

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.

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First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

1 Tim 2:1-2



**Returning to the heart of Caritas**

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**SMC prepares for 135 years of missionary witness**

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**Shrine of Mary Immaculate opens in Sibu**

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# Called to serve, not sit on thrones

**V**ATICAN: Pope Leo XIV has challenged newly ordained bishops to see their vocation not as a throne of power but as a call to humble service. “The gift you have received is not for yourselves, but to serve the cause of the Gospel,” he told them during an audience on September 11.

His exhortation capped a week-long formation course in Rome, where bishops from across the globe gathered in an atmosphere of gratitude and hope, renewing their commitment and drawing inspiration from the Holy Father’s words.

The Pope urged the new bishops to never lose sight of the One who called them. “You have been chosen, called, and sent,” he said, emphasising that their identity as bishops is deeply rooted in their call to be servants of the faith. Their vocation is a response to God’s invitation to lead His people, not from a place of power or prestige, but from humility and love.

He reflected deeply on the meaning of service, noting that it is not simply a series of external actions or duties. Rather, true service is a way of being — a call to “inner freedom, poverty of spirit, and a readiness for service that is born of love.” In choosing to serve, bishops are invited to embody Jesus’ own path, who became poor so that humanity might become rich in God’s grace.

Pope Leo reminded them that God chose to reveal Himself not through displays of earthly might, but through the tender love of a Father who calls His children into communion. This divine love, he said, must be the foundation of every bishop’s ministry.

Quoting St Augustine, the Pope remind-



Pope Leo XIV and newly appointed bishops, including about a dozen from the United States, begin a meeting at the Vatican, Sept 11, 2025, by singing “Veni Creator Spiritus,” invoking the Holy Spirit. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

ed the bishops that those who preside over others must never forget that they are “the servant of many.” He pointed to Jesus’ own words to His disciples, warning them against the temptation to seek greatness and status. “I therefore ask you always,” Pope Leo continued, “to keep watch and to walk in humility and prayer, so as to make yourselves servants of the people to whom the Lord sends you.”

The Pope also recalled the words of his predecessor, Pope Francis, who often spoke of the importance of closeness — closeness to God, closeness to priests, and closeness to the People of God. This closeness, said Pope Leo, is not optional but essential, for it is through this nearness that the care of God is

made visible and tangible.

As pastors, bishops are called to reflect the face of Christ the Good Shepherd — not only in their preaching and governance but also in their daily availability, their willingness to listen, and their ability to walk alongside their flock. The Pope stressed that this is particularly vital in today’s world, where the Church faces a crisis of faith and a weakening of its transmission from one generation to the next.

“These times,” Pope Leo said, “invite us to rediscover the passion and courage for a new proclamation of the Gospel.” He encouraged the bishops to welcome those who knock at the doors of the Church, to be attentive to the cries of the poor and the marginalised, and to

respond to the great cultural and social challenges of our era — from war and violence to ethical dilemmas and the global yearning for fraternity and solidarity.

“The Church sends you as caring, attentive shepherds,” the Pope concluded, “who know how to share the journey, the questions, the anxieties, and the hopes of the people; shepherds who desire to be guides, fathers, and brothers to priests and to all our sisters and brothers in the faith.”

In closing, Pope Leo XIV prayed that the new bishops would be continually strengthened by the Holy Spirit, and that the joy of their ordination would radiate like a “sweet fragrance,” touching the lives of all those entrusted to their care. **Vatican News**



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## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

# Moving past the hype

Every September, the universal Church marks the Season of Creation, a time when Catholics across the world come together in prayer and action to care for our common home. Here in Malaysia, parishes and dioceses have organised tree-planting campaigns, beach clean-ups, plogging sessions, eco-walks, and other activities. These efforts are important — they bring communities together, foster awareness, and remind us that creation is a gift entrusted to our care.

Yet, as encouraging as these initiatives may be, there is a danger that our ecological commitment becomes confined to a seasonal burst of activity — a “September-only” enthusiasm that fades once the month is over. As Pope Francis reminded us in *Laudato Si'*, “Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience” (LS 217). Caring for creation is not a hobby, nor a short-term campaign. It is integral to our discipleship.

Recently, Pope Leo XIV inaugurated the *Laudato Si'* Village at Castel Gandolfo, describing it as a “seed of hope” and a tangible model of ecological conversion. His message was clear: the Church must witness to ecological transformation not only in symbolic actions but also in long-term, structural change. The same applies to our parishes. To call ourselves an ecological parish or diocese must mean more than telling parishioners to avoid single-use plastics at fellowship gatherings. It requires embedding ecological care into the very fabric of parish life, planning, and mission.

This is where the ‘Ecological Parish Protocols’ come in — a framework that calls parishes

to think and act more broadly, beyond the occasional clean-up drive. These protocols invite us to embrace a holistic vision that touches on spirituality, education, advocacy, resilience, accountability, and practical ecological living.

First, parishes are urged to **lead ecological transformation** by pledging themselves as ecological parishes and setting up Creation Justice Ministries. This leadership ensures that ecological conversion is not left to a few enthusiastic individuals but becomes part of the parish’s pastoral vision.

Second, the protocols highlight the need to **deepen ecological spirituality**. Creation care must be grounded in prayer and liturgy, woven into catechesis, homilies, retreats, and formation programmes. As Pope Francis has stressed, ecological conversion begins in the heart — in prayerful contemplation of creation as a reflection of the Creator’s love.

Third, the protocols call us to **build resilience against climate impacts**. With increasing floods, heatwaves, and haze, parishes must conduct climate vulnerability assessments, educate their members, and prepare for emergencies. In this way, parishes not only care for the environment but also protect the vulnerable among us.

Fourth, ecological parishes are called to **advocate and collaborate**. The Season of Creation offers a global platform for raising our voices for climate justice, but advocacy must not stop there. Parishes should partner with civil society, other faith groups, and government agencies to promote policies that protect people and the planet.

Fifth, accountability matters. The protocols urge parishes to **audit their carbon footprint**

and embrace the 7Rs — Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Repurpose, Recycle, Redesign, Regenerate. This means asking tough questions: How much energy does our parish consume? Are we modelling sustainable practices in our events and construction projects?

Finally, the protocols emphasise **practical ecological actions**: switching to renewable energy, promoting zero waste, conserving water, banning harmful chemicals, greening parish grounds, encouraging plant-based meals at events, and even divesting from investments that harm creation. These steps require planning, resources, and perseverance — but they are necessary if our parishes are to be credible witnesses of ecological justice.

The Season of Creation, then, should not be reduced to a flurry of activities in September. It is meant to inspire long-term transformation. Just as Lent leads to Easter and Pentecost, the Season of Creation should bear lasting fruit in ecological conversion.

As Pope Leo XIV reminded us, projects like the *Laudato Si'* Village are not ends in themselves but living signs that inspire communities to go further. Our parishes, too, must become living signs — ecological homes where care for creation is not a programme but a way of life.

The call before us is clear. Let us move beyond the hype of tree planting and plogging, valuable though they are, and embrace the deeper, broader task of ecological discipleship. Only then can we truly call ourselves ecological parishes — witnesses of hope for a wounded earth and a suffering humanity.

Patricia Pereira

## Choosing God over gain

On this 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Scripture challenges us to true justice, faithful stewardship, and wholehearted devotion to God.

The prophet Amos speaks with searing clarity: “Listen to this, you who trample on the needy and try to suppress the poor people of the country!” (Amos 8:4). He denounces those who exploit the vulnerable for gain. At the heart of this lies a profound truth: every human person has intrinsic worth, not measured by wealth, power, or status but by existence itself. To exploit another is not only economic injustice but a violation of the moral law written in reason. As the German philosopher Immanuel Kant reminds us, the human person must never be treated as a means to an end, but always as an end in themselves.

This principle leads us to ask: What is justice? Classical philosophy defines it as giving each their due. For Amos, justice is not abstract but a lived reality — defending the marginalised and upholding the common good. When people are reduced to economic units or relationships to transactions, justice itself is undermined. True justice, rooted in reason and faith, recognises every person as bearing the image of God. Any system that puts profit above people stands in direct contradiction to this divine order.

In Luke’s Gospel, the parable of the dishonest steward (Lk 16:1–13) may puzzle us: why does Jesus seem to commend his actions? Jesus is not praising dishonesty but highlighting the steward’s prudence and foresight. The lesson is clear: if worldly people act decisively for self-preservation, how much more wisely should the children of light act in pursuit of the Kingdom?

The principle at play is the right ordering

of goods. Wealth is a lesser good — a means, not an end. As St Augustine reminds us, the danger lies not in wealth itself but in attachment to it. When money or power outweigh justice, charity, and faith, we distort creation’s order. Jesus’ words, “You cannot be the slave both of God and of money,” are not merely moral but metaphysical: to serve money is to turn from the ultimate good, God Himself. The steward’s prudence teaches us to use temporal things wisely for eternal ends.

Furthermore, this parable prompts us to consider the concept of stewardship itself. Stewardship is an exercise of practical reason. It involves discerning how best to use the resources entrusted to us, not for selfish gain but for the flourishing of others. True stewardship acknowledges that all we possess ultimately belongs to God. Therefore, we are not owners but caretakers, called to manage God’s gifts in a way that reflects His justice and mercy.

This harmonises with St Paul’s exhortation in 1 Timothy: “Prayers, petitions, intercessions and thanksgiving should be offered for everyone ... so that we may live religious and reverent lives in peace” (1 Tim 2:1–2). Paul calls us to order our lives through prayer and right action. This is no passivity but a stance: true peace flows from aligning the soul with God’s will, as the rational mind, guided by faith, seeks harmony between inner life and the world around us.

Prayer itself is a rational act, for it acknowledges the existence of a higher being. God reorients our desires and priorities in light of His will. When Paul urges us to pray for kings and all in authority, he emphasizes the link between individual virtue and societal peace. A just society is built not only

## Reflecting on our Sunday Readings with Fr George Vaithynathan

### 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

Readings: Amos 8:4-7;

1 Timothy 2:1-8;

Gospel: Luke 16:1-13 (or 10-13)

through laws but through the virtuous lives of its citizens. This echoes the classical idea that personal morality and public justice are interconnected; the health of a nation depends on the moral character of its people.

What, then, does this mean for us today? The readings invite us to ask ourselves:

- Do we view others as ends in themselves, or have we fallen into a transactional mindset, subtly using people for our own gain?
- Are we prudent with our resources, using them not for selfish gain but for the good of others and the glory of God?
- Do we order our loves correctly, placing God above all and letting trivial actions find their proper place beneath Him?
- Are we actively working to build a just society, starting with our own hearts and actions?

The way of life teaches us that a rightly ordered existence is a rational one, where the will aligns with reason and reason aligns with truth. For us as Christians, the highest truth is God Himself. Let us, then, take to heart the voice of Amos, the wisdom of Jesus, and the counsel of Paul, striving not for the fleeting wealth of this world but for the eternal treasure of the Kingdom. May our lives mirror the divine order God has set before us, and may we labour faithfully — through both prayer and action — to help build His Kingdom on earth.

# KL Archdiocese re-launches Alpha

KUALA LUMPUR: The Alpha team of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur has been revitalised and is prepared to support parishes following a successful two-day re-orientation held September 5 – 6. Participants arrived with varying expectations — some unsure of what the weekend would entail, others eager to learn — but by the close of the programme, the rapport built and the positive feedback received affirmed that Alpha remains an effective tool for evangelisation.

The weekend, held at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre, anchored on several foundational pillars, proved both fruitful and practical, offering a model that can be readily replicated and even enhanced by lay leaders from other parishes keen to implement Alpha.

The event, which brought together lay leaders from eight parishes, served both as a training blueprint and a source of spiritual enrichment. It was organised following a meeting with Archbishop Julian Leow, who appointed Fr Edwin Peter as the new Spiritual Advisor to the Alpha team. Fr Edwin was present throughout the weekend to lend his support.

The programme blended practical train-

ing with spiritual formation. Key sessions included a biblical reflection on John 1:35-42 and the inspiring story of Ignatius, Peter, and Francis. After being wounded by a cannonball, Ignatius experienced a profound conversion, later evangelising Peter and Francis and founding the Society of Jesus with six companions. The story highlighted evangelisation rooted in persuasion and personal encounter rather than coercion.

Damian Prakash explored the “Why” of Alpha, grounding the mission in Church teaching and referencing papal encyclicals from John XXIII to Leo XIII. He highlighted key points from *Evangelii Gaudium*, demonstrating how Alpha bridges cultural divides and connects participants to the heart of the Catholic faith, especially the *kerygma*.

Caroline David explained the Alpha course structure, moving from an introduction to Christ, through growth in prayer, to mission. Participants then practiced practical skills through role-playing exercises, focusing on the small-group discussions central to Alpha. Special emphasis was also placed on the Catholic understanding of the Holy Spirit and the art of hospitality, complemented by



The participants sharing their thoughts during one of the breaks.

two spirit-filled prayer sessions.

The event was emceed by Terence Andrew of the Church of the Divine Mercy, whose own faith was revitalised through Youth Alpha. Terence also facilitated sessions on the Holy Spirit and the Weekend Away, a key component of the course.

The re-gathering of the Alpha team, including new and younger members, honoured the legacy of the late Fr Dr John Gnanapiragasam, the archdiocese’s pioneer of Alpha. While experienced leaders provided

credibility and depth, the fresh energy and ideas of the new members brought vitality and diversity to the team. Young participants from the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Klang were living examples of Fr John’s pastoral efforts.

The weekend concluded with tangible outcomes: leaders from multiple parishes pledged to run Alpha programmes in the near future. Plans are already underway to launch Youth Alpha at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Port Dickson.

**KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE**

**Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow**

**September**

- 21 Confirmation – Church of Mount Carmel
- 22-26 FABC Bishops’ Seminar on Synodality
- 27 Mass for Neophytes 2025 – Church of St Thomas More, Subang

**PENANG DIOCESE**

**Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis**

**September**

- 21 Confirmation – Church of Our Lady of Sorrows, Penang at 9.00am
- 22-25 Clergy Retreat for Priests from Diocese of San Jose, Philippines – Stella Maris Penang

**MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE**

**Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul**

**September**

- 21 Church of St Matthew, Tangkak 100th Anniversary celebration combined with Confirmation – Tangkak
- 22 Malaysian Catholic Youth Ministers Committee (MCYMC) Annual General Meeting Opening Mass – Good Shepherd Catholic Seminary
- 23 MCYMC Retreat – Good Shepherd Catholic Seminary
- 25 480th Anniversary of St Francis Xavier’s arrival in Melaka, Mass – St Paul’s Hill, Melaka

## Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #240

**Local Takes. Cracks Appearing:** The EPF is working to rebuild contributors’ savings after RM145 billion was withdrawn through four COVID-19 related withdrawal facilities, involving 8.2 million contributors.

SIS Forum called on the government to set up a federal child support fund to provide temporary financial aid for children whose fathers fail to pay maintenance.

According to USM’s criminologist, bullying carries three defining elements: a power imbalance, the intentional infliction of harm, and repetition over time. Too often it has been dismissed as childhood quarrels or harmless initiation rituals. It is a form of deviant behaviour that sits between delinquency and crime — and Malaysia has yet to properly define it.

Unlike Japan or Indonesia, Malaysia

sits on the relatively stable Sunda Plate, making it less prone to large, destructive earthquakes but there have been low to medium scale tremors recorded in a few locations. The Institute of Geology Malaysia said that there are seven main fault lines in Peninsular Malaysia: Bok Bak Fault, Lebir Fault, Terengganu Fault, Bukit Tinggi Fault, Kuala Lumpur Fault, Lepar Fault, Mersing Fault. Segamat quakes leave cracks in schools, hospital and homes, says minister.

**Dedicating Times:** Carlo Acutis, who died of leukaemia, built multilingual websites to spread Catholic teaching, later earning him the nickname “God’s influencer”. He was canonised by Pope Leo XIV alongside Pier Giorgio Frassati, another young Catholic activist, who died a century ago.

Pope Leo said in homily: “The greatest risk in life is to waste it outside of God’s plan. Acutis and Frassati had made “masterpieces” of their lives by dedicating them to God. The new saints “are an invitation to all of us, especially young people, not to squander our lives, but to direct them upwards.”

