

There will be no issue on  
November 30, 2025.  
Our next issue  
will be on December 7, 2025.

## Malaysian Catholics respond generously to Myanmar crisis

KUALA LUMPUR: The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia (CBCM) has expressed deep gratitude to Catholics and people of goodwill across the country for contributing more than RM907,000 towards relief efforts in Myanmar following the devastating earthquake earlier this year.

In a statement issued on November 23, the Solemnity of Christ the King, CBCM President Archbishop Simon Poh said the nationwide appeal launched in April received an outpouring of prayers, solidarity and financial support from dioceses, parishes, religious communities and individuals throughout Malaysia.

As of Nov 11, a total of RM907,574.05 was collected through special weekend Mass collections and subsequent donations nationwide.

According to the CBCM, the contributions have been channelled towards ongoing relief, rehabilitation and community rebuilding efforts, with priority given to vulnerable and marginalised communities affected by the disaster.

RM856,351.35 was transferred on July 31 to Caritas Myanmar (Karuna) and the Archdiocese of Mandalay — the region hardest hit by

the earthquake — through Caritas Malaysia.

The remaining RM51,222.70 will be disbursed on Jan 31, 2026, after further consultation with partners in Myanmar to assess emerging needs and long-term recovery plans.

Archbishop Simon said the generosity shown reflects “the compassionate heart of the Malaysian Catholic Church — a community that listens to the cry of the poor, acts in solidarity, and manifests God’s mercy through concrete love.”

He extended appreciation on behalf of the bishops to all dioceses, parishes, religious congregations and individual donors who contributed to the appeal.

“Let us keep the people of Myanmar close to our hearts and prayers. Even as their suffering fades from headlines, may our solidarity remain steadfast,” he said, adding that the seeds of hope sown through these efforts will continue to take root.

The statement concluded with Archbishop Simon expressing “profound gratitude” for the compassion, care and solidarity shown by the faithful.



# Young at risk in AI era

**VATICAN: The rapid expansion of artificial intelligence online and in schools demands stronger government-enforced safeguards, education in the critical use of media and more consistent monitoring by parents and teachers, Pope Leo XIV said.**

“Children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to manipulation through AI algorithms that can influence their decisions and preferences,” the Pope told academics, AI experts and professionals involved in child protection programmes November 13.

The group was participating in a conference, *The Dignity of Children and Adolescents in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*, which was sponsored by Telefono Azzurro, an Italian hotline for children, and its foundation for research on the mental and physical health of children and teens.

Observing how artificial intelligence is transforming many aspects of our daily lives, including education, entertainment and the safety of minors, he said it “raises important ethical questions, especially concerning the protection of the dignity and wellbeing of minors.”

The Pope warned that children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to manipulation through AI algorithms that can influence their decisions and preferences. It is essential that parents and educators be aware of these dynamics, and that tools be developed to monitor and guide young people’s interactions with technology.

“Governments and international organisations,” the Pope stressed, “have a responsibility to design and implement policies that protect the dignity of minors in this era of AI,” that he said “includes updating existing data protection laws to address new challenges posed by emerging technologies, and promoting ethical standards for the develop-

ment and the use of AI.”

“Yet safeguarding the dignity of minors cannot be reduced to policies alone; it also requires a digital education,” he stressed.

Pope Leo recalled the words of Pope Francis, who once remarked in a safeguarding project promoted by three major Catholic associations in Italy that adults must rediscover their vocation as “artisans of education...”

The Pope acknowledged how important it is to draft and enforce ethical guidelines, but stressed they are not enough.

“What is needed,” he instead called for, “are daily, ongoing educational efforts, carried out by adults who themselves are trained and supported by networks of collaboration.”

The Pope said this process involves understanding the risks that both the use of AI and premature, unlimited and unsupervised digital access may pose to the relationships and development of young people.

“Only by taking part in the discovery of such risks and the effects on their personal and social life,” the Pope said, “can minors be supported in approaching the digital world as a means of strengthening their ability to make responsible choices for themselves and for others.”

The Holy Father suggested that this in itself is “a vital exercise in safeguarding human originality and connectedness, which must always be guided by respect for human dignity as a fundamental value.”

The Church is not opposed to the use of technology, including artificial intelligence, he said, but people must ensure that it “serves as an ally, not a threat, in the growth and development of children and adolescents.”

Pope Leo concluded by expressing his wish that the conference help lay a solid foundation for our ongoing service to children, young people, and the entire ecclesial and civil community and by imparting God’s blessing. **Vatican News/OSV**

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# Saluting the shepherds

“There is no greater joy for a priest than witnessing people grow in grace and guiding them through the Word of God and the Sacraments,” said Bishop Cornelius Piong of the Diocese of Keningau during his homily at the 1999 Chrism Mass.

Inspired by the Solemnity of Christ the King, which we celebrate today, November 23, I would like to ‘salute’ the Catholic priests in Malaysia, who, despite facing constant criticism, continue to be promoters of peace, compassionate companions in the struggles of the faithful, confessors, role models, and fathers to young people. Today, many perspectives exist on clerical celibacy, and there are frequent calls to discuss or even end the practice of celibacy.

Some of my Catholic friends refuse to give up their sons to the priesthood. Why does this attitude still persist? In my community, where marriage is highly valued, it can be difficult for people to understand that priestly celibacy is a gift from God placed in the heart of a priest, not merely a canonical obligation imposed from outside. I still recall that when Archbishop John Wong visited our parish in early October this year, a request was made for more priests. His response was striking, “I don’t have,” he said, and then added, “Where can I find a priest?”

This serves as a heartfelt reminder to parents to open their hearts and pray for their children to consider the priesthood or religious life. My deepest admiration goes to those parents who have faithfully supported and prayed for their sons or daughters to answer God’s call. Eleven years ago, I was

one such mother, hoping my son would become a priest. Though he has now returned to his eternal Father’s embrace, my prayers continue for my only daughter to pursue a religious vocation — a choice some friends sadly view negatively, even warning, “Your lineage will die out!”

Many speak of Sabah as a fertile source of priests, yet few understand the reality: many of these priests are elderly and unable to reach the remote villages that urgently need pastoral care. This underscores the profound importance of encouraging and supporting new vocations, so that God’s presence may continue to touch every corner of our communities.

For those discerning the priesthood, celibacy is not merely a sacrifice but a sacred gift. St John Paul II, in his *Theology of the Body*, explains that this calling reflects the heavenly reality where “there is no marriage” (Matthew 22:30). In choosing celibacy, one begins to experience on earth the fullness of divine love that awaits in heaven.

According to the Vatican news agency *Fides* (October 18, 2025), the global Catholic population rose by 1.15 per cent from 1.39 to 1.406 billion. However, the number of priests fell by 0.2 per cent — a decline of 734 worldwide. Though seemingly small, this marks a continuing 12-year downward trend in priestly vocations, an issue of growing concern for the universal Church.

This decline is indeed alarming. Beyond the lack of parental encouragement for sons to consider the priesthood, another troubling factor is clericalism — a “tumour on the Mystical Body of Christ,” as Pope Francis has

often cautioned. Clericalism fosters the belief that priests and bishops are entitled to special privileges, power, and unquestioned respect. It can also appear in the Church’s overreach into political or cultural spheres. This harmful mindset, deeply rooted in history, must be continually resisted if the Church is to nurture genuine servant-leaders in the priesthood.

How does clericalism become a tumour within the Church? Consider this example: a parish priest who holds absolute control over every decision, allowing no room for others to participate. He believes that his priesthood grants him inherent “leadership power,” giving him sole authority over all parish matters. This attitude not only stifles collaboration but also contradicts the model of servant leadership that Christ exemplified.

Yet, good will always triumph. Every flaw within the priesthood has a remedy. Perhaps the first step lies in strengthening seminary formation to address and prevent clerical attitudes. Equally important is nurturing relationships of mutual respect and cooperation among priests, bishops, and the laity — relationships sustained by prayer, humility, and openness.

The priesthood remains vital because, through the hands of the priest, the very presence of Christ is made visible to the world. May all who respond to God’s call — whether in priesthood, marriage, or lay celibacy — strive with wisdom, fidelity, and love. For every vocation is, at its heart, a self-giving response to God’s love, lived with sincerity and compassion.

Melania Liza Magnus

## Friendship, Faith, Future... Christ the King

The Church celebrates Christ the King again, marking the end of Ordinary Time in its annual liturgical life, while anticipating Advent and Christmas. Most of us are already looking at Christmas activities and preparations, with this solemnity passing us by without much of an impact since the word ‘King’ itself has, in our modern times, lost its grand significance. At the same time, all over the world, the Church also celebrates the local World Youth Day in every diocese with the message of Pope Leo XIV given based on Jn 15:27 “You also are My witnesses, because you have been with Me”. His focus is to remind the young people of their “friendship with Jesus, which we receive from God as a gift, and our commitment to be builders of peace in society”. It is helpful to reflect on the importance of the kingship of Christ with these contexts in mind.

In a world full of passion for its own truth and ideologies, self-autonomy, individualism, secularism and materialism; there is largely no longer an acceptance of God as God, what more as a human and a king! How could anyone then recognise Jesus as God and King? Tragically, a King that could not save Himself and hung up on a cross for display, for all to see, to be mocked and cursed. Yet, in today’s Gospel, a criminal recognised something about Jesus that made him voice out his indignation to the other criminal next to Jesus. All will die surely and so the desperation of the other criminal to be saved is precisely that of desperation, of harassing Jesus to do something to save Himself and also them, which is in direct contrast to how Mary gently nudged Jesus

at the wedding of Cana, when He told her that His time had not yet come, and yet He obeyed her anyway. Perhaps now IS the time, He did not reply to that criminal but instead, He spoke to the other criminal that defended Him, by recognising the innocence of Jesus and the true nature of the man hanging next to him as God. He feared God, recognised his sinfulness and courageously witnessed to Christ even at the brink of death, with only a hope of being remembered by Jesus when He comes into His kingdom. That he may not be forgotten by Jesus, by God. What could that mean?

Jesus is about to die and yet, this criminal not just understood his own true unworthiness but had the audacity to hope. To be with Christ. It is a true hope rooted in Christ Himself. It came from the belief that Jesus is going to come into His own Kingdom, and that He had the power to do what He said He would do. If he was seeing Jesus for the first time, then he must have heard of Jesus and His teachings somewhere or from someone before, for him to hope such things. But, if he had heard His teaching directly before, then he already had the faith in Jesus and the belief that death has no power over him, and Jesus is truly King, truly God. He was not a friend of Jesus and yet Jesus made him one, perhaps even more than a friend when He told him, “Truly I say to you, today you will be with Me, in Paradise”. How happy would that criminal have been. Did he die first before Jesus? or did Jesus die first before him? Either way, the promise had been given to him personally. A stranger that became a friend that witnessed to Him and became a

### Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with Fr Alexuchelvam Mariasosai

#### Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe (C)

Readings: 2 Samuel 5:1-3;

Colossian 1:12-20;

Gospel: Luke 23:35-43

missionary for all of us who hear this reading as an example of true friendship with Christ, a witness of Christ’s true nature as King, with true power over death, authority over life, and creator of Paradise.

To be with Christ, especially in the most dire and distressful times, we are challenged by the accusations of the flesh, the world and the devil to despise God and to reject Him. But the criminal teaches us that even when having nothing but shame, no possession but sin and crime, no dignity but of punishment and guilt, no friends except criminals, Jesus still desires to be our friend. St Paul reminds us in Romans 5:8, “But God shows His love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” It is this love of Christ that should help us to recognise Him beyond a stranger to a friend, beyond a friend to a King, beyond a King to the one true Lord and God. How then could we not celebrate the universal King who judges out of the authority of love, of love of you and I; who laid down His life for His friends. In his message, Pope Leo reveals the true desire of Jesus, “He does not want us to be servants, nor “activists” of a political party; He calls us to be with Him as friends, so that our lives may be renewed.” Let us fulfil that desire of Christ to be His friends and let it be our desire that He be our King.

# Capuchin bazaar raises funds for student formation

KUALA LUMPUR: The annual Capuchin Bazaar, held on November 9 at the Church of St Francis of Assisi, raised approximately RM70,000 (at press time) for the Capuchin Student Fund.

It was a lively, joyful, and well-attended event, drawing around 1,500 visitors. The bazaar featured 35 stalls offering food, drinks, vegetables, fruits, religious items, preloved goods, and more. These stalls were supported by individuals, church ministries, apostolates, and generous sponsors from near and far, including Singapore, Penang, and Seremban.

Guided by Fr Gilbert James OFM Cap and Bro Tony Bingkuan OFM Cap, the organising committee, led by chairperson Vilma Ng Bujang, ensured that the event ran smoothly. The bazaar highlighted the dedication and talent of the church

community and its supporters, while fostering fellowship among parishioners and visitors. Capuchin Bazaar 2025 was a resounding success, fulfilling its aim of building community spirit, offering wholesome fun, and raising support for the formation of Capuchin brothers.

Currently, seven Capuchin brothers are in various stages of formation in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Sarawak. Their formation and education require about RM145,000 annually.

“Your generous contributions will greatly assist in supporting the educational needs of our Capuchin brothers,” said Fr Gilbert, expressing his gratitude to all who contributed.

Those who wish to support the formation of future Capuchin friars may do so through the Capuchin Student Fund at: <https://ofmcap.org.my/capuchin-students-fund/>



Bro Tony Bingkuan OFM Cap with the sellers of one of the stalls.

**KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE**  
**Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow**

**November**

- 24 Meeting – Catholic Welfare Services (CWS), Penang
- 25 Bishops’ Staff Meeting – College General Major Seminary
- 27-30 The Great Pilgrimage of Hope, Penang

**PENANG DIOCESE**  
**Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis**

**November**

- 24 Meeting – Catholic Welfare Services (CWS), Penang
- 25 Bishops’ Staff Meeting – College General Major Seminary
- 27-30 The Great Pilgrimage of Hope, Penang

**MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE**  
**Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul**

**November**

- 24 Meeting – Catholic Welfare Services (CWS), College General Major Seminary, Penang at 2.30pm
- 25 Bishops’ Staff Meeting – College General Major Seminary, Penang at 9.00am
- 27-30 The Great Pilgrimage of Hope, Penang
- 30 Opening Address – Chosen Asia Vision Summit, Light Hotel at 4.30pm

**Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #250**

**Welcome dear friends,**

The Annual Clergy Discernment 2025 is a time to stop, look and go for the clergy.

The diocese prepares for the Implementations of the Synodal Outcome, the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 and the *Ad Limina* audience with Pope Leo and the dicasteries. The North Central Johore Vicariate’s Eucharistic Congress was on November 22 at the Church of St Louis, Kluang.

The Pilgrim Cross journeys from the Church of St Theresa, Gajah Berang on December 3 to remain at the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Krubong from December 4 to January 3, 2026.

**Local Takes. The Changemakers**  
 A *Malaysiakini* commentator said: “Most of the real changemakers don’t even go near politics. They’re the ones running food banks, cleaning up rivers, starting social enterprises, teaching kids in rural Sabah, or fighting for workers’ rights. These people are already solving the problems politicians like to talk about. However, when you ask them if they would ever consider running for Parliament, they laugh because they know the system won’t allow them to do what they need to do.”

