

This issue includes a special supplement on Pope Francis.



TERHAD

PP 8460/11/2012 (030939) ISSN: 1394-3294 | Vol: 32 No. 16 | May 4, 2025

www.heraldmalaysia.com

I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.  
*Rev 1:9*



Chrism Mass celebrations

■ P4 & P5



Diocesan launch of Perjalanan Salib

■ P6



SFX's Lenten vigil challenges youth in an immersive PASSION ENCOUNTER

■ P16

# 'There are no candidates in a conclave'

**KUALA LUMPUR:** As the Catholic Church prepares to gather in Rome to elect a new pope, voices from Asia and the Global South are urging the faithful to focus not on personalities, but on prayer and discernment.

Cardinal Sebastian Francis of Malaysia, who will participate in the conclave for the first time, described the process as "a sacred retreat," emphasizing that it is unlike any political election. "We do not go to Rome with a list of candidates," he said. "We go with open hearts, asking who the Holy Spirit has chosen to guide the Church forward."

Filipino Cardinal Pablo Virgilio David echoed this sentiment before departing for the Vatican. "There are no slogans, no campaigns — just prayer," he said. "We are not choosing a celebrity; we are seeking a shepherd."

"A conclave is a retreat. The cardinals will pray, and it is in the spirit of prayer that we will ask not whom we want to elect, but whom the Lord wants to succeed Pope Francis. That's why we have a big moral and spiritual obligation to enter into the conclave, not in the spirit of politics but in the spirit of prayer for the continuity of the mission of the Church," said Filipino Cardinal Pablo Virgilio David

In his interview with journalists, David said that since the conclave is a "retreat," part of the cardinals' duty is to discern by getting to know their fellow cardinals better.

One way by which they get acquainted with each other, according to David, is by writing each other personal letters.

He said another way is by doing research, noting that there is a website compiling the biographical data and other basic information about the different cardinals. "I am there. I was surprised, I didn't even know who did my write-up," he said.



Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, dean of the College of Cardinals, centre, leads cardinals in prayer during their first general congregation April 22, 2025, in the Vatican Synod Hall. To Cardinal Re's left is US Cardinal Kevin J. Farrell, chamberlain of the Holy Roman Church, and to the left is Archbishop Ilson Montanari, secretary of the College of Cardinals. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

The upcoming conclave comes at a pivotal moment for the Church, as Catholic communities in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, now home to the majority of the world's Catholics, call for a pope who will continue Pope Francis' legacy of synodality, social justice, and mercy.

Cardinal Charles Maung Bo of Myanmar, a long-time advocate for peace and dialogue, noted that "the next pope must carry forward the Gospel of inclusion. Pope Francis showed us that the Church must be with the poor, the forgotten, and those on the margins."

From East Africa, Cardinal Berhaneyesus Souraphiel of Ethiopia reflected on the growing moral leadership of the Global South. "We bring voices shaped by suffering and hope. Our peoples know the meaning of resilience, and our faith communities are vibrant, young, and ready to serve."

Despite media speculation in some countries, particularly in Asia, Church leaders have cautioned against turning the conclave into a popularity contest. "We leave it to the cardinal electors to decide who will succeed Pope Francis," said Fr Jerome Secillano, executive secretary of the CBCP Episco-

pal Commission on Public Affairs, said on church-run *Radio Veritas*.

Secillano, who is also the spokesperson of the Archdiocese of Manila, added, "The independence of the electors must be respected, and the least we can do is pray for all the cardinal electors."

In the spirit of Pope Francis' vision, Cardinal Sebastian encouraged Catholics across Malaysia and beyond to "entrust this time to the Lord." He added, "The future of the Church is not about power or prestige. It is about humility, courage, and love."  
*Agencies*

ESTABLISHED 1994

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

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



**EDITOR**  
Patricia Pereira  
editor1@herald.com.my



**ASSISTANT EDITOR**  
Sandra Ann Inbaraj  
sandra@herald.com.my



**GRAPHIC DESIGNER**  
Amanda Mah  
amanda@herald.com.my



**SOCIAL MEDIA**  
Kevin Francis  
kevin@herald.com.my



**BAHASA MALAYSIA**  
Melania Liza Magnus  
liza@herald.com.my



**MANDARIN**  
Adelina Wong  
yin4482@gmail.com



**ADMIN ASSISTANT**  
Rachael Sharma  
admin@herald.com.my

**ADVERTISEMENT/SUBSCRIPTION**  
advertisement@herald.com.my

**MEMORIAM**  
memoriam@herald.com.my

**LETTERS**  
letterseditor@herald.com.my

### Social Media



www.heraldmalaysia.com



@heraldmalaysia



heraldmalaysia  
Herald Snapshot



@heraldsnapshot

### Disclaimer:

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

Become a voice in the HERALD community.

Capture and share the spirit and vibrancy of your parish or ministry life with our readers.

We're looking for concise articles between 400 to 500 words, accompanied by high-resolution photos (300 DPI) in JPG or PNG format.

Don't forget to include captions that bring your images to life.

Your contributions are essential in keeping our faith community connected and informed.

Send your articles to editor1@herald.com.my



## GUEST EDITORIAL

# A papacy of mercy, humility and presence

It has been an extraordinary privilege to serve as a priest during the papacies of three remarkable leaders of the Church — Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis. I'm often asked which of the three I favour most, and my response has always remained the same: each brought unique gifts, insights, and dimensions to the life of the Church.

Pope John Paul II radiated courage and evangelistic fervour, boldly proclaiming the Gospel across the globe. Pope Benedict XVI offered the Church profound theological depth, guiding the faithful with intellectual clarity and spiritual richness. And Pope Francis inspired with his relentless emphasis on mercy, inclusivity, and encounter. Each has enriched the Church in distinct and powerful ways, deepening its mission and serving as a beacon of hope — not only for Catholics, but for the entire world.

Of these three Popes, my most personal and transformative experiences have been with Pope Francis. His warmth, approachability, and genuine human connection left a lasting impression on my heart, especially during the Synod on Synodality. His vision for a more inclusive and listening Church deeply resonated with me. While studying in Rome, I was also blessed with a brief yet profound encounter with Pope John Paul II. Still, it is my memories of Pope Francis that remain most vivid — his presence, his humility, and his pastoral heart.

Upon his election in 2013, Pope Francis was asked, "Who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio?" His response was both striking and deeply moving: "I am a sinner. This is the most accurate definition. It is not a figure of speech

or a literary genre. I am a sinner." In those few words, he revealed a profound self-awareness and complete reliance on God's mercy. That humility was the defining characteristic of his papacy.

Pope Francis consistently modelled a Church that listens, embraces, and journeys with others. He made himself accessible—not just through his words, but through countless gestures of care and presence. His vision was of a Church committed to dismantling barriers and forging connections — a Church that extends its embrace to todos, todos, todos—all people, without exception!

During both sessions of the Synod, his humility and attentiveness were on full display. He always arrived early, personally greeting not just the participants, but also the doorkeepers, the Swiss guards, the staff preparing coffee and refreshments, and all those working behind the scenes. These small, quiet moments revealed his deep respect for every person, reminding us that no role in the Church is insignificant. Every person, every contribution matters.

Pope Francis always found joy in being among his people — a calling that shaped every chapter of his life. Even as he battled serious health challenges, his commitment never wavered. He remained a beacon of presence and compassion, continually reaching out to others with pastoral care and heartfelt connection. On Easter morning, driven by his unwavering devotion, he chose once more to greet his flock — unaware it would be for the final time (maybe he was aware?). In those last moments, as in every day of his papacy, he embodied the soul of a true shepherd: humble, devoted, and with his people to the very end.

Through such acts, Pope Francis

communicated a powerful message: the Church must be rooted in service, in encounter, and in authentic human connection. He narrowed the distance between the papacy and the people, not with grand gestures, but with the simplicity of kindness, attentiveness, and presence. Witnessing this firsthand, I saw how he made everyone feel seen and valued — regardless of their title, status, or story.

As a priest, the greatest legacy Pope Francis leaves me with is a renewed commitment to radical hospitality and inclusivity. His papacy was a living reminder that the Church must not merely open its doors, but actively go out and invite, embrace, and accompany. He challenges me daily to help make the Church a true home for all — a sacred space where every person, regardless of background, story, wounds, or doubts, feels seen, heard, and loved. His words and actions remind me that we are called to embody Christ's mercy — walking alongside others in compassion, humility, and hope.

As we prepare to welcome a new Pope, the memory of Pope Francis will endure as a powerful example of what it means to be a shepherd who truly lived among his flock. He will be remembered for his humility, compassion, and unwavering dedication to the people he served. His papacy has been a living expression of the Gospel — breaking barriers, healing wounds, and reminding us that at the heart of the Church is the love of Christ, made visible through simple, sincere, human connection.

Farewell, Papa Francesco — until we meet again. Through your life and witness, we caught a glimpse of the heart of Christ.

Fr Clarence Devadass

## The logic of the Eucharist

Most of us would be familiar with this staple Offertory hymn by Kevin Nichols in our parishes — *In Bread We Bring You, Lord*. Recently, I had a renewed sense of appreciation for it, especially the last four lines: "Take all that daily toil, plants in our heart's poor soil. Take all we start and spoil, each hopeful dream. The chances we have missed, the graces we resist, Lord, in Thy Eucharist, take and redeem." I imagine that this is what Jesus was doing when He said to His disciples "Bring some of the fish you just caught." (cf. Jn 21:10).

The Gospel for this Sunday recounts an episode of the disciples who decided to go fishing at the prompting of Simon Peter. This effort of fishing for an entire night however, yielded no fruit. I am sure we can all identify with this sentiment — where our efforts seem so useless, when the work we put in seems lost. Missed opportunities, misplaced affections, misdirected emotions. "Bad" investments of time, talents, and treasures. How many of us have let out a sigh saying, "*Sayang-lah*. What a waste."

In the Eucharist and with our Eucharistic Lord, nothing, absolutely nothing, is wasted. With God, there is no *sayang-lah!* The logic of the Eucharist — take, bless, break, give — demands that something must be given in order for it to be taken. What is given? Everything.

Jesus, standing on the shore of the lake, calls out to His disciples, "Children, have you caught anything to eat?" (cf. Jn 21:5). When they respond in the negative, Jesus instructs them on where to cast the net, and once they do this, they are not even able to

pull the net in because of the number of fish (cf. Jn 21:5-6).

Notice that Jesus does not replace, remove, or invalidate the work of His disciples. Rather, He honours it by giving it a new direction. The disciples did the same thing that they were doing the entire night: casting their nets to fish, but this time in another direction. God never negates, denies, or throws away our efforts. With God, nothing is wasted. He takes everything that we bring, just as it is, just as we are. God takes our efforts.

When the disciples return to shore, they find a curious scene, "they saw a charcoal fire with fish on it and bread" (cf. Jn 21:9). Even though Jesus has something prepared, He still asks the disciples to bring something to this meal, "Bring some of the fish you just caught" (cf. Jn 21:10). Here, the cooperative aspect of the Eucharist is revealed. God is not content with man being a passive recipient of His grace, He wants to collaborate with man, He wants to work with man. God is not in the business of using man, but of working with Him; of letting man participate in His redeeming work. God takes the fruit of our efforts.

When Simon Peter goes to the net to retrieve the fish, John accounts the number and size of the catch: 153 large fish, then remarks that 'even though there were so many, the net was not torn' (cf. Jn 21:11). You and I may struggle and bend in our efforts, but grace will not break us. God is not a utilitarian. Grace operates in such a way that even the tools of our labours are not harmed. In the Eucharistic logic, they are redeemed and restored when man cooperates

## Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with Francisco Overee

### 3rd Sunday of Easter (C)

Readings: Acts of the Apostle 5:27-32, 40-41;

Revelation 5:11-14;

Gospel: John 21:1-19

with grace.

Once Jesus receives the fish from them, He invites His disciples, "Come, have breakfast" (cf. Jn 21:12). This is not a patronising meal; it is not a reward for hard labour. In this meal, Jesus takes man's contribution and adds it to what He Himself has prepared — "fruit of the earth and work of human hands" (cf. Roman Missal 3rd Edition) — and then restores it back to man. He cooperates with man to bring about the Eucharist, to continue His redeeming work in this world.

Jesus continues to desire working with man even when he fails; even when we spoil what we start. "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" (cf. Jn 21:15). Jesus doesn't ask why Peter denied Him; He doesn't blame Peter. He doesn't say, "if you love Me," he doesn't put conditions or manipulate Peter. With these questions, Jesus is saying to Peter, "I still want to work with you, I still want to cooperate with you." This is the logic of the Eucharist. Nothing is wasted or taken for granted. No one is excluded. Everything and everyone can be redeemed.

It is no wonder that the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life (cf. CCC 1324).



**KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE**

**Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow**

**May**

- 7 Christian Federation of Malaysia - Biennial General Conference
- 11 Feast day Mass – Church of the Good Shepherd, Setapak
- 11 Kagape Celebration – Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Klang
- 12 Meeting – KLAPC
- 13 Feast Day Mass – Church of Our Lady of Fatima, Brickfields



**MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE**

**Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul**

**May**

- 7 North Central Johor Vicariate Clergy Meet – St Matthew Church, Tangkak
- 7 Melaka Vicariate Pastoral Council Meeting – St Theresa’s Church, Melaka
- 9 MAJODI Centre Reporting Meeting
- 10 Vicariate Pastoral Councils Assembly – St Louis Church, Kluang

**Introduction to the Child Protection Manual (Tutela Minorum)**

KUALA LUMPUR: On April 12, 27 members from the Catholic Lawyers Society Kuala Lumpur attended a training session titled *Introduction to the Child Protection Manual (Tutela Minorum)*. This training session was presented by Fr Gregory Chan, head of the Diocesan Professional Standards Office.

The session focused on the Universal Guidelines Framework for Tutela Minorum, a document issued by the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors. Over the course of the session, Fr Gregory detailed these guidelines in the context of canon law and Malaysian law, specifically provisions of the Child Act 2001, Sexual Offences Against Children Act 2017 and the Persons with Disabilities Act 2008.

The participants were actively engaged in robust discussion and debate throughout the session. Apart from practical issues and concerns, deeper philosophical matters relating to the need to make the Church a safe place for the vulnerable were also discussed. The session left participants convicted of the importance of the mission to protect children in the Church. They also discussed the necessary next steps in fulfilling the requirements of the guidelines to better protect the most vulnerable and voiceless among us.

To quote the late Pope Francis, who unwaveringly advocated for the protection of minors, stating that it is a fundamental aspect of Christian testimony, “Where there is a child or a vulnerable person who is safe, there Christ is served and honoured”. **Dr Petrina Tan**

**Exploring Lent through children’s eyes**

KUALA LUMPUR: The liturgical and catechetical ministries of the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus recently collaborated to hold a unique and meaningful event specially designed for children aged 7 to 12. Titled *Exploring Lent – Children’s Way of the Cross*, the Lenten programme took place on April 12 and welcomed around 50 participants, including young children, their parents, catechists, and members of the liturgy team.

This special initiative aimed to help children connect more deeply with the Passion of Christ in a way that speaks to their young hearts and minds. In line with the Jubilee Year of Hope, the event also emphasised the message that the Way of the Cross does not end in sorrow, but rather, in the joyful hope of the Resurrection.

The day began with an interactive workshop where children and parents, guided by catechists, crafted their own crowns of thorns using brown paper and toothpicks. With beaming faces and enthusiastic hands, the children wore their handmade crowns, ready to begin their Lenten journey around the parish grounds.

At each station, the children paused to reflect on the love Jesus has for us and how we, in return, can show our love for Him. Each station was made relatable through simple life applications:

- *Station 4 – Jesus Meets His Mother:* Children were reminded of the importance of being obedient and loving to their own parents.
- *Station 7 – Jesus Falls a Second Time:* A call to not complain especially when facing challenges at school or not to feel discouraged and wanting to give up at losing a sport or game.
- *Station 14 – Jesus is Laid in the Tomb:* A beautiful reminder to have kind and generous hearts, like Joseph of Arimathea who gave Jesus his burial tomb.