**A Thought For The Week: Pencil and the Eraser**  
 Pencil: I’m sorry.....  
 Eraser: For what? You didn’t do anything wrong.  
 Pencil: I’m sorry cos you get hurt because of me. Whenever I make a mistake, you’re always there to erase it. But as you make my mistakes vanish, you lose a part of yourself. You get smaller and smaller each time.  
 Eraser: That’s true. But I don’t really mind. You see, I was made to do this. I was made to help you whenever you do something wrong. Even though one day, I know I’ll be gone and you’ll replace me with a new one, I’m actually happy with my job. So please, stop worrying. I hate seeing you sad.

**Lesson from the conversation:** Some benefit, some sacrifice. Some are erasers, some are pencils. Parents are likened to erasers. They’re always there for their children (the pencils), cleaning up their mistakes, getting hurt, and becoming smaller, older, and eventually passing on. The children live on or move on. Parents’ happiness is seeing their children not worrying or being sad.

**QnQ! Q asks: Is Healing about getting better?**  
 Healing may not be so much about getting better, as about letting go of everything that isn’t you — all of the expectations, all of the beliefs — and becoming who you are.

Expectations from family, peers, society, or even yourself about who you “ought”, “should” or “must” be in order to be accepted, okay and validated. Beliefs and labels that don’t truly belong to you; whether they come from culture, religion, personal history or trauma, that weigh you down, keep you in fear and alienate you from your authentic self.

Question: What parts of you do you “feel and know” are not authentically you?  
 What would it feel like to rest simply in who you are, without trying to become someone else?  
 What once used to guide us may no longer serve us.

**Holy Spirit@work:** Be who you were created to be, and you will set the world on fire. *St Catherine of Siena*

**Something to tickle you:** The elevator to success is out of order. You’ll have to use the stairs, one step at a time. *Joe Girard*

**Bishop Bernard Paul**



Fr Frederick Joseph receiving the papal blessing from Msgr James Gnanapiragasam.

## Fr Frederick marks 25 years of priesthood

SENTUL: The parish community of the Church of St Joseph, together with family, friends, and well-wishers, came together to celebrate the 25th sacerdotal anniversary of their parish priest, Fr Frederick Joseph, on August 31. The joyous milestone was the fruit of a year-long preparation marked by prayer, dedication, and unity.

The celebration began with Mass at 5.00pm, presided over by Fr Frederick. Concelebrating with him were Archbishop Emeritus

Murphy Pakiam, 38 priests from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur and the Dioceses of Penang and Malacca Johore, as well as six priests from India.

In his homily, Msgr Stanislaus Soosaimariam reflected on his personal friendship with Fr Frederick and traced his journey to the priesthood. He recalled the ordination theme chosen by Fr Frederick, *King of Kings*, linking it to the wisdom of King Solomon and reminding the faithful of the call to serve with hu-

mility and faith.

The liturgy was enriched by a multilingual celebration, led by the combined choirs of the Church of St Joseph, the Church of the Risen Christ, and members of the Zomi community. Their voices lifted the hearts of the congregation in praise and thanksgiving.

After the Mass, more than 900 guests and volunteers gathered at the HGH Convention Centre, Sentul, for Fr Frederick's Silver Jubilee dinner. The evening began with a tribute

by the youth of St Joseph and Risen Christ, followed by speeches from Organising Chairman John Bosco Morais and Fr Frederick, who reflected on his priestly ministry.

Cultural performances, music, and dance held in conjunction with *Hari Merdeka* showcased the parish community's diversity and talent. The celebration, which ended in joy and thanksgiving at 11.00pm, also featured a commemorative souvenir book chronicling Fr Frederick's journey and community blessings.

# Returning to the heart of Caritas

PORT DICKSON: The Caritas MJD Leaders Retreat 2025 gathered diocesan leaders from August 23 to 25 at the IJ Centre, for three days of reflection, planning, and renewal. The retreat placed strong emphasis on servant leadership, spiritual formation, and the mission of Caritas to embody the love of Christ in both word and action.

The gathering returned repeatedly to a central question: What does it truly mean to embody "Caritas"—that divine love which flows from God through us to serve others? Participants reflected that Caritas is not merely about charitable work but about "love in action"—the transformative love of Christ that uplifts both the poor and those who serve.

During the sessions, participants explored how Caritas organisations differ from secular NGOs and social agencies. While providing direct assistance, advocacy, and community development, Caritas also serves as a "school of charity," forming disciples whose service is rooted in prayer, fellowship, and Catholic social teaching.

"The leadership of Caritas must mirror Christ's model of servant leadership," participants noted during discussions. "We cannot simply focus on outcomes or fundraising; we are called to shepherd our members toward deeper Catholic identity and authentic living of Caritas."

The sessions were facilitated by well-known Catholic trainer and speaker Martin Jalleh, whose input helped participants reflect on the deeper mission of Caritas and the challenges of servant leadership. Drawing from Scripture, Catholic



Fr Martinian Lee celebrating Mass for the diocesan leaders.

social teaching, and Church documents, he emphasised the importance of integrating faith formation into every aspect of Caritas work.

"Prayer must not be treated as a ritual before meetings," Martin stressed. "It should be the foundation that shapes all our charitable action. Leadership in Caritas is not about management techniques alone — it is about forming people of faith who live out Christ's love through their service."

He also guided leaders to reflect on how community-building and individual spiritual growth go hand in hand. When members experience Christian fellowship rooted in forgiveness, encouragement, and a shared mission, they grow spiritually. At the same time, deeper faith inspires greater commitment to service.

The retreat also revisited Caritas MJD's core objective: forming "dynamic Catholics." Such individuals do not live their faith passively but

express it actively through prayer, sacraments, and service to others, especially the poor and marginalised.

Dynamic Catholics, participants agreed, are those who embrace inconvenience for the sake of others, see Christ in the suffering, and find joy in sacrificial love. Their generosity — whether of time, talent, or treasure — flows from gratitude rather than obligation, becoming a living witness of God's love.

This dual calling — to serve others while nurturing spiritual growth — was affirmed as the essence of Caritas. Leaders committed to ensuring that every programme, volunteer training, or meeting integrates both aspects: outward service and inward transformation.

For participant Ezralyn Dayalan, the weekend retreat was both enriching and inspiring.

"It was a refreshing time for me to step away from my usual routine and reflect on what it truly means to be a servant leader. Through



The leaders trying to unlock themselves from the human chain.

the sessions led by Martin Jalleh, I learned more about the mission of Caritas, Catholic social action, and the importance of leading with love and faith. Leadership is not about doing everything alone, but about walking together with others."

Ezralyn also highlighted the fellowship that grew over the three days.

"From praying and sharing meals together to playing games at the beach, I felt a strong bond forming among us. It was a good balance of learning, prayer, and fun. I went home with new friendships, a stronger faith, and a clearer vision of how I can continue to serve in my own community. I hope more people will join in the future to experience this growth."

As the retreat concluded, participants left Port Dickson with a renewed commitment: to become leaders who embody Christ's servant leadership and to form communities that reflect both service and

spiritual growth.

The integration of faith and action, they agreed, is not an added burden but the very heart of Caritas. "When we plan only for service delivery, we risk reducing Caritas to mere social work," one participant observed. "But when we integrate both service and formation, we create organisations that truly embody the fullness of Caritas."

Ultimately, the retreat reaffirmed that the goal of Caritas is not organisational success but the transformation of lives and the building of God's Kingdom. Leaders were reminded that their task is to guide members not only in serving the poor but also in becoming disciples whose lives witness to God's love in families, parishes, and society at large.

As Caritas MJD continues its mission, the Port Dickson retreat stands as a reminder that authentic leadership is rooted in love, service, and faith — a call to embody Caritas in every aspect of life.

## Celebrating nation and family

KUALA LUMPUR: The Assisi Beloved Community (ABC) of the Church of St Francis of Assisi marked Merdeka Day and Parents' Day on August 31 with a vibrant celebration themed *Celebrating Togetherness*.

From as early as 8.00am, members and their families gathered at Taman Tasik Permaisuri, carrying with them joy and gratitude as they honoured 68 years of Malaysia's harmony while embracing the spirit of family, health, and unity.

The day began with a briefing by ABC coordinator, Ann Trissa, followed by a prayer for Malaysia. Soon, patriotic voices filled the park as participants sang *Negaraku*,

*Tanggal 31*, and *Saya Anak Malaysia*, before reciting the five principles of the Rukun Negara. The moment was made even more moving as fellow parkgoers paused to join in the singing, a spontaneous gesture of unity.

To keep the energy flowing, a lively Walkathon was held around the park, with families stopping along the way to feed catfish at the lake — a simple yet meaningful act of togetherness. After the walk, participants enjoyed light snacks and drinks lovingly prepared by ABC families.

Spreading the Merdeka spirit, some of ABC's special friends and coordinators distributed *Jalur Gemilang* flags to visitors in the park,

inviting them to join the festivities. Excitement then built as the crowd gathered for a Zumba session, led by returning coach Nanie, whose boundless energy overcame minor technical hitches and kept spirits high.

The children added colour to the day through arts and crafts. Guided by teachers Aida and Hema, they painted batik pieces themed around Independence and Parents' Day, while one of the parents, Catherine Joseph, inspired creativity by turning dried leaves and twigs from the Walkathon into playful crafts. Families mingled over homemade treats, while parents exchanged thoughtful gifts in a gesture of ap-



The ABC community with family and friends.

preciation and love.

As the fun wound down, the children enthusiastically joined a clean-up activity, reminding all of the importance of caring for creation.

The day ended as it began — filled with gratitude, joy, and unity. It was a

celebration not only of Malaysia's 68 years of independence but also of the bonds that strengthen families and communities in faith and friendship. With God's blessings, ABC looks forward to carrying this tradition into the years ahead. **Elasya Richard**

# Jubilee for Orang Asli in Kg Tekir

Selva Manogary

SEREMBAN: Faith and culture converged in Kampung Tekir as the Orang Asli shared their traditions and joy, reminding all that the Jubilee belongs to every child of God. The village came alive on September 7, as Gereja Maria Bonda hosted a triple celebration — Jubilee for the Orang Asli; the 124th anniversary of Pesta Maria Bonda, and Sambutan Orang Asal. More than a parish milestone, it was a Jubilee of grace for the Orang Asli community, affirming that they are cherished sons and daughters of the Church, fully part of its journey of faith.

The church, adorned with fresh flowers and traditional decorations, welcomed hundreds of faithful for the celebration. Archbishop Julian Leow presided over the Holy Mass, with Fr Christopher Soosaipillai and Fr Edwin Peter concelebrating. In his homily, Archbishop Julian

spoke from the heart, recalling how his vocation to the priesthood was first stirred as a 17-year-old fifth former, during a visit to this very parish. Though it would take him 15 years to answer God's call, he shared that the people, the church, and the sacred grounds of Gereja Maria Bonda have always remained close to him — a testament to the seeds of faith sown here long ago.

After Mass, the faithful joined in a solemn three-kilometre procession through Kampung Tekir, carrying candles and praying the Rosary with one voice. Accompanied by the statue of Mother Mary and the Blessed Sacrament, the walk was a moving expression of devotion and solidarity, culminating in Benediction by Archbishop Julian.

The celebration flowed naturally into a feast, where traditional Orang Asli delicacies were joyfully shared alongside familiar favourites. The table of fellowship was a reminder that the Jubilee is not

only about remembering the past but also about embracing one another in the present. Cultural performances of traditional dances and songs by Orang Asli communities from Kg Belihoi, Mantin; Kg Sebir, Seremban; Kg Bukit Kepong, Port Dickson; and Kg Tekir added colour and vibrancy, weaving their heritage into the fabric of the celebration.

Speaking on behalf of community leader Roslan Kandong, vice leader Lela Telan expressed heartfelt gratitude to God, Archbishop Julian, the priests, and all who took part in the celebration.

The evening's highlight came with the joyous "Ting Ting" line dance, which brought together young and old, parishioners and clergy alike — even Archbishop Julian himself joined with laughter and energy. In that dance, one could glimpse the spirit of Jubilee: a Church that celebrates together, where no one is left out.



The faithful joining in the Marian procession along Kampung Tekir.



The Orang Asli children performing some traditional songs.

## Mass in nature inspires care for creation

BUKIT TINGGI, Pahang: The Archdiocesan Creation Justice Ministry, in collaboration with Camp Red, organised a Mass in nature to mark the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation. Held on September 6, the celebration invited participants to encounter God through the beauty of creation and to renew their commitment to caring for the environment as stewards of His gift.

The outdoor Eucharistic celebration was presided over by Archbishop Julian Leow, with Fr Andrew Manickam, OFM Cap concelebrating. The gathering of 149 people, comprising both young and the young at heart, assembled amidst the serenity of nature — surrounded by lush greenery, the gentle sounds of rustling leaves, flowing water, chirping birds, and singing insects — creating a sacred atmosphere that fostered reflection and reverence.

In his homily, Archbishop Julian drew attention to the beauty of the natural environment surrounding them. He emphasised that all goodness, beauty, and joy originate from God, the Creator of all. He reflected, "Everything that's beautiful, wonderful, and that brings joy to you... there's a beautiful author of Mother Nature. Give praise and thanks to the



Archbishop Julian Leow and Fr Andrew Manickam OFM Cap planting a tree.

Creator of creation." The archbishop reminded everyone that it is easy to overlook the Creator in our daily lives and sometimes blame Him when faced with difficulties. Yet, he urged the faithful to recognise God's hand in all of creation.

He reflected on the biblical account of creation, noting that "God created everything good, even on the sixth day, everything was good." However, he acknowledged that sin has marred this beauty, emphasising our responsibility to preserve and protect what remains. "We are called to be good 'Stewards of Creation,'" he stated, urging everyone to care for Mother Nature just as it sustains and nurtures us.

Throughout the Mass, the congre-

gation was invited to listen attentively to the divine presence manifested in the natural sounds around them. The experience served as a powerful reminder of the divine craftsmanship evident in every leaf, stream, and songbird. It was a call to action — to be custodians of God's gift of creation by caring for and preserving the environment for future generations.

After breakfast, the participants split into different groups to cover the different trails and then proceeded to the waterfall that brought so much joy to all. The treks had colourful fungi, fluttering butterflies and leaves all delicately crafted by the Creator.

This event marked the first-ever Mass held in nature organised by the Archdiocesan Creation Justice Ministry, and it successfully fostered a sense of community and shared responsibility. The gathering concluded with a renewed commitment to nurture and safeguard the Earth, trusting that our efforts honour the Creator's loving design.

Let us listen, learn, and act together for the good of our planet, recognising that through our stewardship, we participate in God's ongoing creation and care. Archdiocesan Creation Justice Ministry.



Participants embracing Mother Nature.

## Ecumenical ecological plogging unites communities

KUALA LUMPUR: More than 50 volunteers from different faith traditions came together for an Ecumenical Ecological Plogging event, organised by the Kuala Lumpur Central District Parishes in collaboration with the Archdiocesan Creation Justice Ministry.

Held in conjunction with the global Season of Creation, the initiative echoed Pope Francis' call in *Laudato Si'* to renew our relationship with the Creator and all of creation.

Volunteers from the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist, Church of Our Lady of Fatima, Church of the Holy Rosary, and Church of St. Anthony were joined by members of other Christian communities, friends from different faiths, and individuals with special needs, including a visually impaired participant whose presence reminded all that caring for creation is a calling for everyone.

The day began with an opening prayer and words of encouragement from Fr Andrew Manickam OFM Cap, Fr Clarence Devadass, Archbishop Julian Leow, and Creation Justice Ministry Coordinator Marilyn Simon. After light refreshments, participants took to the streets in groups, picking up litter while building new friendships.

Each step taken and each piece of rubbish collected became a testimony to what can be achieved when people of faith act in unity.

Fr Andrew said the event's ecumenical and interfaith character was among its most inspiring aspects.

"Christians from various denominations walked side by side with individuals of other faiths, united by a shared love for the planet and a common sense of responsibility," he added.

The plogging event offered a glimpse of that unity in action. It reminded participants that ecological conversion begins with community, when we see one another not as strangers, but as fellow stewards of creation.

In just a few hours, volunteers collected over 20 bags of litter, including plastic bottles, wrappers, and other waste. Yet the event's impact went beyond the rubbish cleared.

Marilyn reminded participants that ecological conversion begins with small, faithful acts:

"These small acts of choosing reusable items, recycling, and reducing waste are spiritual disciplines. Eco-discipleship is not confined to grand gestures — it's cultivated through mindful choices and daily living." **Elvina Fernandez**



Volunteers showing off the bags of litter.