The public believes that the general election (GE) and state election should be held simultaneously to save costs, reduce political tension, and ease administrative processes.

Ministers resigned, cabinet shakeup rumours and Sabah Elections power struggle is on.

The Maldives has become the first country to impose a generational smoking ban – making smoking, buying and selling tobacco illegal for anyone born after January 1, 2007.

**Church In The World:**  
 Making a Difference:  
 1. The Jubilee Year calls for Debt Forgiveness to restart economies. Humanity and poor nations have long wrestled with the chains of debt. The call for justice to go beyond punitive retribution to radical liberation, to forge a new economy, not on the shifting sands of endless accumulation, but on the solid bedrock of forgiveness.

2. “God speaks through the wind and the water”, the archbishop of Cebu explained after the havoc of Typhoon Tino. “He invites us to rediscover our responsibility as stewards, not exploiters.”

3. The Basilica of the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona, to be finished in 2026, takes the record for tallest church in the world.

4. An initiative to reunite a divided Iraq, the ‘Mesopotamia Heritage Truck’, tours Iraq with a message of unity, offering lessons; workshops to reconnect Iraqis with their ancient roots and diverse cultures.

**A Thought for The Week: Seeing is Believing.**  
 A guy met one of his school mates several years after school and he could not believe his eyes; his friend was driving one of the latest sleek Mercedes Benz cars. He went home feeling awful and very disappointed in himself. He thought he was a failure.

**Lesson from Mercedes:** Don’t believe everything you see. He didn’t know that his friend was a driver and had been sent on an errand with his boss’s car!

**New Needs, New Responses:**  
 The Sacred Heart Cathedral (SHC) Johor Bahru offers **SHC JOB CONNECT** to job-seekers, advice; assistance to job hunters on resume building; navigating job websites; and employers. And employers to find suitable staff for their businesses and organisations. It is an initiative to facilitate job connections within the community, and offers resources for job seekers and employers. Open on Saturdays, 3.30pm-4.30pm or contact whatsapp +6016-6105343 or email: [shejobconnect@gmail.com](mailto:shejobconnect@gmail.com)

**QnQ: Q asks: What is real compassion? What is overextending?**  
 It is said: “Don’t destroy your own light just to brighten someone else’s world.”

1. Too often, empathy turns into self-erasure. *We dim our own fire*, thinking it will make others more comfortable, more seen, more warm. We stay late to help a coworker who never returns the favour. We keep forgiving a friend who keeps taking and demanding. We silence our own needs to avoid making someone who is self absorbed feel uncomfortable.
2. That’s what it looks like to dim our own light — small, daily choices where we trade our energy, peace, or joy just to keep someone else’s world spinning.
3. Helping others shouldn’t cost us ourselves. Real compassion includes us too. Ask yourself: “Have I been *overextending myself* for others? What part of my own light have I lost in the process?”  
 Mk 12:31 *Love your neighbour as yourself*  
*If your kindness keeps burning you out, it’s not kindness anymore.*

**The Spirit @ work:**  
 “A church in the land *without the Spirit* is rather a curse than a blessing. If you do not have the Spirit of God, Christian worker, remember that you stand in somebody else’s way; you are a fruitless tree standing where a fruitful tree might grow.” *Charles Spurgeon*

**Something to tickle you:**  
 Courage does not always roar, sometimes it’s the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, “I will try again tomorrow.”

*Bishop Bernard Paul*  
**Bishop Bernard Paul**

# OLL parish walks together in the Spirit

Nesa Dhevasahayam

KLANG: The Parish Pastoral Assembly (PPA) 2025 of the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes was held with the theme *Walking together towards a Synodal and Prophetic Church*. It was a meaningful afternoon of prayer, reflection, and discernment — a true moment of listening to the Holy Spirit and to one another as we continue our synodal journey as a parish community.

The session on November 8, began with registration and the Synod Prayer, inviting participants to open their hearts to the

Spirit's movement. Parish priest, Fr Gregory Chan, welcomed everyone and reminded us that the PPA is not just a yearly meeting, but a moment of grace — a time to pause, reflect, and allow the Spirit to renew our vision for parish life.

Following this, Noel Santiago, Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) chairperson, shared the parish's vision and mission, along with the key findings and activities from 2024. He highlighted the parish's journey over the past year, including its progress, ministry achievements, and ongoing challenges, and encouraged everyone to work together

in faith and unity to fulfil the parish's vision and mission.

The Parish Coordinating Council (PCC) chairperson, Selvaraju, briefed the participants on the synodal spiritual conversation, emphasising that true discernment comes through prayerful listening — to the Word of God, to one another, and to the movement of the Holy Spirit in each heart.

The heart of the assembly consisted of three rounds of spiritual conversation. Participants were divided into fourteen groups, each consisting of six to seven people, according to the four pastoral areas of Family, Church, Ecology, and Society, guided by the diocesan reflection framework for Peninsular Malaysia. The groups included a mix of young adults, seniors and participants from Sabah, Sarawak and migrants. Each round encouraged deep personal sharing, silent reflection, and collective discernment.

Participants expressed that this process brought them a renewed sense of peace, clarity, and commitment to serve. Throughout the conversations, several key themes emerged, including the need to strengthen family prayer life, foster inclusivity within ministries, empower youth, and promote care for creation. These reflections will serve as the foundation for pastoral planning in 2026 and 2027.

Fr Gnana Selvam Berentis, assistant par-



Fr Gregory Chan giving the welcoming address.

ish priest, summarised the action plans arising from the third round of discussions, reflecting on the fruits of the day's sharing. He reminded participants that the real journey begins after the assembly, as these insights are brought into daily life and ministry work. Looking ahead, the focus for 2026 will be Mission, particularly in society, nurturing missionary discipleship and bringing hope as a synodal and prophetic Church. Areas of concern identified include youth empowerment, accompaniment, conversion and relationships, outreach, and family prayer. The parish council will work closely with ministries to implement related activities.

The assembly also introduced the new parish leadership, welcoming Christina Pamela as PPC Chairperson and Nesa Dhevasahayam as PCC Chairperson. The PPA concluded with a joyful celebration of Fr Selva's birthday, complete with a cake-cutting ceremony. Participants then enjoyed a time of fellowship, continuing to share, connect, and celebrate the spirit of unity that had marked the day.



The groups sharing their concerns on the four pastoral areas.

## Pokok Assam chapel celebrates 41 years of devotion

TAIPING: The Chapel of Our Lady of Fatima in the district of Larut Matang and Selama, Perak, joyfully celebrated its 41st annual feast day recently. The evening celebration began with the rosary, Mass, procession, and benediction, followed by a fellowship gathering attended by more than 500 parishioners and visitors from neighbouring parishes and outstations.

This year's feast marked the culmination of nine days of spiritually enriching novena services, conducted in English, Tamil, and Mandarin. The novena period provided a meaningful opportunity for the participation of various church groups, BEC, and language communities, each contributing to the prayerful atmosphere through daily reflections themed around prayer, perseverance, and devotion.

The highlight of the feast day was a solemn multilingual Mass presided over by Fr Raymond Raj from the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Penang, and concelebrated by Msgr Stephen Liew, parish priest of Taiping Catholic Church.

In his homily, Fr Raymond emphasised that true success in the Christian journey is not achieved overnight but through hard work, perseverance, and steadfast faith. He reminded the congregation that both church-going faithful and church leaders are called to persevere in their spiritual lives, to stand firm in prayer, remain faithful in service, and lead others by the witness of their actions.

"A church-going person must persevere in faith, holding on to hope even when life is challenging," he said. "A church leader must persevere in service, leading with humility and compassion. Both must reflect the perseverance of Mary, the Mother of the Church, who remained faithful from the Annunciation to the Cross."

Fr Raymond further reflected on the role of Mother Mary as a model of unwavering faith, patience, and endurance, inspiring the early Christian community and all who continue her mission today.

At the conclusion of the Mass, Msgr Stephen Liew expressed heartfelt appreciation

to the many sponsors, volunteers, and parishioners who contributed their time, effort, and resources to make the annual celebration a success. He also commended the youths who took the initiative to plan and coordinate the nine-day novena, noting their enthusiasm and dedication as a sign of hope for the future of the Church.

The evening continued with a fellowship dinner, generously sponsored by well-wishers, which brought together parishioners and visitors in a spirit of unity and joy. Despite the heavy downpour that followed, the atmosphere remained filled with laughter, gratitude, and shared conversation, a reflection of the deep sense of community and faith that binds the parish family.

As the celebrations came to a close, many were reminded that the Feast of Our Lady of Fatima is more than just an annual event; it is a renewed call to live as a Eucharistic people, carrying Mary's faith and Christ's love into the world with perseverance and joy. **Francis Xavier**



Parishioners praying the Rosary as they walk in the procession.

# Historic SFX church rededicated after massive restoration

**Bernard Anthony**

MELAKA: The historic Church of St Francis Xavier (SFX) was rededicated and reopened on November 9 during the 8.30am Mass, drawing over 1,500 parishioners and pilgrims.

The twin-spired neo-Gothic church, originally built in 1849, had been temporarily closed since July 2023 for 28 months for extensive restoration and repair works. During this period, Masses were held in the adjacent Madonna Hall.

Bishop of Malacca Johore, Rt Rev Bernard Paul, was the main celebrant. He was joined by concelebrants Fr Moses Rayappan, Fr Devadasan Madala Muthu, Fr Michael Goh, Fr Paul Sia and Fr Lawrence Ng CDD. The ceremony began at the main church doors with an 'aarthi', a traditional Indian blessing ritual for Bishop Bernard, followed by a procession led by the Cross bearer, the statue of St Francis Xavier, and four girls in traditional attire from Sabah and Sarawak holding miniature SFX flags.

Rosary and the Jubilee of Hope prayer was held 30 minutes prior to the rededication, creating a spiritually uplifting atmosphere.

Bishop Bernard welcomed the congregation with the words, "Peace be with you. Today is a day of rejoicing as we rededicate this church and altar to Christ. Rise, our hearts, with hope as we draw near this altar and be God's living hope."

During the blessing, Bishop



*A parishioner carrying the statue of St Francis Xavier in procession into the church.*

Bernard sprinkled holy water around the church and sanctuary, inviting the faithful to silently ask God to purify them. In his homily, he noted that the rededication coincided with the Feast of the Dedication of the Basilica of St John Lateran in Rome, drawing parallels between the basilica — seat of the Pope — and his own episcopal seat at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Johor Bahru.

Bishop Bernard emphasised that while the church building is architecturally beautiful, the Church is truly alive through its people. "Even if the building were destroyed, the Church survives because God is with His people," he said. He reminded parishioners that a living Church bears

the fruits of the Holy Spirit, urging them to "bear good fruits and let living water flow through you."

He highlighted the four pillars for a thriving Church — WORD, WORSHIP, WORKS, and WITNESSING — encouraging the faithful to be guided by Scripture, strengthened by prayer, active in good works, and centred on witnessing their faith for God's glory. The homily was delivered in English and Bahasa Malaysia by Bishop Bernard, in Tamil by Fr Devadasan, and in Mandarin by Fr Michael, inspiring the congregation to emulate St Francis Xavier's zeal for God and the Good News.



*Bishop Bernard blessing the congregation with holy water.*

The blessing of the altar, anointing, and incensing were carried out by Bishop Bernard, followed by the incensing of the tabernacle.

The Parish Pastoral Council chairperson, Steven, delivered a thank-you speech, while Bishop Bernard acknowledged all those involved in the restoration project. He noted that SFX is the second-oldest Catholic church in Melaka, and that the restoration required careful planning and effort, particularly due to its heritage status.

Parish priest, Fr Moses Rayappan, expressed gratitude to parishioners and well-wishers who supported the restoration, which cost approximately RM5.8 million, of which the diocese contrib-

uted RM4 million. The remaining funds were raised by the parish. Fr Moses invited attendees to spend moments in silent prayer inside the renewed church and to appreciate the enhancements. A token of appreciation was presented to Bishop Bernard, and all attendees received a souvenir.

The 2.5-hour celebration concluded with a brunch fellowship in the parish courtyard. The church, originally founded in 1845 and built on the site of an old Portuguese church, celebrates its 180th anniversary this year. Its reopening marks the continuation of its legacy as a sacred space of worship, reflection, and solace for generations to come.

## Celebrating the jubilee of teachers and the poor

KUALA LUMPUR: In celebration of the Feast of the Dedication of the Basilica of St John Lateran on November 9, Msgr James Gnanapiragasam reflected on the significance of this feast day — reminding the congregation that the Lateran Basilica symbolises the unity of the universal Church with the Holy Father. He also emphasised that the Eucharist unites

us all, especially as we observed the Jubilee of Teachers and the Jubilee of the Poor on this day.

The celebration was a joint effort by volunteer teachers from EduCare (Church of St Joseph, Sentul) and Mary's Learning Hub (Church of the Risen Christ (RCC)) for children in need. A total of 84 participants, including 42 children (both Catholic and non-Catholic),



*Msgr James Gnanapiragasam leading the prayer before the breakfast fellowship.*

volunteer teachers, and parishioners, joined in this joyful occasion. Before concluding the Mass, Msgr James expressed his gratitude to the teachers and volunteers for their dedication and blessed them with holy water.

The event was the result of weeks of planning and coordination by the organising committee — comprising volunteer teachers from EduCare, MLH, and the PIHDM team — led by James Dass from the Church of St Joseph (SJC). Contributions for food and goodies were generously sponsored by teachers and the PIHDM team.

After the Mass, participants gathered for fellowship and games. Msgr James opened the session

with a welcoming speech, blessing the breakfast fellowship and distributing welcome goodies to each child. The activities began with the Cup Challenge, where winners received small prizes, followed by the first round of lucky draws for children, presented by Msgr James. Another game, 'Alert Always', engaged the children in group play and friendly competition.

The final round of lucky draws for children was presented by Fr Frederick Joseph, followed by the distribution of ice cream and lucky charm giveaways. The celebration concluded with a lunch fellowship and photo session, capturing the joy and smiles shared among the teachers and students. Each teacher

also received a book titled *God's Dreamer* as a token of appreciation for their service and commitment.

The church was filled with laughter, excitement, and heartfelt joy, especially as several children came forward to showcase their talents in singing and dancing.

