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If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died — more than that, who was raised — who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Rom. 8:31b-34



Vocation stories of Deacon Bonaventure Rayappan & Deacon Gilbert James OFM Cap

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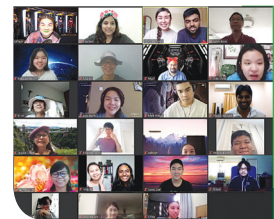
Pandemic, terror threats: Iraq papal trip is complicated, even for Francis

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Building an empire of kindness: The story of India's Sr Lucy Kurien

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Physically distant yet socially connected

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World faith leaders demand end to violence

YANGON: Religions for Peace Myanmar and Religions for Peace international have strongly condemned the shedding of the blood of innocents and called on all stakeholders “to de-escalate the sad turn of events in the streets of Myanmar.”

The organisations said they stand with the people of Myanmar in their quest for the sacredness of life. It said the recent developments have fragmented the nation.

“A long-suffering nation can be healed only through dialogue, not violence in the streets,” the religious leaders said.

They said the poor of the country, already facing multiple challenges including the lethal pandemic, loss of livelihood and food insecurity, urgently need peace for survival.

“We plead with all, especially the army, please return to the dialogue table to reconcile all issues.”

Religions for Peace brings together leaders from diverse faith traditions, investing in a vision of a world without war and violence, and has appreciated the gains of peace and democracy in the past decade by working with all stakeholders in Myanmar.

The leaders also strongly appeal to ASEAN as the regional body committed to “peace, stability and prosperity, to urgently offer its good services to Myanmar” as a member state.



Myanmar people took to the streets to protest against the military coup on February 16, 2021. (Shutterstock/Robert Bociaga Olk Bon)

They said the ASEAN Charter commits its members to democracy and human rights, the rule of law and good governance. “This is a time to step up its service to the people of Myanmar, including all ethnic minorities, before it is too late.”

Cardinal Charles Bo, archbishop of Yangon, is co-president of Religions for Peace International and the patron of Religions for Peace Myanmar.

The appeal from interfaith leaders comes as the Southeast Asian nation has seen daily

protests against the Feb 1 military coup. Three protesters were killed in violent crackdowns by Myanmar’s security forces in Mandalay and Naypyitaw.

A nationwide general strike on Feb 22, the biggest show of public opposition to military rule, was held in several cities, drawing tens of thousands of people from various religions and ethnicities.

Myanmar’s coup was among the issues the UN’s top human rights body was due to address as it opened its highest-level meet-

ing on Feb 22.

During his opening speech, UN secretary-general Antonio Guterres called on the Myanmar military to stop the repression immediately.

“Release the prisoners. End the violence. Respect human rights and the will of the people expressed in recent elections,” Guterres said, insisting that “coups have no place in our modern world.”

On Feb 22, the United States imposed sanctions on two more generals, Moe Myint Tun and Maung Maung Kyaw, who are members of the State Administrative Council which the military junta set up after toppling the elected government headed by State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi.

The new sanctions freeze any assets that the two generals might have in the US and bar American companies and individuals from doing business with them.

Coup leader Min Aung Hlaing was among the 10 generals singled out for sanctions imposed on Feb 11.

The European Union agreed at a foreign ministers’ meeting on Feb 22 to impose selected sanctions on Myanmar’s military leaders, though no details were released.

Britain and Canada have already imposed sanctions on Myanmar’s generals. The military junta has not responded to sanctions imposed by the US, Britain and Canada. — ucanews.com

● Turn to Page 7 for more

First arms fair during COVID-19 pandemic in Abu Dhabi

ABUDHABI: The arms trade is stronger than the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, despite the ongoing worldwide health emergency, the Mideast’s first annual arms fair is currently underway in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Opening with pomp, IDEX 2021 is the most important event dedicated to military technology in the region, which is running in parallel with Naval Defence and Maritime Security Exhibition (NAVDEX) 2021.

Tens of thousands of people are expected, socially distanced with masks and personal sanitisers. To make it easier for people to attend the event, organisers have boosted security measures and are strictly enforcing health restrictions, except for international visitors who were not required

to submit to mandatory quarantine.

The 2021 International Defence Exhibition and Conference (IDEX), which is being held from 21 to 25 February at the Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre (ADNEC), represents the most important exhibit of the defence and security industry in the Middle East and Africa region.

Even during the current pandemic, the event has attracted about 900 exhibitors and is expected to bring in 70,000 local and international visitors from all over the world.

On the sidelines, the UAE signed arms agreements with local and international companies worth US\$ 1.36 billion for state-of-the-art weapons destined to its Armed Forces.

However, arms sales in the Mideast have declined due to the global health emergency and the collapse in oil prices. The drop in arms spending by Gulf nations is expected to be around 10 per cent, with sales not expected to rebound to pre-pandemic levels before 2024.

UAE officials, including Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, attended the fair.

The United States, the world’s largest exporter of weapons, is not present, except for a few US companies which are keeping a low profile.

China and Saudi Arabia are nevertheless present in force. The latter is promoting its own economic and energy programme called Vision 2030. — AsiaNews/Agencies



Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan at one of the exhibitors. (Asianews photo)

How Jesus made more and more enemies

It is never easy to proclaim values that are diametrically opposed to prevailing values. Jesus often discovered it the hard way, when he proclaimed a God of love and compassion.

On the face of it, the values he proclaimed – love, compassion, justice, mercy, forgiveness – were non-threatening to the status quo in Roman-occupied First Century Palestine.

After all, how could someone preaching love – even if it was radical love – be seen as a threat?

But taken to its logical conclusion, the radical love that Jesus proclaimed often got him into trouble.

In the Gospels, we can see the tension building up right from the word go.

Remember the scene in Luke 4, where Jesus proclaimed his ‘mission statement’?

18 The spirit of the Lord is on me, for he has anointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,

19 to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord.

20 He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down. And all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him.

21 Then he began to speak to them, ‘This text is being fulfilled today even while you are listening.’

What was the reaction of the onlookers?

22 And he won the approval of all, and they were astonished by the gracious words that came from his lips. They said, ‘This is Joseph’s son, surely?’

Inspiring words, they must have thought.

But then, when Jesus spells out how inclu-

sive this new kingdom will be, by citing two examples from Scripture, the mood sours.

25 ‘There were many widows in Israel, I can assure you, in Elijah’s day, when heaven was shut for three years and six months and a great famine raged throughout the land,

26 but Elijah was not sent to any one of these: he was sent to a widow at Zarephath, a town in Sidonia.

27 And in the prophet Elisha’s time there were many suffering from virulent skin-diseases in Israel, but none of these was cured -- only Naaman the Syrian.’

What was the reaction of the listeners?

When they heard this everyone in the synagogue was enraged.

29 They sprang to their feet and hustled him out of the town; and they took him up to the brow of the hill their town was built on, intending to throw him off the cliff...

What was in these anecdotes that so enraged these bully boys, when only moments earlier they had gushed their approval?

The problem was that Jesus extended his vision of the kingdom to people outside the circle of the audience. This audience in the synagogue had regarded themselves as favoured in God’s sight; after all, they were part of the practising faithful, the chosen ones.

Sunday Observer

By

Anil Netto

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They would have known that the widow Jesus was referring to was from outside Israel at a time when idolatry was flourishing. And Naaman was an army commander in Syria who was suffering from a skin disease or leprosy.

That was a double, even triple whammy in the eyes of the audience – how could God favour such foreigners, one a destitute widow (looked down upon by society, a woman at that), the other a foreign military man with a skin disease (wrongly) associated with impurity.

The audience didn’t like being reminded how God reached out to the foreigners through his prophets. God had found more faith there than among those who prided themselves as practising believers. No wonder the audience was upset! No wonder Jesus found out the hard way that a true prophet is rarely accepted in his or her own circle.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus would be constantly challenged each time he proclaimed the real deeper implications of the kingdom he was proclaiming – for healing, radical love, distributive justice, empathy with society’s outcasts. He had to constantly remind listeners about what God expects and what true faith is all about.

Today, many Christians have a hard time imagining a kingdom where our imaginary barriers are broken down – racial, religious, national, territorial, social class, gender, our notions of

what is clean and unclean.

We have our own prejudices against those outside our regular circle. We have a hard time reaching out to the Other, much less imagining that they could somehow find favour with God.

As Jesus ministry continued, the list of his enemies grew longer – the spies, the religious superstructure of the time, the wealthy who lived in luxury at the expense of the people. The worst condemnations were reserved for those who were exploiting religion and oppressing the people for wealth, status and power.

