

HERALD

The Catholic Weekly

Mission Statement

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.

TERHAD

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As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:4-5



Double celebration marks new commitments in Franciscan life

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CDM parish hosts first Divine Mercy conference

■ P6



After "Amen" Why young people drift and how they return

■ P16



'As a pastor, I cannot be in favour of war'

ROME: Marking his first anniversary as pontiff, Pope Leo XIV delivered one of his strongest condemnations of war to date, declaring that the loss of innocent lives remains an unacceptable cost of global conflict.

"As a pastor, I cannot be in favour of war; too many innocents have died," the Pope said during an in-flight press conference on his return to Rome following his Apostolic Journey to Africa. His remarks came after encounters with communities affected by violence and ongoing conflicts in regions such as Iran and Lebanon.

Speaking aboard the papal flight from Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, the Holy Father emphasised that his travels are primarily pastoral, not political. He described his mission as proclaiming the Gospel, drawing close to people in their joys and struggles, and accompanying them in their lived realities.

"Very often, there is an expectation that the Pope will speak politically or judge governments," he said. "But the first word is not political. It is the proclamation of Jesus Christ and the desire to be close to the people."

Addressing escalating global tensions, including the situation involving Iran, the United States and Israel, the Pope called for renewed commitment to dialogue and rejected violence as a default response.

"What we have seen is that many innocent people have died," he said, recalling families who lost children in recent attacks. He shared a deeply personal image that continues to weigh on him.

"I carry with me a photo of a Muslim child who, during the visit to Lebanon, was waiting there with a sign saying 'Welcome Pope Leo.' He has been killed in this final phase of the war," he said. "There are many human situations, and we must be able to think in these terms."

Reiterating his stance, he added: "As a Church — I repeat — as a pastor, I cannot be

in favour of war. We must seek answers that come from a culture of peace, not hatred and division."

Rather than focusing on regime change, Pope Leo XIV urged leaders to prioritise the protection of human life and respect for international law. He described the current geopolitical climate as "complex" and warned of its impact on both populations and the global economy.

"I would encourage the continuation of dialogue for peace," he said. "All sides must make every effort to remove the threat of war and ensure that innocent people are protected."

The Pope also addressed migration, economic inequality and the death penalty. On migration, he described it as a global issue requiring shared responsibility, particularly from wealthier nations.

"A State has the right to regulate its borders," he said, "but when people arrive, they are human beings and must be treated with dignity."

He criticised the exploitation of developing

regions, particularly in Africa, and called for greater efforts to promote justice, equality and sustainable development to address the root causes of migration.

On capital punishment, the Pope was unequivocal. "I condemn all actions that are unjust," he said. "Human life must be respected and protected from conception to natural death."

Reflecting on his first year as Bishop of Rome, Pope Leo XIV said his pontificate remains centred on accompaniment, dialogue and applying the Gospel to real-world situations. His recent journey to Africa, he noted, reinforced the importance of presence — walking with people, listening to their stories and sharing in their faith.

As global tensions continue to rise, the Pope's message remains clear: peace is not optional, and the protection of human life must remain at the centre of all political and moral decisions. **Agencies**

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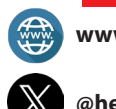
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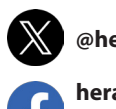
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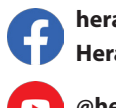
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The Church among the struggling

The global economic landscape of 2026 remains turbulent, and the ripple effects of uncertainty have reached Malaysia, manifesting in a continued rise in the cost of living. While government interventions such as fuel subsidies provide partial cushioning at the pump, the reality for most households is far more complex. The “petrol price” is only the visible layer; the deeper impact is felt in grocery bills, transport costs, school fees, rent, and the daily recalculations families make around their kitchen tables.

This burden is no longer limited to the urban poor. Increasingly, the M40 group is also feeling the pressure, as incomes remain largely unchanged while essential costs continue to rise. Many families who were once financially stable are now quietly adjusting their lifestyles, delaying plans, and feeling less secure about the future.

At the same time, it is important to recognise that migrant workers do not benefit from Malaysia's fuel subsidy system, while refugees and asylum seekers are excluded from formal economic protections. Together with the urban poor, they face greater vulnerability, where even small increases in transport or food costs can quickly threaten basic living conditions and dignity.

The Pastoral Necessity of Closeness

In the face of these realities, the Church cannot remain a distant observer. The credibility of the Church is not measured only in the strength of its structures or the beauty of its liturgies, but in its capacity to stand close to those who are struggling. In times of financial anxiety, people do not only need solutions — they need to know that the Church sees them, hears them, and walks with them.

The Second Vatican Council reminds us in *Gaudium et Spes* that “the joys and hopes, the

grief and anxieties of the people of this age” are also those of the Church (GS 1). If our people are anxious, the Church must not be indifferent. If our people are struggling, the Church must be present.

A Renewed Pastoral Posture

This calls for a renewed pastoral posture across the Church — a shift from maintenance to accompaniment, from programme-centred activity to people-centred presence.

First, the neighbourhood must be reclaimed as a primary space of Church life. As costs of travel increase, *Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs)* become not optional structures but essential expressions of pastoral wisdom. In smaller, local communities, faith is lived closer to home, burdens are shared more naturally, and the Church is experienced as a living presence rather than a distant institution.

Second, *social outreach* must move from the margins to the centre of parish identity. Care for the migrant, refugee, urban poor, and struggling M40 families is not optional charity; it is the Church's concrete expression of the Gospel. This requires attentiveness to those who may already be absent from parish life because they can no longer afford the cost of participation.

Third, there is a need for honest discernment regarding structures and programmes. The Church must ask *what truly serves mission* in this moment. Large-scale events requiring significant travel or resources may need to be simplified or deferred. Formation and pastoral engagement may need to shift more intentionally towards local and digital spaces. The guiding concern is simple: participation in the life of the Church must never be limited by financial capacity.

Stewardship, Simplicity, and Solidarity

There is also a clear call to reflect carefully on

how Church resources are used. Non-essential projects such as renovations, upgrades, or capital developments that are not urgent should be reviewed and, where appropriate, postponed. In a time when many families are under financial pressure, decisions about spending must be guided by prudence and solidarity.

Church resources are pastoral resources before they are institutional ones. Where possible, funds should be directed in two main ways: first, to direct support for those in need, especially vulnerable families, migrants, refugees, and the urban poor; and second, to prudent reserves to ensure the Church can respond quickly to future pastoral emergencies.

The Power of Solidarity

There is also a deeper grace in this moment. When external pressures lead to simplification, the Church is gently brought back to what is essential: communion, care, and presence.

The early Christian communities were not marked by wealth or scale, but by mutual care and a commitment that no one among them would be in need. Their strength was not in structures, but in shared life and solidarity.

While global forces may be beyond our control, our response is not. The Church must choose to be present rather than distant, pastoral rather than procedural.

In standing with those most affected, the Church speaks a simple but powerful truth: **you are not forgotten; you are not alone; the Church is with you.**

In this way, parishes become more than centres of activity. They become sanctuaries of solidarity — where human struggle is not ignored, but held within the compassionate heart of a Church that walks closely with her people.

Sandra Ann

Built on Christ, the living cornerstone

On this Fifth Sunday of Easter, the readings invite us into a vision of the Church as the household of the building site and the living sanctuary, held together by Jesus, the living cornerstone. This image is not merely a theological decoration; it is a concrete, pastoral map for how we live as Christians: trusting, being shaped, and serving one another.

In the Gospel, Jesus comforts His frightened friends: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in Me.” He will not leave them adrift. He promises a way to the Father, a truth that gives direction, and a life that gives meaning. His words are warm and intimate — He prepares a place called home and promises to return for us. For a community gripped by fear and uncertainty, this is deeply practical: our identity rests not in achievements or anxieties, but in His promise.

Peter echoes this through another image. He calls us “living stones” being built into a spiritual house. It is a striking reversal: stones, usually lifeless, are now alive — shaped into a temple of worship and witness. The cornerstone is not an idea but a person, the living Christ who dwells among us. The Church, then, is not a museum of saints but a living body — growing, struggling, rejoicing — offering not sacrifices of smoke and ash, but daily acts of love that make God visible.

Acts shows how this takes form in real life. As the community grows, its structures must reflect love. The first deacons are appointed so the Apostles can remain faithful to prayer and the Word. This is no mere administration; it is the Gospel in action. When people are overlooked, the Church's witness is at stake.

The response is not blame or bureaucracy, but the wise sharing of ministry, ensuring both — that the Word is proclaimed and the community is cared for.

Taken together, these readings tell one story: Jesus builds a people who are to trust Him as home, to be shaped by Him into a living sanctuary, and to live out that shape in practical, mutual care.

For life in today's context, this has three concrete implications.

First, trust trumps anxiety. Our culture prizes self-reliance and certainty, but Jesus invites us into relationship, to believe in God and in Him. When parish life faces decline, disagreements, or the hard work of change, the Gospel calls us not to managerial fixes first, but to trust. Trust frees us to act with charity, to enter difficult conversations with humility, and to plan not from panic, but from the conviction that Christ is building His house.

Second, formation matters. To be “living stones” is to be continually shaped by the Scripture we hear, the sacraments we celebrate, and the relationships we nurture. Formation is not just for children; it is the lifelong reshaping of our desires and habits so we reflect the heart of Christ. A parish that forms saints becomes naturally hospitable, patient, and generous, shaping ministries that serve the poor and proclaim the Gospel.

Third, ministry grows when it is shared. Acts reminds us that leadership is not about doing everything, but about discerning and empowering others. Every Christian is called to serve: to notice needs, speak up, and step

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings with Fr George Vaithynathan

5th Sunday of Easter (A)

Readings: *Acts of the Apostles 6:1-7;*

1 Peter 2: 4-9;

Gospel: John 14: 1-12

forward. The Church's vitality depends on people willing to be sent — to visit the sick, teach the young, welcome strangers, and seek justice. When ministry is shared, the Gospel reaches far beyond what any one person can carry.

Some questions to ponder: Where do you feel overlooked or where might others be slipping through the cracks? Where are you being formed, and where do you resist that shaping? Then consider one concrete act of service this week, not as performance, but as a spiritual offering that builds the house. It could be a call to a lonely neighbour, an hour in parish outreach, or simply bringing someone to Mass. These small, faithful acts are the stones from which God builds His dwelling.

At the centre is the promise: Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. Our service and ministries are not ends in themselves; they lead to Him. We build not to impress, but to make room — a home where others can encounter God. We form not to control, but to be transformed into His likeness. We serve not to be seen, but to make His love visible.

So let us go forward in trust: the cornerstone holds. We are being shaped for worship and witness, and every act of faithful service, no matter how small, helps build the living house of God.

Rediscovering reconciliation: From fear to love

KUALA LUMPUR: The Catechesis for Children and Teens (CCT), a sub-ministry under the Kuala Lumpur Archdiocesan Catechetical Ministry (KLACM), organised the first Study Day for catechists this year themed *Sacrament of Reconciliation* on April 18 at the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The session was presented by Fr David Arulanatham, ecclesiastical assistant for KLACM.

The day started with the participants gathering for breakfast and taking the opportunity to connect with each other before the sessions started.

The first session, entitled *Why is the Sacrament of Reconciliation important?*, explored the significance of this sacrament in the Catholic Church. Participants were reminded that through this sacrament, one's relationship with God is restored, allowing the faithful to experience true forgiveness and grace. This brings inner peace and healing, fosters self-awareness, reconciles individuals with the Church, and provides assurance of absolution.

The second session, *How to make a 'good' confession?*, focused on sincere preparation — both conscious and spiritual. It emphasised



that confession is not merely about clearing one's conscience, but the genuine reconciliation with God and receiving the grace to grow in holiness.

The third session, *How to teach effectively about Confession?*, highlighted the importance of shifting the focus from fear of punishment to the joy of encountering God's mercy among the learners. Effective catechesis invites learners to understand confession as an experience of love rather than fear.

Through the Study Day, catechists deepened their understanding of the grace and mercy received in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. They were also reminded of the importance of experiencing a good confession

personally before imparting this knowledge and encounter to children and youth.

A catechist shared that she learnt that the Sacrament of Reconciliation is a privilege that allows us to be reconciled with God and regain the grace lost through wrongful words and actions. It should not be viewed as a punishment or approached with fear, but rather as an encounter with Christ, with the priest acting *in persona Christi*.

Besides the three-level certification courses organised by the KLACM, two Study Days are also held each year for catechists. The Second Study Day will be on September 26. **Adira Galusin** (Archdiocesan Catechetical Centre)



**KUALA LUMPUR
ARCHDIOCESE**

**Diary of Archbishop
Julian Leow**

May

- 9 **Sacerdotal Ordination – Rev Deacon Philip Asirwalam & Rev Deacon Anthony Robert, Cathedral of St John the Evangelist, KL**
- 9 **Confirmation – Church of the Divine Mercy, Shah Alam**
- 10 **Tzu Chi Foundation 60th Anniversary & Buddha Day Ceremony**
- 10 **Papal Mass – 1st Anniversary of the Pontificate of Pope Leo XIV**
- 12-13 **Clergy Monthly Recollection**
- 14 **Meeting – Archdiocesan Finance**
- 15 **Board Meeting – Sri Seronok**

**MALACCA JOHORE
DIOCESE**

**Diary of Bishop
Bernard Paul**

May

- 3 **Mass – Malacca Johore Catholic Campus Day 2 (MJCCD2) – MAJODI Centre**
- 6 **Meeting – South Johor Vicariate Clergy, Church of St Theresa, Masai**
- 10 **Masses in English and Tamil – Church of Divine Mercy, Skudai**
- 12-13 **Clergy Monthly Recollection – MAJODI Centre**

**Malacca Johore Diocese
News Update #270**

Welcome dear friends,

The Confirmation Commitment Retreat (CCR) drew BM-speaking confirmation candidates, to repent, renew, rebuild and recommit themselves to the Lord.

