The Catholic Weekly
HERALD

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Mission Statement

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



Deacons called to take mission beyond the sanctuary

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Penang's Perjalanan Salib ends, but journey of faith continues

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When racism deepens despair

■ P11

No silent spectators



(photo/Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu)

VATICAN: Being physically present at Mass is not enough if the heart and mind remain elsewhere, Pope Leo XIV said as he affirmed the Second Vatican Council's call for the faithful to participate fully in the liturgy.

"The faithful cannot and must no longer remain silent and passive. Their physical presence cannot be reconciled with their spiritual absence," the Pope said, quoting Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini, then Archbishop of Milan, who later became Pope St Paul VI.

During his general audience in St Peter's Basilica on August 26, Pope Leo explained that the words, gestures and rituals of the liturgy draw the faithful into a true relationship with God and the mystery of salvation. Their participation, therefore, cannot be passive.

The audience marked his final catechesis on *Sacrosanctum Concilium,* the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. Promulgated in 1963, it was the first constitution produced by the council and laid the foundation for the Church's subsequent liturgical reforms.

The reforms sought to make Scripture and the Church's prayers more accessible, helping the faithful understand the sacred rites and participate in them consciously, devoutly and fully.

Sacrosanctum Concilium teaches that Catholics should not attend the liturgy as "strangers or silent spectators". Instead, they should listen to God's Word, receive the Eucharist, give thanks and learn to offer themselves with Christ.

Through such participation, the faithful are drawn into a deeper union with God and one another.

Pope Leo stressed that liturgical reform did not begin suddenly at the Second Vatican Council. It had been developing under successive popes during the decades preceding the council.

Pope Pius XI had already called for the faithful not to remain silent spectators. Pope Pius XII restored the celebration of the Holy Week rites to times corresponding more closely with the events being commemorated, while St John XXIII simplified aspects of the Church's liturgical books.

"The liturgical reform promoted by the Second Vatican Council is thus firmly rooted in the living tradition of the Church," Pope Leo said.

The liturgy, he explained, has developed throughout the centuries. It contains divine elements that cannot change, as well as human elements that may be adapted according to the needs of the time and the spiritual good of the faithful.

The council, therefore, revised the liturgical books, not to discard the Church's heritage, but to express the sacred mysteries more clearly and enable the faithful to participate with greater understanding.

Pope Leo also cautioned against abuses that arose in some parts of the Church after the council and still occur occasionally. These resulted when the principles behind the reforms were misunderstood, exaggerated, or taken to extremes.

In this understanding, active participation does not mean changing the liturgy according to personal preferences or merely performing a visible role. It means entering attentively and prayerfully into Christ's offering.

The Pope recalled that liturgical services "are not private functions" but celebrations of the whole Church, the "sacrament of unity".

Bishops and priests, therefore, bear primary responsibility for safeguarding the liturgy and ensuring that it respects liturgical norms, reflects the "noble simplicity" desired by the council and manifests the unity of the Church.

When celebrated faithfully, the liturgy becomes a means of evangelisation and an instrument of grace, drawing the People of God into communion with the Lord and with one another.

"At every celebration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, let us ask for God's help to be strengthened on our journey and to enter into a deeper relationship with the Lord," Pope Leo said. **Agencies**

Prayer for the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 (MPC2026)

Lord God,
You call us to walk together
as Your People,
drawn into the life of communion
of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Guide us as we prepare for
the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026.
Teach us to listen deeply,
to discern faithfully,
and to trust where You are leading us.

We place before You the four areas we
are discerning together.

Bless our families,
that they may be places of love,
faith, forgiveness, and hope.

Renew our Church,
that we may grow in communion,
participation, and joyful witness
to the Gospel.

Open our hearts to the cry of creation,
that we may care for the earth
with reverence, responsibility,
and gratitude.

Guide our life in society,
that we may seek justice, promote
peace, and stand in solidarity with the
poor and the vulnerable.

As pastoral pathways emerge
from our discernment,
may they enrich and strengthen
our local faith communities.

With Mary, Mother of the Church,
who pondered Your Word and walked
in faith, teach us to walk together
in hope.

Keep us rooted in Christ,
attentive to one another,
and open to the work of
Your Holy Spirit.

May this Convention help us live more
faithfully as one Catholic Church of
Malaysia, serving in this land we love.

Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

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We're looking for concise articles between 400 to 500 words, accompanied by high-resolution photos (300 DPI) in JPG or PNG format.
Don't forget to include captions that bring your images to life.
Your contributions are essential in keeping our faith community connected and informed.
Send your articles to editor1@herald.com.my

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Walking together means caring together

As I write this, the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 is only days away. In speaking with clergy and laity, delegates and non-delegates, I have encountered a mixture of excitement, hope, uncertainty and indifference.

For some delegates, gathering in Sibu will be a new experience. They are eager to meet Catholics from across the nine dioceses, hear different stories and discern what the Holy Spirit may be saying to the Church in Malaysia.

Others, especially veterans of pastoral gatherings, are understandably cautious. They have attended meetings, discussed challenges and returned home with recommendations — only to wonder, years later, whether anything truly changed. Will MPC2026 open new pastoral pathways, or will we eventually discover that we are repeating the same conversations?

Those not attending also respond differently. Some are praying for the convention and hoping it will bear fruit for the entire Church in Malaysia. Others seem largely indifferent. As long as Sunday and daily Masses continue, the sacraments remain available and parish life carries on as usual, they are content.

In other words: "Do not rock my boat."

But attendance alone does not make someone synodal. Delegates, too, must resist arriving in Sibu focused solely on defending their own diocesan priorities. The purpose of gathering is to listen — not merely to voices that confirm what we already believe, but also to experiences that may challenge us.

Can the Church truly walk together if we care only about what affects our parish, diocese, language group or community?

The pastoral realities of Malaysia's nine dioceses are not the same. Some communities travel great distances by road, river or foot to attend Mass. Some parishes face shortages of priests and catechists. Others struggle with poverty, migration, family breakdown, the displacement of indigenous communities or environmental destruction. Young Catholics may feel unheard, while families carry burdens that remain largely invisible beyond their own communities.

Yet each diocese also brings gifts: deep faith, cultural richness, resilience, creativity and ways of being Church shaped by its particular history. Synodality asks us to share not only one another's burdens but also the wisdom and hope that have emerged from them.

It is easy to dismiss another community's concerns when Mass is celebrated nearby, parish programmes are plentiful, and a priest is readily available whenever we need one. Privilege can quietly persuade us that another diocese's struggle is not our responsibility.

St Paul reminds us that we are one Body in Christ: "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26). The suffering of another diocese is therefore not somebody else's problem. It belongs to the whole Church.

MPC2026 will bring together different histories, cultures, languages and pastoral realities. Genuine listening may be uncomfortable because it challenges the belief that our own experience is the norm. It asks us to move beyond "What will my parish gain?" and ask instead, "What does the Church in Malaysia need?"

The same question confronts us as Malaysia Day approaches on September 16.

We proudly celebrate the coming together of Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak to form Malaysia. Yet do we genuinely care about one another's realities? Many in Peninsular Malaysia remain distant from the concerns of Sabah and Sarawak, while urban communities can easily overlook the struggles of rural and indigenous peoples. Too often, injustice disturbs us only when it affects our own race, religion or social group.

It is possible to wave the Malaysian flag while remaining indifferent to Malaysians whose experiences differ from ours. It is possible to speak of national unity while retreating into racial, religious and political enclosures. "As long as my community is safe, why should I care?" may never be spoken aloud, but it shapes many of our attitudes.

Malaysia Day reminds us that belonging to one nation means accepting responsibility for one another. Likewise, belonging to one Church means we cannot be satisfied simply by having our own spiritual needs met.

MPC2026 should leave the Church in Malaysia asking better questions, building deeper relationships and embracing a broader sense of shared responsibility. Its true value will be found in whether we become less preoccupied with protecting our own interests and more attentive to the realities of others.

The convention may not change everything overnight — no gathering can. But it can begin by changing us.

Renewal takes root when another diocese's struggle becomes our concern, another community's pain unsettles our comfort, and another person's hope finds a place in our prayer.

As Church and nation, we must learn to care for one another. Otherwise, our claims of walking together in faith and standing together as Malaysians will remain merely words.

Patricia Pereira

Owe nothing except love

Being in debt is never a good thing. I am quite certain that many of us have been in debt in one way or another; I certainly have (in the form of student loans). For those who have gone through the experience of being in debt, the feeling that comes from the completion of debt repayment is like lifting a heavy burden off our shoulders. However, some debts can never be fully repaid. This is what St Paul calls the debt of mutual love.

So, what is this debt of mutual love? Our parents bore and raised us, giving us all that they could so that we could have a better life than they did. When we grow up, we do our best to repay that love and sacrifice, but no matter how we try, that kind of debt can never be fully repaid simply because it is made up of things which are intangible. Granted, the life they provide is in tangible forms, but the love and sacrifice that comes with it is intangible and can never be measured. This kind of debt is usually not one-sided, as repayment is also done with love and sacrifice. The sad thing is that sometimes this becomes one-sided.

A debt of mutual love becomes one-sided when either party does it for personal gain. For example, parents will see their child as an investment rather than as someone to be loved. When the time comes, they expect to reap the benefits. Some children, on the other hand, are so used to handouts that they keep relying on their family for help instead of paying it back. Worse, they may even forget their own family. This is the sad modern-day reality of life. This is why the debt of mutual love is very, very rare and precious. St Paul tells us that if we love our fellow man, we have carried out our obligations and that love is the one thing that cannot hurt your neighbour.

In this day and age, love is often measured in terms of material wealth. Sentences like "If you love me, you will get me this designer item" or "If you love me, you will do this for me". But all of these are not love, nor are they acts of love. The kind of love that St Paul refers to is the unconditional love that God has for us, and therefore, we too should give and receive this unconditional love as well. Since we are made in the image and likeness of God, which is love, we are capable of receiving this unconditional love and are equally capable of giving it out to others. The problem is that we are so indoctrinated by society that we forget this fundamental truth.

This is also the kind of love that can bring a person back from the brink of destruction. People who feel unloved by family and friends will have the tendency to slip into self-destruction, not caring anymore about themselves because it seems to them that no one cares for them. Depression and suicide cases can happen because of this, and it is really a tragic and sad thing that we allow it to happen. Every life is precious, and when we are confronted with situations like these, we need to remind ourselves that we have a moral obligation to help that person as best as we can.

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

with Fr Philip Tay, OCD

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

Readings: Ezekiel 33: 7-9;
Romans 13: 8-10;
Gospel: Matthew 18: 15-20

One thing is clear – this kind of debt of mutual love is one that we should not collect from. We do it out of love for God and neighbour. This is also the kind of love that Jesus talks about in the Gospel when He tells us to try and win our brothers and sisters back. When individual effort is not enough, a group effort is needed, and only when all measures have been exhausted do we let them be. After all, you can bring a horse to the water, but you cannot make it drink. The important thing is we have done what we need to do, and this is precisely what the first reading tells us.

Ultimately, love is about giving without the thought of kickbacks. If we receive love in return for our love, we praise and thank God for that love, but if we don't, then we lift it to God. Genuine mutual love can often be lopsided but, as I have mentioned, mutual love should never be measured in terms of quantity but quality, and above all, mutual self-sacrifice and self-giving. You can give without loving, but you can never love without giving, giving without the expectation of receiving something in return.

Shared history strengthens bonds at Harmony luncheon

Frederick Lim

KUANTAN: When representatives of different faiths gathered around the same table in Kuantan, they discovered that the bonds connecting their communities had been quietly nurtured for generations.

One such connection emerged during the *Program Harmoni Luncheon 2026* on August 24, when it was revealed that Pahang State Mufti Prof Dato' Dr Asmadi Mohamed Naim and Deputy Mufti Sahibul Fadhilah Dato' Dr Haji Badli Shah were former students of schools established by early Catholic missionaries in Kuantan.

The luncheon, organised by the Pahang State Mufti Department together with leaders and representatives of various places of worship, was held at the Sultan Ahmad 1 State Mosque.

The Church of St Thomas the Apostle was represented by parish priest Fr George Packiasamy, assistant parish priest Fr Philip Asirwalam and the coordinator of the Parish Ministry of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs.

They were warmly received by the Grand Imam of the State Mosque, Tuan Haji Mohd Rizal Mohd Ali Nafiah, and members of the Mosque Imam's Office Committee.

Representatives from the Methodist churches, Hindu temples, Gurdwara Sahib Kuantan, the Pahang Buddhist Association and Taoist communities were also present, reflecting the religious and cultural diversity of Pahang.

In his welcoming address, Prof Asmadi emphasised the importance of sustaining relationships and dialogue among the various faith communities. Such engagement, he said, builds mutual understanding and helps preserve harmony in society.

He also noted that interfaith harmony remains an important concern of His Royal Highness the Sultan of Pahang.

The luncheon created a welcoming space for participants to meet one another, exchange experiences and deepen their appreciation of the different religious traditions that enrich life in Pahang.

Invited to address the gathering, Fr George spoke briefly about the history of the Church of St Thomas the Apostle, which celebrates its 120th anniversary this year. He also recalled the contribution of early Catholic missionaries who established primary and secondary schools to serve the wider Kuantan community.



Representative of different faiths at the "Program Harmoni Luncheon 2026".

The discovery that both the State Mufti and Deputy Mufti had studied at these schools highlighted how education has helped forge lasting bonds across religious boundaries. It was a reminder that institutions founded by one faith community can contribute to the growth and wellbeing of people from many backgrounds.

The Church of St Thomas expressed its appreciation to the Pahang State Mufti Department for continuing to provide opportunities for dialogue and fellowship among the state's religious communities.

The *Program Harmoni* initiative reflected a simple but vital truth: harmony is not built by ignoring differences, but by approaching them with openness, respect and a willingness to listen.

As the closing message of the gathering affirmed: "Differences in our beliefs should never be a reason for us to distance ourselves from one another. Instead, it is through these differences that we learn to know, respect and live alongside one another in harmony and peace."

Participants expressed hope that the initiative would continue to grow, strengthening cooperation among faith communities and contributing towards a peaceful, harmonious and prosperous Pahang for all.

Kuala Lumpur Archdiocese

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

September

7-14	Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 – Sibu
16	Diaconate Ordination of Lincoln Lee, Joseph Tan, Tony Bingkuan OFMCap and Albert Arputhan – Church of the Divine Mercy, Shah Alam
19	Confirmation – Church of Sts Peter & Paul, Banting

Penang Diocese

Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

September

9-13	Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 – Sibu

Malacca Johore Diocese

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

September

9-13	Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 – Sibu, Sarawak
16	Confirmation followed by Parish Pastoral Assembly – Church of St Henry, Batu Pahat
19	MJD CHARIS Leaders' Session – Church of St Louis, Kluang



Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #286

F12 Fridays PM MJD News Updates

Welcome dear friends,

MJD launched *REGENERATE Year 2* on September 5 at the Church of St Mary Ayer Salak with an open-air Mass at 8.30pm.

