the dream whose time has come, whose dance is already real — even if some of us cannot hear the music."

I heard the music in my father's suffering — a hope against hope. In 2012, my father started experiencing lower limb weakness and pain, for which only local treatment was given. Gradually, with the increasing pains, he was diagnosed with CIDP (chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyradiculoneuropathy) along with diabetes.

As an only daughter, I could not let my father fend for himself. I applied for canonical leave from Aug 20, 2019, to Aug 20, 2022. I had hoped to celebrate the silver jubilee of my first vows in December 2022, but my leave deducted three years from my vowed life. It was very painful to hear humiliating rumours from relatives who assumed I had left the congregation, while also dealing with my father's illness and repaying a huge loan I took for his medical treatment and hospitalisation.

Those three years of leave felt like a personal Triduum. To avoid facing humiliation and the scorching eyes of the people in my village, I shifted my residence to my nurse friend's apartment, which was close to the hospital where I work. I felt so comfortable finding a space to be myself.

But a few months later, my friend was



Sr Rexilla Raymond with her parents on the occasion of their golden wedding anniversary on February 26, 2025. (Courtesy of Rexilla Raymond)

pressured by some ultra-Catholic women to ask me to leave the apartment. They told her it was dangerous to house nuns and priests. Fortunately, my hospital hostel residence worked for me despite its lack of privacy and uncomfortable living conditions.

With a heavy heart, I had to transition from institutional religious life to non-institutional consecrated religious life. While my companions celebrated the silver jubilee of their first vows, I had to let go of the fleshpots of Egypt and begin the pilgrim's jubilee journey — walking in hope to the promised land of nowhere.

As a nurse and daughter, my first act of kindness towards my dad was caring for him with compassion and working overtime to repay the loan. This act of kindness gave my mother hope that her daughter would take care of them — medically and financially.

Caring for my father through his debilitating illness was like a long Triduum. I found myself reliving Maundy Thursday, when Jesus washed the feet of His disciples, preparing them to serve humanity. My own

"feet washing" brought my whole being home. I told myself that I was repaying what my father had done for me when I was a child. Now it was my turn to serve him.

Life embraces suffering. I received new insight and began to see everything in a positive outlook. My fear of "What will people say?" turned into "People have the freedom to say what they want to say. I will go on living the message of Maundy Thursday, where love and charity are found, there am I."

This refrain perfectly set me on my pilgrim journey, guided by words I once found written on a bookmark:

If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish ulterior motives. Be kind anyway. What you spent years building, someone could destroy overnight. Build anyway. The good you do today, people will often forget tomorrow. Do good anyway. Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough. Give the world the best you've got anyway. You see, in the final analysis, it is between you and your God anyway.

While caring for my father, a deep conversion began in my heart. I realised we are all finite. Buddhism teaches us that "All beings suffer." This message brought me deep peace and renewed hope.

Though I never celebrated the silver jubilee of my first vows, I collected jewels of wisdom by reading books and watching formative videos that renewed my hope and courage to "give to the world the best you have, and the best will come back to you."

A Buddhist teacher, Joanna Macy, said that "when your heart breaks open, it can hold the whole universe." I experienced this in the Good Friday reading, "The curtain of the Jerusalem Temple ... was torn in two from top to bottom when Jesus died (Mt 27:51)."

During these jubilee

celebrations, I experienced many heartbreaks. Once, after a heavy night shift in the hospital, I came home to care for my dad. He noticed how dead tired I was and he asked me for some medicine to help him die. The word "euthanasia" pierced my body. To me, it felt like a merciless crucifixion. My whole being trembles whenever I hear the word — as it robs suffering of its sacredness.

The silence of my heart brought me to the celebration of Easter. Love and suffering mingled as I cared for my father and supported him financially, even through debt.

Eventually, father accepted his suffering, but that acceptance came at a high price — the loss of my membership in institutional religious life.

To begin the jubilee journey, I took Jesus as my forerunner, the one who said that the seed must die for the plant to bear fruit. I have come to realise that living a synodal religious life means living a nomadic life — ready to adapt at every turn, embracing both the ups and downs. Synodal solidarity has become my new mantra.

Going beyond the joy of Easter, I feel drawn towards the cruciform nature of the universe — where the God of compassion permeates all beings, especially amid our human weakness. **Sr Rexilla Raymond, Global Sisters Report/NCR**

Sr Rexilla Raymond, from India, belongs to the Sisters for Christian Community. She is a fully trained nurse with 19 years of experience in various roles, including senior staff nurse, geriatric care supervisor, nursing aide school instructor, medical coordinator and hospital nursing supervisor.



My grace is sufficient for you

As I sat down to write this, I found myself overwhelmed by self-doubt — fearing backlash, worrying about how others might perceive me, and anxious about what they might say.

Still, I choose to write. Because I know I'm not alone. There are young Catholic children, just like me, struggling to find balance. And maybe even some older brothers and sisters who feel unseen and unheard.

This piece is for all of you.

Faith has been the cornerstone of my life — from childhood through my teenage years, and again in adulthood after a brief departure. Yet, during adolescence, I struggled deeply with my identity — particularly my sexual identity.

Growing up, I sat through countless sermons, camps, talks, seminars, formation sessions, group discussions, and even harsh lectures — all condemning homosexuality. (And by that, I mean the entire LGBTQ+ community, not limited by gender.) As I look back, I can still feel the anxiety and overwhelming shame I experienced at 15, when I realised I was different. I believed I was defying God and His commandments. I didn't want to "be fruitful and multiply," nor did I feel any desire to — and that thought alone filled me with dread.