The children participating in the Way of the Cross specially curated for them.



Adding a spiritual and serene dimension, the children were introduced to Taizé prayer, moving from one station to another, chanting the name of Jesus, led by a young guitarist from the parish choir team. This moment of prayerful reflection added a deep sense of reverence to the experience.

To bring the Passion of Christ closer to home, a small exhibit displayed simple props and informative write-ups, allowing children to touch the statue of Jesus on the cross and to learn more about the crown of thorns, the whip, the nails, and the inspir-

ing story of St Helena’s search for the True Cross.

The event concluded with the recitation of the Jubilee Prayer for Children, followed by a joyful potluck brunch lovingly prepared by parents and catechists — a fitting end to a morning filled with faith, family, and fellowship.

This enriching journey reminded all present, especially the young ones, that while Lent leads us through Christ’s suffering, it ultimately shines the light of hope, love, and resurrection into our hearts

**Musical production highlights faith amid life’s uncertainties**

PETALING JAYA: A compelling new musical production, *Good Shepherd: Dance with Me on Shifting Sands*, scheduled to be held from May 16 to 18 at Loyola Hall, Church of St Francis Xavier, invites audiences to reflect on the enduring presence of faith amid the turmoil of today’s world.

Inspired by the familiar image of the Good Shepherd in Psalm 23, the performance draws audiences into a poignant exploration of what it means to walk with Christ in a world marked by instability and change. Through music, movement, and storytelling, the production tackles key themes central to the human experience: marginalisation, care for creation, intergenerational relationships, and the anchoring role of faith.

The title *Shifting Sands* serves as a metaphor for the challenges faced in contemporary life — from war and displacement to environmental destruction. Against this backdrop of uncertainty, the musical portrays the Good Shepherd as a constant presence, walking beside individuals in both suffering and celebration.

Performed by a multigenerational cast

of 18 children and teens, 15 adults, and eight musicians and singers — ranging in age from 8 to 87 — the production captures the diversity and unity of the community. The ensemble brings to life stories of refugees, the displaced, and those struggling to find hope, while highlighting the urgent call to care for the Earth and build bridges across generations.

“This is not just a performance, but a shared experience,” said the production’s organisers. “It’s a call to reflect on how we can each navigate the shifting sands of our lives with faith, love, and resilience.”

The musical encourages viewers to not only watch, but to move, breathe, and listen — embracing the invitation to “dance” with the Good Shepherd, and to find rhythm in the midst of life’s unpredictability.

*Good Shepherd: Dance with Me on Shifting Sands* promises to be an inspiring experience, inviting all to rediscover the steady guidance of the Divine Shepherd and the transformative power of faith in community.

# Good Shepherd Musical

16 May 2025 (Friday) 8.30pm	17 May 2025 (Saturday) 8.30pm	18 May 2025 (Sunday) 3.00pm & 8.30pm
-----------------------------------	-------------------------------------	--

Loyola Hall, Church of St. Francis Xavier, PJ

ADMISSION

A love offering of RM20 per entry

# A celebration of unity,

## Archdiocese of Kuching

On April 16, the Cathedral of St Joseph was filled with clergy, religious, and lay faithful as Archbishop Simon Poh presided over the annual Chrism Mass.

Archbishop Simon opened his homily by highlighting that 2025 is the Jubilee Year of Hope, a sacred time inspired by Leviticus 25, marked by rest, renewal, and reconciliation. He called it “a time of grace... to return to the Lord and renew our relationship with one another, with creation, and with God.”

Quoting the second reading, “He loves us and has washed away our sins with His blood,” he reminded all that through baptism, every Christian is anointed and sent — called to live as a priestly, prophetic, and kingly people.

The archbishop then blessed the three holy oils used throughout the year:

- Oil of the Sick – for healing and comfort,
- Oil of Catechumens – for those preparing for baptism,
- Sacred Chrism – used in baptisms, confirmations, ordinations, and church dedications.

“These are not ordinary oils,” he said. “They are sacred instruments of the Holy Spirit’s grace.”

He thanked the priests for their Lenten ministry, especially for their presence during long hours of confession, and encouraged early communication for administering the Anointing of the Sick, saying, “We are human, but we strive to give our best.”

Recognising seminarians in attendance, he called on the faithful to pray for more vocations, saying, “We pray to the Lord of the harvest to send us shepherds after His



Archbishop Simon Poh blessing the holy oils.

own heart.”

He concluded with a powerful reminder:

“We are a priestly people, called to prayer.

We are a prophetic people, called to speak the truth in love.

We are a kingly people, called to bring

God’s values into the world.”

As the oils were distributed to priests to take back to their parishes, the message of the evening was clear: we are all anointed, we are all sent, and we each share in God’s ongoing work of healing and renewal.



Bishop Bernard Paul pouring the balsam oil into the Chrism.

## Diocese of Malacca Johore

On the evening of April 15, Bishop Bernard Paul presided over the annual Chrism Mass at the Church of St Theresa.

In his homily, Bishop Bernard drew attention to three key words found in the day’s Scripture readings — priests, ministers, and good news — describing them as the essence of the Christian mission and identity.

“These are more than just words,” Bishop Bernard said. “They are our RNR, our roles and responsibilities. They form our job description as followers of Christ. This is who we are.”

To be a priest of the Lord, he explained, means to share in the very life of Christ, a life deeply rooted in communion with the Father, with humanity, and with creation. Jesus lived in constant union with God, and from that deep relationship, He carried out His mission.

“We are called to live in that same bond

of love,” Bishop Bernard shared, “bonded to the Father, to one another, to creation, and to the world.”

He described this priestly identity as one of communion, a spiritual connectedness made possible through prayer and contemplation, which enables the priest to be fully present and united with God’s people.

Expanding on the second word, minister, Bishop Bernard reflected on what it means to participate in Christ’s saving work.

“To minister is to join in Jesus’ mission of healing and liberation, to free captives, give sight to the blind, comfort the mourning, and mend broken hearts,” he said.

He emphasised that priests are not just ministers by title but by action, men of participation, called to actively engage in building a better Church and a better world, in collaboration with the lay faithful.

“It is not my Church or your Church,” he reminded. “It is our Church, and together

we must serve and grow it.”

The third word, good news reminds all the faithful of their call to be a living proclamation of the Gospel. Just as Jesus journeyed from temples to villages, reaching out to both rich and poor, so too must priests and Christians today be men of mission.

“To be good news is to be a presence in the world, not to hide, but to go out, to include, to welcome, and to proclaim that God is love, God is merciful and forgiving,” he said.

He encouraged priests to never point to themselves but always to Christ, saying, “Our job is to point and say, ‘Behold the Lamb of God.’”

In closing, Bishop Bernard offered a heartfelt word to his brother priests:

“My dear fathers, never stop celebrating your ordination. Be proud of who you are. Rejoice in your calling, and never stop being faithful — faithful as priests, faithful as ministers, and faithful as the good news in every place you go.”

## Palm Sunday mime brings the Passion to life

PENANG: Palm Sunday at Risen Christ Catholic Church took on a deeper, more poignant tone this year. In addition to the traditional procession commemorating Jesus’ triumphant entrance into Jerusalem and the reading of the day’s liturgy, catechism students of various ages presented a powerful mime performance during the proclamation of the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

For many of the children, it was their first experience with mime — a theatrical form that communicates solely through ges-

tures and body movement, without words. Despite the challenge, they poured their hearts into the performance. Unknowingly, they bridged their silent expressions with the themes of the homily delivered by parish priest, Friar Esmond Chua, OFM, who spoke on humility, trust, and love as we enter Holy Week — the most sacred time in the liturgical year.

The mime brought to life key moments of Christ’s journey: His entry into Jerusalem, the Institution of the Holy Eucharist, and His Passion and Death. The congregation

was visibly moved as they experienced the Passion not only through Scripture, but also through the stirring visual narrative presented by the children. It was a moment where Christ’s presence was tangibly felt — His suffering deeply connected to the sins that led to His crucifixion.

Bernie Selva, the catechist who guided the students throughout the Lenten season and choreographed the performance, shared, “The Passion of Christ on Palm Sunday, to me, is a powerful paradox. On one hand, it is triumphant — Jesus enters Jerusalem to cheers and palm branches. On the other, it foreshadows betrayal and suffering. This tension mirrors my own spiritual journey. I often welcome Christ joyfully, only to let fear or weakness distance me from Him. Palm Sunday reminds us of the true cost of love — not comfortable love, but sacrificial, self-giving love.”

Several of the student performers reflected on their experiences.

Mark Jerome Bernard, 15, who portrayed Jesus, said, “I felt honoured and excited to play Jesus. Through the mime, I could sense His suffering — the pain, the torment. It helped me realise how immense His love is, that He would endure so much

for our sake.”

Hayden Choo, also 15, found portraying Pilate challenging. “It was uneasy to play someone who gave in to the crowd and condemned Jesus. It made me reflect on how often we give in to pressure or remain silent in the face of injustice.”

Grace Ann, 15, who took on the role of Mother Mary, was overcome with emotion. “Watching Jesus, my ‘son,’ suffer and carry His cross despite the pain was heartbreaking. I felt like crying. It made me understand Mary’s anguish and the depth of her love.”

Terry Thomas and Ethan Inesh, both 14, played the two thieves crucified beside Jesus, adding to the emotional depth of the portrayal.

For many in the congregation, the performance was not just a reenactment — it became a moment of reflection. One parishioner noted the stark contrast in the crowd’s behaviour: from singing “Hosanna!” with joy to shouting “Crucify Him!” just days later. “We are no different,” the parishioner said. “Like St Paul in Romans 7:15, we often don’t understand our own actions. We want to do good, but we end up doing the opposite.” **Stephanie Cheong**



The children who participated in the mime.

# renewal and service

Nearly 2,000 faithful gathered at Dataran Keuskupan Keningau on April 15 for the annual Chrism Mass, a significant celebration marked by the renewal of priestly promises and the blessing of the sacred oils used throughout the liturgical year.

In his homily, Bishop Cornelius Piong reminded all present — especially the clergy — of the heart of their vocation: to proclaim the Good News in the power and spirit of Christ.

“The priestly vocation is not lived by our own strength,” he said. “It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that we can truly serve in the Spirit of Jesus.”

Bishop Cornelius reflected on more than 30 years of the Diocesan Mission, which has focused on building a faithful and effective community that walks together in faith. He emphasised that pastoral activities in parishes must be directed towards realising this mission.

To do this, he stressed the importance of a deep relationship with Jesus, urging both leaders and lay faithful to constantly renew their spiritual commitment.

Bishop Cornelius drew from the final prayer of Jesus before His return to the Father, highlighting three core elements that guide the life of every Christian:

**Living in Union** – “Wherever we are,

## Diocese of Keningau



unity must be visible,” the bishop said. He urged families to be the foundation of loving communities, nurturing members to live in harmony.

**Protection Against Evil** – The bishop warned of the real presence of temptation and spiritual attack, particularly for those committed to living out their faith. He encouraged the faithful to be vigilant and prayerful, seeking protection in Christ.

**Living in Holiness** – He called on all to read, hear, and reflect daily on the Word of

God, which serves as a guiding light for the growth of parishes and the wider Church.

Following the homily, 27 diocesan priests and eight visiting priests from Indonesia stood before the bishop to renew the promises of their ordination—a solemn reaffirmation of their commitment to serve God and His Church faithfully.

The Mass continued with the consecration of the Oil of Catechumens, Oil of the Sick, and the Sacred Chrism. These oils, essential for the administration of the

sacraments, were presented by Fr David Gasikol, Fr Kennedy Nakudah Killin, and Fr Appolonius Yakis.

Bishop Cornelius concluded the Mass by encouraging the people to pray daily for their priests, acknowledging the challenges and responsibilities of the priestly vocation.

“Let us support our priests through prayer,” he said, “so they may remain faithful in building the faith of God’s people.”

## Diocese of Sibiu



Bishop Joseph Hi stirring the Oil of Chrism.

“Always give your best to our Mother Church!” These words from Bishop Joseph Hii set the tone for the celebration of the Chrism Mass at Sacred Heart Cathedral, where over 1,500 faithful gathered despite heavy rain. The annual liturgy brought together 24 priests from across the Diocese of Sibiu.

During his homily, Bishop Joseph thanked his brother priests for journeying from across the vast diocese to renew their priestly promises, a vow first made at their ordinations. He encouraged them to continue serving the people of God with faithfulness, courage, and compassion.

“Priests are gifts of God to the Mother Church so that His grace and sacraments continue to flow to the people,” he said. “Mother Church needs priests to redo what Christ has done.”

He also expressed deep appreciation to the laity for their presence and prayers, urging them to continue supporting their priests and to pray for him personally as he carries out his apostolic responsibilities.

The Chrism Mass, one of the Church’s most solemn liturgies, also included the blessing of the Oil of the Sick, the Oil of Catechumens, and the consecration of the Sacred Chrism — the oils used throughout the year for sacraments such as baptism, confirmation, anointing of the sick, ordination, and church dedications.

As the Church celebrates the Jubilee Year 2025: *Pilgrims of Hope*, Bishop Joseph reminded the faithful that this year also coincides with the Year of Sister Mother Earth and the Year of Holy Orders.

“Let us give thanks to the Lord for the gift of the priesthood,” he said. “Let us pray daily for our priests, who serve God’s people selflessly — often quietly and without recognition — giving their very best to our Mother Church.”

The Mass concluded with the distribution of the newly consecrated oils to representatives of parishes across the diocese, who will bring them home for use in sacramental celebrations throughout the year.

## Reflections on Christ’s final words draw parishioners closer to the Cross

PETALING JAYA: In preparation for Easter, the Church of the Assumption held a Lenten reflection titled *A Love That Endures – Echoes from Calvary*, focusing on the seven last sayings of Jesus Christ during His crucifixion.

The event, initiated by parish priest, Fr Leonard Lexson and organised by the church’s liturgical committee, drew a strong turnout from parishioners seeking a deeper spiritual encounter during Holy Week.

Held at the church on the evening of April 14, the reflection opened with a hymn and a brief introduction by Fr Leonard. Members of the liturgical committee then took turns meditating on each of the seven last sayings of Jesus, offering scriptural insights and personal reflections.

The session posed two central questions to attendees: “How can we use these words to become the best version of ourselves?” and “What can we take away from the words Jesus uttered, despite the excruciating pain He endured for six hours on the cross?”

Among the reflections was the first saying, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). This highlighted Christ’s profound capacity for forgiveness even in the face of suffering — a call for believers to also offer mercy in times of hurt or betrayal.

Another poignant moment centred on Jesus’ words to His mother Mary and the beloved disciple: “Behold your son: behold your mother” (John 19:26–27). This was interpreted as Christ entrusting His

mother to humanity, and a reminder for the faithful to honour and welcome Mary into their lives and homes.

Parishioners expressed appreciation for the meaningful session, which allowed them to connect emotionally and spiritually with the Passion of Christ.

“This was a small but significant step in our parish’s Lenten journey,” said a member of the organising committee. “It helped us better understand Christ’s suffering and the enduring love He showed on the cross.”

As the faithful prepared to celebrate the Resurrection, the echoes from Calvary continue to inspire lives shaped by forgiveness, compassion and hope. **Liturgical Committee, Church of the Assumption, PJ**



Fr Leonard Lexson giving a brief introduction.

# Dioceses launch *Perjalanan Salib*

The Catholic Church in Malaysia has launched the *Perjalanan Salib* (Journey of the Cross) as a spiritual preparation for the upcoming Malaysia Pastoral Convention (MPC) in September 2026, to be held in Johor.

The initiative unites all nine dioceses in a shared journey of faith, symbolised by nine crosses blessed and distributed at the Malaysian Catholic Youth Day (MCYD) on April 3, 2025, in Kota Kinabalu.

These crosses, decorated with hibiscuses, will travel through parishes and communities over the next 18 months, especially reaching out to the marginalised. Rooted in the spirit of synodality, the journey highlights unity, participation, and pastoral reflection.