Overall, the event was a resounding success, made possible by the teamwork and dedication of the EduCare and MLH teachers, the PIHDM volunteers from both SJC and RCC, and the main organiser, James Dass. Their passion, careful planning, and genuine love made the celebration truly meaningful and memorable, bringing smiles to the faces of both children and teachers alike. **Dianne Kuseela Devi**



*The children engaging in friendly competition.*

# Bishop Bernard expresses God's touch through simple, soulful art

Patricia Pereira

KUALA LUMPUR: Ever wondered how our bishops unwind or where they turn to refresh their souls after the many demands of ministry? Even shepherds of the Church need moments of stillness — spaces where heart and spirit can

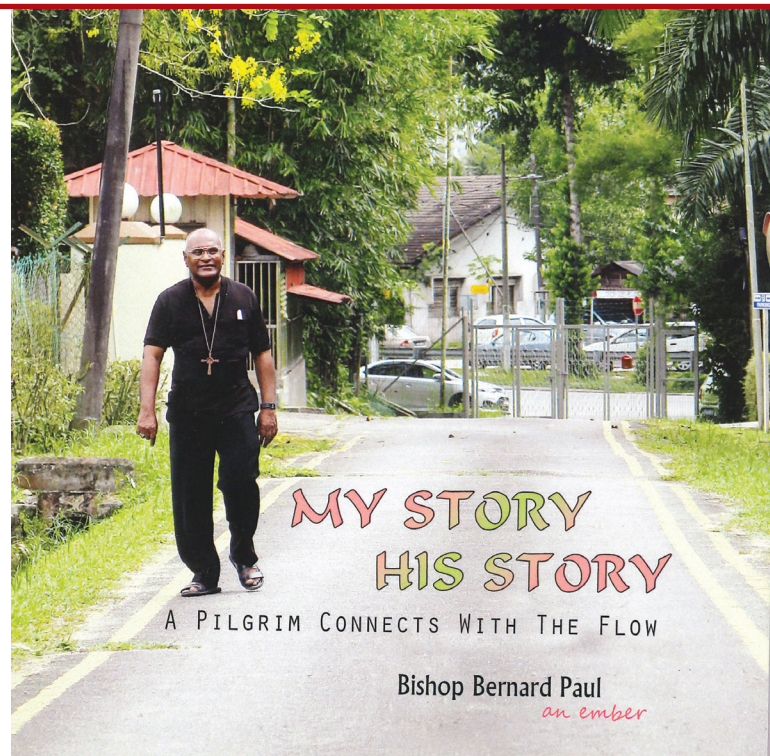
breathe again.

For Rt Rev Bernard Paul, Bishop of the Malacca Johore Diocese, that sacred space is found in art. When he picks up his paintbrush, prayer and creativity become one. His latest work, *My Story His Story*, reveals this deeply personal journey — a canvas where faith, reflection,

and imagination meet.

In the preface, Bishop Bernard describes his book as “a story of a pilgrim.” He writes, “This is a story of a pilgrim. A traveller? A seeker? One who has journeyed many miles, crossed many bridges and seen many paths. There were many detours, many U-turns and dead ends. The ends were also another beginning. As a pilgrim, I saw signs, read signs and interpreted signs. Along with them, there were the unreadable, unseeable and unfathomable. But they were flashes or sparks or illuminations. They lit the way.”

His words speak not only of his own experience but of every believer's journey — one marked by discovery, struggle, and grace. “The pilgrim's journey began in the Spirit, the great creative Breath,” he continues. “It was a journey of seeing self, seeing others, seeing life and seeing the Lord. They were insights, signs and guideposts along the way.



Bishop Bernard Paul  
*an ember*

They are little stories, many stories in the big story.”

From these reflections emerged *My Story His Story* — a collection of drawings inspired by Scripture. Each image is born from prayer, each brushstroke an expression of divine encounter. “The Lord touches our lives,” Bishop Bernard writes, “for us to tell the world that He is real. He impresses, we express. These are expressions of His impressions.”

Printed simply on art card with wire binding, the book's unpretentious form mirrors its message — that beauty often lies in simplicity. Within its pages, Scripture-inspired illustrations are paired with brief reflections, inviting readers to pause and ponder God's gentle move-

ments in their own lives.

Through this labour of love, Bishop Bernard reminds us that creativity is also a form of prayer, that art can be a bridge between heaven and earth. In his own words: “May you sense His leadings. May He move your hearts to express His inspirations.”

*My Story His Story* invites readers on a visual pilgrimage of faith, revealing that even in the quiet moments of rest, God continues to paint His grace upon the canvas of our lives.

The book is available at LOGOS Bookshop, MAJODI Centre in Plentong, Johor. For purchasing details, please contact: 016-7078626.



## Alpha training ignites hearts and faith

CHERAS: The Church of St Francis of Assisi (SFA) played host for a two-day Alpha in the Catholic Context training on November 8 and 9. Participants came from three communities — English speaking adults, and youth, and the Bahasa-speaking community (KUBM).

The training, organised for next year's 'January Alpha hosts and helpers' at SFA, aimed to deepen the understanding of evangelisation and prepare parishioners to bring the message of Jesus to others with love, humility, and authenticity.

The sessions explored the essence of Alpha, focusing on key topics such as *Why Alpha?*; *The Art of Hospitality: Who Is Jesus?* and *How Can I Be Filled with the Holy Spirit?* Led by Alpha ArchKL team, each session combined spiritual depth with practical guidance, helping participants understand that evangelisation begins not with grand gestures but through genuine love and listening, just as Jesus did.

As the training unfolded, the spirit of fellowship and joy grew stronger. The youths brought vi-

brant enthusiasm and creativity, the adults shared wisdom and mentorship, while the KUBM group added warmth and unity through prayer and shared experiences. This blend of generations and languages reminded everyone that the Church is one body, called to serve in harmony and faith.

Participants shared testimonies of their experience: Christeraja, from the adults' group, said, “As a Catholic, I find this course helps to know Jesus more in depth. I also encourage the youths to join the Alpha course.” Andrea, representing the youth, shared, “I wanted to put into practice what I learned in catechism. I was very impressed at how a video could summarise answers to the small questions I usually have in mind.” From the KUBM group, Michelle reflected, “Previously, I prayed about what I could give back to the community and received an invitation to join Alpha. Journeying as a host/helper these past two days has deepened my faith immensely.” Moments of laughter, reflection,

and honest sharing filled the small group discussions, where participants spoke openly about their faith journeys, doubts, and hopes. Many described feeling the Holy Spirit move within them softening hearts, healing wounds, and reigniting a passion for Christ.

A promo video shoot was held where participants shared smiles, testimonies, and creative energy. It was an expression of unity, a living testimony of how the Alpha spirit brings people together in mission.

The second day deepened the encounter with sessions on *Repentance*, *Being Filled with the Holy Spirit*, and *From Alpha to Parish*. Through praise and worship, prayer, and reflection, participants were reminded that evangelisation is not an obligation but a joyful response to God's love.

The training concluded with a prayer of sending forth and final blessings by parish priest Fr Paul Cheong OFM, Cap, who encouraged participants to be living witnesses of Christ's love. **Shivonne Prevena**



## Interactive camp prepares kids for First Communion



KUALA LUMPUR: The Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Jalan Peel, held its First Holy Communion Camp on November 8, with the theme *Jesus, Bread of Life*. A total of 16 children joyfully participated in the half-day programme.

The camp was divided into two enriching sessions. The first session, *Jesus, the Living Bread*, was conducted by parish priest, Msgr Stanislaus Soosamariam, who shared with the children the depth of God's love made present in the Eucharist. With gentle reminders, he encouraged the children to always be kind, loving, and gentle, reflecting the heart of Jesus.

The second session was led by catechist Maria Vethanayagam, focusing on *Jesus, Bread of Life* and the beauty of receiving Jesus in the Eucharist. The explanation was made simple and heartfelt, helping the children understand how Jesus nourishes and strengthens them through Holy

Communion.

The children also participated in creative and interactive activities where they learned to make bread (hosts), practised sitting and dining with Jesus, and designed their own invitation cards, symbolically inviting Jesus into their hearts.

The camp was supported by the vocation team and the altar servers, who assisted with coordination and ensured the smooth flow of activities throughout the day. Their presence added to the spirit of service and fellowship within the community.

The programme concluded with an inspiring video presentation on Eucharistic miracles, followed by an artwork exhibition showcasing Eucharistic-themed creations prepared by the children.

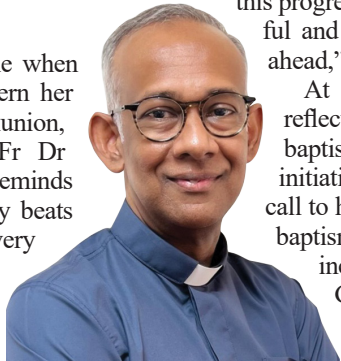
It was a truly enriching and joyful day that deepened the children's understanding of the Eucharist and prepared their hearts for their First Holy Communion.

# Dual call of baptism and mission in a Synodal Church

Shivonne Prevena

KUALA LUMPUR: In a time when the Church continues to discern her path in the spirit of communion, participation, and mission, Fr Dr Clarence Devadass, *pic*, reminds us that the heart of synodality beats in the baptismal call of every Christian. His online talk, *Baptism and Mission in a Synodal Church*, organised by the Archdiocesan Pastoral Institute (API) recently, offered deep insights into how the Church is now in the implementation phase of the synodal journey moving forward with hope towards the post-synodal Ecclesial Assembly to be held in Rome in 2028.

“Although synodality has not yet taken root globally with the momentum once envisioned, the initiatives already underway offer genuine encouragement. We are witnessing meaningful change at the grassroots level, and



this progress reminds us to remain hopeful and optimistic about the journey ahead,” said Fr Clarence.

At the heart of Fr Clarence’s reflection lies the conviction that baptism is not merely a rite of initiation, but a commissioning, a call to holiness and mission. Through baptism, we are clothed in Christ and incorporated into the People of God. This identity unites every believer as a missionary disciple, sent to share the Gospel in daily life. Every

baptised person, regardless of vocation or state of life, becomes an “agent of the Gospel”, actively contributing to the Church’s mission of love, service, and evangelisation. This understanding transforms baptism from a personal milestone into a lifelong commitment to live and proclaim the Good News.

He further explained that each individual is commissioned to their mission the very

moment they are baptised. Responding to a question during the session, he clarified that the commissioning ceremonies we often witness in Church are not new appointments, but rather reminders of this original baptismal commission. Every faithful is already sent forth by Christ through baptism to live as witnesses of the Gospel and to serve within the body of Christ according to their unique gifts and vocations.

He also emphasised that synodality is not a programme, but a way of life for the Church. It is rooted in listening both to the Holy Spirit and to one another so that discernment and mission flow from communion. A synodal Church is one that walks together, ensuring that decision-making and pastoral direction involve the entire People of God. The process values the voices of those on the margins, calling the Church to be inclusive, compassionate, and responsive to the needs of the world.

Through synodality, the Church rediscovers baptism as a source of participation and

shared responsibility. Every baptised person has the duty to listen, discern, and engage in mission. This participation reflects the *sensus fidei* (sense of the faith), the collective instinct of the faithful for the truth of the Gospel. The journey, however, also calls for ongoing formation, deepening our understanding of faith, nurturing missionary discipleship, and strengthening unity amid diversity. By doing so, the Church remains faithful to her call to evangelise while adapting to the realities of contemporary life.

Fr Clarence described the Church as a pilgrim people, ever journeying toward renewal and deeper fidelity to Christ’s mission. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the Church is invited to embrace dialogue, encounter, and discernment as daily acts of faith. Mission, he reminded, is not an individual effort but a communal response born from the unity of baptism. As each believer embraces this call, the Church grows into a living witness of hope, charity, and conversion, journeying together towards the fullness of God’s Kingdom.

## Synodal Church needs servant leadership

KEPONG: A leadership formation was conducted by the Archdiocesan Basic Ecclesial Communities Animating Team (ABECAT) at the Church of Christ the Light, Desa Jaya, on October 25. The one-day formation brought together 50 leaders from various ministries of the Church of Christ the Light, the Chapel of Christ the King, Selayang Baru, and Our Lady of Lourdes, Sungai Buloh.

The formation began with opening prayers and Bible enthronement, setting a reverent tone for the day. Sessions were facilitated by ABECAT who engaged participants through interactive discussions and reflections on Christian leadership in a changing world.

Rita Krishnan emphasised the importance of understanding the true role of a leader — to move out of one’s comfort zone, embrace transformation, and stay focused on God’s calling. Using the metaphor “Who Moved My Cheese,” she drew valuable lessons on adapting to change:

1. Anticipate change – Be ready to move.
2. Adapt quickly – The sooner you let go of the old, the sooner you can embrace the new.
3. Move with change – Follow where God is leading.
4. Enjoy change – Savour the journey and new opportunities.
5. Be ready for continuous change – Growth never stops.

Reflecting on Luke 22:25–26, Fr Mitchel Anthony, the ecclesiastical assistant for ABECAT, reminded all present that true greatness in the eyes of God is found not



Participants working together in groups to answer some of the questions.

in power or authority, but in humility and service. He spoke on the essence of Christian leadership — not as an exercise of control, but as an act of service, listening, and discernment. In a synodal Church, leadership is participatory, Christ-centred, and guided by the Holy Spirit.

Fr Mitchel emphasised that true servant leaders must be Christ-centred, Spirit-filled, and focused on building community rather than seeking self-glorification. “When we serve without Christ, we fail as servant leaders,” he reminded.

Drawing from the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1–11), Fr Mitchel called leaders to undergo a transformation of mind, body, soul, and

spirit. He stressed that holiness is the foundation of servant leadership, cultivated through humble obedience to the Holy Spirit. A servant leader’s character, he said, must be rooted in humility, empathy, and integrity.

Leaders were reminded to rely fully on God — to make Him their compass, to be still in prayer, and to listen to His voice. Leadership, he noted, must be guided by vision, clarity, simplicity, and collaboration.

Throughout the formation, both facilitators shared practical and spiritual insights on becoming effective and humble servant leaders. Citing Romans 12:2, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,” Fr Mitchel urged leaders to adopt a renewed mindset, to embrace change, and to serve the community with love, discernment, and prayer.

He further emphasised that leadership succession is a sacred responsibility — a process shaped by preparation, humility, and divine guidance. Servant leaders are called to listen deeply, act with discernment, and serve for the common good and the glory of God.

The formation concluded with thanksgiving and prayer, marking the end of a meaningful, healing, and Spirit-filled day. Participants departed renewed in faith, inspired to lead with humility, compassion, and a deeper sense of mission in building a Synodal Church rooted in servant leadership. **Moses Sinnappan**



A participant sharing the responses from his group.

Catholic Directory of Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei

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# SMC pays tribute to early pioneers of the parish

IPOH: On the evening of November 7, a small group of parishioners gathered at the old funeral parlour of the Church of St Michael (SMC) to attend a Mass concelebrated by Fr Konstend Gnanapragasam and Fr Aloysius Tan, in remembrance of the pioneers of the faith who established and nurtured the parish.

The celebration was part of the 135th anniversary of the parish, which carries the theme: *Faith, Hope and Charity – 135 Years and Beyond with St Michael*. Those remembered at the Mass included the MEP missionaries (from the Paris Foreign Mission Society), priests who served the church locally and from China, religious brothers and sisters who founded schools and hospitals, and laypeople who contributed to parish life since its establishment in 1890.

In his homily, delivered in English and Mandarin, Fr Aloysius reflected on the day's Gospel reading, the parable of the dishonest steward (Luke 16:1-8). He noted how Jesus praised the steward for being faithful and shrewd in managing His master's resources for the good of others. Similarly, the parish pioneers laboured with love and sacrifice, laying a foundation for the faith community we now enjoy. Fr Aloysius encouraged parishioners to remember these early pioneers in prayer and to continue their legacy through acts of love and service.