September celebrates the ***Season of Creation,*** and Migrants and Refugees Sunday.

The poor are in our midst. See, Judge and Act. When you did it to them, you did it to Christ.

Local Takes! Fair

The *Merdeka* theme is ***Malaysia Madani: Shared Prosperity.*** It reflects the government's commitment to building an inclusive, advanced, and harmonious nation where the country's development and prosperity are shared fairly and enjoyed completely by all layers of society.

The ***API*** indicates that the haze is back. As of August 25, 2026, about 30 areas are unhealthy. Some of the worst affected areas are Serian, Sri Aman and Shah Alam; and nearing unhealthy levels are Segamat, Batu Pahat and Tangkak.

Social Commentators observe that ***online spaces*** amplify political polarisation, misinformation, and selective outrage, challenging traditional journalistic standards and content moderation.

They note that communal identity and Malay rights remain at the ***core of political loyalty,*** meaning economic aid or improved governance alone do not dictate electoral outcomes.

Pope Leo on Music:

Singing and playing a musical instrument are acts of prayer; fosters our unity in praising God and opens our hearts to be fashioned by His grace. Sacred music should always be dignified, inspired by Scripture, reflect local cultures and traditions, and promote the universal Church's musical heritage.

Pope Leo on Creation Justice:

Isaiah's vision of *"swords turned into ploughshares"* becomes a call to transform destructive energies into life, dignity, food, reconciliation and ecological care. The roots of violence and environmental destruction lie in disordered hearts, distorted desires, domination and profit.

Thought for the Week: A Devil's Lamp.

Very early in the morning, a man set off to the church. He tripped and fell, dirtying himself. He returned home, changed his clothes, and was on his way to church. Again, at the same spot, he fell, went home, changed, and off he went to church.

On the way to church, he met a man with a lamp, who said: 'I saw you fall twice on your way to the church, so I brought a lamp to light your way." The churchgoer thanked him, and together they went to church. Upon arriving at the church, the churchgoer invited the man with the lamp to join him at prayer. He refused. The churchgoer unrelentingly kept inviting. The man with the lamp refused.

Finally, when asked about his reluctance to enter the church, the man replied: *"I am Satan. I saw you on your way to the CHURCH, and it was I who made you fall.*

When you went home, cleaned yourself, and went back on your way to the CHURCH, Jesus forgave all of your sins. Then I made you fall a second time, and even that did not encourage you to stay home, but rather, you went back on your way to CHURCH. Because of that, Jesus forgave all the sins of the people of your household.

I was afraid that if I made you fall one more time, then Jesus would forgive the sins of the whole world, so I made sure that you reached the CHURCH safely."

The lesson from the persistent: You can never avoid obstacles, missteps, or stumbling blocks on your path. They are to be overcome.

Your faithfulness may save you, your family, or others.

QnQ? Q asks: Why is listening so important to Christian Living?

The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them, just as loving God begins with listening to His Word. God not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear. So, it is God's work we do when we learn to listen to our brother or sister.

Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. They do not find it among Christians, because these Christians are talking where they should be listening. But he who can no longer listen to his brother or sister will soon be no longer listening to God either; he will be doing nothing but prattle in the presence of God too.

This is the beginning of the death of the spiritual life, and in the end, there is nothing left but spiritual chatter and clerical condescension arrayed in pious words. ***Dietrich Bonhoeffer***

The Spirit @ work: The Spirit comes with the tenderness of a true friend and protector to save, to heal, to teach, to counsel, to strengthen, to console." ***St Cyril of Jerusalem***

Something to tickle you: The Spirit of God breathes inspiration, while the carnal mind breeds vanity." ***Fred C. White***

Bishop Bernard Paul

Deacons called to take mission beyond the sanctuary

Deacon Dr Leslie Petrus

MELAKA: Permanent deacons must bring their ministry of service beyond the sanctuary and into homes, neighbourhoods, workplaces and the lives of those who are easily overlooked, Bishop Bernard Paul told deacons of the Diocese of Malacca Johore.

He made the call during the annual renewal of their diaconal promises at the Church of St Mary in Ayer Salak on August 23. The married permanent deacons renewed their commitment before the bishop and parishioners gathered for the Sunday Eucharistic celebration in the predominantly Catholic village.

In his homily, Bishop Bernard reflected on the sacraments as encounters through which people enter into the mystery of God and God reveals Himself to them.

Drawing from Peter's declaration that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16), the bishop reminded the deacons that this understanding was not reached through human reasoning alone, but revealed by the Father.

He urged them to remain rooted in their identity as servants modelled upon Christ, explaining that a clear understanding of their identity would also guide them towards their mission.

Bishop Bernard invited the congregation to "come and see" who Jesus is and then follow Him faithfully. God, he said, continues to reveal Himself to those who live each day in faith and obedience.

After the Mass, the deacons attended a study day with Bishop Bernard and Fr Damian Pereira, a canon lawyer serving with the Diocesan Tribunal whose thesis focused on the permanent diaconate.

Fr Damian traced the development of the permanent diaconate from its origins in the apostolic ministry of service, to its restoration and renewed emphasis following the Second Vatican Council. He also referred to conciliar documents including *Lumen Gentium, Dei Verbum, Ad Gentes* and *Christus Dominus.*

His second session focused on the obligations of permanent deacons. While many of these responsibilities resemble those of other clergy, married permanent deacons also carry duties towards their wives and children. Those employed in the secular world must likewise live their vocation through simplicity, integrity and high moral standards in the workplace.

Concluding the study day, Bishop Bernard called the deacons back to the foundations of their ministry, particularly their service to people who are poor, vulnerable or forgotten.





The permanent deacons of the Diocese of Malacca Johore.

He encouraged them to work closely with parish outreach groups such as the Society of St Vincent de Paul and the Parish Office for Human Development, especially in responding to the growing needs of migrants.

The bishop also challenged Basic Ecclesial Communities to develop beyond gatherings centred on Scripture reflection and fellowship by becoming communities of social mission.

He asked the deacons to help BECs identify elderly and lonely residents within their neighbourhoods and organise practical assistance. This could include home visits, food provisions, house cleaning and involving young people in delivering meals or helping those unable to manage on their own.

Such efforts, he said, would enable BECs to recognise needs within their surroundings and respond as a caring Christian community.

Bishop Bernard also invited the deacons to reflect on the importance of being available to the people they serve. They are called to engage others, equip themselves for present realities and enable communities to take responsibility for mission.

Prayer, however, must remain their first priority. Rooted in prayer, deacons can help organise, empower and form others as disciples who are ready to serve.

He further emphasised that synodality must shape their ministry through attentive listening, shared discernment and walking alongside the people entrusted to their care.

The vocation of a married permanent deacon carries its own distinctive demands. He must nurture his marriage, raise his family and, when employed outside the Church, live out his ordination in the workplace as part of his ministry.

Bishop Bernard expressed his appreciation to the permanent deacons for their contributions to the diocese over the past 15 to 16 years, acknowledging the challenges and limitations they had encountered along the way.

Offering them a final word of encouragement, he said: "My dear deacons, just do your best. You can be more for God."



At the foot of the Cross, a mission renewed

SELANGOR: A parish is not defined only by its ministries, programmes and activities. At its heart is a community called by Christ to walk together, serve together and share responsibility for the same mission.

This understanding shaped the annual Parish Weekend Away of the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist, held on August 15 and 16 at the Malaysia Bible Seminary in Kuang.

Guided by the theme, *Renewed in Spirit, United in Mission,* the gathering brought together around 80 parish leaders and aspiring leaders for a time of prayer, renewal and discernment. Away from the demands of parish life, participants were invited to reconnect with God and consider how the Cathedral community could grow in unity and mission.

The weekend was facilitated by Nicholas Lye, a Catholic lay missionary and retreat facilitator from Singapore. Drawing upon theology, art and creativity, he helped participants encounter God in fresh and meaningful ways.

Rather than focusing only on what the parish should do next, participants were encouraged to first examine their own hearts, listen to the movement of the Holy Spirit and discern how God might be inviting them — and the wider cathedral community — to grow.

The Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, celebrated over the weekend, added a fitting spiritual dimension to the gathering. Reflecting on Mary as a model disciple, participants were reminded that mission begins with a willing "yes" to God.

Mary did not know where her response would lead, yet she trusted God and remained faithful. Her example invited the parish leaders to consider their own readiness to answer God's call, especially when service requires courage, sacrifice, and a willingness to venture beyond what is familiar.

This spirit of listening and discernment continued during the *Conversations in the Spirit* session. Participants reflected honestly on several questions: What is the parish doing well? Where has it experienced unity in mission? Where is further growth needed?

Through open conversations, they recognised areas in which the cathedral had been strengthened by people working together. They also identified opportunities to deepen collaboration, widen participation and nurture a stronger sense of shared responsibility for the parish's mission.

The reflections and feedback gathered during the session will be collated to help shape the cathedral's plans and priorities.

Another significant moment came when the leaders welcomed the *Salib,* or Cross, ahead of its arrival at the cathedral for the *Perjalanan Salib.*

The *Salib* has been journeying through the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, inviting parish communities to pause, pray and reflect upon the Cross of Christ and the meaning of discipleship. Its pilgrimage forms part of the spiritual preparation for the Malaysia Pastoral Convention (MPC) 2026, as Catholics across the country pray, listen and discern the way forward for the Church in Malaysia.

The Cathedral of St John the Evangelist will be the final stop in the *Salib's* journey through the archdiocese before it continues to Sibu for the MPC in September.

For the cathedral's leaders, receiving the *Salib* during the Parish Weekend Away brought the gathering's theme into sharper focus. Before they could lead others in mission, they were reminded of the need to place themselves before Christ and allow Him to renew their hearts.

A parish does not become united simply because its members work alongside one another. Genuine unity grows when hearts are centred on the same Lord, people learn to listen with humility, and everyone recognises that the Church's mission belongs to the whole community.

Although the weekend has ended, the process of discernment has only begun. The prayers offered, experiences shared, and insights gathered will now become part of the Cathedral's continuing journey as it seeks to understand where God is leading the parish.

This is the heart of a synodal Church: a community that walks together, listens attentively, shares responsibility for mission and discerns the movement of the Holy Spirit. Such a journey cannot end with conversation. Prayer and discernment must shape how the community lives, makes decisions and serves others.

The cathedral now moves forward with renewed leaders and a clearer sense of purpose — to walk together, serve together and keep Christ at the heart of its mission. **Tianne Pereira**

Queen of the Apostles Curia marks 70 years of service

PUTRAJAYA: The Mandarin-speaking Queen of the Apostles Curia of the Legion of Mary celebrated 70 years of service to the sick, elderly and vulnerable with a gala dinner at a restaurant in IOI City Mall, on August 15.

The anniversary celebration drew 550 guests, including guest of honour Archbishop Julian Leow, ten priests, religious, legionaries, family members and friends.

Congratulating the Curia, Archbishop Julian expressed his appreciation for the Legion of Mary's dedicated service to the Church.

He reminded legionaries that their apostolate is also a path towards personal sanctification. Through visiting and accompanying people who are sick, elderly or less fortunate, they grow in holiness, compassion, forgiveness and humanity.

The archbishop commended the Legion's outreach to the "4Ls" — the Least, the Lost, the Last and the Little. By walking alongside those who suffer, he said, legionaries come to understand their struggles and develop hearts that are increasingly attentive and compassionate.

He encouraged them to continue their mission by following the example of St Francis of Assisi, who overcame his fear to embrace people with leprosy, and the Blessed Virgin Mary, who responded wholeheartedly to God's call. He urged them to model their lives upon the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Curia president John Tan thanked all who attended and described the anniversary as an occasion to give thanks for legionaries who had served throughout the past seven decades, especially those who had died.

He said the celebration also offered an opportunity to rekindle the spirit of the Legion, deepen unity among its members and move forward with a stronger missionary commitment.

The evening featured a drama depicting the life of St Francis of Assisi, dance performances and a lucky draw.

The Queen of the Apostles Curia currently comprises 12 praesidia and one Junior Praesidium serving parishes across Kuala Lumpur, Cheras and Kajang. As it enters a new chapter, the Curia remains committed to bringing Mary's tenderness and Christ's compassion to those at the margins of society.



Archbishop Julian Leow with some of the clergy and legionaries.

Legionaries bring Mary's spirit of visitation to Sungai Buloh

SUNGAI BULOH: Sometimes the most meaningful gift is simply the assurance that someone is seen, remembered and valued.

Members of the Legion of Mary from the Church of St Jude, Rawang and the Church of the Risen Christ, Jalan Ipoh, offered that gift when they visited residents of the Leprosy Centre in Sungai Buloh on August 16. They were accompanied by Sr Margarete Sta Maria, FdCC.

Inspired by Mary's Visitation to Elizabeth, the legionaries sought to bring comfort, encouragement and the presence of Christ to those who may experience illness, loneliness or isolation.

The programme began with a warm welcome from the centre's staff. The visitors then spent time speaking with residents, listening to their experiences, sharing reflections and offering words of encouragement.

These personal encounters affirmed the dignity and resilience of the residents, reminding them that they remain valued members of the wider community.

The legionaries also distributed goody bags containing toiletries and other essential items. Though simple, the gifts were received with gratitude and joy as expressions of care and solidarity.

The visit reflected the Legion of Mary's mission to make Christian charity visible through service. By visiting the sick, praying with residents and offering companionship, the members lived out both the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy.

The centre's staff expressed appreciation for the visit, noting that such encounters strengthen the relationship between residents and the wider community while nurturing hope and mutual understanding.

Just as Mary carried Christ's presence to Elizabeth, the legionaries were reminded that every visit made with love can become a visitation of grace. Their presence affirmed a simple truth: no one should feel forgotten, and even the smallest act of compassion can bring the light of Christ into another person's life. **Helena Jaseline**



Legionaries from the Church of St Jude and the Church of the Risen Christ during their visit to the Leprosy Centre in Sungai Buloh.

A new way of leading

PORT DICKSON: Leadership renewal is not simply about changing names on an organisational chart. It is about forming servant leaders who listen, discern and walk with the people they are called to serve.