To be fair, both to the Church and to myself, I genuinely engaged in all those sessions and discussions. After all, this was framed as a "problem" that needed fixing. Deep down, though, I was consumed by shame. I cried myself to sleep many nights, desperately wishing I could undo who I was and silence the feelings I carried. It was a heavy burden to bear.

Thankfully, I found a small circle within my catechism class — brothers and sisters who were also wrestling with questions of identity and sexuality. We formed a bond rooted in faith. A bond where God remained at the centre of everything. We supported one another in ways no one else could — openly sharing our inner struggles without fear of judgment, offering each other comfort, compassion, and a listening ear.

To this day, we remain deeply connected, praying for one another, encouraging each other spiritually, and holding each other accountable as we walk this journey of faith.

So, why am I telling you all this?

The passing of Pope Francis left a profound impact on me, on those close to me, and on the broader Christian-Catholic community. He was a shepherd who championed the belief that the Church is meant to be open to all — free of judgment, free of labels — a place where we are welcomed simply as children of God, and loved without condition by His tender, merciful heart.

I often find myself in the company of fellow believers — laypeople and clergy alike — and while I once felt anxious or uncertain in these spaces, I've come to realize that many of them share a common mission: to extend the love of the Lord to everyone they encounter.

It's easy to say, "Don't let people keep you from God," but in reality, aren't people the visible face of the Church? The way they love — or fail to love — can shape one's experience of faith.

Pope Francis stirred deep conversation within the Church. His words may have

sparked controversy, but I witnessed something beautiful: a shift in how priests and laypeople alike began to embrace a more welcoming posture toward those seeking the grace of God.

A dear friend once told me, "We do not agree with or encourage the sin, but we welcome the sinner. After all, the Church is a hospital for the broken."

That moment was a turning point for me — a moment of grace.

It drew me closer to my faith than I had ever been before.

Having lived for years with guilt and shame for embracing an alternative lifestyle, I have never wavered in my faith. My God loves me, and He watches over me. I am blessed beyond measure, and in turn, I share that abundance with others. Through all my struggles — sin, shame, and guilt — God has never left my side. He has remained steadfast, always reaching out to take my hand.

Of course, everyone's relationship with religion is personal, and some may not believe in it at all. The burden of being our truest selves — socially, professionally, and emotionally — can be so great that it often becomes our own conscience that stands in the way of connecting with the Church. Time and time again, I ask myself, "Why can't I bring myself to church, to serve, and to give back to the Lord?" And the answer, in all honesty, is this: "I will not subject myself to a community or society that may not accept me."

That being said, I have been fortunate to find a church community that embodies Christ-like love and acceptance. But I know

that for many, the experience is far from the same. Many of my brethren from the LGBTQ+ community wear masks out of fear of judgment and differential treatment.

Before we say, "We welcome everyone," I have sat at tables where the conversation about people from the alternative community was, sadly, far from welcoming or pleasant.

Like me, there are many who long to be part of a community that nurtures our spiritual journey and fills our cup of faith, but have yet to find a place where they can truly belong. To those brethren, I hear you, and I see you. God's love and mercy are sufficient for you, and He will never abandon His sheep. No matter the choices you've made, trust that He is with you every step of the way, loving you unconditionally.

Pope Francis, in his lifetime, broke centuries of tradition by being inclusive of all — regardless of identity, sexuality, sin, or gender. His loss is a great one for a community that was beginning to progress in ways we desperately need. As Pope Leo XIV now leads us, we hold on to hope that his guidance will continue the path of tolerance, acceptance, and love that Pope Francis laid before us.

In a world full of challenges, our young people suffer the most — especially when they feel they have no safe place within a community that should offer them love, grace, and refuge. They long for just one moment where they can experience the love of the Lord through His people. You are loved.

The writer wishes to remain anonymous.

The Visitation that brings us Hope

On May 31, we celebrate the second joyful mystery, which is the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary to her cousin, Elizabeth. This happened immediately after the Archangel Gabriel had announced to Mary the news that God had chosen her to be the mother of His Son.

Had Mary ever visited Elizabeth prior to this? Maybe. But why is this visitation recorded and celebrated by the Church? Even if Mary had been visiting Elizabeth or had visited her only once before, this particular visit was different for it contained many aspects concerning our salvation history.

First, it was the meeting of two mothers to be, and it was one consisting of two meetings, one being Mary's meeting Elizabeth and the other being the forerunner, John the Baptist's encountering Jesus, the saviour of the world.

Second, it was a meeting that produced the *Magnificat* — Mary's hymn of praise and thanksgiving. Non-Catholics say that we hype a lot about Mary, but this is scriptural, for the Gospel text says, "All generations will call me blessed." This honour was given to Mary by God, who had chosen her to be the mother of His Son. If we do not give honour to Mary, it means that Scripture had lied and also made Mary a liar.

Third, it was a visit that gave rise to the Hail Mary prayed in the Catholic Church. The first sentence of the Hail Mary comes from the words of the Archangel Gabriel to Mary: "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you". She is full of grace because she embodies every perfection that is possible for a human being to have. It means that there is nothing preventing God's grace from being manifested in her life because she places no obstacles in God's way. Hence,

Mary has perfect faith, perfect trust, perfect love and perfect hope.

Indeed, Mary is the new Ark of the Covenant, carrying within her womb not only the tablet of the Law but the true bread of life and the king of the universe, her son Jesus. She comes to the home of Elizabeth carrying joy and hope. When we look at Jesus with the eyes of His mother, we see Him perfectly and more easily because Mary always draws us to Him.