He expressed gratitude to the ancestors who founded the parish, highlighting that they lived as faithful stewards, not owners, of the gifts entrusted to them. While Mass schedules and practices have changed over the years, many continue to pray the Rosary faithfully, and the parish has grown steadily. "It's all about love — love expressed through our devotions, and the Eucharist that heals," he said. The devotion of previous priests and religious nurtured the faith of the community and inspired others to follow. "Many of the things they did to build and strengthen the parish were truly inspiring, then and now," he added.

Fr Aloysius also paid tribute to the early missionaries, especially the MEP fathers, who left their homes and families to spread the Catholic faith, often never returning to their homeland. Their sacrifice and dedication made the parish their home, and through their prayer, service, and love, they nurtured a flourishing faith community. He emphasised that what is built in love endures forever.

Reflecting on the inspiring legacy of priests and religious, he noted that since the parish's founding in 1890, three priests from St Michael's have become bishops, a testament to the lasting fruits of faithful service. He expressed hope that more will be inspired



Parishioners placing flowers at the niches.

to follow in their footsteps.

Fr Aloysius concluded by encouraging all to attend daily Eucharistic celebrations and to offer their love to the Church in whatever way they can. In doing so, the community honours the early pioneers and ensures that the seeds of faith they planted continue to bear fruit for generations to come.

After Mass, parishioners paid homage in

a special way: each took a flower from the altar and laid it at the graves or niches of priests and religious buried in St Michael's graveyard, pausing to offer prayers of thanksgiving for their contributions. The act served as a meaningful continuation of All Souls' Day remembrance, allowing the faithful to focus on the early pioneers who shaped the life of the parish.

## Celebrating a life of simplicity, service, and stewardship

SANDAKAN: The community of the Cathedral of St Mary, together with parishioners from the Church of St Mark and the Chapel of St Peter, Sungai Manila, joyfully gathered to celebrate Fr Thomas Makajil's 47th sacerdotal anniversary. The thanksgiving celebration was marked by heartfelt gratitude and joy as clergy, religious, and parishioners came together to honour Fr Thomas' remarkable journey of faith and dedicated service to God and His people.

Beyond his priestly duties, Fr Thomas is well known for his simplicity, humility, and love for nature. A passionate gardener, he finds joy and peace in planting trees and nurturing the earth — a reflection of his deep reverence for God's creation. His love for simple, rural, and less privileged communities, especially those in the Paitan Mission, has made him deeply respected and cherished by the people he serves — not only



Fr Thomas Makajil with Bishop Julius Dusin cutting the anniversary cake as others cheer on.

as a priest, but also as a friend and father figure to many. He currently serves as assistant parish priest at the Cathedral of St Mary.

In his address, Rt Rev Julius Dusin Gitom, Bishop of Sandakan, expressed joy and gratitude for the blessings bestowed upon the parish as it celebrated Fr Thomas' 47

years of priestly ministry. He thanked God for Fr Thomas' unwavering commitment and dedication, and for the many graces that have flowed from his service. Bishop Julius fondly recalled that while Fr Thomas was already serving as a priest, he himself was still a seminarian, and shared his deep

appreciation for Fr Thomas' guidance and example throughout his own priestly journey. He also thanked the community for their presence and the love shown in honouring Fr Thomas during this joyful celebration.

In his reflection, Fr Thomas gave thanks to God for His blessings and grace throughout his 47 years of ministry. Drawing strength from his ordination verse, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68), he reflected on the challenges and joy of following Christ faithfully. Grateful for God's guidance "from the mountains to the sea, from towns to remote villages," he asked for continued prayers for all priests and clergy to remain steadfast in their vocation.

The celebration concluded with heartfelt thanksgiving, a touching reminder of God's faithfulness and the beauty of a life dedicated to His service. **Evelyn Jock**

## Children take their first step in the Eucharist

SETAPAK: The Church of the Good Shepherd, Setapak, was filled with joy and reverence on November 8 as 48 children from the parish's diverse language groups received their First Holy Communion,

marking a significant milestone in their faith journey.

The Mass celebrated the culmination of a year of dedicated preparation, enabling the children to participate fully in the sacrificial

banquet of the Eucharist. The celebration was highlighted by the active involvement of both the communicants and their families.

During the Offertory procession, the children presented a cross adorned with personal messages and prayers, symbolising their commitment to follow Christ. Parents also contributed a variety of gifts to the altar, representing the talents and resources they dedicate to the Church community.

As the Mass drew to a close, the newly initiated communicants sang the song *Give Thanks* as a moving expression of gratitude. Following the final blessing, each child received a First Holy Communion certificate and a packet of sweets thoughtfully prepared by their parents.

Parish priest, Fr Mitchel Anthony, expressed his heartfelt thanks to the Standard 3 catechists for guiding the children through-

out the year, preparing them spiritually and intellectually for the sacrament. He also commended the parents for their unwavering support, encouragement, and dedication to their children's faith formation.

Fr Mitchel addressed the young communicants, saying, "Today is not a final destination, but the beginning of a lifelong journey with Jesus. The Eucharist is the very source and summit of our strength as Catholics — it is the bread of life given for you. I encourage you to return to this holy table frequently and continue attending Mass every Sunday, where your faith will truly flourish. May the grace received today sustain you always."

The parish congratulated its newest communicants and prayed that the grace they received would continue to nourish and strengthen them throughout their lives in Christ. **Gerard Sebastian**



The newly communicants singing a song for the congregation.

# Pope Leo XIV to meet cardinals in January 2026 consistory



Cardinals attend the ordinary public consistory for the creation of new cardinals, December 7, 2024. (EWTN News/Daniel Ibáñez)

VATICAN: Pope Leo XIV will hold a consistory for cardinals on January 7-8, 2026, in what will be a rare opportunity for the Church's senior leaders to meet and discuss matters of importance. Unlike typical consistories, this gathering will not include the creation of new cardinals.

During the pontificate of Pope Francis, such meetings were infrequent, a reality many cardinals privately lamented. "It will be a great opportunity for many of us to get to know each other and share our concerns from the perspectives of the periphery, and assist the Holy

Father to discern the direction of the Holy Spirit together," said Cardinal Isao Kikuchi of Tokyo.

The January consistory will allow Pope Leo XIV to engage directly with the cardinals, sharing his vision for the future while also hearing their perspectives. Cardinals William Goh of Singapore and Sebastian Francis of Penang are expected to attend.

Observers note that Pope Francis' style highlighted the importance of openness with close collaborators, and that a pope's acknowledgment of his role as successor of Peter remains a key

factor in the governance of the Church. While Francis was known for his maverick approach and disregard for protocol, Pope Leo XIV faces the challenge of balancing continuity with his predecessor, while asserting his own leadership and respecting the historical traditions of the papacy.

One analyst described the task as threading a difficult needle: Leo XIV must be himself, maintain continuity with Francis' pontificate, and uphold the legacy of the Petrine office — a delicate balance that will shape the early years of his papacy. **Crux**

## AI should benefit everyone, not just few

SEOUL: A Catholic bishop attending a conference in South Korea has said that the benefits of Artificial Intelligence (AI) should not benefit only a few but serve as "a common good for all humanity."

Bishop Linus Lee Seong-hyo, a member of the Vatican's Dicastery for Culture and Education, made his remarks during the 10th Seoul Future Conference held on November 5 in the national capital, Seoul.

Bishop Lee, who also serves as head of Masan diocese, presented a paper titled *Dignity and Participation of the Socially Vulnerable in the AI Era* at the conference.

Lee warned that not only the economically poor, but all of humanity could become socially vulnerable in the AI era.



Bishop Linus Lee Seong-hyo speaks during the 10th Seoul Future Conference held in Seoul, South Korea, on November 5, 2025. (Catholic Times of Korea)

"Humans who reshape themselves around machines lose faith in God's existence and no longer

feel themselves to be God's creatures," Lee said, adding that "humanity must cultivate deep spiritual strength and inner resilience."

Lee cited the document *Antiqua et Nova* (The Old and the New) issued jointly by the Vatican's Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Dicastery for Culture and Education to examine the dual nature of AI.

The Vatican document asserts that "the design, implementation, and use of AI systems must always serve humanity and the common good, and how we include the most marginalised and vulnerable is the measure of our humanity," the prelate said.

"The document predicts that as AI advances, the dignity of the socially vulnerable will be the first to face threats," he added.

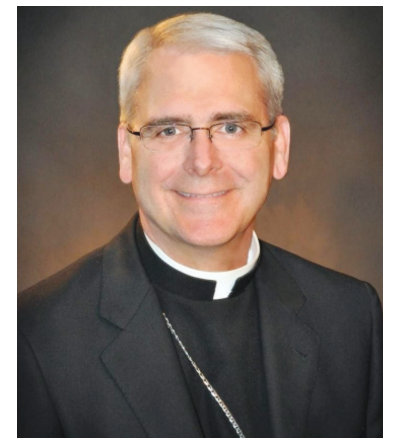
Lee pointed out the risk of AI evaluating human beings based on their ability in a data-driven society, and warned about the possibility of it disproportionately favouring the wealthy in healthcare, education, and labour sectors.

He also highlighted the potential of AI functioning as a remarkable opportunity to lower "learning barriers."

It could function as "a personalised learning tool and enabling early diagnosis and remote care for the elderly and disabled," Lee said.

The prelate pointed out that the Catholic Church is working to embrace diverse fields with a more integrated, inclusive perspective to support the socially vulnerable in the AI era. **Catholic Times of Korea** [ucanews.com](http://ucanews.com)

## Archbishop Coakley is new USCCB president



BALTIMORE, Maryland: US bishops have elected Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City as the new president-elect of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

Gathering in Baltimore for their Plenary Assembly, the US bishops also chose Bishop Daniel Flores of Brownsville, Texas, to serve as the new vice president.

The selection came as Archbishop Timothy Broglio and Archbishop William Lori prepare to step down from their roles at the expiry of their three-year terms in office.

Seventy-year-old Archbishop Coakley, already held a leadership role in the USCCB, serving as secretary. He was ordained a priest in 1983 for the Diocese of Wichita before being appointed Bishop of Salina in 2004, and later archbishop of Oklahoma City in 2010.

He holds a licentiate in sacred theology.

Bishop Flores (64), is the former president of the USCCB Committee on Doctrine. He has been a bishop since 2006. He was one of the 12 bishops to serve on the Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod on Synodality.

He holds a doctorate in sacred theology and is a former theology professor. **Vatican News**

## Caritas bazaars in Hong Kong highlight hope and youth creativity

HONG KONG: Caritas-Hong Kong opened its annual bazaar season with a large public turnout and a renewed call for unity and hope.

Cardinal Stephen Chow, SJ of Hong Kong and visiting Archbishop Julian Leow Beng Kim of Kuala Lumpur inaugurated the festivities at St Paul's Convent School in Causeway Bay, Sunday Examiner reported.

The event, first held in 1961 to foster community spirit and charity, drew more than 22,000 visitors across its Causeway Bay and Tuen Mun venues during the opening weekend.

Cardinal Stephen welcomed the gathering of Church leaders, partners, and young people, saying he was grateful to "be able to gather with such distinguished guests to support the bazaars."

Reflecting on the Jubilee Year theme *Spes non Confundit* (Hope does not disappoint), he noted that "despite challenging times, faith and compassion can guide individuals through difficulties."

He emphasised the role of young people in sustaining the mission, calling their enthusiasm "essential to the mission's success."

Marking his fourth year attend-



A youth-run booth from St. James Church draws visitors during the Caritas Charity Bazaar in Hong Kong. (St James Church/Diocese of Hong Kong)

ing as Hong Kong's bishop, he said the school campus offered "a better place for vitality to be shown and for the laughter of participants to resonate."

The lighting ceremony included Archbishop Julian; Fr Joseph Yim Tak-lung of Caritas-Hong Kong; leaders from the Sisters of St Paul de Chartres; and representatives from St Paul's Convent School and Friends of Caritas.

More than 130 booths from over 50 organisations filled the school grounds, showcasing the engage-

ment of parishes, schools, diocesan commissions, and Caritas units.

Archbishop Julian, who had been meeting with Catholic organisations since his arrival three days earlier, praised Caritas for its long-standing commitment to vulnerable communities.

He said the organisation offers "well-established services for young children, single-parent families, migrants, and the impoverished," noting that it responds not only to material concerns but also provides "emotional, psychological,

and spiritual support."

He said the bazaars show strong cooperation "between the Church, schools, government, and the wider community".

Students from Catholic schools showcased new activities and designs that drew long lines of visitors.

Cardinal Stephen said the bazaars show how diverse groups can act together in charity. "May our efforts be a testament to God's love, and may our actions continue to bring more light to Hong Kong and our world," he said. **LiCAS News**

## When Church silences its own: The crisis of lost agency

One of the most dispiriting things in life is when we have no sense of agency.

Agency is the sense that I can do something about a problem, that I can make a difference, that I have some control over the situation in which I find myself.

We rarely have any sense of agency as such; we become aware of it when we don't have it.

We see this sense of "I have no agency" in societies, clubs, businesses ... and in churches. People who sense their lack of agency feel irrelevant and just opt out.

Ask people why they abandon the Church; often, it results from a sense of having no agency. For example, my life does not fit their model. The Church thinks I'm a mess, but I cannot change to be the sort they want. There is nothing left of me, so I go my own way.

Once a Christian encounters this sense of lacking religious agency, it can rot faith. Many clergy do not even realise there is such a problem.

### Acknowledge the problem

But the sense of a lack of agency in the

Church is far wider.

They express this when they say: 'they want us simply to pray, pay and obey.'

Many feel that if they try to make their views heard, they are ignored.

It might be pointing out that a priest is unsuited to his situation, and the reply: you are lucky to have one.

It might be related to a larger issue, but again, they feel that the concerns will make no difference.

There is too often the quick-fire reply, "That's Church teaching," with the hint that this is unchanging or somehow the last word.



### Voices not heard

But the central problem remains.

We can make our voice audible; we cannot make it heard.

Often, our most significant problems result from the absence of a pope, cardinal, or bishop listening. This leads to a breakdown in the Body of Christ; hierarchs on one side, the other baptised on the other.

We shouted, but you did not hear.

We, as the whole Church, need to re-evaluate the notion

of agency among the baptised.

Jesus came that we might have life and have it to the full (Jn 10:10).

We profess that the Spirit comes at baptism to empower us.

The Gospel is about our empowerment. It is about agency in the face of darkness and evil, and even giving us agency in the face of death itself.

### The acid test

Good pastoral leadership can be tested by asking this question: Does this sister or brother feel empowered by the gifts of the Spirit for the building up of the Church?

If a sense of agency is increased, we are on the right path.

If it is diminished, then those in leadership ministry are failing. **Thomas O'Loughlin, Flashes of Insight/ucanews.com**

**Thomas O'Loughlin is a presbyter of the Catholic Diocese of Arundel and Brighton and professor emeritus of historical theology at the University of Nottingham (UK)**

## 'Burial Gardens'

# How a cemetery visit becomes a lesson in hope

*In the light of Christ's Resurrection, even the resting place of the dead points to the promise that all shall be*

"Look, Dad — a burial garden!" It took me a moment to process our six-year-old's exclamation from the back of the minivan. Burial, yes — she was referencing the cemetery we were passing across the road — but did she just say "burial garden?"