Preparations include:

- Diocesan Pastoral Assemblies focusing on Family, Church, Ecology, and Society
- Regional gatherings in Sabah, Sarawak, and Peninsular Malaysia
- Youth involvement through MCYD

The journey will culminate at MPC 2026, shaping the collective vision for the future of the Malaysian Church.

Here are some highlights of the launch at diocese level.



## Diocese of Sibul

On the morning of April 12, during the 9:00 am Mass at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, the faithful gathered in communion to receive the Salib (Cross), marking the beginning of its sacred journey from Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.

A delegation of 40 youth received the Cross in Kota Kinabalu during the Malaysian Catholic Youth Day and brought it home to Sibul. Their participation reflects the active and vibrant role of youth in the life and mission of the Church.

Bishop Joseph Hii of Sibul, in receiving the Cross during the Mass, offered his heartfelt gratitude to the 40 young representatives, commending their spirit and leadership in carrying the Good News embedded in the Cross throughout the diocese.

In his homily, Bishop Joseph spoke about the presence of the Cross in our everyday lives, in moments of death, illness, and suffering. He emphasised how these experiences, though painful, often serve to draw people together, fostering unity and reconciliation within families and communities. In this same way, the Cross of Christ holds the power to reconcile us with God and with one another, uniting us as one family under the mercy and love of God.

He encouraged the faithful to encounter Jesus not just in symbols, but in the reality of the Cross and in the people around us, to truly experience His unconditional love as the Cross journeys to parishes, chapels,



The congregation walking in procession with the Cross.

communities, and movements throughout the Diocese of Sibul.

The Mass was celebrated by Bishop Joseph Hii and concelebrated by Fr Philip Hu, Rector of Sacred Heart Cathedral, along with Capuchin Friars Fr Raphael Samosir and Fr Francis Go, and Fr Fabian Kong.

Following the liturgy, people of all ages lined up in reverence to venerate the Cross, a touching display of faith and devotion.

Looking ahead, this Cross will journey across the Diocese of Sibul and eventually make its way to Majodi, Johor in September 2026. There, it will reunite with the other eight Crosses during the Malaysia Pastoral Convention scheduled for September 16–19, 2026 — a national gathering that once again celebrates our unity in Christ and our shared mission.

As the Cross continues its pilgrimage, it remains a living sign of Christ's love, calling the faithful into deeper communion and a renewed commitment to the mission entrusted to us.



The youth venerating the Cross.

## Archdiocese of Kuching



The congregation lifting their palms for blessing.

Archbishop Simon Poh launched Salib Malaysia during the Palm Sunday Mass on April 13.

In his speech, Archbishop Simon noted, "Palm Sunday is the beginning of the holy week before Easter, and today, 'walking' (*melangkah bersama kita*) with us is the Salib Malaysia that the young people and I brought from the MCYD in Kota Kinabalu

on March 31-April 6.

"Today is the first time we see, welcome, and engage with Salib Malaysia. It will be with us for 18 months, until next year, when nine crosses are united at MPC 2026.

"So, this cross will be sent to every parish, church, village and longhouse throughout Malaysia.

"I also take opportunity to thank the



Archbishop Simon Poh venerating the cross.

youth who are in front here, who helped us to carry the Salib Malaysia to our archdiocese.

"I invite all the youth to join them and accompany them to bring Salib Malaysia to every parish, village, chapel, long house in the archdiocese.

"Let us accompany the Salib Malaysia throughout the Archdiocese of Kuching."

## Diocese of Malacca Johore

"The Cross is not just about suffering, pain, or death. It is the greatest sign of God's love, mercy, and forgiveness. The Jubilee Year reminds us that it is a Cross of Hope," said Bishop Bernard Paul at the diocesan launch of *Perjalanan Salib* on April 11 at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart.

Before the celebration, the *salib* was assembled by parish youth who had attended the MCYD in Kota Kinabalu.

"Jeremiah and Jesus both faced rejection and threats, yet even in the darkness, some began to believe," the bishop shared. "Why do religious people become hostile? Fear, prejudice,

and jealousy can blind even the devout, leading them away from the God of love."

Bishop Bernard urged the faithful: "Don't just be religious. Encounter God. Let Him open your heart. The truth will set you free."

Citing God's words to Jeremiah and Jesus' trust in the Father, Bishop Bernard reminded all to look again at the Cross: "It is not the end. It is the beginning of hope, love, and new life."

The *salib* remained at the Cathedral until April 26 before being taken to the Church of St. Louis, Kluang, where it will stay until May 31.



Bishop Bernard Paul leading the congregation in prayer before the "salib".

## Diocese of Miri

On April 9, the *Perjalanan Salib* cross was venerated at the Church of St. Dominic and the Rosary. The Chrism Mass that evening was marked by a spirit of unity and solemnity, with Bishop Richard Ng presiding.

In his opening address, Bishop Richard warmly welcomed five visiting priests from Brunei and introduced the presence of the *Perjalanan Salib* cross.

"We are truly blessed tonight to have this special symbol with us," he said. "It is the Cross that unites us. Christ died on the Cross so that Jews and Gentiles might become one people. Through His death and resurrection, we are united."

Before the Mass began, Bishop Richard led the congregation in a rite of blessing over the cross:

Following the blessing, the bishop venerated the *salib*, after which the congregation knelt in reverence.

Bishop Richard concluded by inviting all faithful to approach the Cross at the end of Mass for personal veneration. "Come forward," he said, "touch the Cross, pray before it, and let it speak to your heart."



The congregation venerating the cross.

# Celebrating the Risen Lord

Dianne Kuseela Devi

KUALA LUMPUR: The Church of the Risen Christ (RCC) joyously commemorated its feast day on Easter Sunday, April 20. Prior to that, the spiritual journey began with three days of Masses from April 14–16. These special liturgies, led by parish administrator, Fr Frederick Joseph, featured homilies by Fr Jude Nirmal Doss from India, Fr Vincent Thomas, and former parish priest, Fr Edwin Peter.

Themed Masses guided the faithful through a period of reflection and repentance, building anticipation for the celebration of Christ's Resurrection.

The first day's theme focused on Mary of Bethany, who anointed Jesus with expensive ointment, symbolising the act of offering one's best to the Lord. Fr. Jude reflected on John 12:1-11, highlighting the importance of selfless devotion. He reminded the congregation that, just as "the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment" (Jn 12:3), our lives can radiate Christ's love and grace to the world (2 Cor 2:15). Fr. Jude also reflected on the Jubilee Year of Hope logo, interpreting the leaning cross as a symbol of faith, sacrifice, and enduring hope in Christ's redemptive love.

The second day's reflection, based on John 13:21-33, 36-38, contrasted St Peter's humility with the betrayal of Judas. Fr. Jude focused on Peter's repentance and trust in God's mercy, emphasising that while Peter faltered, he embraced his weakness and sought forgiveness. This

powerful lesson in humility and divine grace was a call for the faithful to trust in God's mercy, no matter their failings.

The final day of the triduum focused on Judas' betrayal of Jesus. Fr. Jude explored the possibility of mercy for Judas, noting that even at His arrest, Jesus still reached out to him, calling him "friend." The homily invited the faithful to reflect on their own potential betrayals of Christ — through greed, selfish desires, or neglect of faith — and to seek God's grace for strength to remain steadfast in love and truth.

Throughout the triduum, Fr. Frederick Joseph also shared important announcements. He introduced a new initiative to provide priority seating for the elderly and sick, ensuring their comfort during Mass. Additionally, he announced the installation of an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) and the formation of a Parish Medical Team to enhance the safety and wellbeing of the community.

The spiritual journey culminated in the Holy Week services, with the Easter Vigil on April 19 marking the baptism of six candidates from the KUBM (Bahasa Malaysia RCIA) group, who received the Initiation Sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation and Communion).

The Easter Sunday feast day celebration at RCC was an expression of the joy of Christ's Resurrection. It was a time of renewal, community, and shared faith, reinforcing the hope and unity of the parish as they embraced the boundless grace of the Risen Christ.



Fr. Frederick Joseph lowering the paschal candle into the water.



Parishioners lighting their candles.

## Letters to Editor

### The silence in Good Friday

Dear Editor,

The world stood in silence with the birth of the Messiah and again she stood in silence at His death. The silence that echoed through the world on Good Friday is the clearest message that was ever communicated. Yet many fail to understand the language of silence.

Silence is the language of God and the mystery of comprehending this silence depends a lot on our inner silence. Silence is the language of prayer which words cannot express; an inner dynamic communicated without sound. Silence reveals the truth and the truth is essential in being a disciple of Jesus Christ. Jesus said it is for this He came into the world and those who seek the truth, listen to His voice.

The Truth cannot be silenced. The Truth cannot be weakened. The Truth cannot be replaced. The Truth cannot be compromised. The Truth cannot be threatened. The Truth cannot be manipulated. The Truth cannot be killed. Seek God in the silence of your faith and the kingdom will be revealed.

The contemplative state of prayer is silence and in silence great intimacy is attained. Jesus always went to a quiet place to pray and in that silence, He was one with the Father. The Silence of the empty tomb communicates the victory over noises. With silence the divine communication continues till today and the stillness unfolds the mystery of God's love for humanity.

Silent night, holy night, all is calm amidst total chaos. Be still and know Jesus is the Saviour of the world, yesterday, today and forever.

Fr Mark Michael  
Kuala Kangsar

### When the Church feels full of hypocrites

Dear Editor,

"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." — Mark 2:17

"I don't go to church anymore, it's full of hypocrites."

It's a statement that echoes with disappointment. Sometimes, even pain. And on the surface, it sounds like a verdict. But beneath it, I often hear something else: a soul still searching, a soul in need of healing.

I've come to believe that when someone says this, it might not just be about hypocrisy. It might be a form of escapism, a shield from having to look deeper — into the Church, yes, but also into their own heart.

Sometimes, it's easier to walk away from the Church than it is to face the possibility that God might be calling us to change, to surrender, to heal. Sometimes, it's not hypocrisy that pushes people away, it's the fear of what grace might ask of them.

But I also wonder, have they truly met Jesus?

For many who have left the Church, the issue isn't just failure in leadership, or the wounds caused by others. It's that they may never have had a real encounter with Jesus. They may have known the Church in structure, but not in spirit. They may have attended Mass but never

experienced the power of the life in the Spirit, the healing of a good confession, the burning love in the Eucharist and the joy of true Christian fellowship. Without an experience of Jesus, the Church can feel like a hollow ritual. But with Jesus, even its cracks reveal His mercy shining through.

In the Gospels, we see two men betray Jesus. Judas turned Him in. Peter denied Him three times. Both failed but their responses were different. Judas, isolated and ashamed, turned inward and chose despair. Peter, broken but trusting, turned back and found mercy.

The Church isn't built on perfect people. It's built on those who fall and come back, again and again. If someone tells me the Church is full of hypocrites, I say yes, it's full of Peter moments. And Jesus never stopped building His Church on Peter, even after the denial.

Yes, there are Judases in the Church. But there are also saints in the making. There are those who fall and get back up. There are mothers who pray faithfully, priests who serve quietly, young people trying to live chastely in a world that mocks it, and wounded hearts learning to forgive.

This is the Church! Not perfect but graced. Not always clean but always being made new. If you've walked away because someone hurt you, I see you. If you feel the Church has disappointed

you, I get it. But please don't let someone else's failure rob you of your encounter with Christ.

The longer you stay away from the Church under the pretext of 'hypocrites,' the enemy rejoices. That's exactly where he wants you — disconnected, disillusioned, and drifting further from the very place where grace, truth, and healing are found. He wants to keep you from the beauty, the goodness, and the power that flow through Christ's Body, the Church.

Come back not for the people, but for Jesus. Come back because, even in a messy Church, His presence is real, His mercy is waiting, and He has never given up on you. Come back to your first love, if you've encountered Him before. And if you haven't, come and discover Him for the first time. He's been waiting for you. Like a bridegroom waiting for his bride, Jesus has been longing for your love — patiently, faithfully, tenderly. Pray and ask the Lord to fill you with His Spirit, and to awaken in you a desire to return, not just to church, but to Him. "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." (John 6:68) We don't go to church because we're perfect. We go because we're in need. We go because we've encountered Jesus and we want more of Him.

Damian Prakash  
Klang



Send your letters to ► [lettereditor@herald.com.my](mailto:lettereditor@herald.com.my)

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

# UN: Asian scam centre gangs expanding worldwide

VIENNA: Online scam operations rooted in Southeast Asia are expanding globally, according to a new report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

Titled *Inflection Point: Global Implications of Scam Centres, Underground Banking and Illicit Online Marketplaces in Southeast Asia*, the report warns of a growing criminal ecosystem spreading beyond traditional hotspots like Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and the Philippines.

"This reflects a natural expansion of the scam industry, but also a hedge against future regional crackdowns," said Benedikt Hofmann, UNODC Acting Regional Representative.

Run mainly by Chinese crime syndicates, these scam centres exploit hundreds of thousands of victims — both those defrauded and those trafficked into forced labour. The operations are likened to a "cancer" that relocates when treated, creating an interconnected ecosystem that threatens governance and sovereignty.



An Indonesian national who had worked at a scam centre in Myanmar walks on the tarmac upon arrival from Thailand, at the Soekarno-Hatta International Airport in Tangerang, Banten. (ucanews.com)

Workers at these centres lure victims through social media or dating apps, aiming to extract money through emotional manipulation.

The report cites the arrest of 77 people in Zambia, including 22 Chinese nationals, and widespread arrests in Nigeria, Angola, and

Namibia, highlighting the global reach of the crime.

Losses have reached US\$ 37 billion (RM162 billion) in East and Southeast Asia and US\$ 5.6 billion (RM24 billion) in the US, with US\$ 4.4 billion (RM 19 billion) linked to

scams originating from Southeast Asia.

The ecosystem is now powered by AI, deepfakes, encrypted apps, and blockchain. Platforms like Huione Guarantee (recently rebranded Haowang18), a dark-web-style marketplace based in Phnom Penh, are central to the operations. It has over 970,000 users trading stolen data, scam software, and money laundering services using untraceable in-system payments.

Online gambling is another avenue for laundering, using "white label" platforms that offer turnkey scam services including crypto payments and malware-loaded browsers to spy on victims.

While governments such as the Philippines have tried to curb offshore gambling, syndicates have adapted, rebranding as tech hubs or call centres, and spreading to new regions.

The UNODC warns that the scalability and complexity of these scams now rival traditional transnational crimes and that global cooperation is urgently needed to counter them. **AsiaNews**

## New ecclesiastical Province of Calicut



CALICUT, India: In a move that reflects the growing pastoral and missionary vitality of the Church in southern India, Pope Francis erected the new Ecclesiastical Province of Calicut, elevating the Diocese of Calicut to the status of a Metropolitan Archdiocese.

In an official announcement from the Vatican, it was also confirmed that Bishop Varghese Chakkalakkal, until now Bishop of Calicut, has been appointed the first Metropolitan Archbishop of the newly elevated archdiocese.

The new ecclesiastical province will consist of three dioceses:

- Archdiocese of Calicut (Metropolitan See)
- Diocese of Kannur
- Diocese of Sultanpet

The dioceses of Kannur and Sultanpet, previously part of the Ecclesiastical Province of Verapoly, will now become suffragan sees under the jurisdiction of the new metropolitan see in Calicut. **Fides**

## Philippines consecrates nation to Divine Mercy amid social, political polarisation

MANILA: In the face of deepening social and political polarisation, the Catholic Church in the Philippines consecrated the entire nation to Divine Mercy on Sunday, April 27, during the celebration of the Feast of Divine Mercy.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) had called on all churches across the country to observe the consecration through special prayers during Masses, framing it as a national act of faith and hope.

Cardinal Pablo Virgilio David, president of the CBCP, described the initiative as "a collective response of faith and hope" to the "serious challenges" confronting both the Philippines and the world.

These include "widespread corruption, the erosion of truth, the growing rejection of the Church's teachings on life and the family, as well as the threat of internal divisions and armed conflicts at the local and global levels."

