The Catholic Weekly
HERALD

TERHAD | PP 8460/11/2012 (030939) | ISSN: 1394-3294 | Vol: 33 No. 40 | November 8, 2026 | www.heraldmalaysia.com

Mission Statement

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

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

1 Thes 4:13-14



St Theresa's Melaka makes synodality a parish reality

■ P4



Building a culture of accountability across parishes

■ P7



Bringing the Word to life

■ P10



Confession is MERCY not JUDGEMENT

ROME: The confessional should not be a place Catholics approach with fear, shame, or dread. It is where human weakness encounters God's mercy, where forgiveness opens the way to healing, and where every sinner is offered the opportunity to begin again.

This was the message of Bishop Krzysztof Józef Nykiel, Regent of the Apostolic Penitentiary, who urged Catholics to rediscover the Sacrament of Reconciliation not as an experience of condemnation, but as an encounter with God's love that leads to genuine conversion and renewal.

Speaking at the conclusion of a two-day formation seminar in Rome on October 24, Bishop Nykiel emphasised that true repentance is not measured by how deeply a person feels ashamed of past failures, but by the willingness to acknowledge one's sins and allow God's mercy to transform one's life.

The seminar, held from Oct 23–24, explored the theme *Contritio Cordis: Biblical, Theological and Spiritual Foundations*, examining the meaning of contrition and its central place in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Bishop Nykiel explained that contrition of the heart does not mean being consumed by "a paralysing sense of guilt" or becoming trapped in endless self-examination. Rather, it is a liberating encounter between the truth of human weakness and God's boundless mercy.

His message challenges the perception of Confession as merely a religious obligation or an uncomfortable admission of wrongdoing. While recognising one's sins is essential, genuine contrition goes further. It opens the heart to forgiveness and calls for a sincere commitment to change.

Offering practical guidance on how Catholics can approach the sacrament more meaningfully, Bishop Nykiel outlined four essential attitudes that place God's love, personal responsibility and ongoing conversion at the centre of reconciliation.

First, Confession should begin with God's love, not a list of sins. An examination of conscience should not be reduced to self-reproach or a mechanical recounting of failures. Instead, Catholics are encouraged to reflect on God's mercy and the love revealed through Christ's sacrifice on the Cross. It is from this awareness of being loved that genuine repentance begins.

Second, honesty is essential. True contrition requires more than a vague feeling of guilt. It calls for the humility to acknowledge specific wrongdoings, accept responsibility and seek forgiveness without making excuses or minimising one's actions.

Third, reconciliation must lead to concrete action. The sacrament does not end when the priest pronounces absolution. Genuine repentance should bear fruit through efforts to repair harm, restore broken relationships and show greater compassion towards others.

As Bishop Nykiel explained, while contrition turns one's gaze towards God, reparation directs it towards one's brothers and sisters and the wider community. The forgiveness received in Confession must therefore be reflected in the way Catholics live and treat others.

Fourth, conversion must become a way of life. Contrition is not a passing emotion experienced only during Confession. It calls for a heart that remains attentive to God's Word, sensitive to wrongdoing, slow to judge others, and willing to begin each day again.

Together, these four attitudes present Confession not as an isolated religious practice, but as part of a continuing process of spiritual renewal that shapes one's relationship with God and others.

Throughout the seminar, speakers explored the biblical, theological, spiritual, psychological, and pastoral dimensions of repentance, highlighting the transforming power of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Bishop Nykiel stressed that God does not desire hearts crushed by shame or hardened by guilt. Rather, He seeks hearts opened to truth, transformed by love and renewed through grace.

His reflections also serve as a reminder that receiving God's forgiveness carries a responsibility to extend mercy to others. Reconciliation cannot remain confined to the confessional if it is to bring about genuine change in personal relationships and community life.

Concluding his address, Bishop Nykiel expressed the hope that the seminar would inspire a renewed appreciation of the sacrament and its power to restore hope.

"May the fruit of this seminar be a renewed discovery of the confessional — not as a place of judgement, but as a home of celebration and resurrection." **Vatican News**

The Catholic Weekly
HERALD
ESTABLISHED 1994

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Tel / Whatsapp: 03-20268291

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


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Your contributions are essential in keeping our faith community connected and informed.
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More than an interruption

Imagine walking into a parish compound and being struck by its beauty and serenity. The peaceful surroundings draw you into prayer, leaving you with a sense of gratitude and closeness to God. You then make your way to the parish office to seek information or complete a form. But the warmth you experienced outside soon gives way to an encounter marked by indifference, impatience, or an unwelcoming attitude.

Have you ever experienced this? Perhaps you have witnessed it happening to someone else.

Those who work in parish and diocesan offices are often among the first people visitors encounter. They are, in many ways, the frontliners of the Church. Before a visitor meets the priest or participates in a liturgical celebration, an interaction with office staff may already have shaped their impression of the church.

This places a particular responsibility on those entrusted with administrative and pastoral duties. Their work involves answering calls, processing documents, and managing schedules. They deserve reasonable working hours, proper breaks, and respect for their well-being. Christian hospitality does not require anyone to abandon these legitimate boundaries.

Yet, there is a difference between maintaining boundaries and making people feel unwelcome.

What happens when someone arrives a few minutes before the office opens or during the lunch hour? Must the person be turned away without a word or left standing in the sun or rain? And if a visitor approaches the wrong office and needs directions to another department in the same compound, is it too much to expect someone to offer guidance?

A simple acknowledgement, a courteous explanation or directions to the appropriate department can make all the difference. Even when immediate assistance is not possible, kindness need not be put on hold.

This is not merely a question of good customer service. It is a matter of Christian witness.

Catholic Social Teaching reminds us that every human person possesses inherent dignity, created in the image and likeness of God. That dignity does not depend on age, social standing, familiarity with church personnel, or perceived importance. An elderly visitor, a young person seeking guidance, or someone unfamiliar with the premises deserves to be treated with respect.

The principle of solidarity calls us to recognise others as brothers and sisters, rather than interruptions to our work. The preferential option for the poor and vulnerable challenges us to be attentive to those who may struggle to speak up for themselves or navigate unfamiliar systems.

These principles are not abstract concepts to be discussed only in classrooms or Church documents. They must shape how we speak, listen, and respond in everyday encounters.

In Matthew 25:40, Jesus teaches that whatever we do for the least of our brothers and sisters, we do for Him. This challenges every Christian, especially those serving in Church institutions, to recognise Christ in the person standing before them.

Of course, not every delayed response is evidence of uncharitable behaviour, nor does every refusal amount to a failure of Christian values. Staff may be attending to urgent matters, managing heavy workloads or following established procedures. Visitors, too, must respect office hours and employees' legitimate needs.

The issue is not whether everyone can be served immediately or every request granted. It is whether people are treated with dignity, even when the answer is no.

This calls for an examination of conscience, both personal and institutional. Do our parish and diocesan offices reflect the welcoming Church we proclaim? Are staff encouraged to practise Christian hospitality? Have we made reasonable arrangements for visitors who arrive early, during lunch breaks or at the wrong department? Is there a sheltered place to wait and clear information about whom to approach?

These are not extravagant demands. They are tangible expressions of a Church that cares.

We must not measure our pastoral effectiveness solely by the beauty of our churches, the solemnity of our liturgies or the number of programmes we organise. The Church's mission extends beyond the sanctuary. It is lived out at reception counters, through telephone conversations, in email replies and in every encounter with someone seeking assistance.

Otherwise, we risk speaking eloquently about mercy, compassion and inclusion while practising them selectively. We may proclaim that everyone is welcome yet communicate the opposite through our behaviour.

Perhaps the most important question is not whether our church doors are open, but whether those who approach them experience an open heart.

The serenity of a church compound may draw someone closer to God. The kindness of the people they meet can deepen that encounter. Conversely, an indifferent or humiliating experience may leave wounds that no beautiful building can heal.

Every person who enters a church office is more than a task to be completed or an interruption to be managed. Each deserves dignity and respect.

So, the next time someone approaches our desk, let us ask ourselves: if Christ stood before us in the guise of a stranger, would we treat Him any differently?

Our answer may reveal more about the Church we are building than all the words we proclaim from the pulpit.

Sandra Ann

From knowledge to wisdom: Being ready for the Lord

Reflecting on our **Sunday Readings** with Fr Philip Tay, OCD

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

Readings: Wisdom 6:12-16
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18;
Gospel: Matthew 25:1-13

If you grew up in the 1980s and 1990s, you might remember watching kung fu movies from Hong Kong in which masters gained wisdom through prolonged meditation. Often, their newfound insight led them to recognise that violence was not the answer. That is how wisdom was portrayed in those films. But wisdom is more than a moment of realisation: it shapes how we live.

Over the past two and a half decades, digital technology has transformed our access to knowledge. Information that was once difficult to find is now at our fingertips. Libraries remain important for research, especially academic study, but an increasing amount of material is available digitally. With our phones and AI tools, we can search for information, summarise documents and explore complex ideas. Our quest for knowledge has become easier. But does gaining knowledge mean gaining wisdom?

The Book of Wisdom tells us that wisdom is bright and does not grow dim. Here we see its first distinctive characteristic: its enduring light. However much knowledge we acquire, we cannot remember everything, and our ability to recall information may weaken with age. Wisdom, however, is not merely stored information. It is a gift from God that helps us see life more clearly. We can study the wisdom of the saints and learn from their example, but reading alone is not enough. Their wisdom must take root in our own lives.

This brings us to a second characteristic of wisdom. The Book of Wisdom tells us that reflecting on wisdom helps our understanding to mature. Knowledge gives us information, and intelligence helps us make sense of it. Wisdom guides us in using it well. It helps us discern not only what we can do, but what we ought to do. Today's Gospel illustrates this distinction.

The familiar parable of the ten bridesmaids draws a clear distinction between the foolish and the sensible. Yet the foolish bridesmaids were not without knowledge. All ten knew why they were there, and all brought their lamps. The difference was that the sensible ones also brought flasks of oil. They were prepared for the possibility of a delay. Knowing what to expect was not enough; they needed to act on that knowledge with foresight. Wisdom turns what we know into thoughtful preparation.

Our own experience offers a simple example. Many of us have attended wedding banquets that began later than expected. We arrived on time, only to wait. If we planned the rest of our evening around the stated starting time, we may have found ourselves frustrated. Experience teaches us to allow for delays. Wisdom helps us use that experience without becoming impatient or assuming that everything will go according to plan.

Whatever our situation, knowledge helps us draw up a plan, while wisdom helps us make that plan sensible and flexible. It prompts us to consider different possibilities and prepare for them, rather than be caught unprepared. This requires humility: we do not know everything, and we are not in control of everything. Yet wise preparation is not the same as anxious overthinking. How do we find the balance?

The sensible bridesmaids show us a way forward. They could not control when the bridegroom would arrive, but they could prepare for a delay. Wisdom calls us to attend to what is within our responsibility and entrust what lies beyond our control to God. The foolish bridesmaids sought more oil only when the bridegroom's arrival was announced, and while they were away, the door was shut. Their experience challenges us: do we act while there is still time? We may admire the wisdom of the saints, but do we heed it and put it into practice?

Growing in wisdom requires humility and self-awareness. Even great knowledge cannot, on its own, teach us how to live well. We must remain willing to learn, to recognise our limitations and to receive God's guidance. The Book of Wisdom assures us that wisdom makes herself known to those who desire her. Let us pray, then, for humble hearts and a sincere desire for this gift. May the knowledge we gain become wisdom we practise, so that we are ready to welcome the Lord when He comes.

Kuala Lumpur Archdiocese

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

November

16	EXCO Meeting – Christian Federation of Malaysia
17	Meeting – Sri Seronok Board
18	Clergy Monthly Recollection
19	Meeting – Archdiocesan Finance

Penang Diocese

Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

November

10	Sacerdotal Ordination of Deacon Ashley Chau and Deacon Patrick Hilary – Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam at 6.00pm
10-11	Clergy Monthly Recollection – Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam
12	Permanent Deacons' Gathering – Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam
13	Fellowship – Stewards of Catholic Health Care Asia (CHCA) and Board and Management from the Ministries, Penang
14	Mass – World Day of the Poor, Church of St Francis Xavier, Penang at 10.00am
15	Confirmation – Church of Our Lady of Good Health, Parit Buntar, Church of St Joseph, Bagan Serai, Church of St Anthony, Nibong Tebal at 10.00am
15	Blessings and Consecration of the Chapel of Christ the King, Buntong, Ipoh at 6.00pm

Malacca Johore Diocese

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

November

9-14	South Korea Pilgrimage – Footprints of the Korean Martyrs
15-17	1st Annual General Meeting – Caritas Malaysia, CCM, Petaling Jaya
21	Study Day – MJD Professional Standards Office @ MAJODI Centre
21	Mass – South Johor MJD Young People's Day – Sacred Heart Cathedral @ 5pm

A concert to help families find answers



PETALING JAYA: For most parents, hearing that their child has a serious illness can be frightening. But imagine the anguish of not knowing what is wrong at all.

Imagine watching your child struggle with unexplained symptoms, moving from one hospital appointment to another, undergoing repeated tests and returning home with more questions than answers. Months turn into years, hope mingles with anxiety, and the search for a diagnosis becomes an exhausting ordeal.

For families already struggling financially, knowing that specialised genetic testing might provide answers, but being unable to afford it, adds another painful dimension to that uncertainty.

It is for these children and their families that Suriana Welfare Society Malaysia is organising *Harmony of the Rare & Brave,* a charity concert on November 21 to raise funds for its Genetic Testing Support Fund.

The initiative aims to help children from financially disadvantaged families access tests that could identify certain rare diseases and guide appropriate medical care.

Behind the effort is Dr James Nayagam, a child rights advocate whose 46 years of working with vulnerable children have reinforced his conviction that financial hardship should not prevent a child from receiving essential support.

Rare diseases, sometimes called orphan diseases, affect relatively small numbers of people. In Malaysia, the Ministry of Health defines a rare disease as a life-threatening or chronically debilitating condition affecting fewer than one in 4,000 people.

More than 7,000 rare diseases have been identified worldwide, with an estimated 80 per cent having a genetic origin.

Yet behind these statistics are children whose conditions may be difficult to recognise and parents desperately seeking answers. Symptoms can resemble those of more common illnesses, resulting in repeated consultations, investigations and referrals before a diagnosis is reached.

This prolonged search, often described as a diagnostic odyssey, can take an enormous emotional and financial toll. Beyond medical expenses, families may face sleepless nights, mounting anxiety and uncertainty about their child's future.

Genetic testing cannot provide every answer, nor does a diagnosis necessarily mean a cure is available. However, identifying a condition can help doctors recommend appropriate treatment, plan early interventions and guide families in caring for their children.

Sometimes, simply understanding what their child is facing can bring a measure of relief after years of uncertainty.

Through *Harmony of the Rare & Brave,* Suriana hopes to turn an evening of music, dance and poetry into an opportunity for the wider community to support children whose struggles often remain unseen.

The concert will feature the Selangor Kuala Lumpur Orchestra and Choir, JAN1513 & Friends, Nightbirds and KL Traders, among other performers.

The event aims not only to raise funds but also to highlight the challenges faced by families caring for children with rare diseases, particularly those struggling financially.

Harmony of the Rare & Brave will take place on November 21, 2026, from 7.30pm to 9.30pm at the Auditorium Dewan Sivik MBPJ, Petaling Jaya.

For concert and ticket information, visit *www.suriana.org/becauseitsrare-wecare.*

● *See also pg 12*



Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #293

F12 MJD NEWS UPDATES

Welcome dear friends,

Pilgrims came from Singapore, Bentong, KL, Melaka and all over Johor to the little Parish of ***St Simon the Zealot, Labis*** to commemorate its 100th Anniversary.

The diocese earlier celebrated the ***Diamond Jubilees*** of St Henry, Batu Pahat and Christ the King, Kulai.

What do the saints show? For the saints, "holiness is never detached from history: Rooted in their own times, they transform the world through faith, embody the Gospel, and make history more human." Remembering ***"All Saints Day".***

Local Takes! Listen and Learn!

The latest film ***"Sayang Sayang",*** a Malaysian-Taiwanese collaboration earned five nominations at the prestigious 63rd Golden Horse Awards at Taipei. It has taken an outsider to remind us, with its mix of languages, traditions and navigating questions of identities, families and future.

PMX called on all PH candidates to ***counter slander and racial incitement*** by demonstrating its achievements and service to the people.

Interesting ways Malaysians speak: "So how?" (What do we do now?); "Abuden?" (Ah! But then?); "bo jio" (you didn't invite me); "cincai lah!" (Whatever!); "jom " (let's go); "ciao" or zhao (let's leave); iykyk (if you know you know). There is no one way about people and things.

Reading the Signs: Being Holy

On All Saints Day (2011): Pope Benedict XVI taught: Holiness is not a privilege of the few, but the vocation of all; that holiness is our identity, the Beatitudes are our pathway; and heaven is our destiny.

On Families and Society: After his surgery, Pope Leo thanked everyone for their prayers and reflected on the role of families as the foundation of society, emphasising the important bond between spouses and the gift of having children.

On the Commandment of Love: "We cannot truly love God unless this love overflows into love for our brothers and sisters."