# SMC prepares for 135 years of missionary witness

IPOH: The Church of St Michael (SMC) held a half-day parish recollection for its English-speaking parishioners recently, in preparation for the parish's 135th anniversary celebrations commencing on September 25.

The session, convened by parish priest Fr Aloysius Tan, took place from 2.00pm to 6.00pm at the Peter Pang Hall of the Parish Activities Centre.

Fr Aloysius said that with the theme *135 Years of Faithful Discipleship: Called, Formed, Sent*, the gathering was an opportunity for parishioners to reflect, to listen to God, and to share the many blessings the parish had received over the years, while also looking ahead beyond the 135-year milestone.

To begin, the more than 150 participants were invited to contemplate on what it means to belong to the parish community of St Michael's Church, Ipoh. Each person was asked to describe their feelings in a single word — words that together painted a picture of the community's shared faith journey at SMC.

Fr Aloysius then spoke on the first theme, *Called*, drawing from Matthew 4:18–22, where Jesus called His first disciples. Looking back on the parish's history, he remind-

ed the community that it was through the dedication of the MEP priests and missionaries from China — men who lived simple, humble lives — that the Catholic faith first took root in Ipoh and has since flourished and grown by leaps and bounds.

Participants were reminded that God's call is unique to each individual. It is a personal invitation, freely accepted, whether to single, married, or religious life. "We serve for our personal salvation, answering the call to build the Kingdom of God, for through Baptism and Confirmation He has already called us to follow Him more closely," Fr Aloysius said.

He added that sometimes there is a "call within a call" — one may be drawn to a particular ministry at first, only to be called later to serve in a different capacity. Participants were then invited to reflect on how they are being called today to follow Christ more deeply. Since the call comes from God, he reminded them, the challenge is to remain faithful, trusting that God will shape them into what He intends.

On the second theme, *Formed*, Fr Aloysius referred to Acts 2:42–47, where the early Christians grew together as disciples in community — remaining faithful, celebrating the breaking of bread, praying,

and strengthening bonds of brotherhood. Likewise, he said, discipleship today must be lived out in the parish, not as individuals. The parish is the "home" where disciples are formed through the Sacraments, the Word, and acts of service.

Over the past 135 years, SMC has grown through ministries, BECs, and parish activities, becoming a living testimony of faith formation. Yet, Fr Aloysius noted, there is still a need to expand the parish's vision for future growth.

On the third theme, *Sent*, he drew from Matthew 28:19–20: "I am with you always, until the end of time." Discipleship, he explained, means being on mission — evangelising, serving, and witnessing to faith in society. Despite the challenges of secularism, family struggles, and youth-related issues, social outreach must remain a priority. The vision for the parish, he said, is to continue the legacy of the past 135 years by becoming missionary disciples.

Fr Aloysius also shared practical steps for moving from being a "maintenance church" to a "missionary church." This includes engaging the talents of young people so they may encounter Christ, and reaching out beyond parish walls. The growth in RCIA baptisms, he noted, is already a sign that



Fr Aloysius Tan explaining on the parish themes.

the Church is on mission. "When we go out to visit the Sahabat Orang Asli, we don't preach Jesus — we bring Jesus to them. It is a call to discomfort, but we have to change from maintenance to mission," he said.

He further challenged the parish to consider how St Michael's could become more widely recognised, like Tzu Chi. The answer, he said, lies in concrete action — reaching out, sharing resources, and being true messengers of hope.

In group discussions, participants were asked: "What gift can I contribute to the parish for the 135th celebration?" Many responded that joining parish ministries and BECs was one of the most meaningful ways to give back.

Parish Pastoral Council chairperson Jennifer Duarte thanked participants for their presence and reminded them that their support would also be needed for the upcoming feast day. In the lead-up, she said, many activities are taking place around the parish and volunteers are essential to make the celebration memorable.

In closing, Fr Aloysius emphasised: "We can only go out on mission when we are grounded in our faith. So we must first ensure that we are firmly rooted in it."



Parishioners discussing ways to contribute for their parish feastday.



Fr Philip Tay OCD.

PETALING JAYA: Carmelite friar Fr Philip Tay, OCD, delivered a talk titled *Confidence in the Merciful Love of God – C'est la Confiance* at the Church of St Francis Xavier (SFX) recently. Inspired by the spirituality of St Thérèse of Lisieux, the "Little Flower," the session highlighted her conviction that holiness is rooted in childlike trust in God's merciful love.

Held as part of the parish's ongoing "Pilgrims of Hope" Jubilee Year series, the talk invited parishioners to deepen their understanding of the Church's living documents

## St Thérèse and the way of confidence

and spiritual heritage while embracing St Thérèse's "little way" of confidence and love.

Drawing from Pope Francis's reflections and the life of St Thérèse, Fr Philip emphasised two enduring themes: simplicity and love. Through her autobiographical writings in *Story of a Soul*, Thérèse offers a theology not of grand gestures, but of radical trust. "It is confidence and nothing but confidence that must lead us to Love," she wrote, a line Fr Philip highlighted as central to her spiritual path.

Initially, Fr Philip admitted he found Thérèse's writing deceptively simple, difficult to appreciate through the lens of academic theology. But as he sat with her words, he discovered their depth: a spirituality rooted in simplicity, daily offerings, and hidden holiness. Thérèse's path was not marked by heroic feats, but by her embrace of ordinary life, chores, difficult companions, and spiritual dryness as sacred ground.

Born in 1873 in Alençon, France, the youngest of nine children, Thérèse was emotionally fragile and deeply sensitive. Her

early years were shaped by profound loss: her mother died when she was four, and her sister Pauline, her closest attachment, entered Carmel when Thérèse was nine. These separations became the soil for her spiritual awakening.

At thirteen, she experienced her "Christmas conversion," choosing joy over sorrow after overhearing her father's comment that the family had outgrown Christmas rituals. "In an instant," she wrote, "Jesus changed my heart." At fifteen, she entered the Carmelite monastery with a singular desire: "to save souls" — to love Jesus and make Him loved.

Fr Philip shared stories that illuminated the radical depth of Thérèse's love. One told of her tender care for a difficult elderly nun, someone who ridiculed her, yet she responded with unwavering kindness and patience. Another recounted a winter night when, while performing a humble chore, she heard sounds of celebration and revelry nearby. She imagined a lavish drawing room brimming with worldly pleasures. Yet she wrote, "Ah! I would not have exchanged the ten minutes employed in carrying out my humble office of charity to enjoy a thousand

years of worldly feasts."

Even in her final illness and spiritual darkness, Thérèse clung to mercy with childlike trust. Fr Philip quoted her: "I really count on not remaining inactive in heaven... My heaven will be spent on earth until the end of the world."

As the Church commemorates the 150th anniversary of her birth and the centenary of her beatification, Pope Francis' decision to reflect on her legacy outside of liturgical dates affirms a deeper truth: Thérèse's witness transcends commemoration. Fr Philip reminded us that her life is not a relic of the past but a living invitation to rediscover the heart of Christian discipleship that is rooted in trust, simplicity, and love.

In an age of distraction, power, and self-absorption, St Thérèse's quiet confidence offers a counter-witness. Fr Philip's message leaves us with a piercing question: What is the quality of our love? And how do we act in love, even amid imperfection?

The session formed the ninth instalment of a series of talks organised by the parish's Firm Foundation Ministry in conjunction with the Jubilee Year. Eddy Lee

# A transit home for cancer patients

**Bernard Anthony**

KUALA LUMPUR: The Society of St Vincent de Paul (SSVP) Conference of the Sacred Heart, in collaboration with the National Cancer Society of Malaysia (NCSM), signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to establish the NCSM-Good Health Home of Hope (Rumah Harapan Good Health-NCSM), a transit home for cancer patients receiving treatment at Hospital Ampang.

The signing ceremony took place on September 8 at the foyer of the Chapel of Our Lady of Good Health in Kampung Pandan, after the Mass celebrating the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The event was attended by Archbishop Julian Leow; Archbishop Emeritus Murphy Pakiam; parish priest Msgr Stanislaus Soosamariam; Fr Albet Arockiasamy; Fr Christopher W. Soosaipillai; Dato' Dr



**Dato' Dr Murallitharan and Peter Das with the signed MoU establishing the NCSM-Good Health Home of Hope for cancer patients.**

Murallitharan, Managing Director of NCSM and several SSVP leaders, members and parishioners.

Peter Das, President of SSVP Conference of Sacred Heart, welcomed the gathering and highlighted the significance of the initiative. "Sixteen years ago, SSVP Conference of the Sacred Heart, together with the National

Kidney Foundation, established the NKF-Good Health Dialysis Centre here in Kampung Pandan. Today, we are proud to announce another project in collaboration with NCSM — a transit home for our brothers and sisters battling cancer," he said.

The transit home will cater to outstation patients undergoing

treatment at Hospital Ampang, offering additional pastoral care to the weary, especially the needy. Peter also invited all present to seek the intercessions of the Blessed Mother, Our Lady of Good Health, for the sick and the wider community.

Dato' Dr Murallitharan described the occasion as "auspicious and blessed," expressing gratitude for the opportunity to serve the community and raise awareness on early detection and prevention of cancer. "We hope to continue working together with the Church and community partners to reach out to those affected by cancer," he added.

The MoU was signed by Peter Das and Dato' Dr Murallitharan, with Msgr Stanislaus and Dunstan Dominic serving as witnesses. Archbishop Julian gave his blessing, praising both organisations for taking the initiative to care for the most

vulnerable. "Thanks for all your initiatives and foresight. May there be more efforts like this to support those in need," he said.

SSVP, an international Catholic lay organisation, seeks to live the Gospel by serving Christ in the poor and needy, regardless of ethnicity or creed. NCSM is a charitable, non-profit organisation. Through this collaboration, both parties aim to leverage their strengths and charisms to provide compassionate care and practical support to those affected by cancer.

The home, donated by a former Chapel parishioner, comprises six rooms and is scheduled to begin operations in January 2026. It will be managed jointly by NCSM and the SSVP Conference of Sacred Heart. The project was initiated by S. Perry, Vice President and Project Officer of SSVP Conference of Sacred Heart, who championed the collaboration to bring this vision to fruition.

## Signing the language of connection

PETALING JAYA: For a span of ten weeks, 16 committed participants gathered at the Church of St Francis Xavier (SFX), to acquire not just a new skill, but a new way of seeing the world. The sign language course, organised by the Catholic Ministry for the Deaf (CMfD) and delivered by Deaf tutors, culminated on August 9 with a sense of accomplishment that extended well beyond the mastery of vocabulary and grammar.

At its essence, the programme centred on the teaching of Bahasa Isyarat Malaysia (BIM), Malaysia's official sign language, yet its true gift lay in cultivating a deeper appreciation of Deaf culture and the universality of

human connection. Participants came to understand that to learn sign language is to embrace an ethic of attentiveness, patience, and mutual recognition.

The significance of such initiatives cannot be overstated. Sign language is not merely a means of exchange but an act of advocacy, ensuring that members of the Deaf community are neither marginalised nor rendered invisible. Each sign learned is, in its own way, a gesture of justice — a refusal to allow silence to become exclusion. In recognising the dignity of the Deaf community and learning its language, the wider society affirms that all voices, whether spoken or signed, carry equal weight in the human story.

The completion of the course was made even more meaningful through the presence and support of Fr Alvin Ng, SJ, parish priest of SFX, whose encouragement and accompaniment throughout the Level 1 BIM journey were deeply appreciated by the participants and Deaf community. His commitment stood as a reminder that pastoral care is expressed not only through words of faith but also through gestures of solidarity.

This course represents a small but meaningful step in the broader mission of the CMfD, which continues to champion inclusion through education, awareness, and empowerment. The ministry offers a progressive pathway of BIM instruction, ranging from Basic



**Fr Alvin Ng SJ with other participants learning sign language.**

Level 1 to Advanced Level 3, all conducted by Deaf tutors whose lived experience lends authenticity and depth to their teaching.

Enrolments remain open to all who wish to not only acquire a

valuable linguistic skill but also to stand in solidarity with the Deaf community. Those interested may visit [catholicministryfordeaf.my](http://catholicministryfordeaf.my) or email [cmfd@aohd.org](mailto:cmfd@aohd.org) for further information.

## Negeri Vincentians deepen commitment to service

PORT DICKSON: The Society of St Vincent de Paul (SSVP) in Negeri Sembilan held a two-day, one-night retreat from August 30-31 at the Infant Jesus Centre, bringing members together for prayer, reflection, and deeper commitment to their mission of service.

Thirty-nine Vincentians from four Conferences — the Church of St John Marie Vianney, Tampin; the Church of St Aloysius, Mantin; the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Port Dickson and the Church of the Visitation, Seremban gathered to deepen their spiritual roots and strengthen their mission

of serving Christ in the poor.

The retreat was led by Carmelite friar Fr Philip Tay, OCD, whose insightful sessions called participants to rediscover the essence of Vincentian service: humility, compassion, and the merciful love of God. His words invited members to return to the heart of their vocation, embracing service not merely as duty but as an expression of faith alive in action.

The tranquil surroundings of the Infant Jesus Centre created an atmosphere of prayer and reflection, giving participants the chance to pause from their daily responsibilities

and reconnect with God's call. Many shared that the experience rekindled their commitment to live out the Vincentian spirit with renewed zeal.

Besides the formation, the retreat was filled with moments of joy and community. For the first time, participants shared a barbecue dinner, a simple yet memorable evening of laughter, conversations, and strengthened friendships. The youth added vibrancy and energy, leading games and activities that drew members of all ages together, transforming the retreat into a true family celebration in Christ.

As the retreat concluded,

Vincentians departed with hearts uplifted, spirits renewed, and a deeper sense of purpose. The gathering became more than just an event — it was a milestone of unity for SSVP Negeri Sembilan, reminding all that their mission of charity is carried forward not in isolation, but in communion with

one another and with Christ at the centre.

This retreat has laid a new foundation for collaboration among the four Conferences, inspiring members to embrace their calling with greater joy, faith, and commitment to serving the poor. **Selva Manogary**



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# Shrine of Mary Immaculate opens in Sibiu

Jane Moh

SIBU: More than 3,000 Catholics from across the Diocese of Sibiu filled the Sacred Heart Cathedral on Sept 8 for the opening and blessing of the Shrine of Mary Immaculate.

Standing at 18 feet tall, the new statue is said to be among the tallest of the Virgin Mary in the region.

In his homily, the Bishop of Sibiu, Rt Rev Joseph Hii, expressed his hope that the shrine would become a place where Catholics could deepen their faith and encounter Christ.

“Through Mary to Jesus. She is the one who can lead us to Jesus. We also ask the Lord to bless this Cathedral, and may we continue to use all kinds of ways to bring people to encounter God,”

he said.

The date also marked the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, adding significance to the celebration.

Bishop Joseph explained that the title Shrine of Mary Immaculate was chosen in recognition of the Legion of Mary, one of the strongest Marian movements in Malaysia, particularly in Sibiu. He recalled how the movement, founded in Dublin on Sept 7, 1921, has long served God and neighbour through prayer and active works of service under the leadership of Mary Immaculate.

“It is this image — Mary Immaculate — her hands open, her feet pressing against the head of the snake. This image is very meaningful,” he said, urging the Legion of Mary in Sibiu to continue to grow in strength.

The bishop also drew attention to the three bridges leading to the shrine, which he said serve as a reminder of the wooden planks that Catholics once walked on to reach the church in earlier days.

“For the older generation, if you remember, our church was on the opposite side, which is now Sibiu Gateway. Before there were all these buildings, we had this wooden plank, only about four feet wide, that we always used to go to the church, school, and convent. In a way, it reminds us of our history, and history is important to know who we are,” he said.

Bishop Joseph concluded by thanking all those who contributed to the success of the shrine, which now stands as both a spiritual landmark and a testament to the enduring faith of the Sibiu Catholic community.



Thousands of pilgrims praying at the Shrine of Mary Immaculate.



## Legion of Mary holds long-awaited congress

PORT DICKSON: The Legion of Mary (LOM) held its long-awaited Congress from September 4 – 6 at the Champagnat Youth Centre. A total of 36 devoted Legionaries attended, representing various Praesidia, Curiae, and the Comitium from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, as well as the dioceses of Malacca Johore and Penang. This was the first Congress in many years, a much-anticipated gathering that united members under the theme *Love and Unity*, which St Paul describes as the “bond of perfection.”