"The national consecration will be a profound expression of our trust in the Divine Mercy, which remains our last refuge in these times of uncertainty and trial," the



cardinal said.

"We entrust ourselves, our Church, and our nation to God's infinite mercy, certain that in it we will find the healing, renewal, and hope we so deeply need," he added.

A special prayer was recited during the ceremony, imploring the Divine Mercy for the suffering caused by war, injustice, and the breakdown of social and moral values.

The prayer included the lines: "Jesus, with complete faith and trust in Your boundless ocean of love, we place ourselves under the protection of Your merciful care... Have mercy on us for the wars between nations and the terrors with which we torment one another. Have mercy on us for the widespread sin against the truth and the horrible sins against justice and human brotherhood."

The national consecration is inspired by the spirit of the Fifth World Apostolic Congress on Mercy, held in Cebu in 2024. There, the faithful reaffirmed their commitment to become "vehicles of the Lord's compassion" and "true messengers of mercy," emphasising the need for "works that translate the spirit of mercy into concrete acts."

Divine Mercy Sunday, established in 2000 by St John Paul II, is observed annually on the second Sunday of Easter. **LiCAS News**

## Family of jailed Chinese lawyer condemns secretive trial, police intimidation

CHENGHUA, China: The family of Lu Siwei, a prominent human rights lawyer in China, has accused authorities of denying him a fair public trial and intimidating his supporters.

On April 18, Lu was sentenced to 11 months in prison and fined 10,000 yuan (RM6000) by a Chenghua District Court in a closed-door hearing, after being charged with illegally crossing the border between China and Laos.

Lu, who was arrested in Laos in July 2023 while holding a valid US visa and passport, was attempting to join his family in the US. He was deported to China and detained until late October 2023, then formally arrested in October 2024.

His wife, Zhang Chunxiao, now in the US, said no public access was granted to the trial and Lu's friends were blocked from attending. Authorities reportedly changed the trial format at the last moment.

Lu, known for defending politically sensitive cases such as one of the 12 Hong Kong activists captured fleeing to Taiwan in 2020, was stripped of his legal license in 2021 and banned from international travel.

Rights groups have called his case a sign of China's growing transnational repression. Lu's supporters have reportedly been "invited for tea", a euphemism for police questioning and subjected to surveillance and intimidation.

Local activists reported heavy police



Chinese human rights lawyer Lu Siwei. (Photo/FORUM-ASIA)

presence near the courthouse during the trial. Lu is expected to appeal the verdict. **ucanews.com**

# Sudan enters third year of devastating civil war

KHARTOUM: As Sudan enters its third year of civil war, the human suffering has reached devastating levels. Tens of thousands have died, and over 14 million people are internally displaced, with more than 3.5 million refugees seeking safety in neighbouring countries.

The conflict, which erupted on April 15, 2023, pits the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF), led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, against the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led by Mohamed Hamdan "Hemeti" Dagalo. The violence has become widespread, with reports of airstrikes, drone bombings, and

looting destroying vital infrastructure and leaving millions without food, water, or shelter.

Particularly alarming is the situation in Darfur, where civilians in El Fasher, capital of North Darfur, are under siege. Reports from humanitarian sources describe severe shortages of food and water, and blocked aid supplies. A recent bombing and takeover of the Zamzam displacement camp by the RSF resulted in at least 500 civilian deaths.

Attacks on power and telecommunications plants have plunged vast regions into

darkness. Millions remain isolated, without communication or access to emergency services. Despite the SAF regaining control of the capital, Khartoum, much of the country remains unstable and unsafe.

The economic toll of the war has been equally severe. Sudan has lost an estimated USD33 billion (RM145 billion) in GDP. Once a growing economy, the country now faces mass factory closures, job losses, and inflation. According to government data, over 40 per cent of factories have shut down, impacting livelihoods and deepening poverty. **Fides**

## Antoni Gaudí, "God's architect," declared Venerable

VATICAN: More than 25 years after the beginning of the investigation for his beatification, the path to sainthood has been opened for him. A fervent Christian who led an ascetic life, the architect Antoni Gaudí (1852–1926) became venerable April 14 after Pope Francis approved a decree recognising the Catalan's heroic virtues.



The designer of the grandiose Sagrada Família in Barcelona was recognised as a Servant of God after the Vatican approved in 2000 the opening of an investigation into the cause of beatification, whose diocesan phase ended three years later. Besides the cathedral of Barcelona, Gaudí scattered several of his creations throughout the Catalan city and its surroundings, such as the Park Güell, designed for one of his patrons.

A practising and devout Catholic at the end of his life, Gaudí thus dedicated his last 14 years to imagining, drawing, and shaping the "cathedral of the poor" in Barcelona, the Sagrada Família, whose construction began in 1900 and will not be completed until 2026, a century after his death. "We especially remember the one who was the soul and the craftsman of this project, Antoni Gaudí, a brilliant architect and coherent Christian, whose torch of faith burned until the end of his life, who lived with absolute dignity and austerity," Pope Benedict XVI said during the dedication Mass of the Barcelona cathedral in November 2010.

This decision by Pope Francis thus opens the way for a possible beatification. For Gaudí to be declared Blessed, the Catholic Church must recognise a miracle that occurred through his intercession. Several miracles attributed to the emblematic architect of Catalonia — originator of many works in Barcelona and whose fame far exceeded Spanish borders — have been analysed in Rome in recent years. **LCI** (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)

## London's private clubs rally round to help the homeless

LONDON: Some of London's most exclusive private members' clubs — including Annabel's, George, Harry's Bar, and Mark's Club — are extending their five-star hospitality to those most in need, by providing meals for the Central London Catholic Churches Homeless Lunch Service at Farm Street Church in Mayfair.

Recently, Cllr Robert Rigby, the Lord Mayor of Westminster, visited the lunch service, where he rolled up his sleeves to serve a hearty meal to around 75 homeless guests. He was joined by staff from Annabel's, including deputy director Dario Mazzolli and managers Dimitris Panopoulos and Camillia Fabbio, who provided the food and volunteered during service.

Established in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, the lunch initiative is supported by Westminster City Council and has been sustained through donations from top-tier hotels like Claridge's, The Connaught, and the Mandarin Oriental. With the addition of London's prestigious clubs, the initiative can now continue serving up to 140 guests each week.

Led by Fr Dominic Robinson SJ, parish priest at Mount Street Jesuit Centre, the service emphasises dignity and respect. Homeless individuals, referred to as "guests," are served at tables by volun-



Lord Mayor of Westminster, Cllr Robert Rigby chats with guests.

teers, reinforcing the principle that everyone is deserving of care and compassion.

"Thanks to our food donors and an amazing band of volunteers, we can continue offering not just meals, but dignity," said Fr Dominic. "While our service took off during the pandemic, it's wonderful to see the community spirit continuing — and growing."

The day's menu included chicken, fried rice with vegetables, roast potatoes and gravy, followed by lemon cake and cream. Mayor Rigby engaged with guests as he served, reflecting on the diverse and often heartbreaking paths that lead to homelessness.

"Some may have struggled with addiction, others simply suffered bad luck or a family breakdown," said the Lord Mayor. "The hospitality industry's support has been extraordinary, and Fr Dominic deserves enormous credit for involving the clubs. Their commitment to the community should be applauded."

Following the lunch service, the Lord Mayor also toured the Cana Lounge Café, located in the church's basement. The volunteer-run café offers training, coaching, and practical skills development to help those affected by homelessness rebuild confidence and transition into employment. **ICN**

## From Syria to Notre Dame, an icon brought out of the flames

PARIS: A new chapel honouring Eastern Christians will be inaugurated at Notre Dame Cathedral on May 25, and with it, eight new icons will be installed. One of the icons is especially meaningful. It's of St Ignatius of Antioch, created by Nahmat Badawi, an iconographer from Aleppo,

Syria.

Badawi painted the icon during a time of deep crisis in Syria. The country has been suffering from 12 years of civil war. Between November 2024 and February 2025, while the Baathist regime of Bashar al-Assad was falling, Badawi worked in his

Aleppo studio with little more than determination and faith.

"We have had no electricity since the war began," he said. "My brother fled, my mother passed away, and my workshop was attacked by militias just weeks ago." Despite all this, the icon survived the destruction.

The image of St Ignatius, a Christian martyr from the second century, is different from traditional portrayals. In Badawi's version, the saint appears calm and majestic, facing tamed lions while holding the Gospel, a symbol of unshakable faith.

"Like St Ignatius, I refuse to give in to despair," Badawi shared. "I feel called to keep going, to show the pain of my people through my art."

Badawi says he cannot separate his art from the political and social chaos around him. He criticised both the former Baathist and later Islamist regimes, saying neither protected the Christian community. He notes that 85 per cent of Syria's Christians have left the country since 2011.

"Today, I feel like a stranger in my own land," the 64-year-old artist admitted.

In another recent project, "Icons of War", Badawi used rubble from bombed buildings, burnt wood, broken stone, as the base for his icons. Instead of saints, he painted the faces of anonymous Syrians, expressing their sorrow and strength. The work keeps to traditional icon style, but reflects the pain of modern war.

Badawi was in Paris recently, speaking at a conference at the Louvre Museum. His visit builds on a history of Franco-Syrian solidarity. In 2019, just after Notre Dame's fire, Maronite Archbishop Tobji of Aleppo donated a cross carved from the stones of his destroyed cathedral.

Now, Badawi's icon of St Ignatius will join that symbol. The French Catholic charity L'Œuvre d'Orient, which supports Christians in the Middle East, calls the icon:

"A powerful sign of unity between Eastern and Western Christians, and a reminder that faith knows no borders." **LCI** (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)



From right to left: Vincent Gelot, Syria director of the L'Œuvre d'Orient, Bachir and Nahmat Badawi. Bachir is the artist's brother and is also an icon restorer. (Photo: L'Œuvre d'Orient)

# Mary, Mother of God and model disciple

The month of May holds a cherished place in the heart of the Catholic Church. It is more than just a time of blooming flowers and gentle transitions into summer—it is, above all, the Month of Mary, a time dedicated to honouring the Blessed Virgin Mary as both Mother of God and Mother of the Church. This devotion is steeped in both theological depth and heartfelt tradition, inviting the faithful into a deeper relationship with Mary as a spiritual mother, guide, and model disciple.

The connection between May and Mary may seem, at first glance, symbolic or seasonal. Indeed, in ancient times, May was associated with fertility and new life, with Greeks and Romans dedicating it to deities of fecundity such as Flora. As Christianity spread, these pagan customs were not discarded but transformed and infused with new meaning that now centres on the one who bore life itself in her womb. The Church, in her wisdom, integrated cultural rhythms into spiritual realities, and thus May became the month to honour the woman who said a pure and powerful “yes” to God: Mary of Nazareth.

## Marian Devotion:

### A Tradition Through the Ages

The formal dedication of May to Mary gained traction in medieval monastic communities, growing more widespread by the 18th century, thanks in large part to the Jesuits. With papal encouragement from leaders like Pope Pius IX and Pope Paul VI, who emphasised Marian devotion in his 1965 encyclical *Mense Maio*, the tradition became deeply embedded in Catholic liturgical life.

In parishes and homes around the world, May is marked by special devotions — rosaries prayed daily, Marian altars adorned with fresh flowers, and heartfelt hymns sung in Mary’s hon-

our. Families set up prayer corners, statues are crowned, and processions wind through streets, carrying images of Mary draped in blossoms and ribbons. These outward acts of love and reverence express something much deeper: the faithful’s spiritual bond with the woman whom Jesus, from the Cross, gave to us all as our Mother.

Behind these expressions of piety is a profound theological foundation. As the Mother of Jesus, true God and true man, Mary is not just the mother of a historical figure. She is the Mother of God, a title that emerged from the early Church’s struggle to articulate the mystery of the Incarnation. Moreover, because Christ gave her to us through St John (“Behold your mother”), she stands as our mother too, interceding, comforting, and guiding us with a maternal care that is not earthly alone, but heavenly.

### The Mary of Devotion and the Mary of Scripture

Catholic theologian Fr Ronald Rolheiser once noted an important distinction between the “Mary of Devotion” and the “Mary of Scripture.” The Mary of Devotion is the one whose statues we venerate, whose intercession we seek through the Rosary, and whose apparitions in places like Lourdes and Fatima continue to inspire millions.

This Mary is tender, accessible, and near to those



stands silently beneath the Cross, not shaking her fist in anger, but sharing in the redemptive suffering

who suffer. She is often found not in the halls of power or prestige, but in the humble villages, speaking to children and the poor, those who, like her, are meek and lowly of heart.

Yet, devotion without depth risks sentimentality, or worse, superstition. Our love for Mary must always be anchored in the Mary of Scripture, the one presented in the Gospels as the model disciple, the one who listens, believes, and obeys. Her words at the Annunciation, “Let it be done to me according to your word,” are the foundation of her discipleship, a fiat that reverberates through her entire life, even to the foot of the Cross.

Mary’s greatness lies not just in her role as Mother of God, but in her radical openness to mystery, her capacity to trust without understanding, and her strength to suffer without resentment. When Jesus declares that “whoever does the will of God is my mother and my brother and my sister,” Mary does not protest or claim privilege. Instead, she continues to live out her quiet obedience, showing us that discipleship is not about status, but surrender.

She is the new Eve, whose “yes” unties the knot of Eve’s rebellion. The first Eve grasped at the fruit to know all things, to remove mystery. The second Eve embraced mystery, trusted the unknown, and gave life to the Saviour. In her acceptance, she did not demand clarity — only the strength to say yes.

### Mary at the Cross:

#### The Birth of a New Humanity

At Calvary, we see the culmination of Mary’s discipleship and her motherhood. She

of her Son. Her pain is not passive; it is active, generative, akin to a mother in labour. As Christ’s death opened the gates of heaven, Mary’s sorrow bore the weight of new spiritual motherhood.

One might see Calvary as the world’s labour ward — through suffering, something new is born. In this moment, Mary becomes not just the Mother of Christ but the Mother of all humanity. Her silent solidarity, her unwavering presence, her refusal to turn away — these are marks of true love and true discipleship.

### Living the Marian Spirit in Daily Life

Honouring Mary in May, then, is not merely a pious tradition. It is a call to transformation. It is an invitation to model her humility, her attentiveness to God’s word, her capacity to reflect deeply, and her courage to act. Through daily rosaries, songs of praise, and acts of service, we align our hearts more closely with hers.

Modern communities also embody her spirit through educational initiatives and works of charity, particularly toward women and children, reflecting Mary’s compassion and strength. These acts are not only devotional but deeply incarnational. They bring Mary’s virtues to life in the here and now.

### Crowned in Glory

May’s devotions culminate in the crowning of Mary, symbolising her as Queen of Heaven and Earth. But her queenship is not one of jewels and power — it is the crown of the woman who served, who wept, who believed. In crowning her, we honour not only her role but her virtues, her faith, and her motherhood.

Indeed, we are blessed to call her Mother. As this month unfolds, let us not only venerate her but also imitate her. May she lead us ever closer to her Son, helping us to echo her words in our own lives: “Be it done unto me according to your word.” **Agencies**



## Pope's prayer intention for May

# The dignity of work and working conditions: A call for change

Pope Francis' May 2025 prayer intention invites us to reflect on the dignity of work, urging that through work, people should find fulfilment, families should thrive with dignity, and society should be uplifted. Yet, the reality of work for many around the world is far from this ideal. Across Malaysia, workers, especially migrant workers, often face exploitation, unsafe conditions, and abuse — stripped of their inherent dignity. This situation is urgent and cannot be ignored.

### Shashi's Story - A Mirror of Systemic Failure

A few weeks ago, I met Shashi (not his real name), a 29-year-old migrant worker from South Asia, at the Health and Safety Advisory Centre in Penang. Shashi had been recruited by an agent who promised him a decent job in Malaysia. In exchange for this opportunity, Shashi had paid over RM7,000 by pawning his family's jewellery. He arrived in Malaysia in 2023, was placed in a restaurant as a kitchen assistant and night chef, working gruelling 12-hour shifts with only two days off every four months — later reduced to just two days off every two months. The working conditions were deplorable. Shashi had inadequate food, one toilet shared by 15 workers, and was forced to relocate to Penang under duress. His mental health began to deteriorate from the stress, and late last year, he endured both verbal and physical abuse from his employer. When Shashi tried to resign, his employer refused to return his passport unless he paid additional fees for his work permit and flight.