And the second sentence of the prayer contains the words of Elizabeth during the visitation: "You are the most blessed," and "blessed is the fruit of your womb." Indeed, we can follow the example of Elizabeth and bless others. It is a sign of our maturity in faith when we bless others and bless the world. The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that "Every baptized person is called to be a blessing and to bless." [CCC 1669].

So how do we bless others? Firstly, blessing someone means acknowledging or appreciating their presence. Secondly, blessing someone means to speak well of them as if we are saying: "I'm proud of you." "Well done!" "I love being around you!". And thirdly, we bless others by giving away some of our own life so that they may have more, for example, the sacrifices that parents make in their lives for the well-being of their children. As in the case of married couples and human relationships in general, we need to give our very own selves for the good of others.

The fourth aspect of this visit is the humility of both Mary and Elizabeth, as well as John the Baptist. Mary had received the news that she was to be the Mother of God, yet in humility, she went to visit Elizabeth. Although Elizabeth was older, she humbled herself by saying "How does



Wikimedia Commons/Philippe de Champaigne

this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" John the Baptist too was humble, for when he heard the greetings of Mary, he leapt for joy in his mother's womb because he recognised the presence and person of Jesus.

Similarly, we must open the doors of our hearts and our homes so that Jesus can come in and visit us. When Jesus comes to visit us, are we humble enough to welcome Him? And how does He do this? He comes to visit us when we help those people who are needy and poor in spirit. In addition, we must be able to love and forgive those

who have hurt us and be able to carry out works of charity. Jesus also comes to visit us in the sacraments and by our listening to His word.

Let us be humble and open our hearts and our minds to the visitation of the Lord. In that way, we shall leap for joy because of the transforming presence of our Lord. Let us pray for the grace that we may not lose sight of what the visitation of the Lord means for us.

Fr Jonathan Andrew Rao, Assistant Priest, Church of St Jude, Rawang



Fr Ron Rolheiser

Faith — beyond the head and the heart

C.S. Lewis, one of the great Christian apologists, didn't become a Christian without resistance and struggle. He grew into adulthood nursing a certain scepticism and agnosticism. He wasn't drawn naturally to faith or to Christ. But he was always radically honest in trying to listen to the deepest voices inside and at a certain point he came to the realisation that Christ and His teaching were compelling in such a way that left him unfree. In conscience he had to become a Christian.

Many of us are familiar with the words he wrote on the night when he first knelt down and gave himself over to faith in Christ. Having just come back from a long walk and a religious discussion with J.R.R. Tolkien (who was his colleague at Oxford) he describes how he knelt down and committed himself to faith in Christ. But, by his own admission, this wasn't an easy genuflection: I knelt down as the most reluctant convert in the history of Christendom. Wow! Not exactly what we take for first fervour.

But he goes on to describe why, despite all his natural reluctance, he became a convert: Because I had come to realise that the harshness of God is kinder than the softness of man, and God's compulsion is our liberation. What is God's compulsion?

Here's an example. There's a famous incident in the Gospel of John where Peter, like C.S. Lewis, is also a reluctant convert. This is the story.

Jesus had just identified Himself with the Bread of Life and ended that teaching by saying that unless we eat His body and drink His blood we cannot have life in us. Understandably this was both confusing and perplexing to His audience, so perplexing in fact that the Gospels tell us that the crowds all walked away, saying this is an intolerable teaching. Then, when the crowds had gone, Jesus turned to His disciples and asked them: Do you want to walk away too? Peter was not exactly enthusiastic and affirmative in his answer. He responded by saying, "We have no other place to go." However (and this is one of Peter's shining moments in the Gospels) he then adds: We know that you have the words of everlasting life.

When you parse out Peter's response, here's its substance. Peter has just heard a teaching that he doesn't understand and what he understands he doesn't like. At that moment, Jesus looks like the opposite of truth and life. Peter's head is resistant and so is his heart. But underneath both his head and his heart there is another part of Peter that knows that, irrespective of resist-

ance of his head and his heart, this teaching will bring him life.

At that moment, like C.S. Lewis, Peter is a most reluctant Apostle. However, he still gives his life over to Christ, despite the resistance in his head and in his heart. Why? Because like C.S. Lewis, he had come to understand that God's compulsion is our liberation.

I remember once seeing an interview with Daniel Berrigan. The host asked him, "Father, where does your faith lie? Is it in your head or in your heart?" Berrigan's response was both colourful and insightful: "Faith is rarely where your head is at, and faith even less rarely where your heart is at. Faith is where your ass is at." By way of commentary he added: "Anyone who has ever been in a commitment over a long period of time knows that there will be times and seasons when your head isn't in it, your heart isn't in it, but you're in it because you know that the path to life for you lies in staying inside that commitment."

What ultimately do we trust enough to give our lives over to? I believe we need to answer that question not with heads nor with our hearts. It's not that our heads and our hearts are untrustworthy in themselves, it's just as we know from experience,

they don't always speak for what's deepest inside us. God's compulsion sits below our thinking and our feeling. Our heads tell us what we think is wise to do. Our hearts tell us what we would like to do. But a deeper voice in us tells us what we have to do.

The deepest voice of God inside us isn't always at ease with our head or our heart. That voice is God's compulsion inside us and it can make us the most reluctant convert in the history of Christianity, it can have us standing before Jesus telling Him that He looks the opposite of truth and life, it can have us looking with utter disillusion at the seemingly chronic infidelity of our churches, and still have us say, we have no other place to go. You have the words of everlasting life.

