

VOCATIONS SUNDAY, MAY 11, 2025

Pope Francis releases his final message for the World Day of Prayer for Vocations

Pilgrims of Hope: The Gift of Life



Dear sisters and brothers

On this, the 62nd World Day of Prayer for Vocations, I wish to extend to you a joyful and encouraging invitation to become pilgrims of hope by generously offering your lives as a gift.

A vocation is a precious gift that God sows in our heart, a call to leave ourselves behind and embark on a journey of love and service. Every vocation in the Church, whether lay, ordained or consecrated, is a sign of the hope that God has for this world and for each of his children.

Nowadays, many young people feel dismayed as they look to the future. Often, they experience insecurity about their prospects of employment and a profound identity crisis, a crisis of meaning and values, which the confused messages of the digital world only aggravate. The unjust treatment of the poor and vulnerable, the indifference of a complacent and self-centred society, and the brutality of war all threaten the hopes for a fulfilling life that young people cherish in their hearts. Yet the Lord, who knows the human heart, does not abandon us in our uncertainty. He wants us to know that we are loved, called and sent as pilgrims of hope.

We, the adult members of the Church, and priests in particular, are called to acknowledge, discern and accompany the young on their vocational path. You, young people, for your part, are called to set out on that path, together with the Holy Spirit, who awakens in you the desire to make your lives a gift of love.

Embracing our specific vocation

Dear young people, “your youth is not an ‘in-between time.’ You are the now of God” (*Christus Vivit*, 178). Realise that the gift of life calls for a generous and faithful response. Look to the young saints and blessed who responded joyfully to the Lord’s call: St Rose of Lima, St Dominic Savio, St Therese of the Child Jesus, St Gabriel of Our Lady of Sorrows, the soon-to-be canonised saints Blessed Carlo Acutis and Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, among many others. They experienced their vocation as a path towards true happiness through friendship with the risen Lord. Whenever we listen to Jesus’ words, our hearts burn within us (cf. Lk 24:32) and we feel the desire to consecrate our lives to God. Naturally, we want to find the way of life that will

best allow us to return the love with which he loved us first.

Every vocation, once perceived in the depths of the heart, gives rise to an impulse to love and service, as an expression of hope and charity, rather than a means of self-promotion. Vocation and hope go together in God’s plan for the happiness of each man and woman, all of whom are called by name to give their lives for others (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 268). Many young people seek to know the path God is calling them to take. Some find, often to their surprise, that they are called to the priesthood or to the consecrated life. Others discover the beauty of the call to marriage and family life, to the pursuit of the common good and to a life of witness to the faith among their friends and acquaintances.

Every vocation is inspired by hope, marked by confident trust in God’s providence. For Christians, hope is more than mere human optimism: it is a certainty based on our faith in God, who is at work in each of our lives. Vocations mature through the daily effort to be faithful to the Gospel, and through prayer, discernment and service.

Dear young friends, hope in God does not disappoint, because at every step of the way He accompanies those who entrust their lives to Him. Our world needs young people who are pilgrims of hope, who courageously devote their lives to Christ and rejoice in being His disciples and missionaries.

Discerning our vocational path

The discovery of our vocation comes about as the result of a journey of discernment. That journey is never solitary, but develops within a Christian community and as a part of that community.

Dear friends, the world pushes you to make hasty decisions and bombards you with a constant blare that prevents you from experiencing a silence that is open to God who speaks to the heart. Have the courage to pause, to listen to what your heart tells you, and to ask God about His dreams for you. The silence of prayer is indispensable if we are to learn how to hear God’s call amid the specific circumstances of our lives and to respond consciously and freely.

Prayerful recollection helps us to realise that all of us can be pilgrims of hope if we make our lives a gift, above all by placing ourselves at the service of those who live on

the world’s material and existential peripheries. Those who heed God’s call cannot turn a deaf ear to the cry of so many of our brothers and sisters who feel excluded, wounded and abandoned. Every vocation confirms us in our mission of being Christ’s presence wherever light and consolation are most needed. In a particular way, the lay faithful are called to be the “salt, light and leaven” of the Kingdom of God through their social and professional commitments.