Others, like the zealots, misunderstood Jesus as a messiah who would bring about political liberation. But Jesus knew that such liberation without a change in the value system of society would be meaningless.

It is not a surprise then that Jesus often asked those he healed to play it down. His ministry was incomplete and he knew how easily his vision could be misunderstood and distorted. Many came to worship him without understanding the depth of his vision of the kingdom, which he proclaimed with so much passion.

As more people saw him as a threat, Jesus would have realised the enormous risks he was taking. Things finally came to a head when he cast his sights on the Temple in Jerusalem. He would have known that his earthly ministry would be cut short.

No, bringing about a new kingdom based on radical values was never going to be easy. As Mandela once famously said of his vision for South Africa: “It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.”

Such selflessness and determination for a transformed world can only come about with great sacrificial love. And ultimately, Jesus’ vision of the kingdom was vindicated.

Second Sunday of Lent: Being Transfigured

The readings begin this Sunday with the familiar story of Abraham and the sacrifice, or near sacrifice of Isaac. We have heard this story many, many times and have always focused on Abraham and his unwavering faith. It is quite a mystery how God could ask Abraham to do such a thing — to sacrifice his son. Human sacrifice and child sacrifice are abhorrent to God. The Old Testament condemns this time and again. It is one of the reasons given for the Babylonian exile. If we stay at the fringe level of the story, it is quite difficult to understand how Abraham could be told to sacrifice his son, Isaac. But, if we go deeper, then we realise that the whole point of the story was the strength of Abraham’s faith. He would trust in God no matter what was asked of him.

I’d like to change the focus from Abraham to His son, Isaac. In Genesis, it seems clear that when he went up that mountain carrying the branches for a sacrificial fire, Isaac did not know his father’s plans. As time went on, Jewish scholars saw Isaac as participating in God’s plan for mankind through his father, Abraham. By the time of the Lord, scholars taught the people that Isaac was a martyr. He was willing to die if this was what it would take for the covenant God made with Abraham to take place. The teachers of Jesus’ time compared Isaac to the Jewish martyrs who died for their faith during the Maccabean revolt against the Syrians. Second Maccabees tells the story of the seven sons and the esteemed elder who would rather die than deny their faith and defile themselves. The scholars taught that like those martyrs, Isaac did not value his life over the completion of God’s plan. Later, Christians would see in

Isaac’s carrying the wood for the sacrifice up the mountain, a prophecy of Jesus carrying the cross up to Golgotha.

It is in this light that we can relate the story of Abraham and Isaac with the Transfiguration, today’s Gospel. On that mountain of mystery, Jesus met with Moses and Elijah. Why Moses and Elijah? Moses was the lawgiver. During the Exodus he showed the Hebrews how they could serve God. He told them they were God’s chosen people. God had a plan for them, one by which He would deliver them out of slavery and to the place He had set aside for them. The most important part of the Jewish bible, the five books of the Torah, were attributed to Moses. Elijah was the greatest of the prophets. He was the one who did not die but was swept into heaven. He would come again when the time was right for God to complete his plan for mankind. The time had come on the mountain of the Transfiguration.

Jesus was there on that mountain. He was ready and willing to sacrifice himself for His Father’s plan to become a reality. He would die for the good of all. His sacrifice would lead to the glory of the Kingdom of God. His life, obscure in the eyes of the world, and His death, which the world would view as dishonourable, freed others, freed us, to live and die in grace.

What does all this mean to us? It means that, as followers of Christ we also must offer ourselves up for the good of others. When Jesus said that we cannot be His followers unless we were ready to take up our crosses, He was not using symbolic imagery. He meant it. As Christians, we are called to sacrifice ourselves for others.

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings

2nd Sunday of Lent

Readings: Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13;

Romans 8:31-34;

Gospel: Mark 9:2-10

making the presence of Christ real in the world. We are participating in God’s plan for mankind.

Something wonderful happens when we step out of ourselves and give ourselves to others. We receive more than we give. We have all realised that whenever we are truly charitable, we feel a huge joy, a joy so real that we are convinced that what we did was insignificant compared to what we received. And we are correct. In those moments of joy, we become one with the Lord. We are transfigured with Him. We become people completely different because we are happier, infinitely happier.

Just as the Transfiguration of the Lord was a touch of heaven and a foreshadowing of the glory to come, our own transfigurations are a touch of heaven and a tangible prediction of the eternal joy to come.

Lent is a time for us to take a close look at ourselves and to consider what we have to do to conquer selfishness and sin in our own lives. The various exercises of Lent help us to dive deeper into our commitment to the Lord. Lent helps us to take those steps we need to be bound to God’s plan.

We pray today for the grace to be part of the plan, part of the sacrifice, and part of the Glory.

— By Msgr Joseph A Pellegrino

Be steadfast in prayer

KUALA LUMPUR: This year, the KL Archdiocese has 147 Elect.

Held on Sunday, Feb 21, the Rite of Election was livestreamed from the Church of the Good Shepherd.

"We are grateful to God that we are able to gather today, after the scare in Holy Family, Kajang at the beginning of the COVID-19 in 2020, at the beginning of Lent, but here we are one year later, online and still able to have this ceremony of the Rite of Election" said Archbishop Leow.

"Every day we make choices. We choose what to eat and what to wear. We try to choose what is best for our families and loved ones. Yes, making choices is a part of daily life. But to become a follower of Christ is not merely an ethical decision or a lofty idea; it's not only a matter of trying to live a better, more virtuous life. To be a follower of Christ is to encounter Christ who gives our lives a new horizon of hope and a decisive direction. For those of you who present yourselves to the Church for Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, we believe that God is at work in your life. We believe that God calls you by name, that God knows you intimately, that God loves you personally. That is why your name is so important – yours is a personal response to a personal invitation – and His invitation has brought you right here to this community where your love for Him and His for you will be nurtured and fed. That is why we inscribe your name in the Book of Elect," said the Archbishop.

Archbishop Leow expressed his hope that the Easter Vigil service will be celebrated with a congregation



Archbishop Julian Leow praying over the Elect during the Rite of Election at Good Shepherd Church, KL.

and all the elect baptised. He urged the Elect to be steadfast in prayer, should there be a delay in their baptism.

He thanked the sponsors and urged them to model what it means to follow Christ as members of the Church and thanked the catechists for guiding them and walking with them in this journey and for supporting the Elect as they prepare for Baptism and Reception into the Church. Lastly, he thanked all the parish communities throughout the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur for opening their hearts and welcoming the new members.

"We begin this year with hope despite the dark clouds of the pandemic that continue to linger and disrupt the normal flow of our daily lives, he added.

He appealed to all Catholics to hold steadfast to our virtues of Faith, Hope and Love and to be beacons of Hope by reaching out, praying and helping those most affected during this pandemic. — *By Jaclyn Sharmelee*

Parishes to conduct Rite of Election in Kota Kinabalu

KOTA KINABALU: The pandemic continues to impact the way of being Church, including the way of preparation for those who desire to be fully initiated into the Catholic Church. Under normal circumstances, catechumens from all parishes under the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu gather for the Rite of Election on the first Sunday of Lent.

In the light of the restrictions for social distancing, the Kota Kinabalu Archdiocese directed individual parishes to conduct the Rite of Election for their respective catechumens locally.

Sacred Heart Cathedral Parish held its Rite of Election for its catechumens on Feb 21, the first Sunday of Lent. The ritual was celebrated by Archbishop John Wong.

The Rite of Election or the Enrolment of Names is the liturgical rite which closes the period of the catechumenate proper, that is, the lengthy period of formation of the catechumens' minds and hearts.

It marks the final period of more intense preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation during which the Elects are encouraged to follow Christ with greater generosity.

This step is called Election because the acceptance made by the Church is founded on the election by God in whose name the Church acts. This step is called the Enrolment of Names because a pledge of fidelity is taken by the candidates who inscribe their names in the book that lists those who have been chosen for



Archbishop John Wong giving his homily during the Rite of Election Feb 21, 2021 at Sacred Heart Parish Centre. (CS photo)

initiation.

There were 13 catechumens from the English RCIA, nine from the Chinese RCIA, 53 from the Bahasa Melayu RCIA and 14 catechumens from the parish of St Paul Dontozidon who celebrated the ritual and were accompanied by their godparents.

The Archbishop explained the reason why the ritual takes place during Lent which is the period of renewal of our life in Christ. He asked the catechumens whether they know Jesus, who has given His life for us, and have accepted Him as the Lord of their life.