Doubt, disillusionment, and lack of understanding aren't virtues, but they can push us to a place where we have to decide before what ultimately we need to genuflect.

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

Offence – Understanding what it does

One Sunday morning, I overheard a sermon by an *imam* who was preaching about offence and the tendency of people to hurt one another — whether intentionally or unintentionally. The message struck a chord with me because offence is something we all encounter in our daily lives, in one form or another. The *imam* explained that this behaviour stems from our flawed human nature. He emphasised that the only true way to deal with offence is through forgiveness. While the solution sounds simple, we all know it's far from easy. Forgiving may be possible — but forgetting, as many would agree, is another matter entirely.

Recurring offences have led many marriages and families into conflict, often causing deep misunderstandings among relatives and friends. I, too, was not immune to offence; for a time, I found myself trapped by it. But thanks be to God — by His grace, I made the choice to confront this painful reality. It was a long and difficult process, requiring much time and reflection. What I share here is based solely on what I have learned from Scripture and does not delve into the psychological aspects of offence.

The word offence is defined as annoyance or resentment caused by a perceived insult or disregard for oneself. Its Latin root means "a striking against" or "a hurt." Throughout the Scriptures — both Old and New Testaments — we see how the people of Israel frequently offended God through disobedience and sin. The Old Testament reveals God's character and His ways of dealing with sin: not with indifference, but with justice and a desire for reconciliation. His ultimate solution was the incarnation of Jesus Christ, Who came to restore what was broken.

Let us consider how Jesus addresses the issue of offence and what we can learn from His perspective.

First, we must recognise that we are engaged in a constant spiritual battle (1 Peter 5:8–9). Offence, when left unchecked, can fester into anger, unforgiveness, and ultimately destruction — even murder, as illustrated in the tragic story of Amnon and Absalom (2 Samuel 13:1–33). Jesus equates harbouring anger in the heart with committing murder (Matthew 5:21–22), showing us the seriousness of unresolved offence.

Jesus also makes it clear that offence is inevitable — it is part of life, especially in relationships (Luke 17:1). Even His disciples, who had witnessed miracles, healings, and the raising of the dead, struggled with the concept of forgiveness. When Jesus taught them about the need to forgive, their immediate response was, "Increase our faith!" (Luke 17:5). This shows that forgiving offences is not easy, even for the faithful — but it is necessary.

Jesus provides the solution to offence: belief in Him and obedience to His commands. As 1 John 3:15 states, "Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer," and in John 14:15, He says, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." Furthermore, Luke 14:26 reminds us that our love and loyalty to Jesus must come before even our closest earthly relationships. When Christ takes first place in our hearts, we are empowered to rise above any offence — whether from a parent, spouse, sibling, or friend.

An offended person often feels betrayed — and betrayal can easily give way to hatred (Matthew 24:10–12). When betrayal enters a relationship, love grows cold, and emotional distance takes root. This kind

of pain can become a spiritual stronghold, a barrier to healing and connection (2 Corinthians 10:3–5). In response, the offended individual may begin to build emotional walls for self-protection, develop justifications for withdrawing, and stop giving or engaging in meaningful ways. Over time, they become wounded — deeply and spiritually.

Betrayal is one of the most destructive forces in relationships; it often leads to abandonment. More than just straining human connections, it can cause a believer's love for God to grow cold, affecting prayer life and even impacting physical and mental health. As Matthew 7:15 warns, Satan targets the vulnerable — especially those wounded by offence — like a predator looking for injured sheep.

People are most easily offended when they have invested significant time, energy, and emotions into a relationship. The depth of the offence often corresponds to the depth of the connection. There are four primary types of love:

Agape — Unconditional, selfless love
Eros — Romantic or sexual love
Phileo — Brotherly love or deep friendship
Storge — Natural affection, such as between parent and child

Those who experience the deepest wounds often fall under the category of Agape love, because this kind of love carries the highest expectations. And when those expectations are unmet or betrayed, the pain cuts deeper. The greater the expectation, the greater the potential for hurt. This truth is echoed in Psalm 55:12–14, where David laments being betrayed not by an enemy, but by a close companion — a trusted friend.

Having recognised the immense destruction that offence can cause, and after

much introspection and seeking counsel, I've come to understand that the void left by offence must be filled with the Word of God. Our faith is not merely a religion; it is deeply personal. If we desire to be free from the bondage of offence, it requires intentional time and effort. As John 5:24, John 6:29, and John 10:10 remind us, the solution lies in the truth of God's Word. These verses call us to actively engage with the Bible, where God speaks directly to us. To heal, we must spend time with Him, listening to His voice.

Our Lord Jesus Christ has already paid the price for unforgiveness, guilt, hurt, and shame for all who believe in Him (Romans 5:1–5). Through faith in Jesus, we are made right with God. To overcome offence, we must first understand the concept of justification. Once we accept and believe in Jesus, we receive the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us and empowers us to live differently (Romans 5:5). Ultimately, the choice is ours to make: to renew our minds and change the way we think (Romans 12:2).

Offence is unavoidable, but with Jesus, we can overcome it (John 14:27, John 16:33). The entire Bible recounts how the people of Israel repeatedly offended God and how He dealt with those offences. Through Jesus' incarnation, death, and resurrection, God showed us the way out of this cycle of offence and death—the slavery of sin that Satan uses to trap us in bitterness and anger.