Accompanying vocations

Consequently, pastoral ministers and vocation directors, especially spiritual directors, should readily accompany young people with the hope, patience and trust that reflect God’s own “pedagogy.” They should be capable of listening to them respectfully and sympathetically, and show themselves trustworthy, wise and helpful guides, ever attentive to discerning the signs of God’s presence in their journey.

I urge that every effort be made to foster vocations in the various spheres of human life and activity, and to help individuals to be spiritually open to the Lord’s voice. It is important, then, that adequate space be given to the accompaniment of vocations in educational and pastoral planning.

The Church needs pastors, religious, missionaries and spouses capable of saying “yes” to the Lord with trust and hope. A vocation is never a treasure stored away in the heart; rather, it grows and is strengthened within a community that believes, loves and hopes. No one can respond to God’s call alone, for all of us need the prayers and support of our brothers and sisters.

Dearly beloved, the Church is alive and fruitful when she generates new vocations. Our world looks, often unknowingly, for witnesses of hope who proclaim with their lives that following Christ is a source of true joy. Let us never tire, then, of asking the Lord for new labourers for His harvest, certain that with great love He continues to call them. Dear young people, I entrust your efforts to follow the Lord to the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church and Mother of vocations. Keep walking as pilgrims of hope on the path of the Gospel! I accompany you with my blessing and I ask you, please, to pray for me.

Rome, Policlinico A. Gemelli, March 19, 2025.

Franciscus

A seminarian's journey ... from Malta to Malaysia

IPOH: Daniel Abela, a fourth-year seminarian from Malta, stayed at the parish of St Michael for three months, from February 2025. Daniel was here to be exposed to the Malaysian Catholic Church, after having spent three months in Kuching and another three months in Taiwan.

Daniel found the Church in Malaysia very different from the Church in Malta. "In Malta, 95 per cent of the population is Catholic. There are churches everywhere and also the Church is an intrinsic part of the culture," he said.



Prior to entering the Diocesan Seminary in the Archdiocese of Malta, Daniel had worked in IT-related jobs for 15 years and led a very comfortable life. He even had two sports cars in his possession and used to play video games for at least 20 hours a day. A pilgrimage to the Holy Land changed his outlook on life. Going through a long period of discernment, he decided that the emptiness in his life could only be filled if He surrendered to the Lord's will. Even the parish activities that he was involved in from young was not fulfilling enough.

At the age of 34, he gave up his worldly life and material possessions when he entered the seminary to become a diocesan priest. His family was very supportive of his decision. In fact, his family did not find it very surprising when he told them of his decision.

Treasuring the experience of the pastoral work he had undertaken in the past nine months, Daniel shared, "In Kuching, there was the missionary dimension of the Church - physically going out to the periphery to communities who thirst for the presence of the priest who visits them once a month.

In Taiwan, being daily with sick people was a very enriching experience as I learned to meet Christ in their situation and their own person.



In Ipoh, I could put into practice what I had learnt in my three years as a seminarian and my previous parish experience.

Generally, these Asian experiences help me to understand more the culture and the faith of Asian people who are now more present in Malta. I can more easily relate to their spiritual needs and give them the pastoral care they need when I go back home and become a priest."

While at St Michael's church, besides accompanying Fr Aloysius Tan, the parish priest, on his numerous engagements, amiable Daniel also got to know the parishioners and spent time with many of them in the different ministries of the parish. He gave introductory sessions on the Bible to parishioners during the season of Lent. He also

visited many of the catechism classes and shared his faith experiences with the children. "While learning about and enjoying particular aspects of the Malaysian Church, I have learned to appreciate my own Church back home," reminisced Daniel.

In sharing his spiritual practices that are most helpful in deepening his spiritual life, Daniel shared, "I like lots of silence. It helps me to reflect about many things and also be easily present to God and others. Daily holy hour in front of the Eucharist is also a must."

If all goes well, Daniel will be ordained in 2028. We pray that he will continue to be strengthened by God's care and love, and will be a true and faithful servant of God in his vocation. **Jennifer Duarte**

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Just as the Israelites wandered in the desert for forty years, so too has my life been a forty-year journey of soul-searching. Now, at 53 years old, I can see clearly how God has been gently and persistently guiding me toward His plan.