From the Gospel of St Matthew (4:1-11) on the temptations of Jesus in the desert, he pointed out how Jesus countered the temptations of the devil with the Word of God, trusting God fully, worshipping and serving Him alone. He revealed that they would receive the Holy Spirit through the Sacraments of Initiation, and urged them to know the Holy Spirit, in order to be guided by the Holy Spirit to do God's will.

Based on the testimonies of the

godparents and the catechists, as well as the catechumens' affirmation of their intention, the Church judged their state of readiness for the reception of the Sacraments of Initiation. Thereafter, the Church made her "election", that is, the choice and admission of those catechumens who have the dispositions that make them fit to take part in the Sacraments of Initiation, that is Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.

During the MCO period, the RCIA facilitators have been using Zoom or Google Meet or other online platforms to keep in touch with the catechumens. They resumed their physical formation sessions after celebrating the Rite of Election.

Part of the journey to the font requires the Elect to celebrate special rites in the middle three Sundays of Lent called the Scrutinies (purification and enlightenment). These will be arranged in the respective languages on Mar 8, Mar 15 and Mar 22, and on April 3 there will be the final rite in preparation before baptism. Let us keep them in our prayers. —

By Catherine Wan, Catholic Sabah



DIocese of
MALACCA JOHORE



MJD News Update #29

Greetings and Peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Dear People of God,

We are living in challenging times. The MCO or CMCOs have not slowed us down, but has brought about desperation in some.

Thus, some want to hurry decisions, others want to slow down legitimate processes of tested systems of governance and businesses.

Remember the Malay proverb, "Biar ikut resmi padi, makin berisi makin tunduk."

1.0 A Thought for The Week: LOVING WHOLEHEARTEDLY

An eager young man longing to live a good life went to his rabbi and said, "I know that the Hebrew Scriptures say that we ought to love God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, all our strength. But I am very much aware that my heart and soul and mind and strength have bad parts in them. So, tell me, how can I love God?"

After a pause the rabbi replied, "Well, it seems that you're going to have to learn *how to love God with the bad parts too.*"

Something to think about:

David Steindl-Rast said: "The antidote to exhaustion is not necessarily rest, but wholeheartedness." **Oscar Wilde** commented: "In fiction good people do good things and bad people do bad: that's why it is called fiction!"

In real life, bad people can do good things and good people can do bad things. It is not about learning to love when one has perfected love in one's self. Rather, it is about loving when we are yet weak, imperfect and sinful. **Never stop loving even when you fail or fall.**

2.0 Announcements for This Week:

2.1 The extended MCO ends on March 4, 2021. Whether MCO or CMCO, some slack has been given to 'Rumah Ibadat Bukan Islam' or **RIBI**, ie beyond the 30-minute allocation for worship; between the times 6.00am-10.00pm for Melaka and 6.00am-2.00pm/4.00pm-10.00pm for Johor. The number of worshippers at one slot is 50 per cent of venue's capacity (Melaka) and not beyond 30 persons (Johor). SOPs, especially sanitisation, face masks and physical and social distancing, are to be observed before, during and after services. The CMCO permits gatherings for weddings, funerals, meetings, seminars and trainings.

2.2 MJD's Lenten 2021 has opted for the theme "Live Simply that Others May Simply Live". The Caritas-MJD, with the Creation Justice Commission, are animating reflections, community projects and Lenten Collections, to Live Lent fruitfully. Begin by teaching each family member to put aside RM1 or more each week for charity, which is "faith in action". On Palm Sunday or after, offer the Lenten Gift to Jesus, the suffering, the abandoned and the fearful.

2.3 Prayers for Myanmar: In your church, BEC, Parish Intercessory Groups or as family, pray for a non-violent political solution, the release of elected leaders who were detained, and the return of the nation to democratic rule. Include this intention in the Sunday Liturgy.

2.4 Some Diocesan Events:

a) On February 22, the **Malacca Johore Diocesan Young People Network or MJDYPN**

organised an online Mass for all youths, young adults and campus students preparing to return to school, exams, colleges, universities, and work. It was a Mass for those who have lost their jobs, are changing jobs or are looking for employment. They joined me, the celebrant at St James Chapel, Majodi Centre. A total of 89 participated via Zoom, while others watched the live stream on Facebook.

b) On March 14, 2021 (8.00pm-10.00pm): the Diocesan Family Life Ministry (DFLM) has arranged for a Zoom session with Dr Joseph Jacob, a geriatrician, and consultant psychiatrist from Kuala Lumpur, to speak on **The Pandemic Stress & Coping Among the Elderly**. Contact Dcn Leslie Petrus or DFLM for more information.

3.0 This Week's Questions & Queries.

The Q asks: How can we respond to troubled times that confront us?

The late Archbishop John Quinn of San Francisco proposed seven strategies from John's Gospel (chapters 13-17) as a "response and opportunity to testify". They are:

1. Jn 13:5 Jesus washed the disciples' feet: **Allowing Jesus to serve or minister** to us to love more.
2. Jn. 13:14-15 Jesus said, you also ought to wash one another's feet: **Seek to serve others**, be willing to assess the needs of others, to be available, to initiate, to be creatively generous.
3. Jn. 13:16-17 Jesus said, the Father will give you another Advocate, to live with you forever:

Live according to the Spirit, abide in Me and bear much fruit.

4. Jn. 14:30 Jesus said, the ruler of this world is coming: **Identify Evil**, the work of the evil one, their influences and enticements, and the Spirit of truth will guide you in all the truth. Jn16:13

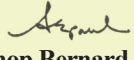
5. Jn. 15:16 Jesus said, you did not choose Me but I chose you: **Being Chosen**, live strengthened by the knowledge and experience that you are personally chosen and sent.

6. Jn. 17:20-23 Jesus said, so that they maybe one, as we are one: **Being in Community**, to be in union with God through formation and the community's sustenance.

7. Jn. 17:1,9,20 Jesus said, I am asking on their behalf, they are yours: Invited to be **in union with God through prayer**, turn to Him in prayer when struggling with ambiguity and adversity.

The troubled times we face can be our "response or opportunity to testify".

Thank you for reading. Let us continue to build God's Kingdom together. Another week of opportunity to witness to the Love of God. God bless you. Take care. Be safe.


Bishop Bernard Paul
February 26, 2021

[Click here to watch the video](#)

Lord, make me your instrument

On Feb 27, 2021, two priestly ordinations were held, one in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur and the other in the Diocese of Keningau. Here are the vocation stories of Deacon Bonaventure Rayappan and Deacon Gilbert James OFM Cap.



Deacon Bonaventure Rayappan. (photo/Jeffrey Chee)

KUALA LUMPUR: Rev Deacon Bonaventure Rayappan was ordained as a diocesan priest on Saturday, Feb 27 2021, by Archbishop Julian Leow, at his home parish, Our Lady of Lourdes (OLL), Klang.

Six months ago, on Aug 6, 2020, amidst a brief easing in the Movement Control Order (MCO), the 34-year-old was ordained a transitional deacon at the Church of St Francis Xavier, Petaling Jaya.

Upon completing his seminary studies at College General, Penang, at the onset of the pandemic, Deacon Bonaventure was assigned to OLL to help prepare for his priestly ordination.

"I am so happy to be in my home parish. The hardest part about the MCO is not meeting parishioners in person.

"As a deacon I officiated at nuptial blessings, visited the homebound and administered Holy Eucharist to those in need. That aside, I have only met parishioners online. After my Sacerdotal Ordination I will be able to administer more sacraments like holy anointing and confession, so SOP permitting, I hope to meet more parishioners," said Deacon Bona.

He was supposed to have been ordained as a priest on Jan 28, 2021. However, when the government issued another MCO and limited the Church's in-person capacity to five people, he asked Most Rev Leow if it could be postponed and he agreed.

The youngest of three children, Deacon Bona said he was raised as a *chinna raja* (little prince). "I am very grateful that my parents gave me a beautiful childhood. I only

realised how much I appreciated my family when I was 22, and my newlywed sister was leaving for her new home. I started crying and could not stop myself. Those around me, including my sister, were surprised as most did not think we were that close.

"My brother, who is six years older, and I did not grow up together. Only after he got married and I joined the seminary, did we grow closer and now share a great bond."