This vision took a significant step forward at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Port Dickson (CICPD), on August 23, when its ministry leaders were commissioned as part of the parish's *Leadership Transformation Roadmap 2026.*

During the English-, Tamil- and Malay Masses, men, women and young people stepped forward to accept responsibility for the parish's life and mission. Before God and the community, they pledged to lead with humility, unity, faithfulness and love — as branches united in Christ and called to bear fruit.

The commissioning was the visible fruit of a process that began in May with a review of parish ministries, long-serving leaders and leadership guidelines.

In June, the parish entered a period of discernment and transparent nominations, encouraging the community to look beyond familiarity and consider the needs of its mission. Nominees were invited to view leadership as a vocation of service before undergoing formation, mentoring and preparation for their new responsibilities.

A key feature of the roadmap is rotating leadership, which creates space for fresh ideas and renewed energy while developing new servant leaders for the Church.

At the heart of this transformation is synodality: learning to listen, discern and walk together as the People of God. This approach does not diminish the pastoral responsibility of the parish priest. It strengthens communion when priestly leadership and the gifts of the laity work together.

Under the guidance of parish priest Fr Edwin Peter, CICPD is developing a model in which priestly authority provides spiritual direction and pastoral accountability, while lay leaders contribute their experience, creativity and charisms to the Church's mission.

The parish has also adopted a "Heads, Hearts and Hands" model of leadership. The head represents understanding the parish's mission, responsibilities and direction. The heart signifies the character required of a Christian leader — humility, prayer, compassion and love for the people. The hands represent the readiness to serve, organise, accompany others and complete the work entrusted to them.

Effective Christian leadership requires all three. Knowledge without compassion can become rigid, while good intentions without action bear little fruit.

Following the commissioning, the parish will undertake a gradual transition and handover from August to September, followed by an evaluation of ministry plans in mid-September Team-building sessions in October will strengthen unity and shared mission.

The journey will culminate in December with Mass for Leadership Transition and Renewal during the parish feast.

The goal is not merely a smooth changeover or better administration, but the formation of servant leaders rooted in Christ. Structures can support leadership, but only Christ can sustain it.

As CICPD continues this journey, the words of Jesus remain its foundation: "I am the vine; you are the branches."

When leaders remain connected to Christ, a parish does more than manage change — it becomes ready for the future. **Susan Teng Yee Ling**



The leaders being commissioned during the Eucharistic Celebration.



Ladang Ketoyong community celebrates its patroness

Bernard Anthony

TANJUNG MALIM, Perak: The modest Chapel of St Anne in Ladang Ketoyong came alive with hymns, prayer and fellowship on August 22, as over 250 parishioners and pilgrims gathered for its annual feast.

The small chapel and tents erected across its grassy compound were filled with faithful who came to honour St Anne and St Joachim, the parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary and grandparents of Jesus.

Guided by the theme, *I Will Never Forget You* (Isaiah 49:15), the celebration began with the Novena to St Anne, followed by a trilingual Mass presided over by Fr Vincent Paul and assisted by Deacon Isaac Alfred Simbun.

Welcoming the congregation, Fr Vincent, parish priest of the Church of the Most Holy Redeemer in Tanjung Malim, invited them to entrust all grandparents and elderly persons to the care of the Lord.

In his homily delivered in Tamil and English, Fr Vincent assured the faithful that God never forgets His people, even amid suffering, unanswered prayers and uncertainty.

Reflecting on the place of the family in God's plan, he spoke of how Sts Joachim and Anne raised Mary in faith and instilled in her the values of God's Kingdom. Their example continues to remind parents and grandparents of their responsibility to nurture children in faith and prepare them to respond generously to God's call.



The congregation praying silently as Fr Vincent Paul leads the Eucharistic adoration.

At a time when family life faces many pressures, he urged the congregation to remain faithful, seek God continually and pray for their children and grandchildren.

"We are all in the heart of Jesus," he reminded them. "Whatever may come, remain faithful to God and to your family."

He encouraged those carrying suffering, challenges and family difficulties, to place them before the Lord, take up their crosses and continue following Christ with trust.

Preaching in Bahasa Malaysia, Deacon Isaac described the celebration as an occasion of joy made possible by God's grace. He reflected on St Anne as a loving grandmother, a woman of holiness and a powerful intercessor for families and children.

He also urged families to cherish their elderly members and draw from their wisdom. Parents, he said, must teach children to become faithful Christians and to respect their elders, so that these same values will one day be handed on to the next generation.

After Mass, the congregation remained for Eucharistic adoration. As the chapel fell silent, Fr Vincent invited everyone to bring their failures, limitations, loneliness and struggles before Jesus.

"As we spend time in silence with Him, remember that He will not forget you," he said. "We, too, must not forget God."

Fr Vincent then carried the Blessed Sacrament through the congregation during Benediction, blessing the faithful gathered inside the chapel.

In a particularly meaningful moment, grandparents and elderly parishioners were invited forward to receive a special blessing. Deacon Isaac presented each of them with a St Anne keychain as a remembrance of the celebration.

Fr Vincent encouraged the faithful to continue seeking the intercession of Sts Joachim and Anne and to remain steadfast when their prayers appeared unanswered. Faith, he reminded them, must not depend only upon receiving what one asks for, but upon trusting the God who remains present and never forgets His people.

He also thanked Deacon Isaac, who preached at the chapel for the first time, as well as everyone involved in preparing the liturgy and the feast-day celebration.

Chapel lay leader Michael expressed appreciation to Fr Vincent and Deacon Isaac and welcomed parishioners and pilgrims who had travelled from near and far. The gathering continued with a communal dinner beneath the tents, where food and sweet delicacies were shared amid lively conversation.

The feast renewed the bonds among members of a community for whom the chapel has long been a spiritual home. Standing for several decades, the peaceful sanctuary has served local estate workers and Catholics from nearby Kampung Kelawar.

The chapel opens monthly for the Rosary and other prayers, while Mass is celebrated primarily for its annual feast. The Kampung Kelawar BEC coordinated this year's celebration.

Prayer that comforts and challenges

PETALING JAYA: Do we relate to God as He is revealed by Jesus, or to an image of God shaped by what makes us comfortable?

This was among the questions Fr Albert Tan, SJ posed to 30 seniors from parishes across the Klang Valley during a two-day retreat at La Salle Centre.

Organised by the Archdiocesan Grandparents and Elderly Ministry (GEM), the retreat explored how Ignatian prayer can lead the faithful into a deeper and more honest relationship with God.

Fr Albert explained that prayer involves both speaking and listening to God. It takes place when a person consciously brings thoughts, feelings and experiences into God's presence and allows them to become part of an intimate dialogue with Him.

"We create images of God that we want to relate to, often without being aware that these images do not represent God as revealed to us by Jesus," he said.

People may choose to see God as loving, supportive, forgiving, merciful and kind — all of which are true. The danger arises, however, when this image of God never confronts the way they live, exposes their sins or challenges them to change.

A genuine relationship with God requires openness to both His comfort and His correction. God listens to the deepest desires of His children, but also calls them to obedience, conversion and growth.

"He loves us so much that He refuses to make excuses for us," Fr Albert said. "Instead, He challenges us to grow, to be better and to become like His only-begotten Son."

To help participants develop this personal relationship with God, Fr Albert introduced three methods of Ignatian prayer: *Lectio Divina,* Ignatian imaginative prayer and the Examen of Consciousness.

He also guided them through meditative exercises designed to calm the mind and reduce distractions before prayer. He emphasised, however, that these exercises were preparation for prayer rather than prayer itself. Stillness is helpful, but it is not the final goal; the purpose of prayer is an encounter and relationship with God.



Particular attention was given to the Examen, which helps a person recognise God's presence and the movement of the Holy Spirit within daily life. Through it, the faithful can revisit the events of the day, notice moments of grace and struggle, and discern where God may be consoling, guiding or challenging them.

Fr Albert explained that St Ignatius placed particular importance on the Examen because it teaches people to discover God not only in formal moments of prayer, but also in ordinary experiences, decisions and relationships.

Although the retreat was demanding at times, Fr Albert sustained the participants' attention through relatable personal experiences and humour. His engaging approach helped make the principles of Ignatian spirituality accessible and relevant to everyday life.

Feedback received by the GEM coordinating team was highly positive, with many participants requesting further sessions on the subject.

The retreat ultimately reminded participants that prayer is not an escape from life or simply a search for calmness. It is the courage to stand truthfully before God — allowing Him to console what is wounded, reveal what must change and lead each person towards greater freedom and love. **GEM coordinating team**



A parish united around one altar

KLUANG, Johor: Different languages and cultures came together in one expression of faith as the Church of St Louis celebrated its annual parish feast from August 21 to 23.

Held in honour of its patron, St Louis IX, King of France, the triduum was guided by the theme, *Togetherness, Together, To Gather.* Known for his deep faith, commitment to justice and care for the poor, St Louis offered the parish community an enduring example of Christian leadership and service.

Parish priest Msgr Peter Ng served as celebrant and preacher throughout the triduum, assisted by Deacon Joseph Arokiam Gratian.

The celebration culminated on August 23 with a combined multilingual feast day Mass. The church was filled, while around 100 parishioners followed the celebration from tents erected on the parish grounds.

The feast also included a procession around the church in honour of St Louis. A statue of the patron saint, mounted on a decorated hand-pushed trolley, led the way as parishioners followed in prayer.

After Mass, Msgr Peter invited everyone to a fellowship lunch at the adjacent Dewan St Louis. Sharing a meal allowed members of the parish's different language communities to mingle, renew friendships and strengthen their sense of belonging to one parish family.

The celebration gave visible expression to its theme: togetherness is built when people make the effort to gather, pray and share life.

Established in 1928, the Church of St Louis continues to serve Catholics across north-central Johor. Nearly a century later, it remains a spiritual home where a culturally diverse community gathers around the same altar, united by one faith and one mission. **Bernard Anthony**

A decade of bringing Christ's hope behind prison walls

John Kuppusawary

KULIM, Kedah: Five members of the Penang Diocesan Prison Ministry were honoured for ten years of faithful service during a Mass at the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on August 14.

The Mass, celebrated on the Feast of St Maximilian Kolbe, patron saint of prisoners, brought together members of the Faith Sharers to thank God for His grace and guidance throughout their ministry.

Parish priest, Fr Desmond Jansen, reflected on the example of St Maximilian Kolbe, whose decision to offer his life in place of another prisoner at Auschwitz revealed a love that comforts, forgives, restores hope and willingly sacrifices for another.

His witness, Fr Desmond said, challenges those involved in prison ministry to recognise Christ in every person they encounter and to love with a heart that refuses to give up on anyone.

During the celebration, certificates of recognition were presented to Loutsnathan, Pusupavali, Patrick Muthu, Albert Philips and Jane Sandanasamy for their decade of dedicated service.

Fr Desmond congratulated the five members and expressed his gratitude for their commitment to bringing Christ's love, hope, mercy and compassion to those in prison.

Their years of quiet and faithful service offered a reminder that prison ministry is not simply about entering a correctional institution. It is about entering the pain, loneliness and struggles of another person with the conviction that no life is beyond the reach of God's mercy.

Inspired by St Maximilian Kolbe, the ministry remains committed to being a light of Christ's love and hope to prisoners — seeing each person not merely through the mistakes of the past, but as someone known, loved and never abandoned by God.



Serving with the compassion of Jesus Christ

KUALA LUMPUR: To serve those in prison is to look beyond the offence, the sentence and the prison number — and recognise a person whom Christ continues to love.

This call was at the heart of a recent workshop organised by the Christian Prison Network, a fellowship of Christian prison ministry workers, at the Full Gospel Assembly. Members of the Catholic Prison Fellowship Association (CPFA) were among those who participated.

The gathering opened with praise and worship led by CPFA member and Church of the Divine Mercy parishioner Perzeus James, accompanied by his three young children. Their presence offered a touching witness of faith lived and handed on within the family.

Rev Elisha Satvinder, founder of Dignity for Children Foundation, then led participants in an inspiring reflection on the attitude needed when serving the poor, imprisoned and marginalised.

Drawing upon St Paul's exhortation to "carry each other's burdens" and thus fulfil the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2), Rev Elisha shared how God had worked through the broken and uncertain chapters of his own life.

Following the early death of his father, who had served as president of the Sikh gurdwara in Petaling Jaya, the young Elisha felt that he had lost his compass. He drifted through life and, at 19, found himself managing a bar and drinking heavily.

His direction began to change after he took a wrong turn while driving and ended up in the Sentul and Pekeliling areas. There, he witnessed the devastation caused by heroin addiction. Later, he encountered people living with advanced AIDS in Pudu Prison.

Behind their suffering, he began to recognise poverty, marginalisation, broken families and generational dysfunction. His search for answers eventually led him to Christianity and then to a seminary in the United States. He later worked on a programme connected with American evangelist Billy Graham and served as a youth pastor, although he still did not fully understand where God was leading him.

Upon returning to Malaysia, Rev Elisha realised that providing food, school supplies and medical check-ups offered only temporary relief. If families were to escape generations of poverty, they needed opportunities for lasting transformation through faith and education.

This conviction led him to establish Dignity for Children Foundation, which has since worked with over 14,000 children. He and his wife also fostered 50 children, raising and caring for them as their own.

The journey, however, was rarely easy. Some of those he helped walked away, while others responded with rejection or abuse. He learnt that one could pour out one's life for another person and still be disappointed.

Yet the poor became his teachers.

"Seminary shaped my theology, while the poor shaped my humanity," he said.

When asked how he persevered through discouragement, Rev Elisha recalled the familiar story of countless starfish washed ashore after a storm. A person may not be able to return every starfish to the sea, but saving even one still matters.

The story offered an important reminder to those engaged in prison ministry: they may not be able to help everyone, but their presence can still make a life-changing difference to the person before them.

Rev Elisha also spoke candidly about compassion fatigue. Constantly accompanying people through trauma can leave caregivers questioning whether their efforts are making any difference. At such times, he said, they must return to Christ and allow themselves to be loved by Him.

Fatigue does not mean that one has stopped caring. It can be an invitation to abide more deeply in Christ, the true vine, remembering His words: "Apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).



Prison ministry workers were reminded that Jesus sees the name behind the prison number and the wound behind the prisoner. Their task is not to act as saviours or imagine that they can transform another person through their own strength.

"You are not the saviour; Jesus is," Rev Elisha stressed. "You plant, and you water, but only God makes it grow."

A prison visit, therefore, is not simply an attempt to make someone behave better. Its deeper purpose is to create the space for a prisoner to encounter Jesus — the One who can bring hope, healing and new direction from within.

Rev Elisha cited the example of Charles Colson, who was imprisoned for his involvement in the Watergate scandal before his conversion led him to establish an international prison ministry. His story showed how God can enter human brokenness and turn it towards a new purpose.