A few days before, we had visited the grave of her great-grandmother, who died three years ago. My mom had brought flowers to the cemetery, distributing them to the grandkids for them to place on the ground. We cried; we laughed; we told stories — we remembered.

This was the first time our six-year-old — who has always had a deep curiosity about death and the afterlife — had visited a cemetery. But apparently, she wasn't afraid or disturbed at all. On the contrary: Whether it was the flowers, the family bond, or just the orderly rows of headstones in that plot of land, she walked away conceiving of it as a garden — a place not only of tranquillity and peace but of vibrancy and colour.

Out of the mouths of the young, God has prepared praise for Himself (Matthew 21:16) — and almost immediately, the phrase struck me as a perfect summary of the paradoxical attitude of the Christian toward death. On the one hand, a cemetery is a place of "burial," the interment of our mortal remains into the earth. Burial signals to us the inevitability and finality of death. "We must all die," a wise woman of Scripture declares. "We are like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up" (2 Samuel 14:14).

On the other hand, a cemetery is a kind of

garden, a charged place of patient waiting, hidden growth, and, above all, of hope for a future flowering. Indeed, in the Gospel of John, we hear that Jesus Himself was buried in an actual garden: "Now there was a garden in the place where He was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid" (John 19:41).

What draws these two images together, the very condition for its possibility, is the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Jesus did not remain dead in that garden but, through the power of the Holy Spirit, emerged as a "spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:44) — supernatural yet "flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39) — leaving behind an empty tomb.

The paradisaic Garden of Eden, lost through disobedience, has touched down in the sorrowful garden of Calvary, claimed by the Son's obedience; and death is now, in Christ, the door to eternal life. St. Paul uses a harvest image for Christ's resurrection: "Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have died" (1 Corinthians 15:20).

Dante beautifully captures this same paradox in a canto from the Purgatory of his *Divine Comedy*:

*Have you not learned that we are only worms born to form the angelic butterfly which flies to justice shorn of its cocoon?*

*About what do your spirits crow so high, defective insects all of you — like grubs falling short of their form's maturity?*

Anthony Esolen, in his commentary on this passage, explains, "The worm of corruption is a common enough biblical image



for man 'that is rottenness, and the son of man who is a worm' (Job 25:6), while the association of the soul with the butterfly goes back to classical Greece. The genius of Dante has combined two commonplaces and fused them into an image at once artistically and theologically potent."

We're not mere butterflies — pure spirits fluttering and flitting about in the air with no connection to the messiness of the ground. Nor are we mere worms — corruptible bodies wearily winding our way down into the ground with no connection to the life-giving air. We're something far stranger: creatures on the way to the perfection of our form. And that perfection isn't the denial of our wormy past but rather, its full "maturity" in the life of the butterfly, a creature drawn, appropriately enough, to gardens.

Someone recently remarked to me that, in her opinion, cemeteries are likely to fall into desuetude and vanish from the face of the earth. Between the collapse of faith in the Resurrection and the increasing popularity of cremation — by some estimates, 70 per cent of Americans will choose it over traditional burial by 2030 — cemeteries may soon be looked upon culturally as un-

sanitary, inconvenient, primitive — even bizarre.

Yet the cemetery remains a vital aspect of Christianity, and it has everything to do with our worm-butterfly nature — and our burial-garden faith in Jesus. Is a cemetery the ultimate place of horror? Only to those still living under the reign of death rather than Christ. Is it the ultimate place of liberation? Only to those who take no stock of the body and this world.

For the Christian, it's something else: a sign of hope amid despair, a flash of light in the darkness, a whisper of a promise that, as Julian of Norwich prophesied, "all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well"; that, as Samwise Gamgee dreamt, everything sad is "going to come untrue" — or more precisely, be integrated into the greater whole of joy; that those grains of wheat that fall into the earth to die will bear much fruit (John 12:24).

Throughout the month of November, Catholics will visit cemeteries to remember and pray for their beloved dead. May we continue to be the people of the burial garden, until death is no more (Revelation 21:4). **Matthew Becklo, Register**

# We don't stop visiting the dying

## *Why do we stop visiting friends with*

Recently, a leader of a church pastoral team in Taiping confided in me that she would never assign a team member to visit someone with severe dementia. Soon after, a pastor shared why she avoids a longtime member: the member's son says his mother "wouldn't remember anyway."

This avoidance is distressingly common. We rally to visit friends battling end-stage terminal illness, yet we often stop calling on those with dementia. So, their world grows smaller and quieter for them — and for their family caregivers. Why do we accept isolation as an inevitable side effect of a cognitive diagnosis?

The problem lies in how we perceive them. Too often, we define people with dementia by their defects and reduce them to mere disease stages. We stop seeing unique individuals and start seeing a homogenous group of "dementia patients." We quickly dismiss them as deficient, leaving no room for the unfolding or the unfathomable human spirit.

We stop seeing them as whole human beings and, instead, only see sufferers.



### Dancing with Dementia

DR CECILIA CHAN

I understand why: Being around someone with cognitive decline is profoundly uncomfortable. We get annoyed by repeated questions, frustrated by language that makes no sense, and we feel helpless. It's easier to avoid the discomfort altogether.

Let me tell you about Lena, who is living with Alzheimer's. As her dementia progressed, her friends and family began to distance themselves, convinced she was only

speaking gibberish. They saw no point in visiting.

Last Friday, however, something shifted. After lunch, Lena smiled widely, pointed at her belly, and announced, "The well is too high."

Instead of disregarding her words as nonsense, I entered her world. I looked at my own stomach and replied, "Mine too." We giggled together. That simple gesture made a world of difference. I understood her message, which was beyond the words she chose.

It made me wonder: When we travel to a foreign country, we learn a few basic phrases to connect. Perhaps we could do the same in the world of dementia.



(Vecteezy/sasirin pamai)

My experience in the world of dementia has provided strong insight into the nature of isolation. I have realised that it is not disability that causes social isolation; it is the way we perceive disability that renders people invisible.

Psychologist Abraham Maslow identified "belongingness" as one of our most fundamental needs. Belonging — the antithesis of social isolation — is not just a need; it is a right. It is time for us to widen our circles and include all people, regardless of their cognitive state. We must acknowledge a fundamental truth: We only belong if we belong together.

We can start small — by making a difference to one person. Perhaps we can reach out to that aunty who used to sing in the church choir but has stopped.

After all, Jesus never healed a crowd of people. He focused on one person at a time. The person in front of us is all the motivation we need.

Change can only begin with us, one person at a time.

**Dr Cecilia Chan is a Gerontologist and Dementia Advocate and Activist. She can be contacted via WhatsApp (013-4384388).**

## Hope and the prevention of suicide

Several years ago, James (not his real name), reached out to me in gratitude for assisting him in managing his suicidal thoughts. He communicated to me that our discussions on strategies to instil hope and delay self-harm had been helpful in him regaining hope and preventing harm to self. He referred to an article I had written titled *Delaying Gratification* which I had shared with him, as being especially helpful. Today, James is a mental health professional helping others with their mental health struggles. He has developed resilience and is able to live life to the fullest.

The Pope's prayer intention for the month of November, 2025 is *for the prevention of suicide. This involves praying for those struggling with suicidal thoughts (that they may) find support, care, and love in their communities and rediscover meaning and beauty in life.*

This prayer intention also calls for the Church to have an "attentive and compassionate heart" that can offer comfort and help.

### The Jubilee Year of Hope and the prevention of suicide

It is fitting that the Catholic Church has earmarked 2025 as the Jubilee Year of Hope in a world in which many people are bereft of hope.

The Jubilee Year of Hope is relevant for many who are experiencing mental health challenges. There is a consensus by public health and mental health experts that the world is experiencing a mental health



### Informed Opinion

PROF XAVIER V. PEREIRA

pandemic. Every mental health disorder carries a risk of self-harm and suicide. Some are low suicidal risk disorders and others like Depressive Disorders and Substance Use Disorders are high suicidal risk disorders.

Knowledge about mental health disorders and the risk of self-harm and suicide attached to these disorders would be useful in the instillation of hope and prevention of suicide.

### The instillation of hope and prevention of suicide

There is a fine line demarcating hope from hopelessness. When hope crosses the line over to hopelessness, the risk for self-harm and suicide increases. Thus, in most psychological therapies for mental health disorders, and especially for depressive disorders, the instillation of hope is an essential strategy.

The famous psychiatrist and psychotherapist Irvin Yalom wrote that "the instillation of hope creates a feeling of optimism about a person's future and the ability to cure that which need not be endured and endure that which cannot be cured. This statement offers much clarity into the process of the instillation of hope. The process can either cure or relieve hopelessness and ensuing suicidal thoughts or help the individual endure these negative thoughts and yet increase his or her sense of hope.

People who are suffering physically and mentally, and have faith in God, can also restore hope in their lives as described in the psalms. Psalm 22:24 assures us that God does not ignore the suffering of the afflicted but listens to their cries for help. The well-known Psalm 23 depicts a loving

God who revives the drooping spirit and restores the soul (Psalm 23:3). There is an interplay of love, faith, and hope (1 Corinthians 13:13). Faith in a loving and caring God helps restore hope.

### Resilience and the prevention of suicide

There has been much discussion about the role of resilience in fostering good mental health.

Oxford Languages describes a resilient person as a person who can adapt and recover quickly from difficult experiences and challenges.

According to the same source, the characteristics of a resilient person are mental and emotional flexibility, allowing the person to cope with and to bounce back from adversity. The resilient person also has the ability to source help from strong social supports, the ability to cope with challenges constructively, and possesses inner strength and is able to draw from personal strengths to cope with stress.

Thus, it is important to build resilience in order to be able to cope with mental health challenges.

Resilience can be built by building and maintaining strong social connections, viewing challenges and setbacks as opportunities to learn and grow, practising self-compassion and self-care, focusing on what can be controlled, and setting realistic goals in life.

One of the reasons attributed to the rise of mental health disorders, self-harm, and suicide among the young (ages 15 to 24) is the lack of resilience. Thus, a preventive strategy for the young would be the building of resilience at an early age.

### Religion and the prevention of suicide

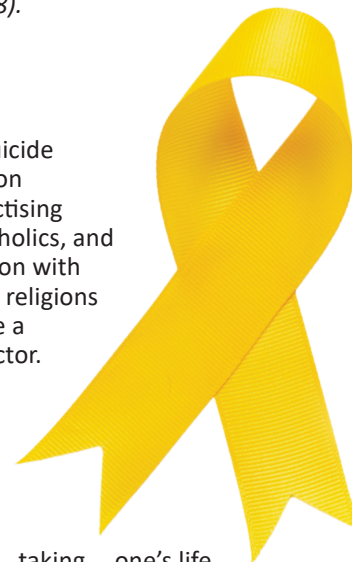
In many studies on suicide, it has been

found that suicide is less common amongst practising Muslims, Catholics, and Jews. Affiliation with monotheistic religions appears to be a protective factor. Researchers attribute this partly to the fear of hell and eternal damnation because of taking one's life deliberately.

The Catholic Church has changed its approach to one that is more compassionate, recognising that severe psychological disturbances can significantly lessen a person's responsibility in taking one's life. Christian burial is now permitted for those who have died by suicide, and priests are encouraged to offer prayers and Masses for the deceased.

Attention also needs to be drawn to the recent increase of Catholic priests committing suicide in countries like India, France, and Brazil. It has been reported that a heavy workload, loneliness, and a lack of support are contributory factors. There is much to be done to prevent these tragic suicides from occurring within the Catholic Church.

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# Living in Community:

Joseph Tek Choon Yee

It began, as most beautiful things do, with a knock on a door. Sometimes the door was opened warmly; other times, a barking dog answered first. Either way, it was the 1980s, and we were young, idealistic and slightly naïve — but that was alright. Faith was our compass, friendship our fuel, and the late Fr Peter Kim, SJ our spiritual engine, forever brimming with energy that seemed powered by divine caffeine.

Reconnecting recently - after three decades — with my old Section 14, Petaling Jaya BEC companions was like unearthing a time capsule of laughter, song, and simple faith. We were once just youths with guitars and oversized dreams, going from house to house singing Christmas carols (sometimes off-key, always off-script).

Life has since carried us far: some now grandparents, others living abroad, a few already called home to God. Yet the thread remains - strong, warm and woven by prayer, patience and the occasional potluck meals.



## BEC beginnings: A Church with many living rooms

The Basic Ecclesial Community, or BEC, was born out of the Church's call for *Aggiornamento* — that lovely Italian word meaning “a breath of fresh air,” not “Ajinomoto” as some of us mischievously thought back then. It was the Church's way of saying: *faith begins at home, not just in pews.*

Inspired by the early Christians who gathered in homes to pray, share and serve, we too began forming our little “churches without steeples.” We prayed, we sang, we reflected — and yes, we ate. Truth be told, many joked that BEC really stood for *Best Eating Club*. Between the rosaries and *rendangs*, we learned that breaking bread together was both sacrament and social glue.

My own journey with BEC began in those formative years - learning leadership through chaos, spirituality through laughter, and humility through burnt *kuih*. The dogs may have chased us, but grace always caught up first.

## Growing together: The joy and the jumble

Community living is never a straight road; it's a winding *kampung* lane of patience, potholes and the occasional wrong turn. In the early days, not everyone embraced this idea of “small communities.” Some worried it meant extra meetings, extra time and money to be spent; others

wondered if they had enough chairs. Yet with time, persistence and zoning maps worthy of town planners, the idea took root.

We began hosting home Masses, carolling nights, Lenten reflections, and in true Malaysian style — *makan* sessions that could rival parish feasts. Sports days, talent nights and tele-matches followed, each one stitched together with laughter and learning. Slowly, the Church became more than a building; it became a living network of people who knew each other by name, prayed for one another and shared life's milestones - from hatch to match to dispatch.

Yes, in community building, there were differences of opinion, bickering, gossip — all the delightful ingredients of the messier side of being human. But hey, that's humanity for you. Still, aren't we a different breed? The kind called not just to clash, but to forgive, to try forgetting (even if selectively) and to move forward with grace - or at least with a bit of humour?

## Faces of faith: The heroes among us

Every BEC is a tapestry woven from ordinary people who make extraordinary things happen quietly.

Uncle Gomez, our calm patriarch, never raised his voice nor his car's speedometer. His old Volkswagen Beetle moved slower than salvation, but it always arrived. I once rode with him to a funeral; honks blared, cars swerved, but Uncle Gomez remained serenely unbothered, humming hymns while I silently rehearsed my confession. From him, I learnt the art of holy patience — that faith, like traffic, cannot be hurried.

Then came the husband and wife, team of Peter and Audrey Yeoh — the dynamic duo who led by example, not decree. Peter was our steady captain, and Audrey his silent compass. Together, they taught



## Faith, Fellowship and Fond

us that true leadership is less about control and more about accompaniment — walking with, not ahead of, others.