Although the Deacon grew up pampered and only learnt to do chores when he joined the working world, his mother did not spare the rod. "Amma treated all three of us equally. For me receiving a belting from Amma was a daily occurrence, like when I opened the cover of the running thosai grinder and wet flour splattered all over the kitchen. I am sure there were many other tools and utensils," said Deacon Bona, remembering her fondly.

His mother, who passed away in 2016 from heart failure, was his beacon of spiritual guidance. "Amma rarely missed Sunday Mass. Even when her leg was amputated, she made an effort to go for Mass. The Eucharist was her spiritual food for all situations and the summit of her life."

Because of his mother's strong faith, Deacon Bona's formative years were spent actively serving in the church. "Until I was 12, I always admired the role of priests in our church and I aspired to be one. When asked what my ambition was during my Standard Six tuition class, I quickly replied 'Father'. As the class was full of Tamil speaking non-Christians, they all burst out laughing think-

ing I wanted to have children. It took a while to clarify what I meant."

After Confirmation, God, church, faith, and religion took a back seat in Deacon Bona's life. "Church was touch and go for me. My focus was to earn a lot of money, have girlfriends, buy the right house, favourite car and get married. I wanted to enjoy the worldly things like my friends, and I did."

Some 13 years ago, amidst living his best life, a profound incident occurred, (which he doesn't wish to detail) and it rocked Deacon Bona's world as he knew it.

"I suddenly found that all the money I was chasing still left me feeling empty."

Since the church played an important role in his younger days, he went back and this time, sat inside. "I felt a peace come over me. I realised, when God calls you, it is hard to run away. He knows how to bring you back."

At that point, he regretted his past actions, but now, in hindsight, feels he needed to experience that side of life to help understand his vocation and his flock better.

His journey through the seminary was not

easy either. His parents were sceptical at first, as there was no one to support the family and take over his dad's business.

"I did not want to seem like I was running away from my responsibilities. So, I prayed that God would clear the path for me to join the Seminary and, in His time, He did.

"God works wonders and miracles in our lives. We just need to believe he will," said Deacon Bona.

Language was his next hurdle. Born and bred in Klang, Deacon Bona's first language is Tamil. "I went to a Tamil primary school and then SMK La Salle, Klang, where my friends were also Tamil-speaking. It took me three attempts on the IELTS exam (International English Language Testing System) to get the required 6.5 points to join the seminary." In that too he saw God's miraculous hands working.

At the seminary, Deacon Bona also learned that a vocation evolves and is ever-changing.

"As I matured in my journey, I found my vocation being purified and fine-tuned. From wanting to do God's will at the beginning of my vocation, I now want to be an instrument of God."

"Although God created us, and like any inventor, wants to see us reach our full and best potential, He loves us enough to let us freely choose our path. Likewise, who am I to try and control others?"

At the seminary, he learnt an important lesson: it's not how many times we fall but that we repent and go back to God. "This has had a huge impact on my growth as a human being – a reminder that even if we fall or fail, we have another chance to do better."

On his ministry as a priest, Deacon Bona said, "I leave that in God's hands. As a priest, I aim to serve God with all my strength, weakness and limitations." — **By Gwen Manickam**

Vocation is my loving response to God's love

KOTA KINABALU: Gilbert James is the second Sabahan to embrace the way of life of St Francis in the Capuchin Order, the first being Fr Valentine Gompok OFM Cap of Tambunan in 2003.

Vocational discernment often begins with listening to God, gaining clarity and taking the next best step closest to the call. For Gilbert, it was no different. In his discernment journey, he explored several Religious Orders/Society, as well as the diocesan priesthood.

But as God would have it, he discovered that to be a son of St Francis of Assisi was the way for him to best answer God's call to the priestly vocation – to live among a band of brothers in simplicity of life and radical poverty, and be deeply in love with God.

On the eve of his priestly ordination, Gilbert shares his thoughts as he recalls his vocation journey and how God has cared for him and his family through it all.

"Life was hard but looking back, I feel God must have cared for me and my family throughout. That is why for my ordination I chose the theme *Caritas Christi Urget Nos* (The Love of Christ urges us on) 2 Cor 5:14).

This verse aptly describes not only my journey to answer His call, but my journey in life. My whole life is a testimony of Christ's love for me, and my vocation is my loving response to His love."

"I grew up in a poor family. I am the eldest of five siblings. Life in the *kampung* revolves around planting rice, hill rice or *padi bukit*. I always worried about what would happen if



Deacon Gilbert James OFM Cap

the rain should stop during planting season or pests attacked the rice, it would surely have led us to experience famine.

"God must have been really helping us because we did not starve. I thought that there must be a God who is so good, but whom I did not know. Though we are cradle Catholics, I did not know God well. So many questions I had about God and about life. So early in life I realised that knowledge is very important.

"I also recalled that I was too lazy to go to church for Mass, and that my father had to wake me up every Sunday so that I would not miss Mass, although he rarely went himself. But I prayed the rosary faithfully as I felt that I could connect with the Blessed Virgin Mary more comfortably."

Deacon Gilbert was ordained by Keningau Bishop Cornelius Piong on Feb 27 at St Theresa Church Tambunan, the home place

of his mother, Anna bte Yakil. Though he grew up in Papar, his formative years were shaped by his mother who lives in Tambunan. The choice of place for his ordination is a tribute to his mother.

His mother's influence continues unabated for "one among her sons" who aspires to this most noble call to the priesthood. "All through my formation years, I believe my mother's prayers helped me through. And I am forever grateful for that," underscores the priestly candidate.

The consolation of his mother somehow diminishes the lack of support from a father who follows the way of tradition that the eldest, on becoming a wage-earner, is expected to take care of them in their old days.

He recalled, "I felt consoled when my mother was very happy and even cried when I told her about my decision. She said that from the time we were still very young, she prayed that God would choose one of her sons. I am the eldest and I know I should be the one to take care of them. But even now, I still believe I can take care of them, not materially, but spiritually, by offering my prayers and little sacrifices for them."

Deacon Gilbert graduated as a civil and environmental engineer, and it was understandable for his father to look towards harvesting from there. What then made him leave a lucrative job and join the seminary?

"It was not an easy decision but I believe that God has called me in a special way to love and serve Him and His people. I realised His great love for me that I feel I need to respond to Him faithfully," he said.

Indeed, our world is now in a very difficult situation. We hear of people being laid off; many farmers cannot sell their produce; families cannot meet as before; even our liturgical life also faces challenges, which requires new ways of doing our ministries. We see churches utilising social media especially to reach their parishioners by way of online Masses, meetings and so on.

I believe I have a role to bring hope, love and care, and to let people see that definitely goodness will triumph, that God will make all things new again. How? With the limited movement, the best possible way to reach people is through social media. In fact, recently some friends shared their struggles in life and I believe listening to them has somehow lightened their burdens.

The MCO and other restrictions really challenge the Church to think of how to minister to her people and how to carry out her duty to spread the Word of God. I believe this pandemic makes the Church realise all the more that a new mode of evangelisation is needed, one that can be applied to situations such as these.

For the priests and religious, they need to be open to new ways to reach to the people in the best way possible.

On the part of the faithful, they are to be encouraged to engage in prayer and the reading of spiritual books or articles in order to nourish and strengthen their spiritual life.

Finally, we must cultivate an openness to the Spirit of God and, above all, to not lose our faith and hope in God. — **By Agnes Chai, Catholic Sabah**

Special needs children need love

KUALA LUMPUR: Children with special needs require extra attention, teaching, care – and love! The ministry for children with special needs in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur seeks to promote dignity and respect and also opportunities within the larger community.

In line with the Kuala Lumpur Archdiocese Office of Human Development's (AOHD) Lenten Campaign, the podcast *Catholics At Home* kicked off with a lively discussion with the Ministry for Children with Special Needs. They spoke to Cheryl Kristine and Rita Anthony who have dedicated their time and talents to serving these children.

Rita Anthony, one of the founding members of the Ministry, who is the mother of an autistic child, spoke of the challenges she faced during the 1990s when there was very little knowledge and resources available. Together with three other families, they found it a challenge to find centres that were not too expensive for ordinary families with autistic kids.

Every Sunday when they met for play therapy, they began to realise the need for a routine programme for kids with special needs.

Rita then approached Bro Anthony Rogers fsc, the then director of



A screen capture of *Catholics At Home* speaking to Cheryl Kristine and Rita Anthony on special needs children.

AOHD, with the idea of setting up a ministry for these kids. Through several meetings and the blessing of the then Archbishop Soter Fernandez, the Ministry for Children with Special Needs was established in July 2001. The centre grew through word of mouth with the support of the archdiocese generous donors and parents of special needs kids.