In conclusion, we must recognise that we are always in a spiritual battle, and offence is one of Satan's most effective baits. Understanding the devastating consequences of offence, Jesus offers us a personal relationship with Him as the ultimate remedy. To begin this relationship, we need faith (Romans 5:5), the Word (Matthew 4:4), and the Spirit (Galatians 5:16). **Deacon Dr Leslie Petrus**

Little Catholics' corner

Rearrange the word of God below. The last sentence is given.

the holy spirit

will teach you all things and

will remind you of everything

whom the Father

But the Advocate

I have said to you

will send in my name

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you (John 14:26-29)

Let's Colour



Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you.
 I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let
 your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.
 (John 14: 27)

Dear children,

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus tells the disciples that He is going away, but that the Father will send the Holy Spirit to help them.

We can't see Jesus on earth any more, because He went to Heaven at the Ascension.

We can't see the Holy Spirit either, because He doesn't have a body.

The Holy Spirit really is in the world, though. He is working in the Church and in people who obey and love God.

The Holy Spirit comes to us mainly through the sacra-



ments. We get grace, which is God's life in us, when we receive the sacraments. Jesus gave us the sacraments to help us on our way to Heaven. Do you know the seven sacraments? Here is a list to help you to remember:

- Baptism
- Confession
- Confirmation
- Holy Communion
- Marriage
- Holy Orders
- Sacrament of the Sick

Until we meet again, be good, okay?

Aunty Eliz

If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth.

What did Jesus say to the disciples to prepare them for His departure? Look at this page in the mirror to find out!



Pope Leo calls on youth to:

Accept the invitation of the Church and Christ the Lord

VATICAN CITY: “To young people I say: Do not be afraid! Accept the invitation of the Church and Christ the Lord!” declared Pope Leo XIV to thunderous applause during his first *Regina Caeli* address as an extraordinary crowd of jubilant pilgrims packed St Peter’s Square on Sunday, May 11

The spontaneous call to young people from the first US-born pope echoed the famous words of St John Paul II in 1978.

On Sunday, Leo’s call — to an estimated crowd of 100,000 people — came during an address that coincided with Good Shepherd Sunday, which the new pontiff called “a gift from God” for his inaugural Sunday as bishop of Rome.

The sound of marching bands and cheerful pilgrims resonated throughout the Vatican as an exuberant, celebratory atmosphere filled the piazza and the surrounding streets. Participants in the Jubilee of Bands and Popular Entertainment, specially welcomed by the pope, provided melodious moments throughout the gathering. Huge crowds poured into the square on a warm Roman spring day with spontaneous cheers of “Viva il Papa” erupting repeatedly.

“I consider it a gift from God that the first Sunday of my service as bishop of Rome is Good Shepherd Sunday, the fourth Sunday of Easter,” Pope Leo said, prompting another

wave of enthusiastic applause.

“This Sunday is always proclaimed in the Mass in the Gospel of John, chapter 10, in which Jesus reveals Himself as the true Shepherd, who knows and loves His sheep and for them gives His life.”

The Pope noted that this Sunday also marks the 62nd World Day of Prayer for Vocations, a day focused on praying for those called to religious life and priesthood.

“Today, brothers and sisters, I have the joy of praying with you and all the people of God for vocations, especially those to the priesthood and religious life. The Church has such a great need for them!” the Pope said.

Leo XIV emphasized the importance of young people finding “acceptance, listening, and encouragement in their vocational journey” within Catholic communities and having “credible models of generous dedication to God and to their brothers and sisters.”

The Pope specifically acknowledged the Jubilee of Bands and Popular Entertainment being hosted in Rome on Sunday. “I greet with affection all these pilgrims and thank them because, with their music and their performances, they enliven the feast of Christ the Good Shepherd,” he said as musical groups in the square responded with brief, spirited performances.

Referencing Pope Francis’ message for the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, Pope Leo encouraged Catholics to welcome and accompany young people discerning their calling.



“Let us ask our heavenly Father to assist us in living in service to one another, each according to his or her state of life, shepherd after His own heart, capable of helping one another to walk in love and truth,” he said.

In a particularly animated moment, the Pope addressed young people directly: “To young people I say: Do not be afraid! Accept the invitation of the Church and Christ the Lord!” The crowd responded with sustained applause.

The *Regina Caeli* prayer replaces the *Angelus* during the Easter season. Pope Leo invoked the Virgin Mary, “whose entire life was a response to the Lord’s call,” to accompany all in following Jesus. He masterfully sang the *Regina Caeli* in mellifluous Latin before imparting his blessing. The crowd erupted in shouts of “Viva il Papa!”

The pontiff then spoke solemnly about the tragedy of the Second World War, which ended on May 8, 1945. “We are now confronting a third world war piecemeal as Pope Francis reminded us,” he said. “As Pope Paul VI said: War no more!”

“I hold close to my heart the suffering of the poor people in Ukraine, that they might find a true and lasting peace,” he continued. He also called for an end to the violence in Gaza and prayed for all those taken hostage to be released. “And I rejoice at the recent peace made between India and Pakistan.” He said he hoped for a lasting accord.

Pope Leo greeted “with affection all of you, those from Rome and the pilgrims from various countries,” mentioning countries and groups by name to cheers and applause from the square.

Leo also acknowledged that Mother’s Day is celebrated in many countries. “I send a special greeting to all mothers for all they give to us,” he said, prompting warm applause.