The IHD Formation was attended by SSVP, the POHD members and other interested participants, conducted by the Caritas Malaysia team.

Different parishes gathered for Easter or after, to include the newly baptised, and others had parish appreciation dinners for leaders and ministers.

Local Takes. A Call to See-Judge-Act
A fire destroyed 1,000 homes of the water villages in Sandakan, displacing over 9000 people.

Heavy rain triggered flash floods in Cameron Highlands and mudflows in Gombak and Taman Tun etc.

The heatwave continues.

A **Senior Citizens Bill**, to safeguard the rights of the elderly, access to facilities and services, is being expedited by the Health Minister.

Malaysians are again being reminded to be more **mindful in their spending**.

The former Minister of Investment, Trade, and Industry highlighted that Malaysia now occupies the **number one spot in southeast Asia** for retail-driven visitor spending. The netizens reacted.

Reading the Signs: A Voice for Peace and the Gospel.
The Pope to the **Algerians**, insisted that religion must never be used to divide or justify violence. Instead, it must become a bridge of encounter. Peace, he reminded, is not only a political goal, but a spiritual vocation.

In **Cameroon**, Pope Leo XIV spoke of the peace of Christ — a peace that does not remove suffering. It is a peace that calms the heart, gives

clarity in confusion, and allows us to move forward without fear. It is not the absence of struggle, but the presence of God within it.

To the people of **Angola**, the Pope reflected on the Risen Jesus who walks with His people. Echoing the Emmaus journey, he described Christian life as a path where: Christ accompanies us in our confusion; enlightens us through the Word; and nourishes us in the breaking of the bread. The Church, therefore, is a pilgrim people, called to walk together and become witnesses of the Resurrection in daily life.

The pastoral style of Pope Leo XIV:
He is firm in defending peace and justice; gentle in inviting people to faith and conversion.
He avoids political confrontation, yet speaks with moral clarity. His focus remains always the Gospel.

A Thought for the Week: 17 Camels
A father left 17 camels to his three sons upon his passing. When the will was opened, it read that half of the 17 was for the eldest; 1/3rd for the second son; and 1/9th for the youngest. They began to fight when they could not divide 17 into half, or 17 by 3 nor 17 by 9.

So, they decided to go to a wise man. The wise man listened patiently about the will. The wise man, after reflecting, brought one of his camels and added it to the 17. There were now 18 camels.

Then he started reading the will again, and began apportioning the camels accordingly: half of 18 - so 9 camels to the eldest; 1/3rd of 18 - so he gave 6 camels to the second son; 1/9th of 18 - and he gave 2 camels to the youngest. It added up to 17 given away, one still remained with the wise man. All went away happy.

The lesson from the wise man: To reach a solution, one must believe that there is

a solution. If we think that there is no solution, one will not be able to reach any. **In any negotiation or problem solving, one must seek the COMMON GROUND, the 18th camel.**

QnQ? Q asks? We are reminded not to suppress the negative within. What does it mean?
Alcoholic Anonymous refers to it as **“dubious luxury”**: anger, justifiable resentment, self-pity, judgmentalism, self-righteousness, false pride, and false humility.”

They are inner states that feel strangely satisfying but quietly drain our freedom. Anger can feel like clarity. Resentment can feel like justice, self-pity like tenderness toward ourselves, judgment and self-righteousness like moral strength. Even false humility can masquerade as virtue.

These attitudes give us a temporary sense of control or superiority, but at the cost of truth and growth. The deeper **cost is subtle**: these states can **freeze us** in a story where we are either the victim, the judge, or the hero. And in each role, **something in us stays stuck** — unable to grow, reconcile, or see more clearly.

Real freedom begins when we notice, not suppress — these patterns, and **gently ask**: What are they protecting in me? And is that protection still needed? Eph 4:31

The Spirit @ Work: Just as spring brings new life, the Holy Spirit enables personal renewal, repentance, and a fresh start.

Something to tickle you: The same power that broke the seal of the tomb helps believers overcome personal despair and darkness.

Bishop Bernard Paul

Double celebration marks new commitments in Franciscan life

CHERAS: The Church of St Francis of Assisi was filled with joy and thanksgiving as members of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) from the different fraternities gathered for a significant double celebration, the Rite of Admission and the Rite of Permanent Profession on April 18.

The celebration began with the announcement of candidates by Local Minister, Mario Richard Peter OFS, and Formator, Margaret Cecilia OFS, who also serves as Vice Minister. Four members were presented for Permanent Profession, followed by five candidates seeking admission into the Order.

The Eucharistic celebration was presided over by Fr Gilbert James, OFMCap, Custos of the Custody of Malaysia-Singapore. In his homily, he offered a reflection drawn from the Gospel account of Jesus walking on water and the first reading of the early Church's appointment of deacons to serve at table.

Addressing both those entering formation and those making lifelong profession, Fr Gilbert described the OFS vocation as a radical call to live the Gospel *secundum formam Sancti Francisci* — according to the form (Rule) of St Francis of Assisi. He reminded the assembly that this



The five candidates requesting to be admitted into the order.

commitment is not an escape from the world, but a deeper immersion into it through faith and witness.

“To you being admitted today: do not be afraid. Jesus comes to you in the storm of your life,” he said, reflecting on the Gospel scene of the disciples in the boat. “Your admission is not a graduation, but the moment you invite the Lord to be the captain of your storm.”

To those making their Permanent Profession, he emphasised perseverance amid life's challenges. “Your final promise is not a guarantee of calm seas,” he said, “but a declaration of trust: even in the storm, I know Your voice.”

Drawing from the Acts of the Apostles, he connected the institution of the first deacons with the Franciscan identity of service. He highlighted how Secular Franciscans are called to serve at the “tables of daily life” — in the family, workplace, among the poor, and within parish communities — echoing the Franciscan call to be *minores*, the “lesser ones” in humble service.

He further underscored the centrality of the Eucharist in Franciscan spirituality. “The boat is the Church, the sea is the world, and the shore is the Kingdom,” he said. “Every time you receive the Eucharist, you are strengthened to walk through the troubled waters



The newly professed members with Fr Paul Cheong OFMCap, Fr Michel Dass, Fr Gilbert James OFMCap and Bro Tony Bingkuan OFMCap.

of life with Christ.”

This celebration was particularly meaningful as some of the candidates had journeyed through their formation during the challenging period of the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrating perseverance and fidelity despite difficulties.

At the conclusion of the celebration, the newly professed members and candidates formally signed the fraternity register together with the Local Minister and the Custos, marking their commitment and entry into the life of the Order. The joyous occasion continued with a time of fellowship, as all present were invited to gather in fraternity and thanksgiving.

The liturgy concluded with prayers to Mary, Our Lady of the Angels, entrusting the newly admitted and professed members to her maternal intercession and the continued guidance of the Risen Christ.

The occasion marked a renewed commitment among Secular Franciscans to live out their vocation as lay men and women deeply rooted in the Gospel, witnessing peace, humility, and fraternity in everyday life.

The fraternity also expressed hope that more faithful will be inspired to embrace the Franciscan way of life, as these members boldly said “yes” to following the path of St Francis in today's world.

History of the foundation of the Secular Franciscan Order in Malaysia

The Secular Franciscan Order (*Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis*) traces its origins to the 13th century, when St Francis of Assisi established a path for lay men and women to live the Gospel in the spirit of Francis, without entering religious life. These members, traditionally known as tertiaries, form fraternities or communities and embrace a vocation of Gospel living in the midst of the world.

Secular Franciscans are lay persons, both married and single, who commit themselves to a life of prayer, fraternity, and service. Guided by the Rule of the Order, they journey through stages of formation known today as Inquiry and Candidacy (formerly Postulancy and Novitiate), before making a permanent profession during Mass. Unlike religious, they do not take vows or live in convents but instead serve as witnesses of Christ in their families, workplaces, and society.

Early beginnings in Malaysia

The foundation of the Third Order in Malaysia predates the arrival of Franciscan friars. The first formal establishment took place at the

Church of St Anthony, Pudu, on October 4, 1927, the feast of St Francis of Assisi.

Although the late Fr Le Mahec, MEP, who served as parish priest from 1910 to 1927, had long desired to introduce the Order, his efforts were cut short due to illness, and he passed away on May 10, 1927.

Later that same year, Fr V. Hermann, then parish priest, successfully obtained the necessary permissions from the Bishop of Malacca and the Superior Regular of the Friars Minor in Ajmer, India. On October 4, 1927, he formally inaugurated the Third Order by enrolling six members as novices, presenting them with the scapular and cord of the Order:

- S. Anthonysamy Pillai
- S. Appapillai
- T. Raphael
- A. Dairianathan Pillai
- S. S. Nathan
- M. Benedict

Fr Hermann served as director of the Third Order from 1927 until 1951, when he retired due to ill health.

Growth and leadership

S. Anthonysamy Pillai, one of the



The members of the Secular Franciscan Order with Bro Tony Bingkuan OFMCap.

pioneering members, became the first President of the fraternity, serving from 1927 to 1931. Over the next 25 years, leadership passed through several dedicated members:

- S. Anthonysamy Pillai (1927–1931; 1936–1940)
- A. Dairianathan Pillai (1931–1934)
- M. Benedict (1934–1936; 1940–1952)

In July 1951, Fr Dominic Vendargon, who later became the first Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur, succeeded Fr Hermann as director.

The early fraternity bore spiritual fruit, with several members embracing religious vocations. Among them were:

- Fr X Anthony Dass, who later

served as parish priest in Ipoh.

- Fr Francis (formerly N. L. Culas), who joined the Rosarian Monastery in Jaffna, Ceylon, and was ordained a priest.
- Bro Mark (formerly M. Anthonysamy) and Bro Emmanuel (formerly N. S. S. Adaikalasamy), who became professed monks at the same monastery.

By 1952, the Third Order in Kuala Lumpur had grown to 50 members, including postulants.

The OFS in Malaysia today

Today, the Secular Franciscan Order in Malaysia continues to flourish, with eight fraternities across the country, six of which are in the Klang

Valley:

- St Francis of Assisi Fraternity, Cheras
- St Anthony Fraternity, Pudu
- St Joseph Fraternity, Sentul
- St Pio Fraternity, Petaling Jaya
- St Clare Fraternity, Kuala Lumpur
- St Elizabeth of Hungary Fraternity, Seremban

These fraternities remain committed to living the Franciscan charism in daily life through prayer, fraternity, and service, particularly among the poor and in the wider community.

Those who are interested in learning more about the OFS may send their enquiries to mario_peter000@hotmail.com.

New leadership, renewed mission for prison ministry

KUALA LUMPUR: The Catholic Prison Fellowship Association (CPFA) recently held its biennial General Meeting, drawing 67 members and reaffirming its commitment to prison ministry.

The meeting was presided over by CPFA president, Gnadass Amaldass, and graced by Archbishop Julian Leow and Fr George Packiasamy, ecclesiastical assistant, along with volunteers.

In his welcome address, Gnadass expressed appreciation for the dedication of members and volunteers who have faithfully served in prison ministry. He highlighted CPFA's outreach through regular prison visits, spiritual formation programmes, and collaboration with Church and community partners in bringing hope and dignity to inmates and their families.

Members were also updated on ongoing initiatives and future plans, including proposed constitutional amendments aimed at strengthening governance and ensuring sustainability. In his closing remarks, Fr George encouraged members to persevere in their mission with compassion

and faith, reminding them that their service brings Christ's love to those behind bars.

A key highlight of the meeting was the election of new committee members for the 2026–2028 term. Audrey Freeman was elected president, marking a historic milestone as the first woman to hold the position. She is supported by vice president, Kenneth Sherman, secretaries, David Chew and Santana Rengam, treasurer, Arthur Rayan, and eight committee members committed to advancing CPFA's mission.

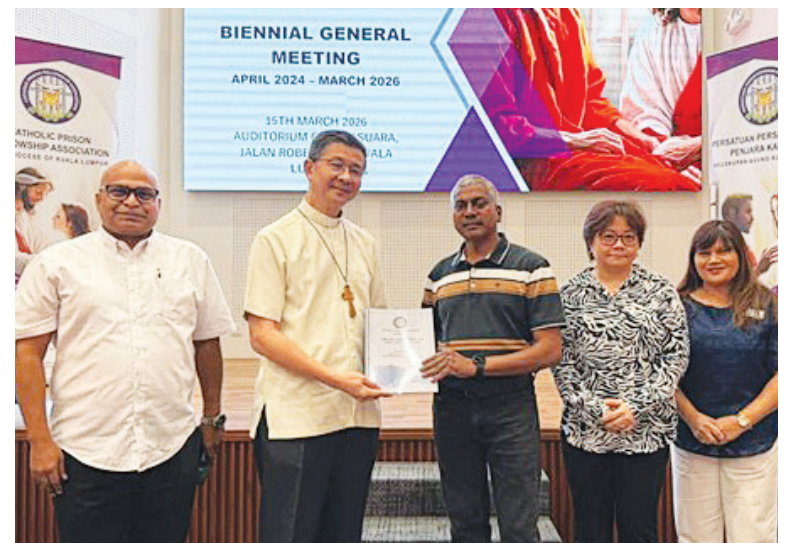
In her acceptance speech, Audrey shared that she had not actively sought the role, but accepted it with humility and trust in God after being chosen by the members. She described the appointment not as a personal honour, but as a call to serve God and His people. Emphasising unity, she noted that the ministry is never about one individual, but about walking together in faith, cooperation, and love.

During the meeting, representatives from other diocesan prison ministries also shared their ongoing work. Camillus Sinapan, representing the Melaka Diocesan

Prison Ministry, highlighted regular prison visits, Scripture sharing, and the organisation of Masses during major liturgical seasons. He also expressed appreciation for inter-diocesan meetings, which have strengthened collaboration among the Kuala Lumpur, Penang, and Melaka dioceses.