Now, Shashi lives in limbo, uncertain of his next steps but effectively trapped in a situation that mirrors the systemic issues faced by countless migrant workers. Sadly, his case is not unique.

### A Historic Echo: The 2002 POHD Case

It reminds me of a similar situation I encountered in 2002, when I was with the Penang Office for Human Development (POHD). That year, POHD took up the case of 22 Indian migrant workers whose wages were withheld. When the workers filed a court case, the employer retaliated by using their withheld passports to cancel their work permits and initiate deportation — so the case could not proceed. Through urgent intervention by Joachim Xavier, then head of POHD's migrant desk, the Home Ministry stepped in. The workers received new permits and regained their passports, a victory that was seen as historic at the time. Yet, 23 years later, Shashi's story reflects the unchanged reality for many migrant workers, highlighting the systemic failures that persist in addressing these injustices in our country.

### Malaysia's Labour Reality: Low Wages, High Insecurity

In reflecting on this reality, I turn to the wisdom of Dr. Michael Jeyakumar Devaraj, a physician who has dedicated his life to the poor and marginalised. He was a former parliamentarian and is currently the chairperson of Parti Sosialis Malaysia. Dr. Jeyakumar's insights provide a stark and valuable perspective on the dignity of work and the state of working conditions in Malaysia. According to him, the dignity of work involves a situation where the working person:

1. Engages in work that he or she identifies with and finds meaningful.
2. Has some degree of control over their working environment and the work process, with the freedom to innovate and make improvements.



**PRAYER PRISM**  
Fr Fabian Dicom

3. Is treated with respect and decency by others in the work environment.

Dr Jeyakumar shares that full-time workers in organisations like the PSM and some NGOs, as well as people employed in health and education, experience many of these features of dignity in their work. Yet, for many workers in Malaysia, this ideal remains elusive. Dr Jeyakumar highlights that many workers are simply performing tasks because they need the money, not because they find fulfilment in their work. They often find themselves in abusive or trying work environments, particularly in factories, estates, and construction sites, where they are forced to work overtime and, in many cases, are not paid their due wages.

He also points out that the presence of an estimated 4 million undocumented workers in Malaysia significantly reduces the bargaining power of the B40 (bottom 40%) wage earners, driving down their wages. The lack of enforcement of labour laws, particularly those outlined in the Employment Act, means that workers often fear speaking up about mistreatment, as they cannot afford to lose their jobs. The situation is equally grim for graduates, with only around 60,000 new jobs for tertiary-educated individuals being created annually, while 250,000 graduates enter the job market each year. This imbalance leaves graduates with limited job security and low wages, leading to precarious working conditions. Over the past two decades, real income for graduates has declined, and many find themselves in insecure employment, often working long hours without proper compensation.

### Toward a Fairer Economy: Living Wage Principles

Dr Jeyakumar offers a vision for a fairer society, one where everyone who wishes to work has the opportunity to do so and is guaranteed decent working conditions. He proposes that a fair society is built on the principles that:

1. Everyone who wishes to work should be able to secure a job that meets their and their family's needs.
2. The job should provide as many of the dignified features outlined earlier.
3. The pay should be a living wage, at a minimum.

A living wage, as Dr. Jeyakumar notes, can be adjusted downwards if the state subsidises essential goods and services such as health care, public transportation, and housing, or provides a universal pension for all who need it. He also emphasises that the Malaysian economy's growth over the past 50 years, while impressive in terms of GDP, has not translated into a fair distribution of wealth. Currently, the richest 5 per cent of the population controls 55 per cent of the national income, while the bottom 95 per cent receives only 28 per cent, and the remainder 17 per cent goes to the government. Dr. Jeyakumar suggests that a redistribution of wealth from the top 5 per cent to the bottom 95 per cent — whether through higher wages or social benefits — would stimulate demand and create more jobs, fostering a more equitable society.

### Technology and Unemployment

However, Dr Jeyakumar recognises that increasing aggregate demand alone will not solve the problem. He also cites the issue of technological unemployment. Advancements in technology have drastically reduced the number of workers needed to produce goods, leading to the displacement of workers in many industries. While this technological progress could lead to a better quality of life for all, it requires a radical rethinking of how work is distributed and compensated. Dr Jeyakumar advocates for a progressive reduction in the working week, so that the available work can be shared among all who need it, with increased wages to ensure workers can support their families while working fewer hours.

### Voices from the Front Line: Arjunan's Witness

Dr Jeyakumar's perspective is reinforced by the experience of Mr. A. Arjunan, a veteran in the labour rights movement who has worked extensively in the trade union sector. Arjunan's story witnesses the personal sacrifice and commitment required to stand up for the dignity of workers. He recalls his decision to leave a secure government job to join the trade union movement, motivated by a deep sense of justice for the underprivileged, particularly the working class. Arjunan's story beautifully captures the essence of dignity at work, demonstrating that work is not simply a means of survival but a vehicle for personal fulfilment and societal change.

Arjunan further highlights that dignity at work entails creating a workplace where all employees feel valued, respected, and treated fairly. A safe and healthy work environment, free from discrimination, bullying, and harassment, is essential to ensuring that workers can thrive. He stresses that workers must be seen as human beings with inherent worth, not merely as cogs in a production process. Yet, many workers, especially in the manufacturing sector, face environments that deprive them of this basic dignity, where they are treated as mere tools of production for profit, with little regard for their well-being or sense of purpose.

This lack of fulfilment in work is a significant issue, especially in an economy where workers are often denied job security and the opportunity to own the means of production. Arjunan shares his own experience of working with workers in the manufacturing sector, where many lack a sense of meaning in their work. For these workers, employment is not about pursuing a calling or making a meaningful contribution but simply about exchanging labour for subsistence to support their families.

Both Dr Jeyakumar and Arjunan stress the importance of work as a basic human right, one that provides individuals with a sense of purpose, independence, and dignity. Work allows individuals to contribute to society, develop skills, and experience fulfilment in their daily lives. Yet, the reality for many workers — particularly those in low-wage, insecure, or abusive jobs — is a far cry from this ideal. The gap between the potential for work to be a source of fulfilment and the grim realities many workers face justifies the urgency of Pope Francis' prayer intention for May 2025.

As we reflect on these insights, it becomes clear that the call to humanise work and make it a source of dignity is not just an ideal but a necessity. In a world where economic systems prioritise profits over people, it is essential

that we, as a society and a Church, advocate for fair wages, safe working conditions, and respect for the rights of workers. This means ensuring that work is not merely a means of survival but a means of flourishing, where each person can find meaning, purpose, and dignity. The fight for the dignity of work is a fight for the dignity of every human being, and it is a fight that must continue until the systems that oppress workers are dismantled and replaced with just, equitable alternatives.

### Catholic Social Doctrine - from Rerum Novarum to Francis

The social teachings of the Church have long championed the rights of workers and the need for just working conditions, echoing the belief that work is not just a means of survival but a pathway to human dignity and fulfilment. From Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* in 1891 to the more recent teachings of Pope Francis, the Church has consistently called for a society that recognises the inherent worth of every worker and ensures that labour is a source of dignity, not exploitation.

### Responding as Church: Six Concrete Paths

Here's how we can respond:

- **Accompany:** Establish Worker Service Centres in parishes or dioceses, staffed by full-timers who assist with legal aid, contract disputes, health, safety, and wage recovery.
- **Revive Movements:** Support or resurrect groups like the Young Christian Workers (YCW) — a global Catholic movement which, though no longer active in Malaysia, once trained countless lay leaders in the "See – Judge – Act" methodology. YCW's mission among workers is just as urgent today.
- **Model Justice:** Ensure all Church institutions (schools, parishes, retreat houses) pay living wages and offer humane work conditions to their staff.
- **Form and Teach:** Embed Catholic Social Teaching on labour, justice, and dignity into catechesis, RCIA, and youth ministry.
- **Advocate:** Collaborate with unions and NGOs for policy reform - including abolishing unjust union balloting systems therefore giving workers an automatic and statutory right to unionise, advocating for better social protections, and improving enforcement mechanisms.
- **Celebrate Work:** Preach boldly about Jesus the worker, honour Labour Day in our liturgies, and integrate workers' voices into our community life.

### Conclusion

Most of us reading this, I believe, may feel removed from these stories. But every day, we benefit from the labour of workers we rarely acknowledge: the cleaner at our office, the delivery rider at our gate, the foreign domestic worker next door.

Their hands build our lives. Their silence hides our comfort.

Let us no longer look away. Let us hear their cry. Let us be the Church that Jesus envisioned — not seated in comfort, but walking alongside the ones He called "blessed."

We give thanks for Pope Francis' prophetic witness and pray that his vision for a human centred economy will continue to inspire the Church. His teachings now form part of the Church's living social tradition, urging us to carry his legacy forward.

Fr Fabian Dicom is the National Director of Caritas Malaysia

## Vincent D'Silva

**J**OHOR BAHRU: In a dazzling celebration of history, tradition, and pride, SMK Infant Jesus Convent (IJC) will commemorate a significant milestone on the evening of August 30 this year, as the school celebrates its 100th anniversary.

The milestone will be honoured in a grand reunion dinner, bringing together alumni, staff, former teachers and students from across the decades. The event, to be held at Restaurant Pekin Daiman 18 Golf Club in Taman Johor Jaya, will be a heartfelt tribute to the state's first girls' school. It honours the school's pivotal role in shaping generations of women and its significant contribution to the local community's educational and cultural landscape.

Founded in 1925 by the Sisters of the Infant Jesus, IJC was the first school of its kind in Johor, created to provide girls with formal education at a time when opportunities for women were limited.

Over the years, the institution has earned a reputation not only for academic excellence but also for nurturing strong values and empowering young women to become leaders in various sectors.

Speaking to *HERALD*, the school's alumni president, Antonette Oliveiro, 83, recalled the school's humble beginnings, when it started as a small mission with just a handful of students.

"One hundred years ago our founders had a vision – to offer girls the same opportunities as their male counterparts. This vision has evolved into a legacy of strength, resilience, and success, not just in academics but in every facet of life," she said, her voice brimming with emotion.

She went on to say that they celebrate this milestone with pride and gratitude, acknowledging the tireless efforts of those who have come before us and those who continue to support its mission.

She said the centenary celebration has meaning for former students as they have seen how the institution metamorphosed from a school set amid a *lalang*-marred landscape to well-manicured grounds on which three freshly painted beige and yellow buildings now stand.

"The convent has groomed many leaders who went on to do well in government, politics, judiciary and the corporate sector, and who have lived up to the school's motto 'Simple in Virtue, Steadfast in Duty,'" enthused Antonette.

She said that IJC was the first girls' school in Johor which went on to establish a tradition in excellence by grooming students whose integrity and dedication arose from having a good, all-round education.

According to Antonette, the 100th anniversary will also commemorate the school's long history and tradition that has produced many individuals who have served and are still serving the community.

"Many past and present students will remember a beloved school that held so many memories treasuring the dedication and hard work of the IJ Sisters, lay principals and teachers," she added.

The school was led by the Infant Jesus sisters until 1977, when Ramakrishnan Pillai became its first lay principal for the secondary section, followed by Ramlah Mohamad, who became the head of the primary school in 1983.

The school transcends racial, religious, and class distinctions among students and teachers. What truly matters is the commitment to universal humanitarian values, which are embraced and upheld by all.

Meanwhile, alumni committee member



# Infant Jesus Convent — A century of legacy



**Antonette Oliveiro,**  
School Alumni President.

Rosemarie Lee Swee Hong, 79, said, like many missionary schools, the convent school achieved prominence not only in sports, but also in academic and co-curricular activities.

Rosemarie, who also taught in the school, mentioned that the Convent has undergone numerous transformations, adapting to the changing educational landscape while maintaining its core values.

"The school has expanded its curriculum, modernized its facilities, and embraced new teaching methodologies, but its focus on empowering young women through education remains unchanged," she said.

Rosemarie expressed that the glow of the upcoming anniversary celebrations



**Rosemarie Lee Swee Hong,**  
Alumni committee member.

reflects the enduring spirit of Infant Jesus Convent — a school that has empowered generations of women to dream big, act with integrity, and make a meaningful impact on the world.

Without hesitation, she emphasised that for the school's alumni, the 100th anniversary is not only a celebration of its history but also a reaffirmation of the values that continue to guide them as they confront new challenges in the century ahead.

"The 100th anniversary of Infant Jesus Convent is more than just a reflection of the past; it is a promise of an even brighter future, where women will continue to rise, lead, and make an impact, just as they have for the past century," she affirmed.

Rosemarie highlighted that this historic

moment provides a perfect opportunity to reconnect with old friends and reminisce about school memories. Additionally, the event aims to raise funds for upgrading the school's infrastructure.

The school's journey began in 1925, when three nuns and two teachers opened the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus in two rented shophouses on Jalan Ibrahim. With a starting enrolment of just 83 students, the school quickly grew. By 1947, the student population had risen to 590.

Impressed by the school's impact, the late Sultan Sir Ibrahim and Sultanah Rogayah generously donated a piece of land for the construction of a proper school building. The new school opened in 1927, and the late Sultan also donated a white Carrara marble statue of the Immaculate Conception, which became the centrepiece of the school's frontage.

Originally admitting both boys and girls, the school made a pivotal shift in 1938 when it became an all-girls institution. In 1936, special Malay classes were introduced to meet the requirements of the Education Department.

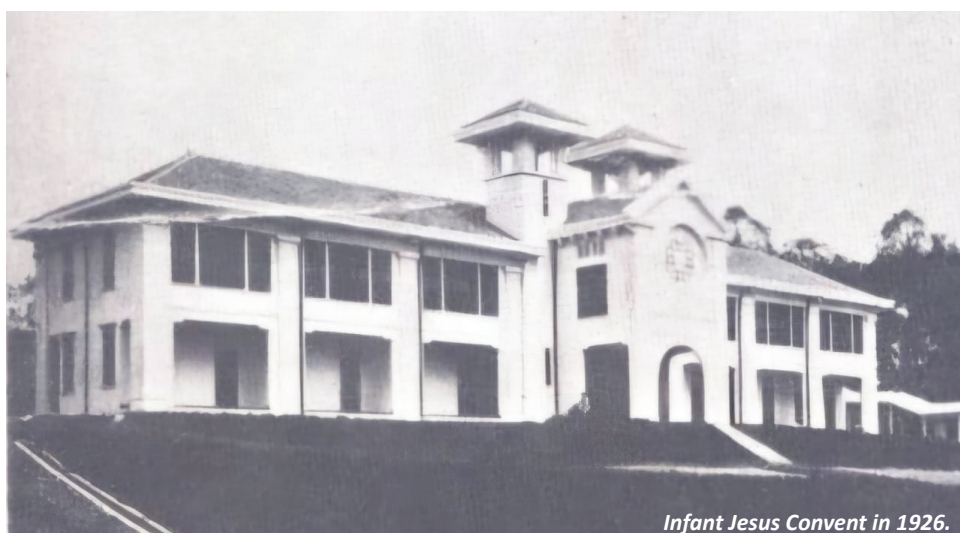
By 1939, the school registered students for the Senior Cambridge examination for the first time, achieving a remarkable 100 percent pass rate.

In 1959, the school was divided into primary and secondary sections, and the school's building was redesigned to reflect gothic motifs, adding to its distinct architectural charm.

The school's luminaries include former International Trade and Industry Minister Tan Sri Rafidah Aziz, Toh Puan Rahah Razak, the mother of former prime minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and former New Straits Times columnist Adibah Amin.

The school also counts among its notable figures the late former Prime Minister Tun Hussein Onn, the late Tunku Tun Maimunah Sultan Ismail, and Fauziah Ismail, the former head of the New Straits Times Press art gallery.