The pope thanked everyone and wished everyone a “buona Domenica” and a happy Sunday. He spent a few moments gratefully smiling and acknowledging the ecstatic, warm reception before departing. AC Wimmer, CNA



Church in Seoul hosts major youth festival as preview to World Youth Day 2027

SOUTH KOREA: More than 30,000 people took part in the “Hee Hee Hee” Youth Festival in Seoul from May 9 to 11, a large-scale, youth-led celebration organised by the Archdiocese of Seoul and the Local Organising Committee for World Youth Day (WYD) 2027.

Held in the context of the Jubilee Year and Vocations Sunday, the three-day event was designed as a preview of the global Catholic gathering scheduled for 2027.

Organisers said the festival aimed to offer “a vibrant, youth-led celebration of faith, vocation, and community” through programmes inspired by the Korean characters for “Light,” “Hope,” and “Joy.”

Youth played a central role in planning and executing the festival, which featured thematic zones, concerts, liturgical celebrations, and interactive exhibits.

According to organisers, the event welcomed “people of all ages, nationalities, and religious backgrounds, creating a space of shared joy and intercultural dialogue.”

A Preview of WYD

Structured to mirror elements of WYD, the Seoul gathering included catechesis, witness

talks, creative performances, a prayer vigil, and Mass held on May 11 at the Catholic University Sungsin Campus, also known as the “Truth Zone.”

Presiding over the Mass, Archbishop Peter Soon-taick Chung of Seoul urged young people to listen to God’s call.

“In a special way this year, as we journey toward the 2027 World Youth Day within the grace of the Jubilee Year, I earnestly hope that the ‘Hee, Hee, Hee’ Youth Festival will inspire more young people to open their hearts to the Lord’s call and respond with courage and faith,” he said in his homily.

“The Church thrives and bears fruit when it gives rise to new vocations,” he added. “In many ways, the world is, perhaps unknowingly, yearning for ‘witnesses of hope’ — those who testify through their very lives that following Christ is the wellspring of true joy.”

An estimated 3,500 people attended the Mass, which featured music, testimonies, and a strong focus on vocational discernment.

Three Zones, One Mission

The festival was divided into three thematic



Religious sisters present handmade crafts and vocational materials at a booth during the “Hee Hee Hee” Youth Festival in Seoul. (Committee for Communications, Archdiocese of Seoul)

areas — Truth, Peace, and Love — each offering a unique entry point into Christian life and witness.

Truth Zone: Served as the spiritual centre of the festival, hosting the May 10 vigil and the May 11 Mass. The space encouraged deeper reflection on faith and vocation.

Peace Zone: Set at Dongsung Middle and High School, this area focused on vocational formation. Religious congregations from across Korea set up booths to share their way of life. A highlight was the “Chat with a Religious” session, which offered youth informal conversations with religious men and women. The “Oseyo Concert,” held nearby, featured lively performances by religious communities, showcasing their diverse charisms.

Love Zone: Along the car-free Daehak-ro street, Catholic youth groups and partner organisations created a festive atmosphere with interactive exhibits and outreach ef-

forts. A Talk Concert on May 11 brought together youth, clergy, and artists for open conversations about faith, purpose, and hope.

Festival Spirit

The festival was supported by 180 youth volunteers and 60 adult staff. Organisers emphasized sustainability, using reusable materials and implementing zero-waste practices. Real-time assistance and on-site surveys contributed to a smooth participant experience.

Describing the event as “more than a local celebration,” organisers said it served as a “faithful preview of World Youth Day itself.”

By blending prayer, culture, and community engagement, the “Hee Hee Hee” Youth Festival offered a glimpse of the vision for WYD 2027 — a global Church led by young people who, as organisers put it, “walk in the light, live with hope, and radiate joy.” **LiCas**



Religious sisters take the stage during the “Hee Hee Hee” Youth Festival in Seoul, engaging thousands of young participants with songs, testimonies, and performances celebrating consecrated life. (Committee for Communications, Archdiocese of Seoul)

Young pilgrims prepare to share love of Christ in the Eucharist during 3,300-mile trek

LOS ANGELES: Young men and women took part in the 2025 National Eucharistic Pilgrimage spoke at a press conference about their preparation and excitement for the 3,300-mile pilgrimage, which begins from Indianapolis, May 18.

The 36-day pilgrimage, attracted thousands of participants to walk with and adore Christ in the Eucharist, is a response to the cultural and spiritual needs of today, said Leslie Reyes-Hernandez, a pilgrim and a high school algebra teacher from Phoenix.

“If anything, I think this [pilgrimage] is an invitation for something that the world is hungry for, and the Eucharist is our anchor, and the pilgrimage is a public expression of hope,” she said.

Reyes-Hernandez is one of eight young pilgrims who seek to publicly witness to the truth that Christ is truly present in the Blessed Sacrament by accompanying the Eucharist the entire route from Indianapolis to Los Angeles, crossing through 10 states and taking part in numerous special events.

Rachel Levy, who works for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis serving Catholic young adults, described preparing “spiritually, just trying to keep a consistent prayer life,” attending daily Mass, and spending time in adoration. Practically, she’s been “trying to



get out and walk a little bit more than normal,” getting prepped for the upcoming extended periods of time outside and getting some “good walking shoes.”

Asked what the Eucharist has done for her in her life, Levy recounted a moment in adoration in front of the tabernacle where, feeling “unworthy” and “unequipped” for ministry due to past brokenness, she experienced a profound sense that the Lord “loved me just as much in the worst of the worst of my sin as he did in that moment that I was sitting in front of the tabernacle, and that he loves us each each moment of every day the same no matter what we’re doing. His love is constant.”