On WYD 2027 in Seoul: the organisers have launched an official pilgrim app to help young Catholics prepare for travel to South Korea and take part in the gathering.

Thought for the Week: God's Mercy

An atheist planned to mock those who observed the Sabbath on Sunday. He had prepared his land for cultivation on Sunday.

On another Sunday, he sowed the seeds. Manuring and working the field had been done on Sundays. He had very good crops. The next day he took an advertisement in the local newspaper, boasting, *"I did all my work on Sundays, broke the Sabbath. But at harvest time, I had better crops than you, my dear Sabbath-observing friends"*

He received a beautiful reply, *"My friend, you have misunderstood God, as one who punishes those who do not keep the Sabbath. Harvest and good crops are not the criteria of God's blessing. Who knows how much you have lost in between. How many blessings may have gone your way during this time?*

Lesson from a reader: God is always merciful. He is free with His blessings. Maybe one can persist to be successful, and miss out on the grace moments or the something bigger that God may have laid out.

QnQ? Q asks: Why do we react? Why do some feelings keep lingering or persist within us?

"When a person has a reaction to something in their environment, there's a 90-second chemical process that happens in the body; after that, any remaining emotional response is just the person choosing to stay in that loop.

Something happens in the external world and chemicals are flushed through your body which puts it on full alert. For those chemicals to totally flush out of the body it takes less than 90 seconds.

This means that for 90 seconds you can watch the process happening, you can feel it happening, and then you can watch it go away.

After that, if you continue to feel fear, anger, and so on, you need to look at the thoughts that you're thinking that are re-stimulating the circuitry that is resulting in you having this physiological response over and over again."***Jill Bolte Taylor***

The Spirit @ work: "The starting point for every authentic renewal in the Church is one's own discovery of Jesus' love," ***Pope Leo XIV***

Something to tickle you: "The purpose in life is not to win. The purpose in life is to grow and to share. When you come to look back on all that you have done in life, you will get more satisfaction from the pleasure you have brought into other people's lives than you will from the times that you outdid and defeated them." ***Harold Hushner***

Bishop Bernard Paul

St Theresa's Melaka makes synodality a parish reality

Francis Ong

MELAKA: Listening to one another is only the beginning. The greater challenge lies in translating what has been heard and discerned into meaningful action that strengthens parish life.

This was the focus of a follow-up gathering at the Church of St Theresa on October 25 as parishioners came together to reflect on the outcomes of their Parish Pastoral Assembly (PPA) held on August 16 and explore how its priorities could be translated into concrete commitments.

The gathering brought together 37 participants, comprising 26 Mandarin-speaking and 11 English-speaking parishioners, at the parish hall. It aimed to clarify the purpose and direction of the PPA while providing an opportunity for parishioners to raise questions, share concerns and offer suggestions.

Following the August assembly, the PPA Working Committee had reviewed and discerned the contributions from 32 groups that participated in Conversations in the Spirit.

Among the priorities identified were putting God first in parish life, making prayer central, serving with joy and deepening relationships within the parish community.

These priorities were subsequently discussed with the Parish Pastoral Team (PPT) on Sept 15 and presented to the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) on Sept 20. Together with the commitment to hold a follow-up conversation, they formed five pastoral commitments, each accompanied by proposed actions, persons responsible and target dates.



A participant sharing his thoughts on the outcomes of the PPA.

The Oct 25 gathering marked the first step in putting these commitments into practice.

Proceedings began with prayer and a reflection on Scripture, drawn from James 1:19–20, which calls believers to be quick to listen and slow to speak.

After several minutes of silent reflection, participants shared their thoughts in small groups, putting into practice one of the parish's commitments — making prayer central to its life and activities.

Participants were then taken through the history and evolution of the parish's pastoral assemblies.

Since the early 2000s, the parish has held annual assemblies as opportunities to review, reflect and renew its pastoral direction. Over the years, the approaches have evolved from questionnaires and SWOT analysis to Appreciative Inquiry and, more recently, Conversations in the Spirit, introduced in the diocese two years ago.

The gathering also reflected on how earlier assemblies, which largely centred on reports from parish leaders followed by questions and criticism from parishioners, sometimes reinforced an unintended division between leaders and the wider community.

While such exchanges had their value, they did not always foster the collaboration, mutual understanding and unity that parish life requires.

Participants were reminded that the Church does not belong solely to its leaders. Rather, every baptised person shares responsibility for its life and mission.

This understanding lies at the heart of the synodal Church envisioned by Pope Francis and continued under Pope Leo XIV — a Church in which the People of God listen to the Holy Spirit, discern together and take shared responsibility for mission.

The Conversation in the Spirit approach, used during the Synod of Bishops in Rome in 2023 and 2024, encourages prayerful listening, respectful dialogue and communal discernment rather than debate or confrontation.

For St Theresa's parish, adopting this approach represents a continuing effort to move beyond individual expectations and interests towards a greater sense of belonging and shared responsibility.

The five pastoral commitments for 2027 were subsequently presented and explained. These will be incorporated into the parish's pastoral plan for the coming year.

During the open-sharing session, participants were given two minutes each to speak, followed by one minute of silent reflection before the next person took the floor. A countdown timer helped maintain the structure and encouraged attentive listening.

Seven parishioners shared their views, raising matters relating to parish facilities, liturgy, children and Sunday School, as well as experiences of caring outreach and personal involvement in parish life.

The questions and suggestions will be reviewed by the PPT at its November meeting, with responses to be provided subsequently.

In his closing remarks, parish priest Fr Thomas Chong SJ thanked those present while expressing concern that some whose participation was particularly needed had not attended.

Acknowledging that not everyone, including PPC members, had fully grasped the practice of Conversation in the Spirit, he nevertheless recognised the progress being made.

He encouraged parishioners to remain open to the process rather than resist it, emphasising that learning to listen and discern together is essential to becoming one Church.

Drawing on Bishop Bernard Paul's reminder, "No preparation, no celebration," Fr Thomas stressed that preparation is necessary in every aspect of Christian life, including participation in Sunday Mass.

Liturgy, he reminded parishioners, is not merely something celebrated in church but must be reflected in the way Christians live.

He affirmed the goodwill and commitment of those present and encouraged them to continue serving the parish community.

The gathering concluded with prayer, a blessing and fellowship.

More than a follow-up to an annual assembly, the gathering reflected St Theresa parish's continuing effort to make synodality a lived reality — where listening leads to understanding, discernment leads to action, and every parishioner recognises a shared responsibility for the Church's mission.



97 children receive First Holy Communion

KAJANG: Ninety-seven children received their First Holy Communion during the weekend Masses on October 24-25 at the Church of the Holy Family.

Assistant parish priest, Fr Bonaventure Rayappan, delivered the homily prepared by parish priest Fr Michael Chua, reminding the children that they would receive the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ, who would come to dwell in their hearts, especially through the Eucharist.

Reflecting on the Gospel reading and Jesus' commandment to love God with all one's heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love one's neighbour as oneself, Fr Michael encouraged the children to develop a daily relationship with Jesus through prayer and Sunday Mass.

He also urged them to listen to their parents and teachers, help with household chores, share their toys, be kind to their siblings and apologise when they made mistakes.

"Every time you receive Jesus in Holy Communion, He is saying to you, 'I love you.' You must, in return, love Him back," he said, highlighting two simple rules for the children to follow: love God with all their hearts and love the people around them.

After Mass, Fr Michael reminded the children that while they had previously watched their parents receive the Eucharist, they could now join them in receiving Jesus in Holy Communion.

He commended the catechists for their commitment to preparing and guiding the children and thanked their parents and families for supporting their faith formation. He also stressed the importance of attending weekend Mass and catechism regularly, reminding parents of their responsibility to nurture their children's spiritual growth.

Fr Bonaventure encouraged the communicants to love Jesus wholeheartedly and remember that He is truly present in their lives and hearts.

Of the 97 children, 50 received their First Holy Communion at the Saturday sunset Mass, while eight received the sacrament at the Tamil Mass and another eight at the Mandarin Mass. The remaining 31 received their First Holy Communion at the Bahasa Malaysia Mass on Sunday.

The congregation and families prayed that the children would continue to grow closer to Jesus and encounter Him more deeply through the Eucharist, strengthened by His grace, love and presence in the Blessed Sacrament. **Bernard Anthony**

Making room for the Holy Spirit

CHERAS: Adults and youth from the Church of St Francis of Assisi (SFA) stepped away from their daily routines for an opportunity to pray, reflect and reconnect with God during the Alpha Holy Spirit Weekend on October 10 and 11.

Through talks, prayer and fellowship, participants were invited to deepen their faith and remain open to the Holy Spirit's presence in their lives.

Each person arrived with different hopes, questions and expectations. For some, the weekend brought clarity or confirmation about matters they had been praying over. Others experienced renewed peace, encouragement and spiritual strength.

The experience also offered a reminder that encounters with God unfold differently for each person. An answer may bring clarity, while a quiet moment of prayer can offer reassurance amid uncertainty. Questions do not always disappear, but there is room to keep asking, listening and growing in trust.

Alongside the personal moments of reflection, fellowship provided space for connection and mutual encouragement.

The invitation extended beyond the weekend: to remain attentive to God and carry the fruits of prayer into family life, friendships, studies, workplaces and the parish community.

Making room for the Holy Spirit is an ongoing commitment, expressed in the choices and relationships of everyday life. The peace received, the questions raised and the encouragement shared can become starting points for a deeper relationship with Christ.

As participants returned to their routines, the hope was that their encounter would continue to grow through prayer, openness to God and a willingness to share His love with others. **Shivonne Prevena**



Small in numbers, strong in faith

Isabel Joseph

GOPENG: Established and blessed in 1919, the Church of St Jude has stood for 107 years as a place of prayer, hope and devotion, sustained by generations of faithful who have kept its spiritual heritage alive.

From October 22 to 25, the parish community celebrated the church's 107th anniversary and patronal feast under the theme *Faith that bears fruit (Iman Yang Menghasilkan Buah)*, reflecting on how faith must be expressed not merely through prayer and worship, but through compassion, generosity and service to others.

The four-day celebration featured Eucharistic celebrations in Tamil, English, Bahasa Malaysia and a multilingual Mass, with invited priests offering reflections on different aspects of Christian discipleship.

Welcoming the faithful on the opening day, parish priest Fr Francis Andrew encouraged them to remain steadfast in their faith, particularly when confronted with life's difficulties.

He reminded parishioners that faith must extend beyond the walls of the church and be reflected in their homes, workplaces and relationships. Remaining faithful to God, he said, enables believers to face life's challenges with greater trust, patience and peace.

On the second day, Fr Stanley Antoni challenged the congregation to consider how often they postpone opportunities to show kindness.



Faithful participating during the feastday Mass.

He recounted the story of a young boy who repeatedly asked his mother to help a beggar outside a shopping mall, only to be told each time, "Next time."

Turning the situation around, Fr Stanley posed a thought-provoking question: What if, when we desperately seek Jesus' help, His response to us is also "Next time"?

The illustration served as a reminder that compassion should never be delayed. Christians are called to extend kindness not only to family and friends, but also to strangers and those who have little to offer in return.

On the third day, Fr Simon Anand reflected on the meaning of happiness through the story of a fisherman and a wealthy man.

The wealthy man encouraged the fisherman to expand his business, acquire bigger boats and accumulate wealth so that he could eventually enjoy a comfortable and happy life.

The fisherman, however, simply replied, "But I am already happy now."

Through the story, Fr Simon reminded the faithful that happiness is not necessarily found in greater wealth or possessions, but often in appreciating life's simple blessings and sharing what one has with others.

Drawing on Exodus 22:20–26, he also stressed the importance of justice and compassion towards the vulnerable, particularly strangers, widows, orphans and those struggling financially.

He cautioned against exploiting others or taking advantage of their difficulties, reminding the congregation that a faith which bears fruit must be evident in how people treat those most in need.

On the feast day itself, Fr Mark Michael invited parishioners to examine whether they were truly listening to God or merely expecting Him to answer their prayers.

Using the story of a woman who complained that her asthma medication was ineffective, only for the doctor to discover that she had been spraying the inhaler onto her neck rather than inhaling it, he illustrated the importance of following instructions.

Similarly, he observed, Christians may continually seek God's blessings while failing to listen to His Word or put His teachings into practice.

He also encouraged the faithful to approach the Eucharistic celebration with greater attentiveness and reverence, reminding them that participation in Mass requires more than physical presence.

Prayer, he emphasised, calls for an attentive heart, openness to God's Word and a willingness to respond through daily living.

Taken together, the homilies reinforced the central message of the feast: faith bears fruit when it is translated into kindness, gratitude, justice, attentive prayer and service to others.

In preparation for the celebrations, the church also underwent several improvements, including the rebuilding of toilet facilities, upgrades to the sink area and roofing works.

These efforts reflected the community's commitment to maintaining a welcoming and comfortable place of worship for parishioners and visitors.

The parish is also preparing for a retreat scheduled from late November into December, involving the communities of St Joseph and St Jude. The retreat is expected to provide opportunities for spiritual renewal, particularly within the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs).

Beyond the liturgical celebrations and preparations, the 107th anniversary was an occasion to acknowledge the dedication of parishioners who continue to sustain the church through their prayers, contributions and voluntary service.

Although relatively small, the community remains committed to preserving the faith handed down through generations.

Every helping hand, every contribution and every act of service formed part of the celebration, reflecting the spirit of a community that continues to care for its church and one another.

For the faithful of St Jude, Gopeng, the anniversary was not merely a celebration of the past, but a call to carry forward a legacy of faith that continues to bear fruit for future generations.

St Jude's feast draws faithful together

RAWANG: Prayer, fellowship and the veneration of relics brought parishioners and pilgrims together at The Church of St Jude for its annual patronal feast, celebrated under the theme *"Celebrate, Listen and Walk Together, All Are Welcome, Everybody Belongs"*.

Relics of four apostles, on loan from College General Regional Seminary in Penang, were a special feature of this year's celebration. They included a first-class relic of St Jude Thaddeus and relics of St John, St Andrew and St Thomas.

At a special para-liturgy on October 15, the faithful gathered to pray and venerate the relics. Parish priest, Fr Simon Labrooy brought the reliquary to elderly people and those with disabilities so they, too, could participate.

Thanking the seminary for the loan, Fr Simon expressed his hope that those seeking St Jude's intercession would also encounter the living Christ.

The nine-day novena began the following day despite rain and chilly weather. Feast committee chairman, Diana Prem Alphonse Ryan, raised the church flag as parishioners and pilgrims sang the hymn in honour of St Jude. Joining them were Fr Simon, Fr Jonathan Rao, Fr Anthony Robert and Deacon Joseph Tan.

Diana said accepting the role had required prayer and discernment as she balanced Confirmation classes with visits to her ailing mother in India. Humbled and honoured by the invitation, she entrusted the responsibility to God and drew confidence from His help.

The committee widened participation by involving both parish zones and ministries. Preparations included the annual *gotong-royong* on October 11, while the zones prepared meals for fellowship after each Mass.

Throughout the novena, daily sub-themes invited the faithful to reflect on God's love and presence in their lives. The opening theme, "Do Not Be Afraid – You Are Precious to God", set the tone for reflections on trust, perseverance, and hope.

Attendance increased over the nine days, with the Mass for the anointing of the sick drawing a particularly large gathering. It reminded everyone of the Church's care for the sick and elderly, and of the strength Christ offers amid suffering.

Devoted pilgrims and former parishioners returned for the feast, some sharing accounts of prayers answered through St Jude's intercession. Participants were reminded of his mission as an apostle who brought Christ's message of salvation to a world in need of hope.

The annual procession was a highlight, bringing families and pilgrims from different walks of life onto the streets of Rawang. Walking and praying behind the decorated vehicle carrying St Jude's statue, they publicly expressed their faith and the celebration's call to walk together.

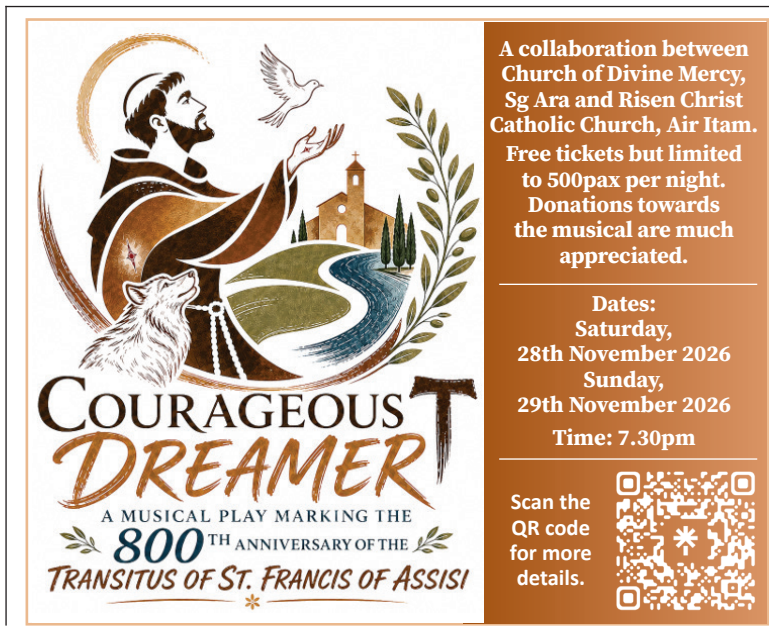


A pilgrim venerating the relics.