The Penang Diocesan Prison Ministry (PDPM), under the guidance of Cardinal Sebastian Francis and spiritual director Fr Michael Raymond, OFMCap, shared insights from its decade-long ministry across four states. With 201 permit holders, including 25 priests and four deacons, PDPM reaches inmates through weekly Gospel sharing, Masses, and community projects such as soap-making and meal preparation. The ministry also provides support for incarcerated mothers with infants.

Looking ahead, PDPM outlined plans for 2026–2027, including establishing a halfway home at the new St Joseph Skill and Farm Centre, expanding volunteer recruitment, strengthening formation programmes, and extending



Presentation of CPFA Biennial Report to Archbishop Julian by Fr George Packiasamy and the core team.

services to rehabilitation and parole centres.

In his keynote address, Archbishop Julian urged volunteers to adopt creative approaches across all three phases of ministry: pre-prison, during imprisonment, and post-prison. He encouraged preventive efforts through mentoring, education, and fostering a healthy understanding of consequences. During imprisonment, he highlighted the importance of skills training and parole programmes to aid reintegration.

He also emphasised that small gestures such as providing Bibles, reading glasses, and regular visits

can make a profound difference. "Our visits provide them with friendship and hope," he said. "They know there are people who still care, even when their own families may not. We are there to help transform lives."

The assembly reflected on CPFA's ongoing mission of bringing hope, dignity, and the message of Christ's mercy to those in prison. Members acknowledged the challenges of the ministry, expressed gratitude for the dedication of volunteers, and renewed their commitment to serving the least and the forgotten in society.



Seeing with compassion, acting with love

TELUK INTAN: A spirit of reflection, renewal, and mission filled the Church of St Anthony as parishioners gathered for a 'See, Judge, Act' workshop recently.

The programme brought together Caritas members, ministry leaders, and youth for a morning of formation that was both deeply rooted in faith and firmly grounded in action.

Co-organised by Caritas Malaysia, the Diocese of Penang, and Caritas Church of St Anthony, the workshop aimed to equip participants not only with spiritual insight but also with practical tools to live out a mission-driven faith.

Facilitators Francis Tan and Raechel Perera led participants through the principles of Catholic Social Teaching using the "See, Judge, Act" method — a simple yet powerful framework for

responding to the realities of the world.

Participants were first invited to see — to recognise the challenges and struggles present within their own communities. They were then encouraged to judge these realities in the light of the Gospel and the teachings of the Church. Finally, they were called to act — with compassion, justice, and a renewed sense of responsibility.

The workshop highlighted the Church's enduring mission to serve the poor, to care for creation, and to build a society rooted in dignity, solidarity, and love.

Through group discussions and shared experiences, participants reflected on real-life situations and explored how faith can shape concrete responses within their ministries and parish life. The exchange of ideas fostered a deeper awareness that transformation be-

gins not only with programmes, but with hearts willing to listen and respond.

For many, the workshop was a moment of awakening — a reminder that every Christian is called to be attentive to the signs of the times and courageous in responding to them.

The programme reflects the Church's ongoing commitment to forming lay leaders and youth who are grounded in faith, guided by discernment, and ready to serve the wider community with purpose and conviction.

The workshop concluded with a closing prayer led by Deacon Anthony Michael, entrusting the participants' renewed commitment to God's guidance as they continue their mission — to see with compassion, to judge with wisdom, and to act with love. **Marie Ann Dawson**

DEPTH 3 students gather for formation ahead of exams

KUALA LUMPUR: A group of 30 students from the third cohort of the Distance Education Programme in Theology (DEPTH 3) gathered at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Institute (API) on April 18 for a day of spiritual and academic formation at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre (APC).

The 3.5-year diploma programme (2025–2028), offered in collaboration with Vidyajyoti College of Theology, currently serves 46 students from across Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah, Sarawak, Indonesia, and Brunei. The course is structured in two phases, each comprising 30 credits, covering key areas of Scripture and Theology through guided study, assignments, and examinations.

The recent contact class, held at APC Level 2, featured sessions by Fr Gerard Theraviam, parish priest

of the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist, on the Book of Psalms, and Fr Michael Cheah, parish priest of the Church of St Michael, Alor Setar, on the Sacraments of Initiation. Students found both sessions enriching, gaining deeper insight into Scripture as prayer and a clearer understanding of the sacramental life of the Church.

This session marked the conclusion of their third contact class. As the students now prepare for their Phase I examinations in July, marking the midpoint of their formation journey, the faithful are invited to keep them and their invigilators in prayer.

The Archdiocese continues to support such initiatives, encouraging more of the faithful to take up opportunities for ongoing faith formation and to deepen their knowledge of the Catholic faith.



CDM parish hosts first Divine Mercy conference

SHAH ALAM: The inaugural Divine Mercy conference held at the Church of the Divine Mercy marked a significant and grace-filled milestone for the parish community. As the first conference of its kind, it drew parishioners and participants from surrounding areas, all gathered in a spirit of anticipation and devotion for an enriching and deeply enlightening encounter with the message and spirituality of Divine Mercy.

The conference featured four clergy speakers — Fr Prospero V Tenorio, Secretary General for Asia of the Apostolate of Divine Mercy (AACOM); Fr Nap Baltazar, Asia's Assistant Secretary General of the World Apostolate of Divine Mercy (WACOM); Fr Simon Agbo; and Fr Michael Raymond, OFMCap — alongside lay speaker Peter Ng, who offered a powerful personal testimony rooted in the Diary of St Faustina. Each session drew participants into a deeper encounter with God's boundless mercy, inviting them to trust more fully in its presence and power in their daily lives.

The clergy speakers each brought unique insights and rich pastoral perspectives. Drawing from Scripture, Church teaching, and the revelations of St Faustina, they illuminated the essence of Divine Mercy — not merely as a devotion,



Participants holding their photos of the Divine Mercy and a lighted candle.

but as a way of life. They emphasised trust in Jesus, the importance of repentance, and the call to extend mercy to others. Participants were reminded that Divine Mercy is not reserved for the extraordinary, but is accessible to all, especially in moments of weakness and need.

One of the most impactful moments of the conference was the sharing by the lay speaker, who spoke candidly about his personal journey with the Diary of St Faustina. Peter's testimony added a deeply human and relatable dimension, showing how the message of Divine Mercy can transform lives in both practical and profound ways. Through his experiences, participants were encouraged to engage more deeply with the Diary and to allow its

message to shape their relationship with God.

Cynthia Leowardy, (WACOM Asia's lay coordinator) now residing in Canada, delivered a powerful testimony about her calling to spread the message of Divine Mercy to the world. She also played a key role in establishing the St Faustina Shrine in Puncak in 2000. Her sharing deeply inspired participants, stirring in them a desire to share St Faustina's message with others.

The structure of the conference allowed for both teaching and reflection. Attendees were not only absorbing information but were also given space to internalise what they had heard. Moments of prayer, quiet reflection, and communal participation helped create an atmosphere

where the message could truly take root in the hearts of those present.

Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive. Many described the conference as "eye-opening" and "deeply enlightening." For some, it was their first meaningful encounter with the Divine Mercy devotion, while others shared that their understanding had been significantly deepened. A common sentiment expressed was a newfound clarity about what Divine Mercy truly means and how it can be lived out in everyday life.

Several attendees remarked that the conference helped dispel misconceptions, presenting Divine Mercy not as a distant or abstract concept, but as an active and living expression of God's love. The

teachings reinforced the importance of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, and acts of mercy toward others — simple yet powerful ways to live out this devotion.

The success of this first conference can also be attributed to the dedication and collaborative efforts of the organising team. Their commitment to planning and execution ensured that the event ran smoothly and created a welcoming environment for all. From logistical arrangements to hospitality, every detail contributed to the overall positive experience of the participants.

More importantly, the conference has sparked a renewed enthusiasm within the parish community. Many have expressed a desire for continued formation and similar events in the future. There is a growing awareness that the message of Divine Mercy is not only relevant but essential in today's world, where hope and compassion are so greatly needed.

The words "Jesus, I trust in You" echoed not only throughout the sessions but now resonate in the hearts of those who attended — serving as both a reminder and a mission. This conference has indeed been a meaningful step forward in spreading the message of Divine Mercy within the community and beyond.

Faith and family at the Heart of Divine Mercy feast

PENANG: The Church of the Divine Mercy (CDM), Sungai Ara, drew large numbers of parishioners and pilgrims for its 2026 Divine Mercy Feast Day celebrations, marked by prayer, reflection, and a strong emphasis on family life.

The highlight of the celebration was a 2.65km candlelit procession along Jalan Kenari, where the faithful moved in prayer behind the Blessed Sacrament. Led by representatives of various ministries and Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC) zones, participants carried candles, the Divine Mercy image, and streamers while chanting the Divine Mercy Chaplet continuously

throughout the route. The solemn procession, visible to the surrounding neighbourhood, became a powerful public witness of faith.

Among those who participated was a young family from the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Penang. Bufford and Mary Biggs, together with their children, described the experience as deeply meaningful. Despite the challenges of walking with a toddler, Mary shared that the journey left a lasting impression and expressed her hope that it would become an annual family tradition.

The feast day was preceded by a nine-day novena which began on Good Friday, centred on the parish theme of "Family". Each day focused on different groups within the family and parish community, inviting participants to reflect on their relationships and deepen their faith.

Fr Andrew Manickam from the Church of Our Lady of Fatima, Kuala Lumpur, presided over the weekday novena Masses from day four to day eight. Through his homilies, he emphasised the importance of trust, compassion, intimacy with God, unity in families, and mission. Parishioners were encouraged to be transparent in building relationships, to practise compassion in daily life, and to take the first step in restoring family unity.

Various ministries animated the



The faithful reciting the Divine Mercy Chaplet as they walk in procession.

novena Masses, with meaningful activities that engaged participants of all ages. These included prayer-sharing sessions, writing notes of gratitude, and youth-led reflections, fostering a deeper appreciation of God's mercy and love within the family context. Each session concluded with fellowship, strengthening bonds within the parish community.

The weekend feast day Masses were celebrated by Bishop Richard Ng of Miri, who highlighted the importance of returning to the foundations of the early Christian community as described in the Acts of

the Apostles. He reminded the faithful to remain steadfast in the teachings of the Apostles, fellowship, the Eucharist, and prayer, as essential pillars in building strong and faith-filled families.

Pilgrims from across the region, including groups from Ipoh and Butterworth, joined the celebrations, reflecting the widespread devotion to Divine Mercy. While many took part in the procession, others remained in the church in prayer, reflecting on the message of Divine Mercy through spiritual talks and quiet devotion.

The celebration concluded with

Benediction and a time of fellowship, as parishioners gathered for a communal meal. During the weekend, the parish also launched its Multipurpose Community Centre Fundraising Project, aiming to raise RM3 million through a brick donation drive.

Parish priest, Fr Michael Raymond OFMCap, expressed gratitude to all who participated, noting the strong turnout and spirit of unity. The celebration, he said, was a testament to the living faith of the community and a reminder of the abundant grace of Divine Mercy. **Anne Rowena David**

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Creating space for every soul in Christ

CHERAS: The Assisi Beloved Community (ABC) Ministry of the Church of St Francis of Assisi continued its mission of fostering awareness and inclusion by organising two talks on April 11 in conjunction with Autism Awareness Month. The initiative reached out not only to families and caregivers of persons with special needs, but also to members of the wider public seeking to better understand and support the community.

The morning began with a spirit of fellowship as participants gathered over a simple breakfast, many meeting for the first time in a warm and welcoming setting. The session opened with prayer, entrusting the day to the Lord.

An icebreaker invited participants to introduce themselves and complete the phrase, "Today I am here because...". Their responses reflected a shared desire to learn, support, and journey alongside persons with special needs and their families — a hopeful sign of a growing, compassionate community.

The first session, titled *Ensuring Proper Care and Preventing Misuse of Funding for Special Needs Individuals*, was delivered by Ms Juliet Choo, a Senior Franchisee with Rockwills and a certified financial planner. With both professional expertise and a deep commitment to families with special needs



children, Juliet shared practical guidance on planning for the long-term care of their loved ones.

Her presentation focused on two critical areas: the appointment of a suitable guardian and the management of financial resources. She outlined the responsibilities and requirements of guardianship, as well as the importance of careful financial planning — including funding needs, sources of income, and the establishment of trust structures to safeguard assets. Through a real-life case study, she demonstrated how proper planning can ensure continuity of care and prevent potential misuse of funds.

Juliet's session addressed difficult but necessary questions faced by many parents: What will happen to their child in their ab-

sence? How can they prepare responsibly for the future? Her talk offered both clarity and reassurance, grounded in practical solutions.

Also present was Ms Wan Kun, a paediatric physiotherapist, who underscored the importance of consistent, hands-on parental engagement in supporting a child's motor and developmental progress beyond clinical settings.

Following a short break, participants reconvened for the second session by Dr Valerie Jaques, a Clinical Psychologist Consultant and leader of the Integrated Psychology Network. With over 28 years of experience, Dr Jaques brought both professional insight and a deep sense of faith to her presentation.

In her talk, *A Room for Every Soul in Christ*, she reflected on Scripture to affirm that every individual, especially persons with special needs, has a rightful place in the Body of Christ. Drawing from biblical passages and Church teachings, she emphasised themes of inclusion, dignity, and God's universal call to love.

Dr Valerie also referenced international frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), underscoring the importance of upholding dignity, equality, and active participation for persons with disabilities in society. Her message was clear: the Christian community is called not only to care, but to welcome, befriend, and walk alongside one another in love.