Johnathan “Johnny” Silvino Hernandez-Jose, who resides in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and helps run his family’s construction company, said he anticipated challenges during the pilgrimage experience: “walking every day, talking every day, lack of sleep.” He described a previous walking pilgrimage experience at World Youth Day 2023 in Portugal that touched him deeply.

“Emotionally, maybe we’ll get a little drained,” he noted, anticipating the intensity of constant interaction during the pilgrimage and the need to manage social energy. He also mentioned overcoming personal shyness and not taking any perceived shortfalls too hard on himself. Ultimately,

though, he said he sees the pilgrimage as a “walk with Christ, the trust that we put with him and the love that we have for him.”

“The root of this is spiritual,” Hernandez-Jose continued. “I think when anything comes our way, these challenges, I think all we could do is really trust God and just pray with each other. And honestly, for me, what I like to do is just offer it up, you know?”

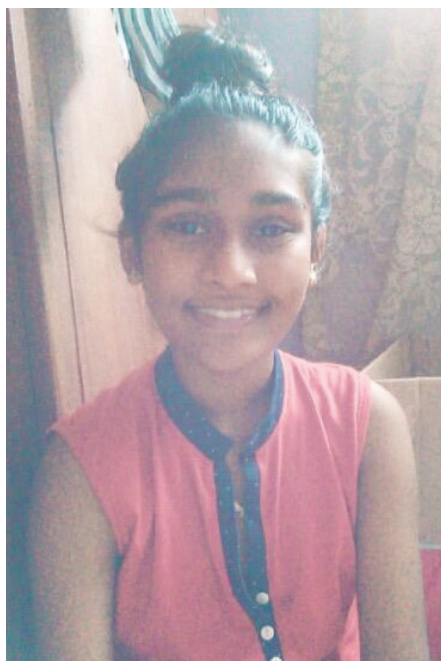
Arthur “Ace” Acuña, who works in campus ministry at Princeton University, was drawn to the pilgrimage by the pivotal role the Eucharist played in his own reversion to the faith and his desire to “see Jesus do what he does best, which is draw all things to himself.”

He said “seeing people fall in love with him ... fall in love with the Eucharist and the love that he’s offering them, because he’s passing by. And just like in the Gospels, he encountered so many people.”

Acuña also emphasized the importance, especially during the Church’s ongoing Jubilee Year of Hope, of carrying Jesus not only into cities and rural areas but also into prisons and other places that experience suffering or isolation, seeing it as a “testament to the fact that Jesus wants to encounter everyone” and bringing healing and “light into the dark places.” **Jonah McKeown, CNA**

Asla, the ‘witness of faith’ whose death united Christians and Muslims

COLOMBO: “Even though Asla had a Muslim name, she wanted very much to be baptised as a daughter of Jesus. She prayed at home. She invented little prayers that she recited on various occasions. That Easter Sunday, she went to Mass with great joy to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. God took her life in church. In my sorrow, I am happy to know that she too has been included among the witnesses of faith, together with the other 115 killed in the church of Katuwapitiya in Negombo”.



This is how Rupika Rosairo remembers her daughter Fatima Asla *pic*, one of the victims of the massacre of massacres that bloodied Sri Lanka at Easter 2019. With her heart still full of pain for the loss of her daughter, who was of school age, she expresses her joy for the gesture made by the Catholic Church of Colombo which has decided to include her name in the list of witnesses of the faith sent to Rome on the occasion of the Jubilee, which by will of Pope Francis also includes the commemoration of the martyrs of the 21st century.

Asla’s mother, Rupika Rosairo, is a Sinhalese Catholic woman. Her husband is Muslim and for this reason her three children — two girls and a boy — have received Muslim names.

But the girl wanted to be baptised and attended the Catholic community. “We

thank Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith and all the members of this committee for taking such a beautiful and significant step,” Rupika Rosairo said. “Asla was preparing to enter the path of baptism that year. She went to church and attended Mass whenever possible, and she was learning the prayers. She always spoke about Jesus and said that she saw Him in our room and spoke to Him. But we didn’t pay much attention to what she

shared with us... thinking she was still a little girl.”

“That day too,” the woman continues, “she had gone to church with my mother and older sister for the morning Mass, while I went with my little son to the evening Mass. But Asla, my angel, did not return home like every other day with the joy of the Risen Lord. When we received the news of an explosion in the church, we rushed there immediately. I still have in my eyes a horrible scene that I cannot even put into words... My older daughter was holding Asla in her arms, but she was silent. She and my mother were also injured.”

“We went beyond all the rules and buried her in the Muslim cemetery in Negombo,” Rupika added. “Even though she was preparing to fulfil her dream of being baptised, legally she was still a Muslim. We respect that. And I must also mention the great support we received from the Muslim community in Negombo, for which I am grateful. They have been with us from the very beginning.”

“Since that terrible day in April 2019, on the 21st of every month, without exception, concludes Mrs Rapika, “I participate in the Mass for the soul of my beloved daughter and distribute alms in her memory. And I will continue to do so.” **Melani Manel Perera, AsiaNews**

Coordinator of Catholic organisation murdered in parish

TAMBURA: A new act of violence has shaken the parish of St Mary Help of Christians, in Tombura County, Western Equatoria State, one of the ten states of South Sudan. According to local media reports, Paul Tamania, a young coordinator of the Catholic Organisation for Development and Peace (CODEP), was shot dead on May 8, inside the parish premises. CODEP is an organisation born within the Diocese of Tombura-Yambio.