I was born and raised a cradle Catholic, but for many years, I didn't live out my faith. As a teenager, I drifted away — drawn by the allure of lust, comfort, and the pleasures of a worldly life. Then came a moment of grace that changed everything: I encountered the story of St. Francis of Assisi. His transformative call to “repair the Church” stirred something deep within me.

Compelled by this inspiration, I began to seek God in earnest. I started attending daily Mass, reading Scripture, and spending time in silent prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. It was during one of those quiet moments that I heard God speak to my heart through the words of Isaiah 43:1: “I have called you by name. You are mine. Do not be afraid.”

That moment brought me to tears, for three days I wept with a repentant heart, overwhelmed by peace and the love of God. I had fallen in love with Him and, for the first time, felt an overwhelming desire to serve the Church. I became a catechist and immersed myself in parish life. My spiritual transformation was beyond words.

A Call Deferred, But Not Denied

I began sensing a call to the priesthood. However, with my father nearing retirement, I felt a responsibility to care for my family as the eldest son. I chose to find stable work and viewed my job in government service as a blessing from God. That job took me around the world — flying business class, staying in five-star hotels, and networking with high-level officials and business leaders.

And yet, in the midst of success and lux-

You did not choose me, I chose you



Celebrating mass with the parishioners of Gereja Roh Kudus in Sook, Keningau in March 2025.

ury, something essential was missing. There was no deep sense of fulfillment — no “yes, this is it.” That moment finally arrived unexpectedly while I was stationed in Myanmar.

A Burmese priest, Fr. Gregory Thin, invited me to a hilltop village to attend a priestly ordination. I had never experienced anything like it: 100 priests, 600 faithful, all gathered in joy and reverence. There, in that holy moment, God again whispered to my heart: “You did not choose me, but I chose you. Go and bear fruit.” (John 15:16)

The calling I had once postponed resurfaced with clarity. I turned to Fr Gregory and told him, “I too want to be a priest.” He replied, “Nothing can hold back God's choice. You can be His choice, for nothing is impossible with God.”



Newly ordained Fr Jonathan Rao giving the Body of Christ to his mother.

Those words gave me hope and joy. Within a week, I submitted my application for early retirement after nearly 20 years of service. My resignation was approved without resistance. I left my job in November 2015, at the age of 43.

A Journey of Formation

In December 2015, I reached out to several priests in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur. Guided by their counsel, I began discerning with the Capuchin religious order at the Church of St Francis of Assisi in Cheras. With the support of the parish priest, Fr Andrew Manikam OFM Cap, and the Capuchin vocation director, Fr David Reagan OFM Cap, I entered their postulancy program in January 2016.

After a year of formation, I discerned that I was called not to the religious order, but to diocesan priesthood. His Grace, Archbishop Julian Leow, accepted my application in January 2017.

From there, I began seminary formation at College General in Penang, completing my philosophy studies over two years. In 2019, I was sent to the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Puchong for pastoral exposure and Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), ministering to patients at Assunta Hospital.

In 2020, I continued my theological studies at St. Peter's Major Seminary in Kuching. After completing my formation in May 2024, I was assigned to the Church of St. Jude, Rawang, and ordained a deacon there on July 20, 2024. Later that year, on October 1, I was reassigned to the Cathedral of St John.

During a priestly recollection in

November 2024, the archbishop joyfully announced my priestly ordination scheduled for January 25, 2025, at the Church of St Francis of Assisi, coinciding with the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul. Praise God!

“Do Whatever He Tells You”

Throughout my formation journey, one Scripture line became my anchor: “Do whatever He tells you.” (John 2:5)

Like the Blessed Virgin Mary, who lived in full obedience to God's will, I learned to say “yes” daily — yes in joy, yes in trials, and yes in surrender. Seminary life shaped me in every way: humanly, spiritually, intellectually, pastorally, and communally.

I drew strength from Scripture and the Eucharist. God revealed His presence through formators, lecturers, seminarians, parishioners, priests, religious, friends, and even strangers. Every encounter helped me grow in self-awareness and in my understanding of God's call.