The sick and elderly coming forward for the anointing of the sick.

The novena closed with the burning of petitions and the lowering of the church flag, as the faithful were encouraged to place their hopes, struggles and intentions in Christ's care. **Mercy Almeida**



Prayer at the heart of evangelisation

KUALA LUMPUR: Mission does not always mean travelling to distant places. Sometimes, it begins with a prayer for someone in need, a listening ear or a simple act of kindness towards a family member, colleague or stranger.

This was the message at the inaugural Missionary Holy Hour held at the Church of Our Lady of Fatima, Brickfields, on October 16, drawing more than 100 faithful from parishes across the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.

Organised by the Archdiocesan Mission of New Evangelisation for Christ (AMNEC), in collaboration with the parish and the Archdiocesan Prayer Ministry, the gathering sought to deepen awareness of prayer as the foundation of evangelisation and encourage Catholics to respond to Christ's call to mission.

The Holy Hour began with the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, led by parish priest Fr Andrew Manickam, followed by the *Angelus.*

Welcoming participants, AMNEC coordinator Andrew Lim outlined the four movements of the prayer gathering: *Watch, Pray, Intercede, and Be Sent.*

"We are here to watch with Jesus, pray for people, intercede for mission and allow Jesus to send us," he said.

Emphasising that prayer lies at the heart of evangelisation, Andrew reminded participants that their prayers could help open hearts, strengthen faith and draw others closer to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Fiorentina Anne then guided the congregation through the hour of prayer and reflection, beginning with Jesus' words to His disciples in Mark 14:37–38: "Could you not keep awake one hour? Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial."

The faithful were invited to spend time in quiet adoration, keeping watch with Jesus before turning their prayers towards others.

They prayed for families, young people, those who had drifted away from God and people they might encounter in their daily lives.

The intercessions then widened to include missionaries, the Church in Malaysia, AMNEC, the Archdiocesan Prayer Ministry and the need for more workers in the Lord's harvest.

The final movement, *Be Sent*, invited participants to reflect on how they could respond personally to Christ's call.

"Lord, what are You asking of me? Who are You asking me to pray for this week? What is one mission step You want me to take?"

Participants were reminded that being sent on mission does not necessarily involve travelling far from home. It could mean reaching out to someone struggling with life's challenges, offering encouragement, praying with another person or simply being present to someone who needs to be heard.

The faithful were encouraged to make a concrete commitment, whether by praying daily for someone, reconnecting with a person in need, becoming more faithful in prayer or joining AMNEC's intercessory team as a Prayer Evangeliser.

The Holy Hour concluded with Benediction, followed by Mass celebrated by Fr Andrew Manickam and Fr Edwin Peter, AMNEC's Ecclesiastical Assistant.

The gathering reinforced a simple but important message: evangelisation begins with a personal encounter with Christ, is sustained through prayer and finds expression in everyday acts of love and service.

Those interested in becoming an AMNEC Prayer Evangeliser may contact 013-7543519 or 012-3313997.

Equipping teachers to promote natural fertility awareness

Maydeline Ijon



BINTULU: A two-day Billings Ovulation Method® (BOM) Teachers Training Course was held at the Magnificat Centre, Bintulu, on October 17–18, equipping participants with greater knowledge, practical skills and confidence to promote fertility awareness and women's reproductive health.

Conducted by Dr Chan Lek Lim, assisted by Kevin Kawen, the training sought to deepen the understanding of existing BOM teachers while preparing four new teachers to guide individuals and couples in understanding and applying the method.

Throughout the course, participants explored the principles of BOM, a natural fertility awareness method that helps women recognise their patterns of fertility and infertility through observation of cervical mucus.

The sessions covered the use of the BOM Slide Rule as a teaching aid, as well as the interpretation of fertility charts under various circumstances, including breastfeeding, stress, perimenopause and short luteal phases.

Participants also examined how the method can assist couples seeking to conceive, alongside discussions on fertility patterns following contraceptive use and certain ovarian conditions.

Practical worksheets and charting exercises reinforced their learning, enabling participants to apply their knowledge and develop greater confidence in guiding others.

Beyond strengthening technical understanding, the training highlighted the importance of providing accurate information and appropriate guidance to individuals and couples seeking to understand their fertility.

The course also reinforced the role of BOM teachers in promoting greater awareness of women's reproductive health and helping couples make informed decisions about family planning.

Armed with renewed knowledge and practical skills, participants are better equipped to extend fertility awareness education to families and the wider community.

When fathers and sons make time for each other

SETAPAK: Fathers and sons may share the same home, meals and everyday routines, but how often do they set aside time to truly listen to one another, share their thoughts or simply enjoy each other's company without distractions?

For 11 fathers and their sons, a special bonding workshop at the Church of the Good Shepherd on October 3 offered an opportunity to do just that.

Organised by the parish's Family Life Ministry under the theme *Building Bonds, Creating Memories,* the half-day workshop brought together 22 participants for a morning of laughter, meaningful conversations, teamwork and spiritual reflection.

More than simply spending time together, the gathering encouraged fathers and sons to be fully present to one another, strengthen mutual understanding and create memories beyond their usual daily routines.

The morning began with breakfast and light-hearted icebreakers, helping participants relax and ease into the activities. Interactive games, including *Find Someone Who... and the Father & Son Challenge,* soon had the pairs working together, laughing and discovering how well they knew each other.

But beyond the fun and games came an opportunity for something perhaps less familiar — honest, uninterrupted conversations.

During a guided heart-to-heart session, fathers and sons were invited to share their thoughts on appreciation, relationships, understanding one another, future hopes and dreams, and encouragement.

The emphasis was not on giving advice, correcting mistakes or finding immediate solutions, but simply on listening.

For fathers accustomed to being the ones who guide, instruct and provide answers, it was an invitation to listen without interruption. For sons, it was an opportunity to express themselves openly and feel heard.

The conversations were complemented by hands-on activities that tested teamwork, patience, creativity, and trust. Pairs tackled puzzles constructed family-themed creations using blocks and craft materials and navigated a blindfolded challenge that required them to rely on one another.

Another meaningful activity saw each father-and-son pair create a time capsule containing personal messages and goals for the future — a reminder of the promises, hopes and aspirations they had shared that morning.





Some of the games and activities organised for the father-son workshop.

As the workshop moved into its final segment, the lively atmosphere gave way to quieter moments of spiritual reflection.

Fathers and sons were encouraged to express gratitude for their families, reflect on how they could grow together in faith and spend time in prayer.

It was a reminder that the father-son relationship is not built solely through providing material needs, sharing activities or fulfilling responsibilities, but also through emotional presence, mutual respect, encouragement and faith.

Before the workshop concluded, participants posed for photographs holding a takeaway card bearing a simple but powerful message: "Don't Just Spend Time Together — Be Present With Each Other."

The gathering ended with closing remarks, tokens of appreciation and a final blessing. However, the conversations were not meant to end when participants left the church grounds. Fathers and sons were given a further challenge to continue their dialogue during the drive home.

The Family Life Ministry expressed its appreciation to all who participated, hoping that the experience would encourage fathers and sons to nurture stronger relationships through regular conversations and shared moments.

Ultimately, the workshop offered a reminder that meaningful relationships are seldom built through grand gestures. Sometimes, they begin with something as simple as putting aside distractions, asking a question, listening patiently or sharing a laugh.

And perhaps the most valuable gift a father can give his son — or a son his father — is not something that can be wrapped or bought, but the willingness to make time, listen and be present. **Nick William & Jessica Ghanamal Edward Nathan**

Building a culture of accountability across parishes

PETALING JAYA: Financial stewardship in the Church is about more than balancing accounts, preparing budgets and complying with procedures. It is also about accountability, transparency and ensuring that the resources entrusted to parishes are used responsibly in serving the Church's mission.

This was the underlying message of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur's annual Parish Finance Workshop, held on October 17 at the Church of St Ignatius which brought together parish leaders, Parish Finance Committee (PFC) members, accounting personnel and younger clergy for a day of shared learning and practical engagement.

Guided by the theme *United in Mission; Responsible in Stewardship – Working Together as One Church,* the workshop departed from the conventional lecture-based format in favour of interactive discussions, practical exercises and collaborative learning.

Embracing the spirit of synodality, Archdiocesan Financial Administrator, Jude Braganza and his team encouraged participants to listen, exchange experiences and learn from one another, reinforcing the understanding that sound financial management is a shared responsibility.

For the first time, digital tools were incorporated to make the sessions more engaging. Participants accessed workshop materials through QR codes, while Kahoot! quizzes and live question-and-answer sessions helped reinforce key financial policies, project governance requirements and administrative guidelines.



Jude Braganza (centre) moderates a panel discussion featuring Parish Pastoral Committee (PFC) chairs from four parishes.

A highlight was a panel discussion moderated by Jude, featuring Adrian Miles from the Church of St Francis of Assisi, Sharon Ong from the Church of St Thomas More, Denise Lim from the Church of the Divine Mercy and Peter Ho from the Chapel of Kristus Aman.

Drawing on their respective parish experiences, the panellists shared practical insights into the roles and responsibilities of PFCs, monthly financial reporting, parish budgeting, annual audits and building committee governance.

The discussion provided an opportunity for parishes to exchange good practices, address common challenges and explore ways to strengthen financial accountability across the archdiocese.

Participants also worked in small groups on real-life project case studies involving budgetary controls and governance procedures. Building committee representatives, Datuk Steven for the Church of the Holy Spirit and Selvanathan from the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist, shared practical experiences in managing building projects while adhering to established standard operating procedures.

Other sessions focused on the financial provisions of the Pastoral Directory, particularly the importance of compliance, accountability, and timely reporting.

Parishes were reminded of the requirement to submit monthly financial reports within 30 days after the end of each month and complete their annual audits within six months after the close of the financial year.

Jude also highlighted the financial benefits of placing surplus parish funds in centralised archdiocesan fixed deposits, which he said could generate almost twice the returns offered by standard parish deposit rates.

Beyond the technical discussions, moments of prayer, praise and worship kept the day's proceedings rooted in the Church's wider mission. Participants were reminded that financial administration, though often carried out behind the scenes, is an important ministry that supports pastoral work and the needs of the faithful.

In her closing remarks, master of ceremonies Rina Roche, a parishioner of the Church of the Holy Family, summed up the spirit of the gathering: "When one parish learns, the entire Church has an opportunity to grow."

Fr Gnana Selvam Berentis led the closing prayer, invoking St Ignatius of Antioch and reinforcing the understanding that financial stewardship is ultimately a ministry of service, grounded in integrity, accountability and concern for the common good.

The workshop underscored a simple but important principle: while each parish manages its own resources and responsibilities, all are part of one Church, united in a common mission. By learning from one another and strengthening financial practices, parishes can better ensure that the resources entrusted to them serve not merely institutional needs, but the people and communities they are called to serve.

Praying for the world, living the mission at home

KUALA LUMPUR: The call to evangelise extends beyond distant mission territories. It begins in our homes, families, parishes and communities, wherever opportunities arise to share Christ's love through prayer, witness and service.

This message was at the heart of a Mission Rosary gathering organised by the Mission Rosary Team for the New Evangelisation at the Chapel of Our Lady of Good Health, the residence of Archbishop Emeritus Murphy Pakiam in Kampung Pandan, on October 19.

Held during World Mission Month, the gathering brought participants together in prayer, reflection and fellowship, inspired by Christ's command to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19).

The Mission Rosary, introduced by Venerable Fulton Sheen, uses five colours to represent the continents: green for Africa, red for the Americas, white for Europe, blue for Oceania and yellow for Asia.

Each decade is dedicated to the spiritual and missionary needs of a continent, inviting the faithful to pray for those who have yet to encounter Christ, missionaries serving in difficult circumstances and communities in need of peace, healing and hope.

The Mission Rosary for the New Evangelisation has been adapted for the Church in Malaysia, retaining its universal missionary intentions while encouraging Catholics to reflect on their own responsibility to proclaim the Gospel.

Through Mary's intercession, the faithful are invited to recognise that missionary discipleship begins with a personal encounter with Christ and finds expression in everyday life, particularly within families, Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), parishes and the wider Archdiocese.

To encourage greater participation, a Mission Rosary booklet has been prepared in four languages — English, Bahasa Malaysia, Mandarin and Tamil — making it accessible to families and parish communities across the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.



The Mission Rosary Team with Archbishop Emeritus Murphy Pakiam.

In his message accompanying the e-booklet, Archbishop Julian Leow encouraged families, BECs and parish communities to pray the Mission Rosary for the New Evangelisation throughout October.

He emphasised that the prayer should not merely inspire Catholics to intercede for missionary work worldwide but also encourage them to become missionary disciples wherever God has placed them.

Following the recitation of the Rosary, participants reflected on a question relating to mission and the new evangelisation, sharing their insights on how the call to proclaim Christ could be lived more meaningfully.

The gathering concluded with a blessing from Archbishop Emeritus Murphy Pakiam, followed by fellowship that strengthened friendship and a shared commitment to the Church's evangelising mission.

The evening served as a reminder that while the Mission Rosary embraces the needs of the entire world, its message also challenges every Catholic to look closer to home, recognising that the mission of the Church begins wherever faith is lived, love is shared and Christ is made known. **Mission Rosary Team**



OLF welcomes Southeast Asian delegates for interfaith exchange

KUALA LUMPUR: An exchange of questions, perspectives and experiences brought together people of different faiths and cultures at the Church of Our Lady of Fatima (OLF), Brickfields, on October 27, demonstrating how dialogue can foster understanding, mutual respect and friendship.

The parish welcomed approximately 70 delegates attending the 3rd Southeast Asia Dialogue Cities Conference, led by Dr Amir Ishak, Chairman of INSaf.

Held in Kuala Lumpur from Oct 26 to 28, the conference was jointly organised by the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID) and the Coordinating Council of Islamic NGOs Malaysia (ACCIN). It sought to strengthen interfaith and intercultural cooperation in addressing challenges faced by urban communities.

Representing various faith traditions and Southeast Asian countries, the delegates were received by OLF Parish Administrator Fr Andrew Manickam, Parish Pastoral Council representative, Santhana Rengan, and members of the parish's PMEIA ministry.

The hour-long visit provided an opportunity for open and engaging exchanges, with delegates raising questions and expressing keen interest in understanding Catholic beliefs and practices.

The lively discussion reflected a shared willingness to learn from one another, recognising that meaningful dialogue begins with listening and a genuine desire to understand.

With so much interest generated, the hour seemed all too short. Malaysian delegates were warmly invited to return to the parish for further conversations and opportunities to deepen interreligious friendship.

The gathering served as a reminder that harmony among people of different faiths is nurtured through personal encounters, openness and mutual respect.

By creating opportunities to meet, listen and learn from one another, communities can overcome misconceptions, strengthen relationships and contribute towards a more understanding and harmonious society. **Ruben Soosay**

Asian Catholic council to strengthen Deaf ministry

SEOUL: A new Asian Catholic forum has been launched to strengthen the Church's pastoral services for deaf people and ensure their gatherings yield result-oriented actions, not just one-off conferences.

The Asian Catholic Deaf Council was launched during the fourth Asian Catholic Deaf Congress in the South Korean capital, Seoul, on October 15-21.

The event was jointly hosted by the Archdiocese of Seoul and the Seoul Catholic Mission for the Deaf.

It drew around 230 participants, including priests, religious, laypeople and hearing sign-language interpreters from various Asian nations. Participants from Timor-Leste and Mongolia joined the conference for the first time.

According to the resolutions, the council will serve as a hub for sharing pastoral experiences, sign-language catechetical and liturgical materials, and resources.

The council was formed in response to a proposal by the Catholic Association of the Deaf in the Philippines at the third congress in Jakarta in 2023. The first congress was held in Bangkok in 2015.

Fr Joseph Thermadom of the Order of the Holy Cross, the first deaf Indian Catholic priest, addressed the past, present and future of deaf Catholics in Asia and the challenges facing deaf communities.

Carmen Nanko-Fernández, a professor at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, spoke on Deaf Liberation Theology and called for deaf people to be recognised as subjects of the Church rather than merely recipients of pastoral care.

The conference kicked off with a Holy Mass at Myeongdong Cathedral in Seoul on Oct 16, presided over by Seoul Archbishop Peter Chung Soon-taick and concelebrated by Archbishop Giovanni Gaspari, apostolic nuncio to South Korea, and Father Benedict Park Min-seo, spiritual director of the Seoul Catholic Mission for the Deaf.

In his homily, Archbishop Chung compared the assembly's use of multiple sign languages to the descent of the Holy Spirit.

"The Holy Spirit does not unite everyone into one language, but respects each person's language while making us one heart," he said.

Gaspari conveyed the greetings and blessing of Pope Leo XIV and urged Deaf Catholics to voice their pastoral needs confidently. "The Asian Church needs you," he said.

Participants attended sessions on Deaf media, prayer, the Bible, liturgy, and religious vocations.