The crime comes five months after the murder of the parish choir director, which occurred on December 13, 2024. Local authorities have opened an investigation to clarify the events.

In response to the incident, the Bishop of

Tombura-Yambio, Bishop Barani Eduardo Hiiboro Kussala, strongly condemned this latest episode of violence: “These continuous attacks on innocent lives are absolutely unacceptable, deeply immoral, and must cease immediately. The Church is not a battlefield, it is a sacred place, a refuge where people come to find the peace of God, not the cruelty of man. That such a sanctuary should be violated by acts of murder is a grave sin and a wound to our collective humanity.”

Tamania was highly regarded in the community for his dedication to youth work and his commitment to peace building in the county, according to local sources. Over the past

three years, the parish where he was killed also served as a shelter for thousands of internally displaced people fleeing the violence that continues to plague various regions of the country.

“You are not serving your people or your cause; you are destroying your brothers and sisters. Choose peace. Lay down your weapons,” urged Bishop Hiiboro Kussala. Concluding his message, he launched a forceful appeal to the authorities: “Bring those responsible to justice. Restore peace and security to this region. Save your people. It is your solemn duty to protect the life and dignity of all citizens.” **Fides**



Bishop Barani Eduardo Hiiboro Kussala

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Journalists urged to be peacemakers in a divided world

VATICAN: Pope Leo XIV thanked journalists for their service to the truth while urging them to become agents of peace in a world increasingly fractured by conflict, misinformation, and ideological division.

Addressing several thousand members of the press in the Paul VI Audience Hall on May 12, the new pontiff expressed deep gratitude for the media's dedication in covering Pope Francis' funeral, the Easter celebrations, and the papal conclave.

"They say when they clap at the beginning it doesn't matter much... but if you're still awake at the end and still want to applaud, thank you very much!" Pope Leo quipped in English, breaking from his prepared remarks and drawing laughter from the crowd.

The mood then turned serious as he reflected on the responsibilities of communication in today's world. "Peace begins with each one of us," he said. "In the way we look at others, listen to others, and speak about others."

Pope Leo emphasised the vital role of journalists in shaping culture, not merely conveying information. He called on them to reject sensationalism, partisanship, and what he termed the "paradigm of war", aggressive, divisive language that fuels social and political polarisation.

He also raised a prophetic voice for the de-



A girl holds out a drawing she made for Pope Leo XIV, hoping that he will accept it after his meeting with members of the media May 12, 2025, in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

fence of press freedom, appealing for the release of journalists imprisoned for telling the truth. "The Church recognises in these witnesses... the courage of those who defend dignity, justice, and the right of people to be informed," he said, noting that only informed individuals can make truly free choices.

Among the names that resonated was that of Evan Gershkovich, the *Wall Street Journal* reporter imprisoned in Russia in 2023 on charges of espionage and freed in 2024. But the Pope's

words also struck a chord in Peru, where two journalists, Pedro Salinas and Paola Ugaz, have faced years of legal retaliation for exposing widespread abuse and corruption within the Sodalitium Christianae Vitae (SCV), a powerful lay group suppressed by Pope Francis earlier this year.

Ugaz, who greeted the Pope after the address, presented him with handmade chocolates and a scarf crafted by women in the Peruvian Andes.

Salinas, who had attended the conclave, was

unable to be present for the media audience due to a court hearing related to ongoing legal cases brought against him by individuals linked to the SCV. Pope Leo's mention of imprisoned and threatened journalists was seen as a powerful show of solidarity.

Turning to broader themes, Pope Leo urged communicators to move beyond "loveless languages that are often ideological or partisan," and instead to foster spaces of encounter — both human and digital. "Your service, with the words you use and the style you adopt, is crucial," he said.

He highlighted the increasing influence of artificial intelligence in shaping public discourse, noting its enormous potential but also its risks. He called for discernment and responsibility to ensure new technologies serve humanity rather than manipulate it.

Drawing inspiration from Pope Francis' World Day of Social Communications message, Pope Leo concluded with a passionate appeal: "Let us disarm communication of all prejudice and resentment, fanaticism and hatred. We do not need loud, forceful communication, but rather communication capable of listening and of gathering the voices of the weak who have no voice."

"To disarm words," he said, "is to disarm the world." CNA/CruX

United with the Canossians
Prayer for and with Canossian sisters in Malaysia as they seek justice and fair resolution for their land in Melaka known as Portuguese Convent (Lot 6), commonly known as Sacred Heart Canossian Convent.

Pray to our Lord for:

- * Clarity, insight, to those who will consider this appeal. Guide their thoughts and judgments so that fairness and equity prevail.
- * Strengthen the sisters with patience and unwavering faith, as they await the outcome. Help them to accept His will, knowing that He is a God who acts justly, knowing that He will work out all things for good for those who love Him.
- * Surround the sisters with His Peace, that surpasses all understanding, calming any anxiety or fear that may arise. Grant them the strength to face the future with hope and resilience.

*The hearing of the appeal will be fixed in due course

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- Basilica of St Antonio, Padova
- Duomo St Maria del Fiore, Florence
- Leaning Tower of Pisa, Pisa
- Basilica of St Francis of Assisi, Assisi
- Shrine of Padre Pio, San Giovanni
- Papal Audience
- St Peter's Basilica, Rome

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- Nile River Cruise
- Climb up Mount Sinai
- Shepherd's Field Church
- The Nativity Church - Birthplace of Jesus
- Via Dolorosa (14 stations)
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