Bernie, our indefatigable Martha-Mary hybrid, was the community's heart and hands. She could organise a home Mass, decorate an altar, and whip up curry puffs — all before evening prayers. She once schooled me in flower arrangement for church, gently reminding me, “It's for God, Joe — not your girlfriend!” Her perfectionism was prayer in motion.

And who could forget the Terrance-Lawrence-William trio — our “Positivity Powerhouses.” If laughter were liturgy, they'd be saints. William's cologne was as legendary as his charm, often preceding him by a good two minutes. Their humour lightened every gathering, reminding us that joy, too, is a form of worship.

Finally, Eddie, Cindy and Susan Siow - siblings who supplied the soundtrack to our memories. With guitars, keyboard and endless enthusiasm, they transformed carolling into community theatre. Eddie once strapped speakers to a bicycle *ala beca* just to amplify our Christmas cheer. In hindsight, it was early innovation - the prototype of the “mobile ministry.”

## The spirit of hatch, match and despatch

BEC life mirrored life itself: baptisms (hatch), weddings (match), and funerals (dispatch). We laughed with the newlyweds, wept with the bereaved and prayed for one another in between. In joy and in sorrow, we gathered - not because we were perfect Christians, but because we were imperfect humans learning to love better.

These shared seasons of life taught us that faith isn't a Sunday outfit; it's the everyday wear of compassion, forgiveness and fellowship. It was through these ordinary moments — folding chairs

after Mass, sharing leftover *mee hoon*, comforting a grieving friend — that the extraordinary took root.

## Lessons in living community

Looking back, those years in Section 14 were less a chapter of youth and more a school of life. BEC taught us that community doesn't just happen; it's cultivated. It requires openness to others' quirks, the humility to serve and the courage to stay when misunderstandings arise.

From those days, I carried into adulthood the priceless skills of speaking, leading and listening — gifts that would later serve me at work, in boardrooms and beyond. But deeper still was the understanding that leadership without community is hollow, and faith without fellowship, lifeless.

BEC gave me my first taste of shared mission — a microcosm of the Church as communion, not institution. It was where theology met *teh tarik*, where Scripture found skin and bone.

## A legacy that lives on

Decades later, many of us are scattered — across continents, careers, and callings — yet the flame still flickers. WhatsApp now replaces weekly gatherings, but the warmth remains the same. Every Christmas, when carols drift through the air, I catch myself smiling, hearing echoes of youthful voices, off-key but full-hearted.

As I grow older, I realise that BEC was never merely about prayer meetings; it was about forming a way of being — the new way of being parish and Church. It was, and still is, about people learning to live, forgive and grow together in faith.

And perhaps that's the truest measure of any community: not how grand its events were, but how deeply it shaped our hearts.

*Where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I in their midst.*

That promise was alive in Section 14 BEC — and still lives on wherever we choose to gather, pray, and break bread together — anywhere in the world.

So here's to the unsung heroes of my former BEC — the planners, the prayers, the flower-arrangers, the carollers, the cooks and the quietly faithful. You showed me that heaven isn't somewhere we go; it's something we build - one neighbour, one prayer, one potluck at a time.

God bless the community that taught me how to live, love, and laugh in faith.

# When the Temple became a bank: What Jesus' rage tells us about power today

Ann, an older widow, sits at a little florist shop run by her daughter in Penang, while taking care of her infant grandson. The business income is barely enough to cover expenses. She worries about another son, who has dropped out of school. Inflation and shrinking farmland have pushed up the family's grocery bills. Fish prices have soared as land reclamation swallows coastal fishing waters.

Ann hasn't heard about national budgets, the Davos meetings or giant asset managers. All she knows is that each time she opens her wallet, there isn't much left.

Families like hers sometimes wonder who really governs our world. Whose interests do these powers look after, that determine whether low-income families like theirs have enough food on the table?

'Conspiracy theorists' might argue that the real rulers could be shadowy elite circles such as the Illuminati or the 'Rockefellers' operating in secretive boardrooms.

In the past, I used to think it was the multinational companies, as they had grown from regional prototypes such as the East India Company to the modern versions spanning dozens of countries around the world.

But with the rise of financial capitalisation, Big Tech and Big Pharma, that circle has expanded, with their own spheres of influence. Among them are multi-billionaires, bankers and tycoons who flock to the rarified circles of Davos for meetings of the World Economic Forum.

Asset management giants – controlling trillions of dollars – command enormous influence over corporate decisions worldwide. Sovereign wealth funds too are often overlooked but are incredibly powerful.

Tech monopolies have joined



## Sunday Observer

ANIL NETTO

the fray, and Big Tech's control of data allows it to shape public behaviour and influence ordinary people. Then there is the emergence of AI...

Pharmaceutical giants influence health policy, medical research and even the medical profession.

Other international financial institutions like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and central banks wield massive power. Global bodies such as the G7 and Nato command enormous clout.

Then, you have the superpowers such as the United States (with its military-industrial-media-entertainment complex), China and Russia.

So, identifying specific worldly 'rulers' is not so simple. It is not one secret group like the 'Illuminati'. Rather, power lies in networked centres of influence, not formal control. These power blocs coordinate through forums like the World Economic Forum and interlocking corporate boards and shareholdings.

While they don't always act in perfect unison, their separate – sometimes overlapping – decisions influence public policies, often in their favour.

The result is clear. The ultra-rich grow wealthier and command a greater share of global wealth while the share of the vast majority of humanity shrinks. National economies gravitate to serve these wealthy interests.

What has this got to do with Jesus? During His time, many were crying out for a political messiah to rid them of Roman occupation and oppression.

But Jesus knew foreign occupation – though oppressive and extractive – was not the sole problem. He knew that if the land was freed from Roman occupiers, there were enough greedy local political, economic

and even religious elites who would take over the business of exploiting the people for greater wealth.

Apart from the Romans, there were the high priest families, the Sanhedrin, the aristocrats and the landed class who were complicit in ripping off the people.

This is why Jesus' wrath during the cleansing of the Temple – though overtly directed at the money changers – was not solely aimed at them. Instead, Jesus condemned the "den of thieves".

What was this den? It was the cosy network of the political, economic and religious elite collaborating to extract maximum profits from the people.

Worse, they were using the Temple – which was supposed to represent a God of justice and compassion – to carry out this extraction.

By this time, the Temple was functioning more like a central bank, or money lender. The money changers were linked to 'bankers', while the Temple establishment cooperated with the aristocracy in exploiting the poor.

Substantial money and wealth was stored at the Temple, where it could be lent by the wealthy to the poor. The poor in turn risked losing their land – many of them did – if they could not repay their debt. Animal sacrifices too grew into a huge money-making racket that burdened the poor even more.

No wonder Jesus was furious! But He didn't single out the Roman occupiers by rising up against them. He knew there were other 'sharks' around who were carrying out the extraction at the local level, leaving many suffering, poor, and even destitute.

Jesus understood that even if the Romans were gone, the local political, religious and other elites would carry on the business of oppressing the people.

The Temple itself had gone 'rogue' and corrupt. It had become an oppressive financial institution that collaborated with those at the top of the imperial domination system. It

was this Temple, this seat of collaboration and extraction – with money sloshing around in its inner chambers – that Jesus said would be destroyed.

But, in three days, Jesus said, it would be rebuilt – a different kind of Temple. His own Spirit would propel the new kingdom that Jesus envisaged would confront the forces shaping the world.

Jesus' vision of the world was not naïve. He didn't imagine that overthrowing one set of rulers would usher in justice. He saw that the problems ran deeper – the human capacity for greed, its desire for selfish power and the accumulation of obscene wealth at the expense of the poor.

The entire religious and political edifice had corrupted God's vision for the people. So, He lashed out at this corrupt den of thieves that was burdening the people.

Because He threatened these powerful vested interests, they whispered among themselves that He deserved to die. And so He was crucified.

The good news is that Jesus – and His vision of the kingdom – refused to stay dead. He had proclaimed a new kingdom where the last shall be first, the poor shall be blessed, the outcasts called from the streets to the banquet.

His kingdom takes deeper root when we refuse to participate in the worldly web of domination and exploitation. It grows when we choose solidarity with the poor over the accumulation of wealth.

Unlike the old Temple that was eventually flattened, this new spiritual Temple – rebuilt in three days – cannot be destroyed by the powers of this world. It has risen from the ashes and it will rise again today, opening its doors to all who share Jesus' vision of the new kingdom.

*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.*

No, this isn't an article on a world wind romance, or the swept-off-my-feet love story nor is it a tutorial on decoding mixed signals. This is about the other kind of love – the one we practice (or struggle to practice) with family, friends, colleagues, strangers and that one person who tests our patience just a little too often.

I am sure you would agree that love in everyday relationships is messy, stretching and occasionally makes you wonder if sainthood comes with a fast-track or skip option. Yet it is also this very thing that shapes us, softens us and pulls us beyond ourselves.

Recently, someone I look up to told me that I should accept a person who had deeply hurt someone I care about, because the person who cheated is family. It was difficult, because from where I stood, what happened was wrong, unfair and painful for so many people. And even though I wasn't the one betrayed, I wasn't ready to be okay with the situation. When I hesitated, I was told, "You're being a Pharisee."

A Pharisee? I initially laughed, but the word stung like vinegar. It rang in my head the whole day, then the whole week. I replayed the conversation in the car, in the shower, while trying to sleep. Was I really being self-righteous? Harsh? Unloving? Un-Christian? The more I thought about it, the more I felt like a hypocrite wearing a nice Sunday face.

And maybe the word "Pharisee" stung more because if I'm really honest, that was in fact a real struggle for me, because there are moments when I do feel that Pharisee rising in me. It happens even at Mass, when ministers



## A Blessed Life

TIANNE PEREIRA

## Crazy little thing called love!

are dressed a little too casually, when people are chatting among themselves, when someone has their phone out recording, or when people move up and down the aisle more than necessary during the liturgy. I feel my chest tighten, my eyebrows lift, my inner judge awakened. The casualness around the sacredness of Mass gets to me and in that moment when I feel that flicker of self-righteousness, I try to fight it off by whispering to myself, "Stop

being a Pharisee Tianne, at least they are trying!" So you see, I do struggle with where to draw the line between defending reverence and slipping into Pharisee-ing. It's a tension I feel often, wanting to honour God deeply without turning my heart into a measuring stick for others.

The more I reflected on this whole "Pharisee" joke, the more I realised being a Pharisee isn't the only biblical role I slip into. Some days, I'm not a Pharisee at all, instead I am a full-blown Jonah, running in the opposite direction of the person God wants me to show compassion to. Other days, I am Martha, busy judging everyone else's behaviour while convincing myself I'm simply being "responsible." And let's not forget the older brother in the Prodigal Son story, the one standing outside the party, arms crossed, convinced that fairness should trump mercy.

So here I am, apparently no longer just a "Pharisee," but now carrying a whole collection of unflattering biblical titles. The dilemma – I am also trying to be a good person, to genuinely love God, to pray, and to live what I believe –

but in addition to all this, now I couldn't seem to move past this family hurt.

As I sat wondering what I lacked, the word **love** kept returning to me almost insistently, because I've always believed that everything truly boils down to love. When love is real, hurt softens, negativity fades, even world peace feels possible. Love has a way of putting everything else in its proper place. But then I didn't hate this family member, not even close. I still cared; I still loved them. So, what was wrong? Did love mean I had to agree with someone just because as Christians we're supposed to be understanding? Did I have to pretend nothing happened? Is love swallowing pain so others don't feel uncomfortable?

Charlie Kirk, someone I genuinely admired, said something to the effect of "Love means telling the truth." More fully, he said "**Love is not affirmation. Love is not confirmation. Love is making sure that you care so much about someone that you are willing to challenge them.**" In other words, if you really love someone, you don't just go along with what's easy or comfortable, you speak truthfully to them because you care about their well-being.

This made sense, even when Jesus loved, He didn't tiptoe around wrongdoing. He loved the woman caught in adultery but He didn't say, "Carry on." He loved Peter but He still called out, "Get behind Me, Satan." He loved the Pharisees too but He confronted their hypocrisy to save their hearts.

So, I guess love is not always soft, mushy, tolerant and gentle. Sometimes it is a heavy cross. Sometimes it is surrender. Sometimes it is choosing not to become bitter. Sometimes it is letting go even when the apology never comes.

And sometimes...love is simply admitting to God, "I don't know how to forgive. But if it is Your will, help me want it too."

I realised something freeing, I don't need to be perfect to forgive, and the one who needs forgiveness doesn't have to be perfect either. I don't need to agree with wrongdoings to forgive. I don't need to be ready, I just need to be willing and to love. Love in this circumstance is not a moment of emotion, it is a slow, steady decision to let God's love reshape the wound. This crazy little thing called love, Christ's kind of love, isn't weak, blind, or naïve – it is bold, discerning and rooted in truth rather than convenience.

So maybe the person who "Pharisee-ed" me wasn't entirely wrong. Maybe a tiny Pharisee was hiding inside me, not because I refused to forget the wound, but because I refused to let God transform my heart around it.

I write this for anyone who has ever felt torn between truth and tenderness, anyone who has struggled to forgive without feeling fake, anyone who has been called names for standing their ground, anyone who doesn't want to be a Pharisee but also doesn't want to pretend the hurt never happened. May you know this – You are trying. God sees your heart. And He is walking this crazy, complicated, beautiful road of love with you and I.

*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.*



Fr Ron Rolheiser

# Letting people into our stingy heaven

John Muir once asked: *Why are Christians so reluctant to let animals into their stingy heaven?*

Indeed, why? Especially since St Paul tells us in the *Epistle to the Romans* that all creation (mineral, plant, animal) is groaning to be set free from its bondage to decay to enter eternal life with us. How? How will minerals, plants, and animals go to heaven? That's beyond our present imagination, just as we cannot imagine how we will enter heaven: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard. Nor has it entered the heart of man the things God has prepared for those who love Him." Eternal life is beyond our present imagination.

What John Muir asks concerning animals might be asked in a wider sense: are we too stingy about who gets to go to heaven?

What I mean by "stingy" here is how we are so often obsessed with purity, boundaries, dogma, and religious practice that we exclude millions from our church doors, our church programs, our sacramental programs, our Eucharistic tables, and from our notion of who will be going to heaven. This is true across denominational lines. As Christians, we all tend to create a stingy heaven.

However, I can appreciate the instinct behind this. Following Jesus must mean something concrete. Christian discipleship makes real demands and churches need to have real boundaries in terms of dogma, sacraments,

membership, and practice. There is a legitimacy in creating a dividing line between who is in and who is out. The instinct behind this is healthy.

But its practice is often not healthy. We often make heaven stingy. Metaphorically, we are too often like that group in the Gospel who is blocking the paralytic from coming to Jesus, so that he can only get to Jesus by entering through a hole in the roof.

Our instinct may be right, but our practice is often wrong. We, those of us who are invested deeply in our churches, need to be strong enough in our own faith and practice to be anchors of a spirituality and ethos that welcomes in and dines with those who are not invested. How so? Here's an analogy.

Imagine a family of ten, now all adults. Five of the children are deeply invested in the family. They come home regularly for visits, have meals together every weekend, check in with each other regularly, have regular rituals and celebrations to ensure that they stay connected, and make it their family business to see that their parents are always okay. They might aptly be called "practising" members of the family.