Former volunteer and now administrator of the Ministry, Cheryl Fernandez found herself drawn to these kids after a couple of months of volunteering. She is now a full-time staff and is passionate about ensuring that all special needs children are given an opportunity to learn.

The pandemic has greatly affected their teaching with more reliance on parents to be more involved in the online teaching and preparing of visuals to help their kids. The online classes are also required to be interactive or kids lose attention easily. Some days they face internet connection problems and a lack of computers to facilitate learning.

The MCO has greatly impacted families, in that they're not able to have access to tools that are helpful for their autistic children. The centre now has to package and post these tools to each family, so that they can use them in the comfort of their home, so that learning is not disrupted.

Cheryl Kristine shared that a typical day in the centre involved teachers going through a routine visual schedule at the start of class. This enabled the children to be more involved and less anxious, once they know what needs to be done.

Replying to questions on the age limit for admission to the centre; Cheryl shared that there are two age groups; 4 to 8 years old and 9 to 14 years old. For a child to be admitted to the centre, they would have to be assessed first, to determine the child's ability and to tailor the programme to the child's age and requirements.

Cheryl shared that 'all autistic children look like normal kids but their brains are wired differently. Using the analogy of a computer, you need to programme a computer in a certain way, for the correct outcome. It is the same with autistic children'.

The assessment for the children is done by the centre as most of the families that come to the centre are from the B40 group and cannot afford expensive assessments. Therefore the centre helps in whatever way possible.

In reply to questions, Cheryl said that they are not equipped for children with Downs Syndrome and dyslexia as they have a shortage of manpower

and expertise in that area. They have appealed to the public and experts for volunteers and help in whatever way possible.

Rita shared that for them, a success story is 'when the children are able to do little things according to their age and abilities, and do normal things like other kids; i.e.: shopping, using the gym and being able to adapt to the outside world'.

Cheryl replied that their dream for the centre is that they might be able to reach out and help more families from the B40 group, through counselling services and transportation, as well as extending the ministry to other areas.

Rita hopes that the Church and other organisations would provide opportunities for autistic young adults to be meaningfully engaged and gainfully employed.

Rita and Cheryl appealed for experts such as speech and behaviour therapists to get in touch and welcomed volunteers or anyone who might be interested in the position of teacher at the centre as they are short of manpower, and thus are unable to take in more students. The public can also help by providing laptops and tablets, to help some of the families who are affected by the lockdown. —

By Jaclyn Sharmelee

Four new novices for the Franciscan Sisters

PURAK, Papar: Amid pestilence, poverty and disease, God still calls. Here, there is a religious congregation which continues to be filled with people who say yes to God's call even in the most terrible circumstances.

While many are either recovering from the pandemic or still find ourselves overcome by fear, four novices of the Congregation of the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (FSIC) took their first vows after completing the mandatory two-year formation in the novitiate.

These novices are Jessica James from St Pius, Bundu Tuhau, Lea Mannel from Holy Cross, Toboh Tambunan, Venessa Julian from St Mary Cathedral, Sandakan, and Anna Andrew Sipail from St John, Tuaran.

They asked to be professed, and with the approval of the Mother General and her Council and after the Canonical Examination by Archbishop John Wong of the

Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu, they were professed with the Rite of First Profession on Feb 20, at Pace Bene Retreat cum Formation Centre here.

The ritual includes the calling of the candidates, the examination of candidates, and the Profession itself, in which they vow to live through the three evangelical counsels for one year before the Mother General and in the presence of the Archbishop.

After pronouncing their vows, they were given their religious habits. Donning the religious habit signifies taking on the religious life and bearing their religious name: Sr Mary Jessica James, Sr Mary Lea Mannel, Sr Mary Venessa Julian and Sr Mary Anna Andrew, as Temporary Professed Sisters in the Congregation of the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception.

Only the parents and a few siblings of the newly professed Sisters were present to comply with the



The newly professed, from left Sr M. Jessica James, Sr M. Venessa Julian, Sr M. Anna Andrew and Sr M. Lea Mannel.

current SOPs.

Arrangements were made to live-stream the Eucharistic Celebration with the Rite of First Profession to enable the rest of the congregation, and the extended family members of the Sisters, to participate.

The Mass was celebrated by Archbishop John Wong and concelebrated by four priests from St Joseph Church, Papar. He urged the newly professed Sisters to follow Jesus wholeheartedly, just like Levi in the Gospel, who left everything

and followed Jesus.

Drawing from the theme of the celebration *You are salt of the earth...* (Mt 5:13), the prelate shared some wisdom with the Sisters: "To follow the Saviour is to share in his salvation plan; to follow the light is to enjoy the light. Those who are in the light do not illuminate the light but are themselves illuminated and enlightened by the light. They add nothing to the light, rather they are beneficiaries, for they are enlightened by the light."

He acknowledged the presence of their parents and thanked them for their generosity in allowing their daughters to be God's instruments in the service of the Church.

In her turn, Mother General Sr Frances Mani acknowledged with gratitude the presence of the Archbishop and the clergy for celebrating the Eucharist. She also thanked the parents of the Sisters for consenting to offer their daughters for God's work and assured them of God's abundant blessings for their generosity.

Mother General then announced the posting for the newly professed Sisters: Sr Jessica will be assigned to St Rose Convent, Kota Marudu, Sr Lea to St Maria Goretti, Binaong Keningau, Sr Venessa to Stella Maris Home, Tanjung Aru and Sr Anna to the Convent of the Immaculate Conception at Toboh Tambunan. She concluded by asking those present to continue to pray for the newly professed Sisters. — FSIC, *Catholic Sabah*

Opening Mass for aspirants in Kota Kinabalu

KOTA KINABALU: "Why do you want to become a priest?" This question was asked by Archbishop John Wong in his first address to the 21 young men comprising new aspirants and seminarians who have come forward to begin their journey towards the priestly vocation.

The formation programme is traditionally held at the Catholic Archdiocesan Centre (CAC) located in Penampang, while the Initiation Year seminarians will begin their priestly formation from St Peter's College, Kota Kinabalu.

At the opening Mass for the new Academic Year of CAC Aspirant and



Initiation Year seminarians in St Peter's College Kota Kinabalu

Initiation Year Seminarians, Archbishop Wong highlighted that the priesthood is not a career but, rather a commitment to a life of prayer and pondering upon the Word of God.

This is the foundation of the priesthood and should be the guide to answer the question which he posed to them.

Prior to his address, the Archbish-

op, in his homily, invited the seminarians and the aspirants to reflect on the importance of Jesus as the centre, not only of the journey towards priesthood but also in their daily life.

Joining the Archbishop at the altar were Fr Mattheus Luta (Director of the Initiation Year), Fr Isidore Gilbert (Director of CAC Aspirants), and Fr Paul Lo.

The opening of the Academic Calendar was held at St Peter's College, Kota Kinabalu on February 16, 2021.

This Year was unique as the church complies with the SOP protocols imposed by the government to flatten the spread of COVID-19. The event was only celebrated among the seminarians and formators without any outside guests. — By Seminar-ian Yosef Jup, *Catholic Sabah*

Tools to cope with the pandemic and lockdown

KUALA LUMPUR: The Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur conducted an online forum on *Emotional Tools to Cope with the Current Pandemic and Lockdown* with the Director of CAREERsense at HELP University, Eric Bryan Amaladas, on Feb 16.

Before the event, a survey was conducted to gauge how people are coping during this pandemic.

Some said they stay connected via social media platforms and perform self-care activities. Others took walks with friends or alone, watched online Masses and movies, or spent time reading. Some rekindled old habits or took up new ones like learning to cook and bake from YouTube and gardening. One person said that besides spending time with God and family, he/she took up crocheting and made shawls, bags and scarfs as a means of de-stressing. A few were taking things one day at a time, trying to remain positive while thanking God for each day.

On coping tools, Eric said, "This topic is important simply because COVID-19 has changed the way we live. We each have different coping styles and ways of managing our lives. Some are a little healthier than others."