God's grace guided every step, helping to purify my intentions, deepen my prayer life, understand the Church's teachings, and serve others with humility and love.

The Servant Priest

Though unworthy, I responded to God's invitation. I envisioned my priesthood modelled on the servanthood of Christ: “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.” (Matthew 20:28)

God, in His perfect timing, called me. And I, in my imperfection, chose to follow.

Fr Jonathan Rao serving as assistant parish priest at the Church of St Jude, Rawang



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A life for Christ

Novina Bildram was born on March 3, 1997, at Queen Elizabeth II Hospital. She is the fifth of nine children born to Bildram Omar Ullap and Ancelicia Boulis Jomilo, with five sisters and three brothers.

Drawn to the Catholic Faith

Though her parents were not Catholic, Novina often accompanied her devout grandmother to church. It was during a retreat that she met Sr Maria Colette, PKARM, of the Daughters of Carmel. Seeing the brown-habited sisters radiate such joy left a lasting impression on young Novina.

Curious, she asked Sr Colette about the source of her happiness. Pointing to an image of Christ crucified, Sr Colette explained that it was Jesus, her divine spouse, who gave her such joy. Novina was puzzled; she had thought Christ was dead. Sr Colette gently taught her that Jesus lives, and that through her vows, she had given her life entirely to Him.

Deeply moved, Novina soon approached

the late Fr Fundes Montiung, parish priest of the Church of St Thomas More, Kepayan, expressing her desire for baptism. She explained, “I want to always be happy like Sr Colette and belong to Jesus.”

Recognising the sincerity of her heart, Fr Fundes agreed to prepare her for baptism. At the age of nine, Novina was baptised, a day she remembers as overflowing with grace. She offered her life to Christ, saying, “Ask of me what You want me to do. I am ready.” From that day, a profound, lasting joy took root in her soul.

A Missionary Heart Awakens

By the age of eleven, Novina felt called to bring others to Christ. Inspired to share the truth of the Gospel, she committed to learning English and strengthening her knowledge of the faith. She diligently studied the catechism and grew deeper in love with God. At twelve, after three years of eager waiting, she received her First Holy Communion, igniting in her a desire to suffer with Christ and even,

if necessary, to embrace martyrdom.

At fourteen, Novina experienced a second, more intense conversion — and a clear call to religious life. Though initially too young to enter a convent, she patiently persevered. Confirmed at sixteen, she later embarked on missionary work with the Holy Trinity Community (Third Order) in Indonesia and remote parts of Sabah, serving alongside the Sisters of Putri Karmel and the Brothers of Carmelitae Sancti Eliae.

The Path to Religious Life

In 2016, Novina discerned a call to the Institute Servants of the Lord and the Virgin of Matará (*Servidoras*) in the Philippines. She entered as a postulant on August 6, the Feast of the Transfiguration. On September 12, 2017, the Feast of the Holy Name of Mary, she received her religious name: Sr Maria Sukacita para Martir (Mary, Joy of Martyrs). Two days later, she donned her religious habit as a novice.

Sr Sukacita made her first profession

of temporal vows on August 15, 2018, Solemnity of the Assumption of Our Lady, and began her studies in philosophy and theology. After two years, she was sent to her first mission: a Mercy Home for Girls in the Philippines, ministering with five other sisters to nearly forty underprivileged girls, providing care, education, and a home filled with love.

In February 2024, she was assigned to Italy for further studies. In March 2025, she received her next missionary appointment: South America.

A Joyful “Yes” Forever

On April 25, 2025, Sr Maria Sukacita para Martir made her perpetual profession of vows at the Church of St Thomas More, Kepayan — the same parish where she was baptised, confirmed, and received her First Communion.

Her life of joyful surrender continues to be a testimony of hope, love, and the transformative power of encountering Christ.

“The Lord of Hosts Lives, Before Whom I Stand” (1 Kings 17:1)



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From Fields to Faith: A Journey of Vocation and Grace

Fr. Nelbart Peter

I am the second of six siblings. My early years were spent in Keningau, where life was comfortable and stable. Our parents made sure we attended Mass every weekend at the Cathedral of St Francis Xavier, and I studied at St Francis Mission School from kindergarten through Year Three. School supplies and necessities were easily accessible, and life in town seemed secure.