As Johor's first girls' school celebrates its centenary, the legacy of the Infant Jesus Convent continues to shine brightly, an enduring testament to the power of education and the transformative potential of young women. Here's to the next 100 years of shaping lives, breaking barriers, and inspiring generations to come.



Infant Jesus Convent in 1926.

# Francis shook up the Church and the world

From the moment Jorge Mario Bergoglio chose the name Francis upon his election as pope in 2013, you knew he was going to be different.

Never had a pope adopted this name – which is surprising given how St Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) lived the Gospel values in his life and community.

Shunning the ostentatious papal paraphernalia and lodgings, Bergoglio's spartan lifestyle and personal simplicity endeared him to many.

But it was the new Pope's radical approach that caught the attention of those seeking deeper change in society.

As a longtime activist, I was taken up by five key areas where he made a striking difference.

**1. Trenchant criticism of unbridled capitalism**  
At the second World Meeting of Popular Movement in Bolivia in 2015, Francis lashed out against unbridled capitalism and damage to the ecosystems, which was brutally punishing so many people.

Behind this suffering and destruction, he said, was a stench from the "dung of the devil" – the unfettered pursuit of money.

"Do we realise that that system has imposed the mentality of profit at any price, with no concern for social exclusion or the destruction of nature? ... let us not be afraid to say it: we want change, real change, structural change."

This system is by now intolerable, he said: "Farm workers find it intolerable, labourers find it intolerable, communities find it intolerable, peoples find it intolerable ... The earth itself – our sister, Mother Earth, as Saint Francis would say – also finds it intolerable."

The Pope called for a different kind of globalisation – a change in our lives, in our neighbourhoods, in our everyday reality – that could affect the entire world.

Global interdependence calls for global answers to local problems, he said. "The globalisation of hope, a hope which springs up from peoples and takes root among the poor, must replace the globalisation of exclusion and



## Sunday Observer

ANIL NETTO

indifference!"

This strident criticism of unbridled capitalism prompted many to broaden their understanding of Christian theology.

**2. He welcomed the voices of liberation theology**

So, it was not surprising when Francis rehabilitated liberation theologians who had been cast in the wilderness for decades for their "heresy".

This theology, which contemplates the plight of the poor, had been viewed with suspicion during the Cold War years for

threatening "the sacramental and hierarchical structure" of the Church.

But in 2015, the founder of liberation theology, Gustavo Gutierrez, was invited as a key speaker at a Vatican event.

In 2015 as well, 35 years after his assassination, Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador was finally beatified. He had paid with his life for his outspoken defence of the poor. Romero was canonised three years later. If not for Francis, who knows how long the slain archbishop's case would have languished.

In doing so, the Church gave real meaning to the call to liberate people from poverty and to challenge the idolatry of money in the mindless pursuit of profit.

For too long, the focus of the Church was on a narrow salvation from personal sin rather than on poverty. But poverty and inequality are often the result of unjust structures – a serious social sin.

So, there ought to be no contradiction between the personal and the social in the message of redemption. After all, Jesus Himself said He had come to proclaim "the Good News to the poor" and "liberty to captives".

Only six months before Francis passed away, the Bishop of Rome bid farewell to Gutierrez, in a glowing tribute.

Another liberation theologian, the Brazilian Leonardo Boff, who was once censured and silenced by the Church, was also given a new lease of life.

Boff had seen that the Church needed to be decentralised so that the Gospels could be rooted and blossom in a variety of local cultures.

**3. He made more people aware of the ecological crisis**

Boff's concerns are reflected in a couple of key Vatican documents, notably Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

In 1997, Boff published a book *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, which linked liberation theology to the ecological challenges of our era. His work increasingly focused on the global ecological crisis.

Some even speculated that Francis' landmark *Laudato Si'* had some input from Boff. In *Laudato Si'*, the Bishop of Rome highlighted pollution and climate change, the water crisis, loss of biodiversity and a decline in the quality of life.

The Bishop of Rome also pointed to a breakdown of society and scandalous global inequality, along with weak responses to all these problems. In sounding the alarm on climate change, Francis played an instrumental role in waking up many to the urgency of the climate and ecological crises.

**4. Marginalised communities**

Soon after he took over as pope, Francis reached out to migrants and indigenous people from around the world. In this world of plenty, he constantly pointed to the exclusion of so many people from the 'banquet'.

In 2019, indigenous people from South America were hosted at the Vatican. This move drew flak from more conservative Catholics, pushing them closer to the Christian right, which has allied itself under US President Donald Trump.

Francis was unfazed. He persisted in reacting with compassion to other marginalised and forgotten groups as well, like the LGBT community, the sick and prisoners.

His concern for the victims of violence, persecution, war and carnage led him to express concern for warring groups in Sudan, victims of war in Ukraine and those suffering from the carnage unleashed by Israel on Gaza.

This concern for "the other" rattled many

Christians, who held a more traditionalist view within the confines of the old familiar Church. Many of them drifted to the conservative right where they found new allies among Christian Zionists, especially those in the US.

May these Christians read the Bible in a new light and discover that Francis' compassion for the migrants, the dispossessed, even Creation itself, is deeply rooted in the words of Jesus and the rest of Scriptures.

**5. A new way of seeing the Church**

In many ways, Francis propelled forward Vatican II, which was convened by the great John XXIII in the 1960s, to its logical conclusion.

His vision of a decentralised and synodal Church recognised the universal character while celebrating the diversity of its people and cultures.

This is the Church of the poor, the "field hospital" and the Church on the periphery. This is the Church that those working on the margins of society can identify with.

Francis also saw the Church in constant dialogue with people of other faiths. And many of them recognised his sincerity in reaching out to them. It is perhaps no surprise that many Christians from other denominations and people of other faiths, or none, reacted with deep sorrow at Francis' demise.

In our darkest moments as activists, as Christians on the ground, we were comforted by the thought of Francis shaking up world leaders in the corridors of power.

Unfortunately, Francis left us in the stillness of Easter Monday, before he could see his vision – the vision of the Kingdom – fully realised.

But just as Jesus' followers received the power of his Spirit after his Resurrection, we too must allow the Spirit to use us to usher in a new kingdom, where the last shall be first.

The best way we can honour Francis' life and legacy is to work towards real structural changes and compassion in our lives, our local communities, our country and our world.

Come, Lord Jesus, may your kingdom come!

**Anil Netto is a freelance writer and activist based in Penang. He believes we are all called to build the kingdom of God in this world.**

"This is me."

These three simple words from the soundtrack of one of my all-time favourite movies, *The Greatest Showman*, rings as a familiar anthem for many of us. In the movie, we see a dreamer who rises from poverty, yet beneath the showmanship lies the real struggle; the human desire for approval, the ache for recognition, and the delusion that success and fame will finally make us feel enough. In the movie, the main character soon comes to realise that his true treasure was never in the applause of the crowd, but in the loving faithfulness of his family and in the dignity of those he initially saw just as pawns for success.

I am confident, all of us at one time or another, is or has been, the greatest showman. Sometimes we are so good at hiding what is really going on inside, we show the world what we think it wants to see. I don't think we intentionally make a decision to deceive nor set out to paint a portrait of a rosy life – sometimes I think we just don't know how to cope, and the best way of dealing with things is to sweep it under a rug and put on the "everything is perfect" mask – that sooner or later becomes part of our identity.

Christians (in my opinion) are particularly good at this kind of pretending. We show up at church on Sunday with our best face forward and don't want anyone to know the action - packed drama that unfolded after we yelled at our kids and argued with our husband just before stepping out of the car at the church parking lot. We Instagram our reflections, prayers and devotions – but we also don't talk to our mom, that aunty and this uncle. We hang holy images all around our homes – but we also go all week complaining about that priest, how unfriendly he was and how the other priest was too strict. We go through the motions and know all the textbook answers - yet we hide the disconnect we feel with

## The greatest showman

ourselves and with God.

I think this especially resonates when we actively serve in church. We tend to think we need to be as perfect as Jesus. That is a tall order. So, we resort to putting on a mask. I can relate! I for one, always felt like I had to have it together, I wanted to be the strong one for everyone else, I was not able to have my own problems and I was a professional at making life look like it was a breeze. But after a while, I began to lose my footing on what was genuinely me, and what was for show. I remember reading somewhere, pride does not always look like arrogance; sometimes it looks like striving to appear perfect because we're terrified of being seen as broken.

If you have ever watched *Desperate Housewives*, you would know Bree Van de Kamp. To me she is that picture-perfect woman; great homemaker, poised, elegant and effortlessly in control. There's something captivating about the way she keeps it all together regardless of how her world is falling apart. But she is fictional! Sometimes I have to remind myself, Bree does not have a pile of dishes piling up, or a toddler screaming because he cannot find his favourite car, or white hair sprouting from stress, or a house that looks like a tornado has touched down. And that's okay, real life is messy, and I'm slowly but surely learning to embrace the beauty in that.

I think many times, we too become performers in our own lives, setting "fictional" expectations for ourselves. We want to be admired, appreciated, and even envied. But if we are really honest, that pursuit leaves us empty. Maybe it is because what we really crave isn't attention but love. It is not applause, but acceptance. And no amount of human validation can satisfy a soul that was made for divine communion. As I

continue to reflect on this, I am slowly starting to realise that from a Christian perspective, revealing our brokenness is not a sign of failure but an act of courage and faith. It's a way of saying, "I trust God more than I trust myself."

It surely is not easy, but when we allow others to see the cracks in our armour, we make room for Christ's power to shine through. In fact, I think many times it is our vulnerability that often becomes the very bridge God uses to connect us with others. It is in our struggles, when shared with humility and honesty, that become testimonies of God's faithfulness. We all carry struggles within ourselves that we try to keep hidden, whether insecurities, doubts, habits we're not proud of, because we fear that there will be whispers of us not being good enough. But many, like us, struggle financially, battle addictions, have broken hearts, broken relationships, have health issues, we all sin. (I probably just sinned like two minutes before writing this line). But that is reality, whether we believe it or not, everyone is struggling with something and sometimes the most powerful connection comes when we are brave enough to admit that we are not as put-together as we seem.

Let us remember that time and again, the Bible reveals how God works most powerfully through weakness. Moses had a stutter. Elijah was suicidal. Job went bankrupt. Noah was a drunk. Peter denied Jesus. Paul called himself the "chief of sinners." Yet these broken vessels became instruments of God's glory – not because they were flawless, but because they surrendered.

In fact, Jesus Himself did not hide His pain. He wept, He grew weary and in Gethsemane He cried out in distress. In His vulnerability, we see the humanity of our God who understands

suffering. If Christ, the epitome of perfection, the Son of God, was not ashamed to show His weakness, then we, too, can be honest about ours.

In the end, showing our struggles isn't about seeking pity or attention – it's about giving glory to God. It's about creating real connections in a world that desperately needs authenticity. And it's about becoming vessels of healing, comfort and hope.

I write this article from a place of healing, not perfection. It serves as a reminder to myself and anyone who needs to hear it, there is beauty in our struggles because it's there that we rely on God. The world may tell us to hide our pain, but Jesus invites us to bring them into the light. Not so we can be shamed by it, but so we can be set free. Because freedom doesn't come from our performance; it comes from His grace. Let's take off our masks, step off the stage of self-promotion and into the freedom of grace. Let us be bold enough to say, "This is me", and trust that our Father in heaven smiles back, proudly, and says, "and this is the you I have and will always love!"

**Tianne Ramona Pereira identifies first as a Catholic daughter, sister, wife and mother. From years in the media industry, she eventually started and continues to run her own businesses while teaching part-time. She has been actively serving in church for as far back as she can remember and is involved in various charities.**



## A Blessed Life

TIANNE PEREIRA



Fr Ron Rolheiser

# Seeing spring and Easter

In my mid-20s, I spent a year studying at the University of San Francisco. I had just been ordained a priest and was finishing a graduate degree in theology. Easter Sunday that year was a particularly gorgeous, sunny, spring day, but it didn't find me in a sunny mood. I was a long way from home, away from my family and my community, homesick, and alone. Almost all the friends I had made during that year of studies, other graduate students in theology, were gone, celebrating Easter with their families. I was homesick and alone and, beyond that, I nursed the congenial heartaches and obsessions of the young and restless. My mood was far from spring and Easter.

I went for a walk that afternoon and the spring air, the sun, and the fact that it was Easter did little to cheer me up, if anything, they helped catalyse a deeper sense of aloneness. But there are different ways of waking up. As Leonard Cohen says, there's a crack in everything and that's where the light gets in. I needed a little awakening and eventually it was provided. At the entrance of a park, I saw a blind beggar sitting with a cardboard sign in front of him that read: It's springtime and I am blind! The irony wasn't lost on me. I was as blind

as he was! For what I was seeing, it might as well have been Good Friday and raining and cold. That day, sunshine, spring, and Easter were wasted on me.

It was a moment of grace and I have recalled that encounter many times since, though it didn't alter my mood at the time. I continued my walk, restless as before, and eventually went home for dinner. During that year of studies, I was a live-in chaplain at a convent that had a youth hostel attached to it and the rule of the house was that the chaplain was to eat by himself in his own private dining room. So, even though that wasn't exactly what a doctor would have ordered for a restless and homesick young man, I ate dinner alone that Easter Sunday evening.

But the resurrection did still arrive for me on that Easter Sunday, albeit a bit late in the day. Two other graduate students and I had made plans to meet by the ocean at nightfall, light a fire, and celebrate our own version of the Easter vigil. So, just before dark, I caught a bus to the ocean and met my friends (a nun and priest). We lit a large bonfire (still legal in those days), sat around it for several hours, and ended up confessing to each other that we'd each had a miserable Easter. That fire did for us

what the blessing of the fire the evening before at the Easter vigil hadn't done. It broke the spell of restlessness and self-absorption which had blinded us to everything outside ourselves. As we watched the fire and talked of everything and nothing, my mood began to shift, my restlessness quieted, the heaviness lifted. I began to sense spring and Easter.

In John's account of the Resurrection, he tells the story of how, on the morning of the first Easter, the Beloved Disciple runs to the tomb where Jesus has been buried and peers into it. He sees it is empty and that all that remains are the clothes, neatly folded, within which Jesus' body had been wrapped. But since he is a disciple who sees with the eyes of love, he understands what this means; he grasps the reality of resurrection and knows that Jesus has risen. He sees spring. He understands with his eyes.

Hugo of St Victor once famously said: Love is the eye. When we see with love we not only see straight and clearly, we also see depth and meaning. The reverse is also true. It is for a good reason that after Jesus rose from the dead, some could see Him and others could not. Love is the eye. Those searching for life through the eyes

of love, like Mary of Magdala searching for Jesus in the garden on Easter Sunday morning, see spring and the Resurrection. Any other kind of eye, and we're blind in springtime.

When I took my walk that Easter afternoon all those years ago in San Francisco, I wasn't exactly Mary of Magdala looking for Jesus in a garden, nor the Beloved Disciple fired by love running off to look into the tomb of Jesus. In my youthful restlessness, I was mostly looking for myself, and meeting mostly my anxious self. And that's a blindness. When we are caught inside ourselves, we're blind, blind to both spring and the Resurrection. I learned that lesson, not in a church or a classroom but on a lonely, restless Easter Sunday in San Francisco when I ran into a blind beggar and then went home and ate an Easter dinner alone.

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

## Rising to glory on Easter Monday

Having risen from a well-deserved afternoon nap on Easter Monday, I routinely, and somewhat groggily, checked my phone only to see a message stating that Pope Francis had died. I immediately rechecked but the multiple messages from different sources showed that the inevitable had happened. I needed to sit down in silence to take it all in...and it is still a work-in-progress.

I have lived through five popes: Popes Paul VI, John Paul I, John Paul II, Benedict XVI and finally Francis.

Pope John Paul's pontificate was long and impactful, and lasted through my teens, seminary years and, as well through my early priesthood, including my four-year sojourn in Rome as a graduate student. Pope Benedict came next but most recently, it was Pope Francis who won my heart. To me his simple approach, without the baggage of the frills and fancies in attire, lifestyle, residence and his whole mode of living out his life, even in terms of how he wanted his funeral to be, was that of a true servant-leader.