Now, imagine that five of the children have drifted from the family. They no longer cultivate any regular meaningful connection with the family, are dissociated from its everyday life and ethos, aren't particularly concerned

with how their parents are doing, but still want to have some connection to the family to occasionally share an occasion, a celebration, or meal with them. They might aptly be described as "non-practising" members of the family.

This poses the question: Do the "practising members" of the family refuse them entry into their gatherings, believing that allowing them to come jeopardises the family's beliefs, values, and ethos? Or do they allow them to come, but only on condition that they first make a series of practical commitments to regularise contact with the family?

My guess is that in most healthy families the "practising" members would happily welcome the "non-practising" members to a family event, gathering, or meal, grateful they are there, graciously accepting them without initially asking for any practical promises or commitments. Nor would they feel threatened by them joining the celebration and taking a seat at the table, fearful that the family's ethos might somehow be compromised.

As "practising" members of the family, they would have a steady confidence that their own commitment sufficiently anchors the family's ethos, standards, and rituals so that those who are present and uncommitted aren't threatening anything but are making the celebration richer and more in-

clusive. That confidence would be grounded on knowing (*in terms of this particular family*) that they are the adults in the room and can welcome others without compromising anything. They would not be stingy with the gift and grace of family.

There's a lesson here, I submit: We who are "practising" Christians, responsible for proper church practise, proper doctrine, proper morals, and the authentic continuation of preaching and Eucharist, should not be stingy with the gift and grace of Christian family.

Like Jesus, who welcomed everyone without first demanding conversion and commitment, we must be open in our welcome and wide in our embrace. Inclusion, not exclusion, should always be our first approach. Like Jesus, we should not be threatened by what seems impure, and we should be prepared to occasionally scandalise others by whom we are seen with at table. Let's not be stingy in sharing God's family, especially since the God we serve is a prodigal God who isn't threatened by anything!

**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)

## From Leo to Leo: Learning hope and peace from the popes

"As you pray with our popes from Leo XIII to Leo XIV, may you discover anew the hope and peace of Christ, which compels us all to engage the social ills of our day and move forward in making the world a better place for all people now — and for generations to come," writes Catholic speaker and author Katie McGrady in the introduction to *Praying with the Popes: Words of Hope and Peace from Leo XIII to Leo XIV*.

McGrady's invitation is both simple and profound. It reminds us that the wisdom of the popes isn't meant to remain confined to dusty shelves or theological journals — it's meant to shape how we live, love, and serve right where we are.

The words of these Shepherds of the Church, when prayed with and reflected upon, can inspire an active hope, deepen our understanding of true peace, and transform our daily lives into expressions of Christ's love.

Here are a few ways to let their teachings come alive in the ordinary rhythms of our days.

### Hope that draws us together: Leo XIII

"No one is so rich that he does not need another's help; no one so poor as not to be useful in some way to his fellow man ..."

Pope Leo XIII, who wrote passionately about the dignity of labour and the mutual responsibility between rich and poor, reminds us that hope begins in relationship. In a culture that prizes independence and self-sufficiency, his words are a gentle correction: We need each other.

### Reflect and Pray:

We all have moments when we need help or when we're in a position to help someone else. How can we give and receive in ways that draw us closer to one another? Ask God to show you one way to give and one way to receive selflessly this week.

### Love that acts: Benedict XV

"Christian charity ought not to be content

with not hating our enemies ... it also demands that we treat them with kindness ..."

Pope Benedict XV wrote during the chaos of World War I, yet his message is timeless. True peace is not simply the absence of conflict; it's the presence of love in action.

### Reflect and Pray:

How can you move beyond tolerance into genuine kindness? Ask God for the grace to love others selflessly — even those who frustrate or oppose you — and to work actively for their good.

### Faith that becomes reality: Pius XII

"The obligation of Christian love ... is not an empty word, but a living reality."

Pope Pius XII spoke into a world wounded by war, calling Christians to show that love is not abstract — it's visible, lived, and incarnate.

### Reflect and Pray:

Thank God for those who have embodied Christian love in your life. Ask how you might make that love visible to others today — in your family, at work, or among friends.

### Peace that begins with brotherhood: John XXIII

"We are called brothers. We actually are brothers ... Why, then, do we act as though we are foes and enemies?"

Pope John XXIII reminds us that peace begins with how we see one another. Division and resentment fade when we remember that each person shares our same human dignity and eternal destiny.

### Reflect and Pray:

Examine your day: have you treated others as brothers and sisters, or as obstacles? Pray for the grace to see Christ in everyone you encounter.

### Charity in the small things: John Paul I

"Charity is the soul of justice ... I always recommend not only great acts of charity, but

little ones."

Pope John Paul I — known for his warmth and humility — calls us to live charity not only in grand gestures, but in small daily acts: a kind word, a patient response, a simple prayer for someone in need.

### Reflect and Pray:

What small act of love can you commit to this week? Remember, holiness grows in the ordinary.

### The sacred value of life: John Paul II

"Every person sincerely open to truth and goodness can ... recognize the sacred value of human life ..."

Pope John Paul II's defence of life calls us to be grateful for the gift of our own and every person's existence. To live as people of hope means to cherish life in all its forms.

### Reflect and Pray:

Name five things you're grateful for this week. Let your gratitude become praise for the Creator who sustains all life.

### Becoming bread for the world: Benedict XVI

"Each of us is truly called ... to be bread broken for the life of the world."

Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that every Mass sends us forth to live Eucharistically — to give ourselves in love as Christ gives Himself to us.

### Reflect and Pray:

How are you being called to become "bread broken" for others? Perhaps through forgiveness, generosity, or service. Ask Christ in the Eucharist to strengthen you for this mission.

### Care that extends to creation: Francis

"The earth is essentially a shared inheritance ... every ecological approach needs to incorporate a social perspective."

Pope Francis connects care for creation with care for the poor. Our stewardship of the earth is a matter of justice, a reflection of how we love our neighbours.

### Reflect and Pray:

Try an "ecological fast" one day this week — using fewer resources and creating less waste. Let it remind you that creation is God's gift meant for all.

### Humanity above technology: Leo XIV

"Our personal life has greater value than any algorithm ... artificial intelligence remains equipped with a 'static memory' [incomparable to] human beings."

Pope Leo XIV's message is both timely and prophetic: no machine can replicate the soul. The relationships, memories, and love that make us human are gifts from God.

### Reflect and Pray:

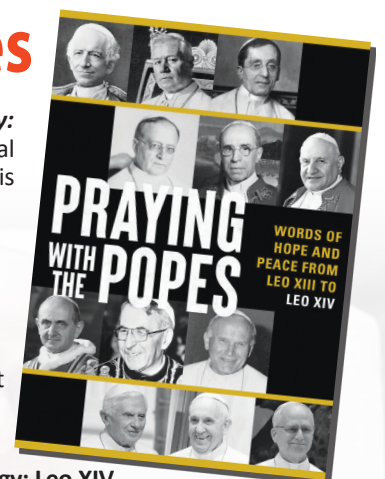
Think of the people whose presence enriches your life. Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for them — and for the irreplaceable gift of your own humanity.

### Praying, not just reading

*Praying with the Popes* introduces readers to nine leaders who have shaped the Church's vision of hope and peace. Their words span more than a century, yet they speak into the same human struggles we face today — loneliness, division, injustice, and distraction.

It's valuable to study the lives and teachings of these popes. But as McGrady reminds us, it's even more powerful to pray with them. When we do, we begin to hear the heartbeat of the universal Church — and more importantly, the voice of Christ calling us to love the world into holiness.

Because when we pray, we don't just learn what the Church teaches. We begin to live it. **Erin Pierce, Aletea**



# Little Catholics' corner



Dear children,

This Sunday, November 23 is the feast of Christ the King.

When Jesus was on earth, many of His followers thought that He was going to be a normal sort of king, with a kingdom and soldiers

and everything.

Is that what Jesus did? Before He died, Jesus said that His kingdom was not in this world.

Do you know where Jesus' kingdom is?

Did you know that the Kingdom of Heaven is not just in Heaven?

It's in the soul of every person who follows Jesus.

Do you try to be like Jesus? Is He your king?

Here is a little prayer you can say to Jesus any time you think of Him, maybe every time you see a picture of Him:

Jesus, you are my King

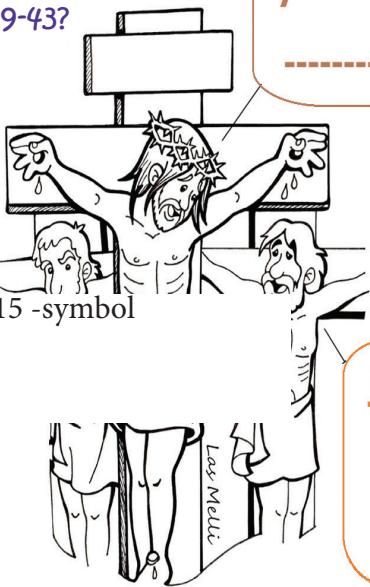
and my God and I love you.

Help me to be your good servant!

Make sure you do something special today to celebrate the feast of Christ the King!

Love  
Aunty Eliz

Can you decipher the symbols in the picture to read the dialogue between Jesus and the two criminals in Luke 23: 39-43?



----- ✨ I tell you, today you will be with me in ----- 😊

Aren't you the ? Save and !"

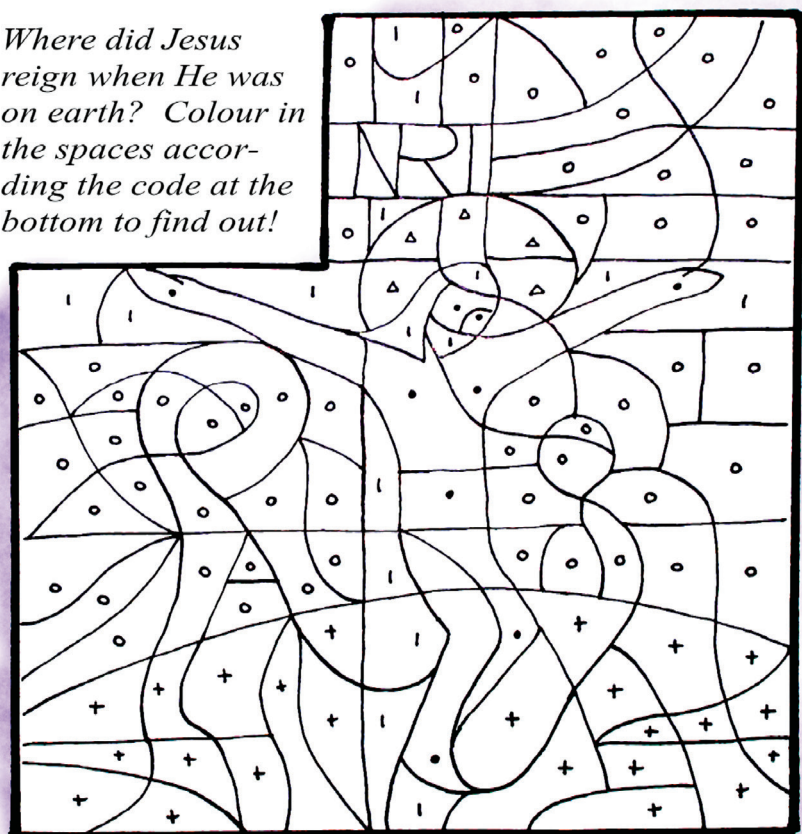
15 -symbol

Jesus, me when you come into your .

✨ Truly 😊 paradise 🕊 us 🛎 yourself ⌚ Messiah

✚ remember ⚙ kingdom

Where did Jesus reign when He was on earth? Colour in the spaces according to the code at the bottom to find out!



• skin colour    ◦ blue    | brown  
▲ yellow        + green

Luke 23:35-43



## Christ the King

### Word-Find

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

See if you can find all the words from the list at the bottom. Then put the leftover letters in the spaces to find a little prayer you can say any time.



BEGINNING	HEAVEN	LOVE
CHRIST	HIGH	PEACE
CHURCH	JESUS	POOR
CREATOR	JUDGE	REDEEMER
DOMINION	JUSTICE	RULE
EARTH	KINGDOM	THRONE
FEAR	LORD	WORLD
GOD		

Answer: Jesus, you are my king!

-----  
-----!



**B**ANGKOK: The recent 60th-anniversary celebration of the Second Vatican Council's declaration *Nostra Aetate* in Rome inspired participants, including five young delegates from Thailand, to renew their commitment to interreligious dialogue, mutual respect, and peace in a divided world.

The Thai youth group, composed of middle and high school students from five schools, was selected to serve as Youth Peace Ambassadors from Thailand at the international gathering. Among them was Narawich Bunyarit, 15, a student at Assumption College in Bangkok.

The Youth Ambassadors joined the Thai delegation led by Somdej Phra Maha Thirachan, Abbot of Wat Phra Chetuphon Royal Temple (Wat Pho), and were among religious leaders from more than a dozen faith traditions, including Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism, and Christianity, in an extraordinary appeal for global peace with Pope Leo XIV.

"It was such a privilege to witness leaders of many religions together with the Holy Father," Narawich told *LiCAS News* on November 8. "The celebration reminded us that dialogue is not merely an option but a sacred duty for building a better world."

The event, organised at the Vatican by the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, marked six decades since *Nostra Aetate*, or the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, was promulgated in 1965.

The document, signed by St Paul VI, was a watershed moment in Catholic history, encouraging mutual understanding and respect among people of different faiths.

Popes, including St. John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis, called it the "Magna Carta of interreligious dialogue." Pope Leo XIV, continuing that legacy, reaffirmed his desire to "build bridges, not walls."

In his address, Pope Leo XIV emphasized that "dialogue is not a tactic or a tool, but a way of life, a journey of the heart that transforms everyone involved. We walk this journey not by abandoning our own faith, but by standing firmly within it."

"Authentic dialogue begins not in compromise but in conviction, in the deep roots of our own beliefs that give us the strength to reach out to others in love," he added.

For the Thai Youth Peace Ambassadors, the highlight of their participation was the audience with the Pope, where he reflected on the continuing vitality of *Nostra Aetate*.



## Thai youth peace

# witness unity of faiths in Vatican celebration



Thai Youth Peace Ambassadors proudly display their "Youth for Peace to Vatican" banner in St Peter's Square during the 60th anniversary celebration of *Nostra Aetate*. (*LiCAS news/Narawit Bunrit*)

"With *Nostra Aetate*," the Pope said, "a seed of hope for interreligious dialogue was planted. Today, your presence bears witness that this seed has grown into a mighty tree, offering shelter and bearing the rich fruits of understanding, friendship, cooperation, and peace."

Narawich said the encounter with the Pope went beyond attending a commemoration; it was a lived experience of *Nostra Aetate's* message.

"I saw the immense power of love and devotion among the people gathered with the Pope, the spiritual leader of Catholics worldwide. It inspired me to work for peace and unity," he said, adding that the trip also deepened his appreciation of the Vatican's art, architecture, and history.

Phattharaporn Upamakan, another member of the Thai delegation, said the atmosphere of the ceremony was "filled with joy and faith."