They also joined cultural and fellowship activities including visits to Seoul landmarks, a performance of Nanta, a famous, non-verbal comedic theatrical performance, mini-Olympics, and preparing *gimbap,* a traditional Korean dish made of bap, vegetables, and optionally, cooked seafood or meat rolled in *gim* — dried sheets of seaweed.

They also visited the Demilitarized Zone, Imjingak and Catholic sites in Paju, a border town separating South and North Korea, where they prayed for peace on the Korean Peninsula, before presenting traditional costumes and folk dances from their countries.

Fr Park thanked sponsors for supporting travel and other costs for the participants as well as the mission for the deaf people.

"Without our sponsors, this moving moment today would not have existed," he said.

"The seeds of love you have planted will blossom into great fruits of faith throughout Asia," he added. **ucanews.com**



Participants of the Fourth Asian Catholic Deaf Congress exchange the sign language for the English word 'LOVE' during the opening Mass ((Photo by Park Ju-hyun/Catholic Times)

Restore forests, protect lives, urge Church leaders

JAKARTA: Catholic and Protestant leaders have urged Indonesian authorities to restore fire-damaged forests, prevent their conversion into mines and plantations, and protect communities affected by fires and haze.

In an October 27 statement, the Indonesian Catholic bishops' Commission for Justice and Peace and the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People described forest restoration as a responsibility to both people and the environment.

"Restoring forests is a moral and legal obligation for the sake of life, the balance of nature and the future of coming generations," it said.

Fires in Sumatra, Kalimantan, Papua, Maluku and Sulawesi threatened health, livelihoods and homes, particularly those of Indigenous communities and vulnerable groups, the commission warned.

Citing government reports, it said 11,772 hotspots had been detected nationwide as of Oct 10. Health Ministry figures from August recorded more than three million people exposed to haze in seven provinces, while data as of Oct 17 showed 311,363 acute respiratory infections in fire-affected areas of Sumatra and Kalimantan.

However, the commission cautioned that not every hotspot indicated a fire, and not all respiratory infections could be conclusively attributed to smoke.

It called for stronger fire prevention and response, access to healthcare and particular protection for children, older people and other vulnerable groups.

"Human safety must be the overriding priority," it said, urging firm, fair and transparent enforcement against those proven responsible for forest burning and environmental destruction.

Economic interests must not override public safety or the right to a healthy life, it stressed.

The commission also sought protection for Indigenous and local communities' land rights, livelihoods and cultural identity, including their participation in forest management. It urged government and businesses to adopt transparent policies, prevent fires and restore ecosystems.

Describing the crisis as a humanitarian and ecological justice issue linked to poverty and inequality, it called on religious communities, schools, civil society and businesses to assist affected residents and support recovery.

Commission secretary Fr Marthen Jenarut told *UCA News* that forests were a shared home for life, whose protection safeguarded human dignity, biodiversity and future generations.

In an Oct 26 pastoral letter, World Council of Churches general secretary Jerry Pillay appealed for practical assistance regardless of religion, ethnicity or social status.

He said polluted air had disrupted schooling, healthcare and livelihoods, while haze had spread to neighbouring Southeast Asian countries. Churches were called to respond through prayer, compassion, service and solidarity.

On Oct 27, Indonesia and Singapore agreed to establish a joint task force to investigate companies linked to forest and land fires and strengthen cross-border cooperation.

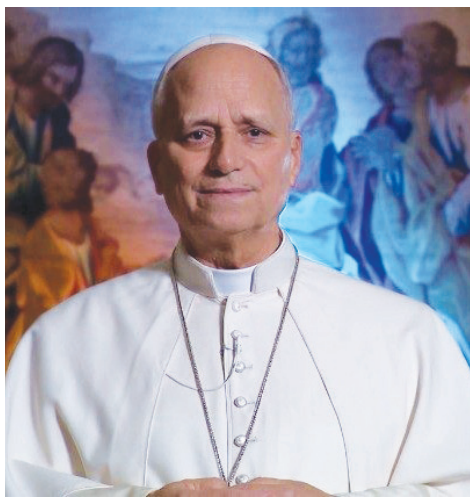
Indonesia has imposed administrative sanctions on 32 companies covering 1.93 million hectares of concessions, suspended six operations and ordered ecosystem restoration. Criminal proceedings remain a possibility. **ucanews.com**



A man uses a tree branch to try to extinguish a peatland fire in Palangkaraya, Central Kalimantan, on October 22, 2026. (LiCAS News photo)



God's name must never justify war



VATICAN: Pope Leo XIV urged religious leaders to reject every attempt to justify war in God's name and work together through prayer, dialogue and concrete action for peace.

"War can never be waged in the name of God," he said in a video message to the International Meeting for Peace in Assisi on October 27. "There is no such thing as a holy war: only peace is holy."

Organised by the Community of Sant'Egidio, the three-day gathering took the theme *Unarmed and Disarming Peace*. It marked 40 years since St John Paul II brought religious leaders together in Assisi for the World Day of Prayer for Peace on Oct 27, 1986.

Pope Leo expressed his regret at being unable to join participants at the tomb of St Francis and bear witness together that fraternity was possible.

At a time marked by a "culture of power", he called for a renewed commitment to the spirit of Assisi: rejecting religious justifications for war, encouraging mediation and dialogue, and combining prayerful reflection with practical action.

"We must rebuild peace everywhere, not prepare for more wars," he stressed.

Peace, he said, must become a shared goal for all peoples, guiding decisions and exposing injustice.

The Pope described prayer as central to this commitment.

"Prayer may seem weak in the face of the powers of the world, but it is the humble strength of believers," he said, urging participants to ask God to touch the hearts of those pursuing war and terrorism.

"Let us not forget that prayer is never in vain."

He also called on religious leaders to foster dialogue within their communities and wider society, allowing arrogance to give way to negotiation and understanding, and helping humanity break the cycle of violence.

Pope Leo concluded by praying that God would grant peace to the world's nations and make believers "unarmed instruments of His peace". **Vatican News**

Mercedes-Benz marks long history of making cars for the pope

VATICAN: Mercedes-Benz, the German luxury automaker, celebrated nearly 100 years of producing the popemobile — the pope's personal vehicle.

To mark the occasion, Pope Leo XIV held a private audience with Mercedes-Benz executives on October 25. That same day, the exhibit *A Century of the Popemobile* opened at the Vatican Museums, featuring the first popemobile, gifted to Pope Pius XI in 1930, and the one in which St John Paul II was shot on May 13, 1981.

In his address to Mercedes-Benz, the Pope praised the company for its enduring partnership with the Vatican and reflected on how papal transportation — from St Peter to the present — has evolved.

"Over the decades, the Popemobile has evolved from a means of transportation into an instrument of encounter, enabling the pontiff to draw closer to the faithful during pastoral visits and public celebrations," Pope Leo said.

"In this way, your work has helped facilitate the Church's mission of reaching out to people and bringing a message of faith, of hope, and of charity to the world."

The Pope also encouraged them to direct their innovations toward a more sustainable world, placing their "technological innovation at the service of human dignity, care for creation, and the common good."

Papal transportation has evolved since the late Roman Empire, when popes were carried on the "sedia gestatoria" — ornate, ceremonial thrones carried by 12 footmen during processions and major liturgical celebrations.

From the late 19th century onward, popes increasingly chose modern forms of transportation, with Blessed Pius IX using the first papal train in 1859. The Nürburg 460 Pullman, made by Mercedes-Benz and given to Pope Pius XI in 1930, was the first official automobile used to transport the pope.



Pope Pius XI used the Nürburg 460 Pullman, made by Mercedes-Benz, as the first official automobile to transport the pope. (Photo courtesy of the Vatican Museums)

The word "popemobile" was first used to describe a custom-made Lincoln Continental for St Paul VI's 1965 visit to the United States. Popes since St John Paul II have used the popemobile, with Mercedes-Benz adapting future models for security since his 1981 shooting.

Speaking on the sidelines of the launch of the exhibit "*A Century of the Popemobile*," the Mercedes-Benz executives spoke with *EWTN News*, reflecting on the near-century-long partnership with the Vatican.

Marc Langenbrinck, CEO of Mercedes-Benz Italy, described the partnership as a privilege, especially as a Catholic.

"[This day] is just simply the most beautiful day of my career because I am Catholic and I believe, and for me it is something which is a project of a lifetime," said Langenbrinck.

Marcus Breitschwerdt, executive vice president of Mercedes-Benz, explained the security and accessibility measures implemented in the popemobile.



Pope Leo XIV with some executives of Mercedes-Benz after his private audience with them at the Vatican on October. 28, 2026. (Vatican Media)

"Well, first of all, a vehicle has to move safely, comfortably, but also safely in terms of traffic and accident risks," said Breitschwerdt. "It has to be safely conceived and executed in terms of the current modern risks you face if you are in big crowds."

"So we have armoured versions; we have the secured glass Popemobiles, which are very, very sophisticated," Breitschwerdt added.

Breitschwerdt, in a speech for the exhibit launch, also said that no Mercedes-Benz employee is ever allowed to sit on the pope's seat in the Popemobile.

"There is a strict rule that no one — not even the mechanics who maintain the vehicles or our CEO — is allowed to sit in the pope's seat," Breitschwerdt said. **EWTN News**

Singapore churches strengthen security

SINGAPORE: More than 3,500 priests and ministry members have received security training over the past three years as the Catholic Church in Singapore strengthens preparedness across its parishes.

The Archdiocese of Singapore has introduced the Threat-Oriented Person Screening Integrated System (Topsis) in 30 of its 32 churches, with the remaining two expected to join by year-end, *Catholic News SG* reported.

The Singapore Police Force programme trains participants to identify high-risk individuals, conduct security questioning and carry out enhanced checks when necessary.

The archdiocese received a Topsis organisational award on October 14 at Orchard Hotel in recognition of its safety and security efforts. Sim Ann, Singapore's Second Minister for Foreign Affairs and Home Affairs, presented the award.

"Places of worship are designed to be open and welcoming to all; however, this openness may also give rise to vulnerabilities," she said.

"The archdiocese has demonstrated that a welcoming environment can be maintained alongside a strong culture of vigilance."

The Archdiocesan Emergency Response Operations (Aero) has led efforts to equip priests and ministry members to recognise suspicious behaviour and potential threats. Its pool of police-certified Topsis trainers has grown from five to 13, all volunteers.



Aero chair Mr James Soo (L) and Aero ex-officio member Mr André Ahchak at the award ceremony on October 14, 2026. Photo: Aero

Aero chair James Soo credited volunteers who had generously contributed their time, skills and energy. The aim, he said, was to keep churches safe, secure and welcoming for clergy, parishioners and visitors.

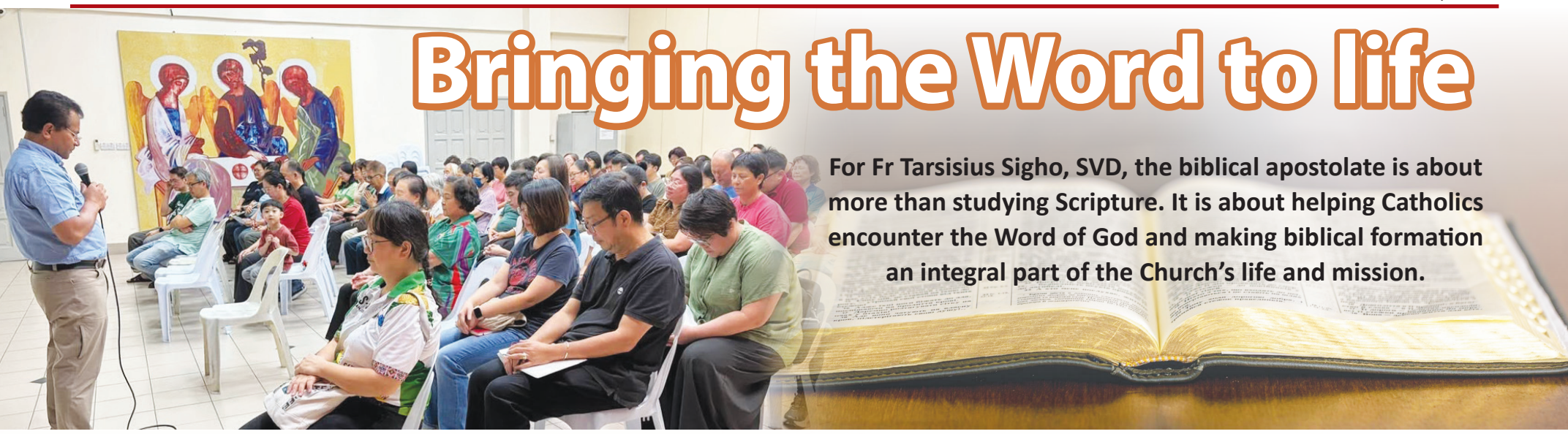
The archdiocese also wants security awareness to become part of everyday parish life, with responsibility shared across the community.

Aero circulates security advisories based on incidents in parishes and conducts practical exercises to assess volunteers' readiness.

Topsis trainer John Low advised parishioners who noticed suspicious behaviour or objects to remain calm, keep a safe distance and report their concerns through the proper channels.

They should avoid confronting anyone, touching suspicious objects or attempting their own investigations.

"That's the role of trained personnel who are equipped to confirm and resolve the concern safely," he said. "Ordinary parishioners help by observing and reporting, not by intervening." **LiCAS News**



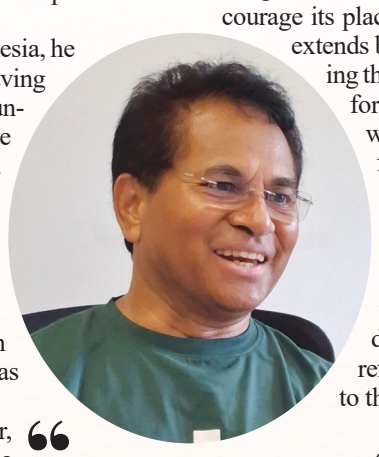
Bringing the Word to life

For Fr Tarsisius Sigho, SVD, the biblical apostolate is about more than studying Scripture. It is about helping Catholics encounter the Word of God and making biblical formation an integral part of the Church's life and mission.

Christina Lazaroo

When Fr Tarsisius Sigho, SVD, was invited to become a missionary in Taiwan, his first response was a firm no.

As a seminarian in Indonesia, he was apprehensive about leaving home for an unfamiliar country, particularly one where he would have to learn a new language. Chinese seemed an almost impossible challenge. But when a professor approached him a second time, he reconsidered the invitation and eventually accepted it as a call from God.



> **Fr Tarsisius seeks to strengthen both personal engagement with Scripture and collaboration among Catholic communities committed to making the Word of God more accessible to the faithful.**

Thirty-four years later, Taiwan remains the place where he serves as a missionary priest, dedicating his ministry to helping people understand and encounter the Word of God through Scripture. His work extends beyond parish communities to the wider Chinese-speaking Catholic biblical apostolate, where he serves as general spiritual director of the Chinese Catholic Biblical Association in Taiwan and coordinator of the Northeast Asia region of the Catholic Biblical Federation. Following the 12th World Chinese Catholic Biblical Congress in Taiwan, he also assumed the presidency of the United Chinese Catholic Biblical Association (UCCBA), which brings together Chinese Catholic biblical associations internationally.

His journey into the biblical apostolate was shaped by his years in parish ministry, where the responsibility of writing articles for a parish publication led him to read and reflect more deeply on Scripture. A subsequent pilgrimage to the Holy Land challenged him further when he encountered a Muslim tour guide with extensive academic knowledge of the Bible. The experience prompted him to consider how deeply he himself, as a priest and missionary, needed to understand Scripture.

That conviction eventually led him to pursue a master's degree in biblical studies at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. Upon returning to Taiwan, he devoted himself fully to the apostolate of the Word of God, conducting biblical formation sessions, workshops, and seminars in parishes and dioceses.

For Fr Tarsisius, this ministry addresses a fundamental need in the Church: helping people move beyond simply hearing the Word of God to understanding it, reflecting on it, and allowing it to shape their lives. Through his work in Taiwan and his leadership in the wider Chinese-speaking biblical network, he seeks to strengthen both personal engagement with Scripture and collaboration among Catholic communities committed to making the Word of God more accessible to the faithful.

Making Scripture part of everyday faith

The biblical apostolate seeks to make Scripture accessible to the faithful and encourage its place in the life of the Church. It extends beyond academic study, bringing the Bible into parish life through formation sessions, reflection, workshops and opportunities for people to deepen their understanding of Scripture.

At the parish level, this means encouraging Catholics to engage with the Bible beyond the Sunday readings and develop the confidence to read, reflect on and apply its message to their lives.

For Fr Tarsisius, this work calls for a willingness to accompany people wherever they are in their faith journey. Even when a formation session attracts only one participant, he believes that person deserves his full effort and attention.

His weekends are spent travelling to parishes and dioceses across Taiwan to conduct seminars, workshops and biblical formation programmes. During the week, he handles administrative responsibilities for the Society of the Divine Word (SVD), making biblical formation an additional commitment alongside his weekday duties.

For him, the work brings a sense of fulfilment. It is not simply about imparting biblical knowledge, but helping people develop a deeper relationship with the Word of God.