Ignatius Wang, President of the Kuala Lumpur (KL) Regia of the LOM, delivered a welcome address expressing gratitude for the divine providence that gathered the members for the Congress. Ignatius emphasised the importance of seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance to promote unity among members and ensure their service remained faithful to the Legion's mission. Noting the presence of newly appointed officers and legionaries, he encouraged all attendees to build relationships and share their stories during the event.

At the opening Mass, Fr Philip Tay, OCD reminded participants that God's Word must be lived out through tangible acts of compassion, especially toward the least, the lost and the lonely. He stressed that internalising the Word should lead to mercy and active service.

The Mass was concelebrated with the KL Regia's Spiritual Director, Fr Paul Cheong, OFM Cap.

Over the two-day event, participants prayed, reflected, and shared experiences related to Legion work, recruitment, and communication. Sessions were conducted in both Mandarin, facilitated by Fr Philip, and English, led by Fr Paul. The Congress highlighted that love lies at the heart of the Legion vocation, giving meaning and fruitfulness to prayers, meetings, and apostolates. Unity, while not uniformity, was celebrated as working hand in hand under Mary's banner to glorify God and bring souls to Jesus.

Fr Paul encouraged the legionaries to renew their commitment to the four pillars of the Church: being rooted in holiness, united in communion, active in participation, and sent on mission. This renewal inspires a readiness to spread Mary's love and unity throughout praesidia, parishes, and families.

A key moment was the election of new office-bearers to serve for the next three years — a process acknowledged as both administrative and spiritual. The Legion Handbook reminds members that leadership entails humble and dedicated service, following Mary's example and Jesus' teaching: “Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant”

(Mark 10:43).

All members share responsibility for the Legion's vitality, supporting their leaders and working in unity — like the many parts of the Body of Christ. The election was conducted prayerfully, seeking guidance from the Holy Spirit and the Blessed Mother.

The newly elected Regia office-bearers will implement suggestions from the Congress discussions to advance the Legion's mission.

Present in over 160 countries, the LOM invites Catholics to grow in holiness by working with Our Lady for the salvation of souls. Its mission is to glorify God through the sanctification of its members, carried out through prayer, active service, and Marian spirituality. Members strive to imitate Mary's virtues — faith, humility, and charity — while deepening their relationship with God through daily prayer and the sacraments. Extending the priest's ministry, the Legion serves through works of mercy, such as visiting the sick, elderly, and marginalised. Paired work and fellowship also foster strong bonds, creating a family-like support network.

Do you feel a calling to deepen your faith and serve your parish community? Come and see what the Legion is all about. Contact your parish office to join us for our weekly meeting. All are welcome! **Cynthia Fernandez**

## Walking in silence, praying in faith, journeying towards hope

KUALA LUMPUR: With rosaries in hand and prayer intentions close to their hearts, 21 pilgrims joined a sacred walk of reflection and intercession, organised by the KL Archdiocesan Prayer Ministry. The pilgrimage was a quiet yet powerful expression of faith, uniting participants in prayer for peace in the world and for all who suffer in body, mind, and spirit.

The journey began with the Eucharistic Celebration at the Church of Our Lady of Fatima, where pilgrims offered up their intentions before setting out. The early morning rain had cooled the roads, giving way to a radiant sunrise that accompanied their steps. Along the way, scenes of daily life — such as schoolchildren dressed in Malaysia's national colours hugging their parents before rushing to class — became moments of prayer, as pilgrims remembered children everywhere who long for safety, love, and peace.

The group reached the Chapel at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Institute, where they spent an hour in Adoration before the Blessed

Sacrament. Prayers were lifted for those in need of healing and comfort, for peace in conflict-stricken regions, for children suffering silently as victims of war, for lives lost in the 9/11 tragedy, and for personal intentions carried in each pilgrim's heart.

This was the second foot pilgrimage organised by the Prayer Ministry in the Jubilee Year. The first, held earlier this year, took pilgrims from the Church of Our Lady of Fatima to the Chapel of St Charbel at the Church of the Holy Rosary. Both journeys were designed as spiritual offerings for the needs of the Church and the world.

Reflecting on the significance of such pilgrimages, Pope Francis wrote: “Pilgrimage on foot is a great aid for rediscovering the value of silence, effort and simplicity of life.” (*Spes Non Confundit*, May 2024).

The KL Archdiocesan Prayer Ministry continues to invite the faithful to embrace these spiritual journeys — walking in silence, praying in faith, and journeying together in hope. **Archdiocesan Prayer Ministry**



Pilgrims walking and quietly praying for peace and for those suffering in body, mind and spirit.

# Caring for Creation is our vocation

CASTEL GANDOLFO: Pope Leo XIV inaugurated the *Laudato Si'* Village (Borgo Laudato si) on September 5, describing it as a “seed of hope” and a model of ecological conversion inspired by Pope Francis’ vision.

The project combines spirituality, education, nature, art, and sustainable innovation as a witness of the Church’s commitment to creation and the vulnerable.

Welcomed by staff and families, the Pope toured the site in an electric cart, highlighting sustainable mobility. He stopped at the historic Little Madonna Garden, where he had earlier celebrated Mass for the Custody of Creation, calling it a “natural cathedral” and urging reflection on lifestyles and care for the environment.

Along the way, he met workers and families tending to more than 3,000 plant species,

blessed animals at the biodynamic vineyard, and paused to admire the gardens’ beauty.

The visit culminated in the newly built net-zero greenhouse, the hub of the Borgo *Laudato Si'*, which houses a Higher Education Centre on ecological sustainability. There, the Pope presided over a Liturgy of the Word and Rite of Blessing, accompanied by music from tenor Andrea Bocelli and his son Matteo.

In his homily, Pope Leo XIV reminded the faithful that every creature has a place in God’s plan. “Care for creation is truly a vocation for every human being. We are creatures among creatures, entrusted with the responsibility to care for all that the Creator has made,” he said.

Calling the village a “living laboratory” of faith and sustainability, he added: “It is



Pope Leo XIV feeds fish at a pond in the Pontifical Gardens of Castel Gandolfo, Italy, September 5, 2025. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

a place of harmony where spirituality, daily life, and technology meet, and a seed that can bear fruits of justice and peace.”

The celebration concluded with a prayer

for creation, asking God to awaken gratitude, inspire leaders to promote the common good, and strengthen humanity’s resolve to protect life. **Vatican News**

## Kerala inaugurates first church dedicated to St Carlo Acutis

VERAPOLY: As Pope Leo XIV canonised Pier Giorgio Frassati and Carlo Acutis in St Peter’s Square on September 7, Catholics in Kerala celebrated a historic milestone: the consecration of the first church in India – and perhaps the world – dedicated to the newly canonised “millennial saint.”

The Church of St Carlo Acutis at Pallikkara, in the Ernakulam district of Kochi, was consecrated and inaugurated with a solemn Eucharistic celebration led by Archbishop Joseph Kalathiparambil of Verapoly. The new parish, which can accommodate about 600 people, also houses a relic – a lock of hair – of the young Italian saint.

Archbishop Kalathiparambil said the dedication of the church was meant “not only to honour Carlo Acutis but also to encourage our youth to emulate him in their lives.” He described the canonisation of a teenager as “a great encouragement to youths” navigating modern challenges, showing them that holiness is attainable today.

Auxiliary Bishop Michael Antony Valungal echoed this sentiment, noting that the parish is envisioned as a hub for youth ministry. “Our local Church hopes that St Carlo’s life will inspire young people seeking to combine spirituality and modern technology. His extraordinary love for the Eucharist, which he also shared online, makes him a model for today’s generation,”



Church of St Carlo Acutis, Kerala.

he said.

Parish priest Fr Sojan Micheal confirmed that devotion to the saint has already taken root. “People pray his novena and present requests for intercession, especially entrusting their struggles and the future of young people to him. St Carlo is already an example for Indian youth and a reference point for all of us,” he shared.

Fr Mathew Kallinkal, Vicar General of the archdiocese, said the response from the faithful since the consecration has been overwhelming. “We never expected such

crowds. It is a great honour for us to have the first church dedicated to the teenage saint in India, and perhaps in the world,” he said.

Construction of the church began long before Acutis’ canonisation and was completed in April. “We waited for his canonisation to dedicate it to him,” Fr Kallinkal explained, adding that the archdiocese plans to introduce special prayers, such as a novena in his name, to deepen devotion and spread his message of love for the Eucharist and the Blessed Mother. **Agencies**

## Nepal’s Christian community focuses on peace

SILIGURI: Nepal’s small Christian community is responding to the recent youth-led protests with a focus on peace and core principles.

While not participating in the street demonstrations, Church leaders have shown solidarity with the youth’s demands for justice and good governance, which were sparked by a social media ban and widespread anger over corruption and economic stagnation.

According to Fr Silas Bogati, the Apostolic Administrator of the Vicariate of Nepal, the Christian community, which numbers approximately 8,000 believers, is a “drop in the ocean” but is fully invested in the nation’s future. The church’s primary method for addressing the issues driving the unrest is through its educational and social work.

Fr Bogati highlighted the Church’s shared desire for a better future and an end to corruption, while also stressing the Christian community’s stance that “violence is never a solution to problems.”

In light of the escalating violence, he has urged for a peaceful resolution and appealed directly to Gen Z protesters to help restore stability.

To ensure safety, Christian institutions have remained closed. Fr Bogati confirmed that all personnel and institutions are safe. Ultimately, the church’s response is one of cautious, long-term engagement — supporting the youth’s ideals for a more just society, but advocating for a non-violent path achieved through education and social work. **Matters India**

## Singapore archdiocese releases 10-year pastoral plan

SINGAPORE: The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Singapore has released an Archdiocesan Pastoral Plan describing its goals and priorities for the next 10 years. Titled *Communion in Mission*, the plan was released on the archdiocesan website on September 8, the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin

Mary.

In its summary, the archdiocese stated that the 2025-2035 plan is the fruit of a synodal journey that began with a collective discernment exercise in 2021 and which culminated in the Archdiocesan Assembly in March this year.

The plan was developed through extensive consultations with more than 1,000 clergy, Religious, laity, Church organisations, Catholic schools and parishes.

The archdiocese said that “the Plan is a rallying call for unity across the Church to realise the mission that Christ has entrusted to us. It provides a common language for meaning-making, guiding us toward becoming more vibrant, evangelising, and missionary.”

The plan describes five pastoral priorities that provide a framework for pastoral action across all levels of the Church:

- Lifelong formation of clergy and laity for evangelisation and mission.
- Building communities of faith in and across parishes for different groups.
- Enhancing differentiated co-responsibility of clergy and laity.
- Building unity in diversity across all levels.
- Embracing synodality as a way of being Church.

In a pastoral message, Cardinal William Goh, Archbishop of Singapore, said the plan comes at a crucial time in the archdiocese’s history. “Like the rest of the world, we are ministering the Gospel in increasingly complex and divisive situations,” he said. “As Church, our present times are marked by deep division and polarization, which at times seem irreconcilable.”

He said he hopes the plan “will provide us with a common language and tools to make meaning of the situations we face”, that it will serve “as a rallying call for unity across the Church” and that it will “guide us towards fullness of life in Jesus Christ”.

In addition to a 22-page summary of the plan, a detailed 97-page version is also available for study on the Archdiocesan website ([catholic.sg/pastoralplan2025](http://catholic.sg/pastoralplan2025)). **Christopher Khoo**

*Christopher Khoo is a Singapore-based freelance journalist and educator.*



# 'Neuralink' vs Imago Dei

## What Catholic anthropology has to say about Musk's tech and AI

It's straight out of a sci-fi movie. Except it's Elon Musk's latest Neuralink demo: touting whole-brain data streams that could let humans communicate "thousands, perhaps millions of times faster" and even restore motion to the paralysed and sight to the blind.

Last year, Neuralink became the first company to implant a brain chip in a human patient. In July, the company announced it now has seven clinical-trial patients with ALS and paralyzing spine injuries equipped with the coin-sized implant, allowing them to type, browse and play chess on their devices, merely by way of thought — benchmarks Musk considered rudimentary in comparison to the ambitious milestones he plans to pass prior to commercial rollout of the technology by 2028.

Musk's latest "Neuralink Update, Summer 2025" and his vision of realising "a fundamental change to what it means to be a human" poses challenging anthropological questions for the Catholic Church to answer as the technology marches forward. Pope Leo XIV, building upon the work of his papal predecessors, has already begun to formulate a response to the advances of artificial intelligence, stressing that any technological advancement must be evaluated "in light of the integral development of the human person and society."

"AI, especially Generative AI, has opened new horizons on many different levels, including enhancing research in healthcare and scientific discovery," the Pope said in a message to participants of this summer's AI conference at the Vatican. Yet he acknowledged AI "also raises troubling questions on its possible repercussions on humanity's openness to truth and beauty, on our distinctive ability to grasp and process reality."

### Neuralink's Demo

Neuralink, started by Musk in 2016, builds and surgically inserts brain-computer interfaces that let people control a computer or device just by thinking. Since 2016, the device, considered useful for its medical utilities, has quickly advanced, and the company envisions a future in which thought-guided computing becomes an integrated aspect of daily life.

Musk touted his vision of reality in an hour-long video, released in July, that demonstrates how Neuralink's brain-computer interface is aiding clinical trial patients through the use of "conceptual telepathy." He also explored how the associated increase of the brain's processing speeds might aid anyone.

"Your ability to communicate is very limited by how fast you can talk and how fast you can type," Musk said. "And what we're talking about is unlocking that potential to enable you to communicate ... thousands, perhaps millions of times faster than is currently possible."

During his latest update video, Musk explained that increasing the human brain's "input/output bandwidth" will allow it "to match the will of artificial intelligence."

He also raised rhetorical questions about the nature of consciousness and being and proposed his answer: "I mean, we are the brain. Basically ... you can get a heart transplant, you can get a kidney transplant, but I don't know anyone who's gotten a brain transplant. So, you are your brain."

### A Catholic Response

Some Catholic ethicists have taken issue with Musk's vision of a new, superior way of being human, particularly because of how it conflates being human with brain and body function.

Steven Umbrello, the managing director at the Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies in Willington, Connecticut, and a research fellow at the University of Turin, told the *Register* in an email that "Musk repeats a familiar claim: 'You are your brain.' This is typical materialist nonsense, and it is unfounded and reductionistic."

"It's true that brain function is integral to cognition, but it does not exhaust what it means to be a person," said Umbrello. "Consciousness, intentionality and moral responsibility point to a deeper ontological reality that can't be reduced to neural activity."

Umbrello contrasted Musk's transhumanist vision with the Catholic view of the human person as a unity of body and soul.

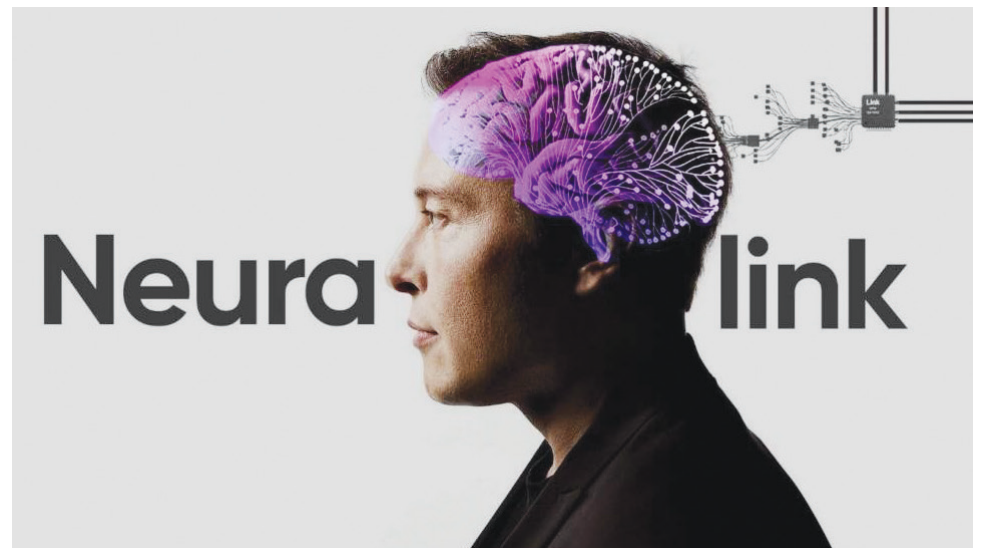
"Catholic philosophy has long distinguished between the subjective interiority of the soul and the objective mechanisms of the body," he said. "The Neuralink project, however, tends to collapse these two into one, which, unsurprisingly, is a move that flattens the human person into data. The risk here is both philosophical error as well as the erosion of moral categories like responsibility, love and suffering."