To guard against exhaustion and discouragement, participants were encouraged to spend time alone with God, practise *Lectio Divina* and listen attentively to His voice. Faithful service must always flow from prayer, because work well done speaks more powerfully than good intentions left unfulfilled.

After the talk, participants reflected privately before gathering in small groups to pray aloud. Their prayers revealed the heart of Christian service: to recognise the suffering Christ in every prisoner; to understand how inequality pushes people to the margins; to give generously because all gifts come from God; and, above all, to love as Jesus loves.

Prison ministry may bring few visible rewards, and its fruits may take years to appear. Yet every visit, prayer and compassionate encounter can become a quiet reminder to a prisoner: you have not been forgotten, you are not merely your past, and even here, Christ is seeking you. **Mildred Lopez**

Letters to Editor

BECs and the way forward

Dear Editor,

It would be helpful for the leaders of the Dioceses in Peninsular Malaysia to do surveys and consultations to find out the reasons why young Catholics and young Catholic families are not actively participating in BEC communitarian life. And take it from there to bring about renewal in the communitarian life of BECs.

Perhaps a decision needs to be made during the Malaysia Pastoral Convention, September 9–13 in Sibu, Sarawak, on whether BECs are fundamental to parish life and ministry.

BECs can respond to the needs of the poor, the sick, children and young families. They can also nurture the faith and faith-life of lay people.

Most importantly, BECs can provide a space for ordinary Catholics, young and old, to embrace synodality as a way of life — through communion, participation and mission. This includes building bridges with the poor and vulnerable, our neighbours of different ethnicities and faith traditions, and with our environment and creation.

May the laity and clergy of the Malaysian Church continue to walk together and make decisions together, through the See-Judge-Act process, guided by the Gospels and the leadership of the FABC, Pope Leo and the Vatican.

May our communitarian life and mission at all levels, from BECs to parish, diocese and Malaysian Church continue to be Christ-centred and rooted in personal and communitarian relationship with Christ.

Alice Tan
Via Email

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Please include your name and address. *Letters without name and address will not be entertained.*

Penang's Perjalanan Salib ends, but journey of faith continues

Christopher Kushi

PENANG: After travelling through parishes, schools, hospitals and communities across the Diocese of Penang, the *Perjalanan Salib* reached its diocesan culmination at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit on August 25 — not as the end of a pilgrimage, but as a call to continue walking together towards the Malaysia Pastoral Convention (MPC) 2026.

The celebration began with the *Via Lucis,* or *Way of Light,* during which the faithful meditated on Christ's Resurrection and reflected on their calling to carry His light throughout the diocese.

Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang, presided over the Mass, concelebrated by Msgr Stephen Liew, Msgr Jude Miranda, Msgr Henry Rajoo and Fr Raymond Raj. Deacon Andrew Loh assisted.

In his homily, Cardinal Sebastian recalled the origins of the *Perjalanan Salib.* A single cross was divided into nine parts, representing Malaysia's nine dioceses, and entrusted to young Catholics when the journey was launched during the Malaysian Youth Day in Kota Kinabalu on April 3, 2025.

Since then, the nine crosses have travelled through dioceses, parishes, villages and rural communities, carried along rivers and across hills and mountains to reach the faithful wherever they live.

"No one has been left out; everyone has been included," the cardinal said.

Referring to Pope Leo XIV's message to young people at the 2026 Franciscan Youth Meeting in Assisi, Cardinal Sebastian urged them to reject fear, embrace Christ wholeheartedly and become the "new saints" the world needs. He echoed the Pope's call for young people to write "new pages of history" through courage, compassion and radical faith.

In Penang, the journey began at the Minor Basilica of St Anne on May 1, 2025. Over the following 16 months, thousands encountered the cross through prayer, veneration and reflection before it arrived at the cathedral for the culmination.

The cardinal also drew attention to the significant national and ecclesial events surrounding MPC2026. Following the *Merdeka* day celebration on August 31, the Malaysian bishops designated Sept 4 as a National Day of Prayer and Fasting for the convention.

About 900 delegates from across the country, including 78 from Penang Diocese, will gather in Sibu, Sarawak, from September 9 to 13. There, the nine parts of the cross will be reunited to form the *Salib Malaysia.*

The convention will conclude shortly before Malaysia Day on September 16, commemorating the formation of Malaysia through the coming together of Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak. Cardinal Sebastian said the timing invited the Church to recognise the Holy Spirit working ahead of all human plans and efforts.

Drawing on the theme of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences' 2026 Plenary Assembly in Jakarta, *You Will See Greater Things,* the cardinal cautioned that these "greater things" could also involve greater challenges and sacrifices.

Whatever lies ahead, he said, the Church in Malaysia must face it together. He called on the faithful to unite themselves with the bishops and delegates, accompany them in prayer and listen attentively to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church.

Msgr Jude, chairman of the Penang diocesan



Cardinal Sebastian Francis blessing some of the MPC delegates. (photo/Felix Lam)

Perjalanan Salib, described the pilgrimage as a journey of faith shaped by prayer, reflection, communion and encounter.

Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, he said, the faithful often encounter Christ unexpectedly. As the cross travelled beyond church walls into schools, hospitals and communities, it brought Christ's comfort, healing and hope into people's daily lives.

The journey also inspired conversations around the four pastoral areas of Family, Church, Society and Ecology. These encounters invited the faithful to listen to one another, discern together and ask what the Holy Spirit is calling the Church in Malaysia to become.

Msgr Jude said the cross challenged Catholics to translate faith into action and reminded them that they belong to one diocesan family in which no one should walk alone.

He thanked the priests, religious, parish leaders, volunteers, families, young people and communities whose participation made the journey possible.

The Mass concluded with the blessing of candles and packets of salt, carried to the altar by young representatives from the diocese's 29 parishes.

The candles, lit from the Paschal candle, signified Christ, the Light of the World, whose light must shine beyond church walls into homes, workplaces and society. The salt symbolised the mission of Christians to preserve what is good and bring the flavour of the Gospel into their communities.

The culmination was therefore not an ending, but a new beginning. As the cross continues towards Sibu, its message remains: one faith, one mission and one hope in Jesus Christ — the Way, the Truth and the Life.



(photo/Felix Lam)

Serving the Church through lens and livestream



Anthony Chai facilitating the live video streaming session.

MIRI, Sarawak: Behind every livestream and photograph of parish life is a communications volunteer entrusted with capturing sacred moments faithfully, reverently and responsibly.

With this mission in mind, the Diocese of Miri's Social Communications Ministry held its first workshop on livestreaming and photography recently, equipping parish teams with practical skills to document and share the life of the Church across the diocese.

Anthony Chai facilitated the session on live video streaming, while Ronald Suyong led the photography segment. Participants were introduced to the technical foundations of both disciplines, alongside the attentiveness and sensitivity required when covering liturgical celebrations and other significant moments in parish life.

The facilitators emphasised that Church communications is not simply about operating cameras or producing attractive images. It is a ministry that calls for reverence, awareness and a genuine heart for service.

Fifteen participants representing parishes across the diocese attended the workshop. Certificates of appreciation were presented to the facilitators and participants at the end of the programme in recognition of their commitment to serving the Church through social communications.

The initiative reflects the ministry's wider vision of walking together in communion, guided by the Holy Spirit, and using communication to help build a Christ-centred diocesan family.

As the ministry develops, the workshop marks an important step towards forming a skilled and united communications team capable of sharing the stories and sacred moments of parish life with clarity,


(Vatican Media)

Pope calls Christians to unity and peace

VATICAN: Pope Leo XIV has urged Christians to overcome hostility, pursue reconciliation and work together for peace and justice.

Meeting Lutheran bishops from Norway during their pilgrimage to Rome on August 26, the Pope encouraged them to visit sites associated with the early Christians and martyrs, whose witness continues to inspire believers to give their lives "for the glory of God and for the good of our brothers and sisters".

Reflecting on the world's "particularly turbulent period", Pope Leo warned of growing animosity among peoples, evident not only in international conflicts but also in the bitterness increasingly shaping political and social discourse within nations.

Christians, he said, could also fall into hostility towards those with whom they disagreed. Yet Christ points to a different path — one of reconciliation and fraternity.

"Jesus shows us another way, revealing that goodness and charity have the power to disarm," he said.

The Pope described the bishops' pilgrimage as an expression of their desire for greater Christian communion, noting that even small gestures could guide and inspire the journey towards reconciliation.

Recalling Jesus' prayer that his disciples "may all be one" so that the world may believe, Pope Leo highlighted the common ground shared by Catholics and Lutherans.

"Grounded in our common Baptism and our shared mission in the world, I pray that we may always grow together in our service to the promotion of peace and justice," he said.

Concluding, the Pope invited the bishops to follow the example of the early martyrs and saints, whose lives revealed the transforming power of charity. **Vatican News**

Mass and coffee offer hope amidst rubble

YATSUSHIRO, JAPAN: Three weeks after the July 28 earthquake devastated Kumamoto Prefecture, claiming 39 lives and causing widespread damage, the Catholic community in Yatsushiro — the worst-hit area in the Diocese of Fukuoka — experienced a moment of hope with the resumption of Sunday Mass.

As the parish church had been severely damaged, the liturgy was celebrated in a hall at the convent of the Sisters of St Paul de Chartres. Bishop Joseph Abeia of Fukuoka presided over the Mass, attended by about 50 people, together with parish priest Fr Ferruccio Brambillasca, an Italian PIME missionary.

The celebration gave the community an opportunity to pray, reunite and reflect on how to move forward as they continued to face the effects of the earthquake, compounded by intense heat.

"Faced with the earthquake, we might ask ourselves: 'Why did this happen?' There is no answer to this question," Bishop Abeia said. "But the question we can answer is: 'How do we move forward together?'"

That spirit has guided the parish since the first days of the disaster, despite serious disruption to the water supply. Fr Brambillasca began distributing water and other essential supplies brought from Minamata — the other parish entrusted to him — and neighbouring communities. He had also been displaced after the presbytery in Minamata was damaged.



The Sisters of St Paul de Chartres contributed another vital resource: water from their own well, normally used to serve about 30 children attending an educational centre. This enabled shower facilities to be set up, providing much-needed relief amid the extreme heat and lack of running water in homes.

Caritas Japan subsequently launched a coordinated relief operation, drawing on experience gained during the 2011 earthquake, tsunami and Fukushima nuclear disaster, as well as the more recent earthquake on the Noto Peninsula.

An office has been established at the parish to assess people's needs and develop a long-term response, with particular attention given to those who have lost their jobs, elderly people living alone and others experiencing hardship.

Caritas Japan also opened a café for displaced people at the evacuation centre in Yatsushiro Middle School No. 4. Supported largely by parishioners from the local Catholic church, the café has welcomed many people since opening.

Some had been sheltering at home but came to the centre after running out of food. For others, even a cup of hot coffee offered a moment of comfort.

"This is the first time I've had a hot coffee since the earthquake. It was delicious and really cheered me up," one visitor said.

Caritas Japan noted that many arrived looking sombre and tense, but their faces gradually brightened as they shared food, coffee and companionship. Some, it said, appeared to leave with a lighter step. **AsiaNews**

New vocations renew Myanmar's embattled Church



Cardinal Charles Maung Bo performing the ordination rites during sacerdotal ordination. (Photo by RVA Myanmar)

YANGON: Amid conflict, displacement and poverty, Myanmar's Catholic Church has welcomed three new priests, four deacons, two religious sisters and a coadjutor bishop in a series of celebrations throughout August.

"These are tangible signs of a Church that, even amid hardship and suffering, looks to the future with trust in the Lord and continues to proclaim and bear witness to hope," said Bishop Bernardino Ne Ne, the new coadjutor bishop of Taungoo.

On August 14, Cardinal Charles Maung Bo of Yangon ordained Salesians Fr John Phyo Thura Aung SDB and Fr Freymoe Win SDB at the Salesian Novitiate in Pyin Oo Lwin, Archdiocese of Mandalay.

Recalling Christ's words, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you," Cardinal Bo urged the new priests to become "bridges, not walls", particularly in their ministry among young people in a country scarred by division.

The following day, Auxiliary Bishop Raymond Wai Lin Htun of Yangon ordained Fr Stephen Aung Zay Zey Ya Moe OSM at St Francis Xavier Church in Thanlyin.

"The priest does not belong to himself, but to the universal Church. He is called to be a sign of unity and hope," Bishop Htun said. He urged the new priest to console those who suffer, encourage the discouraged and promote peace and unity.

In the Diocese of Hakha, four candidates — two diocesan seminarians and two members of the Missionaries of the Little Way of St Thérèse — were ordained deacons at St Joseph's Cathedral on Aug 4.

Addressing over 500 faithful, Bishop Lucius Hre Kung said holiness was measured not by academic excellence but by love for God, humility and zeal for souls.

"We may not excel in our studies, but what we need is to possess the virtues of St John Vianney: love for the faithful and zeal for their salvation," he said.

Myanmar's religious communities also celebrated the first profession of Sr Maria Lydwine Hkawn Bu and Sr Maria Ephrem Eugenie as Sisters of St Vincent de Paul on Aug 11 at Sts Peter and Paul Church in Insein, Yangon.

Bishop Htun described religious life as "a visible witness to the Kingdom of God", adding that communities must become places of love, forgiveness and sharing. The sisters will serve the poor, sick, vulnerable and elderly according to the Vincentian charism.

Another significant celebration took place on Aug 6, when Fr Bernardino Ne Ne was ordained coadjutor bishop of Taungoo at Sacred Heart Cathedral. Cardinal Bo presided, with Archbishop Basilio Athai and Bishop Celso Ba Shwe serving as co-consecrators.

Reflecting on the Transfiguration, Cardinal Bo said its light prepared the disciples for the suffering of Christ's Passion.

"The people of Myanmar are passing through a true valley of tears," he said, but added that "the light of Christ continues to shine in the darkness".

He called on the new bishop to make that light visible by consoling the wounded, reconciling divided communities and standing alongside the poor, displaced and fearful. **Fides**



Our shepherds speak: Hopes for MPC2026

In this issue, we continue to share the bishops' reflections on their hopes for the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026.

I hope the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 will be a grace-filled time of **reflection** on what it means to be Church in Malaysia. May it bring us **together** to **celebrate** our shared faith while embracing the richness of our cultural and ethnic diversity.



I hope we will **listen** deeply to one another's joys and sorrows, hopes and dreams, and learn to **accompany** and **support** one another along life's journey. Through this spirit of attentive listening and shared **discernment,** may we **rediscover** our prophetic role as Church in Malaysia and identify pastoral pathways that respond to present challenges while preparing us wisely for those that lie ahead.