However, everything changed when my parents decided to return to our ancestral land in Simbuan to cultivate the fields. Transition-

ing from urban comfort to rural village life was a profound adjustment. School supplies became scarce, and poor road conditions made trips to Keningau town rare, sometimes just once a year. Despite these hardships, it was in the simplicity of village life that I learned to speak my mother tongue, Dusun, and discovered a deeper connection to the land and to God's providence.

Reflecting on this experience, I see how it shaped my vocation theme: "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few" (Luke 10:2). Life in the village taught me resilience, gratitude,

and faith, seeds that would later blossom into my priestly vocation.

School Days: Challenges and Perseverance

My educational journey spanned two very different environments: urban and rural. In town, we were driven to school; in the village, we walked daily, rain or shine. Initially, I struggled academically, I couldn't even read until Year Two. But through my mother's tireless encouragement, I eventually caught up. Moving to the village improved my academic performance somewhat, although my passion leaned more toward practical skills rather than academics. During secondary school, my disinterest in purely academic subjects often led to poor performance, worrying my parents, especially my mother.

In Form Three, determined to pursue a vocational path, I studied hard to complete the Lower Secondary Assessment (PMR) syllabus within a year. With support from my teachers and older brother, I passed with excellent results. However, despite my dream of entering vocational school, my mother insisted I continue on the academic path.

After completing Form Five, I reluctantly entered Form Six at SMK Bingkor in 2012, but after a month, I expressed my desire to quit. Hoping for an easier commute, my mother transferred me to SMK Sook. Yet, after beginning Form Six there, I once again asked to leave. Frustrated, and seeking an end to the discussion, I blurted out words I barely understood: "I want to be a priest." My parents, shocked into silence, didn't press the issue further.

Seeds of Vocation

What began as an escape from academic pressure unexpectedly opened a door to a true calling. Living close to the land, I often read the diocesan diary after work. Luke 10:2 "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few", stirred something deep within me. I prayed for young men from our village to answer God's call, until one day I realised: I could be the answer to that prayer.

When I shared this newfound desire with my parents, they were surprised, and my grandmother initially objected, worried about the lack of grandchildren. But my mother helped her understand and, in time, she accepted my decision.

To discern more deeply, I met with Fr Benedict, our parish priest, who explained the formation process. I was intimidated by the eight-year journey ahead especially the English requirements, but Fr Benedict, who shared his own struggles, encouraged me. Trusting in God's grace, I attended a vocation seminar at Bundu Tuhan Retreat Centre in 2014.

Although I was initially placed on the waiting list, I remained hopeful. Later that year, during a vocation retreat at Tatal Retreat House, I was chosen to begin my seminary formation in 2015.

Seminary Life: A Time of Growth

Starting formation at the Catholic Diocesan

Centre (CDC) in Kota Kinabalu was a moment of great joy. Seminary life was structured and prayer-centred, and though it took time to adjust, I gradually embraced it. In 2015, seminary restructuring moved the philosophy program to College General in Penang, and a higher MUET score was required. My English skills were not strong, so I spent an extra year improving them. Thanks to God's help, perseverance, and support from teachers, I passed MUET with Band 4 in 2016 and entered the Initiation Year in 2017.

The Initiation Year deepened my spirituality and knowledge of Church teachings. However, 2017 also brought a painful trial: the sudden passing of my mother. I had prayed fervently for her healing, and her death left me lost and heartbroken. Yet God's grace sustained me. Supported by my siblings, friends, and seminary community, I found the strength to continue. This suffering matured my faith and taught me to entrust my life fully into God's hands.

Formed for Mission

I continued my formation at College General, Penang (2018–2019), studying the development of human thought and preparing for theological studies. From 2020 to mid-2024, I studied Theology at St Peter's College (SPC) in Kuching. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted classes and pastoral assignments, but even in adversity, I grew in perseverance and love for the Church's mission.