Sustaining this work, however, requires more than individual commitment. It also depends on structures that connect parishes and dioceses, enabling formation to continue beyond occasional programmes and individual initiatives.

A shared mission across dioceses

Taiwan provides an example of how biblical formation can be supported through diocesan collaboration. Each of the country's seven dioceses has its own biblical association, linked through a central biblical apostolate structure under the Regional Bishops' Conference of Taiwan.

Representatives meet every three months to exchange experiences and coordinate their work. An annual national gathering provides opportunities for biblical reflection, workshops and sharing, while parish biblical commissions help bring the apostolate closer to local communities.

This network forms part of a wider Chinese-speaking Catholic biblical movement, which has reached 35 years of collaboration. In January 2026, the 12th World Chinese Catholic Biblical Congress was held in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, under the theme "Read God's Word, Enter God's Heart, Spread God's Love".

The wider mission reflects the Church's renewed emphasis on Scripture following the Second Vatican Council. Promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1965, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, emphasised the place of Sacred Scripture in the life and mission of the Church. The Catholic Biblical Federation was established in 1969 to help advance the biblical apostolate.

Such collaboration creates opportunities for local Churches to share resources and experience. Its lasting impact, however, depends on how these efforts translate into meaningful formation and sustained engagement with Scripture in parishes and dioceses.

Strengthening biblical formation in Malaysia

This wider mission has particular relevance for Malaysia, which is preparing to host the 13th World Chinese Biblical Congress in Kota Kinabalu in 2029.

Organised by the UCCBA, the congress brings together Chinese-speaking Catholic biblical organisations and faith communities to promote collaboration and strengthen the biblical apostolate. Malaysia has participated in the congress since its inaugural gathering and previously hosted the seventh congress in Kuching in 2003 and the nineth in Kuala Lumpur in 2010.

Preparations for the 2029 gathering involve Church leaders and biblical apostolate representatives visiting dioceses across Malaysia to encourage participation and build connections among local communities.

The congress presents an opportunity to strengthen the country's commitment to biblical formation. However, its significance will extend beyond the gathering itself. The longer-term task is to ensure that the exchange of ideas, resources and experiences leads to sustained work in dioceses and parishes.

For the Malaysian Church, this raises important questions about how biblical formation can be made more accessible, how laypeople can be equipped to facilitate Scripture sharing, and how parishes can develop initiatives that continue beyond individual events.

Fr Tarsisius' experience in Taiwan offers an example of how such a ministry can be sustained through cooperation between dioceses, regular formation opportunities and the development of parish-level structures.

Rather than relying on occasional programmes, a lasting biblical apostolate requires continuity and a shared commitment among clergy, religious and laypeople.

A Church rooted in the Word

At its heart, the biblical apostolate is concerned with the place of Scripture in the life of the Church. It seeks to help Catholics understand the Bible more deeply and to recognise its relevance to their faith, their relationships and their daily lives.

For Fr Tarsisius, this work is sustained through the formation of people and communities who can continue sharing the Word of God with others. Whether through a parish workshop, a diocesan gathering or a wider regional initiative, the aim remains to bring Scripture closer to the faithful.

His missionary journey, which began with an invitation he initially resisted, has led him to a ministry that reaches across parishes and dioceses. Today, his work forms part of a wider effort to ensure that the Word of God remains central to the Church's mission.

As Malaysia looks towards the 2029 World Chinese Biblical Congress, the challenge is not simply to gather people around the Bible, but to strengthen communities that will continue to read, understand and live its message long after the event has ended.



Fr Tarsisius with the Archdiocesan Chinese Language Apostolate Committee (ACLAC) of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.

From congregation to mission

The Church in the marketplace vs becoming a marketplace

Anthony Alan Lukose

The decline in attendance at mega-churches in the United States since COVID-19 has raised important questions about the nature of Christian worship, community, and mission.

One possible explanation is the change in habits during the pandemic. Lockdowns made online worship a necessity, but they may also have inadvertently convinced some people that physical participation in a church community was no longer essential. After all, if one could worship from home, why return to the congregation?

Perhaps WFH has acquired a new meaning: not Work from Home, but Worship from Home! Jokes aside, the question deserves serious consideration: what is lost when worship becomes an individual activity rather than a shared expression of faith?

The rise of the seeker-friendly Church

Another factor worth examining is the evolution of evangelical church ministry in the years preceding the pandemic.

For much of the decade before COVID-19, many churches adopted approaches influenced by the Purpose Driven model popularised by Rick Warren and Saddleback Church. These approaches helped churches engage newcomers, build community, and communicate Christian principles in accessible ways. Yet, as with any model, methods of attracting and retaining congregations risk overshadowing the deeper purposes of Christian worship.

In some settings, Sunday services increasingly revolved around sermons, practical life lessons, and fellowship, while the liturgical and devotional dimensions of worship received less attention. The church experience could begin to resemble a motivational seminar, with the congregation evaluating the service primarily by the speaker's quality or the message's relevance.

The concern is not that preaching, fellowship, or practical Christian teaching are unimportant. They are essential. The concern is whether they are sufficient on their own.

When worship becomes primarily about what we receive, do we lose sight of what we are called to offer? When the Cross becomes less visible, both literally and symbolically, does the Christian message risk becoming more comfortable, but less challenging?

Research into religious participation and belonging has raised questions about the strength of people's attachment to their congregations and their sense of purpose beyond attending services. These questions deserve closer examination, rather than assuming that attendance alone is a reliable measure of spiritual vitality.

A similar concern within our own Catholic community

I believe this is a question worth asking within the Catholic Church in our archdiocese as well.

We seem to be witnessing a growing appetite for seminars, talks, workshops, and spiritual formation programmes. Whenever a popular speaker comes to town, registration fills up, halls are packed, and people willingly spend several days listening to talks and attending Mass.

There is certainly value in these gatherings. Good teaching can deepen our understanding of the faith, renew our spiritual lives, and inspire us to become better Christians.

But what happens afterwards?

Do we return to our parishes with a renewed commitment to serve? Do we become more involved in our communities, more attentive to the poor and marginalised, and more willing to reach out to those who have drifted away from the Church? Do our newly acquired insights translate into concrete acts of Christian witness?

Or do we simply wait for the next seminar, the next inspiring speaker, and the next spiritual experience?

If our formation programmes continually fill our calendars but do not move us towards action, we may need to reconsider what we mean by formation itself.

Pope Francis has spoken extensively against "Churches being transformed into markets or social lounges dominated by 'worldliness'". About a Church needing to be in the marketplace, bloodied, but still sharing the message of Salvation and Redemption.

The Catholic faith is not merely something to be studied, discussed, or experienced within the safety of a church hall. It is a faith to be lived. The Eucharist does not send us forth simply to return for another programme; it nourishes us to become Christ's presence in the world.

From being formed to becoming missionary disciples

The challenge is not to organise fewer seminars or to discourage people from seeking spiritual enrichment. Rather, it is to ensure that formation leads to transformation, and transformation leads to mission.

A healthy parish must do more than organise activities and fill its pews. It must form disciples who are prepared to step beyond their comfort zones, serve those in need, accompany the suffering, share their faith, and participate actively in the life of the Church.

This also requires our leaders to ask difficult questions:

- Are our programmes producing committed disciples or merely satisfied participants?
- Are our prayer groups nurturing a deeper life of prayer that sustains service and evangelisation?
- Are our parishes equipping the faithful to take responsibility for the Church's mission, or are we content to remain consumers of religious activities?

The apparent decline of many prayer groups should also give us pause. Prayer is not an optional extra in the life of a Christian community. It is the foundation from which our mission flows. If prayer groups are losing their vitality, we need to understand why and find ways to renew them.

Ultimately, the Church is not called merely to gather people together. It is called to make disciples.

Perhaps the question we should be asking is not simply, 'How many people attended our last seminar?' but rather, 'How many lives were changed, how many people were served, and how much closer did we come to fulfilling Christ's mission?'

We need formation that sends us forth, worship that deepens our communion with Christ, and prayer that gives us the courage to act.

May we never become so occupied with attending programmes about our faith that we neglect the work our faith calls us to do.

Anthony *is a parishioner of the Church of the Holy Family, Kajang.*

Before we invite them back, are we ready to listen?



Recently, I received an invitation to an introductory session on *Landings: Exploring a New Pastoral Outreach to Welcome Returning Catholics,* an initiative encouraging parishes to create welcoming spaces for Catholics considering a return to the Church.

The invitation came shortly after I completed module one of my formation as an evangelising catechist. Interestingly, I had already been reflecting on this subject and recording my thoughts in my journal.

Something had been stirring within me.

I found myself thinking about Catholics who have stopped attending Church, particularly those who may wish to return but hesitate. Will I be welcomed? Will people judge me for staying away? Do I still belong?

I know people who quietly carry such fears. Some still pray, believe in God and love Jesus, yet remain uncertain about walking through the church doors again.



When the invitation arrived, it felt like a gentle prompting from the Holy Spirit to explore something already weighing on my heart.

As I read about *Landings* and its emphasis on listening, sharing and creating a safe space for people to reconnect with their faith, one question kept returning: Before we invite them back, are we ready to listen?

We often express concern about Catholics leaving the Church. We notice familiar faces missing from Sunday Mass or once-active parishioners who have gradually disappeared. Naturally, we ask how to bring them back.

But perhaps we should first ask why they left.

Behind every empty place in the pews may be a story we have never heard. Some have experienced hurt or disappointment. Others have faced difficult circumstances, struggled with Church teachings or gradually lost their connection with the community.

Not everyone who leaves wishes to return. Their reasons differ, and listening helps us understand rather than assume.

A person is more than their absence from the pews.

As an evangelising catechist, I am learning that our vocation extends beyond teaching Scripture, prayers and Church doctrine. These remain essential, but evangelisation also calls us to accompany people, build relationships and recognise their struggles.

The Gospel offers a beautiful example in the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35). Jesus encounters two disciples struggling with confusion and disappointment. Rather than immediately correcting them, He walks with them, asks what they are discussing and listens. Only then does He open the Scriptures to them.

Jesus first draws near.

Similarly, in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32), the father sees his returning son from a distance and runs to embrace him. He does not demand explanations or require proof that his son deserves to come home.

These encounters challenge us to examine how we receive those returning to the Church.

When someone finally walks through the church doors, are they greeted warmly or questioned about their absence? Do we make room for those carrying doubts or painful experiences, or expect them to fit immediately into familiar parish routines?

It is one thing to invite people back. It is another to create a community where they genuinely feel welcomed.

A welcoming Church does not abandon truth or compromise its teachings. Rather, it allows people to encounter that truth through love, patience and accompaniment.

Listening does not mean agreeing with everything someone says or avoiding difficult conversations. It means recognising the person's dignity and allowing trust to develop.

Returning to the Church may be a gradual process, not a single decision. It requires companions willing to walk patiently with others.

Our mission is not simply to fill empty pews but to help people rediscover their place in the family of God.

This responsibility extends to those already attending Mass. Do they feel welcome and heard? Can they express doubts or ask difficult questions without fear of dismissal?

Evangelisation is not only about reaching those who have left. It is also about nurturing communities where those already present can experience Christ's love.

Perhaps the real challenge is not simply persuading Catholics to return, but ensuring that when they do, they encounter a community ready to receive them with patience, understanding and love.

For some, the first step home may begin with something remarkably simple: someone willing to listen without judgement.

Before we invite them back, we must be prepared to welcome the stories they bring.

Marie Ann Dawson

Marie *is a mother, catechist and educator involved in evangelising catechesis and inclusive faith formation.*







Every child's story matters



The heart behind Suriana's mission

Christina Lazaroo

What does it take to change a child's life? Sometimes, it begins with noticing that a child is struggling, asking why, and caring enough to do something about it.



For Dr James Nayagam, *pic,* that belief has shaped 46 years of working with children and families who might otherwise have been overlooked.

In his twenties, he left a corporate career to devote himself to vulnerable children, convinced that his time and abilities could make a greater difference among those who needed them most.

It began with tutoring children from squatter settlements. Over the years, that commitment grew into a lifetime of advocacy. He went on to co-found Shelter Home for Children, which established four homes for abused, neglected and abandoned children. In 2005, he founded a school for young prisoners at Kajang Prison and later served two terms as a commissioner of the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM).

Through these experiences, Dr James recognised a troubling pattern. Too often, society intervened only after a child had suffered abuse, neglect or some other crisis. By then, much of the damage had already been done.

He began asking a different question: What if families could be reached earlier, before their difficulties became overwhelming?

That conviction led to the founding of Suriana Welfare Society Malaysia, a community-based organisation committed to addressing the circumstances that place children at risk, with education at the heart of its work.

"We don't do charity. We touch lives," Dr James said.

For him, helping someone is not simply about providing assistance and walking away. Meaningful change begins with understanding people, earning their trust and helping them build a better future.

Addressing problems at their root

Suriana takes its name from the Malay phrase *Suara Rintihan Kanak-Kanak,* meaning "the cries of the children".

The name reflects its mission: to recognise the struggles of children whose needs may go unnoticed and respond before those difficulties deepen.

Suriana works directly in underserved urban communities, addressing issues such as poverty, child abuse, domestic violence and limited educational opportunities.

Rather than waiting for families to seek assistance, the organisation brings its programmes into the neighbourhoods where they live.

"A child comes from a home. And if the home is dysfunctional, it affects the child's education, mental health and overall wellbeing," Dr James explained.

This understanding shapes Suriana's education programmes for children aged four to 17, including those living in People's Housing Project (PPR) communities.

Its after-school centres provide homework assistance, literacy and numeracy support, language development and activities involving play, music and digital learning.

For children whose parents are still working after school, these centres also offer something equally important: a safe, welcoming environment where they receive guidance, encouragement and care.

But Dr James does not see them merely as tuition facilities. His hope is that residents will eventually take ownership of the programmes, recognising that children's wellbeing is a shared community responsibility.

When families and neighbours begin supporting one another, the benefits can extend throughout the community.

When helping a child means helping a family

Sometimes, the greatest obstacles confronting a child are not immediately visible. Consider Nicole*, a child who is blind, deaf and unable to speak.

Her parents had repeatedly struggled to obtain an OKU (persons with disabilities) card, encountering difficulties in clarifying her disability during the application process.

For a family already caring for a child with significant needs, navigating administrative procedures became another burden.

Suriana stepped in, accompanying the family through repeated attempts until the application was finally approved.

Dr James recalled the moment Nicole's parents received the news. Both were moved to tears.

For them, the card meant more than official recognition of their daughter's disability. It opened the way to support they had struggled to secure.

Sometimes, making a difference does not require grand gestures. It means refusing to give up when a family needs help.

Another experience, shared by Ivan Lee, Suriana's general manager and director of corporate affairs, began with what appeared to be an ordinary school attendance problem.

Sharon*, a student who had previously performed well, began missing school.

Her teachers noticed the change and alerted Suriana. Rather than simply questioning her attendance, the organisation sought to understand what was happening at home.

What emerged was a family in serious difficulty.

Sharon's father, who earned his living selling *putumayam*, had been involved in an accident and was bedridden. As the family's sole breadwinner, he could no longer provide an income.

Her mother began collecting and selling recyclable materials to support the household.

With the family struggling financially, Sharon had to walk a considerable distance to school along a route considered unsafe.

Her declining attendance was not due to a lack of interest in education. It reflected circumstances over which she had little control.

Suriana arranged sponsorship for her transport and, through corporate partnerships, secured food and financial assistance for the family.

But their difficulties did not end there.

Sharon's mother subsequently developed a blood clot in her leg and required a procedure to insert a stent, costing RM10,000. Although assistance from the Social Welfare Department reduced the burden, the family still faced a RM5,000 shortfall, which Suriana helped raise through crowdfunding.

What began with a teacher noticing a child's absence from school had uncovered a household struggling with unemployment, illness and financial insecurity.

Had nobody taken the time to ask questions, the real reasons for Sharon's difficulties might have remained hidden.

Her experience illustrates a principle central to Suriana's work: when a child is struggling, the answer is not always found in the classroom. Sometimes, the family needs help before the child can begin to thrive.

Trust takes time

Reaching vulnerable families is not simply a matter of introducing programmes and expecting people to participate. Trust must first be earned.

Dr James recalled that when Suriana began engaging residents, some were hesitant to attend its awareness programmes. They were unfamiliar with the organisation and uncertain about its intentions.

Suriana persevered, building relationships through consistent engagement.

As the education centres became established and children began attending regularly, confidence grew. Community awareness events that initially struggled to attract participants eventually drew between 50 and 100 people.

For Dr James, this growing involvement showed that residents were beginning to see the programmes as initiatives they could participate in and sustain.

The organisation also relies on corporate partnerships and volunteers who contribute resources, expertise and time. Corporate social responsibility initiatives help provide practical assistance to families, while volunteers support teaching and activities at the learning centres.

Yet sustaining such work presents challenges.

Financial resources remain an ongoing concern, while attracting younger people willing to commit themselves to community work has proved difficult.

Dr James believes finding people who can teach is not necessarily the greatest challenge. What matters just as much is finding those who care enough to understand the children in their charge and the circumstances shaping their lives.

A teacher may help a child improve academically. But someone who takes an interest in that child's wellbeing may also notice when something is wrong at home or when a family needs support.