Archbishop Julian Leow,
Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur



The call for the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 (MPC2026) was made by the Magisterium of the local Church in Malaysia, comprising the nine bishops. The decision was unanimous, and together we bear collective responsibility for the direction and pastoral vision of MPC2026.

The process and content of MPC2026 have been prepared by an organising committee representing all nine dioceses, consisting of clergy, religious, and laity. Every stage of the preparation has been reviewed and formally approved by the bishops, ensuring ecclesial coherence and fidelity to the pastoral realities and needs of the Catholic Church in Malaysia.

It is important that the outcome of MPC2026 is not determined by myself or my brother bishops but entrusted to the **OBEDIENCE** and **FIDELITY** of all participants who have committed themselves to this synodal process. The Holy Spirit, the prime mover, will lead us. Our task is simply to participate with humility, obedience, and fidelity to the Holy Spirit and to the People of God, entrusted to us and whom we represent.

My hope is that the most significant fruit of MPC2026 will be the strengthening of bonds, solidarity, and communion among the nine dioceses that together form the Catholic Church in Malaysia.

Cardinal Sebastian Francis,
Diocese of Penang

My hope for MPC2026 is that it will help us recognise, perhaps as never before, what it means to be one Malaysian Church. This Convention, to be held from September 9 to 13, marks a significant first in our history. Since Malaysia was formed in 1963, the dioceses and regions of Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak have developed their own pastoral approaches and held their respective assemblies in response to local realities. Now, for the first time, bishops, priests, religious and lay leaders from across the country will gather on Sarawak soil to listen, discern and seek a way forward together.

Through the synodal process, I hope we will learn to walk alongside one another as a pilgrim people, attentive to how the Holy Spirit has guided each diocese and region in responding to its particular pastoral needs. This is not about deciding which region has the best approach. It is about listening with humility, appreciating the gifts and experiences that each brings, and discerning how these can enrich our shared mission of building God's Kingdom in our local communities and throughout Malaysia.

The Convention concludes on Sept 13, just three days before Malaysia Day. This timing is particularly meaningful. At a time when political developments and national issues can heighten religious sensitivities and social tensions, MPC 2026 offers us an opportunity to read the signs of the times and ask how we, as one Malaysian Church, are called to respond.



I hope that we will leave Sibu with a deeper sense of communion, a clearer commitment to walk together and a renewed desire to bear a united, faithful and constructive witness in our nation.

Archbishop Simon Poh,
Archdiocese of Kuching

Preparation to mission: KL delegates ready for MPC2026

As the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 (MPC2026) draws near, 85 delegates from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur (ArchKL) gathered for their fourth and final preparatory session, following three previous remote sessions ahead of the national pastoral convention in Sibu from September 9 to 13.

Held at Alpha Hub @ Lot 10 on August 21 and 22, the gathering brought together Archbishop Julian Leow of Kuala Lumpur, clergy, religious and laity for a final period of formation, listening and discernment, preparing not only for MPC2026 but for the mission ahead.

The gathering opened with a welcome by Gregory Pravin Rajah, a member of the Central Working Committee and ArchKL Secretariat. Gregory leads the *Perjalanan Salib* sub-committee in preparation for the national pastoral convention.

Reflecting on Isaiah's vision of the mountain of the Lord, Fr Dominic Tan, parish priest of the Church of the Holy Rosary, described the journey towards MPC2026 as a pilgrimage, with the Malaysian Church continually discerning how to renew itself, deepen communion and become more missionary. The *Perjalanan Salib*, journeying from one community to another, reflects this reality: the Church does not belong to any one community, but journeys together as one people.

Through the lens of joy, sorrow and hope, Fr Dominic noted the Church's growth in unity amid diversity, greater lay participation, stronger formation and ministries, and a growing culture of listening. Yet he also acknowledged challenges including uneven implementation, declining participation, shortage of priests, fragmentation and the danger of becoming inward-looking.



Archbishop Julian Leow blessing the MPC delegates.

Amid these realities, he expressed hope for a more synodal and missionary Church, renewed families and Catholics who can witness more prophetically to Malaysian society. Ultimately, he reminded delegates that the joys, sorrows and hopes of the Malaysian Church are held together by one conviction: the Holy Spirit has never abandoned the Church.

He ended with Christ's words in John 16:33: "Take courage! I have overcome the world," reminding delegates that there is no need to be afraid for Christ has already overcome the world.

The second input invited delegates to look at the Church's mission through four areas: **Family, Church, Ecology** and **Society**. As they prepare for MPC2026, delegates were encouraged to consider how the Church can respond to the realities faced by families and young people, strengthen its own communities, care for creation and engage a changing society. These reflections were guided by *Amoris Laetitia* and *Christus Vivit* on family and youth, *Evangelii Gaudium* on Church life and mission, *Laudato Si'* on care for creation, and *Fratelli Tutti* on social responsibility and the Church's role in the modern world.

The session also challenged delegates to examine the "silo mentality" within the Church, where ministries can become focused on their own goals rather than the shared mission of the wider Church. They were invited to identify one radical way to break down such barriers before presenting their ideas and concerns about the Malaysian Church.

Sr Mary Salomi Cruz (RGS), Province Leader of the Good Shepherd Sisters for the Singapore-Malaysia region, led the session *Preparing the Heart for the Conversation*. She introduced the Conversation in the Spirit (CIS), the spiritual approach that will guide MPC2026, encouraging delegates to move beyond debate and personal positions towards prayerful sharing, attentive listening and genuine dialogue. Through this process, delegates are invited to set aside their own agendas and discern how the Holy Spirit is calling the Malaysian Church forward.

Divided into 17 groups of four, delegates reflected on the question: "As I prepare to participate at MPC2026, what dreams do I have for MPC2026?" The conversation gave them space to listen to one another and discern their hopes for the national convention.

This call to preparation continued at Holy Mass at the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist, where Archbishop Julian Leow invited the faithful to reflect on who Jesus truly is and whether their lives reflect their belief in Him as Christ, the Son of the living God and Saviour of the world. Reflecting on Simon Peter, he reminded them that despite his weaknesses and failures, Peter was entrusted with the keys to the Kingdom because he was willing to repent and return to the Lord.

Like Peter, the Church is called to recognise its dependence on Christ rather than rely on its own strength or perfection. Archbishop Julian also highlighted the Church's mission of reconciliation and Christ's real presence in the Eucharist, urging the delegates to allow it to strengthen their faith, deepen their humility and help them reconcile with God and one another.

The gathering concluded with the commissioning of the MPC2026 delegates by Archbishop Julian.

Having spent four sessions reflecting, listening and discerning together, the delegates now turn towards Sibu ready to listen to the wider Malaysian Church, discern together and respond to the mission entrusted to them.

When racism deepens despair

As World Suicide Prevention Day is observed on September 10, consultant psychiatrist DR XAVIER V. PEREIRA reflects on the psychological cost of racism and the urgent need for schools, workplaces and society to confront discrimination.



News of a young person's death by suicide is deeply disturbing. The recent death of a 14-year-old Malaysian schoolgirl has therefore prompted grief, concern and difficult questions.

The girl's family alleged that she had experienced bullying and racial taunts at school. Her reported final message also conveyed hopelessness and distress over living in a racially polarised society. The family claimed that an earlier complaint had been made, while the authorities have since begun investigating the allegations of bullying and discrimination.

Until those investigations are completed, the circumstances surrounding her death should not be treated as established fact. Suicide is complex and seldom attributable to a single cause. Nevertheless, the case compels us to confront the psychological harm that racism, bullying and discrimination can inflict, particularly upon young people.

Understanding racism

Racism begins with the belief that some racial groups are superior to others. It manifests through prejudice, discrimination and the unfair treatment of people because of their race or ethnicity.

Prejudice involves forming an opinion about a person or community without sufficient knowledge or understanding. Discrimination occurs when that prejudice leads to unequal or unjust treatment based on characteristics such as race, religion, gender or age.

Whether expressed through insults, exclusion, harassment or unequal opportunities, racism violates a person's dignity and right to be treated fairly. From a religious perspective, it is also sinful because it denies the equal worth of every human person.

Racism may be individual, involving hostile words or actions, or institutional, when policies and practices consistently disadvantage certain racial groups. Experiences and allegations of both forms of discrimination remain part of Malaysian society and must be addressed honestly rather than dismissed or normalised.

Racism and mental health

Racism is a serious psychosocial stressor. Repeated discrimination can contribute to anxiety, depression and a diminished sense of self-worth. When racial abuse involves bullying, threats or psychological and physical violence, it may also produce trauma-related symptoms.

A person affected by post-traumatic stress disorder may experience nightmares, flashbacks, panic attacks, hypervigilance and avoidance of places or situations associated with the trauma.

I have treated teenage students who developed symptoms of PTSD after being bullied at school. Some experienced panic attacks when attempting to enter the school compound, leading to absenteeism or school refusal. They required psychological and behavioural interventions, sometimes combined with medication, to overcome their distress. Many were from ethnic minority communities.

Racial discrimination is also experienced in the workplace. I have treated employees from different ethnic backgrounds who reported harassment or unfair treatment by superiors. Such situations can create severe and prolonged stress, particularly when employees fear retaliation or believe that making a complaint will threaten their careers.

In these cases, advocacy is important. Human resource departments and organisational leaders must be alerted and urged to act. Workplace policies are meaningless if employees do not feel safe reporting discrimination or if complaints are ignored.

Being trapped in an abusive situation can intensify feelings of helplessness. When helplessness develops into hopelessness, the risk of self-harm and suicide may increase. This is why racism must be recognised not only as a social or political problem, but also as a mental health concern.

Changing the narrative

World Suicide Prevention Day is observed annually on September 10. Its theme for 2024 to 2026 is *Changing the Narrative on Suicide,* with the call to action, "Start the Conversation". It encourages society to replace silence, stigma and misunderstanding with openness, empathy and support. World Health Organisation, International Association for Suicide Prevention.

These conversations must include racism and its impact on mental health. This will not be easy because racial attitudes have become ingrained in many areas of Malaysian society. Race continues to influence politics, public policies and social relationships.

Changing this reality requires courage and integrity from political, religious and community leaders. It also requires ordinary Malaysians to examine their own prejudices and recognise how seemingly casual remarks, jokes or assumptions can wound and exclude others.

Teachers and lecturers have a particularly important responsibility. Educators must be trained to recognise bullying and discrimination, respond effectively to complaints and understand how sustained stress affects students' mental health.

When a student reports racial abuse, the concern must be taken seriously and investigated promptly. Telling the student to ignore it, toughen up or regard it as harmless teasing may deepen their sense of isolation. Silence can leave the victim feeling that the institution is protecting the aggressor instead.

Schools and universities should also provide accessible counselling and clear channels through which students can seek help without fear. Early psychological support can reduce distress and prevent a crisis from escalating.

Workplaces have a similar duty. Employee assistance programmes, counselling services and fair complaint procedures can give distressed employees access to support. Managers and human resource personnel must be equipped to identify harassment and intervene before prolonged stress develops into a serious mental health disorder.

Encounters can overcome prejudice

Racism and discrimination can also be challenged by creating safe spaces for honest dialogue.

As an educator, I developed an activity exploring discrimination based on race, religion and gender. At the beginning of their psychiatry posting, medical students were asked to sit beside someone of a different race, religion and gender and then reflect on their thoughts and feelings.

Most responded positively, although some admitted to initial discomfort. As they spoke and listened to one another, that discomfort gradually diminished. The exercise showed that prejudice can be challenged when people move beyond assumptions and encounter one another as human beings.

Education against racism cannot consist only of slogans and policies. People must be given opportunities to listen, question their assumptions and build relationships across racial and religious boundaries.

From conversation to action

Many suicides can be prevented, but prevention demands shared responsibility. Families, schools, workplaces, religious communities and public institutions must learn to recognise distress, listen without judgement and help people obtain professional support.

Changing the narrative means making it safe for people to speak about suicidal thoughts. It also means confronting the conditions that deepen despair — including racism, bullying, discrimination and institutional indifference.

We must not wait until another life is lost before taking a complaint seriously. Every report of bullying or discrimination deserves careful attention. Every person experiencing distress deserves to be heard, protected and supported.

Let us work to prevent self-harm and suicide. At the same time, let us confront the racism that wounds human dignity and leaves some people feeling that they do not belong in their own country. Our differences should never become weapons used against one another. They should lead us towards understanding, respect and a society in which every person knows that their life has value.



Listening to women at the margins

Elizabeth Harding

KUALA LUMPUR: Gender-based violence is not always visible. It may take the form of physical or emotional abuse, but for women living on the margins, it can also be woven into unequal wages, exploitative working conditions, insecure immigration status and the barriers that prevent them from speaking out or seeking help.

These realities came into focus during *A Conversation with Tenaganita,* organised by the Women Ministry of the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development (AOHD) at Cahayasuara Auditorium on August 22.

The session brought together parishioners and community members from across the Klang Valley, including Afghan refugees and members of the Rohingya and wider migrant communities. It offered participants an opportunity to understand the experiences of women in Malaysia's plantation, migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking communities.

Glorene Das of Tenaganita began by broadening the understanding of gender-based violence. Wage disparities and the fear of speaking out — especially when a woman's employment or immigration status may be at risk — are also expressions of injustice, she said.

She explained that Tenaganita means "women's force". Although the organisation works with women from vastly different circumstances, their struggles are often shaped by overlapping inequalities. Its work, she stressed, is not confined to documenting hardship, but also seeks to recognise women's strength and their capacity to rebuild their lives.

Manggalam Panjasaram, Tenaganita's project manager, spoke about women working in Malaysia's palm oil and plantation communities. They include mainly Indian women in Peninsular Malaysia, as well as migrant and Indigenous women in Sabah and Sarawak.

For many, the working day begins before dawn and involves hours of physically demanding labour, including carrying fertiliser and handling pesticides. Some chemicals, she said, remain in use despite having been officially banned. Protective equipment can be difficult to wear for extended periods in Malaysia's heat, while even basic facilities such as toilets may be unavailable on plantation grounds.

These women carry responsibilities in their homes, workplaces and communities, yet are frequently excluded from decisions that affect their lives. Those experiencing domestic violence may face further risks if they speak out, including the loss of employment or additional harm.

"Yet when I look at them and how they put on a brave face in all the adversity, it inspires me to be strong," Manggalam said.

Puan Maslina Abu Hassan, Tenaganita's programme manager for the Anti-Trafficking in Persons programme, highlighted the challenges confronting migrant domestic workers, who make up most of the organisation's caseload. They come primarily from Indonesia, as well as the Philippines, Cambodia, Thailand, Sri Lanka and India.