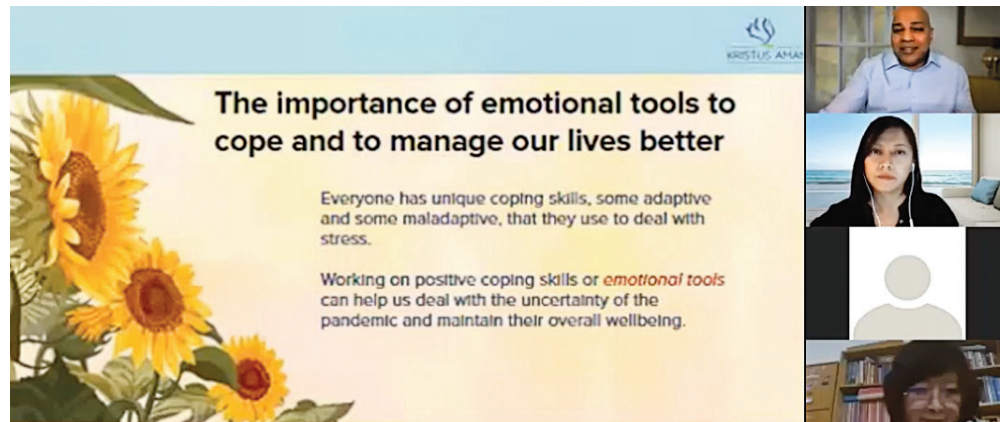
He said coping is often associated with distressing or challenging situations in life. This pandemic has taught us about ourselves, and our resilience, especially in the face of uncertainty. Revisiting the topic of coping skills helps us remember some key life management skills we may have taken for granted.

In the past year, many of us have faced some form of anxiety, fear, dread and or grief.

"In psychology, we call this Ambiguous Grieving, as we are not sure or clear what the loss is, unlike when facing the death of a loved one," said Eric. There is a sense of loss of normalcy, loss of safety, and we don't know if there is an end in sight.

People are also struggling with different types of fatigue – be it information fatigue, caution fatigue or just plain fatigue.

"We must not forget, the marginalised are even more affected by this. Many are facing loss



An online forum by Eric Bryan Amaladas on how to cope with the lockdown.

of income, having to home school children with a lack of electronic devices, and shortage of food to name a few.

"How effectively we respond to problems and challenges is pretty much how we cope. There are two methods of dealing with this."

Problem Focused Coping is where an individual takes proactive steps by engaging with the outside world, planning, strategising, creating action steps and arming themselves with the necessary tools to take on a particular challenge.

On the other hand, Emotional Focused Coping is directed inward. It involves changing how we deal with an immovable challenge and things we are not in control of.

Eric said both coping mechanisms are equally important as they address different kinds of challenges.

On how to assess one's coping skills, the counsellor said, a simple way would be to compare yourself between this year and last year. If it appears you are working more hours, drinking more alcoholic beverages, experiencing fewer positive emotions, not sleeping well – it's a sign you are not coping too well.

Circumstances outside the pandemic also influence the way we cope. If a person lives alone, is a caregiver or recently lost employment, then the coping mechanisms may be more challenging.

Resilience, which is a person's ability to bounce back from adversity, is an important tool in coping with adversity. It is rooted in how we actively engage in making sense of a crisis and how we come out of it.

Other tried and tested techniques include Emotional Regulation which is to effectively manage and respond to different emotional situations. It means — what we do to make ourselves feel better when we are feeling down rather than allowing negative feelings to control us.

"If we do not deal with certain emotions in our life, at some point they will blow up, either within or in some other form which will also affect other people. Often, a loved one is on the receiving end, simply because we are likely to get away with it."

Cognitive Reframing is another emotional tool. Our thoughts affect our emotions and the focus here is how we change our thinking.

Self-Care is another aspect of coping – it involves doing things you enjoy.

During this pandemic, it is also important to be mindful of the difference between social distancing and social isolation. We can and need to remain connected, be it differently than before.

As each person functions differently, the success of the suggested techniques also varies according to individual needs. — *By Gwen Manickam*

Bringing cheer to the elderly

SEREMBAN: During the Chinese New Year season, Visitation Church's Women's Desk, the praise dance team and Fr Xavier Andrew visited Pusat Jagaan Orang Tua Weng Da on February 15 to bring cheer to the residents.

The members brought along some provisions, face masks and Mandarin oranges.

They sang and clapped together with the elderly folks. The joy was reflected in their smiling faces.

At the end of the event, Fr Xavier gave each one an ang pow and an orange. It was a happy morning to see their faces lit up and we felt a deep gratitude to be able to share the laughter and joy of CNY amidst COVID-19. — *PIHDM, Visitation Seremban*



Fr Xavier Andrew giving an ang pow to a senior citizen during the visit to Pusat Jagaan Orang Tua Weng Da. (Visitation Seremban facebook)

Solidarity in diversity in the family

KUALA LUMPUR: The KL Archdiocesan Family Life Commission (AFLC) organised a webinar on the topic, *HOPE: Believe, Live & Give* in conjunction with the Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral February Theme *Solidarity in Diversity in family life*.

The moderators were Robert & Shelah Basker, Chaircouple of AFLC. The panel of speakers were Fr Jude Nirmal Doss, a professor at St Peter's Pontifical Seminary in Banga-

lore, India, Sr Angelin Gnanapragasam, from the Franciscan Missionaries of Divine Motherhood (FMDM), who is a trained Clinical Nurse Specialised in Oncology Palliative Care and Mrs Cynthia Varghese, a mother of three who together with her husband, serves actively in various ministries to help educate and improve the lives of youth and the marginalised. In a culture that has lost hope, the panellists and the moderators shared their life experienc-

es on HOPE in the Lord Jesus Christ. It was an hour of sharing on unshakable confidence in God — even when circumstances give us every reason to doubt.

Fr Jude gave a brilliant explanation on the meaning of having HOPE in our families and society in general. He shared that when we are faced with life challenges, we should "stare at Jesus and glance at the problem" instead of the other way around.

Speaking on Solidarity in Diversity, Fr Jude gave three examples of couples in the Bible who reflected these traits, i.e. Abraham and Sarah, Elkanah and Hannah, and Joseph and Mary, who were diverse in personalities and yet united in facing their challenges.

Cynthia shared very personal and touching testimonies on how she faced the challenges in her own life and how her faith in the Lord Jesus Christ carried her through the "STORM". It is only when everything is hopeless that hope begins to be a strength. Parents must teach their children the difference between our culture's view of hope and the hope we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. Hope is not mere optimism or wishful thinking; it's an essential part of our faith. Cynthia added "Help your children learn more about our hope in the Lord Jesus Christ with age-appropriate activities and discussions. The family is the domestic church

and parents play a vital role in this pandemic to teach the faith to our children.

Sr Angelin FMDM shared that she prayed and reflected on the theme Solidarity in Diversity. Sr Angelin said that diversity in a family can be painful because of the various members' sensitivities. We are reflected in the faces of our loved ones and it hurts when there is diversity in relationship, although there is hope for us to reflect and take stock of what is happening and then to put it right. There is no perfect family; however, there is always the opportunity to grow and learn to be a family.

Our moderators too shared their experiences during the pandemic. When we hope in HIM we find the confidence and strength to face any challenge that comes our way. We can find encouragement and joy amid life's struggles because we know we have HOPE with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Key points to take away from the session: HOPE is an unshakable confidence in God, despite one's circumstances, HOPE is essential to a believer's faith and HOPE gives strength, teaches patience and brings encouragement.

For those who missed out on the webinar, please log on to <https://youtu.be/-teZxKoZbHs> — *By Joshua Vinod Balakrishnan, Joseph and Anita Pragasam*



A webinar on Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral's February theme by Fr Jude Doss, Sr Angelin Gnanapragasam and Cynthia Varghese.

Burma's Catholic bishops call for peace and dialogue as two protesters killed

ROME: The Catholic bishops of Burma have called for a "return to dialogue" as two protesters were killed during demonstrations over the weekend.

"The heartrending scenes of youth dying in the streets wound the conscience of a nation," the bishops said in a Feb 21 letter.

"This nation has the reputation of being called a golden land. Let not its sacred ground be soaked in fraternal blood," they said. "The sadness of parents burying their children has to stop. Mothers' tears are never a blessing to any nation."

The letter was signed by 10 bishops, including Cardinal Charles Bo, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar, the country's official name.

The bishops' appeal came after two people died and at least 20 people were injured in clashes between police and demonstrators in Mandalay.

Demonstrators are protesting against this month's military coup and calling for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, the country's elected civilian leader.

She was detained along with Burma's President Win Myint and other members of



Thousands march in the streets to protest against the military coup in Myanmar on Feb 16, 2021. (Shutterstock/Robert Bociaga Olk Bon)

the National League for Democracy (NLD) party when the military seized power on Feb 1, alleging fraud during last Novem-

ber's elections, which the NLD won by a landslide.