At the conclusion of the sessions, tokens of appreciation were presented to the speakers by ABC coordinator Ann Trissa, who also thanked participants for their presence and support. The day ended with a closing prayer led by Fr Simon Agbo, entrusting all present and their intentions to God's care.

The community then gathered for lunch, sharing not only a meal but also meaningful conversations and renewed bonds. It was a day marked by learning, reflection, and fellowship — a living expression of the Church's call to be a welcoming and inclusive community for all. **Elasya Richard**

Interfaith event celebrates Easter spirit of unity

SEREMBAN: The Parish Ministry of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (PMEIA) of the Church of the Visitation organised a meaningful interfaith gathering on April 18, themed *Easter Joy Brings Peace and Unity to Humanity*. Led by Anne Sumitra and her team, the event reflected the spirit of Easter by promoting harmony, dialogue, and friendship among diverse faith communities.

The gathering brought together representatives from a wide range of religious organisations, including IKRAM, the Bahá'í community, Hindu Sangam, Agape Church, the Buddhist Association, Gurdwara Seremban, Malaysia Sikh

Union, St Mark's Church, the Methodist Church, Sri Balathandayuthapani Temple Seremban, and Amazing Grace Church. Also present were members of the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) and ministry leaders from the Church of the Visitation, underscoring a shared commitment to mutual respect and peaceful coexistence.

The occasion was further graced by the presence of YB Teoh Kok Seong, chairman of the State Executive Action Committee for Industry and Non-Islamic Affairs and State Assemblyman for Bahau, who underscored the importance of interreligious harmony in strengthening the fabric of society.

The programme began with an opening



prayer led by Fr Albet Arockiasamy, parish priest of the Church of St John Marie Vianney, Tampin, invoking God's blessings of peace, unity, and understanding upon all present.

A key highlight of the event was a session by Fr Xavier Andrew, who reflected on the meaning of Easter. His sharing centred on themes of hope, renewal, sacrifice, and love — values that resonate across faith traditions and form a foundation for unity in diversity.

Adding a lively dimension to the gathering, participants took part in interactive unity games that encouraged teamwork, communication, and camaraderie. The

activities created a warm and joyful atmosphere, helping to build connections among attendees from different religious backgrounds.

The event concluded with a time of fellowship, allowing participants to engage in meaningful conversations, exchange perspectives, and deepen friendships. This informal interaction reinforced the central message of the programme — that peace and unity are possible when people come together in sincerity and openness.

Overall, the gathering was a resounding success, serving as a powerful testament to the role of dialogue and shared values in building bridges across communities.

KEDAH: Senior citizens of the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Kulim, gathered in joyful fellowship to celebrate their annual Easter event, marked by prayer, reflection, and a sense of community.

The programme began with an opening prayer led by Anne Ignatius, followed by the proclamation of the Word by Grace Ho. Bro Gabriel Tan then offered a reflection on Acts 4:32–37, reminding participants of St Paul's call to the early Christians to share their possessions and live in unity.

Chairperson Mary Ann Loh, extended a warm welcome and conveyed Easter greetings to all present. Vice chairperson, Desmond Fernandez served as master of ceremonies, working alongside committee members to organise a lively and engaging programme.

The celebration featured cheerful activities, including *Poco Poco* dancing and



Seniors celebrate Easter in joy and fellowship

karaoke, where participants enthusiastically showcased their talents in Bahasa Malaysia, English, Mandarin, and Hindi songs.

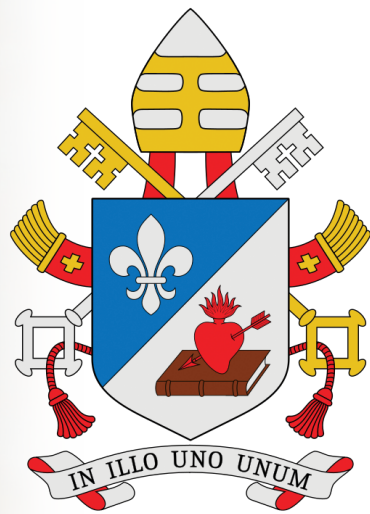
Members also contributed generously

with food and refreshments — from noodles and chocolate drinks to a delightful variety of desserts — adding to the festive atmosphere.

The gathering was a meaningful and

joy-filled occasion, bringing the community together in the spirit of Easter. Participants returned home grateful, carrying with them the blessings and hope of the Risen Lord. **John Kuppasawary**

IN ILLO UNO UNUM



A year of unity, love and a Church sent forth

A year after his election on May 8, 2025, Pope Leo XIV has emerged as a pastor shaped by Augustine and inspired by Francis — calling the Church to unity in Christ and mission in the world. In his first year, he has travelled across continents, restored consultation among cardinals, spoken forcefully for peace, and called the Church back to its deepest identity.



The man behind the office

To understand why Pope Leo XIV leads this way, one must look beyond Rome — to Chiclayo, Peru.

There, as bishop, he became known not for grand gestures, but for quiet presence.

A priest recalls their first meeting lasting

more than 40 minutes — not because the bishop spoke, but because he listened.

That attentiveness defined his ministry. Whether in parish meetings or pastoral visits, he resisted haste, preferring to hear people fully before making decisions.

During floods caused by El Niño, he did not wait. He stepped into the water.

“He taught me to listen and to wait.”

During the COVID-19 pandemic, he helped mobilise support to build oxygen plants for those in need.

And in a small but telling moment, decades after serving in an Augustinian community, he remembered the name of a homeless man they had fed daily: Félix.

Such details reveal something essential.

He did not learn to be Pope in Rome. He learned it in parishes, in crises, and in the discipline of listening.



(NCR/Caritas Chiclayo)



(NCR/Janina Sesa)

A beginning that revealed everything



When Pope Leo XIV first stepped onto the balcony of St Peter's Basilica, the world waited for direction.

Instead, it received something more fundamental.

In those first words, the new pope did more than introduce himself. He offered a key to understanding his entire pontificate.

“For you I am a bishop, with you, I am a Christian.”

He located himself not above the Church, but within it.

His episcopal motto — *In illo uno unum* (*In the One, we are one*) — expresses that conviction. Unity, for Pope Leo XIV, is not constructed through strategy or enforced through structure. It is received in Christ.

From the very beginning, he pointed the Church not to himself, but to communion.

Dilexi Te: The heart of his pontificate

If that first appearance revealed the tone, this apostolic exhortation *Dilexi Te* revealed the heart.

Far from a programmatic document, it is a meditation on the primacy of love — a reminder that before the Church teaches, governs, or acts, it is first loved by God.

“On the wounded faces of the poor... we see the suffering of Christ himself.”

This is not abstract theology. It is a vision grounded in encounter — with the poor, the suffering, and the forgotten.

This same vision finds concrete expression in his turn toward Franciscan spirituality — a Church that not only reflects on love, but lives it in simplicity and closeness to the poor.

Love, in this pontificate, is not sentiment. It is structure.



A Church that walks

That same pastoral instinct now shapes his global ministry.

In his first year, Pope Leo XIV has travelled not simply to visit, but to accompany.

In Türkiye, he marked the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea alongside Orthodox leaders. In Lebanon, he prayed at the site of the Beirut explosion. In Assisi, he returned to the roots of simplicity and peace.

Across these journeys, a pattern emerges: he goes where the Church must be present — at the intersection of suffering and unity.



Pope Leo XIV joins Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and other Christian leaders for an ecumenical prayer service in Iznik, Turkey, November 28, 2025. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)



Pope Leo XIV prays in silence before the tomb of St Charbel at the Monastery of St Maroun in Annaya, Lebanon, December 1, 2025. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

IN THE ONE WE ARE ONE



Assisi and the Franciscan key

Among the earliest and most revealing gestures of his pontificate was his visit to Assisi.

There, in the town of St Francis, he did not simply honour a saint. He pointed the Church towards a way of being.

The subsequent proclamation of the Franciscan Jubilee Year made that intention clear.

In a world marked by war and excess, Assisi becomes not a memory, but a proposal.

At a time of conflict, inequality, and ecological strain, Pope Leo XIV has drawn

attention to the enduring relevance of the Franciscan charism: simplicity in a culture of excess, peace in a fractured world, care for creation, and closeness to the poor.

This does not stand apart from his Augustinian roots. It completes them.

If Augustine offers the language of unity, Francis offers its expression.

Together, they form a vision: a Church grounded in Christ, living simply, and becoming a credible sign of reconciliation in the world.

“Our first great desire: a united Church – a sign of unity and communion.”



Governing in communion

One of the most significant developments of his first year lies in how he governs.

Pope Leo XIV has restored the consistory as a genuine forum of consultation with the College of Cardinals — a move that signals a shift in tone and method.

A gathering in January 2026 marked the beginning of that renewal. A longer meeting is planned for June, with the intention of

establishing regular, extended consistories that allow for deeper reflection and shared discernment.

This reflects a deeper vision.

He has spoken of his desire to be “a more synodal pope” — one who listens, discerns, and walks with others.

Authority, in this vision, is not exercised in isolation, but in communion.

“We walk together... towards the homeland God has prepared.”

A voice in a fractured world

In a time marked by conflict and uncertainty, Pope Leo XIV has emerged as a steady moral voice.

He has described the war in Ukraine as a “senseless war,” called for ceasefires in Gaza, and urged dialogue in multiple global conflicts. He has spoken with equal clarity on human dignity.

“Migrants and refugees remind the Church of her pilgrim dimension.”

And on the challenges of the modern world:

“Peace cannot be decreed. It must be embraced.”

“AI can process information quickly... but it cannot offer real wisdom.”

Across these interventions, a consistent language emerges — one that calls for peace, dignity, responsibility, and truth.



Vatican II: From memory to mission

Beneath the visible gestures of his first year lies a deeper task.

For Pope Leo XIV, the Second Vatican Council is not simply a historical reference. It is a living inheritance — one that must be received anew in every generation.

Yet that inheritance now stands at a turning point. The generation that experienced the Council is passing, and what was once

lived memory risks becoming distant history.

Pope Leo has made clear that this cannot be allowed to happen.

Through his weekly catecheses, renewed emphasis on synodality, and a consistent return to the Council’s vision, he is working to embed Vatican II more deeply into the life of the Church — not as a set of docu-

ments, but as a way of seeing, listening, and engaging the world.

In his own words, the Council remains the Church’s “guiding star” — pointing towards a mission rooted in Christ, open to dialogue, attentive to the faithful, and committed to the dignity of every person.

The task before him is not to revisit Vatican II, but to ensure it is lived — so that its spirit becomes not only remembered, but embodied.

Conclusion: A unity lived

After one year, it may be too early to measure this pontificate by decisions alone.

What has become clear is the shape of his witness.

Formed by the interior wisdom of St Augustine, he calls the Church back to unity in Christ. Inspired by St Francis of Assisi, he points outward — towards simplicity, fraternity, and peace.

He listens before speaking. He accompanies before directing. He remembers people.

“That all of us may be one people, always in peace.”

In a world drawn to displays of power, his leadership reflects something quieter, yet more enduring. A year into his pontificate, Pope Leo XIV appears to be living precisely that.

Not above the Church, but within it. Not apart from the world, but sent into it.

To be one in Christ, to live that unity in love, and to become — quietly but unmistakably — a sign of peace in a divided world.



“The Second Vatican Council remains the Church’s guiding star.”



Walking with Jesus in 1997

From vision to action, and from preparation to renewal, this 15th instalment traces how the Church in Peninsular Malaysia journeyed from the momentum of PMPA 1997 towards the Great Jubilee 2000 — embracing a shared mission, mobilising communities, and preparing hearts for a new millennium of faith.

TO the People of God in Peninsular Malaysia

Greetings in the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE Second Vatican Council is often considered as the beginning of a "New Era in the Life of the Church" (Tertio Millennio Adveniente, TMA 18). Ever since its successful conclusion, the Church in Peninsular Malaysia has attempted to live out the inspirations of this Council. In 1976 we inaugurated this renewal process by...

A PASTORAL Letter on the occasion of the official launching of the immediate preparations for the Great Jubilee Year 2000 in Peninsular Malaysia.



When the bishops turun padang



Bishops Roadshow

Richard Chia

In the wake of the Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Assembly (PMPA) 1997, the Church in Peninsular Malaysia did not simply return to routine. Something had shifted. The conversations, prayers, and discernment of that gathering began to crystallise into a shared vision — one that would guide the Church into a new and more intentional phase of its journey.

At the heart of this renewal was a Vision and Mission that gave both direction and identity. The Church saw itself as rooted in the communion of the Trinity and united among its people, standing in solidarity with the wider human family and all creation. It was not a vision turned inward, but one that compelled the Church outward — to live its vocation in service of the Kingdom of God.

Flowing from this vision was a clear mission: to build communities grounded in Christ through Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), and to transform parishes into a true Communion of Communities. It was a call not only to proclaim the Gospel, but to enter into genuine dialogue — with cultures, with religions, and especially with the poor. In essence, it was an invitation to journey together towards what the Asian Church had long described as a "new way of being Church."

Yet vision alone could not sustain momentum. It needed to take flesh.

That responsibility fell to the Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Team (PMPT), which in

April 1997 launched an ambitious and unprecedented initiative: district-level formation sessions led by the Pastoral Animation Formation team. What followed was nothing short of a nationwide pastoral mobilisation.

The bishops of the three dioceses, accompanied by a 20-member team of clergy, religious, and lay leaders, journeyed across the peninsula — covering 16 districts, known as deaneries in the Diocese of Penang and vicariates in the Diocese of Melaka-Johor. Their purpose was simple yet profound: to bring the vision of renewal directly to the people.

These pastoral animation and formation sessions would later be fondly remembered as "The Bishops' Roadshow."

From Sungai Petani in the north to Kuala Lumpur in the centre, from Johor Bahru in the south to Kuantan along the east coast and Klang in the west, the Church quite literally went on the road. Along the way, more than 8,000 faithful were reached — a remarkable achievement for its time.