"Let the Church always be a place of mercy and hope, where everyone is welcomed, loved, and forgiven." This quote of his, early in his pontificate, had me reflecting on the nature of the Church. He reminded me that the church doors needed to be opened wide for all to enter. The reality is that we are all sinners, at different stages of our journey, all needing a place of welcome and acceptance, to experience forgiveness and love in a community. Sometimes, the Church has been portrayed by both leaders as well as laypersons, within and out, as a haven for the 'already saved', a 'closed community' for only the 'good and worthy'. But in Francis, we saw so clearly how the Church should be. He reminded me of the father of the Prodigal Son, ready to embrace everyone with open arms, welcoming them home with a fatherly smile. He wasn't afraid to court controversy in his welcome. He welcomed people of all faiths, the poor and marginalised. His openness

to the gay community raised eyebrows and concern, but it helped us all see that no one is outside the love and mercy of God, no matter whatever labels others have placed on them. We all belong!

His personality was enough to make persons welcome and at ease, rather than being tense and rigid. I saw this in a Biblical meeting I attended in Rome where, despite the lateness of the hour, he lingered on longer than he should at the audience, as there was another group waiting. He discarded the prepared speech, saying we could read it later and spoke from the heart in a simple but heartfelt manner. My only regret from that meeting was that because he was running so very late, I didn't get a chance to shake his hand or get nearer to him physically. Again recently, in Singapore, it was so heart-warming to see him characteristically embracing children and the elderly before the Mass with genuine warmth.

He didn't distinguish between the mighty and the poor – to all he was an open personality. He said what needed to be said, but always with love. What you saw was what you got – and I saw him as a father who cared rather than a figure on a papal throne. I delighted in the stories of his forays especially in his early years, going out in disguise to meet the poor. The fact that he went to the optician, himself and lived in Casa Santa Martha rather than the Apostolic Palace, showed me a man who desired to stay in touch with himself and the ordinary person.

He exuded joy! In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, he set out his hopes and plans for the Church, starting with the theme of the Joy of the Gospel. As I read his work, I was so glad that he wrote in simple terms that I could and actually wanted to read, rather than in heavy theological jargon that would be relegated to scholars and libraries. His style of talking and writing were simple and down-to-earth, speaking to the hearts of people and not just their minds.

Of course, he had his enemies! Not

everyone agreed with or liked him but he actually allowed opposing views and encouraged a spirit of conversation and dialogue, rather than silencing his critics. Some of his critics were vicious and seemed to attack his very person, but he allowed them their say. He brought a new spirit of openness and dialogue and, especially through the recent Synod meetings, taught us as Church, to have a culture of Listening. And he himself listened!

He listened to the poor, in particular. Not in an abstract distant way, but he frequently had conversations with people who were in difficult situations. The fact that he had frequent telephone conversations with the parish priest in Gaza shows his desire to hear first-hand, and to commiserate with persons on the margins. His calls for peace in Gaza, Ukraine and elsewhere have fallen largely on deaf ears but that didn't deter him from continuing to be an apostle of peace.

He listened to women. Yes, the Church has always been seen as patriarchal but Francis listened to women and promoted their cause. Perhaps, not as much as some may have hoped but he certainly heard and promoted the feminine voice – as seen in some of his appointments of women to positions of responsibility.

He listened too to the cries of the earth. While recent popes had begun to address ecology, his Apostolic Exhortation on the climate crisis, *Laudato Si'* (and its recent sequel *Laudate Deum*) brought the attention of the world to the festering ecological crisis that some chose to ignore or deny. While much needs to be done, he has made the clarion call which has been picked up well beyond the Catholic world.

He listened to Christians of all persuasions. He built bridges in the course of his pontificate and his recently expressed desire to work towards a common date for Easter with the Orthodox churches shows his conviction that a common, united witness was vital to be

credible in the world.

He listened to people beyond the Christian faith.

The response to Pope Francis' death from non-Catholics says a lot about the impact he had. Being in the cathedral and seeing so many persons of different faiths coming to sign the Condolence Book, reading the messages of condolences in the media, makes me realise yet again his relevance, not just for Catholics. He reached out to everyone. He saw the need to extend the hand of friendship, peace and reconciliation to persons of all faiths and none, respecting their faith and culture and this was reciprocated. Together with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar in Egypt, Sheikh H.E. Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, Pope Francis issued a document on *Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together* when he visited the UAE in 2019. This is perhaps unprecedented, but Pope Francis saw the need to work together with people of all faiths for peace, as we are all children of God. His vision was not closed, but wide and open to all people. Truly, he was Pope for the world.

I could go on and on – there are so many facets of Pope Francis that have touched my mind, heart and life. Living out his legacy is what we all need to do, to continue the unfinished work. I pray that the next Successor of St Peter will continue to trail-blaze in the footsteps of Jesus.

*Requiescat in pace, noster Papa Franciscus!*

**Fr Gerard Theraviam** is the parish priest of the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist in Kuala Lumpur, as well as the Spiritual Director to the World Community for Christian Meditation, Malaysia.



**As I was Contemplating**

FR GERARD THERAVIAM

# Little Catholics' corner

## Rest In Peace Pope Francis 1936 - 2025

Let us recite one "Our Father", one "Hail Mary" and one "Glory Be" for Pope Francis. Don't forget to colour the picture.



Dear children,

I believe that many of you are saddened to hear of the passing of Pope Francis. His Christian example has been an inspiration to countless people.



Children, let us take a moment to read some of the words of Pope Francis.

He once said, "if we walk in hope, allowing ourselves to be surprised by the new wine Jesus offers us, we have joy in our hearts, and we cannot fail to be witnesses of this joy".

Pope Francis reminded us that Christians are joyful; they are never gloomy. "God is at our side. We have a Mother who always intercedes for the life of her children."

"Jesus has shown us that the face of God is that of a loving Father. If we are truly in love with Christ and if we sense how much He loves us, our heart will "light up" with a joy that spreads to everyone around us."

Eternal rest grant unto Pope Francis, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him.

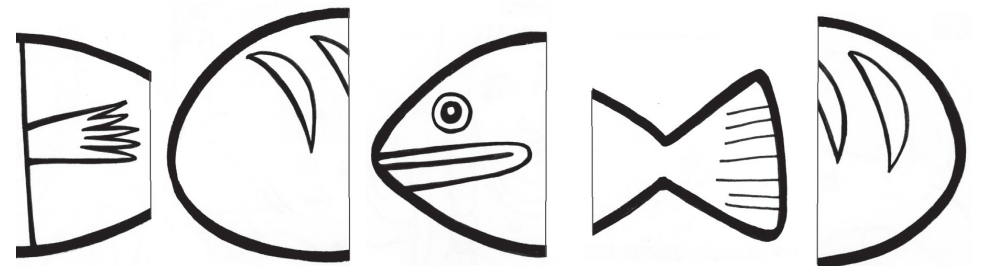
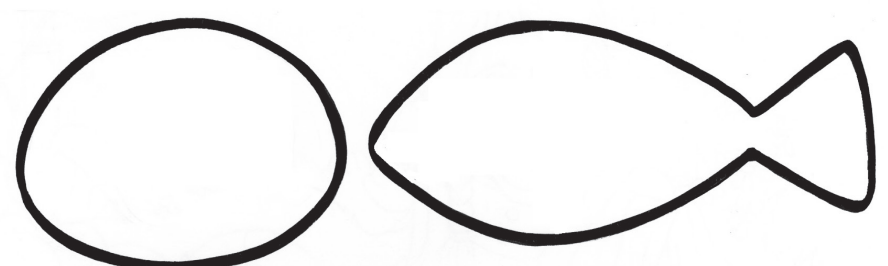
Aunty Eliz

Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask Him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. (John 21:12-13)

Cut along the bread and fish image and paste it in the picture provided.



22 18 21 17 21      15 11 19  
 ---      ---      ---      ---      ---      ---      ---      ---  
 14 25 18  
 ---      ---      ---  
 16 20 23 15 12 17 13 10 17 21  
 ---      ---      ---      ---      ---      ---      ---      ---      ---  
 12 15 14 12 25      10 24  
 ---      ---      ---      ---      ---      ---      ---  
 24 20 21 25  
 ---      ---      ---      ---



What is today's Gospel reading about?  
Sort out the letters by their numbers to fill in the blanks.



# SFX's Lenten vigil challenges youth in an immersive PASSION ENCOUNTER

By Amelia Lim

**P**ETALING JAYA: The combined youth ministries of the Church of St Francis Xavier (SFX) successfully hosted a unique overnight Lenten Vigil from John 3:16 - *Will You Stay Awake With Me?* on April 11 and 12.

The event was a landmark achievement for the parish. Unifying all SFX youth ministries for the first time, the vigil represented an unprecedented undertaking in scope and scale for the community, the first of its kind ever seen at the church.

Inspired by the renowned *Oberammergau Passion Play*, the vigil gave participants an immersive journey through the final hours of Jesus Christ's life. Attendees witnessed moving depictions of the Last Supper, Passion, Death, and Entombment, thoughtfully staged across diverse settings, utilising both indoor and outdoor areas of the church grounds.

The interactive nature pushed beyond observation; participants were challenged to symbolically stone Jesus during His journey and were urged to become part of the crowd calling for His crucifixion, prompting deep personal reflection. Interspersed with these dramatic portrayals were periods of spiritual engagement, featuring moving Praise and Worship sessions and contemplative Taizé prayer, guiding participants through the emotional and spiritual arc of the night.

The visually captivating experience was further enhanced by costumes, life-size sets,

a specially constructed 12-foot by six-foot cross, dynamic lighting, evocative music scoring and sound, creating a deeply spiritual and atmospheric journey.

This ambitious, large-scale production was conceived, planned over six months, and executed by the youth of SFX, highlighting their dedication, creativity, and collaborative spirit with the support of parishioners.

Parish priest, Fr Alvin Ng, SJ, the spiritual director for the event, reflected on the experience: "Witnessing our youth pour their hearts into bringing the Lord's Passion to life, including the challenging interactive moments and periods of beautiful prayer, was truly inspiring."

He added, "This vigil wasn't just a play; it was an invitation for everyone, especially our young people, to enter more deeply into the mystery of Lent and encounter Christ's profound love and sacrifice in a powerful, personal way. The successful execution of an event of this magnitude showcased the capabilities and commitment of the youth of today"

Reflecting on his role as Jesus, **Duncan Joshua Dennis** said: "Embodying Jesus, especially His vulnerability during the Passion, while surrounded by peers involved in these intense, interactive scenes, was humbling. It pushed me beyond just acting. There was a tangible connection, a shared spiritual energy throughout the night. My prayer was simply to be a conduit for His message, hoping everyone felt that personal call to 'Stay Awake With Me' deep in their hearts."

Participants also shared the moments that moved them most deeply throughout the

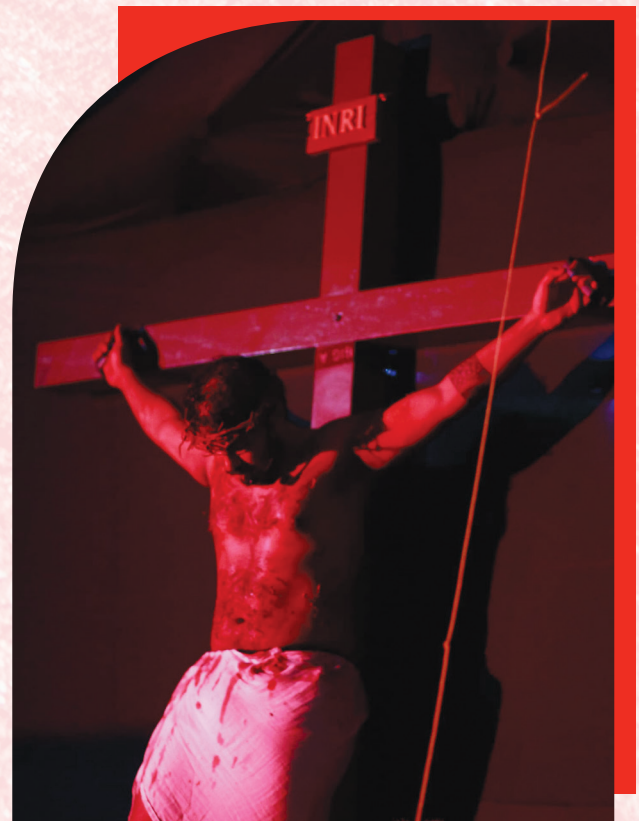
night. For some, the Taizé prayer proved a space of unexpected release. **Calvin Anak Nyibos** (23) described, "The part that impacted me the most was during the Taizé prayer, especially the examination of conscience, when we wrote all our sins on the paper. Somehow, I felt humbled that I could name my wrongdoings and surrender them to God tonight."

Others were struck by the Washing of the Feet. **Justin Heng Jin Ming** (23) shared, "I felt the unworthiness, but also God's immense love for us — that He chose us. The person washing our feet was Jesus Himself through His representatives."

**Samuel Lee** (23) described the moment he walked alongside Jesus carrying His cross as the most impactful part for him: "Seeing how He was whipped and dragged by the Roman soldiers, — it was heartbreaking. He took our place, and that sacrificial love moved me deeply."

The symbolic act of throwing paper stones — representing personal sin — struck a chord with **Amelia Xaviour** (25), who reflected, "No matter how much negativity we throw at Jesus, the only thing He gave us back was love. It moved me, and it taught me something I want to live by — to respond with love, always."

During the Crucifixion scene, **Joel Elvion Sitorus** (20) felt the message come alive: "I've heard the Passion story many times be-



fore, but after seeing it in real life, it changed something within me. I feel like I've become more faithful after this."

And for some, it was the stillness afterwards that brought the message home. **Mary Joanne James** (23) said, "The most impactful part for me was the discussion session. It allowed me to reflect properly on the play. Everything came back to me in that moment — that Christ sacrificed Himself, and now I can stand here free, free from my past sins."

Offered free of charge, the vigil welcomed youth aged 16 - 25, providing an accessible opportunity for spiritual renewal and community fellowship during the sacred Lenten season. The event successfully fostered prayer, growth, and a deeper understanding of faith among participants, leaving a lasting impact on the youth and the wider parish community and setting a new benchmark for youth-led initiatives at SFX.



Passover - Dipping of bread.



Shadow play.



The walk.



Peter's denial.



Betrayed with a kiss by Judas.



He meets Veronica.



Weeping women.

# Lenten outreach: Altar Servers and BECs in action

KUALA LUMPUR: The altar servers from the Church of Christ the Light, Desa Jaya; Chapel of Christ the King, Selayang Baru and Chapel of Our Lady of Lourdes, Sungai Buloh, united in a beautiful act of love and service by reaching out to the residents of Sivananda Home.

With the blessing and unwavering support of our beloved shepherd, Fr Peter Anthony, the Lenten outreach became a heartfelt mission to bring Christ's compassion to life. Ministries such as the Parish Integral Human Development (PIHD), Society of St Vincent De Paul (SSVP), and the Liturgy provided their full support, in ensuring the success of this initiative.

Led by Joel and Patrick, the head servers from Christ the Light and Christ the King respectively, the young servers spent a joyful day with the boys of the home. Upon arrival, they served lunch, touching hearts with their gentle presence. Laughter and joy filled the air during a fun-filled game session, forging bonds of friendship and warmth.

The visit to the orphanage made Holy Week deeply significant for the servers, who became the very hands and feet of Christ,



Altar servers carrying the provisions to Sivananda Home.

offering smiles, companionship, and love to the vulnerable.

Before departing, Joel and Patrick presented food rations graciously sponsored by PIHD and SSVP to the orphanage manager,

Manickam, concluding the visit with a heartfelt goodbye.

Parallel to this effort, the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) at the three parishes also engaged in acts of service and compas-

sion throughout Lent. The BEC coordinators and their core teams came together to feed the hungry, share meals, wash the feet of the elderly, and gathered in homes for the Way of the Cross.