Such commitment requires patience, compassion and a willingness to remain involved even when progress is slow.

For Suriana, meaningful community work is about listening, understanding and working with people so they can become active participants in improving their own lives.

A mission that has touched his own life

After 46 years of serving vulnerable children and families, Dr James does not speak of his work merely in terms of what he has given. He speaks, too, of what he has received. "Over the 46 years of serving people, it has come right down to blessing me," he said. "In touching people's lives, my life and my family's lives have been touched."

What began as a young man's decision to leave a corporate career has become a lifetime of learning from people whose struggles, resilience and determination have shaped his understanding of service.

Through Suriana, that commitment continues in classrooms, homes and communities where children and families are striving to overcome difficult circumstances.

The organisation's work also extends to families affected by rare diseases. Its Genetic Testing Support Fund seeks to help children from financially disadvantaged households access specialised tests that could identify their conditions and guide medical care.

To support this initiative, Suriana is organising *Harmony of the Rare & Brave,* a fundraising concert on November 21, from 7.30pm to 9.30pm, at the Auditorium Dewan Sivik MBPJ, Petaling Jaya.

Tickets and further information are available at *suriana.org/becauseitsrare-wecare.*

For Dr James, the mission remains rooted in the conviction that every child deserves to be seen, heard and allowed to flourish, regardless of the circumstances into which they were born.

Nicole's parents needed someone willing to persevere with them. Sharon needed someone to recognise that her difficulties at school were part of a much larger family struggle.

Their experiences remind us that compassion is not always expressed through extraordinary acts. Sometimes, it begins with paying attention, asking the right questions and refusing to turn away when someone needs help.

And perhaps that is what Dr James has spent 46 years demonstrating: we may not be able to solve every problem a child faces, but we can make sure that child does not have to face it alone.

To know more about Suriana Welfare Society, visit: *suriana.org*

• *Names marked with an asterisk have been changed to protect the children's identities.*

Photos published with the permission of parents/guardians.

The faith of tomorrow begins with families today



Catholic Digest

Elvina Fernandez

Early this year, I began accompanying a group of children preparing for their First Holy Communion. Like many catechists, I expected to teach them about the sacraments, explain the Mass and guide them towards a deeper encounter with Jesus.

Instead, I found myself beginning with something far more basic.

It took months for some children to learn how to make the Sign of the Cross correctly. Week after week, we prayed the *Our Father, Hail Mary* and *Glory Be* together, yet many still struggled to remember the words.

Today's nine-year-olds were toddlers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their formative years unfolded amid extraordinary disruption, when families were navigating uncertainty and many familiar routines, including opportunities for communal worship and faith formation, were interrupted.

Perhaps we are now witnessing some of the quieter effects of that period.

As catechists, we do our best with the limited time entrusted to us each week. We teach prayers, explain the sacraments and share stories about Jesus. But even 30 hours of catechism a year cannot replace what happens during the countless hours children spend at home.

The Church has long described the family as the "domestic church" because it is where faith first takes root. Long before children understand theology, they understand what they see.

They learn prayer by watching their parents pray, gratitude when the family thanks God before meals, forgiveness when they experience it at home, and the importance of Sunday Mass when worship becomes part of family life.

Passing on the faith cannot rest solely with catechists, priests, religious or parish programmes. The home remains the first and most important school of faith.

Yet we often ask why teenagers are disengaged, why young adults drift away from the Church and what programmes might bring them back.

Perhaps we should ask an earlier question: Are we strengthening the roots before trying to repair the branches?

If we believe parents are the primary educators of their children in faith, our pastoral priorities must reflect that conviction. We must help parents become confident in praying with their children, particularly those who may themselves be unsure where to begin.

Family prayer need not be elaborate. It can be as simple as thanking Jesus for something good that happened or asking for His help when someone is frightened, ill or struggling. Teaching children to speak naturally and honestly to Jesus can be the beginning of a lifelong relationship.

I was reminded of this recently.

After months of repeating prayers with my students, one child began our prayer by saying, "Good morning, Jesus. Thank you for bringing us to class today. Keep us safe from germs and bad people, and help us be good."

I had been wondering whether all that repetition was making any difference. There had been countless Signs of the Cross, Our Fathers, Hail Marys and gentle reminders to pray.

But somewhere along the way, this child had grasped what I had been hoping to teach: Jesus is not simply Someone we read about in a catechism book or hear about at Mass. He is alive. He listens. And we can speak to Him.

That simple, spontaneous prayer meant more to me than a perfectly memorised answer.

Of course, I want these children to understand the sacraments, participate meaningfully in Mass and know the teachings of our faith. But beneath that knowledge must be a relationship.

Prayer is conversation. Prayer is trust. Prayer is recognising Jesus in the ordinary moments of life.

Sometimes we sow for months before seeing anything emerge. Then a tiny shoot appears, reminding us that God has been working quietly beneath the surface.

Perhaps parents need that reminder too.

Family prayer will not always be perfect. There will be evenings when everyone is tired, a child is distracted, someone complains and someone else forgets the words. Parents may wonder whether their efforts accomplish anything.

But perhaps the invitation is simply to persevere.

A prayer whispered beside a child's bed, the Sign of the Cross before leaving home, an *Our Father* during a difficult moment, or Sunday Mass attended faithfully as a family may seem insignificant.

Over time, these small practices teach children where to turn when life becomes difficult. They remind them that God is not confined to a church building but is present in everyday life.

This is why parishes must accompany families rather than merely remind parents of their responsibilities.

We need practical opportunities for parents and children to grow together through family rosaries, Scripture sharing, retreats, Eucharistic adoration and accessible prayer resources. Equally important are opportunities for parents themselves to rediscover their relationship with God.

Some parents may never have been taught how to pray confidently. Others may be struggling with work pressures, financial worries or family responsibilities.

Our response cannot be judgement. It must be understanding, encouragement and accompaniment.

Instead of asking only why families are not practising their faith at home, we should also ask what we, as a Church, are doing to help them begin.

As I continue accompanying these children towards their First Holy Communion, I remain hopeful.

Every child who finally makes the Sign of the Cross confidently matters. Every *Our Father* slowly committed to memory matters. Every question about Jesus matters. And every spontaneous "Good morning, Jesus" matters.

These small moments remind me that God is already working in young hearts.

The future of the Church is being formed not only in parish halls and catechism classrooms but around dining tables, during car journeys, beside children's beds and in ordinary moments when adults choose to bring God into family life.

If we want children to become teenagers who remain connected to Christ, and young adults who recognise the Church as their spiritual home, we must begin long before adolescence.

It begins when a child discovers that Jesus is not distant but Someone who can be greeted in the morning, thanked for a safe journey and trusted with both great fears and small concerns.

The faith of tomorrow's Church is already being formed in today's families. Strengthening those families may be the most important investment we make in the next generation of Catholics.

Elvina *is passionate about connecting scripture with contemporary realities. Through her writing, she seeks to inspire belonging, empower the community, and make faith accessible in everyday life.*

Pressing forward together



Stepping Stone

Anne Amaladasan

Life often tempts us to dwell on the past. If we are being completely honest with ourselves, it is so easy to get caught up replaying our mistakes, cycling through our deep regrets, or even constantly looking back at former glories because we are afraid our best days are behind us. Yet, Scripture repeatedly calls us to look forward, not backward. In Isaiah 43:18–19, God speaks directly to our weary hearts and reminds us: "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland"

It is a beautiful promise, and even though moving forward can feel daunting at times, we don't have to navigate the hard parts alone. Yes, it is natural to look at our track records, our family histories, or our old destructive patterns and silently wonder if our past ultimately determines our future. We might catch ourselves assuming we are just permanently stuck, asking: Is this just who I am, or am I carrying some kind of generational curse that I can't break out of? In doing so, we trap ourselves in a distorted, broken record of regret that keeps playing. We don't play it by choice, but by chance, whenever life throws an unexpected curveball or provokes us to react out of pain rather than retract into peace. If we allow the past to dominate our thoughts like this, we risk completely missing the very "new thing" God is trying to show us today. Resetting these old hurts takes an immense amount of courage and continuous, practice. It certainly isn't easy, but we will never truly know the depth of our inner strength — especially when we are guided and sustained by the Holy Spirit — until we try. Healing isn't a straight line. We may move ahead by two steps and slip back by one, but ultimately, we must remember that we are still one step ahead of where we started.

When I look at the Apostle Paul's life, his words in Philippians 3:13–14 hit us on a deeply personal level. He reminds us about humility and letting go of our past — not just the painful failures, but even the former successes — and relentlessly pressing forward if we want to grow closer to Christ. When I think about the weight of regret Paul could have spent the rest of his life carrying — knowing he had actively torn apart the early Church — it gives me so much hope. He had to make a daily choice to leave that massive brokenness behind, refusing to let past guilt or old memories lock him in a cage. His example shows us that moving forward takes real, daily spiritual discipline. It takes a conscious, exhausting effort for us every single day to redirect our focus away from our old shadows and walk toward Christ.

Also, I think that's why Joseph's story hits so close to home when we are dealing with deep, personal pain. If anyone had a right to stay bitter and angry, it was him. He was betrayed by his own flesh and blood, thrown into a pit, sold into slavery, and then left to rot in a cold dungeon for something he didn't even do. We know how easy it is to sit in the dark and let resentment take over after a betrayal, and Joseph had years to do just that. Yet, when he finally stood face-to-face with the very people who broke his life — with all the power in the world to get even — he chose a completely different lens. He looked at them and declared: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." He simply refused to let the ugliest wounds of his past dictate where he was going. Because he chose to trust that God was working out a much bigger, more beautiful picture, he was able to let go of the exhausting need for retaliation and offer real grace instead.

Joseph's choice is a gentle, yet piercing reminder that we don't have to remain permanent prisoners to the hurts inflicted upon us by others. It challenges us to stop replaying old grievances; to drop the imaginary court cases we hold in our minds, and to instead trust that God can take the shattered, broken pieces of our past and weave them into a beautiful, new future.

None of us were meant to live stuck in the past, and we don't have to stay there. So, I want to invite you to join me on this journey. Whenever we catch our minds hitting that automatic "rewind" button on old hurts and regrets this week, let's choose to pause, breathe, and open our Bibles together. Let's look forward together, anchored in the fresh, beautiful work God is doing in our lives today.

Anne *embraces her call to guide individuals through Holistic Life Planning that encompasses retirement readiness and bereavement support. More importantly, she is blessed to be a caregiver, wife, and sister; and a person woven into the fabric of her family. Through these meaningful vocations, each day unfolds as a journey of compassion, partnership and patience, lived in devotion to honouring God through the ordinary rhythms of life.*

Patricia Pereira

Good intentions alone will not renew the Church

The Church has never been short of good intentions. We speak of renewal, evangelisation, inclusion and the need to reach those on the margins. We identify challenges, propose solutions and articulate visions for the future. Yet one question continues to demand our attention: How much of what we envision actually changes the way we live, lead and serve as Church?

It is a question worth considering as the Diocese of Simla and Chandigarh in northern India unveils an ambitious seven-year pastoral plan that places considerable emphasis not merely on identifying priorities, but on ensuring they are translated into action.

Titled *Together Towards 2033: A Shared Mission,* the plan prioritises evangelisation, youth leadership, greater lay participation, stronger families and outreach to migrants, the poor and marginalised.

What distinguishes this initiative is its effort to make pastoral commitments measurable. Its Bible Commission, for instance, aims to have at least 60 per cent of families read or hear the entire Bible by 2033 and establish active Basic Ecclesial Communities in 80 per cent of neighbourhoods.

The plan also outlines implementation phases, measurable indicators and mechanisms for monitoring progress. A dedicated platform has been established to track pastoral initiatives, while the Diocesan Pastoral Council has begun reviewing implementation at parish and deanery levels.

These are ambitious targets, and achieving them will undoubtedly present challenges. Nevertheless, they demonstrate an important principle: pastoral aspirations become more meaningful when communities know what they are working towards and how progress will be assessed.

Bishop Sahaya Thatheus Thomas makes a pertinent observation: "The success of this Pastoral Plan depends not merely on its formulation, but on its faithful implementation."

It is a reminder that resonates well beyond his diocese, including here in Malaysia.

We recognise many of the challenges confronting our own communities: disengaged youth, struggling families, declining participation, the need for stronger lay leadership and the responsibility to reach those on society's margins. But recognising a problem and responding effectively to it are two different things.

The Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 (MPC2026), held in Sibu in September, brought together Catholics from across the country to reflect on four interconnected areas: Family, Church, Society and Ecology. Through Conversation in the Spirit, participants listened, shared experiences and discerned possible pastoral pathways.

The conversations brought many pastoral realities into sharper focus. But awareness alone does not bring about renewal. The greater challenge lies in translating what has been heard into practical responses that parish communities can recognise, embrace and sustain.

This is where the Indian diocese's approach offers useful lessons.

First, pastoral priorities must translate into practical commitments. If youth engagement is a concern, are we creating meaningful opportunities for young Catholics to help shape the Church's future, or are they still largely expected to carry out decisions made by others?

If families are the foundation of faith formation, how are parishes supporting parents struggling to nurture faith at home? Are we sufficiently attentive to working parents, single-parent households, elderly caregivers and families facing financial pressures?

Second, participation must mean more than consultation. Synodality cannot end with inviting people to share their opinions. Genuine participation requires shared responsibility, openness to different perspectives and recognition that valuable expertise does not reside exclusively among the clergy.

Laypeople, particularly women and young adults, bring professional skills, lived experiences and insights that can enrich pastoral decision-making. Their involvement should extend beyond implementing programmes to helping shape pastoral priorities.

Third, pastoral renewal must reach beyond parish activities. Migrant workers, refugees, persons with disabilities, the elderly, the poor and those who feel excluded cannot remain peripheral concerns.

Malaysia's religious and cultural diversity offers opportunities for the Church to demonstrate Christian compassion through interreligious cooperation, sustained outreach and a commitment to human dignity. But outreach must become an integral part of parish life rather than an occasional charitable exercise.

Equally important is recognising that renewal does not necessarily mean introducing more programmes, committees or activities. Many parishes already depend on volunteers who juggle demanding jobs, family responsibilities and multiple ministries.

Sometimes renewal begins by asking difficult questions. Are existing ministries meeting people's needs? Are resources being used effectively? Have familiar activities become ends in themselves rather than opportunities for evangelisation and service?

And are we prepared to change practices that no longer serve their intended purpose?

Pastoral renewal also cannot be driven by diocesan offices alone. Parish priests, pastoral councils and ministry leaders must take ownership of the process, creating space for collaboration, fresh approaches and honest evaluation.

This brings us to accountability.

Pastoral plans need realistic timelines, clearly assigned responsibilities and regular assessments. Parishioners should know what their communities hope to achieve, what progress has been made, and where improvements are needed.

Accountability is not about finding fault. It is about ensuring that good intentions produce meaningful results.

Of course, Malaysia cannot simply adopt another diocese's pastoral blueprint. Our circumstances, resources, and pastoral realities differ. But one principle remains relevant: discernment must eventually lead to decisions, and decisions must lead to action.

A truly synodal Church is not measured by the number of meetings it conducts or documents it produces, but by whether its people become more involved, its communities become more welcoming, and its mission becomes more responsive to those in need.

The Malaysian Church has invested considerable effort in listening. The task ahead is to ensure that what has been heard informs how we move forward.

After all, the real test of any pastoral plan is not what is written on its pages, but what changes in the lives of the people it is meant to serve.



Fr Ron Rolheiser

Don't try to imagine God

If we try to imagine God, it's easy to become an atheist. Why?

Imagine this: We believe one Person, God, is the sole creator of all that exists.

Now, all that exists, although itself finite, is already beyond what we can imagine – billions of galaxies, trillions of planets, and billions of people stretching back through thousands of years. As well, we believe that God knows every rock, insect, animal, and plant not just on Earth, but everywhere in the universe. How can we wrap our minds around that? We can't.

And there's the further issue of trying to picture the scope of God's love. Today there are more than eight billion people in the world, and our faith asks us to believe that God loves each one of those eight billion individually and intimately, as if he or she were the only person in the world. Moreover, through millions of years God has loved intimately every man, woman, and child on this earth, right back to our ancestors who lived in caves. How can one mind, one heart, one person do this? It's beyond the mind.

However, and this is the point, *it's not intended to be imagined or conceptualised.*

God is infinite. Infinity, by definition, is impossible to imagine. *(For example, what's the highest number it's possible to count to?)* Infinity takes us beyond what can be conceptualised. To conceptualise something, the mind needs to start somewhere and God has no beginning. Indeed, to the extent that we do create for ourselves an imaginative picture of God, we always have something less than God, and often an idol.

And the problem is that we are forever slimming down God to fit the size of our imagination when, by its very essence and definition, God is ineffable, unable to be pictured, imagined, or captured in a concept. This is a dogmatic teaching in all Christian Churches and in Judaism. As the prophet Isaiah says, God is holy, meaning beyond all visualisation and all conceptualisation, beyond anything that can be imagined. That's why Scripture asserts that in this life "no one can see the face of God and live."

However, as Christians, we believe that Jesus came to us and, in His person and teaching, gave concrete expression *(incarnation)* to God so that we can grasp, imagine, and speak truly about certain aspects of God. To know Jesus is to know His "Father."