He added: "Our Catholic anthropology insists that human identity is not derivative of utility. It is rooted in our being created imago Dei."

Other Catholic ethicists agree. Back in 2023, when the US Food and Drug Administration approved Neuralink's clinical trials for the brain-computer interface device, the National Catholic Bioethics Center, a Philadelphia-based organisation that provides ethical guidance to the US bishops and Catholic health care providers, raised a red flag.

Joseph Meaney, a senior fellow for the NCBC, wrote in an essay that while "treating the brain-injured or enabling the paralysed to walk are certainly good goals," Musk's ultimate goal of connecting a person's mind to artificial intelligence in order to "create a 'superhuman' is an attack on the sacred inviolability of the human person."

"There is no anti-science agenda in the



cautious attitude of the Church," Meaney emphasised, "but prudential and ethical considerations must be made of all the possible uses of a certain technology."

### Secular Ethical Caution

Arthur Caplan, one of the leading secular bioethicists in the country and an adviser to the United Nations and the World Health Organisation, echoes this cautious approach. He told the *Register* he's "no fan of Neuralink."

"There are legitimate efforts to study brain modulation. Those experiments are peer reviewed; they get approved by independent people, and then they get published. That is the proper way to proceed," he said. "Neuralink is not peer-reviewed."

He continued: "Neuralink seems to be taking a giant step that's not based in where the science is — it's way too far ahead, putting massive things into the brain when the rest of the science world is putting in little key things to stimulate almost a few cells, not big portions of the brain."

Caplan criticised what he called Neuralink's bare-bones regulatory framework. "Given that we're doing brain manipulation, it needs a lot more than that," he said.

Yet Caplan also expressed the concern that the bioethical field doesn't have the manpower to handle all the ethical questions new technologies are posing.

"Things are moving so fast that the science is getting way ahead of where the ethicists are thinking. And the law? Well, it's even lagging even more," he told the *Register*.

## A digital future

Musk's plans for cybernetically enhancing the human person are not isolated. The future ahead sees a great number of technologies like Neuralink on the horizon. ChatGPT creator OpenAI plans to invest in a brain implant start-up, called Merge Labs, to compete with Neuralink, according to a report by *The Independent*, while Apple has patented future AirPods that scan brain activity.

In 2023, researchers at the University of Texas published their results in developing an AI system that can decode brain activity into coherent language with 72 per cent accuracy. That same year, Meta succeeded in developing technology able to decode brainwaves and reconstruct a rough visual representation of thoughts. And in 2024, a California start-up, REMspace succeeded in transferring ideas between two individuals in the dream state across long distance.

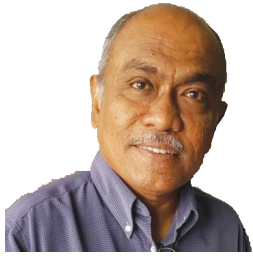
As data centres grow in scale and data processing speeds exponentially increase, the combination of these technologies is widely expected to reshape society with breathtaking speed. The Church has warned of such danger and is attempting to help steer that convergence so that technology remains a servant of the mystery it touches — the whole human person — before private, corporate or governmental interests set society on the path towards a far less humane design, one more akin to an episode of science-fiction dystopia.

"The Church has a responsibility to embrace scientific advances that support human dignity and healing," researcher Steven Umbrello emphasised. "But it must also resist technological narratives that obscure what it means to be human. Musk's vision is radically modern — materialist, progressivist and instrumental. The Church, by contrast, proposes a vision of the human person that is sacramental, relational and oriented toward communion — an inverse and authentic Trinitarian rebuttal."

And as Pope Leo XIV stated in his message released to young pilgrims at a youth festival in Medjugorje: "No algorithm will ever replace a hug, a look, an encounter — not with God, not with our friends, not with our family." **Andrew Likoudis, Register**



# Rebirth by water and the Spirit



## Echoing the Faith

DR STEVEN SELVARAJU

In the previous article, I examined the catechumenal process in the early Church from the second to fifth centuries, especially from the time of the Christian's first contact with the candidate to the rite of election. In the present article, I will describe the preparatory process leading to the baptismal rite.

### Period of enlightenment and purification

After the rite of election, those seeking initiation into the Church, now called the 'elect' (or competents), would enter the next stage of their preparation. This period, which coincided with the season of Lent, was a time of intense spiritual preparation for them. It was often accompanied by prayer, catechetical homilies, especially on the Eucharist, and strict Lenten observances. In the weeks leading to Easter, and especially during Holy Week, the preparation intensified and special ceremonies and rites were celebrated. Among these were the final scrutiny (scrutatio, examen), the renunciation of the devil (renunciatio) and the presentation of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer (Our Father).

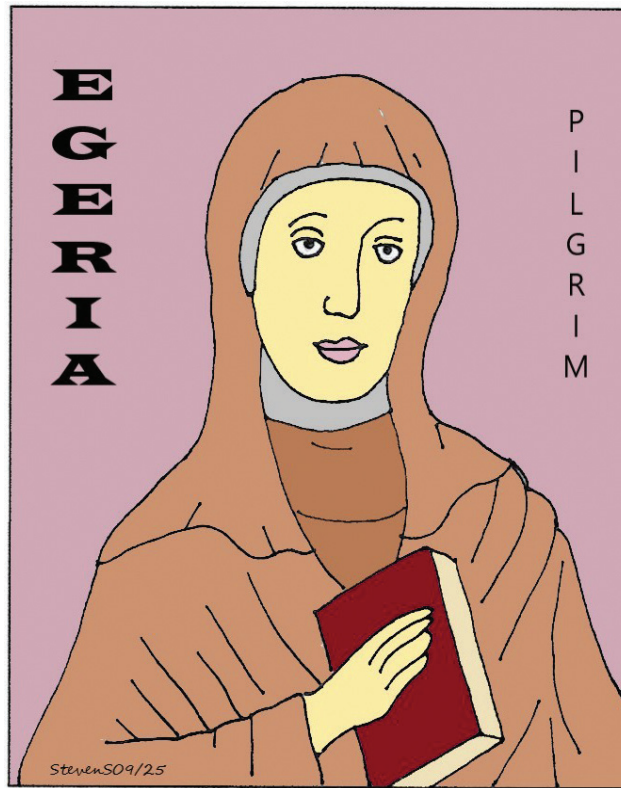


St Ambrose was the bishop of Milan (374 - 397) who baptised St Augustine in the second half of the 4th century AD.

In his writings, Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, urged the elect to take the preparations seriously. They were to eat and drink sparingly, to be chaste in body and to avoid any form of entertainment. He compared the elect to an athlete in training for a race. Therefore, exorcism was a frequent part of the elect's experience. According to Ambrose, exorcisms helped "to sought out whether impurities clung to anyone's body. Through exorcism, not only of the body but also of the soul, sanctification was searched for and grasped. If the exorcisms revealed that some of the elect were not "purified", their baptism was delayed.

The presentation of the Creed, also called "the handing-on of the rule of faith" or "The Canon of Truth", had become a common liturgical practice in the Church by the fourth century onwards. Usually done on the fifth Sunday of Lent, it consisted of an instruction on the articles of the Creed by the bishop to the elect. The Creed was always presented orally and never in writing. After hearing it, the elect were expected to memorise the entire Creed. A week later, the candidates had to recite it publicly before the bishop and the community.

In her diary, in which she kept a record of her travels in the Holy Land (c. 381 - c. 384), the Spanish nun, Egeria, describes how the elect, accompanied by his or her

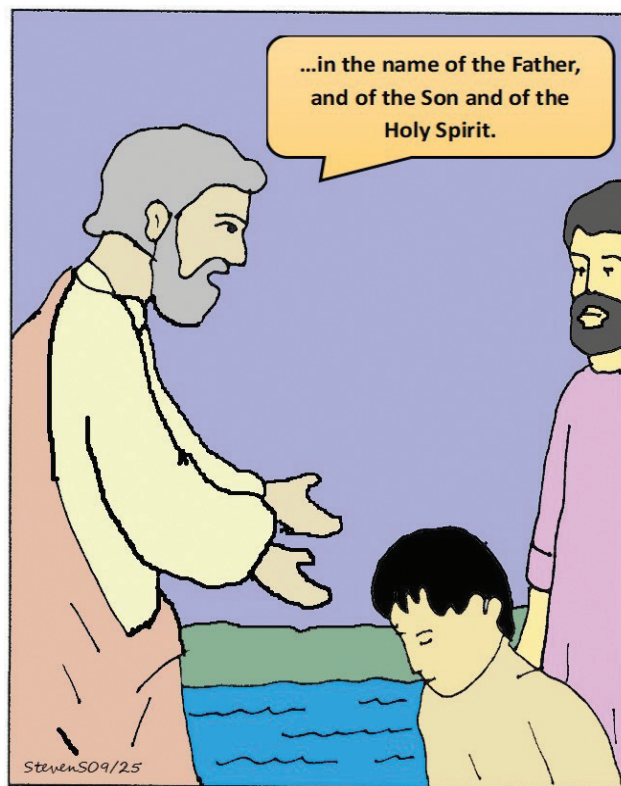


For three years, the nun, Egeria recorded the accounts of her travel in the earliest known Christian pilgrimage diaries.

godparent, recited the Creed to the bishop:

"When the seven weeks of Lent has passed, and only the Passover Week remained, which is called the Great Week, the bishop comes in the morning at the larger church to the Martyrium. Back on the apse behind the altar, a chair is placed for the bishop. Each man goes with his father and each woman with her mother and one by one they return the creed to the bishop".

Later, usually on the sixth Sunday of Lent, the presentation of the 'Lord's Prayer' took place. Here again, the bishop confided the prayer to the elect orally and they were expected to recite it publicly on the morning of Holy Saturday.



The baptismal ceremony was carried out in an elaborate but solemn manner with the participation of the Christian community.

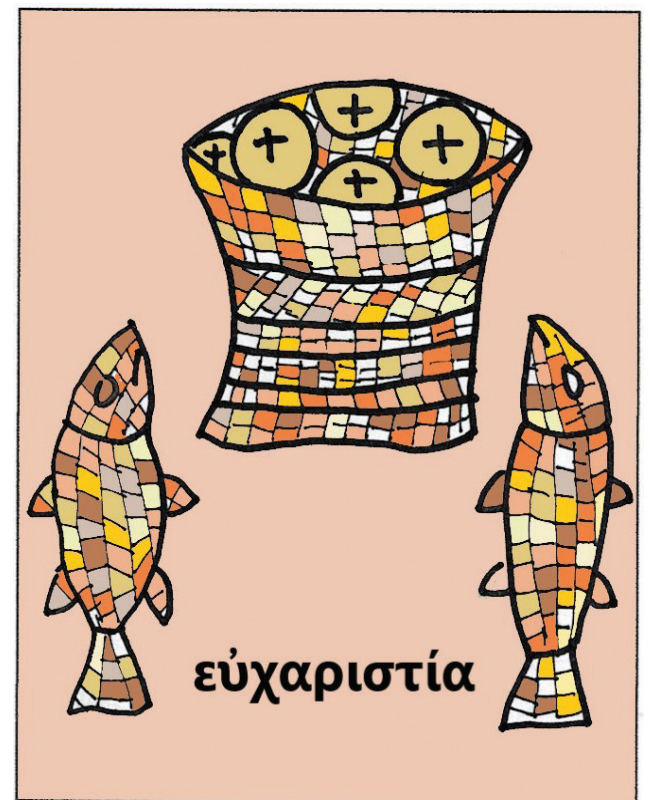
### Reception of the Sacraments of Initiation

The celebration of the baptismal rite at the Easter Vigil differed according to regions and churches. Usually, the baptismal rite began outside the baptistry with the rite of the *ephphetha*. The bishop touched the eyes and nose of the one to be baptised, drawing comparison to Mark 7: 34, where Jesus healed the blind man with a speech impediment. The bishop touched the nose because the newly baptised would inhale the sweet odour of salvation. The baptismal ceremony itself was carried out in an

elaborate but solemn manner with the participation of the entire Christian community. Here, we use the words of T. M. Finn, an expert in the history of the catechuminate, to describe an initiation ceremony as it took place in North Africa in the fourth century.

"At cockcrow the process of conversion reached its climax in the rites of baptism proper: firstly, baptismal water was consecrated; secondly, the competents processed to the font while chanting Ps 41 (42); thirdly, they removed their garments (coarse leather penitential tunic); fourthly, they responded to a final inquiry into their faith and firm will as they stood waist-deep in the font; and fifthly, they were immersed three times in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy spirit."

When they emerged, the bishop imposed his hands on them, anointed their heads with chrism, and traced the sign of the cross on their foreheads, probably with chrism. The newly baptised then dressed in white, including a linen head cover. They then received a baptismal candle and the embrace of the congregation.



"The five loaves and two fishes" was a common symbol used in the early Church to depict the Eucharist.

Finally, they celebrated their first Eucharist and a homily on the Resurrection. It was a widespread Eucharistic custom at that time to give the newly baptised (in addition to the bread and wine) a cup of baptismal water and a cup of milk and honey. The water symbolised the penetration of baptism into their inmost being. The milk mixed with honey signified their entry into the Promised Land of gifts and grace and their return to paradise.

The newly baptised, now known as 'neophytes' were fully initiated members of the Christian community. To them, there was a complete break with the past and the beginning of new life. They would return later on Easter morning for a second Eucharist (and perhaps in the afternoon for a third), hearing a homily devoted to the meaning of the Eucharist." The whole incorporation of the new candidates lasted an entire week and engaged the rest of the Christian community with considerable intensity.

### Conclusion

The catechumenal process in the early centuries was essential in initiating men and women into the Church, especially from the second to the fifth centuries. The preparation for baptism was intense and was taken very seriously by the Church. In the next article, I will examine the post baptismal period during which the neophytes are incorporated more deeply into the community.

Dr Steven Selvaraju, STD, STL, holds a Doctorate in Theology with Specialisation in Catechetics and Youth Ministry from Pontifical Salesian University, Rome. He serves as Director of the Archdiocesan Catechetical Centre, Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.

# FROM SACRED ECHOES TO DIGITAL DREAMS



A photo of the Assumption Church taken on a cloudy day. Transformed into an image on canvas with digitally-generated cotton representing the clouds based on actual photographs (Courtesy image/ Leonard Selva Gurunathan)

tech tools with good old-fashioned research, he has crafted a compelling video narrative that highlights the journey of the pipe organ and its profound role in the life of the church.

The project began with meticulous research into the church's history, archives, and the evolution of its musical traditions.

"The visual part of the video was done with the use of AI," said Leonard, "while the rest

of it was based on old-school research methods which included going through newspaper archives as I typed the information I needed into the prompts," he added.

"I curated the story," he notes, "based on the duration of the music."

To visualize the church's and pipe organ's rich history, Leonard employed AI-powered video editing and animation software. These tools transformed static images and archival footage into dynamic visuals, illustrating the organ's physical changes, restorations, and its integration into the church's liturgical life over the years.

The entire production has served as a testament to how technology can serve as a bridge—connecting heritage, faith, and innovation.

The resulting video not only celebrates the Church of the Assumption's storied past, but also highlights the enduring significance of its pipe organ as an instrument of worship and cultural identity.

It underscores how the organ has witnessed generations of worshippers and has become an integral part of the church's spiritual and community life.

This project exemplifies how modern tools can be harnessed to preserve, interpret, and share heritage in compelling

ways. It also emphasises the importance of safeguarding such cultural treasures within UNESCO's protected zones, ensuring that future generations continue to appreciate the rich tapestry of history, faith, and music.

As the Church of the Assumption continues to serve its community within the vibrant streets of George Town, its story—enhanced by AI, technology and old-school research methods—reminds us that tradition and innovation can go hand in hand.

By blending historical preservation with modern storytelling, Leonard's creative endeavour invites us all to reflect on the enduring power of music, faith, and heritage in shaping our collective identity.

Discover the journey of the Church of the Assumption's pipe organ and its musical legacy through this innovative video (<https://shorturl.at/gbCw3>)—a celebration of history, faith, and technological ingenuity. [postcodegeorgetown.com](http://postcodegeorgetown.com)



A digital image of the Assumption pipe organ transformed into a diorama setting by Leonard Selva Gurunathan.