She described the experience as "an invaluable opportunity to learn about religion, history, culture, and even professional journalism."

"Dialogue is definitely preferable to confrontation. Believers of different faiths can collaborate for human flourishing while maintaining their distinct identities," she added.

Her sister, Chayapa Upamakan, shared a similar sentiment. "I feel very proud and happy to have had the opportunity to meet the Pope. As Youth Peace Ambassadors, we also interviewed adults from different faiths during the celebration. It was truly a great experience," she said.

"In our fractured world, *Nostra Aetate* remains a light of hope illuminating the path toward harmony," she added.

Phurapat Naravijitthanon, another delegate from Bangkok,



Pope Leo XIV sits with Buddhist monks and global faith leaders during the 60th anniversary celebration of *Nostra Aetate* at the Vatican. (*LiCAS news/Narawit Bunrit*)

said the event taught him that "respecting differences is the foundation of peaceful coexistence," adding, "When we open our hearts to listen, we see the beauty in diversity and appreciate the humanity we all share."

From Khon Kaen province in northeastern Thailand, Kritphet Trachu said he was deeply moved by the peaceful atmosphere among leaders of many religions.

"It reminded me of the value of peace, understanding, and forgiveness – the very foundations of building harmony in society," he said. **Chainrong Monthienvichienchai, LiCAS News**

# Sacrament of Confirmation

ALOR SETAR: On November 7, six candidates received the Sacrament of Confirmation at the Church of St Michael. The Mass was celebrated by Archbishop Julian Leow. Parish priest, Fr Michael Cheah, thanked the Archbishop for his presence and expressed gratitude to the teachers who prepared the candidates, making the day a truly memorable occasion.



Confirmands with Bishop Bernard Paul, Fr Joseph Heng and Fr Patrick Tyoh.



Confirmands with Archbishop Julian Leow and Fr Michael Cheah.

MELAKA: Thirty-three Form 5 students gathered with hopeful hearts, to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Bishop Bernard Paul celebrated the Mass with Fr Joseph Heng and Fr Patrick Tyoh concelebrating. The trilingual Mass reflected the rich diversity of the community. The candidates consist of 20 Mandarin-speaking, 10 English-speaking, and three Bahasa-speaking.

As the bishop anointed them with sacred chrism,

some smiled nervously, others closed their eyes in reverence, but all felt the gentle stirring of grace — a moment of strength, peace, and promise.

When the final blessing was given, the newly confirmed youths walked out not just as students, but as young disciples ready to carry their faith to serve the community. May the Holy Spirit continue to guide their steps, kindle their courage, and help them shine Christ's love wherever they go.



## We are Pilgrims of Hope



The youths walking up to Mount Hosanna Church in Simanggang.

KUCHING: The Kuching Archdiocesan Youth Commission (KAYC), in collaboration with St Joseph's International School (SJIS), organised the Kuching Young Christian Students (KYCS) Pilgrimage with the theme: *We are Pilgrims of Hope* recently.

One hundred and thirty pilgrims participated in this event, all from the Young Christian Students (YCS) movement. They were composed of 100 students and 24 teachers from seven different schools, namely; SMK St Teresa, St Joseph's Private Secondary School, St Joseph's International School, SMK Penrissen No. 1, SMK Batu Kawa, SMK Serian and SMK Green Road.

The journey began with prayer at St Joseph's Cathedral before buses rolled out, picking up students from SMK Penrissen and SMK Serian along the way. On-board, chatter, songs and laughter

mingled with quiet anticipation. By the time we arrived at Mount Hosanna Church in Simanggang, rain was falling steadily — yet our spirits were high. We persevered through the weather, while being reminded that a pilgrim's road is sometimes challenging, yet always graced.

Ralph Balan, a YCS alumnus, gave us an engaging session that opened our eyes to the variety of YCS activities in different schools. Students shared what their YCS groups did in their schools and listened attentively to others — discovering new ideas and realising that they are part of a larger movement of faith-filled young people.

After the session, students enjoyed a simple meal and bonded with each other, even more through conversations. The sight of a small group of students from different schools playing volleyball, laughing and playing together was a beautiful expression of community — bonding not just through prayer but also through friendship and fun. Later, everyone regrouped for deeper sharing. Mixed-school groups discussed their YCS experiences and learned more about one another's challenges and joys in living out the YCS spirit (See, Judge, Act).

The highlight of the pilgrimage was the Holy Mass, where we were reminded: "Once a Young Christian Student, forever a Young Christian Student." It was a pow-



erful affirmation of identity and mission. Before leaving, heartfelt appreciation was expressed to the teachers, animators, speaker Ralph Balan, and especially Mt Hosanna's Church community for their warm welcome and support that made this event possible. The return journey to St Joseph's Cathedral Parish Gallery was filled with laughter and conversations. One of the buses even had music from a student playing the harmonica — a gentle reminder that God's presence can be felt in many ways.

More than just a trip, this pilgrimage helped students to bond with God and with each other. It was a powerful time of mutual growth and spiritual enrichment, reminding every pilgrim that they are part of something much bigger — a vibrant, hopeful community of young Christian Students, journeying together in faith, hope, and love. We pray that this event inspired hope and strengthened the bonds

among Young Christian Students throughout the Archdiocese of Kuching and we look forward to more opportunities like this to journey together, grow in faith and friendship, and continue being pilgrims of hope in our daily lives. **Today's Catholic**

**Feedback from participants**  
**"T**he pilgrimage reminded me that God is always present in small moments. The bus trip was definitely the most memorable because even though there were delays, we still had fun together. It gave me hope that challenges can be turned into joy." *Liaw Yixin, SJIS*

**"T**he pilgrimage was a very fun experience, it was quite memorable when the bus broke down and we were stranded but that hasn't made me forget about the purpose of the pilgrimage. It was fun to interact with students from other schools and connect with them throughout YCS." *Gabriel Lee, SJIS*



Group sharing session.

# Buddhist monk who walked in light of love



BANGKOK: Phramaha Thongrattana Thavorn, a revered Thai Buddhist monk and long-time friend of the Focolare Movement, passed away on November 10 after a battle with prostate cancer. He was 81.

News of his death quickly reached Focolare communities across the world, drawing attention to his lifelong commitment to interreligious dialogue, mutual understanding, and peace — values that transcended religious boundaries and defined his life's mission.

The Focolare Movement, also known as the Work of Mary, was founded in Italy in 1943 by Chiara Lubich. Its goal is to promote unity among peoples of all backgrounds, inspired by Jesus' prayer, "May they all be one."

Today, the movement is present in more than 180 countries. It includes members from different Christian denominations, other faith traditions, and even non-believers — all committed to building a culture of fraternity and peace.

According to Varaporn Phongpit, a senior member of the Focolare community in Thailand, the story of Phramaha Thongrattana's relationship with the movement began in 1995.

"While accompanying his disciple, Phramaha Thong, to Italy, he visited Loppiano, the international center of the Focolare Movement, and met Chiara Lubich for the first time," said Varaporn. "From that meeting, a deep spiritual friendship was born."

Touched by Lubich's message of universal love, the monk affectionately called her "Mamma Chiara." Recognising his spiritual depth, Lubich gave him the name Luce Ardente — Italian for "Burning Light."

From then on, Phramaha Thongrattana became a devoted friend and bridge between Focolare and the Buddhist world.

For three decades, Luce Ardente took part in Focolare gatherings across Asia and Europe, meeting Popes John Paul II and Francis, and engaging in interreligious dialogues that emphasised cooperation over competition.

His message was always consistent: "Religions must not compete but collaborate for the good of humanity."

In a December 2024 interview with *LiCAS News*, he explained, "When you are a good person and I am also a good person, we should bring our goodness and our morals together. We can come together without losing our own identity."

"This is the era of globalisation," he added. "We must keep an open mind. Religions should not be compared as to which is better or worse."

Phramaha Thongrattana articulated what has come to be seen as his spiritual testament: "I would like each one, in his or her own religion, to seek the deep meaning of his or her doctrine. Only in this way will we be able to live together in peace and harmony."

It was a call not for uniformity but for depth — to live one's faith authentically and encounter others with sincerity.

His reflections echoed the message of Pope Leo XIV, who, during the recent commemoration of the 60th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* — the Second Vatican Council declaration on relations with non-Christian religions — called for unity among all faiths.

"Let us collaborate, because if we are united, everything is possible," the Pope said. "Let us ensure that nothing divides us."

Following his passing, Margaret Karram, President of the Focolare Movement, sent a heartfelt letter to members worldwide, remembering him as a beacon of hope and compassion.

"Phramaha Thongrattana lived fully the name Chiara had given him — Burning Light — being everywhere an instrument of light, consolation, and hope," Karram wrote. "Until the end, he loved and lived to build fraternity."

She recalled how he faced misunderstanding and hardship with quiet strength. "Once, a monk asked him, 'Master, do you follow a Christian woman?' And he replied: 'I do not follow a woman, but her ideal of universal fraternity. She is not only a Christian; she is also ours.'"

In his final message to Karram, written before his death, Phramaha Thongrattana expressed the serenity of a man who had made love his way: "Margaret, I suffer, but I resist, I resist, I resist, because my sufferings are nothing compared to those of Jesus on the Cross. I resist because I am the son of Mother Chiara. Remember: we don't see each other anymore, but one day we will meet again. I'll go to her soon."

Karram said she carries his words as a lasting lesson. "He taught me what it means to 'resist for love,'" she wrote. "His unity with me was a precious gift that I will never forget."

In predominantly Buddhist Thailand, where the Catholic population numbers fewer than 400,000 — less than one percent of the population — interreligious harmony has long been a hallmark of society.

Within that context, Phramaha Thongrattana's friendship with the Focolare Movement embodied a living example of dialogue in action.

"Phramaha Thongrattana wanted many people to get to know Chiara and Focolare," said Varaporn. "He brought many monks and lay Buddhists to meet us. He believed love was the only language everyone could understand."


Even in his final days, Luce Ardente remained faithful to that conviction — that beyond all differences, love is the path that unites us all. **Chainarong Monthienvichienchai, LiCAS News**

## MEMORIAM

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1ST YEAR ANNIVERSARY

IN LOVING MEMORY OF



**WILSON PETER**  
August 05, 1965 - November 19, 2024



One year on, not a single day passes without thoughts of you. You live on in our hearts and minds, forever loved, forever missed.

May your soul rest in eternal peace, and may we feel God's comforting presence as we continue to navigate the sorrow of your absence.

Forever cherished and deeply missed by your wife, children, relatives and loved ones.

In Loving Memory of

35th Anniversary 39th Anniversary

**Philip Anthony D'Cruz**  
Departed: 27-11-1990

**Rajamah D'Cruz**  
Departed: 2-12-1986

Our hearts will always love and cherish you.  
Deeply missed and always remembered by  
Loved ones.

### In Loving Memory of



**Eruthyanathan @ Rogers**

Departed:  
November 23, 2023

"Happy the man who has placed his trust in the Lord."  
Psalm 40:4

Forever cherished by family and all loved ones.

### In Loving Memory of



**Peter & Stella Dass**

25th Anniversary 12th Anniversary

From the Lord: 16 July 1921  
To the Lord: 17 June 2000

From the Lord: 6 June 1931  
To the Lord: 29 November 2013

Close in our hearts you will stay,  
loved and remembered everyday by  
Children, Grandchildren and loved ones.

## NOTICE

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Resting in Eternal Peace

1st Heavenly Anniversary Memorial Mass Invitation in Loving Memory of

**Madona M.M Pereira (Mrs Antony)**



27 May 1948 - 24 November 2024

"You are gone from our sight, but never from our hearts. Our memory is a blessing, your life a testimony of faith. Until we meet again, God has you in His keeping, we have you in our hearts"

Please join us for the 1<sup>st</sup> Heavenly Anniversary Memorial Mass on Saturday / 29 November 2025 / 6.00 pm at the Church of St Philip, Segamat. No. 8, Jalan Buloh Kasap, 85000 Segamat Johor and thence followed by fellowship at St Joseph's Hall after mass.

Dearly Missed & Cherished by Daughter  
Claina Antonette Antony  
Relatives & Friends.

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• BUILDING OF MONUMENTS • SUPPLY OF CONDOLENCE WREATHS •

# Kerala celebrates beatification of pioneer nun and educator

KERALA, India: The Archdiocese of Verapoly rejoiced on November 8 as faithful from across India and Asia gathered at the National Shrine Basilica of Our Lady of Ransom, Vallarpadam, Kochi, to witness the beatification of Mother Eliswa Vakayil, *pic*, the founder of the Congregation of Teresian Carmelites (CTC) and the first indigenous women's religious congregation in Kerala.



The solemn Mass, presided over by Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang and papal representative, began at 4:30 pm and included the reading of the apostolic letter, the unveiling of Mother Eliswa's statue, and the placement of a relic from her tomb, a site long visited by pilgrims seeking her intercession. Apostolic Nuncio to India Archbishop Leopoldo Girelli and Archbishop Joseph Kalathiparambil of Verapoly also participated in the ceremony.

"Today, the Church celebrates with joy not only her heroic virtues but also her simplicity and radical witness through a God-centred life," Cardinal Sebastian said. He described Mother Eliswa as "a woman who remained faithful to God to the very end, with graceful fortitude," noting that her life exemplifies courage, steadfast faith, and love.

Two years ago, on Nov 8, 2023, the Vatican had declared her Venerable. Her beatification followed the recognition of a miracle: the in-womb healing of a baby girl diagnosed with a cleft lip at 34 weeks, attributed to Mother Eliswa's intercession.

Mother Eliswa (1831-1913) was a trailblazer for women's empowerment and education. In 1866, she founded India's first indigenous women's religious community, the Third Order Discalced Carmelite Congregation (TOCD), at Koonammavu near Ernakulam. Cardinal Sebastian hailed her as "a pioneer of inclusion, a woman ahead of her

time, walking together in communion," whose dedication to education, care for the poor, and fostering collaboration between rites offers a living example of synodality in action.

He added, "In a world facing moral confusion, gender inequality, and spiritual hunger, Mother Eliswa teaches us that the path to sainthood is not easy, but it is worth it."

As Mother Eliswa was officially proclaimed Blessed, church bells tolled and the basilica resounded with hymns and applause. Her tomb at Varapuzha, which Cardinal Sebastian visited before the ceremony, has long been a place of pilgrimage. "Her tomb has become a site where people of all backgrounds come to seek her intercession. Now, she intercedes for us from heaven as Blessed Eliswa, a beacon of hope and a spiritual mother for our times," he said.

The beatification, 112 years after her death, marks the third stage in the four-step canonisation process and was attended by clergy, religious sisters, and pilgrims from across Asia.

Meanwhile, Pope Leo XIV spoke of the beatification of Mother Eliswa highlighting her "courageous commitment to

the emancipation of the poorest girls." "The witness of Mother Eliswa Vakayil," the Pope affirmed during his greetings in Italian at the end of his general audience on Nov 12, "is a source of inspiration for all who work in the Church and in society for the dignity of women." **Agencies**



Cardinal Sebastian Francis sprinkling rose petals at the tomb of Mother Eliswa.

## ORDO 2025-2026



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