However, that's not the same thing as capturing God in a concept. Indeed, we can "know" God, but we can't "think" God. We can never create a "picture" of God.

Why is this important? Because whenever we do create a picture of God, we always end up with something less than God – and invariably something that works for our self-interest.

Critics of Christianity accuse us of forever *creating God in our own image and likeness.* There's a lot of truth in that. That's why the God we create for ourselves invariably likes the same people we do, hates the same people we hate, makes the same judgments we make, likes us better than other races, favours our country over others, and assures us that our religion (and our own interpretation of it) is the true way to heaven.

Whenever we capture God in a concept, we end up with a God who is no more intelligent and compassionate than we are, whose heart isn't larger than ours, and who is unworthy of Jesus and Christianity.

For a dozen years I taught a course to seminarians entitled *A Theology of God.* The course looked at many things: how God is presented in Scripture, the historical development of our dogmatic creeds about God, theological speculation about the nature of God, the salient critiques atheists have made about our Christian belief in God, and insights from the mystics and popular piety vis-à-vis how we might relate more affectively to God.

But throughout the course and particularly at its end, I would say this to the seminarians: *Whatever else you do in your teaching, preaching, and pastoral practice, try not to make God look stupid!*

In essence: try not to make God look tribal, racist, nationalistic, legalistic, denominational, sexist, rigid, petty, vengeful, angry, defensive, and anything less than unimaginable wisdom, unimaginable love, unimaginable embrace, and unimaginable forgiveness. Try not to make God just another imaginable human person with all our flaws.

I know sincere, good-hearted atheists and agnostics who don't believe in God because when they try to imagine a Person who is creating millions of universes, billions of people, and trillions upon trillions of minerals, plants, and animals, and who is knowing and loving each element in existence intimately as if it were the only thing in existence, they can't imagine it.

Neither can we. It's not meant to be imagined. It's meant to be known in a cloud of unknowing, to stretch our minds and hearts beyond their natural limits and bring us to an awe that bends our knees in genuflection.

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

LITTLE CATHOLIC'S CORNER

Dear children,

Have you ever waited excitedly for someone to visit you, only to realise that you were not ready when they arrived? Maybe you forgot to tidy your room or prepare something for them to eat.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells a story about ten young women who were waiting for a bridegroom to arrive at a wedding feast. Five were wise, while the other five were foolish. They all brought lamps because they wanted to welcome the bridegroom when he arrived. However, the wise ones brought extra oil for their lamps, while the foolish ones did not.

The bridegroom took a long time to arrive, and everyone fell asleep. When he finally came at midnight, the wise women had enough oil to light their lamps and welcome him. But the foolish women had run out of oil and were not ready. While they went to buy more oil, the bridegroom arrived, and the door to the wedding feast was closed.

Jesus tells us this story to remind us to always be ready for Him. We do not know when He will come, but we can prepare our hearts by praying, helping others, being kind, and doing what is right.

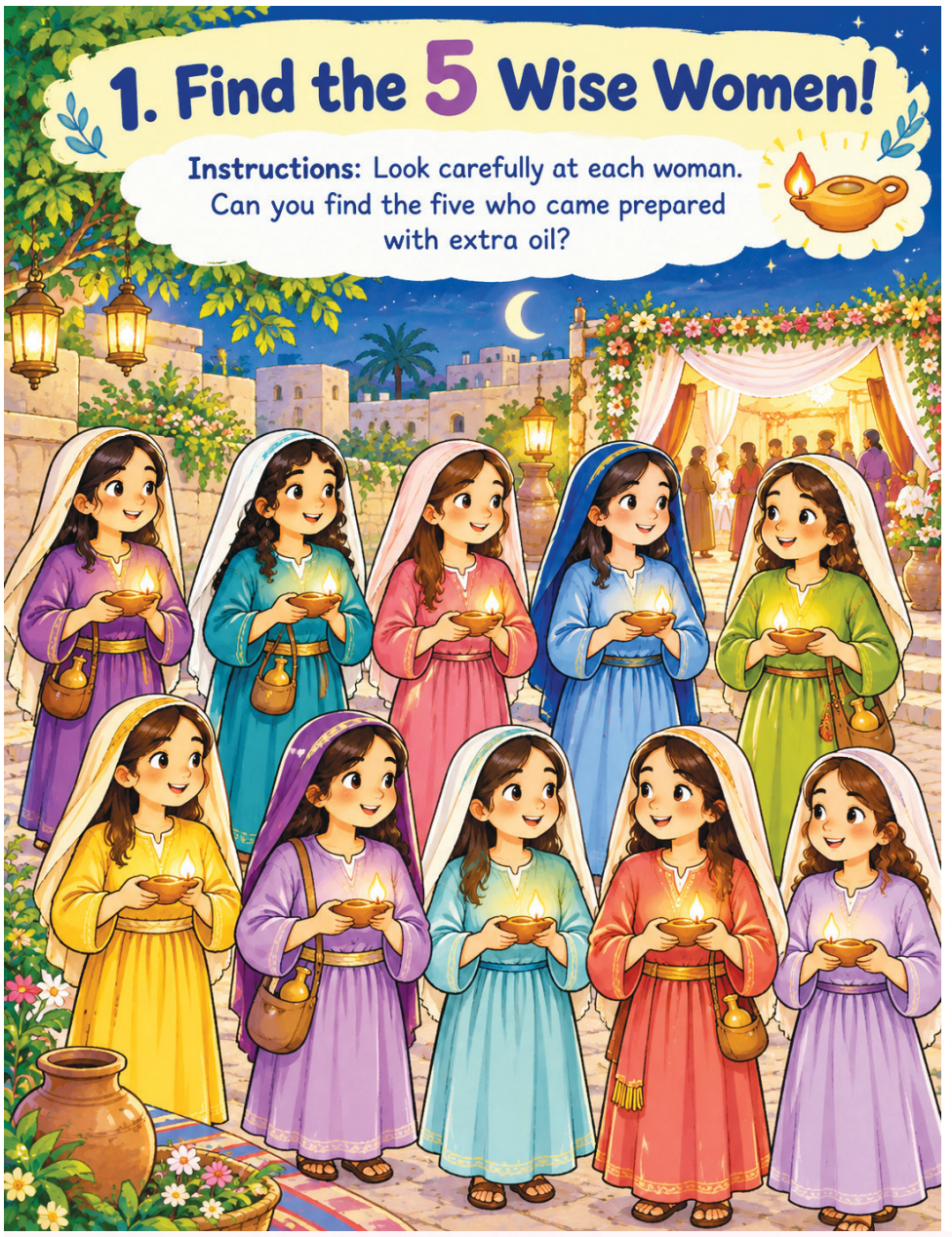
Remember, children, being ready for Jesus means living each day with love and faith. Let us not wait until tomorrow to do good. We can start today.



Love, Aunty C

1. Find the 5 Wise Women!

Instructions: Look carefully at each woman. Can you find the five who came prepared with extra oil?



Give Me Oil In My Lamp

Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour. Matthew 25:13 (NIV)

Based on Matthew 25:1-13 (NIV)



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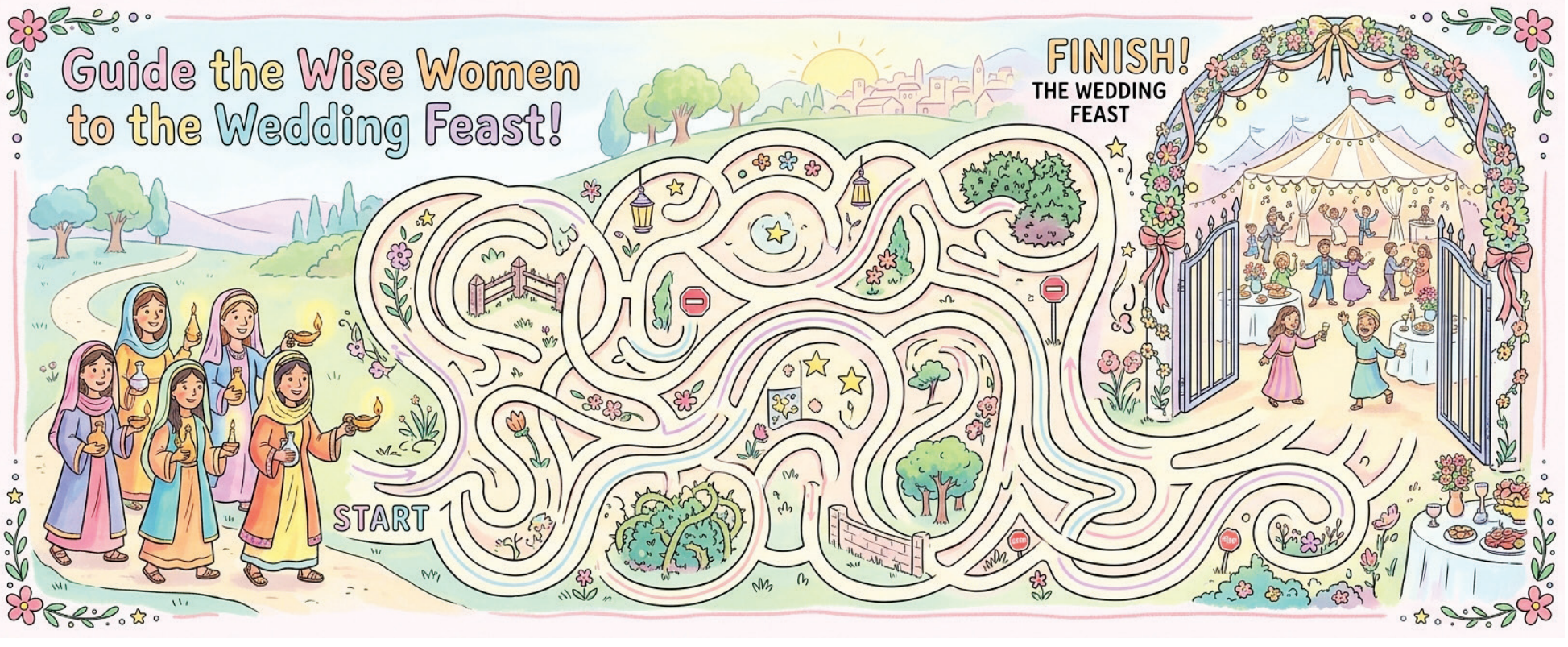
R	S	R	C	U	B	O	D	A	A	M	O	Z	T	E
G	S	D	I	K	T	Y	O	N	T	W	D	W	K	X
I	T	T	S	M	W	G	M	G	C	R	F	O	S	W
N	V	I	H	O	M	Z	I	Z	H	P	W	D	O	Y
S	N	N	T	P	X	E	W	E	D	D	I	N	G	E
U	T	C	Z	G	X	C	D	S	W	I	S	E	E	C

FOOLISH	MEET	DROWSY	VIRGINS	BANQUET
MIDNIGHT	WEDDING	TRIMMED	RANG	KINGDOM
BRIDEGROOM	LAMPS	WISE	WATCH	COME
DOOR	ASLEEP	HEAVEN	OIL	WOKE

Guide the Wise Women to the Wedding Feast!



YOUTH

Hearts of young people are longing to discover Christ's love

Devin Watkins

VATICAN: Pope Leo XIV held an audience on October 23 with participants in the Jesus Youth International Conference, marking the ecclesial association's first meeting with the Successor of Peter.

In his address, the Pope expressed appreciation for the "special encounter," which comes 40 years after the movement's creation in Kerala, India.

Over the past three years, members of the Jesus Youth movement have undergone lengthy consultation in a synodal style to discern its path forward.

On Oct 23, the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life officially approved the revised statutes of Jesus Youth, a decade after it received recognition as an international association of the faithful from the Holy See in May 2016.

Pope Leo recalled that Jesus Youth grew out of the spontaneous initiative of young people in India, as part of the Charismatic Renewal.

"The starting point for every authentic renewal in the Church is one's own discovery of Jesus' love," he said. "Members of various prayer groups thus felt the need to come together to channel their enthusiasm and their initiatives into something that could sustain and guide the new spiritual and missionary impulse they had experienced."

As Jesus Youth matures in its ecclesial journey, added the Pope, members are invited to take up new challenges and bear new fruit.

Pope Leo pointed to the many young people who have become joyful witnesses to the faith, especially Ajna George, whom he said was sustained in her illness and trials by her love for Jesus' presence in the Eucharist.

"Do not lose your apostolic zeal, but rather, foster it and carry it to new countries," he said. "Once again, all of this is possible only by keeping your gaze on Jesus Christ."

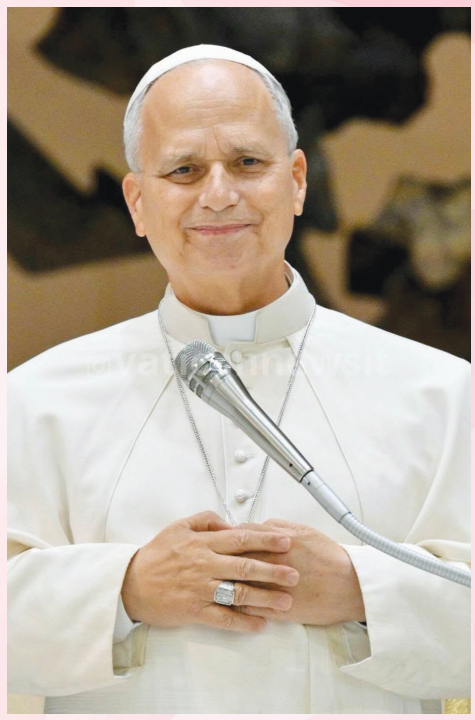
The Pope noted that Jesus Youth is present in many areas where Christians are a minority, saying their Christian witness can help others realise their deep desire to discover Christ's love.

He invited the movement to help young people discover their vocation to marriage, as well as to the priesthood and religious life.

"Young people need to know that their lives are great and beautiful because they are part of God's greater plan," he said.

In conclusion, Pope Leo XIV encouraged members of the Jesus Youth movement to maintain their "youthful freshness and enthusiasm for the faith," while patiently overcoming any difficulties that arise from ritual differences.

"Seek to preserve your unity, especially amid the great diversity of social backgrounds, cultures and languages that are hallmarks of your movement." **Vatican News**







YOUTH URGED TO STAY IN CONTROL OF DIGITAL MEDIA

INDONESIA: An Indonesian bishop has warned young Catholics against allowing digital media to control their lives, urging them to use communication technology critically and responsibly.

Bishop Hilarion Datus Lega of Manokwari-Sorong appealed to the opening Mass of the Pre-Indonesia Youth Day 2026 gathering at Christ the King Cathedral in Sorong on October 20.

"Do not let communication media control us; rather, we must maintain full control over communication technology," Datus said.

The bishop warned young Catholics against becoming slaves to media and said misusing communication tools could lead to isolation, withdrawal, and passivity, according to a report by *MIRIFICA News.*

He urged young Catholics, known in Indonesia as Orang Muda Katolik, or OMK, to understand communication principles and use information platforms in constructive ways.

Datus said young people should be intelligent and critical users of media as rapid technological change reshapes how people communicate.

He also urged them to act wisely and responsibly on social media platforms such as Instagram and warned against using them simply as outlets for personal impulses.



The bishop said truth encountered in digital spaces should not be treated as absolute, stressing that ultimate truth belongs to God.

At the start of his homily, Datus referred to an appeal from Bishop Maksimus Regus, chairman of the Youth Commission of the Indonesian Bishops' Conference, for young Catholics to rise and take an active role amid changing times.

Datus said young people must continue learning and adapting while developing the maturity and resilience needed to face rapid social and technological change.

He also stressed the importance of solidarity and cooperation in Church and community life.

"The journey of young people must be grounded in the full awareness that human beings were created to stand alongside and support one another. As taught in Scripture, Catholic youth are reminded always to be 'good and faithful servants' in carrying out every task in life," he said.

The bishop encouraged young Catholics to contribute to the life of the Church, beginning in their local communities and Basic Ecclesial Communities, and to become witnesses of love in society.

He also urged them to cultivate three qualities: deep faith, pride in being disciples of Christ, and joy in service.

"Through a spirit of complementing and strengthening one another, all the hopes and aspirations of the Church for the future can be prepared on a firm and well-directed foundation," Datus said.

He closed his homily by reminding young Catholics that the Word of God remains the foundation of Christian life, describing it as living and life-giving rather than simply written words. **LiCAS News**

CONFIRMANDS READY TO WITNESS TO CHRIST

KULIM: Twenty-four young Catholics took a significant step in their journey of faith when they received the Sacrament of Confirmation at the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, on October 17.

Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang, presided at the Eucharistic celebration, with parish priest, Fr Desmond Jansen, concelebrating. The confirmands comprised 13 Tamil-speaking, nine English-speaking and two Mandarin-speaking students, reflecting the parish's unity in Christ across different languages.

Through the laying on of hands and anointing with Sacred Chrism, the confirmands received the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit, strengthening the grace of their Baptism and drawing them more deeply into the life and mission of the Church.