Reports on Sunday said that some protest-

ers in Mandalay threw projectiles at police, who responded with live fire and tear gas.

The bishops urged those in power to seek reconciliation and healing, beginning with the release of the detained leaders.

"Just a month ago, this nation held in her heart a great promise: dreams of enhanced peace and a robust democracy," they wrote. An election was held despite the coronavirus pandemic and "the world admired our capacity for managing our differences."

"Today the world weeps with us, shattered by the fragmentation of this nation once again. Our youth deserve better," the bishops wrote.

They said that if Burma does not learn to solve its problems peacefully, it could be wiped off the world map.

"Urgently, the recourse to violence has to stop. The past lessons warn us violence never wins. Seventy-two years after independence, those in power need to invest in peace," the bishops said.

"The peace dividend will heal this nation. Give peace a chance. Peace is possible, peace is the only way." — **By Hannah Brockhaus, CNA**



COUNCIL OF CHURCHES OF MALAYSIA

Deportation of Myanmar-national asylum seekers

It is reported that on 23rd February, Malaysia plans to deport 1,200 detained Myanmar nationals, in coordination with the Myanmar military. Those set to be deported include refugees and asylum seekers who are at risk if they are forcibly returned to their homeland.

In this time of political insecurity in Myanmar, sending these Myanmar nationals back is to send them to an uncertain fate. The system of checks and balances, transparency and accountability have all but disappeared, and to repatriate these people

from our shores is to send them into a hostile and very dangerous situation.

We, therefore, call on the government of Malaysia not to participate in the disavowing of refugees as it is an act contrary to international law and norms. Instead, the Prime Minister should grant UNHCR full access to detention centres to identify refugees and asylum seekers and ensure their protection and safety. Until such time when law and order is restored in Myanmar, and a democratically-elected government is firmly in place, chosen by the popular vote


of its citizens, we should not cast the lives of these 1,200 detained Myanmar nationals into an undesired and dangerous territory.

In our Christian faith tradition, God instructs his people to show mercy and compassion to others. He calls us to care "for the widows, the fatherless and the foreigners among us" (Deuteronomy 10: 18)

Since this is the season of Lent, we are called to spiritual introspection and to engage in acts of charity. What better way to affirm it than to uphold the principles of the sanctity of life and the dignity of all per-

sons, created and loved and endowed with rights by God?

Not a single asylum seeker, refugee and anyone else whose life is under threat should be forced to return to Myanmar or any other country where they may face persecution or even death in a situation of conflict.


Rev. Dr. Hermen Shastri
General Secretary
February 23, 2021



CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF MALAYSIA

February 23, 2021

Repatriation of Myanmar Nationals Stranded in Malaysia

In the most recent encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (*On Fraternity and Social Friendship*), Pope Francis reminded the Church that all of us are part of a larger human family and that our human fraternity "transcends the barriers of geography and distance." In a spirit of fraternal love, the Church cannot turn a blind eye to the vulnerable and those in need irrespective of who they are and where they come from, especially in times of crises. In this Season of Lent, the sacrifices of fasting, prayer and almsgiving which Lent call us to, must move us beyond individualistic Lenten practices towards cultivating a love and compassion for one another that excludes no one and is open to all. "Whatever affects one di-

rectly, affects all indirectly."

It has been recently reported in several local and international media sources that Malaysia is about to repatriate 1,200 Myanmar nationals from our shores, and amongst them are also refugees and asylum seekers. At a time of grave political uncertainty in Myanmar, our faith tells us that we cannot remain silent and be complicit in this action towards those who have fled due to a grave humanitarian crisis. Guaranteeing personal security to the most vulnerable refugees, migrants and asylum seekers must not only be governed by international laws but also by the "laws of humanity", which are grounded on mercy, compassion and love.

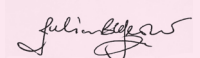
As committed Malaysians whose faith calls us to the two-fold commandment of love of God and of one another (cf. Luke 10:27), we cannot remain indifferent to the tragedies of human misery. Loving God and one another means that we are firmly committed to building a more just world and restoring humanity where no one is left behind.

We call on the Malaysian government to not subject the lives of these Myanmar nationals to an uncertain and unknown fate by simply repatriating them in these uncertain times. We also ask that an international organisation such as the UNHCR be allowed to verify these individuals so that their personal security can be guaranteed. As caring Malay-

sians, we should not subject anyone to situations that are marked by fear, uncertainty and unease.

We also call upon all Catholics to offer their fast during this season of Lent for the peoples of Myanmar, for a genuine dialogue among all sides, and for lasting peace and freedom. We unite ourselves in prayer with the people in Myanmar invoking God for peace, reconciliation and harmony in these uncertain times.

Continue to love each other like brothers [and sisters], and remember always to welcome strangers, for by doing this, some people have entertained angels without knowing it. (Hebrews 13:1-2)


+ Most Rev Julian Leow Beng Kim D.D.
President, CBCM
Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur

+ Rt Rev Sebastian Francis
Bishop of Penang

+ Most Rev John Wong
Archbishop of Kota Kinabalu

+ Rt Rev Julius Gitom
Bishop of Sandakan

+ Rt Rev Richard Ng
Bishop of Miri

+ Rt Rev Bernard Paul
Bishop of Malacca Johore

+ Rt Rev Cornelius Piong
Bishop of Keningau

+ Most Rev Simon Poh
Archbishop of Kuching

+ Rt Rev Joseph Hii
Bishop of Sibiu

Fr Stan Swamy hoping for bail at his March 2 hearing

MUMBAI: The special National Investigation Agency (NIA) court will examine on 2 March a new appeal for the release on bail of Fr Stan Swamy, a 83-year-old Indian Jesuit held in Taloja prison, near Mumbai, since October 9.

Fr Stan is accused of terrorism for his long-term commitment to the rights of tribal communities. The hearing will come just a few days after the Mumbai High Court on Feb 22 ordered the release on a six-month bail of poet and activist Varavara Rao, who is in the same prison as Fr Swamy.

Like the elderly Jesuit and 14 other people, Rao is also accused of instigating the violence that broke out in 2018 in Bhima Koregaon, Maharashtra, during the Elgar Parishad, the commemoration of a historic battle 200 years ago,

seen as a milestone in the struggle to assert the rights of Dalits and tribal communities in India.

In Varavara Rao's case, after more than two years in custody pending trial, the High Court ruled that he should be released for six months because of poor health. This overturns a ruling by the NIA court, which had rejected a defence request on the same grounds.

The poet, who contracted COVID-19 last July, worsening pre-existing health conditions, is expected to be released this afternoon from the prison's hospital.

The Bombay High Court found that Rao needs specialised medical assistance that cannot be guaranteed in prison. However, it ruled that he cannot leave Mumbai, that he must remain available for questioning, and that he should not,



Fr Stan Swamy SJ

alone or with others, "take undue advantage of the situation, which would ultimately adversely affect the trial."

On paper, the same applies to Fr Stan Swamy, who was arrested in

Ranchi four months ago. Suffering from Parkinson's disease, he struggles to eat and drink, and has lost his hearing and suffers from lumbar spondylosis.

So far, the request for release on health grounds has been rejected. Now the new application filed by his lawyers is based on the argument that the prosecution has not yet demonstrated how Fr Stan took part in illegal activities or incited others to carry them out.

The Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) "is a law for emergency times of widespread violence. It was earlier meant only for organisations," said Fr Frazer Mascarenhas, a Jesuit and a sociologist at St Xavier's College in Mumbai.

"Recently the NDA government amended the Act to include indi-

viduals. And it has been very liberally using it against human rights activists, journalists, lawyers, writers, poets and even students. The denial of bail to Fr Stan is not surprising as the UAPA itself makes this very difficult.

"Hence the need for all civil society [groups] to come together to demand a repeal of this law . . . A government that cannot tolerate democratic dissent can so easily abuse such a law."

"The accusation itself becomes the punishment for the persons concerned and their families. An insensitive and overburdened jail administration makes things worse. This is not the depth of degradation our country should have sunk to. But it's not too late to wake up. Our farmers are leading the way." — **By Nirmala Carvalho, AsiaNews**

German Bishops' Conference elects first female general secretary

BERLIN: The theologian Beate Gilles was elected general secretary of the German bishops' conference on Feb 22, becoming the first woman to hold the post.