What made this journey particularly significant was its inclusivity. The bishops engaged with the full diversity of the Malaysian Church — English, Bahasa Malaysia, Tamil, and Mandarin-speaking communities — ensuring that the message of renewal was not only heard, but understood and embraced across linguistic and cultural lines.

At each stop, the programme unfolded with clarity and purpose. The faithful were led through the historic journey of the Church from 1976 to 1996, helping them recognise how the seeds of renewal had been sown over two dec-

ades. They were introduced to the call of the Asian bishops to embrace a pastoral life shaped by a new way of being Church. And they were invited to reflect on the decisions and recommendations of Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Convention II (PMPC II) — not as distant texts, but as a living roadmap for their own communities.

The impact was tangible. What had once remained within assemblies and documents began to take root at the grassroots.

This momentum carried into 1998 with the publication of two key manuals: *Guidelines for Basic Ecclesial Communities* and *Guidelines for Parish Structures*. Produced in a comprehensive A4 format spanning 180 pages, these texts became essential tools for parishes seeking to translate vision into practice.

More than instructional guides, they served as formation resources — exploring the nature of BECs, drawing from the teachings of the universal Church and the Asian bishops, and offering practical direction for nurturing and sustaining community life. In many ways, they marked a decisive shift from inspiration to implementation.

As this renewal unfolded, a broader horizon came into view. The universal Church was preparing for a moment of great significance — the Jubilee of the Year 2000.

The call came from Pope John Paul II who, on November 29, 1998, formally proclaimed the Jubilee through his papal bull *Incarnationis Mysterium (The Mystery of the Incarnation)*. Yet, as with all meaningful journeys, the preparation had begun much earlier.

Jesus Christ, calling the faithful to rediscover the person at the core of their faith.

- 1998 turned to the Holy Spirit, the unseen guide and giver of life.
- 1999 led the Church to contemplate God the Father, the source of all love and creation.

Woven through these years was a Marian dimension, with prayers of entrustment to the Blessed Virgin Mary accompanying the faithful on this journey into the mystery of salvation.

In Peninsular Malaysia, this universal call was not merely acknowledged — it was embraced and lived. The local Church responded through a pastoral statement signed by Archbishop Soter Fernandez, Bishop James Chan, Bishop Antony Selvanayagam, and Auxiliary Bishop Murphy Pakiam. Together, they set the tone with the theme for 1997: *A People... Walking with Jesus*.

It was a simple yet profound invitation — not just to reflect, but to move. To walk together. To rediscover discipleship in the ordinary rhythms of life.

This preparation was further strengthened at the regional level with the establishment of the Regional Jubilee Commission in 1996, chaired by Archbishop Soter Fernandez. A series of themes was carefully developed, spanning the liturgical years from 1997 to 1999, and integrated into the broader pastoral direction of the Church in Peninsular Malaysia.

Gradually, parishes, communities, and ministries aligned themselves with this shared vision. The Jubilee was no longer a distant milestone — it was becoming a lived and communal experience.

Archbishop Soter consistently reminded the faithful that the Jubilee was not simply about marking a date in history. It was a grace-filled opportunity — to deepen faith, to renew commitment, and to witness more authentically to Christian values within an increasingly secular society.

In hindsight, these years reveal a Church that understood the need for preparation of the heart. Not merely outward celebration, but inward transformation.

● 1997 centred on

All historical information in this series has been taken from various sources.

Pastoral Animation and Formation Sessions

East Coast parishes feel left out

KUANTAN: "We are so far away and often miss out on what is happening at archdiocesan level," said Bernard Nicholas, a participant from Kuala Terengganu. Similar sentiments were echoed by many of the participants of the Pastoral Animation and Formation Sessions (PAFS) who had come with the hope that the bishops would put their mind to ease and assure them that they are very much a part of the bigger picture of the Peninsular Malaysia Church.

"Each time, we have to remind the people in the Kuala Lumpur archdiocese of our existence and ensure that we are also included in the activities planned at archdiocesan level," said Dato' B. Bodipalar, the chairperson of the Church of St Thomas, Kuantan. "Having sessions are fine, but we need something concrete to fall back on."

"Since our main problem is a shortage of trained facilitators and of travelling to the West Coast for sessions, perhaps the archdiocese could come up with a formation kit which we could utilise to train our own people," he added.

The inadequacy of the people in the East Coast was quite apparent as shown during the open forum when the following questions were raised by one of the participants: "What is the next step? Do we wait the return of the team (Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Team — PMPT) for the implementation of the pastoral plan?"

Bishop Antony Selvanayagam responded by saying that it was up to the parishes (parish, parish council) members, BEC leaders (etc) to take the initiative and act upon it.

He added that the PMPT as well as the Archdiocesan Pastoral Institute, "We often miss out on archdiocesan activities"

"We lack manpower for matir"

Recognise that we are different and that not all ideas are acceptable

WE in Kuantan are somewhat fortunate that we are not totally isolated from the bigger picture of the KL Archdiocese. There is a link of some sort. Unfortunately places like Kota Bharu and Terengganu are somewhat isolated.

Formations and retreats for the laity normally take place in the West Coast and we find it difficult to send a large group to attend because of the expense.

Formations are always taking place in Kuala Lumpur and I have raised this issue on a number of occasions but the sessions continue to take place in the same place.

Although we have a small number of trained laity, it is still necessary to bring in people from the West Coast. The facilitators here have already

You cannot push us with your ideas from the West but recognise the fact that we still need people to teach us, to guide us whilst not forgetting the fact that there are only 5 priests to one to the needs of the people in the East Coast.

However, this is a first in that we have managed to get people from districts

Giving their full attention... From near and far they had come — the young, the old, families, communities. They had put aside their personal plans for the day to show their commitment and to journey together as Church.



The Diaconate: Rediscovering the heart of service

A quiet but powerful ministry

Not every vocation stands in the spotlight. Some are lived in the quiet, steady work of serving — unseen, often unspoken, yet deeply essential. The diaconate is one such calling, revealing the Church in service.

In Malaysia, as the Church continues her journey of renewal and reflection in preparation for the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026, there is a growing awareness of what it means to be a Church that listens, walks together, and serves. In this context, the diaconate offers another glimpse into that vision — a Church rooted not only in structure, but in service, presence and compassion.

The Sacrament of Holy Orders unfolds in three distinct yet united degrees: bishop, priest, and deacon. While the first two are more visible in parish life, the diaconate often remains in the background. It is precisely here, in this space of quiet service, that the Church further reflects Christ most clearly. The story of the diaconate is therefore not merely historical, but a story of rediscovery.

Where it all began:

A ministry born of need

The origins of the diaconate emerge from a moment of tension within the early Christian community. As described in Acts 6:1–6, widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food — a situation that threatened not only fairness, but unity itself.

In response, the Apostles appointed seven men “full of the Spirit and wisdom” to ensure that no one was forgotten. Among them were St Stephen and St Philip, whose lives would extend far beyond practical service. Stephen would become the Church’s first martyr, while Philip would take on the role of missionary.

From the very beginning, the diaconate was about embodying Christ the Servant — through word, action, and witness.

A trusted ministry in the early Church

As the Church grew, so too did the role of the deacon. Deacons became close collaborators of the bishop, assisting in the liturgy, caring for the poor, and serving as a vital link between Church leaders and the faithful.

This resonates deeply within the Malaysian context, where much of the Church’s life unfolds through close-knit parish communities, Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), and outreach ministries. The spirit of the diaconate — bridging leadership and the people, faith and daily life — is already visible in many forms.

One of the most striking examples remains St Lawrence (258 AD). When Roman authorities demanded that he hand

To understand the diaconate is to encounter the Church at her most authentic — humble, listening, and serving. Having reflected on priests and religious on Vocations Sunday, we now turn our attention to the often less understood calling of the permanent diaconate.

over the Church’s treasures, he presented the poor instead, declaring, “This is the Church’s treasure.”

It is a reminder that wherever the Church is — whether in a city parish in Kuala Lumpur or a rural mission in Sabah or Sarawak — her true wealth is found in the people, especially the most vulnerable.

A ministry that faded — but never disappeared

Over time, the permanent diaconate gradually faded from common practice in the Latin Church. By the Middle Ages, it had largely become a transitional stage on the path to priesthood. This shift unfolded gradually, shaped by theological development and pastoral needs.

Yet even as its visible presence diminished, its essence endured. The Church never lost sight of the diaconate as a true sacramental order rooted in service.

A rediscovery in a time of need

It would take the challenges of the modern world to bring the diaconate back into focus. In times of war and in mission territories, where priests were few, lay leaders stepped forward to sustain communities.

In many ways, this is not unfamiliar to the Malaysian Church, where vast distances, diverse populations, and limited clergy in certain areas have long required strong lay leadership and creative pastoral responses.

These realities raise an important question: what if the Church once again had these ordained ministers dedicated specifically to service?

The turning point: Vatican II

The Second Vatican Council marked a decisive turning point. Returning to the sources of the early Church, the Council recognised the diaconate not as something new, but as something to be restored.

In *Lumen Gentium*, the Council Fathers affirmed that the diaconate could once again be lived as a permanent vocation — not merely as a step toward priesthood, but as a calling in its own right.

This was more than a structural change. It was a reclaiming of the Church’s identity as a servant people.

A ministry reborn

Following the Council, Pope Paul VI formally restored the permanent diaconate in 1967. For the first time in centuries, men — including married men — could be ordained not for

priesthood, but for a lifetime of service as deacons.

For the Church in Malaysia, where family life, work, and faith are deeply interconnected, this presents another dimension. A married deacon, rooted in both family and community, is called to be a bridge between Church teaching and lived experience.

The deacon today: Word, liturgy and charity

Today, the ministry of the deacon is lived in three interconnected ways: proclaiming the Word, serving in the Liturgy, and carrying out works of Charity.

In a Malaysian parish context, this could mean proclaiming the Gospel at Mass, accompanying families in times of grief, visiting the sick, supporting migrant communities, or working alongside organisations such as Caritas and parish outreach ministries.

Whatever the ministry may be, charity remains the heart. The deacon is not simply one who serves, but a visible sign that the Church herself is called to serve.

A bridge in a Synodal Church

As the Church journeys toward becoming more synodal — a Church marked by communion, participation, and mission — the role of the deacon could become increasingly significant.

Many permanent deacons are husbands, fathers, and professionals. In a multicultural and multireligious society like Malaysia, this allows them to engage naturally in everyday spaces — workplaces, neighbourhoods, and social settings — bridging further the Gospel and real-life encounters.

Deacons, together with the other ordained ministries, stand at the threshold between altar and street, teaching and experience, reminding us that faith is not confined to church buildings alone, but lived in homes, offices, and communities.

A witness for our time

In a world marked by inequality, loneliness, and spiritual searching, the permanent diaconate in Malaysia could further offer a quiet but powerful witness through meaningful outreach to the poor, migrants, indigenous communities, and those on the margins of society.

It is not loud. It is not prominent. But it is deeply needed.

The words of St Lawrence still echo with urgency: The poor are the treasure of the Church.

A ministry rediscovered

The story of the diaconate is not simply about the past. It speaks to the present and points toward the future.

It reminds us that the Church is most faithful to Christ not when she seeks power, but when she chooses service; not when she stands above, but when she walks alongside.

And in that quiet, faithful service, the deacon, as part of the People of God, reveals a truth the world often forgets: to serve is to lead, to give is to receive, and to love is to become fully who we are called to be. *HERALD Malaysia*

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Pope Leo XIV stands out on *TIME's* most influential list



In a list defined by power and visibility, his influence stands out for another reason entirely.

Each year, *TIME* releases its list of the world's most influential people, a mix of leaders, artists, and public figures whose names carry weight far beyond their immediate sphere. It is a list that draws attention not only for who is included, but for what it suggests about the kind of influence our world values.

This year, among global political leaders and powerful voices, is Pope Leo XIV, a presence that feels both entirely natural and quietly unexpected. While many on the list wield influence through power, visibility, or decision-making authority, his influence operates differently, not depending on volume or dominance, but on something more enduring: moral clarity, consistency, and the ability to speak into complex situations without

losing sight of what is fundamentally human.

TIME itself acknowledges that influence is not easily defined, noting that there is "no single metric" for it, and that the list reflects "the stories that are shaping the world each year." That idea matters because it shifts the question from how much influence someone has to what kind of influence they exercise, and it is precisely here that figures like Pope Leo begin to stand out.

In recent weeks alone, he has spoken with unusual directness about war, power, and responsibility, challenging global leaders and calling for peace in a way that does not seek to dominate the conversation, but to redirect it, as shared in *The Guardian*. His influence lies not in control, but in conviction, in the ability to name what matters, even when it is uncomfortable, and to do so in a way that

resonates beyond immediate headlines.

Influence: Responsibility not visibility

What we begin to see, then, is that influence is not only about reach or recognition, but about direction, about who sets the tone, who reframes the conversation, and who reminds us, even briefly, of what is worth holding on to. The presence of Pope Leo on such a list does not simply affirm his influence, but quietly reshapes the idea itself, suggesting that influence is as much about responsibility as it is about visibility.

This also brings the question closer to home, because most influence does not happen on a global stage, but in smaller, quieter ways, in the tone we set, the attention we give, and the way we respond to others. It is found in the everyday interactions that rarely draw notice, and yet shape the lives around us in lasting ways.

If you bear this in mind, the list becomes less about admiration and more about reflection, inviting us to consider not whether we are influential, but what kind of influence we are already exercising. While only a handful of names are written down each year, the possibility of shaping the world, even in small and unseen ways, is far more widely shared, and perhaps, in the end, that is the kind of influence that matters most. **Cerith Gardiner, Aleteia**

How a visit to the Holy Land changed a "de facto Catholic"

From Notre Dame to the land where Jesus walked, Hunter Bratton's journey was not simply geographical — it was deeply spiritual. What began as a pilgrimage became an encounter that reshaped how he saw the Gospel, suffering, and the quiet presence of God in everyday life.