For these young Catholics, Confirmation marks a renewed responsibility to live the Gospel courageously. In their homes, schools and friendships, they are called to make Christ's love visible through kindness, honesty, forgiveness and service. The gifts of the Holy Spirit will help them discern what is right and remain faithful amid the challenges of growing up.

The parish extends heartfelt appreciation to the evangelising catechists for their hard work and steadfast commitment in preparing the students for this holy sacrament. Their patient teaching, prayerful guidance and generous sharing of time have helped the confirmands deepen their understanding of the Catholic faith and strengthen their relationship with Jesus.

Gratitude also goes to parents and sponsors, whose continuing example and encouragement remain essential to nurturing the young people's faith beyond this celebration.

The parish warmly thanked Cardinal Sebastian and Fr Desmond for their pastoral care and spiritual accompaniment.

As the newly confirmed continue their journey, may they remain rooted in prayer and the Eucharist, attentive to the Holy Spirit, and ready to serve as joyful witnesses of Christ.





Bishop Bernard urges candidates to live Christ's love

AYER SALAK: Bishop Bernard Paul administered the Sacrament of Confirmation to 27 candidates during a 9.00am Mass on Sunday, October 25, at St Mary's Church parish hall, attended by about 800 people.

With the main church undergoing repairs, Masses are being celebrated at the parish hall opposite the church. A photo session was held at the old church, St Mary's Chapel, before Mass.

The Mass was concelebrated by parish priest Fr John Yoew and assistant parish priest Fr KC Wong, with Deacons Anthony Chua and James Anthony assisting.

Of the 27 candidates, six were from the Chapel of Corpus Christi at Terendak Camp, comprising four adults and two students. The remaining 21 were students from St Mary's parish. Most had completed two years of preparation for the sacrament.

During the liturgy, the candidates renewed their baptismal promises and received the anointing with Sacred Chrism. Bishop Bernard's homily was also translated into Mandarin.

At the beginning of his homily, Bishop Bernard asked the candidates whether they were ready to receive the sacrament. He then highlighted the two great commandments taught by Jesus: to love God and to love one's neighbour.

The bishop stressed that outward expressions of religious devotion must be accompanied by genuine Christian living. Citing the offering of flowers and candles to God as examples, he cautioned that such offerings, without a corresponding love and care for others, could amount to an attempt to buy God's favour, likening it to "bribery".

He emphasised that God does not entertain attempts to gain His favour through offerings while neglecting the responsibility to love one's neighbour.

Following Christ's commandments, he added, requires more than acts of devotion within the Church. It calls for building genuine relationships through love, care and concern for others, including non-Catholics and members of the wider community.

Ordinary people called to extraordinary mission

KOTA KINABALU: Thirty-seven young Catholics received the Sacrament of Confirmation from Archbishop John Wong during the feast day celebration of St Simon Catholic Church, Likas, on October 25.

In his homily, Archbishop John called on the faithful to respond to Christ's invitation to holiness through prayer and service, reminding them that holiness is not achieved through human effort alone but through God's grace.

Drawing on the life of St Simon, he explained how Christians are called by Christ, formed through prayer and sent forth to serve others.

"Jesus has called us to be holy, no doubt," he said, emphasising that every Christian is capable of growing in holiness through God's power.

He encouraged parishioners to deepen their relationship with God through prayer, which enables them to discern His will and fulfil their Christian mission.

The archbishop pointed to the apostles, ordinary men who were transformed by the Holy Spirit and entrusted with extraordinary missions. Citing St Thérèse of Lisieux, he reminded the congregation that even the smallest acts, when performed with great love, could become meaningful expressions of Christian service.

The Mass was concelebrated by parish rector, Fr Michael Modoit, and Fr Cosmas Lee. Representatives of the parish's various ministries and sub-ministries joined the procession, carrying their respective banners as a sign of their shared commitment to the Church's mission.

Following Mass, parishioners gathered in the church hall for brunch and fellowship.

Addressing the gathering, Fr Michael highlighted the parish's strong family bonds, active participation across generations and commitment to spiritual formation through the Word of God.

He expressed his desire to further strengthen the parish's family-centred character and encourage Scripture sharing within its ministries.

Fr Michael also thanked Archbishop John for his guidance during a dialogue with parish leaders the previous evening, particularly his encouragement to foster greater collaboration within the parish community.

Parish pastoral council chairperson Teresa Ham congratulated the newly confirmed youths and expressed appreciation to the priests, parents, sponsors and volunteers who had accompanied them in their preparation.



Archbishop John Wong with parish priest Fr Michael Modoit, Fr Cosmas Lee, the 37 newly confirmed youth and their catechists during St Simon Catholic Church's feast day celebration.

Reflecting on the candidates' preparation theme, she reminded them that every person is created in God's image.

"When you look in the mirror, and when you look at one another, you are looking at a unique reflection of God's love, of God's purpose, and of God's light," she said.

Teresa also welcomed Fr Michael, who began his assignment at the parish earlier this year, and acknowledged the contributions of former rector Fr Cosmas Lee.

She encouraged parishioners to carry the faith and missionary zeal of their patron saint into everyday life, recognising Christ's presence in one another and expressing their faith through acts of love and service. **Audrey Ansibin**



He preached the Gospel by transforming lives



For Vietnamese missionary priest Fr Pius Ngo Phuc Hau, proclaiming the Gospel meant more than preaching from the pulpit. It meant building bridges where there were none, providing clean water for struggling families, opening doors to education and sharing the everyday hardships of the poor.

His was a mission rooted in a simple conviction: faith must be lived, and love for God must find expression in service to others.

Fr Hau, who died on October 17 at the age of 90, spent decades transforming impoverished communities in Vietnam through his tireless commitment to evangelisation and human dignity.

His death, on the eve of World Mission Sunday, carried particular significance. Friends recalled that he had long expressed a wish to die on Mission Sunday, a fitting coincidence for a priest whose life had been devoted to missionary service.

Five bishops, including Bishop Dominic Hoang Minh Tien of Hung Hoa Diocese, concelebrated his funeral Mass on Oct 20 at Hien Quan Church in northern Vietnam, where he had been baptised. Dozens of priests and thousands of mourners gathered to bid him farewell.

Retired Bishop Anton Vu Huy Chuong of Hung Hoa remembered him as a priest who dedicated his life to helping others encounter Christ through his witness.

Born in 1936, Fr Hau was ordained in 1964 for Can Tho Diocese. After serving as a school principal, he volunteered in 1971 for missionary work in Ca Mau, Vietnam's southernmost province, where poverty and limited access to education, healthcare and basic infrastructure shaped daily life.

Known affectionately as Anh Tam Hau, or Brother Tam Hau, he began his mission in a cramped rented room furnished with a bed and a table that doubled as his dining space, workspace and altar.

Within three years, he had established six mission stations that eventually became parishes.

But Fr Hau understood that evangelisation could not be separated from the realities of people's lives.

He helped build roads and bridges across canals, dug wells, provided homes for impoverished families and secured scholarships for children who might otherwise have been denied an education.

Between 1994 and 2006, his initiatives helped provide nearly five kilometres of concrete roads, 20 bridges, 200 wells and 60 houses. He also established a healthcare facility and supported hundreds of disadvantaged students.

His pastoral ministry bore spiritual fruit too, with more than 2,000 people baptised during that period through catechesis and personal encounters.

Perhaps among his most enduring achievements was education. After nearly two decades of support, approximately 200 young people graduated from university, creating opportunities for families previously trapped by poverty.

His influence extended to future Church leaders. Bishop Tien himself was encouraged by Fr Hau, while working in Ca Mau as a young man, to embrace missionary service.

Despite his accomplishments, Fr Hau remained remarkably simple. He preferred T-shirts that required no ironing, ate inexpensive bananas and favoured modest churches over elaborate buildings.

He also promoted Gospel meditation before the Blessed Sacrament and wrote extensively on inculturation, interfaith dialogue, social justice and lay participation in evangelisation.

After returning to Hung Hoa in 2011, he remained faithful to the simplicity that had defined his ministry, even requesting an inexpensive coffin and a humble burial.

He did not simply preach the Gospel to the poor. He lived it among them.

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MEMORIAM

For enquiries, please contact:
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37th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of



Aleykutty James
Departed: 12-11-1989

Upright and just in all her ways,
Loyal and true
through all her days,
Silently suffered patiently borne,
God took her home
to suffer no more.

Always remembered by loving children, grandchildren and loved ones.

May she rest in peace.



IN LOVING MEMORY
2nd Anniversary of our beloved Amma

Sawariamah Rayappan
@ Mary Paul Raju
(wife of Late Paul Thanaraju Devasahayan)

9th December 1955 — 7th November 2024

Two years have passed,
Yet your smile still warms us through every prayer and every day
You are not gone, dear Amma,
But the warm home we carry deep inside, to the end.

MEMORIAL MASS
Saturday, 7th November 2026 at 6.00 pm
Church of the Divine Mercy, Shah Alam

Deeply missed and fondly remembered by
Children, Sons-in-Law, Daughter-in-Law, Grandchildren & Loved Ones.

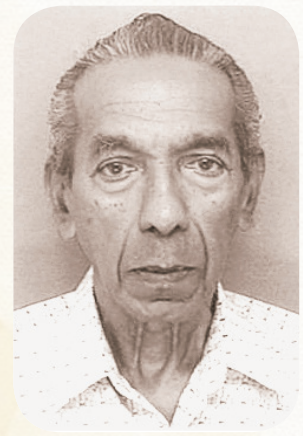
In Loving Memory of



Madam Savariamah Arokiasamy
27/1/1944- 12/5/2026

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be anymore pain: for the former things are passed away".
(Revelations 21:1-4)

Amma, you are forever loved and cherished.



In Loving Memory of
SOOSAI SANTHANASAMY
15 Nov. 1929 to 14 Nov. 2016
10th Anniversary

Memorial Mass is offered on Saturday, 14th November at 6.00pm at St Ignatius Church, Taman Plaza, PJ.

Fond memories of our Beloved One who has touched our hearts in one way or another, by his own way of life. In him was love, charity, respect, patience and a deep concern for one another. He was ever ready to assist and serve where required.

I am the Resurrection and the Life, he that believeth in Me, even if he dies shall live forever.
Eternal rest grant unto him O Lord, May the perpetual light shine on him.
May his soul rest in peace.

Remembered by Family and Friends.

NOTICE

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In Loving Memory of Our Beloved

BEATRICE BOEY YOKE PHENG



4 July 1940 – 10 November 2015
11th Anniversary

ESTHER BOEY YOKE MOY



15 October 1957 – 27 September 2021
5th Anniversary

In remembrance of a life of grace.
Forever cherished, never forgotten.

Deeply Missed and Always Remembered in Our Hearts.
The Family Members, Relatives & Friends.

24th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of



Eric Singh Lahre
16-04-1969 ~ 13-11-2002

O Death,
Where is thy victory?
O Death,
Where is thy sting?
– 1 Cor. 15:55.

Deeply missed and forever remembered by Mum and Rod



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FOR THE PROPER USE OF WEALTH
We pray for the proper use of wealth, that not succumbing to the temptation of selfishness, it may always be put at the service the common good and solidarity of those who have less.

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ISSN 1394 - 3294
9 771394 329008
November 8, 2026

Message for Deepavali

Hindus and Christians: forging pathways of peace together in "the spirit of Assisi"

Dear friends,

The Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue extends its warmest prayerful and festive wishes to you as you celebrate Deepavali on November 8 this year. May God, the fount of all that is good, bless you, your families, loved ones and communities with abundant joy, peace and prosperity!

Forty years ago, on October 27, 1986, representatives of the world's religions gathered in Assisi, at the invitation of St John Paul II, to pray for peace. Assisi, the birthplace and resting place of St Francis of Assisi, who was hailed as "a man of peace" (cf. Pope John Paul II, *Address to the Representatives of the Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of the World Religions,* Oct 27, 1986), thus became the setting for a historic encounter, in which people of various religions came together to pray, convinced that religions and interreligious solidarity can help address global crises and promote peace. St John Paul II called this the "spirit of Assisi", which over the years has inspired countless initiatives for peace throughout the world (cf. *Address to the Leaders of the World Religions,* Oct 26, 1986).

In the face of the many challenges facing humanity today, especially those arising from wars, conflicts, and the use of religion for political ends, the commemoration of the 1986 Assisi gathering offers us the opportunity to reflect with you on how Hindus and Christians can forge pathways of peace together, drawing inspiration from the spirit of Assisi.

One such pathway is to come together to pray with a shared spiritual commitment to peace, each according to his or her own religious tradition, while respecting that of the other. Indeed, genuine prayer overcomes differences and disarms hearts, minds and lives (cf. Pope Leo XIV, *Message for the 59th World Day of Peace,* Jan 1, 2026), transforming us into men and women of compassion and peace.

Another pathway is to nurture the spirit of universal fraternity exemplified by St Francis, who treated all as *omnes fratres,* "brothers and sisters all" (cf. Pope Francis, *Message for the 47th World Day of Peace,* Jan 1, 2014). Fraternity enables us to recognise the face of God in others and to stand in solidarity with them, especially the poor and the weak. The more fraternity flourishes among us, the more peace will take root in our world.

Above all, interreligious dialogue lies at the heart of the spirit of Assisi, because of its profound potential to advance the cause of global peace. Today, such dialogue is a "vital necessity" (cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Address to the Ambassadors of Countries with a Muslim Majority and to the Representatives of Muslim Communities in Italy,* Sept 25, 2006). As Pope Leo XIV reminds us, it plays "a decisive role, because at the heart of the great spiritual paths lies a message of peace" *(Encyclical Letter Magnifica Humanitas, 223).*

The spirit of Assisi is at its core a commitment to peace. The Assisi gathering united people of diverse religious traditions and showed the world that authentic religions of their very nature promote peace and reject every form of violence, since violence "is the antithesis of religion and contributes to its destruction" (cf. Pope Benedict XVI, Address at the Day of Reflection, Dialogue, and Prayer for Peace and Justice in the World, Oct 27, 2011).

As persons grounded in our respective religions, and as people with shared values, may we, Hindus and Christians, draw renewed inspiration from the fortieth anniversary of the Assisi gathering. May we imbibe ever more the spirit of Assisi in our own lives by praying for peace, living the spirit of fraternity in our daily lives, and, by engaging actively in interreligious dialogue, joining hands with people of other religions and all people of goodwill in working for peace in our world.

We wish you all a Happy Deepavali!

Cardinal George Jacob Koovakad
Prefect

Msgr. Indunil Janakaratne Kodithuwakku Kankanamalage
Secretary

Church communication must begin with listening

MACAU: Jesus did not choose perfect people as His apostles, but ordinary individuals with their own histories and limitations, called to serve rather than dominate others, Bishop Stephen Lee Bun-sang of Macau reminded Church communicators on October 28.

Presiding over the opening Mass of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Office of Social Communication (FABC-OSC) Bishops' meeting at St Joseph's Seminary Church, Bishop Lee urged participants to embrace humility, personal encounter and genuine listening in evangelisation, particularly in the age of artificial intelligence (AI).

The Mass coincided with the feast of Sts Simon and Jude, Apostles. Reflecting on Jesus praying before choosing the Twelve, Bishop Stephen emphasised the importance of prayer, discernment and accompaniment in the Church's mission.

Proclaiming the Gospel, he said, required more than disseminating information or adopting new technologies. It demanded personal presence and sensitivity to human suffering.

"Listening before speaking, accompanying before judging," he urged, highlighting an approach rooted in synodality.

The October 27–31 meeting brought together Asian bishops, priests and communication delegates under the theme *Magnifica Humanitas and the Synodal Ways of Evangelisation in Asia: Communicating Christ in the Age of Artificial Intelligence.*

Concelebrants included Cardinal Sebastian Francis of Penang and Bishop Marcelino Antonio "Junie" Maralit Jr of San Pablo, Philippines, chairman of FABC-OSC.

Bishop Stephen challenged Church communicators to consider whose stories were being told and whose experiences were being overlooked, particularly those of people facing suffering and marginalisation.

He encouraged collaboration across national and linguistic boundaries to ensure that Church communication reflected the diverse realities of Asian communities.

Addressing AI's growing influence, he stressed that technology must serve the common good and safeguard human dignity, strengthening authentic relationships rather than reducing people to data or categories.

The meeting took place as the Diocese of Macau marked its 450th anniversary. Established by Pope Gregory XIII on January 23, 1576, Macau became an important gateway for Catholic missionaries travelling to China, Japan and other parts of Asia.

St Joseph's Seminary, founded in 1728, provided a historic setting for discussions on renewing the Church's missionary commitment amid technological and social change.

Drawing on Macau's missionary heritage, Bishop Stephen encouraged participants to explore new approaches to evangelisation while remaining faithful to the Gospel's emphasis on human encounter and service.

His message underscored that technological advancement could not replace the human relationships through which the Gospel is encountered and shared.

Effective Christian communication began not merely with what the Church said, but with its willingness to listen, accompany and serve. **RVA**



Published by The Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur on behalf of the Bishops of Peninsular Malaysia, HERALD, APC, 5 Jalan Robertson, 50150 Kuala Lumpur and printed by Vivar Printing Sdn. Bhd., Lot 25, Rawang Integrated Ind. Park, Mukim Rawang, Jalan Batu Arang, 48000 Rawang, Selangor.