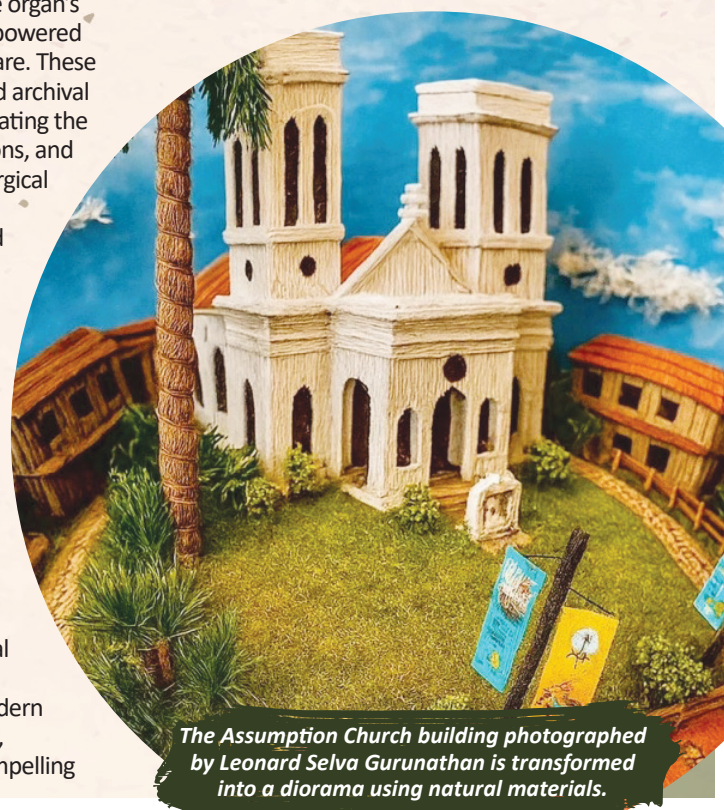
PENANG: Nestled within the UNESCO World Heritage core zone of George Town, the Church of the Assumption stands as a testament to the island's rich history and cultural tapestry.

Established in 1787, this historic Roman Catholic church has long been a spiritual and community cornerstone, seamlessly blending tradition with modernity.

Among its treasured heritage is its magnificent pipe organ, fondly known as 'The Old Lady'—a majestic instrument that has echoed through generations, accompanying countless masses, religious ceremonies, and musical celebrations, and holds the distinction of being Malaysia's oldest pipe organ.

Recently, a passionate pipe organist and music enthusiast—Leonard Selva Gurunathan—embarked on an innovative project to trace and showcase the church's musical roots.

Leveraging the power of artificial intelligence (AI) and a suite of cutting-edge



The Assumption Church building photographed by Leonard Selva Gurunathan is transformed into a diorama using natural materials.

## Motorcycles become lifelines for missionaries

KOILAMATI, India: In the hills of northeast India, where rainforest paths can lead to sudden encounters with elephants, tigers, or rhinos, three Carmelite priests travel tirelessly to reach their flock.

The parish of Koilamati, entrusted to the Carmelite Fathers since 2009, stretches across 50 villages.

Sixteen of these are home to Catholic communities who rely on the priests not only for Sunday Mass but also for the sacraments during the week, visits to the sick and dying, and day-to-day encouragement.

Life in this corner of Assam is marked by hardship. The 20,000 inhabitants, mostly from the Karbi tribe and other ethnic minorities, survive as small farmers, woodcarvers, or sellers of handmade textiles.

Many families manage no more than two meals of rice and vegetables a day. Child mortality is high, and diseases such as malaria remain common.

Reaching the villages has always been a challenge. The terrain is mountainous, the roads are poor, and many settlements lie high in the hills.



A Carmelite priest in Koilamati parish stands beside one of the new motorcycles used for pastoral work. Photo courtesy of Aid to the Church in Need.

For years, according to the Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), the priests relied on two old motorcycles, "completely worn out and damaged through years of use." After

repeated repairs, they had reached "the limit of their usefulness."

With their old vehicles beyond repair, the priests turned to their provincial superior,

Fr Xavier Jayaraj, who sought outside assistance.

ACN responded with funding worth \$1,266, enough to provide two new motorcycles for Koilamati's Carmelite mission.

In his letter to ACN, Fr Xavier expressed his gratitude, saying that "only a powerful motorcycle can cope with these difficult tracks in order to reach the people whom God has entrusted to their pastoral care."

"Thank you for your love and your understanding for our difficulties, and thank you for meeting our request," he added.

The missionary priest said the apostolate of the Fathers in Koilamati "has been greatly simplified as a result, and now, they can reach the villages much more quickly and spend more time and energy serving the people."

For the priests of Koilamati, the motorcycles are not just machines but lifelines—allowing them to spend less time navigating dangerous roads and more time walking alongside the people they serve.

LICAS News

# Why poverty is more than just lack of money

Over the last few months, I have heard from a few ex-students of an Infant Jesus learning centre who are now adults.

Their experiences have shown me that poverty and deprivation, especially at a young age, have long-term impacts we may not realise.

These conversations have made me more painfully aware of the curse of intergenerational poverty. Children in deprived environments grow up facing constant and unforeseen problems, including lack of counselling or parental guidance. This is not just about inheriting debt but inheriting disadvantage from the earliest and most crucial years of a child's formation.

Their experiences as young adults are chastening.

One of them today is a single mother who works as a part-time security guard on certain days. Her 10-year-old son is not in school – the reason remains unclear.

Another young woman is struggling to get her new florist business running, but sales are slow and competition tight. Family crises are constant. Her newborn boy is sickly, as is her own mother who has a heart problem and is now concerned about her nephew who has dropped out of school.

A third former student is struggling to get his own business going. He has dreams of making it big, but his debts are piling up. That has taken a toll on his own family life – he has several young children.

We often look at poverty as a one-dimensional problem – lack of income. But poverty creates many other problems that those with higher incomes may avoid.

Consider nutrition first. The inability to afford a balanced diet of essential nutrients could result in some degree of what is called “nutritionally acquired immune deficiency



## Sunday Observer

ANIL NETTO

syndrome”.

This may explain why so many people came to Jesus for healing of all kinds of ailments. Many suffered from immunodeficiency caused by malnutrition. Such immunodeficiency in an extreme form can be seen today among the starving people of Gaza, who are experiencing a genocide at the hands of Israel.

Health care presents a barrier. The inability to seek prompt quality healthcare

treatment due to higher costs and lack of insurance coverage is another issue that cannot be ignored. Without such treatment – consider especially the refugees and stateless among us – mental health deteriorates. This makes it harder for the poor to secure work or housing. It is no surprise that many in low-income families in urban areas suffer from some kind of mental illness.

Education suffers too. Poverty limits education opportunities. The poor are often unable to pay for private tuition and later college and university fees. Poor study environments and external influences contribute to higher dropout rates.

Housing and social problems multiply. Housing insecurity and homelessness add to the problem, as do social exclusion and stigma. The lack of knowledge of access to employment, housing and healthcare support does not help. The digital divide limits access to online services, education and jobs. The poor also face greater legal vulnerability from debt, dispossession of their homes and domestic abuse due to their lack of funds to seek legal help.

All of this limits young people's prospects as they land up in subsistence-income jobs. This tempts some of them to turn to crime or other unethical work. Many of them could already be exposed to gangsterism,

drug addiction and alcoholism in their early years due to the pressures of poverty in their neighbourhoods.

So, geography matters too. Poverty is often concentrated in certain areas – increasing the exposure to related problems. The lack of social workers to help the large numbers of the poor and low-income people compounds their helplessness. Children in such areas lack role models who have carved out a route to academic or professional success. They also lack early opportunities – high-quality schools, tuition teachers (given declining education standards) and computer and other facilities. They lack networking contacts to seek better-paying jobs.

When avenues to a more liveable income are blocked or narrowed, some turn to illegal alternatives. One solution: expanded access to vocational training and remedial and higher education.

The Montfort Brothers and the Infant Jesus Sisters have done outstanding work among young people either through vocational training or through learning centres. They immerse themselves in the lives of many people, each with their own problems and crises, and often transform their lives, working miracles in their lives.

But problems in society run deep. We need more such admirable efforts that touch the lives of people from a young age. Tackling poverty requires a coordinated approach that recognises these interconnections. Cash transfers, though providing immediate relief are like plasters on a wound. They don't treat the underlying issues with people's struggles – their lack of dignity, opportunity, and ultimately, hope.

One way out is by ensuring that everyone has not just a minimum wage but a living wage, apart from access to decent public health care, education and efficient public transport. Older adults need a universal pension and support, even care from social workers and care homes, especially as the population ages.

After all, when Jesus Himself came to bring the good news to the poor, apart from feeding the multitudes, He also healed the sick and people who were mentally disturbed.

Poverty is just one side of the coin. The flip side is the concentration of wealth in fewer and fewer hands, nationally and globally. Each time a tax break or lopsided mega-contract is awarded to the billionaire class, it eats into the public purse. This is money that could have been spent on the poor – on upgrading education and healthcare amenities, on building genuinely affordable homes, and improving public transport.

It is no surprise that Jesus' first followers were fishermen who were feeling the impact of commercial overfishing (remember how they were fishing all night without a decent catch?). This was at the time of creeping regional globalisation that turned independent farms into large estates and local fish catches into fish processing for the export markets.

Perhaps this is why Jesus spent so much time among the poor. No wonder he railed against the wealthy and powerful who were burdening the people. These were the people who were grabbing farmland and squeezing fisher folk and imposing taxes that burdened the ordinary people. Many were reduced to subsistence levels of income, their nutrition suffered, making them more prone to disease.

The Gospel message is far-reaching, beyond just providing food to the poor. It involves transforming unjust systems and working for distributive justice – in education, health care, job opportunities and much more.

As people of faith, we cannot accept the status quo. We have to recognise the multidimensional and intergenerational curse of poverty – and respond meaningfully to the challenge.

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

As I sat watching the canonisation of Sts Pier Giorgio and Carlo Acutis, I couldn't help but imagine what St Carlos' mother must have felt at the time. Seeing your own child officially declared a saint by the Roman Catholic Church? The little boy whose diapers you changed, who you potty-trained and held in your arms, now venerated by the whole world? What a moment! What a feeling it must have been.

As I sat with these thoughts, it occurred to me that the

Church only formally recognises a fraction of the saints in heaven. I am convinced, for every canonised saint with a feast day, there are thousands, millions even, of silent, hidden saints whose life story we will never hear of or read about in books. Souls who lived and died with faith, who now intercede for us in ways we may never even realise. Without sounding dramatic or overly bold, I am certain my own mother is a saint. The way she lived, loved, and even in death, it all pointed upward. She may never appear on stained glass or on a holy card, but I know she is part of that “great communion of witnesses” praying for and cheering us on.

My mind drifted to friends, relatives, and acquaintances who have passed. Some, I believe, now dwell among the holiest; others were once almost impossible to be around. Yet death softens rough edges and magnifies the beauty of a life. Flaws fade, virtues shine, and suddenly we see the little things we once overlooked – the kindnesses taken



## A Blessed Life

TIANNE PEREIRA

for granted. Which made me wonder: what about the living saints?

My mind immediately went to, (now imagine with me...) the warmest, gentlest soul you know, soft hands and softer words, with a smile that makes you feel like the most important person in the world, tie this together with the heartiest meals ever cooked from scratch and filled with heaping spoons of love, the kind that fills your stomach and your heart

all at once. Now, I don't mean to throw the word 'living saint' around loosely, but if ever there were someone who fit the description without the official title, it's my Mama.

My maternal grandmother, Mama, is now 92 years young and honestly, she's the gentlest soul you'll ever meet. Step into her home and you'll know exactly what I mean. She'll shuffle to the kitchen to make sure you've eaten (and eaten properly, not just a nibble), she'll smile that warm smile that wraps around you like a hug before she even says a word. Everyone, from family, neighbours, domestic helpers, odd job workers, even stray animals and her plants get the Mama treatment. Everyone and everything thrives under her love.

Life hasn't been easiest on her. She lost my Papa, and three years later, her daughter, my mother. That kind of grief could break a person, but Mama bore it with grace, the quiet strength that only faith gives. Mama's prayer life is something else. Morning,

noon and night she's at it – rosaries, holy hours, Divine Mercy chaplets at 3.00pm. She prays for everyone, family, friends, even people she's only heard about. Whether it's exams, sick kids, job interviews, birthdays, anniversaries, Mama has got it covered. Honestly, she's like the family's very own spiritual 999. Everyone knows, if you need prayers, you call Mama.

Here's the part that makes me squirm – I haven't been the best granddaughter. I don't visit or keep in touch as much as I should. After losing my mummy, part of me still struggles to stand in the space she left behind, and loss has a way of making you hesitate, even where you're most loved. But Mama never makes me feel less loved for it – her love remains steady and ever-reaching.

One of the things Mama taught me, almost without trying, is the beauty of Confession. I remember her once sharing how she recounted every little fault, even counting them on her fingers. It made me smile, but also moved me – her sincerity and humility were striking. She showed me that confession isn't about shame, but about accountability, honesty, and the grace of starting over. It's God's way of saying: “Okay, let's try again.”

Isn't that the heart of sainthood? Not never falling, but always running back to God, no matter how many times it takes.

And so, as I think of Sts Pier and Carlo, of my mother, and of all the souls who might be enjoying heaven without us knowing, I also think of the saints still among us. They are not in churches or statues. They may not be the most visible and active leaders in church. They

are sometimes in kitchens and living rooms, in fathers, mothers, uncles, aunties, grandfathers and grandmothers who keep the faith alive in families.

Mama is one of them. Our living saint, our prayer warrior, our rock. She may never be canonised, but her sanctity is written in the love she pours into all of us, in her prayers, in her gentle witness.

If I learnt math correctly, then, if my grandmother is a living saint and my mother is a saint, that pretty much leaves me no choice – I've got to be one too. It is slightly terrifying, considering I can barely get through a Rosary without wondering what I'm forgetting on my to-do list. I constantly remind myself I've got some pretty huge shoes to fill. But isn't that the call? And maybe this is God's way of nudging me forward.

For those of us still stumbling – grumbling over little things, gossiping, getting distracted in prayer, and feeling more “trying-to-be-nice” than holy – take heart. God isn't asking for perfection, only willingness. Holiness isn't far away; it's woven into the ordinary, found in our homes and in the quiet acts of love that surround us. Look closely, and you'll see the saints are nearer than you think.

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

## Not all saints wear halos



Fr Ron Rolheiser

# Atheists, dark nights, Good Friday, and revelation

The classical atheistic thinkers of the Enlightenment, philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Ludwig Feuerbach, taught that all religious experience is simply human projection. God does not exist. We create God, and we create him in our image and likeness, ultimately to serve our needs. We create the notion of God because we need a God for our own purposes. Moreover, what we believe to be God's word, divine revelation, (scriptures, creeds, and dogmas) is all ultimately human projection.

How true is this?

They are largely correct, not in that God doesn't exist, but that we are forever shaping and distorting the idea of God and God's word to serve our own needs. We have God's word in Christ and in our Scriptures, but we are forever shaping it to fit our needs. That's why we have so many different religions and Christian denominations. That's also why (by happy coincidence) God always hates the same people we do and always loves the same people we love.

When atheists tell us that God is a human projection to serve our needs, they are doing us a favour because they are holding up a mirror in which we can see that, in fact, we do perennially shape and distort divine revelation so that it works for our advantage. Their critique keeps pressure on us to clean up our notion of God and divine revelation.

But, while they may be 90 per cent correct, they are 10 per cent wrong, and that 10 per cent makes all the difference. In that 10 per cent, we allow God to flow into our lives in a way that we cannot shape or distort the experience but only receive it purely.

This happens in what mystics call "dark



nights of the soul", and that phrase refers to those times in our lives when our natural faculties of imagination, intellect, and affectivity (as they pertain to God and faith) are at an impasse, paralysed, and unable to function.

All our former ways of imagining and thinking about God now feel empty, counterfeit, useless. We can no longer imagine that God exists, feel like atheists, and are unable to think our way out of that helplessness.

That helpless condition, when we can no longer imagine God or affectively feel God's presence, is in fact a gift. Why? Because when our natural faculties are paralysed, we are also paralysed in our ability to imagine God. Now we can only receive God as God is, not as we imagine God to be. We no longer have the power to shape or distort our experience.

The ultimate example of this, of course, is Good Friday, that time in history when the Gospels tell us it grew dark at midday. Good Friday was the ultimate "dark night

of the soul" for Jesus' followers.