She challenged the use of terms such as "maid" or "bibik", which can diminish a person's dignity. Calling them "domestic workers", she said, acknowledges that what they do is legitimate work deserving of fair treatment and protection.

Confiscated passports, coercion, trafficking and the denial of legally entitled rest days remain common. Yet most domestic workers seek something simple: stable, respectful and long-term employment. Change can begin with two basic acts of justice — paying workers on time and respecting their weekly rest days.

Katie Fung, project lead, and Sarah Jane, programme officer, turned the discussion towards refugees and asylum seekers, including those from Myanmar, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

For people who have already endured displacement, the absence of secure legal status can deepen their vulnerability to child marriage, verbal abuse, trafficking and economic exploitation. Without recognised documentation or adequate protection, survivors often face immense barriers when attempting to report violence or seek assistance.

Masuma, a leader within the Afghan community, stressed the importance of listening and creating safe spaces, even when language differences make communication difficult. Feroza, who works with the Myanmar Muslim and Rohingya community, explained that



trusted community leaders often become the first point of contact for survivors.

Sarah Jane outlined the principles of a survivor-centred approach: safeguarding confidentiality, obtaining informed consent and respecting the survivor's right to decide what happens next. Not every case can or should be reported to the police, she explained, particularly when the survivor is undocumented.

"The role of organisations like Tenaganita is not to decide what is best for a survivor, but to ensure they have what they need to make that decision for themselves," she said.

When asked what sustained them in their work, the panellists returned repeatedly to the resilience they witnessed in the women they accompanied. Katie spoke of their determination to carry on each day. Maslina expressed her desire to continue serving through God's strength and grace. At the same time, Manggalam reflected on the women's refusal to surrender and their instinct to support one another, even amid hardship.

Yet resilience, Manggalam stressed, must not be used as an excuse to speak on behalf of women. Genuine empowerment means giving them the space and opportunity to speak for themselves — and ensuring that their voices are heard.

The panellists also reflected on Tenaganita's wider contributions, from helping women organise into unions to co-drafting Malaysia's Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act and Domestic Violence Act. Alongside these national efforts are quieter victories that seldom make the headlines but can transform individual lives.

Closing the session, Glorene invited everyone present to recognise Christ in each person, especially those pushed to the margins — migrants, refugees and survivors of exploitation.

She also recalled the legacy of Tenaganita's founder, the late Irene Fernandez, whose courage to speak the truth continues to shape the organisation.

"It is a value that should not remain within Tenaganita alone, but one that all of us can carry in our hearts," Glorene said.

In a room shared by parishioners, refugees, migrants, advocates and members of the public, the conversation became an invitation to look beyond labels and statistics to the dignity of each person.

Confronting gender-based violence begins with recognising injustice, but it cannot end there. It requires the courage to listen without judgement, to make room for survivors' voices and to stand beside them as they reclaim the freedom to shape their own lives.


(FMT photo)



(FMT photo)

Walking together in hope



Catholic Digest

Elvina Fernandez

Synodality has become a guiding light for the Church in our time. It is not simply a programme but a way of being Church: walking together, listening, discerning and acting as one Body in Christ.

Its real test is how it is lived in our parishes. Do we reach those who cannot reach us? Do we make room for younger leaders? Do we welcome those returning to the faith and listen to those who feel overlooked or excluded?

Going out to those who cannot reach us

Christ went to the sick, the poor, and those on the margins. A synodal parish must, therefore, extend itself beyond the church building.

Are we visiting the homebound, the elderly and sick who cannot attend Mass? Are we bringing them Holy Communion, the Word of God, and the companionship of the parish community?

When Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion and other pastoral ministers visit them, they carry an important message: "You still belong to us." Such visits also allow the parish to hear the struggles and hopes of those who might otherwise remain unseen.

A parish cannot claim to be welcoming if its welcome is available only to those able to walk through its doors.

Opening doors to new and younger leaders

Too often, parish ministry is marked by the familiar refrain: "I have been doing this since before you were born."

Experience is valuable, but it should be a gift handed on, not a position guarded. Those who have served faithfully can mentor younger leaders and allow them to contribute their ideas, energy, and creativity.

New leaders may do things differently. They may make mistakes and need guidance, just as previous generations did when they began. A welcoming parish gives them room to learn and grow.

Synodality does not push aside those who came before. It brings generations together, recognising that the Holy Spirit speaks through both, the wisdom of age and the vision of youth.

Embracing unity in diversity

We sometimes imagine unity as everyone speaking the same language or doing things in the same way. True synodality, however, honours our differences.

Pentecost did not erase different languages. The Holy Spirit enabled people to understand one another through them. Our cultures, languages and backgrounds need not divide us. Unity is not uniformity; it is different people learning to walk together as one.

This is what the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 hopes to embody when participants from all nine dioceses gather in Sibu. The *Perjalanan Salib,* which has journeyed through communities across the country, reminds us that we may come from different places yet share one faith and mission.

MPC2026 will have meaning only if its spirit returns home with the delegates, and its insights and hopes are translated into pastoral action.

Welcoming returning and new believers

We sometimes dismiss people as "Catholics on paper" because they seldom attend Mass. Before labelling them, perhaps we should ask: Did we look for them? Did our Basic Ecclesial Communities reach out? Did anyone listen to why they left?

Some carry hurt, disappointment or painful experiences of the Church. Reaching out cannot begin with blame; it must begin with listening.

When someone returns after years away, our response should be joy, not suspicion. A welcoming parish notices who is missing and reaches out — not to pressure or condemn, but to accompany and invite.

Mixed-faith families, parents struggling with their children's faith formation and those uncertain about returning should know that they are seen and valued. Inclusion is not simply assigning someone a role; it is helping them rediscover that they belong.

This requires patience. Those who have been away may need time, friendship and gentle accompaniment. A genuine welcome does not demand that they first prove themselves worthy.

Offertory as a sign of welcome

Even the offertory can express welcome. Inviting a mixed-faith couple to present the gifts together, where appropriate, affirms that the whole family is valued.

Likewise, parents struggling with their child's faith formation should be accompanied and encouraged to participate in parish life. Every thoughtful act of inclusion can become a witness to the Gospel.

Willingness to let go of old ways

Synodality also requires pastoral discernment. Rules and traditions have their place, but they must serve faith, reverence and human dignity.

I recall attending a parish feast when an aunty who felt faint asked for water. A hospitality minister insisted, "No drinking or eating in the church." Yet the woman needed help, so I brought her a cup of water.

This was not disrespect for sacred space. It was compassion. Christ healed on the Sabbath, reminding us that rules must never become an excuse for ignoring suffering.

A synodal Church does not abandon tradition whenever it becomes inconvenient. It understands the purpose behind what we do and responds with mercy when someone's wellbeing or dignity is at stake.

Seeking those who are missing

Many baptised Catholics become disengaged through hurt, misunderstanding or indifference. Rather than simply labelling them "inactive", a synodal parish reaches out, listens and invites them back into community life. It does not blame or condemn, but accompanies the hesitant, doubtful and wounded, helping them rediscover faith as a way of life.

Walking together in hope

Synodality is ultimately about relationships: listening to those who feel excluded, accompanying those who are uncertain and making room for seldom-heard voices. It also requires personal conversion. We cannot ask our parishes to become welcoming if we are unwilling to surrender control, change our attitudes or listen to experiences different from our own.

As MPC2026 approaches, our parishes should prepare not only by sending delegates to Sibu but by living synodality here and now. Who is missing from our community? Whose voice have we not heard? Who is waiting for an invitation?

A synodal Church is not one in which everyone agrees on everything. It is one in which no one is treated as though they do not matter. When we listen, welcome, accompany and make room for one another, we become a living witness to Christ's love.

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

Honouring Christ in every season



Stepping Stone

Anne Amaladasan

Life is a tapestry of highs and lows — moments of triumph and seasons of disappointment, days of joy and times of struggle.

As I reflect, I'm compelled to ask: at the end of each day, have I given glory to Christ only for the victories I celebrate, or also for the setbacks I endure?

The truth is that both belong to Him.

Victories belong to Christ

Every achievement is a testimony of His grace — the strength He imparts and the doors He opens. Success is never the product of our effort alone; it is the fruit of His favour. To give victory to Christ in moments of success is to humbly recognise that every good and perfect gift comes from above (James 1:17).

Think of the milestones we celebrate — sealing a business deal, passing exams, receiving a promotion at work, experiencing a breakthrough in ministry, restoring a relationship, cooking meals to nourish loved ones or preparing one to feed the hungry, or savouring the quiet victories of discipline and perseverance. Each of these reflects God's hand at work. When we crown Him with thanksgiving in these moments, we guard our hearts against pride and acknowledge that He is the source of all blessing. Gratitude in success keeps us rooted in humility, reminding us that our achievements are not ours to boast about but His to glorify.

Downtimes belong to Christ

Yet disappointments, too, are surrendered victories. When we lay our frustrations, failures, and unmet expectations at His feet, we declare that Christ is Lord even over what we cannot understand.

Disappointments are not wasted moments; they are classrooms of faith. They teach us dependence, patience, and trust. They remind us that our story is not finished, and that God is still writing chapters of redemption and restoration. He is the Author and Finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2), and because He holds the pen, we can rest assured that even the hardest seasons are part of a greater narrative of hope.

No matter how the scales tip between seasons of triumph and seasons of trial, each of us will face a unique ratio of victories and downtimes. Yet Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 4:8–9 remind us of a greater truth: 'We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.' These words anchor our faith, assuring us that God is faithfully carrying us forward. He is moving us from brokenness to wholeness, from sickness to health, from struggle to abundance, and from insecurity to confidence. His hand is guiding us from mediocrity to success, from missed opportunities to blessings that chase us down, and from loneliness to relationships overflowing with joy.

In every season — whether in joy or in sorrow, in triumph or in trial — God's promises remain unshaken.

Gratitude in all circumstances

Scripture calls us to a radical posture: "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Gratitude is not situational — it is foundational. It is easy to thank God when life is smooth, but true faith is revealed when we choose thanksgiving amid trials.

Gratitude transforms perspective. Instead of seeing setbacks as defeats, we begin to see them as opportunities for God's glory to shine. Instead of viewing delays as denials, we recognise them as divine timing. Gratitude shifts our focus from what we lack to the abundance of His presence.

God's covenant is steadfast

The journey of faith is not without obstacles — oftentimes neglecting spiritual disciplines, compromising on matters that seem small, losing focus amid distractions, or facing temptations that draw us away from God's blueprint.

Yet unlike human contracts that falter when details are overlooked, God's covenant is steadfast. He is faithful even when we stumble, and His promises remain true regardless of our circumstances.

From Abraham to David, from Paul to the early Church, Scripture resounds with the testimony of God's unwavering faithfulness. This truth calls us to honour Christ in every season — whether in moments of triumph or times of trial — because His promises remain firm and His presence never fails.

Conclusion

Christ's presence is not limited to times of joy — He is equally present in seasons of challenge, drought, or struggle. So, whether the day closes with joy or sorrow, success or setback, we give victory to Christ because His covenant is steadfast.

Let us honour Christ in every season — crowning Him with thanksgiving in our achievements and with trust in our disappointments — just as He faithfully cares for us in every season too.

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



Fr Ron Rolheiser

When are we home?

More than anything else, we long for home. Our deep ache for intimacy, security, and comfort is, in the end, a longing for home, nothing more. We are forever restlessly searching for someone or something to take us home.

But what is home? A family? A house? A city? A country? A lover? A language? An ethnic group?

Home transcends all of these. We can find a home in many different families, houses, cities, countries, ethnic groups, and languages, and we can be far from home in our own family, house, city, country, and/or ethnic group.



Home is a place in the heart, not a bloodline, building, city, or ethnicity. Home is that deep, fragile place inside us where we hold and guard what's most precious to us. It's that place where, in some dark way, we remember that once, before we came to awareness, we were caressed by hands far gentler than any we've met in this life and where we were once kissed by a truth and a beauty so perfect that they are now the unconscious standard by which we measure everything. Home is where things "ring true", where what's most precious to us is cherished, the place of tender conscience, of intimacy.

And we know when we're there and when we're not. Home is a gut feeling, a resting place, a goodness, a security that we sense or don't sense.

Sometimes people ask me: "How do I know that the love I have for a person is the kind of love that I can build a marriage on?" My answer: "Love is a mystery, and there are no guarantees; but ask yourself this: Does this person bring me home? Or is this a love, irrespective of how powerful and exciting it might feel, from which I need eventually to go home?"

There's a huge difference between sharing powerful feelings with someone and building a life and a home with him or her. There's a huge difference between an affair and a marriage, between having a honeymoon and building a life with someone. Many kinds of love make for a honeymoon, but only one kind takes us home.

And then, after we've found home, we still have the problem of staying there. This isn't meant literally, but in a deeper way. How?

In the Gospels, immediately after he denies Jesus, we are told that Peter "went outside". What's being described here isn't a simple physical movement, someone stepping through a door and going outside. What's meant is that Peter went outside of himself, outside of who he was, outside of his conscience, outside of his normal understanding of things. He "went outside" in the way a man "goes outside" when he goes to a singles' bar and hooks up with someone in a way that takes him "outside" of his normal moral realm.

And from that, he has to go home. Why? Because, like Peter, he has "gone outside".

What a person does in any morally schizophrenic act, in essence, takes him or her away from home (even if that act is done in his or her own house). Morally and psychologically, the act is done away from home. It's done "outside".

There's a crude joke that catches this. It asks: "What do promiscuous people do after they have sex?" The answer: "They go home!" That expresses a sad irony: Sex is not something from which we are ever meant to go home. It's meant to take us home, to constitute home. Intimacy is home, and if we need to go home from an experience, that's an infallible sign that what we've experienced isn't ultimately life-giving.

And this has huge implications for understanding life. In the Gospels, Jesus says: "To you (those inside the circle of understanding) are revealed the secrets of the Kingdom, but to those outside everything is in riddles." Who's "inside" and who's "outside" the circle of understanding? Who "gets" the secret and who doesn't "get" it?

"Getting" or "not getting" the secret is not a question of intelligence, learning, luck, or finding the right books or teachers. Rather, we are "inside" the circle of understanding and we "get" the Gospels when we are "at home", when we are true to what's deepest in us, when we are true to our consciences, when we don't morally "go outside" (as did Peter and as we do when we do acts that morally aren't true to who we are).

When we are morally faithful, we "get" the Gospel.

Conversely, we "don't get it" when we "go outside", outside morally, when we "leave home" by being unfaithful as Peter was.

And we know this truth from experience: When we're faithful, the Gospels make sense.

When we're unfaithful, almost immediately, we fill with objections, grow bitter, and begin to poke holes in truths we once believed.