Like many pilgrims, Hunter, *pic*, found that visiting the Holy Land gave vivid context to Scripture. Standing by the Sea of Galilee, the Gospel stories were no longer distant narratives but living realities. "You have a much better mental image," he reflected — not just of the places, but of the moments where Christ walked, taught, and healed.

One site, however, stayed with him in a profound way: the Pool of Bethesda. Recalling the story in John 5 — of the



man who waited 38 years for healing — Hunter found himself drawn into the scene. He had come carrying his own intentions, shaped by long-term struggles. Being there, where Jesus spoke healing into a man's hopelessness, stirred something deep within him. It was no longer just a story. It was a reminder that God sees, waits, and acts — even when healing seems delayed.

For a time, Hunter admitted, he had been fixated on the suffering of the cross. Yet the pilgrimage opened his eyes to something more expansive: the richness of Christ's miracles and the quiet hope they offer. "There's so much more beyond the suffering," he realised. In

those sacred places, he encountered not only the memory of pain, but the promise of restoration — the truth that God continues to work, in ways both extraordinary and unseen.

"Jesus hasn't forgotten us," he said simply. "He's always with us." That conviction, once abstract, became deeply personal. It did not erase hardship, but it gave him a way to carry it — with trust that every struggle has another side.

Hunter's journey of faith has been equally layered. Raised in a Protestant tradition, his time at the University of Notre Dame introduced him to Catholic theology and liturgy. What began as curiosity grew into appreciation. He often describes himself, half in jest, as a "de facto Catholic" — someone drawn to the beauty and depth of the Mass, even while continuing to explore his place within the wider Christian tradition.

His first experience of Mass, on campus, was strikingly different from what he had known — structured, reverent, and centred on the Eucharist. Though unable to receive it, he came to understand its significance and found meaning in worshipping alongside Catholic friends and colleagues. For now, he remains

open, still discerning, still learning.

The pilgrimage also became a shared journey with his mother, a lifelong student of Scripture who joined him on the trip. Together, they attended daily Mass, visited sacred sites, and "connected the dots" of their faith in a way that was both intellectual and deeply personal.

Among the many places they visited, St Peter in Gallicantu left a lasting impression. Praying in the dungeon where Jesus was believed to have been held, Hunter reflected on the raw honesty of Psalm 88 — a cry of abandonment that revealed Christ's humanity. "He felt what we feel," Hunter said, "but we are not alone, because He is always with us."

That became the thread running through the entire pilgrimage: a quiet but unwavering truth. In moments of awe, in places of sorrow, in prayers whispered across ancient stones — God was present. "He is with us through it all," Hunter said.

And in that realisation, the Holy Land became more than a destination. It became a turning point — a reminder that faith is not only about where Jesus once walked, but about recognising where He walks with us still. **Aleteia**



Jesus may have won victory over death, but do we not sometimes feel like losers in life?

During a session on Palm Sunday for a group of children, I shared how the Palm branch is a sign of victory and reminds us that Jesus always wins! But I also pointed out how Jesus was nailed to the cross and died on Good Friday, and I asked the children if that meant Jesus had lost, or what ways could He still be winning, even after dying on the Cross?

Some answers I was hoping to arrive at was how Jesus continued to love and forgive us while on the Cross, and how He eventually rose from the dead on Easter Sunday, showing how He still won over death. What surprised me was when one boy simply exclaimed: Jesus was still the Son of God! That answer just blew my mind, for it made me realise how retaining one's identity and worth is WINNING, even in the worst of situations.

How often do we allow unpleasant situations or bad outcomes to tear down our identity and worth, when we feel we have lost not only from what has happened to us, but from feeling like losers because of what happened. When things do not go our way, or when someone hurts or rejects us, it can lead us to feeling sorry for ourselves, believing that we are unloved, unworthy, and a failure in life.

What the young boy reminded me is that not even death or the betrayal of Jesus could take away His identity and worth as the Son of God. No one and no event, no matter how bad, could take away His power as the Son of God. Despite how He was treated, He continued to forgive His enemies, care for His disciples by giving us His Mother, and offered us His life, not as a victim but as a victor.

"We do not pretend that life is all



Word Made Flesh

Nicholas Lye

What children taught me about winning

beauty. We are aware of darkness and sin, of poverty and pain. But we know Jesus has conquered sin and passed through His own pain to the glory of the Resurrection.

And we live in the light of His Paschal Mystery — the mystery of His Death and Resurrection. "We are an Easter people and Alleluia is our song!" (Pope St John Paul II)

If we truly believe that we too are sons and daughters of God, and are truly people of the Resurrection, then perhaps we are also invited to hold on to our identity, worth and power, and not give them away, especially when life gets harsh or when things go wrong in our lives. Are we still able to trust in the power of the Holy Spirit given to us to rise above challenges, to hope against hope, and to love ourselves as much as God loves us? Are we able to not succumb to the temptations and lies to think the worst of ourselves or God, and still choose to see ourselves as victors, even in the midst of struggle and pain?

To further show how winning can take place even through 'losing', I asked the children to think of instances where they were still winning despite something bad that had happened to them. A girl then shared how she was accidentally pricked by the palm which someone beside her was holding. Though it was painful, she shook off the pain in her hand and bravely moved on from it. Another child shared

how scared she was the first time she was in a swimming pool. But despite her fears, she decided to still enter the pool and eventually overcame her fears and enjoyed herself.

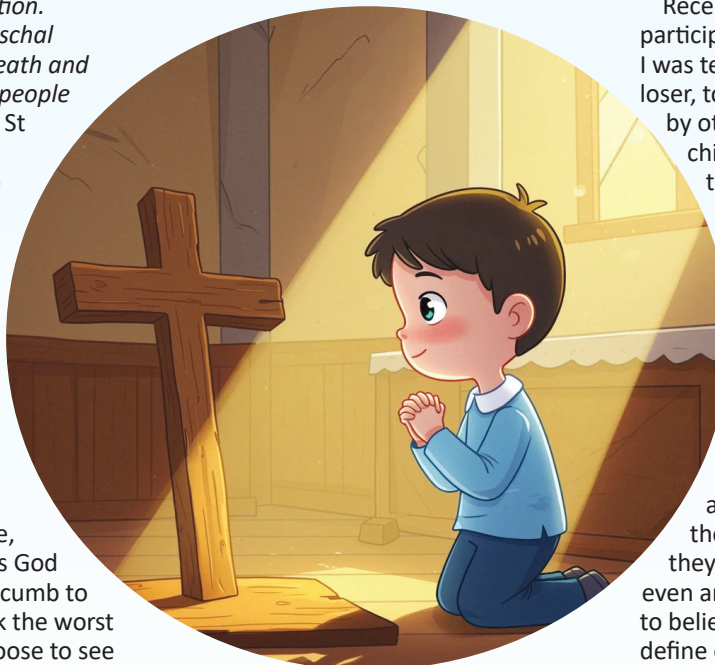
you too, the holy priesthood that offers the spiritual sacrifices which Jesus Christ has made acceptable to God, may be living stones making a spiritual house." (1 Peter 2:4-5)

Recently, when I had only two participants showing up for my workshop, I was tempted to think of myself as a loser, to perceive that I was being rejected by others. Yet when I thought of the children, and how they bravely faced their difficult situations, I too chose to believe that I was still a victor as God's beloved son, and that He could still bring victory out of a 'loss' event.

Sure enough, after continuing with the workshop, I realised how much those two participants really needed the small numbers to feel safe enough to share more honestly their current struggles, and eventually allow God to offer them the encouragement and love they needed. In this way, all of us won, even amidst our struggles, for we learnt to believe that our circumstances do not define our identity and worth.

Truly, the children have taught me what it means to keep living and winning as Easter people, and to continue making Alleluia our song, regardless of the circumstances or situations we find ourselves in.

Nicholas is a lay missionary and creative evangelist who loves to use creativity and various art forms to share the faith and help people encounter God's truths in a fun and meaningful way



How amazing that these young children could already grasp this simple truth, that 'death', pain and fear is not the end, but an opportunity for victory, bravery, self-love and self-worth to still prevail. They were able to rise above the darkness, claim their identity as Easter people, and make Alleluia their song.

"The Lord is the living stone, rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to Him; set yourselves close to Him so that

"Angel of God, my Guardian dear..."

This well-loved prayer to my Guardian Angel was one of the first prayers taught to me by my mother as soon as I was old enough to learn to pray. And I used to pray it every day in the firm belief that my Guardian Angel was always with me, keeping me from sin and harm.

"O Guardian Angel, cover me with thy wing; O Friend, illumine my path. Direct my footsteps and be my protection just for today." St Therese of Lisieux

Sadly, devotion to one's Guardian Angel seems to be regarded as one of the things we "discard" as we grow older, like having dolls or believing in Santa Claus or playing childhood games. Our Guardian Angel goes the way of that imaginary childhood friend we used to play with, someone in our distant past, someone slightly ridiculous, someone we feel even a wee bit embarrassed about. And I daresay this is universal. Try finding an image on the internet of a Guardian Angel with an adult! Angels are inevitably pictured bending protectively over toddlers. They are regarded as the stuff of childhood devotions and Catechism classes and seem to have no place in the spirituality of adult Catholics.

"We are like children who stand in need of masters to enlighten us and direct us, and God has provided for this by appointing His angels to be our teachers and guides." St Thomas Aquinas.

Not just any angel, excuse me, but our OWN, PERSONAL ANGEL who is commissioned by God Our Father, no less, to

be with us from the moment of our birth to the day they accompany us into His presence when we enter Eternal Life. (CCC336) Then and only then is their task over. They are answerable for us, and honestly, I cringe to think of the times my Guardian Angel has had to shrug their shoulders and say to God, "Sorry, but she just wouldn't listen."

"Make yourself familiar with angels, and behold them frequently in spirit; for, without being seen, they are present with you." St Francis de Sales.

So that's what we have to do: 1. Believe in our Guardian Angels 2. "Behold them frequently in spirit".

I feel deeply blessed that this has never been difficult for me all my life. My Guardian Angel is as real to me as the air I breathe or the daylight I see the world by or the sounds that reach my ears. Not visible but never not there.

"Everyone, no matter how humble he may be, has angels to watch over him. They are heavenly, pure and splendid and yet they have been given to us to keep us company on our way; they have been given the task of keeping careful watch over you." Pope Pius XII

My personal experience of my Guardian Angel watching over me? Where do I begin??

I was driving to church for morning Mass along dark, deserted roads and I stopped at a traffic light. When the lights turned green, I didn't move forward. For some reason,

I waited. A split second later, a huge truck thundered past at great speed. The driver had shot his red light and would have just ploughed into me had I moved forward. I whispered, "Thank you, Guardian Angel" and went on my way.

There have been times when I am all ready to leave the house, I pick up my keys and my handbag and open the door And then "something tells me" to go back in and wait awhile. So, I do. I will never know why, or if by doing so some mishap was averted but I firmly believe this is how my Guardian Angel works. And because I pray for their guidance daily and have made it a habit of being conscious of their presence, I am able to cooperate.

Third anecdote: Again, while driving to morning Mass along dark but this time not-so-deserted streets. The car in front of me was crawling along and I wondered why. Then I noticed two young girls dressed in evening wear (read short and skimpy) walking on the side of the road, clinging to each other, trying to keep as far away as possible from the car. I could see it contained men who were leaning out of the car windows, hassling them, laughing coarsely. I pulled ahead of the car, opened my passenger door and yelled to the girls, "Get in". They clambered in and I accelerated away to the sound of the men yelling and hooting at me for spoiling their fun. When



And in the end...

Marge Martinez

I replayed the incident in my mind, it was like a scene from a movie! Now, mind you, I am an old lady, not an off-duty cop. Where did I find the quick reflexes, presence of mind and sheer gumption (not to mention driving skills!) to do what I did? The girls lived close by, so I dropped them home with an earful of "Auntie" advice. And then I drove to church, thanking my Guardian Angel all the way and not forgetting to thank their

Guardian Angels, the girls' Guardian Angels, for protecting them that morning.

"Make friends with angels." St Augustine.

Absolutely. My Guardian Angel is my faith friend — always nudging, pointing, revealing, inspiring my faltering efforts at prayer and discipleship. I love that my childhood prayer before Holy Communion invites my Guardian Angel to "lead me to the altar of God".

Standing by my side right now as I write this, by the way, and smiling...

And in the end...

*The angels keep their ancient places;
Turn but a stone and start a wing!*

*'Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces,
That miss the many-splendoured thing.*

Francis Thompson

Marge loves retirement because of the time it gives her to read. To play Word Games. To learn new words. To wait upon the Lord and let Him move in her life.



Fr Joseph Stephen, C.S.S.R.

Walking with hope

Fr Joseph Stephen, C.S.S.R.

These are troubling times for our world — though, in truth, they are not new. Our world has always known unrest. From natural disasters close to home — the tsunami that struck Thailand, Aceh, India, Sri Lanka, and even parts of our own country — to wars in Syria and Iraq and conflicts elsewhere, suffering persists. Then there are the refugees and displaced — men, women, and children searching for safety and dignity.

We see it, too, in quieter but no less painful ways: those who waited years for visas, only to be turned away by a single decision; families separated, hopes deferred. Closer to home, many are losing confidence in the Malaysian economy. The elderly, once at rest, now consider returning to work as savings dwindle and the cost of living rises.

At the same time, the social fabric of our nation is being tested. Where we once stood more united as Malaysians, we now see growing bigotry and deepening racial and religious polarisation — in our schools, in our workplaces, even in our playgrounds. The political divide widens, while corruption erodes trust. There was a time we spoke of one bad apple; today, it can feel as though the whole basket is compromised.