They had been following Him, listening to His word, His revelation; but, notwithstanding Jesus' repeated attempts to correct their view, they had shaped and distorted His person and His words to fit their own notion of what they wanted in a Messiah. What they wanted was a divine superman who would destroy all their enemies, be dazzling in glory, and bring glory to them.

Good Friday completely devastated them. Jesus died in a horrible manner, stripped naked, shamed, beaten, powerless, seen as a criminal. That shattered all their expectations of how they imagined a Messiah should be. There was no earthly glory, only shame, and no overt display of divine power. That completely shattered their religious understanding.

They were stunned, literally. Every notion they had of what a Messiah should be was turned upside down. They were mute imaginatively, unable to imagine how any of this could make sense. Their religious

world had turned dark in the middle of the day.

Indeed, it took some years (and the insights of St Paul) for light to appear again, before the meaning of Good Friday broke through to them, before it made sense.

But then it broke through cleanly, without distortion, because the religious dark night that paralysed them on Good Friday had left them imaginatively, affectively, and intellectually disabled completely in terms of interpreting what was being spoken to them through Jesus' unexpected shameful death. Consequently, they couldn't distort their experience but only receive it.

In a remarkable book, *The Crucified God*, Jurgen Moltmann writes: "Our faith begins at the point where atheists suppose it must end. Our faith begins with the bleakness and power which is the night of the cross, abandonment, temptation, and doubt about everything that exists! Our faith must be born where it is abandoned by all tangible reality; it must be born of nothingness; it must taste this nothingness and be given it to taste in a way no philosophy of nihilism can imagine."

That was the experience of Good Friday, and that is the experience of what mystics call a "dark night of the soul". And it is inside the frustrating darkness of that experience that God can flow into our lives without distortion.

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

## SOCIAL JUSTICE



### Making a Difference

Tony Magliano

## Why the silence on abortion?

There is a common complaint among Catholic social justice and peace activists that the only life and death issue we ever hear about from the bishops, in general, and from priests and deacons during Sunday Masses, is the issue of abortion.

Being a strong proponent of the "consistent ethic of life" Catholic doctrine – the Catholic teaching that sees the importance of regularly praying, educating, and acting on all the life issues, caring about all of our suffering fellow human beings and our wounded Mother Earth – I understand the feelings of my social justice and peace comrades, but not entirely.

I agree with them that yes, it is true, far more attention is placed on abortion by the clergy (and laity) than on any of the other life issues. That in fact, we almost never hear challenging homilies and calls to action concerning the many other issues of injustice like hunger, homelessness and war, to name just a few, that hundreds of millions and even billions of unseen, unheard human beings

suffer every day, a suffering most of us can only imagine – if we even dare to do that.

But I also try to help my social justice and peace colleagues see that even abortion, is in fact, not mentioned that much by the vast majority of clergy and laity.

For the most part, only a few times a year is the horrible, death-dealing reality of abortion, endured by millions of unborn babies every year, barely mentioned.

In the US (my country), usually only a couple of times during Respect Life Month in October, might we hear something about abortion from the pulpit, and maybe in the Prayer of the Faithful. And perhaps there might be a pro-life poster or two in the church narthex, but not much more. And then around the annual March for Life in January, we might in some cases, hear about signing up for a parish bus heading to Washington, DC, or a state capital, to protest the legality of abortion – still a sad reality throughout much of the US.

But that's it! However, that should not

be all there is to it. After all, the unborn are people too. And abortion is the barbaric dismembering of these most defenceless, tiny human beings!

And although in many of the more economically rich nations the majority of abortions – 73 million worldwide every year – are now chemical abortions. Abortion, including chemical abortions, is always a barbaric, inhumane practice that no civilised nation should permit.

Years ago, I attended a pro-life conference hosted by Americans United for Life (see: <https://aui.org/>) where the late highly distinguished French paediatrician and geneticist Dr Jerome Lejeune – who discovered the extra chromosome that causes Down Syndrome – was the keynote speaker. After his presentation, I asked him a most important question. I said, Dr Lejeune, when does human life begin? And with his beautiful French accent, he said, "At conception, of course." And I followed up by asking him if any of his colleagues disagreed

with him. He replied, "No, we all know when life begins. But we don't agree as to when human life deserves protection."

For Lejeune, a devout Catholic who was declared "Venerable" by the late Pope Francis, it was logically and morally crystal clear that human life deserves protection at the beginning. That is, at conception! (see: <http://bit.ly/3JwXkt9>)

Every single baby – born and unborn – is a wonderful, unique, unrepeatable gift from the Creator. All we need do is open our eyes, minds, and hearts to know and celebrate this wonderful truth!

So, let us – clergy and laity alike – actively pray and work all year long to promote and protect the life and dignity of every baby – born and unborn!

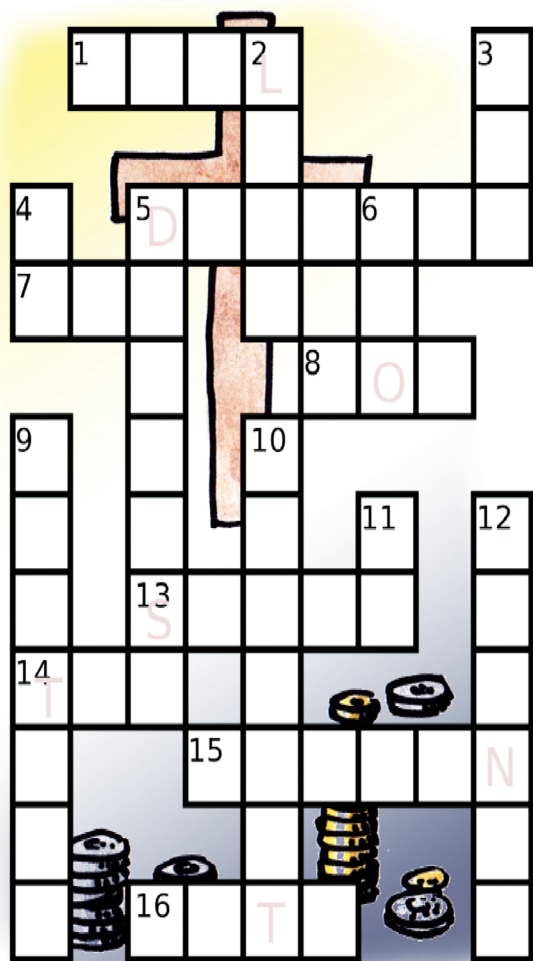
**Tony Magliano** is an internationally syndicated Catholic social justice and peace columnist. He is available to speak at diocesan or parish gatherings. Tony can be reached at [tmag6@comcast.net](mailto:tmag6@comcast.net).

# Little Catholics' Corner

## Whom Do You Serve? Cross-Word

Use the words in the list to fill in the blanks in today's Gospel reading and fit them into the puzzle.

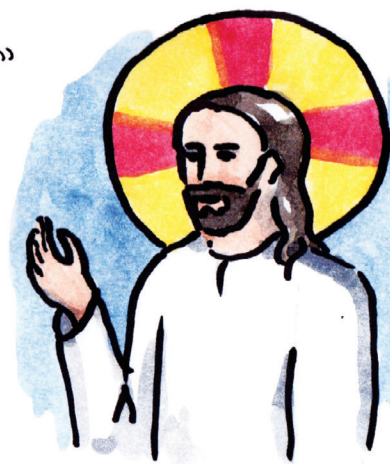
A=Across D=Down



- CANNOT
- HATE
- MASTERS
- SERVANT
- MAMMON
- THE
- SERVE
- HE
- DESPISE
- YOU
- TWO
- ONE
- LOVE
- NO
- DEVOTED
- GOD
- WILL



He who is faithful in a very little will be faithful also in much, and he who is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. Luke 16:1-13



Luke 16:1-13

Look in the mirror to find out one of the lessons Jesus taught from today's parable.

Can you find 12 differences in the pictures below?



" \_\_\_\_\_ 4D \_\_\_\_\_ 10D can serve \_\_\_\_\_ 6D  
 \_\_\_\_\_; 9D for either \_\_\_\_\_ 11D will \_\_\_\_\_ 16A  
 the one and \_\_\_\_\_ 2D \_\_\_\_\_ 14A other, or he  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 1A be \_\_\_\_\_ 5A to the \_\_\_\_\_ 7A  
 and \_\_\_\_\_ 5D the other. \_\_\_\_\_ 8A  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 12D \_\_\_\_\_ 13A \_\_\_\_\_ 3D and  
 \_\_\_\_\_." 15A

Answers: Across: 1. will 5. devoted 7. one 8. you 13. serve 14. the 15. mammon 16. hate  
 Down: 2. love 3. God 4. no 5. despise 6. two 9. masters 10. servant 11. he 12. cannot

Dear children,

Jesus tells the story of a steward who looked after a rich man's wealth.

When he was about to lose his job, he quickly made friends by letting the rich man's debtors pay less than what they owed.

Then when he couldn't work anymore these friends would look after him.

What Jesus is telling us through this parable is that we should use the money and things we have on earth to make friends with God and the saints so that they will be happy to take us into

Heaven when we die and have nothing left.

How can you make friends with God using your money?

First of all, God wants us to be good stewards.

That means spending money when it is good or necessary, and not foolishly.

Children, we can also please God by giving money to the Church and the poor.

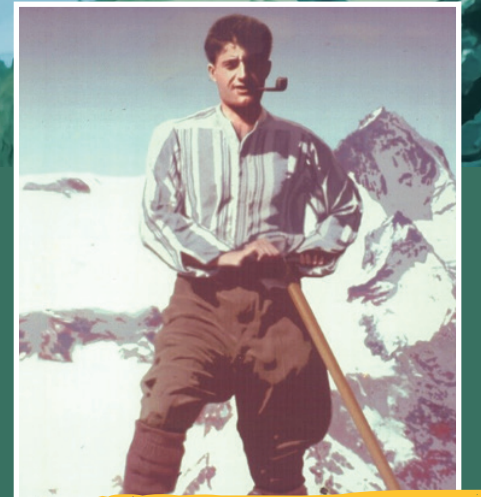
He wants us to show that we can do well looking after small things like money so that He can trust us with bigger jobs.

Love  
Aunty Eliz

# YOUTH



## You don't have to be perfect to be a saint



**ST PIER GIORGIO FRASSATI**

Amanda Mah

**S**omething remarkable happened in Rome on September 7. Before a crowd of 70,000, Pope Leo XIV proclaimed Pier Giorgio Frassati and Carlo Acutis as saints of the Catholic Church. Two young Italians — two “ordinary guys” — are now officially recognised as holy patrons for the world.

But this wasn't just another Church event. The canonisations of Carlo Acutis and Pier Giorgio Frassati were a crucial step in a decades-long effort to draw people — especially the young — closer to the Catholic faith through relatable, holy patrons. Their canonisation confirms that holiness is not an abstract ideal. It can manifest itself in contemporary ways, close to the sensibilities of young people — through friendship, study, family, today's challenges, and even through illness borne with Christian hope.

Pier Giorgio Frassati loved adventure,

mountain climbing, and being with friends. He was cheerful, sometimes stubborn, and far from a perfect student. Yet he carried an extraordinary love for the Eucharist and compassion for the poor. His life shows that holiness isn't about withdrawing from the world, but about being fully alive and letting Christ shine through the way we live.

Carlo Acutis, a teenager of the early 2000s, enjoyed football, Nutella, and computers. Instead of being consumed by the internet, he transformed it into a tool for evangelisation, creating a website to spread knowledge about Eucharistic miracles. Though he died of leukaemia at just 15, his short life proved that even ordinary passions—yes, even coding, gaming, and scrolling online — can be used for God's glory.

At their canonisation, young people from across the world filled St Peter's Square with banners, songs, and joy. For many, it was a pilgrimage of hope. Some had travelled great distances, arriving exhausted yet determined to be there.

Students from the University of Dallas, for example, waited patiently for hours just to be close to the Pope. One student put it simply, “Both Acutis and Frassati were pretty normal guys like us. They enjoyed life and lived it to the fullest — the right way.” Another admitted that learning Frassati wasn't a top student was strangely liberating, “You don't have to be perfect to be a saint.”

Others were struck by Carlo's creativity with technology. “I'm deeply inspired by how he used the internet, something so common in our lives, to talk about God,” said one pilgrim. For them, his life was proof that faith and modern tools don't clash — they can go hand in hand.

And that is the truth we often forget.

Sainthood is not about straight A's, flawless piety, or never making mistakes. It is about how we love, how we serve, and how we keep saying “yes” to God — even in the small, hidden moments of daily life.

Teachers at the canonisation echoed this hope. Carlo, they said, is the “saint of technology.” In a world where screens dominate, he shows us that the digital space can be holy ground too — an arena for spreading kindness, truth, and faith. Frassati, with his motto “Verso l'alto” (“to the heights”), challenges us not just to climb mountains but to rise in courage, virtue, and generosity.

Chiara Chiaradia, a primary school teacher from Calabria, put it

beautifully: “Technology is an instrument of our times. We must know how to use it positively, in the best possible way, to reach others, to spread the faith, to communicate beautiful things.” Her words remind us that evangelisation today doesn't mean leaving behind the tools of our generation—it means transforming them into bridges of hope.

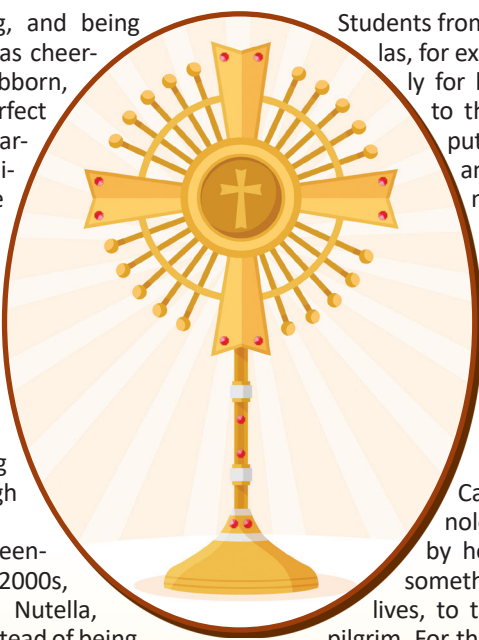
There is something contagious about their witness. As one German pilgrim said: “Seeing that ordinary people like us attained holiness encourages us to follow the same path.” That is the heart of it. Saints are not superheroes. They are not born with halos. They are ordinary people who lived with extraordinary love.

So here's the challenge: stop asking, “Am I holy enough?” or “Can I ever be a saint?” Start asking instead, “Why not me?”

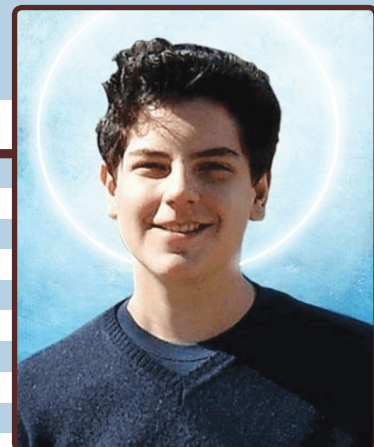
If a young man who struggled with school and another who loved computers could both climb the mountain of holiness, then so can we. The Church holds up these saints not as distant statues but as companions who walk beside us. They remind us that joy, friendship, study, play, technology, and even struggles can all become paths to God. Holiness does not wait until we are older, wiser, or perfect. Holiness begins now.

The canonisation of these two young saints is, above all, an invitation. Our ordinary lives are not too small for God to do extraordinary things through them.

So the next time sainthood feels out of reach, remember Carlo and Pier Giorgio. They were ordinary, imperfect, and full of life — just like us. And their message still echoes today — You don't have to be perfect to be a saint!



### ST CARLO ACUTIS



Technology is an instrument of our times. We must know how to use it positively, in the best possible way, to reach others, to spread the faith, to communicate beautiful things.



# RUAH 2025: A rest stop of renewal



**PLENTONG** : Seventy-two young working adults came together in prayer and fellowship at the *Roh Untuk Aku Hidup* (RUAH) programme, held at Majodi Centre from August 16–17.

Organised by the Malacca Johore Diocese Young People Network (MJDYPN) in collaboration with the Bahasa Youth Apostolate, the gathering carried the uplifting theme “Pilgrims of Hope.” It united young professionals from across the diocese through meaningful icebreakers, recreation, and heartfelt group sharing on what it means to journey as people of hope.