T. S. Eliot once said, "Home is where we start from." It's also the place from which we understand what does or does not bring us life.

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***

Priests who carry us

We see them at the altar every Sunday, vested and ready, leading us through the familiar rhythms of Mass. We call them when life falls apart — when someone dies, a marriage breaks, or a child is in trouble — and we expect them to show up, steady and available. But how often do we stop to think about what their lives look like once they leave the sanctuary?

A priest's closest thing to a family is often the parish itself. He becomes a spiritual father to a community, carrying not just sacraments but other people's grief, confusion, guilt, and hope. That kind of life does not come with the ordinary comforts most of us rely on: home, privacy, shared responsibilities, and the quiet support of family at the end of a hard day.

Every morning, he celebrates the Eucharist, whether five people are in the pews or fifty. He hears confessions, visits the sick, brings communion to hospital rooms, and answers calls in the middle of the night when someone is dying and the family needs a priest now. This is not occasional work. It is the shape of his life. And while most of us can close the door on work and rest, a priest is often still on call long after everyone else has gone to sleep.

The financial side is modest, too. The collection basket does not support a priest in any ordinary sense. He usually lives on a small stipend meant to cover the basics — food, clothing, and transportation. When he needs a holiday, he often saves for it with gifts from friends or well-wishers, because there is no paid leave waiting for him. We expect him to be available for everyone, all the time, even when he is tired, sick, or worn down.

And just when he begins to know a parish well, he is often moved. Priests are reassigned regularly, usually after five to seven years, so they must leave behind relationships they have built and begin again somewhere else. They learn new names, new wounds, and new expectations. Through it all, they depend heavily on volunteers and laypeople who quietly keep parish life moving.

None of this excuses wrongdoing. When a priest abuses trust, mishandles money, or harms others, he must be held accountable. But we should not let the failures of a few erases the fidelity of the many. Too often, gossip does more damage than truth does good. A careless remark in the parking lot or over coffee can spread far beyond what is fair or accurate, leaving a priest judged before he is truly known.

Priests are vulnerable in ways we rarely notice. Many live alone, with little company when they are lonely, unwell, or discouraged. Think of Father Stan Swamy, the Jesuit priest who suffered and died in custody in his eighties, weakened by Parkinson's disease and denied even basic dignity. His story is painful, but it also reminds us how easily priests can be overlooked when they need care themselves.



(nbvmseic photo)

Imagine getting a call at two in the morning to go to a dangerous neighbourhood and anoint someone who is dying. Imagine getting out of bed, driving through the dark, returning home near dawn, and then celebrating Mass an hour later. Who checks on the priest when he is sick? Who sits with him when he is grieving? Who notices when he is carrying more than he can comfortably bear?

We can do better than admiration from a distance. Remember his birthday. Acknowledge his ordination anniversary. Invite him to dinner. Offer a ride. Sit with him when he seems troubled. If he makes a mistake, correct it without cruelty. If he is doing well, say so. These are small gestures, but they matter more than we think.

Think of the priests who have walked with you through life's most important moments: the one who baptised your children, heard your confession, witnessed your marriage, anointed your dying parent, or prayed with you when you had no words left. They carry those moments too, often quietly and without recognition. They give their lives in service. The least we can do is see them clearly, treat them kindly, and return some of the care they so freely give.

Our priests need us as much as we need them. That is not sentiment. It is simply the truth. **Fr John Singarayar SVD**

Fr John, *a member of the Society of the Divine Word, India–Mumbai Province, holds a doctorate in anthropology. He is the author of several books and a regular contributor to academic conferences and publications. His work focuses on sociology, anthropology, theology, philosophy, ecology, artificial intelligence, leadership, management, tribal studies, spirituality, and mission.*

LITTLE CATHOLIC'S CORNER

Dear children,

Imagine your best friend says something mean to you. What would you do? Would you shout back, ignore them or tell everyone what happened? In today's Gospel, Jesus teaches us a better way to deal with problems.

Jesus tells His disciples that when someone hurts us or does something wrong, we should talk to them privately and kindly first. Instead of embarrassing them or telling everyone else, we can explain how their actions made us feel. Sometimes, the person may realise their mistake and say sorry. When this happens, we have helped our friendship heal.

But what if they do not listen? Jesus tells us to ask a few trusted people for help. The important thing is that we should always try to solve problems with love, patience and peace, rather than anger or revenge.

Jesus also reminds us that we are never alone. Whenever two or three people gather together in His name, Jesus is there with them. This means that when we pray together, especially in a difficult situation, we can trust that Jesus is beside us.

So, the next time someone hurts your feelings, try not to shout or take revenge. Speak kindly and ask Jesus to help you make peace. And if a problem is too difficult to solve alone, do not be afraid to ask someone you trust for help. When we choose love and forgiveness, we follow Jesus' way.



Love, Aunty C

COLOUR THE PICTURE





PEACE DETECTIVE

Uh-oh! Friendship problems can happen. What should you do **FIRST?**

Read each situation and circle the best choice.

1 Jamie calls you "stupid" in front of the class.



A. Shout at him in front of everyone.



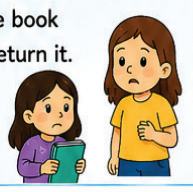
B. Tell the teacher right away.



C. Talk to him privately and calmly.



2 Your friend borrows your favourite book and doesn't return it.



A. Talk to her privately and kindly.



B. Tell your other friends what she did.



C. Ignore her and never talk to her again.



3 Your friend says she doesn't want to play with you anymore.



A. Ask your other friends to ignore her.



B. Talk to her privately and try to understand.



C. Get angry and say mean things back.



4 Someone takes your pencil without asking.



A. Grab it back and yell at him.



B. Talk to him privately and ask nicely.



C. Tell the whole class what he did.



5 You and your friend have a big argument at recess.



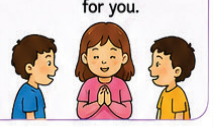
A. Stay angry and avoid him forever.



B. Talk to him privately and say sorry if needed.



C. Ask someone else to fix it for you.





Jesus teaches us to speak to the person privately and try to make peace.

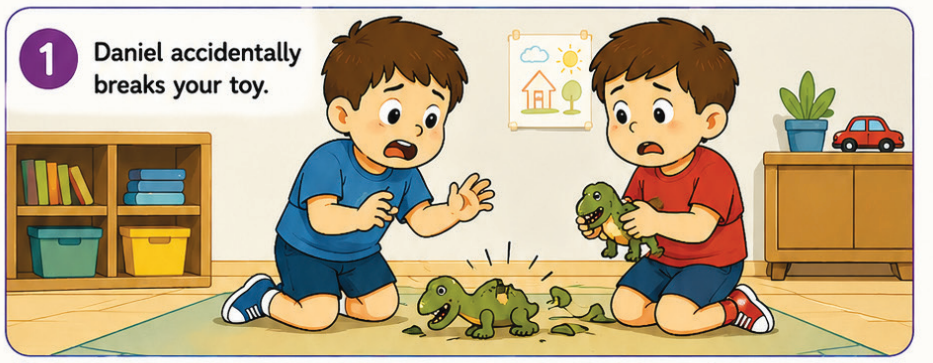


Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.
Matthew 18:20

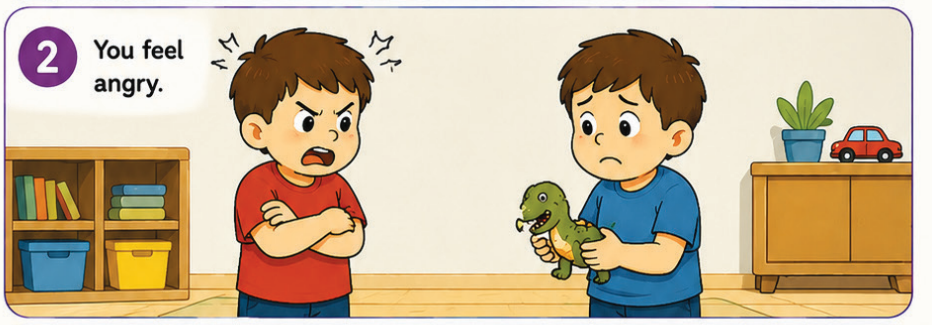
WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Read the story below. What should the boy say? Write your answer in the speech bubble in Panel 3.

1 Daniel accidentally breaks your toy.



2 You feel angry.



3 What do you say?



Choose one of the answers below or write your own kind words in the speech bubble above.

A. I hate you!

B. I'm going to punch you!

C. I'm upset. Can we talk about what happened?

JESUS TEACHES US...

to handle conflict peacefully, speak kindly, and try to make peace with others.



YOUTH



Young faithful walk in the LIGHT OF THE RISEN CHRIST

Christopher Siddharth

PENANG: With the *Salib* before them, children and teenagers at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit discovered that the journey of the Cross does not end at Calvary. It continues in the hope, peace and new life of the Resurrection — and in the way each Christian chooses to live.

The cathedral marked the final stage of the *Perjalanan Salib* through the Diocese of Penang with an opening Mass on July 13. In the days that followed, over 25 parish ministries and zones took turns organising prayer and worship sessions centred on the Salib.

As part of this shared journey, the Catechetical Education Committee organised para-liturgies for students, reflecting the synodal character of a parish in which every generation is invited to participate, pray and walk together.

Secondary school students gathered in the church for the Way of Light, a devotion recalling 14 encounters with the Risen Christ and the events that followed His Passion.

After learning about the significance of the *Perjalanan Salib* and the song *Bangkitlah*, the students reflected upon each station and considered how its message related to their daily lives. Personal prayer between the stations and their united responses expressed their faith and hope in the Risen Lord.

Preschool and primary school students later made their own Way of Light across the parish grounds, accompanied by catechists and parents.

The sight of the young children taking turns to carry the *Salib* was a simple but powerful expression of discipleship. At each station, catechists proclaimed a Scripture passage, offered a short reflection and guided the children through an action connected to its message.

Through these activities, the children learnt how the Risen Jesus brings hope where there is discouragement, peace where there is fear, forgiveness where there is hurt and new life where all seems lost. They were also reminded that Christ calls them to carry His light into the lives of others.

Their journey concluded inside the church, where the children spent time in silent prayer before the *Salib.* In their final prayer of commitment, they asked Jesus to give them eyes that notice those in need, ears that listen to the lonely, mouths that speak with kindness and truth, hands that readily serve, feet that follow Him and hearts that love as He loves.

The *Salib* may continue its journey beyond the cathedral, but its message remains with those who gathered around it. Every Christian has a personal *Perjalanan Salib* — a journey of carrying the hope of Christ into everyday encounters and allowing His light to reach others through acts of compassion, forgiveness and service.



Taking faith beyond the church doors

PORT DICKSON: Confirmation was not the end of a faith-formation programme for young people at the Church of the Immaculate Conception. It became the beginning of a deeper journey with Christ.

Just days after receiving the sacrament, the newly confirmed gathered from August 15 to 16 for an Alpha Youth weekend that invited them to explore questions about faith, purpose and God's love in an open and engaging setting.

The initiative grew from a vision of parish priest Fr Edwin Peter, who had organised a similar programme for Confirmation students in 2025. Encouraged by its impact, he wanted the latest group of confirmands to have a dynamic space in which they could encounter Christ personally and allow the gifts of the Holy Spirit to take root in their lives.

A team of Alpha Youth presenters travelled from Kuala Lumpur to facilitate the weekend. Through icebreakers, honest conversations, live presentations and video sessions, they encouraged the participants to ask questions, express their doubts and reflect upon what faith means in everyday life.

The programme's livelier moments created an atmosphere of friendship and openness, but it was during the prayer and ministry sessions that many participants experienced the weekend most deeply.

As they prayed for healing, renewal and empowerment, the young people encountered the grace of Confirmation as a living reality rather than simply something they had learnt about. Many emerged from the sessions with renewed joy, confidence and a stronger awareness of the Holy Spirit at work within them.

The shared experience also helped deepen bonds among the participants. They discovered that faith does not have to be lived alone but can grow within a community where young people pray for, encourage and accompany one another.

The weekend concluded with warm embraces, smiling faces and a renewed sense of belonging. The young people now return to their schools, friendships and daily routines with a challenge: to allow their encounter with Christ to shape the way they speak, choose, forgive and serve.

Confirmation sealed them with the Holy Spirit. The Alpha Youth weekend reminded them that the same Spirit now sends them forth — not merely as participants in a parish programme, but as joyful witnesses of Christ wherever life takes them.

Staying safe in the street and online

KUALA LUMPUR: A moment of distraction, an unfamiliar link or a poorly judged situation can expose a young person to danger. Learning to recognise the warning signs may prevent that danger from escalating.

With this in mind, the Parish of St Joseph, Sentul, organised a personal safety workshop titled *Crime: Avoid Being a Victim; Be a Survivor* in conjunction with the Feast of St Maximilian Kolbe.

Open to young people from Form Two to young adulthood, the interactive session equipped participants with practical knowledge to protect themselves against physical dangers and digital threats.

The workshop was facilitated by Master Saiful Hamiruzzaman Mohd Hazir, a personal safety, cyber-awareness and self-defence expert with experience in martial arts, criminology and crime prevention.

Through an engaging presentation, he introduced participants to situational awareness, practical self-defence concepts and strategies for navigating cyber risks. The young people were encouraged to remain alert to their surroundings, recognise potentially unsafe situations and think carefully before responding to threats online or offline.

The programme also challenged them to move away from passive vulnerability by becoming informed, prepared and resilient. Personal safety, they learnt, is not driven by fear, but by awareness, sound judgement and the confidence to act wisely.

Held around the feast of St Maximilian Kolbe — patron saint of prisoners and amateur radio operators — the workshop drew inspiration from his courage and willingness to protect another person at great personal cost.

His example reminded participants that vigilance should extend beyond protecting themselves. Young people can also help create safer communities by watching out for friends, speaking up about suspicious behaviour and seeking help when someone may be at risk.

The session concluded with participants better informed about personal security and the responsibility they share for one another's wellbeing. In a world where threats can emerge both on the street and through a screen, awareness can become the first line of defence. **Mary Low**



WHO ARE YOU?

Confirmands challenged to find their identity in Christ

MELAKA: Young people today are surrounded by voices telling them who they should be. At the Church of St Francis Xavier, 28 confirmands were reminded that their truest identity cannot be found in popularity, achievement or the expectations of others, but in a personal encounter with Christ.

The young people received the Sacrament of Confirmation during Mass on August 23, celebrated by Bishop Bernard Paul and concelebrated by assistant parish priest, Fr Devadasan Madala Muthu, and Fr Paulino Miranda.