In all this, hope can seem fragile.

Yet, despite everything, we Christians celebrate Easter — the season of new life, new hope, and renewed mission. In the midst of uncertainty, we are called to see differently: to recognise possibility where others see only loss. We are called to hope.

Hope speaks a different language — one that refuses to surrender to darkness and insists that new life is still possible.

What is hope?

The Gospel offers us a powerful image in the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Two disillusioned followers walk away from Jerusalem — away from hope. They had given everything to follow Jesus, only to see Him crucified. For them, it was over. The only path left seemed to be a return to their old lives.

Yet, it is precisely on this road of



(Unsplash/James Wheeler)

disappointment that transformation begins. The Risen Lord draws near, walks with them, and opens the Scriptures. In the breaking of the bread, their eyes are opened — He is alive. In that moment, everything changes. They turn back. No longer walking away in despair, they return to Jerusalem — to mission, to community, to hope.

What changed? They listened, reflected, and allowed their hearts to be stirred. They began to see differently. That is what hope does — it reorients our journey. Their story moves from despair to witness.

And this is our story too. In the midst of discouragement — in our nation, our families, our workplaces, and our parishes — Christ meets us and leads us from hopelessness to hope.

Hope, in Scripture, is not passive. It is trust, waiting, and desire — but always active. It moves us.

I recall a theology professor from my seminary days, Fr Gerwin, a Dutch Franciscan friar, who once said: “If you wish to go to Madras, then buy a ticket and go. You cannot sit here and keep wishing. You must act.” That lesson has stayed with me.

Nothing changes if we simply sit and hope. Many pray for unity, justice, and peace — in our nation, our Church, and our families. These are good and necessary prayers. But prayer must lead to action. God is not a magician who acts without us. If we desire renewal, we must be part of it.

New hope is born out of ideas

In 2010, after much persuasion, my superior granted me a sabbatical to attend a programme at Sangre de Cristo in New Mexico. During a visit to Alamogordo — where the first atomic bomb was tested — a guide remarked that everything begins with an idea. Whether for good or ill, all things are born from an idea.

Ideas shape history — and they grow. As Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. observed, a mind stretched by a new idea never returns to its former state. So too with hope. It stretches us, inviting new ways to seek peace, unity, and renewal.

Yet often, we hesitate, telling ourselves change is too difficult.

There is a familiar image of the “crab mentality” — pulling one another down when someone tries to rise. Hope calls us to move beyond this. It calls us to move forward — towards life and newness.

This is the invitation of Easter. We have been given new life, new purpose, a new mission — to renew the face of the earth. We see it in our parishes, where new ministries emerge and people step forward to serve. These are signs of hope alive among us.

Hope requires imagination

Have you heard the story of the dragonfly? This is how it goes. At the bottom of an old pond lived a group of grubs who could not understand why none of their companions

ever returned after climbing the lily stems to the surface. So, they made a pact: the next to go would come back and tell the others what lay beyond.

One day, a grub felt the urge to rise. Reaching the surface, it rested on a lily pad and was transformed into a dragonfly with delicate, radiant wings. It tried to return, flying back and forth over the pond, peering down at its friends. But it could no longer see them, and they could not recognise this new, luminous creature as one of their own.

So it is with hope. It transforms. We sometimes call such people “holy.” We notice the change: once distant, now present; once uninvolved, now deeply engaged. This is what Easter hope does — it gives new vision, fresh energy, and new ways of seeing and responding.

I am reminded of another story. A friend once shared how, as a child, he lived in a small kampung house. Each day, his father would cycle him home from school, pointing out large houses along the way and saying, “You could live in one of these if you study hard and find a good job.” That vision took root. He studied, built a career, and eventually provided a beautiful home for his family. It all began with imagination.

Christian hope works in the same way. When we allow God to speak into our lives, our vision begins to change. We start to see new possibilities — and in seeing differently, we are transformed.

Spirituality of Christian hope

Hope is not for the faint-hearted. It is a spirituality stirred by the Holy Spirit, filling us with vision for how the Risen Lord works in our lives. It is where beauty is reborn even in broken places. It is a spark that, once lit, cannot be extinguished — its flame only grows.

There is no limit to where hope can lead. It begins within — that is its starting point.

“Were not our hearts burning within us while He spoke to us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

That fire is hope. And it is still burning.

A priest for 46 years, Fr Joe holds a Master’s degree in Pastoral Theology from Chicago. He has authored several books on spirituality and pastoral issues, his latest focusing on ageing.

Reflecting on the PMP theme - May

The grace of accompaniment

In a world that celebrates independence and self-sufficiency, the pastoral theme for May invites us to rediscover something far more life-giving, which is the grace of walking together. Within the family, our first and most formative community, this call to accompaniment is not an abstract ideal but a daily and lived reality.

To accompany one another is to be present to each other in a real and intentional way. It means choosing relationship over efficiency, people over productivity, and love over convenience. It means sitting at the table even when conversations are difficult, listening when words are hard to find, and remaining when it would be easier to walk away.

St Paul’s exhortation to the Colossians provides a clear and practical guide for this journey, as he reminds us to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. These virtues are

not expressed through dramatic gestures but are revealed in the ordinary moments of family life. Compassion calls us to notice the unspoken struggles of others, while kindness is shown in simple acts of care and thoughtfulness. Humility allows us to acknowledge our mistakes, meekness teaches us to respond with gentleness rather than anger, and patience invites us to give each other the time and space needed for growth.

To walk together as a family is to recognise that none of us is perfect and that all of us are still growing. There will be misunderstandings, tensions, and moments of disappointment, but it is precisely in these moments that accompaniment becomes meaningful. Accompaniment is not about achieving perfection but about remaining faithful to one another despite our weaknesses.

When St Paul encourages us to bear with one another, he is calling us to an active

form of love that involves supporting each other, especially in times of difficulty. This kind of love is sustained by forgiveness, which lies at the heart of every healthy family relationship. Forgiveness is not always easy, especially when wounds run deep, but it is essential for healing and renewal. As we have been forgiven by the Lord, we are called to extend that same forgiveness to one another, allowing grace to restore what has been broken.

The pastoral pathway for this month highlights the importance of accompanying one another by sharing moments, offering comfort, and praying together. Sharing moments requires intentionality, as it means making time for one another despite the many demands of daily life. These shared experiences, whether joyful or challenging, strengthen the bonds within the family. Offering comfort involves being attentive to the needs of others and assuring them that

they are not alone in their struggles. Often, this comfort is expressed not through words but through quiet presence.

Praying together as a family is equally essential, as it places God at the centre of family life. Through prayer, hearts are softened, relationships are deepened, and families are reminded that they are sustained by God’s love. A family that prays together learns to see one another with greater understanding and compassion, recognising each person as a gift entrusted by God.

Ultimately, walking together as a family does not mean having everything in order, but it means journeying forward together with faith and trust. Accompaniment reflects the way God loves us, as He walks with us patiently and faithfully in every stage of our lives. As families strive to accompany one another with compassion, forgiveness, and prayer, they become living witnesses of God’s presence in the world.

LITTLE CATHOLIC'S CORNER

Dear children,

In today's gospel, Jesus is talking to His disciples before He leaves them. They are worried and don't understand what is going to happen.

So, Jesus tells them, "Do not let your hearts be troubled."

He is telling them not to be afraid, because they can trust in

God and trust in Him.

Jesus explains that He is going to His Father's house to prepare a place for them.

Jesus says that heaven is real, and there is a place there for everyone who believes in Him. Then Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

What does this mean? It means....

Jesus is the way to God, teaches us the truth about God and He gives us life now and forever.

One of the disciples, Philip, asks Jesus to show them the Father.

Jesus answers that if they have seen Him, they have seen the Father. This means Jesus shows us exactly what God is like—loving, kind, and good.

Jesus also tells them that those

who believe in Him can do good works too. We are called to live like Jesus by loving and helping others.

So, when you feel scared or worried, remember that you can trust Jesus. He is always with you and will guide you.

Love, Auntie C



CAN YOU FIND ALL THE WORDS FROM JOHN 14:1-12 HIDDEN BELOW?

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

Word List:

- | | |
|-------------|--------------|
| 1. ROOMS | 7. WAY |
| 2. BELIEVE | 8. TRUTH |
| 3. TROUBLED | 9. LIFE |
| 4. HEART | 10. FATHER |
| 5. PREPARE | 11. MIRACLES |
| 6. PLACE | 12. THOMAS |

Can you find the words Jesus spoke in John 14?

- "Let not your hearts be _____. Believe in God; believe also in me." — John 14:1
- "In my Father's house are many _____. If it were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you?" — John 14:2
- "I am the _____, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." — John 14:6
- "Whoever believes in me will do the _____ that I do; and greater works than these will he do." — John 14:12

Great job! Jesus comforts us and shows us the only true way to God.

way troubled rooms works

FOLLOW JESUS THROUGH THE MAZE

Help the children reach Jesus! Start from the two children at the top. Follow the correct path through the maze. Avoid the dead ends and reach Jesus at the centre.



Lord Jesus, thank You for reminding us not to be afraid. Help us to trust in You as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Guide our hearts when we are unsure, and teach us to follow You each day through our words and actions. Stay close to us and help us to share Your love with others.

Amen.

YOUTH



After “Amen”

Why young people drift and how they return

Shivonne Prevena

They said “Amen” — and then many disappeared. Why do young Catholics drift away after Confirmation, and what will it take to walk with them again?

She stood before the altar, clothed in white, radiating a quiet confidence that only youth can carry. The bishop traced the sign of the cross on her forehead with holy oil and spoke the ancient words, “Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.” She answered, “Amen.” Her family smiled, her godparents beamed, and the parish community rejoiced. Then, slowly and quietly, she disappeared.

This is not the story of one individual, but of many.

Catechists, youth ministers, parents, and parish leaders will recognise this pattern. Young people who were once present at Mass and active in parish life gradually drift away after Confirmation. One missed Sunday becomes many, and before long, the pew remains empty.

Where did they go, and why did they leave?

One young adult, Eric, shared his experience with honesty. He spoke of hearing about love, grace, and humility on Sundays, yet encountered judgment, gossip, and pride during the week. Over time, the gap between what was preached and what was lived became too painful to ignore.

Stepping away did not mean abandoning faith. He continued to believe in love and truth. What he sought was a healthier space in which to encounter them.

His story is not unique. For many young people, the struggle is not with God, but with how faith is lived. A Church that proclaims mercy may struggle to embody it. A community

meant to feel like home can, instead, feel distant. Many leave not in rebellion, but in quiet weariness.

Too often, Confirmation is treated like a graduation. Years of catechism seem to culminate in an endpoint rather than a beginning. Yet faith is not a syllabus to be completed. It is a relationship to be lived.

Perhaps the question is not only why they leave, but whether we have walked with them beyond the sacrament. We call them the future of the Church, yet often, struggle to make space for them in the present.

They are growing up in a world shaped by pressure, comparison, and uncertainty about identity and purpose. In Malaysia, this is often compounded by academic expectations and family pressures. They are not primarily searching for rules, but for authenticity, be-

longing, and meaning. At times, they find this more readily elsewhere.

This is not an accusation, but a lament. The Church has so much to offer.

We are a Church of beauty and mystery, shaped by saints, martyrs, and communities that share life together. We believe in a God who enters into human suffering — becoming flesh and dwelling among us.

Yet if this is never experienced beyond textbooks, if liturgy feels distant, or if questions are dismissed, young people will drift.

But not every story ends in drifting.

Joel Jeremiah, now a junior apprentice with the Missionary Community of St Paul the Apostle in Kenya, recalls how his journey began with a simple question: “Have you ever thought about being a priest?”

There was no pressure, only conversation

and time. Over a simple cup of cappuccino and *sirap bandung ais*, a new chapter began to unfold.

Joel did not fully understand what he was saying yes to, but that small “yes” became a turning point. Through formation and mission work, he encountered a deep peace. He met people with almost nothing, yet full of hope, and in them he saw God’s love made real.

Serving the poor transformed his understanding of happiness. He realised that love is not about giving things, but about giving oneself.

Joel speaks honestly about doubt and weakness. Yet again and again, he encountered grace.

His message to those who have drifted away is simple: he understands. Like the Prodigal Son, he wandered in search of meaning. When he whispered a small “yes” to Christ, he did not encounter judgment, but embrace.

This is the heart of our faith — a God who invites, waits, and welcomes.

Perhaps young people today do not have less faith, but are growing up in a world that makes it harder to notice God.

The question, then, is not simply why they left, but how we welcome them home.

We are called to respond not with guilt, but with listening; not with expectations, but with accompaniment; and not with programmes alone, but with authentic relationships.

This calls for mentoring, for spaces where young people can speak honestly, and for communities that walk with them beyond Confirmation. The Church is not whole without them.

They once said “Amen.” The journey was never meant to end there. Now it is our turn to walk with them.

If we dare to live our faith with humility and joy, many may rediscover that they were never truly lost.

They are only waiting to come home.





SEOUL PARISHES TAKE LEAD IN PREPARING FOR WORLD YOUTH DAY 2027

SEOUL: The Archdiocese of Seoul has mobilised parishes as frontline hosts for World Youth Day Seoul 2027, placing local communities at the centre of preparations for the international youth gathering.

The move shifts preparation from a centralised effort to a parish-based mission, with communities tasked to host pilgrims, coordinate logistics, and lead participation across the local Church.

At a Mass on April 19 at Myeongdong Cathedral, the Local Organising Committee formally launched parish organising committees, marking the start of parish coordination for WYD 2027.

Archbishop Peter Soon-taick Chung presided over the liturgy, which drew about 1,000 participants, including clergy, lay leaders, and youth representatives from across

the archdiocese.