After nine and a half years of formation, I was assigned full-time pastoral ministry at the Church of St Theresa, Tambunan embracing with joy the very mission I had prayed about years before.

Ordination and Mission

On November 10, 2024, I was ordained a deacon by His Lordship Bishop Datuk Cornelius Piong at Dataran Keuskupan Keningau. On March 2, 2025, I was ordained a priest at the Church of the Holy Spirit in Sook — the culmination of a journey that began with a small, half-understood "yes" to God many years ago.

I now serve joyfully at the Church of St Theresa, Tambunan, answering Christ's call to labour in His abundant harvest.

A Word to the Youth

To the young people, especially those still discerning their future: Do not be afraid to deepen your relationship with God. Trust Him. He may call you to the priesthood or religious life. The journey is not without struggle, but the reward is a life filled with purpose and profound joy. As Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few." (Luke 10:2)

Let us pray for more generous hearts to answer His call.



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Decades of Devotion: Our Jubilarians

This year, we joyfully honour and give thanks for the dedicated clergy of our Church who celebrate significant jubilees of priestly ordination. These priests, marking 25, 30, 40, 50 years and beyond, stand as living witnesses to the enduring love and faithfulness of God.

Through decades of ministry in parishes, missions, seminaries, and beyond, they have brought the sacraments to the faithful, offered comfort in times of sorrow, celebrated with us in moments of joy, and shepherded countless souls on their journey

of faith.

We thank them not only for the length of their service but for the depth of their dedication, a powerful reminder that a vocation is not merely a role, but a lifelong journey of faith.

May their example inspire a new generation to listen to the voice of the Lord and to follow Him with the same courage and generosity. Let us keep our jubilarians in prayer, that they may be renewed in strength and joy as they continue to serve the Church with wisdom, compassion, and faith.



NAME	DATE	YEARS	DIOCESE
Msgr Daniel Lim	02.02.1965	60	Kuala Lumpur
Ab Emeritus Peter Chung (Episcopal)	15.11.1970	55	Kuching
Fr Bede Anthonius	24.04.1980	45	Keningau
Fr Joseph Gapitang	24.04.1980	45	Keningau
Fr Primus Jouil	01.05.1980	45	Kota Kinabalu
Fr Joseph Stephen, CSsR	03.08.1980	45	Penang
Rt. Rev Anthony Selvanayagam	01.09.1980	45	Penang
Fr John Anandan, OFM Cap	01.10.1980	45	Malacca Johore
Fr Vincent Chin	30.06.1985	40	Kuching
Msgr Michael Lee	22.10.1985	40	Sibu
Fr Ivan Fang, MHM	30.11.1985	40	Sibu
Fr David Sham	24.11.1985	40	Kota Kinabalu
Fr Sylvester Wong	24.11.1985	40	Kota Kinabalu
Fr Patrick Massang, CSsR	12.12.1985	40	Penang
Fr Thomas Koo Kwai Fong, CDD	27.01.1995	30	Kuala Lumpur

NAME	DATE	YEARS	DIOCESE
Fr Patrick Heng	18.02.1995	30	Kuching
Bishop Richard Ng	18.02.1995	30	Miri
Fr Philip Chua	30.04.1995	30	Kuala Lumpur
Fr Paulino Miranda	09.08.1995	30	Kuala Lumpur
Fr Paul Mikin	09.09.1995	30	Keningau
AB Emeritus Murphy Pakiam (episcopal)	04.10.1995	30	Kuala Lumpur
Fr Lucas Ng, CDD	06.12.1990	35	Kuching
Fr David Reegon, OFM, Cap	31.08.2000	25	Kuala Lumpur
Fr Philip Tay, OCD	06.08.2000	25	Kuala Lumpur
Fr Frederick Joseph	31.08.2000	25	Kuala Lumpur
Fr Joseph Heng Chon Sin,	01.08.2000	25	Malacca Johore
Fr Anthony Pillai	14.02.1990	35	Penang
Fr Michael Modoit	12.02.2000	25	Kota Kinabalu
Fr Charles Chiew	25.11.1990	35	Keningau
Fr Gilbertus Engan	08.12.1990	35	Keningau
Fr Vincent Shim	2000	25	Miri