In each act, they revealed the heart of Christ — serving the vulnerable, uplifting one another in prayer, and living out the Gospel with humility and grace.

The BECs continue to play an essential role in fostering a deep sense of family and unity within our parish communities. They encourage active participation in the Church's mission, especially in reaching out to the poor and sowing seeds of peace and love in the wider community.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all our BECs for their steadfast compassion and faithfulness. Through their quiet presence, attentive listening, and visits to the homebound and elderly, they truly embody Christ's love.

The continuous guidance and inspiration from Fr Peter Anthony, BEC Animating Team (BECAT), and BEC Co-Ordinating Team (BECCOT) have been instrumental in nurturing and strengthening the spirit of our BECs.



Serving lunch.



Everyone having a joyful time during the game session.

## Stella Maris International School's Lenten Almsgiving to support dialysis patients

KUALA LUMPUR: In the spirit of Lent, a season marked by prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, Stella Maris International School, Damansara (SMIS) once again demonstrated its commitment to charitable outreach by raising RM8,000 for the National Kidney Foundation of Malaysia (NKFM).

This Lenten initiative formed part of the school's annual Kidney Awareness Day charity drive, which involves students, parents, teachers, administrative staff, and well-wishers. Over the past nine years, SMIS has raised more than RM111,821 for the NKFM, even continuing its efforts steadfastly during the challenges of the COVID 19 pandemic.

Chairman of the School's Board of Governors, Dr Tarcisus Chin, expressed his gratitude for the community's enduring support. "It is heartening to witness the generosity of the SMIS family and our wider community, culminating in this meaningful contribution to NKFM. This initiative is our way of showing that we care and that we are here to help," said Dr Chin during the cheque-presentation ceremony.

In addition to fundraising, the initiative



aims to raise awareness about kidney disease. As part of the programme, students attended presentations addressing the global challenges faced by renal patients, highlighting the importance of early intervention and preventive care. The school dedicates a day each year to Kidney Awareness in conjunction with World Kidney Day, during

Stella Maris International School, Damansara presented RM8,000 from generous donors to the National Kidney Foundation at the School's 10th Annual Cross-Country Run on 12 April 2025.

which students, teachers, and staff wear red in solidarity with NKFM.

Educational activities such as video presentations and quiz competitions on kidney health further engage the students and enhance their understanding of the issue.

This year's cheque-presentation was held during the school's 10th Annual Cross-Country Run on April 12, adding a vibrant community element to the occasion and aligning the event with the Lenten spirit of compassion and service.

# Korean Catholics pay tributes to ferry tragedy victims



South Koreans pay homage to victims of the 2016 MV Sewol tragedy that claimed 304 lives, mostly children on a school trip, in this file image. (ucanews.com)

SOUTH KOREA: About 300 people joined a memorial programme, including a Mass in the South Korean capital Seoul, to pay tributes to the victims of the deadly MV Sewol ferry capsized in 2016.

The April 16 programme marked the ninth anniversary of the tragedy that claimed 304 lives, mostly children and teenagers.

“Let the souls of those who died in the Sewol ferry disaster become the salt that purifies the world, the torch of conscience,” said Catholic Fr Bernard Sang Ji-jong of Uijeongbu Diocese, who led the Mass.

The programme was jointly organised by various Church-run organisations, including the Justice and Peace Committees of Seoul Archdiocese and Uijeongbu Diocese. It was themed *Remember and Stand in Solidarity*.

During the Mass, the names of the 304 victims were called out one by one to pay respect to them.

“The victims will enjoy eternal life in the arms of God, so they do not need names, but their names will be with their friends on this earth,” said Fr Bernard Sang Ji-jong, who celebrated the Mass.

He asked the participants to pray and hope that “the pain of the Sewol Ferry disaster will never be repeated.”

Some family members of the victims also joined the programme.

“I meet many priests and nuns when I go to places where solidarity is needed. I get comfort

and strength from the church for being there for us,” said Jeon In-sook, the mother of the victim, Lim Kyung-bin.

She said her daughter was alive when the Coast Guard rescued her after the ferry capsized, but she did not survive because of the delay in medical support.

“Instead of being transported by emergency helicopter, she was transported by boat after four hours and 41 minutes, and died. Those responsible (for the delay) have not been punished,” she regretted.

Apart from Seoul, churches in various places in South Korea organised memorial programmes on the anniversary.

The South Korean government of President Park Geun-hye faced criticism following the deadly disaster due to poor rescue measures.

The MV Sewol ferry, with 476 passengers onboard, sank off the southern island of Jindo on its way from Seoul. A total of 304 people died, most of them children and teenagers, on a school trip.

The tragic sinking was largely blamed on overcrowding and the ship’s illegal redesign. Corruption and lax safety standards were also blamed for the accident.

Many still believe that the tragedy could have been avoided had the Sewol’s captain and crew not instructed the passengers to remain on the vessel despite the risks. [ucanews.com](http://ucanews.com)

# Catholics mourn central India’s popular indigenous archbishop

BHOPAL: Thousands of people joined the funeral service of retired Jesuit Archbishop Pascal Topno of Bhopal in central India on April 9, hailing the indigenous Church leader’s simplicity and love for his people.

Archbishop Topno died of age-related ailments at a Church-run hospital on April 6. He was 94.

Topno led the Bhopal archdiocese, based in the Madhya Pradesh state capital, for 13 years until his retirement in 2007.

A statement from the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI), a body of Latin rite bishops in India, said the prelate was known for his “simplicity, wisdom, and deep spiritual insight.”

“He was regarded as a living saint by both the people and the priests in the archdiocese,” said Fr Maria Stephan, former public relations officer of the archdiocese.

“He was extremely supportive, encouraging, and collaborative with his priests,” said



Fr Stephan.

“He was so humble and travelled by train in the general compartments like ordinary people, avoiding the air-conditioned coaches,” the priest said.

“He never carried money. Sometimes, while travelling long distances for pastoral visits, his driver had to pay for their tea or drinking water,” the priest said.

“After hearing about such incidents from the driver, the procurator would keep money in the car before each journey. Upon returning, the bishop would provide precise details of the expenses. Such was his accountability,” Fr Stephan said.

The prelate also travelled abroad “only when necessary and spent most of his time with his people,” said the priest who worked with him.

Binu Varghese, a Catholic, said the archbishop “talked to us like an ordinary person, always with a smile. He was never in a hurry and always listened to people patiently until they finished speaking,” said a Church member. [ucanews.com](http://ucanews.com)

## MEMORIAM

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



**Andrew Ng Su Boon**  
Called Home to the Lord  
on 23 January 2025

### 100th Day In Loving Memory of

You taught us strength,  
you taught us grace;  
In every memory,  
you’ll find your place.  
So rest in peace dear Daddy,  
we’ll carry your love every single day.  
Though we part with tears in our eyes,  
your spirit in us forever lies.

“Precious in the sight of the Lord is  
the death of his faithful servants”  
**Psalm 116:15**

Lovingly remembered and deeply  
missed by children, grandchildren, siblings, relatives and loved ones.

### 21st Anniversary In Loving Memory Of



**Anne Clara d/o Stephen**  
Departed: 2nd May 2004

21 years have passed, yet  
not a single day have you  
left our mind & hearts.  
Sadly missed & fondly  
remembered by  
her children,  
grandchildren, close  
relatives and friends.

### 10th Anniversary



**Dato Senara Bakti  
Robson Miranda**  
Departed: 3rd May 2015

“Grief is the Price  
We Pay For Love.”  
Always in our Hearts &  
Dearly Missed by  
wife, Datin Edith, Children  
and Grandchildren.

### 24th 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.

Because of the  
tender mercy of our God,  
whereby the sunrise  
shall visit us from on high  
to give light to those  
who sit in darkness  
and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet  
into the way of peace.”

Luke 1:78-79

## NOTICE

The cost for  
placing a  
memoriam  
is RM150 per  
column.

For enquiries,  
please contact us:

Tel/WhatsApp:  
03-2026 8291

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

## BE FORMED AND INFORMED

SUBSCRIBE TO



We provide news, commentaries and teachings on the Catholic Church.  
Get the physical copy of *HERALD* delivered to your doorstep.  
You can also subscribe for your loved ones.

Subscription Rates:

COUNTRY	YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION
Malaysia	RM220
Singapore	RM1,400

For enquiries, please contact:

**HERALD The Catholic Weekly**

5, Jalan Robertson, 50150 Kuala Lumpur

Tel/WhatsApp: 03-2026 8291 | E-mail: [advertisement@herald.com.my](mailto:advertisement@herald.com.my)

Website: [www.heraldmalaysia.com](http://www.heraldmalaysia.com)

# Honouring the legacy of Pope Francis

Following the passing of Pope Francis, our local prelates have expressed sorrow and offered heartfelt tributes to the late Pontiff, remembering him as a shepherd who led with compassion, humility and a tireless commitment to justice and peace. Their reflections honour his legacy as a spiritual father who profoundly shaped the Church in the modern world.

**CARDINAL WILLIAM GOH** of Singapore reflected on Pope Francis' unwavering commitment to the Church, noting that even in his final days, he remained actively engaged. From his hospital bed, he continued shepherding the faithful and offered Easter blessings despite his frailty.



"Pope Francis never spared himself in serving the Church and the people to the very end," Cardinal William said. "He lived out his ministry as a true pastor, the Good Shepherd after the heart of Christ."

Known for his closeness to the people, Pope Francis champi-

oned the poor, the marginalised, and the vulnerable. He rejected condemnation, offering instead compassion and patience, guiding others to experience Christ's grace.

"He gave people hope, encouragement, and compassion," Cardinal William noted. "He revealed the heart of Jesus and taught us to live the Joy of the

Gospel even amidst suffering."

Under his leadership, the Church became a powerful witness to truth and love, marked by inclusivity, interfaith dialogue, and environmental advocacy. "Pope Francis was truly a figure of hope and peace," Cardinal William said. "We thank God for His gift of Pope Francis to the Church. May he rest in peace."

## ARCHBISHOP ASIMON POH

of Kuching expressed deep sorrow following the sudden passing of Pope Francis, calling the pontiff a "shepherd with a human heart" who profoundly shaped the modern Catholic Church and inspired leaders around the world.

"I felt a deep sadness that Pope Francis has left us so suddenly. He was the one who inspired bishops and priests to be shepherds who smell of the sheep — to stay close to the people we are called to serve."

Appointed as bishop in 2015 and later as Archbishop of Kuching, the prelate reflected on the personal encounters he had with Pope Francis in Rome, most notably during the month-long Synod on Youth in October 2018.

"Pope Francis inspired my episcopal motto, *Pastor Cordis Christi* — 'Shepherd after the Heart of Jesus.' From him, I



learned to be a bishop who stays near to the people, and to engage with spiritual leaders of other faiths," he said.

The archbishop praised the Pope's commitment to interreligious dialogue, human fraternity, and social justice. "By recognising each other's humanity, engaging in dialogue, and respecting both our similarities and differences, we can build a society rooted in peace, harmony, and mutual respect," he said.

Describing the late pontiff as a "world spiritual leader," Archbishop Simon highlighted Pope Francis' advocacy for the marginalised, migrants, refugees, and environmental stewardship.

"He showed us a Church that is welcoming, merciful, and filled with compassion — a true reflection of God's heart. We are deeply saddened by his passing, but his legacy of love, peace, and justice will continue to inspire generations to come."

**BISHOP BERNARD PAUL** of Malacca Johore described Pope Francis's 12-year papacy as one of passion, mission, and spiritual strength despite physical weakness.

"He was weak, but strong in the Lord who sent him. He walked faithfully until the finish," he said.

Bishop Bernard highlighted three pillars of the Pope's legacy: *Communion*: The Church draws



life from communion with God and one another — in solidarity and social friendship.

*Listening Church*: The Church remains relevant by listening, learning, and following the Spirit.

*Mission for All*: Every baptised person is called to be the Good News of mercy and hope, everywhere.

"He walked faithfully till his finish, strong in the Lord who sent Him," Bishop Bernard concluded.

## ARCHBISHOP JULIAN ALEOW

of Kuala Lumpur shared a personal tribute, recalling personal encounters with Pope Francis that left a lasting impression.

"My first encounter was in 2014 when he personally called to congratulate me on becoming archbishop," he said. "He always made you feel valued, offering his full attention with warmth and humility."

Over the years, Archbishop Julian met Pope Francis in several countries, including their most recent

meeting during the Synod in Rome. "Spending time with him was deeply memorable. He had a special way of connecting with people," he shared.

As the Church moves forward, Archbishop Julian urged the faithful to continue living out the values Pope Francis upheld. "May his legacy of fraternity, inclusivity, and synodality live on through us."



"I am very saddened to learn of the passing of His Holiness Pope Francis," said **BISHOP CORNELIUS PIONG** of Keningau said. "Personally, I am grateful to have had him as the third Pope during my ministry. Pope Francis was a great inspiration, especially through his call for priests and bishops to be 'shepherds with the smell of the sheep.'"

Bishop Cornelius praised Pope



Francis as a transformative leader whose pastoral vision reinvigorated the Church's mission and connected deeply with people from all walks of life.

"His Holiness touched every life and contributed tremendously to strengthening the family, renewing the Church's role in society, and promoting care for creation and the environment," he said. "He tirelessly championed interfaith dialogue, mutual understanding, and the shared values that

The Bishop of Sandakan, **TRT REV JULIUS DUSIN GITOM**, extended heartfelt condolences on behalf of the clergy, religious, seminarians, and lay faithful of the diocese.

"We, the faithful in the Diocese of Sandakan, were greatly saddened to learn of the passing of the Holy Father, Pope Francis," Bishop Julius said. "On behalf of the priests, deacon, religious sisters, seminarians, and the people of God in the Diocese of Sandakan, I convey my deepest condolences to the Apostolic



Nuncio, Archbishop Wojciech Zaluski."

Bishop Julius called on the faithful to join in prayer and thanksgiving for Pope Francis' life and legacy, describing his leadership as a gift to the Church and the world.

"As we join the people of God throughout the world in mourning the passing of our beloved Pope Francis, we pray with deep gratitude for the goodness of a life well lived and his leadership as the shepherd of the universal Church," he said.

**BISHOP JOSEPH HII TECK KWONG** of Sibul remembered Pope Francis as a tireless advocate for mercy, justice, and human dignity.

"He was a shepherd after the heart of Christ — humble, joyful, and deeply loving toward all creation," he said.

Bishop Joseph highlighted the Pope's call to ecological responsibility, solidarity with the poor, and respect for every person's dignity. "He reminded us that our shared humanity binds us as one family

under God."

Quoting *Fratelli Tutti*, he added: "Let us dream, then, as a single human family... children of the same earth which is our common home."

"As we entrust him to God's eternal embrace, we give thanks for his witness, and continue walking together as a Synodal Church," Bishop Joseph concluded.



"The passing of our Holy Father Francis brought the Universal Church to a moment of deep prayer and mourning," said **FR ROBERT LEONG**, the Apostolic Administrator of the Vicariate of Brunei Darussalam.

"We have lost a true champion of the poor, the marginalised, and



the suffering, one who urged the Church to welcome all and listen deeply. He is missed not only by Catholics but by people of many faiths.

"May his soul rest in peace, and may his legacy continue to inspire and transform lives."

## BISHOP RICHARD BNG

of Miri paid tribute to the late Pope Francis, describing him as a Pontiff distinguished by his humility and humanity, particularly evident in his deep compassion and closeness to those who were suffering.



**ARCHBISHOP JOHN AWONG** of the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu expressed deep sorrow at the passing of Pope Francis on Easter Monday, marking the end of a 12-year papacy defined by humility, compassion, and service.

"I am deeply saddened by the departure of our beloved Pope Francis. As we mourn, let us join the universal Church in praying for the repose of his soul," he said.

While acknowledging the global grief, Archbishop John offered comfort, saying, "We are consoled by the hope that Pope Francis is now with the Heavenly Father who called him to lead His Church."

He also invited the faithful to pray for the upcoming conclave. "May the Holy Spirit guide the Cardinals in choosing a worthy successor to lead the Church forward."