Parishes are expected to play a central role in welcoming pilgrims, particularly through homestay programmes and the use of parish and school facilities. As the first point of contact for visitors, parish communities will lead local preparations and extend hospitality during the event.

The archdiocese said the initiative also seeks to renew parish life and deepen awareness that WYD is a shared responsibility, calling for both spiritual and financial participation from clergy and lay faithful.

In his homily, Chung underscored the purpose of the gathering, saying, "WYD Seoul 2027 is not simply an event or a mega-event. It must become a time of grace in which God is encountered in the young people of the world."

Reflecting on the Gospel account of the

disciples on the road to Emmaus, he said the Church is called to accompany young people in their fears and difficulties so they may encounter the Risen Lord and be renewed in faith.

The prelate urged broad participation across parish communities, adding: "Some will take part through prayer, others through support, others through service, and still others by opening their homes. When each of us responds with courage, all of us can become true protagonists of the journey toward WYD Seoul 2027."

During the Mass, representatives of parish pastoral councils and youth groups publicly pledged their commitment to support preparations. Organisers also presented appointment certificates, badges, and parish manuals to establish the new structure.

Chung blessed nearly 300 wooden sculp-

tures bearing the WYD Seoul 2027 logo, each designated for a parish. The archdiocese said the installations serve as visible signs of prayer, unity, and shared mission, extending awareness of WYD beyond church communities into the wider society.

Before the conclusion of the celebration, Chung identified three key areas for participation: financial support, prayer, and homestay. He thanked priests for their voluntary contributions and urged the faithful to support fundraising efforts, take part in the One Billion Rosaries Prayer Campaign, and open their homes to pilgrims.

The launch formally begins parish-based preparations across Seoul, with communities expected to take the lead in hosting and accompanying pilgrims ahead of 2027. **LICAS News**



Students' memorable village encounter

NEGERI SEMBILAN: A group of 40 pre-Confirmation students from the Church of the Divine Mercy, Shah Alam, accompanied by their catechist, made a meaningful visit to the Orang Asli village of Kampung Belihoi recently.

The day began with the recitation of the Rosary, followed by the celebration of Holy Mass, setting a prayerful tone for the visit.

The group was later warmly welcomed by the village elder, Mr Langkap, who shared a brief history of the Chapel of the Risen Christ — a site of deep personal significance, as it once stood as his family home. A fifth-generation resident of the land inherited from his forefathers, he also recounted stories of his lineage, including that of his uncle, the village's first chief, who was said to have lived to

the remarkable age of 170 and is buried in Kampung Belihoi.

After lunch, the students visited the homes of the Orang Asli community, engaging with residents and gaining a deeper appreciation of their way of life.

Despite the sweltering heat earlier in the day, the weather later shifted dramatically into a thunderstorm, adding an unexpected yet memorable dimension to the experience.

Moments of connection were evident as children bonded over shared games, with technology helping bridge differences and foster friendships.

The visit concluded on a heartfelt note, with words of encouragement offered to the students as they prepare for their Confirmation on May 9, urging them to remain steadfast in their faith. **Selva Manogary**

MELAKA: Recently, a group of 17 young adults from Melaka came together in collaboration with Caritas MJD for the *Bag of Love* project, reaching out to those in need with compassion and generosity. This year, the initiative extended its support to the Montfort Youth Centre, Fatima Home, and several underprivileged families within the local community. More

than a charitable effort, the project became a tangible expression of faith in action.

Through the *Bag of Love* initiative, young adults contributed essential items such as groceries, household supplies, and children's necessities. These items were carefully packed in the *Bags of Love* provided and later distributed personally to families and communities in need, especially those from lower-income backgrounds. They managed to collect a total of 80 bags.

However, what made this initiative truly meaningful was not just the distribution of goods, but the human encounters that came with it.

The young adults spent time with each community and family they visited, listening to their stories and sharing moments of joy and connection. In doing so, they discovered that sometimes, the greatest gift is not the physical items we give, but the presence we offer.

The first stop was the Montfort Youth Centre in Ayer Salak, where 88 boys warmly

welcomed the young adults and readily offered their help. Together, they unloaded the goods and

spent time engaging in light-hearted games in the hall, creating a joyful and memorable experience for all.

The group then proceeded to Fatima Home in Banda Hilir, where they interacted

with children from different backgrounds, fostering a spirit of empathy, understanding, and fraternity. A short praise and worship session was also conducted, adding a meaningful spiritual dimension to the visit.

In reaching out to local families in need, the young adults collaborated with Agape Care Centre, a non-profit organisation dedicated to serving individuals regardless of age, creed, gender, or beliefs. With the locations provided, the young adults personally visited each home and delivered the items directly to the families.

Through these encounters, the young people witnessed firsthand the realities faced by many in society and, more importantly, realised that they too have the ability to make a difference.

As Caritas MJD continues its mission of promoting love in action, this initiative stands as a powerful testimony that when communities come together, even small acts of kindness can become signs of hope.

Eugene Wong Chen Wei

A 'Bag of Love' story





(Crux/Francisco Seco)

Death of nearly 8000 migrants in 2025 is 'nothing short of a tragedy'

SWITZERLAND: The International Organization for Migration (IOM) released a report April 21, that found approximately 7,900 migrants died or went missing in 2025, bringing the total since 2014 to over 80,000 deaths.

"With more than 80,000 deaths and disappearances documented during migration worldwide since 2014, the nearly 8,000 deaths documented in 2025 mark a continuation and escalation of a global failure to end these preventable deaths," the UN agency stated in the report which is released annually.

"While these figures represent only the lowest boundary of the true number of affected people, they nonetheless underscore the need for urgent action to end migrant deaths and address the complex needs of families left behind," the IOM added. "2025 was marked by an unprecedented level of aid cuts and restriction of information on dangerous irregular routes, rendering more and more missing migrants invisible," the report also said.

Bishop Paul McAleenan, Lead Bishop for Refugees and Migrants at the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, told Crux Now that the report's findings were "nothing short of a tragedy."

"The fact that almost 8,000 migrants died or went missing on journeys that were undertaken to flee conflict or to search for a better life is nothing short of a tragedy," McAleenan said.

"As Catholics, we are often reminded that every migrant has a name, a face and a story. When that story comes to an abrupt and tragic end, it is a stark reminder of the dangers people are driven to endure: Unsafe sea crossings, exploitation, hostility, loss of dignity," he added.

In 2024, the number of deaths was 9,200 and the IOM attributed the reduction in numbers to a marked decline in people wanting to use "irregular and dangerous migration routes."

"But it is also explained by the financial restrictions imposed on humanitarian actors who document migrant deaths on the main migration routes," the agency added.

For McAleenan, the IOM's report was a timely reminder of the need for safe and legal routes for migrants.

"Safe and accessible routes remain limited across both the UK and Europe, leaving many migrants with no real choice but to risk their lives. This serves as a solemn reminder of the urgent need for safe and legal pathways for those in need," he told Crux Now.

This point was also made in the report's conclusion. "When safe pathways are out of reach, people are forced into dangerous, irregular journeys. This irregularity means that when things go wrong, families are too often left without any information about their loved ones," the report said.

The report also focused on the impact on families, estimating that 342,488 people are the family members of dead or missing migrants.

"With so few missing migrants ever identified, families face enduring grief and complex social, legal and economic hardships that come with having a relative who disappeared without a trace," the report said.

After the Spanish government announced in January a plan to regularise the status of 500,000 migrants living in the country, last week the government approved a royal decree to make it happen.

Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez posted an open letter to X (formerly Twitter), explaining why the progressive coalition that makes up the government made the decision.

"Spain, like other European countries, is growing older. If we do not take in new people to work and contribute to the social security system, our prosperity will slow, our capacity to innovate will decline, and our public services — health care, pension, education — will suffer," he wrote.

Any unauthorised immigrant who can prove that they have lived in Spain for at least five months before January 1, 2026, can apply.

The move has been praised by the Catholic Church in Spain and the Migration Department of the Spanish bishops' conference, as well as Caritas and the Spanish Conference of Religious, which released a statement in January.

"The time has come to take a decisive step toward a more just and inclusive society, where no one is relegated to invisibility and exclusion," the statement read. **Crux**

MEMORIAM

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25th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of



Boniface Anthony Gomez

Departed: 07-05-2001

Even after we lose one we hold so dear, The warmth of his love keeps his memory near.

Sadly missed by
Loved ones.



10th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of
Regis Fernandez
Returned to the Lord on
2nd May 2016

*"Your love is always in our hearts
Your kindness is fondly remembered
Your faith has shown us grace and mercy
Even though you are now
in God's kingdom,
The memory of you is
always beautifully near."*

Dearly missed
and fondly remembered by
husband, children, grandchildren,
family and friends.

1st Anniversary
In Loving Memory of



Herman Joseph Fernandez

7th April 1954 – 8th May 2025

We hold you close within our hearts and there you will remain until we meet again in the Lord.

Dearly missed by
Family and Loved ones.

In Loving Memory

20 Years

6 Years



Christopher Ravindran Nair

Departed: 06.05.2006



Janet Sylvia Lopez

Departed: 05.08.2020

*Not a day passes that we don't think about you.
Abide in Eternal Rest and Peace that
this world could never give you.
Safe in the arms of Jesus.*

Forever alive in the hearts and minds of your loved ones.

22nd Anniversary
In Loving Memory Of



Anne Clara Stephen

31 July 1937 –
2 May 2004

*"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."
(2 Timothy 4:7)*

Remembering our dearest Mum — a dedicated, and devout woman who lived her faith every day. Though you have been with the Lord for twenty-two years, your love remains our greatest treasure.

Forever missed and always in our prayers. Lovingly remembered by your children and those who were touched by her kind love.

In Loving Memory of



LT. COL (R) NOEL SAGAYARAJAH RMAF

1957 – 2026

He had a way of lighting up any room - a joke, a smile, and suddenly everyone was laughing. He wouldn't want this to be too heavy. More smiles, fewer long faces.

He'd probably say, "Don't be so serious lah... just come."

40th Day Memorial Mass
Sunday, 3rd May 2026
6.00pm at the Church of St Ignatius, P.J.

Deeply missed by family and loved ones.

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14th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of
Emmanuel Victor



Departed 30 April 2012

"Heavenly Father, as we remember the passing of our father, we thank You for the blessing of his life, his love, and the lessons he taught us. We have trusted him into Your loving arms and pray that his legacy of faith lives on in us."

Forever remembered by
Loved ones.

Church leaders have ‘sacred duty’ to speak truth

KUALA LUMPUR: The Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) has reaffirmed that while the separation of Church and State remains an important safeguard, it does not require silence from people of faith, particularly those in spiritual leadership.

In a statement dated April 20, CFM stressed that religious leaders carry a “sacred responsibility” to speak truth, even when it challenges those in authority. The federation underscored that the distinction between religious and civil spheres should not be interpreted as a withdrawal from moral engagement in public life.

Drawing on Scripture, CFM pointed to the

long tradition of prophetic witness, where figures such as Nathan, Elijah and John the Baptist confronted rulers and called them to account. These examples, it said, demonstrate that fidelity to God demands courage in the face of power.

“This calling is not rooted in political ambition, but in obedience to divine justice,” the statement said, adding that the biblical image of the watchman in Ezekiel highlights the moral responsibility to warn against wrongdoing.

CFM emphasised that Church leaders are not only permitted but obligated to speak out when injustice occurs, particularly when the vulnerable are oppressed or when leaders



(HERALD filepic)

depart from what is right. In doing so, they fulfil their role as moral voices anchored in truth rather than influenced by power.

The federation also cited German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, noting his assertion that “silence in the face of evil is itself evil.” It said remaining silent in the face of wrongdoing constitutes a failure to uphold the responsibilities entrusted to those in spiritual leadership.

“At every age, the integrity of faith demands a voice that does not bend to power,” the statement noted, calling for both courage and humility in addressing issues of jus-

stice and governance.

CFM reiterated its commitment to continue speaking on matters affecting national and religious freedom. It said it would do so both independently and in collaboration with other faith groups, including through the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST).

The statement reflects CFM’s ongoing role as a collective voice for the Christian community in Malaysia, particularly in addressing issues at the intersection of faith, ethics and public life.

SIGNIS Malaysia urges ceasefire, dialogue



(OSV News photo/Ibraheem Abu, Mustafa, Reuters)

KUALA LUMPUR: SIGNIS Malaysia has called for an immediate ceasefire and renewed diplomatic engagement as violence in the Middle East intensifies, warning that continued conflict is claiming more civilian lives and displacing entire communities.

In a recent statement, the Catholic communicators’ network urged “Christian communicators and people of goodwill worldwide” to unite in pressing for peace, echoing the appeals of Pope Leo XIV for an end to hostilities and a return to dialogue.

“United in faith and conscience, we call for an immediate end to the war and a sincere commitment to dialogue,” the statement said, highlighting the urgency as casualties mount and displacement worsens.

Grounding its appeal in the Gospel, SIGNIS Malaysia reiterated the moral imperative of peace: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.” It warned that escalating violence continues to erode human dignity and deepen divisions among nations.

The group called on global leaders —

especially those with political and military influence — to take concrete steps toward de-escalation, ensure the protection of civilians, and prioritise diplomacy over force.

Reaffirming Catholic social teaching, the statement stressed that “war is always a defeat for humanity,” noting that lasting peace can only be achieved through justice, reconciliation and mutual respect.

SIGNIS Malaysia also expressed solidarity with those affected by the conflict, including refugees and displaced families, regardless of nationality, religion or ethnicity, and assured them of continued prayers.

The network further invited individuals, faith communities, institutions and civil society groups to endorse the appeal, which will be presented to diplomatic missions and international representatives in Malaysia as a collective moral voice.

“May our shared voice, though humble, become part of a greater chorus calling the world away from the shadow of war and into the light of peace,” the statement concluded.

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