The confirmands included seven young people from the Tamil-speaking community and two from Alor Gajah. Family members, friends and parishioners filled the church to accompany them as they took this important step in their journey of faith.

In his homily, Bishop Bernard used three striking biblical images from the day's readings — the peg, the rock and the key — to help the young people understand how God speaks and what He calls them to become.

From Isaiah came the image of a peg driven firmly into place, symbolising stability, reliability and the ability to support others. It invited the confirmands to ask whether their lives were firmly rooted in God and whether others could depend upon them.

St Paul's reflection in Romans pointed to the unfathomable depth of God's wisdom. It reminded them that they would not always understand God's ways, but could still trust the One whose knowledge and love reach far beyond their own.



In the Gospel, Peter recognised Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God". Jesus then spoke of the rock upon which He would build His Church and entrusted Peter with the keys of the Kingdom. The rock represented a faith grounded in truth, while the key symbolised trust, responsibility and the power to open doors for others.

Bishop Bernard challenged the confirmands not to settle for second-hand knowledge of God inherited from parents, catechists or friends. To discover who they truly are, they must come to know God personally and experience Him as He is.

Confirmation therefore called them to move from simply knowing facts about Jesus to building a living relationship with Him.

Anointed with Sacred Chrism and strengthened by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the newly confirmed were sent forth to live confidently as beloved children of God. Their faith must now be visible in the choices they make, the people they become and the way they treat others.

Reflecting on the celebration, Luke Maalan said he felt "lighter and completely renewed". Amelia described herself as truly blessed, adding that the experience encouraged her to "walk and live her faith fully".

The celebration ended, but the challenge Bishop Bernard placed before them remains: to stay anchored in Christ, discover their identity in Him and use the gifts of the Holy Spirit to become steady supports, firm witnesses and open doors through which others may encounter God.

FROM INHERITED BELIEF TO PERSONAL CHOICE

PETALING JAYA: "Today, it is you who say, 'Yes, I still want to be a Catholic.'"

With these words, Archbishop Julian Leow challenged 66 confirmands at the Church of St Ignatius (SIC) to take personal responsibility for the faith first professed on their behalf at Baptism.

The young people, including 15 from the Mandarin-speaking community, received the Sacrament of Confirmation on August 16. Archbishop Julian presided over the Mass, concelebrated by parish priest Fr Thomas Koo,CDD.

"I hope you know why you are receiving Confirmation today," the archbishop told them. "I hope it is not just because your friends are coming, or because you are simply following along and going through the motions."

At Baptism, he explained, their parents and godparents had professed the faith for them. Confirmation marked the moment when the candidates freely claimed that faith as their own.

Celebrated on the Solemnity of the Assumption, the Mass also offered the confirmands Mary as a model of humility, service and steadfast faith. Although honoured as Queen of Heaven, she always remained the humble servant of the Lord.

Recalling Mary's journey to assist her cousin Elizabeth, Archbishop Julian urged the young people to notice the needs of others and respond generously. He also encouraged them to seek Mary's intercession when faced with temptation, doubt and unanswered prayer.



Life's storms can make abandoning faith or compromising one's values appear tempting. Rather than running from difficult questions, however, the archbishop invited the confirmands to reflect upon their purpose and place in God's plan.

Faith, he said, must be chosen freely because genuine love cannot exist without freedom.

"If there were no choice, God could have programmed us always to obey Him," Archbishop Julian explained. "But that would not be love because there would be no free will."

Choosing God is therefore not a decision made once on Confirmation Day. It is a choice renewed through daily actions, relationships and priorities.

Before anointing the candidates with Sacred Chrism, the archbishop reminded them that Confirmation leaves a lasting spiritual mark.

"It is a sign that you are sealed with the Holy Spirit and that you belong to God," he said. "God does not want you to be lost, but to be with Him forever in Heaven."

He prayed that the gifts of the Holy Spirit – including wisdom, understanding, fortitude and fear of the Lord – would give them the courage to choose God each day, nourished and sustained by the Eucharist.

The celebration marked a decisive step from a faith received from others to one personally embraced. The challenge now is to live that "yes" beyond the church doors – not simply by calling themselves Catholic, but by allowing the Holy Spirit to shape how they think, choose, love and serve.

WYD Seoul 2027



Volunteering opportunities at WYD Seoul

Volunteering opportunities are available during the upcoming World Youth Day. Organisers anticipate about 30,000 volunteers, including 10,000 serving in central operations in roles such as pilgrim assistance, interpretation, event management, medical services and safety, along with 20,000 parish volunteers across the Archdiocese of Seoul.

So far, 378 volunteers, including foreign residents in South Korea and international long-term volunteers, are already involved in preparations. Registration for additional short-term volunteers in South Korea and abroad will begin alongside pilgrim registration in October. Organisers said volunteers will receive training and spiritual formation.



Youth ministers to visit Korea in September

About 250 Catholic youth ministry representatives from bishops' conferences around the world will travel to Seoul to get an introduction to Korean culture at the Second International Preparatory Meeting Sept 14-17.

The meeting, jointly organised by the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life and the World Youth Day organising committee, will coordinate planning to take into account the needs of international delegations, while giving the Catholic youth ministers a taste of Korean culture.

For young people still undecided about making the journey to Seoul for World Youth Day, Fr Kong's advice is simple: "Go and see."

"So many young people today are carrying real questions and anxieties about their lives and their futures. I would encourage them that this gathering could become a moment where they glimpse a light amid that," he said, adding that it is an opportunity "not only for believers, but also for young people without faith to encounter the presence of God."

He said the invitation reflects the World Youth Day 2027 theme, "Take courage, I have conquered the world" (John 16:33)." **OSV News**



East Tennessee diocese mourns Dolly Parton as 'one of our own'

TENNESSEE: The Diocese of Knoxville, is remembering the late Dolly Parton — whose career as a singer, songwriter, actress, businesswoman and philanthropist spanned decades — as "one of our own."

Bishop Mark Beckman said he was "very sorry to hear of her passing" and "praying for those who are mourning her loss."

"She made a wonderful contribution to our world and our community, and she will be greatly missed," said Bishop Beckman.

The 80-year-old Parton, whose many honours included 10 competitive Grammy Awards, a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award, and a National Medal of the Arts, died August 25 at Nashville's Vanderbilt-Ingram Cancer Centre, following what her representatives described as a "brief battle with cancer."

Her late husband of 58 years, Carl Thomas Dean — whom she met at a laundromat in 1964 on her first day in Nashville — died in 2025 at the age of 82.

Born in 1946 in Locust Ridge, Tennessee, Parton — the fourth of 12 children — was "a daughter of Sevier County," said the Diocese of Knoxville in an Aug 26 statement.

Parton spoke candidly about the poverty she and her family had experienced, as well as the faith and the musical gifts they shared in the heart of Appalachia.

Dolly Parton 'never hid her faith'

As a child, she sang in both church and on television, even debuting at the Grand Ole Opry — the self-described "mother church of country music" — in 1959 when she was just 13.

"Dolly was born and raised in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains," said the Diocese of Knoxville in its statement. "She first sang in a small Pentecostal church, long before the world knew her name. She never hid her faith. It showed up in the hymns she recorded across six decades, in how openly she talked about God."

Parton's choir-backed cover of Don Francisco's song *He's Alive* — which recounts the Resurrection from Peter's perspective — galvanised fans at the 1989 Country Music Awards, with Parton often performing and posting the song on social media over the years.

As she ascended in the entertainment industry — finding success in the fields of country and pop music, developing a film career, launching multiple business enterprises and supporting numerous charitable efforts — Parton's impact spread.

"Her life carried the spirit of our mountain home far beyond the Smokies," said the Diocese of Knoxville in its statement.

Dolly Parton 'shaped by these hills and these churches'

In particular, the diocese noted Parton's Imagination Library, which began in 1995 as an effort to provide books to children in Sevier County and now delivers free books to kids throughout the US, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Ireland. As of 2025, the library had distributed close to 305 million books in total.

Parton had launched the effort in honour of her father, a sharecropper who had never learned how to read or write.

"East Tennessee knew Dolly Parton as more than a world-famous star," said the diocese. "We knew her as one of our own. She was shaped by these hills and these churches. Her life shows what can grow from faith, perseverance, imagination, and love for one's neighbours — even from humble beginnings." **OSV News**

MEMORIAM

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Dear God, in Your infinite love and mercy, embrace the soul of my departed loved one. Let them find peace in Your divine presence, free from earthly struggles and pain. May their journey in the afterlife be filled with tranquility and light. Comfort our hearts with the assurance of their peaceful rest in Your eternal kingdom. Amen.



4th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of

PHILIP ANTHONY A/L JOSEPH

Born: 30.9.1960
Departed: 6.9.2022

Our thoughts are forever with you,
Though you have passed away, But those who loved you dearly are thinking of you today.
Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord.
And let perpetual light shine upon him.
May his soul rest in peace. Amen.

Deeply missed and fondly remembered by
Loving Wife, Children, Grandchildren
and all your loved ones.



11th Year Memorial

Peter Devarraj

Departed: 1.9.2015

Not a day goes by
that we do not think of you.
Your love, your kindness,
your laughter, and
the memories we shared
remain forever
precious to us.
You may be gone
from our sight,
but you will never be gone
from our hearts.

Always loved.
Deeply missed.
Never forgotten.

Loving Wife, Children,
Family & Friends.

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In Loving Memory of



Emmanuel Devarayan Nathan
4th July 1922 – 29th March 1990

Philomena Rao Nathan
24th April 1932 – 7th September 2025

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the most high
Will rest in the shadow of the almighty
I will say of the Lord
"He is my refuge and my fortress,
My God in whom I trust." – Psalm 91:1-2

A beautiful memory left behind



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Unity in diversity is Malaysia's strength



KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysians must remain vigilant against divisive forces, narrow perspectives and extremist ideologies that could fracture the nation's unity and threaten its shared future, the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) said in its 2026 *Merdeka* and Malaysia Day message.

In the greeting dated August 26, CFM reflected on the significance of the two national celebrations. *Merdeka* Day commemorates the country's freedom from colonial rule and its journey towards nationhood, while Malaysia Day recalls the formation of Malaysia and the shared identity that emerged from it.

"Regardless of ethnicity, religion or historical background, we are all Malaysians — one people, bound together as one nation," it said.

That common identity, CFM added, carries a responsibility to build a united society that serves the good of every Malaysian. The country's cultural and religious diversity, strong social fabric and abundant resources, are gifts entrusted to its people for the prosperity, wellbeing and flourishing of all.

CFM stressed that unity should not be confused with uniformity. Malaysia's strength lies in the ability of its people to respect, celebrate and work alongside one another while retaining their respective identities, cultures and beliefs.

"This is what makes Malaysia special," it said.

The Federation cautioned Malaysians against taking the nation's distinctiveness and blessings for granted. What has been received, it warned, can be lost if citizens fail to cherish and protect it.

As Malaysians continue their observance of the national celebrations, CFM encouraged them to display the *Jalur Gemilang* in their homes, workplaces and houses of worship as a visible expression of their shared belonging.

It also called upon citizens to continue walking "hand in hand" and building a nation founded upon mutual respect, unity, justice and peace.

The Christian Federation of Malaysia comprises the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia (CBCM), the Council of Churches of Malaysia (CCM) and the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship Malaysia (NECF).

The message was signed by CFM chairman Rev Dr Eu Hong Seng and vice-chairmen Bishop Datuk Danald Jute, Archbishop Julian Leow and Bishop Ong Sek Leang.

CFM concluded by wishing all Malaysians a blessed and meaningful *Merdeka* Day and Malaysia Day.

"Selamat Hari Merdeka and Selamat Hari Malaysia!"

Church must help families wounded by addiction



VATICAN: Pope Leo XIV has urged the Church to accompany families suffering from drug abuse, violence and poverty, stressing that strong family life offers the best protection against addiction.

Addressing participants at a meeting on Addiction in Latin America, organised by the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, the Pope acknowledged those working in faith-based centres to prevent drug abuse and support the recovery and reintegration of young people.

Noting that participants came from Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas, he said "suffering and hope know no borders".

Pope Leo identified four "bridges" needed in the response to addiction: cooperation between the Church and international organisations; dialogue between faith and science; collaboration across continents; and joint action among Christian communities.

He highlighted the commission's collaboration with the Organisation of American States and the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops' Council (CELAM) in training those serving in faith-based community organisations.

The Church, he said, does not seek to compete with neuroscience, psychiatry or public health, but to complement their work with an integral understanding of the human person.

"She seeks to shed the light of the Gospel upon it through an integral understanding of the human person," he said.

The Pope placed the family — the "domestic Church" — at the heart of efforts to combat addiction.

"The family is the place where life is nurtured, cared for and given direction. There is no better protection against drugs than a good family," he said.

Recalling Pope Francis' call for the Church to "touch human misery" and "the suffering flesh of others", Pope Leo said many families were being torn apart by drug use, violence, criminal recruitment, poverty and a lack of opportunity.

"Today, we witness the suffering of many broken families," he said, calling the Church to stand close to those pushed to society's margins. **Vatican News**



Pope Leo XIV meets with participants in the meeting promoted by the Pontifical Commission for Latin America. (Vatican Media)

Cardinal Bo urges ban on autonomous weapons

ITALY: Cardinal Charles Maung Bo of Yangon has called for a binding international ban on fully autonomous lethal weapons, warning that artificial intelligence (AI) must not replace human conscience in decisions over life and death.

Addressing Christian leaders and lawmakers in Assisi on August 24, Cardinal Bo said machines could neither comprehend the consequences of killing nor recognise the sacred value of human life.

"A machine cannot possess a right intention; it cannot comprehend grief, mercy or the sacred value of a human life. It can only execute statistical optimisation," he said.

Speaking during discussions on human dignity, AI and Christian peace-making, the cardinal warned that the technology was becoming increasingly linked to military power and geopolitical rivalry.

"AI is becoming a swift weapon in the hands of the wealthy and the powerful, perpetuating unending wars and leaving thousands in misery," he said.

He placed the rejection of automated warfare first among three pillars for Christian leadership: "No War", "Peace for All" and "Prosperity for All".

Cardinal Bo also cautioned that unchecked AI could deepen political polarisation, surveillance and economic inequality, while concentrating power among governments and technology companies.

Urging lawmakers to impose safeguards and demand transparency from technology firms, he said: "Reject the automation of human slaughter, and ensure that technology remains entirely subservient to the magnificent humanity that God has entrusted to our care." **LiCAS News**



OpenAI, 3rd Street, San Francisco, CA, USA No Autonomous Weapons (Unsplash photo/Nathan Kuczmarski on)

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