Guided by Friar Marvin Voo, OFM, and Aloysius Irenaeus (MJDYPN), participants reflected on the call to be pilgrims in family life, the workplace, studies, and the everyday realities of life. Moments of praise and worship, the Divine Mercy chaplet, and the Eucharistic celebration with Friar Clarence Motoyou, OFM, deepened the spiritual encounter.

Led by dedicated Bahasa Malaysia youth leaders from various parishes, the programme was marked by joy, energy, and an openness to God’s Spirit. For many, it became a much-needed “rest stop” on life’s demanding journey — a sacred space to lay down burdens, be strengthened in community, and rediscover the enduring hope found in Christ.

**Participants’ Reflections:**

1. “I enjoyed the outdoor activities such as poison ball and other games during leisure time. I learned what it means to be a pilgrim of hope, and I hope to help more Catholics know Jesus deeply.” – *Elly Sylvia, Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, Krubong*

2. “As a facilitator, I was happy to see participants enjoying the activities and valuing the sessions with Friar Marvin and Aloysius. I gained new friends, more confidence, and the discipline to be punctual. My hope as a pilgrim is to trust in God’s faithfulness, hold on to hope in trials, and help others by bringing them to church, serving together, and offering encouragement.” – *Lazaruz Edward, St Teresa Church, Masai*

3. “This was my first RUAH Camp, and it was an eye-opening experience as it was specially for young adults. Unlike teen camps I attended before, the sessions here really helped me reflect deeply on spending time with God. The sports and friendships also kept me joyful and engaged. I hope our hopes and prayers will be fulfilled — see you at the next RUAH Camp!” – *Britney Dominic, Christ the King Church, Kulai*



## Stella Maris inspires patriotism through recycling campaign

**KUALA LUMPUR**: Stella Maris International School, Damansara (SMIS) has established a *Rukun Negara* Club to nurture students as torchbearers of Malaysia’s founding ideals. For 2025, the Club is shining a light on the fifth principle — Courtesy and Morality — embracing it as a call to care for creation. By linking respect for one another with responsibility for the environment, the initiative reminds students that true patriotism is lived out through kindness, integrity, and stewardship of the world entrusted to us.

In conjunction with *Merdeka* Day and

Malaysia Day, the *Rukun Negara* Club launched a Recycling Awareness Campaign that brought together students and staff from both the Primary and Secondary Wings of Stella Maris International School. The initiative aimed to instil responsible recycling habits and promote sustainability, marked by the placement of recycling bins across the campus.

The campaign highlighted that true patriotism is more than waving the *Jalur Gemilang* or singing the national anthem. It is expressed in everyday choices — choosing

responsibility, respect, and care for the land we proudly call home. By protecting the environment, beginning within the school community, students learned that one of the most powerful ways to love the nation is to safeguard its future.

The campaign was officially launched on September 3 at the school’s open court by Brig Gen (Rtd) Dato’ Richard Robless, chairman of the Yayasan Tan Sri Dominic Vendargon. The ceremony was attended by members of the School’s Board of Governors, Yayasan officials, the Senior

Management team, and distinguished guests.

A highlight of the launch was the symbolic ringing of the “*Rukun Negara* Bell,” installed on the school grounds in 2023 as a lasting reminder of Malaysia’s guiding principles. Since its establishment, the *Rukun Negara* Club has championed initiatives that embody patriotism in action. This year’s Recycling Awareness Campaign is envisioned as a seed — one that will grow into sustained efforts to nurture the school, community, and nation for generations to come.



The symbolic ringing of the *Rukun Negara* Bell to launch the Campaign.

Students of Stella Maris International School are excited over the Recycling Awareness Campaign launched by their *Rukun Negara* Club.



## Fr Alberto Irenus David, SJ

# A gentle shepherd and faithful Jesuit called home

PETALING JAYA: Fr Alberto Irenus David, SJ, was called home to the Lord on September 11, at the age of 58. His passing leaves a deep sense of loss, yet an even deeper gratitude for the life he lived — a life marked by quiet strength, humble service, and steadfast devotion to Christ.

Born on January 24, 1967, in Kepayan, Kota Kinabalu, and baptised at Stella Maris Church, Tanjung Aru, Fr Alberto's faith journey was rooted in his early years. On April 21, 2000, he entered the Society of Jesus in Singapore, courageously embracing a vocation that would take him far beyond his home, yet always deeper into the heart of God.

His Jesuit formation took him to many corners of the world — Philosophy at Ateneo de Manila (2002–2004); Regency in Petaling Jaya (2004–2006); MDiv from Fu Jen Catholic University in Taipei (2006–2010), and a Licentiate in Sacred Theology from Milltown Institute, Dublin (2010–2012). Each stage shaped him into a man of prayer, discernment, and intellectual depth.

Ordained a priest on July 31, 2011 the Feast of St Ignatius of Loyola, by Bishop Cornelius Piong in Keningau, Fr Alberto gave himself completely to pastoral ministry. As assistant parish priest at



the Church of St Francis Xavier (SFX), Petaling Jaya (2012–2015), parishioners remember him as a patient listener and a gentle guide who met each person with warmth and respect.

He went on to serve the Society of Jesus with great dedication as Pre-Novitiate Director (2015–2018), Youth and Vocations Director for Malaysia–Singapore (2018–2021), and Local Superior of the Xavier Hall Jesuit

Community (2020–2021). In every role, he formed and inspired others through his example of prayerful leadership and compassion.

At the time of his passing, Fr Alberto had returned to SFX as assistant parish priest, a place he loved and where he was loved in return. He also shouldered key regional responsibilities as Regional Coordinator for Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei, and Continental Coordinator for Asia Pacific for the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network. His work quietly touched countless lives, drawing people into deeper prayer and uniting them with the intentions of the Holy Father.

Fr Alberto will be remembered not only for his pastoral gentleness and intellectual clarity, but also for his ability to see Christ in others and to help them see Christ in themselves. He was a man who walked humbly with God, who encouraged without fanfare, and who lived the Jesuit motto *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam* — for the greater glory of God.

The funeral Mass was celebrated on September 15 at the Church of St Francis Xavier, Petaling Jaya, where parishioners, friends, and Jesuits gathered to honour a beloved shepherd, give thanks for his life, and commend his soul to the Lord he served so faithfully.

## Estonia celebrates beatification of bishop who 'did not abandon' the flock

ESTONIA: On September 6, Estonia marked a historic milestone with the beatification of Archbishop Eduard Profittlich, SJ, *pic*, — the country's first Catholic to receive this honour. The beatification Mass, held at Tallinn's Freedom Square, was presided over by Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, representing Pope Leo XIV, and attended by Estonia's President Alar Karis, ecumenical guests from Lutheran and Orthodox Churches, and clergy and laity from around the world.



martyr — which does not require the recognition of a miracle, though one is still needed for canonization.

Cardinal Schönborn highlighted Profittlich's courageous choice in his homily: "He did not want to abandon them and thus did not return to Germany — fully aware that this decision would almost inevitably lead him to death." The cardinal described his fidelity as "a beacon of hope and a testament to unwavering faith."

Born in 1890 in Birresdorf, Germany, Eduard Profittlich joined the Jesuits in 1913. Sent to Estonia in the early 1930s, he became apostolic administrator in 1931 and was consecrated archbishop in 1936, making him Estonia's first bishop in more than 400 years since the Reformation. Known for his episcopal motto, *Fides et Pax* ("Faith and Peace"), he embraced Estonian culture, quickly learned the language, gained citizenship, and shepherded a small Catholic community of just a few thousand believers.

When Soviet forces occupied Estonia during World War II, Archbishop Profittlich repeatedly refused offers to evacuate, insisting on remaining with his people. He was arrested by the NKVD in 1941, shortly after Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union. He died in February 1942 in a prison camp in Kirov, Russia, weakened by illness and mistreatment. Because he died for the faith, he was beatified as a

For Estonia's Catholic community — one of the smallest in Europe, with only about 7,000 members, or half a percent of the population — the beatification was an occasion of immense pride and spiritual renewal. Father Wodzislaw Szczepanik, a Polish priest serving in Estonia, called the event "an unprecedented moment," describing it as a gift from God for such a small and resilient Church. He recalled the moving liturgical emphasis on Profittlich's decision to remain in Estonia: "Where the sheep are, there is also the shepherd." The ceremony gathered Catholics from across Europe and beyond, and featured participation by cardinals, bishops, priests, religious, and laity.

The beatification was also a moment of national memory and healing. The day before the Mass, organisers held a continuous 24-hour reading of the names of more than 22,000 Estonians who suffered under Soviet repression. "This beatification is

not only about one person but honours all victims of the Soviet regime in Estonia," Father Szczepanik observed.

Jesuit Father Bogusław Steczek, who has ministered across Russia, Belarus, and Kyrgyzstan, stressed the broader significance of the event: "Through his beatification, the church also honors all of those who died in the Soviet era. Today, he is a special intercessor not only for the church in Estonia, but also in Russia and other post-Soviet republics." Profittlich's martyrdom, he added, offers inspiration to missionaries serving small and often struggling communities under challenging conditions. "It is a visible proof that the future of the church depends more on authentic witnesses than on statistics." OSV News

### MEMORIAM

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**30th Year Anniversary**  
In Loving Memory of

**V. Daniel**  
Departed:  
**21.9.1995**

*"For God alone my soul waits in silence  
from Him comes my salvation.  
He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress;  
I shall not be greatly shaken."*

*Appa, it's been 30 years but  
you are still deeply missed.*

Always remembered by  
wife Lily, children, grandchildren,  
daughter-in-law, sons-in-law and relatives.



**25th Anniversary**  
In Loving Memory

**Gregory Kumar Kandasamy**  
3rd September 1941 -  
22nd September 2000

*Twenty-five years have passed, yet  
the ache of your departure remains as  
deep as ever. In the quiet moments, in  
the laughter we wish you could hear,  
in the milestones we long to share  
with you, your absence is profoundly  
felt. But so is your love, your strength  
and your spirit, which continue to live  
on in us. You are missed beyond  
words, remembered beyond time and  
loved beyond measure.*

Always on our minds, Forever in our hearts.  
Deeply missed and forever loved by:

Wife: Charlotte  
Children: Caroline & Jason  
Son-in-law: Alison Anthony  
Daughter-in-law: Marianne Chia  
Grand Daughters: Melanie, Maegan & Annamarie



**11TH ANNIVERSARY**  
IN EVER  
LOVING  
MEMORY OF

**LOURDS MARY ANTHONY**  
(MRS. C. ANTHONY)  
Departed:  
24-09-2014

Mum,  
*The world changes from year to year,  
our lives from day to day, but the love and  
memory of you, shall never pass away.*

Your family.

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# Cross-border Caritas pact champions migrant dignity

KUALA LUMPUR: Caritas Indonesia and Caritas Malaysia have entered into a pioneering Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to strengthen protection, accompaniment, and empowerment of Indonesian migrants in Malaysia.

The agreement was signed on September 3 at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre, formalising a collaborative framework between the two Caritas organisations.

The initiative was first proposed by Fr Fredy Rante Taruk, Executive Director of Caritas Indonesia, who has consistently voiced the Indonesian Church's concern for its citizens working abroad. While both Churches have long provided pastoral and humanitarian accompaniment to Indonesian migrants, the MoU now offers a structured platform for greater effectiveness and collaboration.

The signing followed an online consultation on Aug 5 this year, involving groups from both countries, including members of the Episcopal Commission for Migrants and Itinerants (ECMI), pastoral workers, and priests engaged in migrant ministry. Grounded in listening and reflection, the session paved the way for this bilateral agreement.

Although the MoU does not formally as-



Fr Fredy Rante Taruk and Fr Fabian Dicom showing the signed MoU.

sign roles to commissions, ECMI continues to serve as the lead commission on migration in Malaysia. Caritas Malaysia, with its extensive networks, will coordinate the collaboration, drawing in other stakeholders and partners. This approach reflects the late Pope Francis' vision of a Church that "journeys together" in solidarity with the most vulnerable.

Behind the numbers of Indonesian labour

migration to Malaysia lie stark human realities – undocumented workers, families without legal identity papers, stateless children, migrants dying far from home, and communities often facing exploitation or criminalisation.

To respond to these challenges, the MoU commits both Caritas bodies to:

- Strengthen pastoral and humanitarian services, including documentation,

dignified repatriation of remains, and spiritual care.

- Promote joint advocacy for humane and inclusive migration policies, particularly for stateless children.
- Enhance cross-diocesan coordination, communication, and referral systems.
- Facilitate exchange of good practices and learning across dioceses.
- Appoint focal points within each organisation to ensure consistent follow-up.

The partnership, Church leaders emphasised, is not merely administrative but rooted in the conviction that migrants are not "problems" to be solved but brothers and sisters who bear the face of Christ. Catholic Social Teaching affirms that human dignity and solidarity underpin all pastoral and humanitarian action.

Quoting Pope Francis, the statement recalled that migration should be a free choice, not the product of poverty, exploitation, or despair. Through this MoU, Caritas Indonesia and Caritas Malaysia reaffirm the Church's prophetic role in defending the dignity of migrants, and in working for justice, compassion, and hope across borders.



(photo/KSI Strategic Institute for Asia Pacific facebook)

## Forum calls for tolerance and moderation for unity

KUALA LUMPUR: The National Unity Forum 2025 was held on September 11 at Berjaya Times Square Hotel in conjunction with Malaysia Day, marking 62 years since the nation's formation and 68 years since *Merdeka*.

Carrying the theme *Strengthening Tolerance & Moderation for Unity, Harmony, and Cohesion*, the forum brought together key influencers, thought leaders, business representatives, civil society actors, and youth leaders to reflect on the state of national unity. Participants explored practical ways to strengthen social harmony, reduce divisiveness, and build a more cohesive Malaysia.

Among the invited speakers was Archbishop Julian Leow, who offered his perspective as a religious leader on the role of faith communities in fostering unity. The archbishop urged faith communities to resist fear-mongering and mistrust, reminding them that the earth is humanity's shared home and differences should be embraced as part of one human family.

The forum opened with an address by

YB Datuk Aaron Ago Dagang, Minister of National Unity, delivered on his behalf by YB Senator Puan Saraswathy Kandasami, Deputy Minister of National Unity. She reaffirmed the government's commitment to patience, tolerance, trust, and moderation as the pillars of a multi-racial and multi-religious Malaysia.

A special luncheon session featured a keynote address by YB Senator Dato Awang Beme bin Awang Ali Basah, Yang di-Pertua Dewan Negara, titled *The Role of Parliament and the Senate in Promoting and Strengthening National Unity*. He emphasised inclusivity, constructive discourse, and ensuring that unity remains central to Malaysia's nation-building agenda.

Throughout the sessions, participants underscored that building a better Malaysia requires hard work, discipline, and dedication — supported by cross-sector collaboration and lessons drawn from history. Insights were shared on strategies to strengthen trust, nurture national identity, and foster cohesion in an increasingly diverse and complex society.

## US Catholic leaders call for prayer in 'perilous moment' in society

WASHINGTON: Catholic bishops and Church leaders in the United States have responded with grief and appeals for peace following the killing of conservative activist Charlie Kirk, who died on September 10 after being shot during a speaking event at Utah Valley University in Orem, Utah.

31-year-old Kirk, leaves behind his wife and two young children. His assassination comes amid a series of violent episodes that have shaken communities across the country.

The Diocese of Arlington noted that the tragedy adds to a "vicious pattern of political and social disorder" that has claimed the lives of several innocent victims in recent weeks.

Among them are two children killed in a school shooting in Minneapolis and Ukrainian refugee Iryna Zarutka, murdered on a Charlotte light rail train; and now Charlie Kirk, an American conservative political activist, founder of Turning Point Action.

"We entrust each of these victims to God, our Heavenly Father and author of

every human life, and his Son Jesus Christ, the reason for our supernatural hope," the diocesan statement reads.

Church leaders emphasised that the roots of such violence lie in the rejection of God and of the dignity of the human person. "We can eradicate these ills only through a firm reliance on God, through a deeper devotion to Christ and the Gospel, through a sincere love for persons reflected in law, and through a renewed commitment to justice and public order," the statement continues.

They warned that the nation is living through a "perilous moment," not only in terms of political disagreements and policy disputes, but in the deeper challenge of upholding faith, family, and a shared commitment to live together in peace.

In the wake of the tragedy, bishops and Catholic officials across the US are calling for prayer for Kirk's family, for all the recent victims of violence, and for a renewed spirit of reconciliation in American society. **Vatican News**



(Vatican News)