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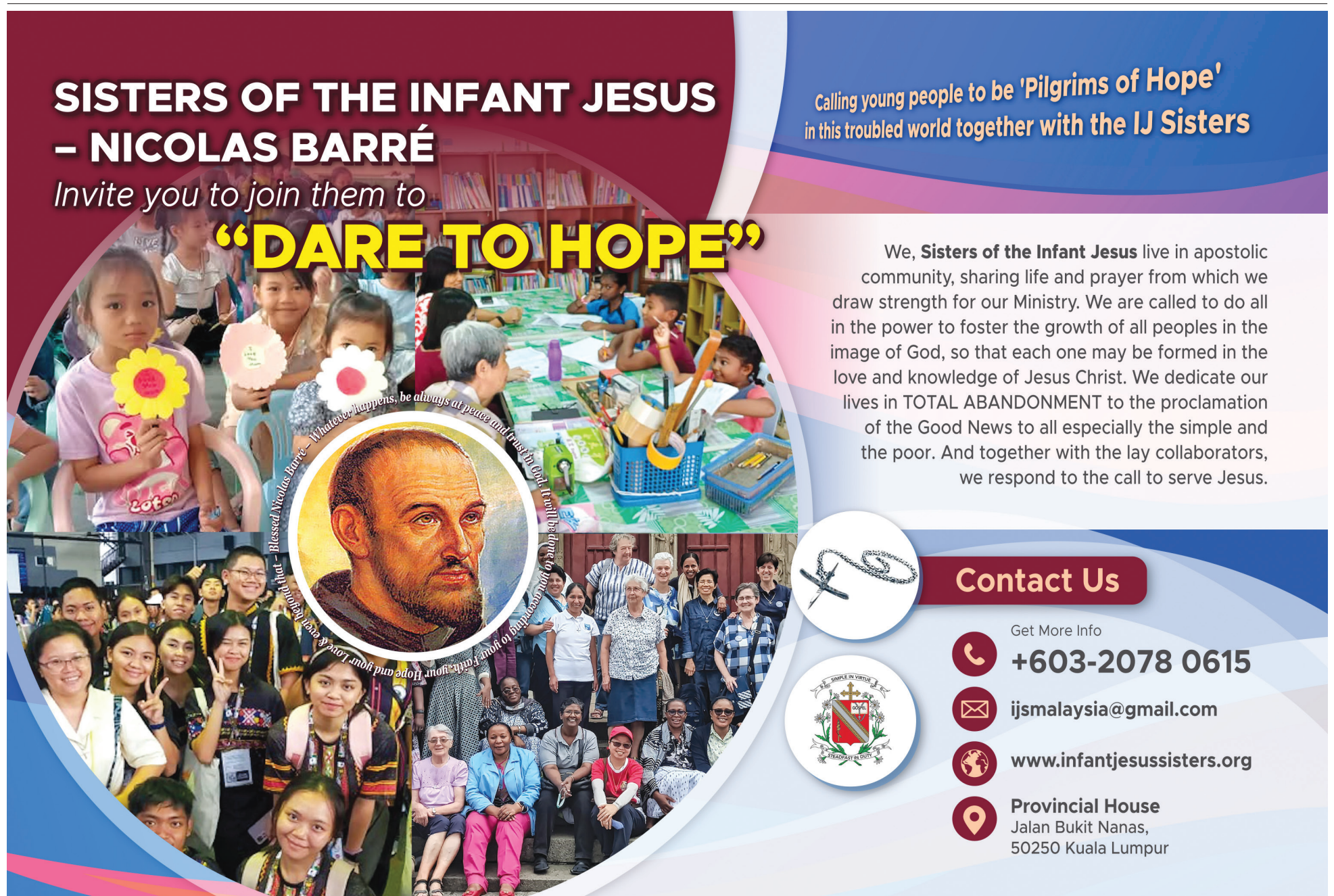
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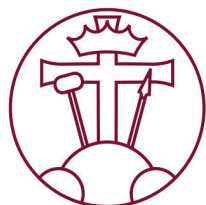
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