She succeeds Fr Hans Langendörfer, SJ, who held the office from 1996 until he stepped down in January.

Bishop Georg Bätzing, the president of the German Bishops' Conference, welcomed the appointment on Feb 23.

CNA Deutsch, *CNA's* German-language news partner, reported that Bätzing described her election as "an important day for the Church in Germany."

He said: "I see this as a strong sign that the bishops are fulfilling their promise to promote women in leadership positions."

Bätzing, the bishop of Limburg, described Gilles as a "profound theologian" with connections throughout the Catholic Church in Germany.

She has served since 2010 as head of the department for children, youth, and family in the Diocese of Limburg.

Gilles, who will take office on



Theologian Beate Gilles

July 1, expressed appreciation for the work of her predecessor, Langendörfer. The German Church's official website, *katholisch.de*, noted that while Langendörfer held the title of "secretary," Gilles would be known as "general secretary" in accordance with Church law.

She said: "It is a challenging but also exciting phase for the Catholic Church in Germany. With the Synodal Way, something new has started. This process will enable me to quickly get to know the differentiated Catholic landscape." — *CNA*

Pyongyang hackers attack Pfizer targeting anti-COVID vaccine

SEOUL: A new North Korean unit for online piracy recently breached Pfizer's computer system: the aim was to steal secrets related to the development of the COVID-19 vaccine.

This episode was reported by *Daily NK* on the basis of information obtained from a high-level source of the Kim Jong-un regime.

The news confirms what Ha Taekyung, a member of the Intelligence Committee of the South Korean Parliament, declared on February 16 after having witnessed a briefing

by the secret services.

But while the Seoul parliamentarian made direct reference to a hacker attack in Pyongyang on Pfizer, the intelligence agents in the South then specified that they had only provided a general picture of the situation.

They found that North Korean hacker attacks grew 32 per cent from a year ago, including those to steal data on coronavirus vaccines, but did not name a specific pharmaceutical company among the victims. — *AsiaNews / Agencies*

Cardinal prays on CNN programme marking 500,000 COVID-19 deaths in US

WASHINGTON: During a Feb 22 evening programme on *CNN*, Washington Cardinal Wilton D. Gregory offered a prayer for those who have died from COVID-19 asking God to "grant eternal peace to all our sisters and brothers lost to this disease."

"Let us now open our hearts to recall those who have died from the coronavirus," Cardinal Gregory prayed. "Strengthen those families and friends who remain behind, to comfort one another and to wipe the tears from our eyes. May each one find peace and let the memory of our loved ones itself be a blessing."

The cardinal called it "a great honour and privilege" to offer the prayer at the invitation of Jake Tapper, *CNN* anchor and chief Washington correspondent, on the programme *We Remember 500,000: A National Memorial Service for COVID-19*.

It commemorated the milestone reached Feb 22 when the United States surpassed 500,000 deaths due to the coronavirus.

Over 1,200 coronavirus deaths were reported Feb 22, bringing the nationwide total to 500,103. More than 28.2 million Americans have been infected by the virus. Also, as of Feb 22, close to 13 per cent of the US population has received the first round of the COVID-19 vaccine, and about six per cent of Americans have received both shots.

"We pray that — regardless of race, age, religious heritage, economic or immigration status — all people are able to receive the life-saving vaccine to bring an end to our common suffering," Cardinal Gregory prayed.

He also said that "our hearts are filled with gratitude for our doctors, nurses and emergency personnel" and prayed that "they remain well and be strengthened."

"May the one who fashioned us



THOLIC CARDINAL REMEMBERS COVID-19 VICTIMS

Cardinal Gregory offers a prayer during *CNN's* evening programme Feb 22, 2021, remembering over 500,000 Americans who have died of COVID-19. (CS screen capture/Andrew Biraj)

help us to focus on our mutual humanity," Cardinal Gregory prayed. "Although weary from so many months of isolation, help us not to lose hope, help us to continue to care for our neighbours as we remember those we have lost in this pandemic."

Before he said the prayer, the cardinal pointed out that "the poor, the elderly, and people of colour have experienced a disproportionate amount of sadness" due to the coronavirus and he added that the pandemic "has increased our awareness of our common humanity."

"We have been brought to a deeper awareness we are one people and this illness, this disease, this virus is no respecter of persons," he said.

When was asked by Tapper what the Catholic faith teaches about helping one another when it is not safe to physically come together, Cardinal Gregory said: "We Catholics are grateful that we have each other, even under these limited and painful moments when we cannot be with each other, to reach out and embrace and be in the presence of those who are suffering."

He said the "sacramental reality" of the Catholic faith "is expressed in word and sacrament, in sign and

prayer and music," and "not being able to have a full display of those sacramental signs of our faith is itself an additional sorrow."

In interviews during recent months, the cardinal has stressed the need to pray for those who have died of the coronavirus as well as their families and friends and to get the vaccine when it is made available to them.

On Jan 19, he offered the invocation at a pre-inauguration memorial service beside the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool attended by President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris to remember the 400,000 Americans who had died from COVID-19 at that point.

In a livestreamed Mass in January for the community of Archbishop Carroll High School in Washington, Cardinal Gregory encouraged people to get the coronavirus vaccine when it is made available to them.

"We have vaccines that are effective in helping to protect us, and I urge and plead and invite all of our students, faculty, parents, grandparents, teachers (and) benefactors to make good use of those vaccines, to get vaccinated," he said. — **Richard Szczepanowski, CNS**

Poland celebrates 90th anniversary of Divine Mercy apparition

PLOCK, POLAND: A Vatican archbishop celebrated the 90th anniversary of the first Divine Mercy apparition on Monday, Feb 22, in the Polish city of Plock.

Archbishop Jan Romeo Pawłowski, an official at the Vatican Secretariat of State, celebrated Mass on Feb 22 at the Shrine of the Divine Mercy in Plock, where St Faustina Kowalska saw a vision of Jesus on Feb 22, 1931.

The Polish nun said that Jesus appeared dressed in white, with rays emerging from his chest, asking her to create an image of him bearing the words 'Jesus, I trust in you.'

In his homily, Pawłowski said: "Today, after 90 years, the prayer 'Jesus, I trust in you!' is translated into hundreds of languages, and is repeated millions of times."

"We can dare to say that this prayer completes the *Our Father* prayer, also established by Jesus himself to teach his disciples how to turn to the Father, while the one taught to Sr Faustina tells us how to turn to the Merciful



Archbishop Jan Romeo Pawłowski celebrates Mass on the 90th anniversary of the Divine Mercy apparition at the Divine Mercy Sanctuary in Plock, Poland, Feb 22, 2021. (CNA Photo/Foreign Communication)

Son."

The Polish archbishop, who was appointed Secretary for the Pontifical Representations in December, said that he had discussed his visit to Plock with Pope Francis before departing the Vatican.

He said: "Before leaving to come here, I notified the Holy Father, who

told me: 'Pray for me and make people pray for me. Tell them that I deeply believe in divine mercy.'

The pope formally marked the anniversary in a letter to Bishop Piotr Libera of Plock, where St Faustina lived in a convent from June 1930 to November 1932.

"Let us ask Christ for the gift of

mercy. Let it engulf us and penetrate us. Let us have the courage to come back to Jesus to meet His love and mercy in the sacraments," he said in the letter, dated Feb 15.

"Let us feel His closeness and tenderness, and then we will also be more capable of mercy, patience, forgiveness, and love."

Pope Francis also referred to the 90th anniversary following the Angelus on Feb 21, saying: "Today my thoughts go to the Shrine of Plock in Poland, where 90 years ago the Lord Jesus manifested Himself to St. Faustina Kowalska, entrusting a special message of divine mercy to her."

"Through St John Paul II this message reached the entire world, and it is none other than the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who died and rose again, and who gives us His Father's mercy. Let us open our heart, saying with faith, 'Jesus, I trust in You.'"

The Divine Mercy image was first painted by the Polish artist Eugeniusz Kazimirowski. After the nun's

death in 1938, other artists created images inspired by her description of the apparition. The best-known version was painted by the Polish painter Adolf Hyla in 1943.

Sr Faustina was canonised by Pope John Paul II in the year 2000, becoming the first saint of the new millennium. In his canonisation homily, the Polish pope described her life and witness "as a gift of God for our time."

Poland's President Andrzej Duda also sent a message marking the 90th anniversary.

He said that the message of St Faustina, shared with the world by St John Paul II, "has a universal dimension, reaching the hearts of people of good will, regardless of their religion and worldview."

He continued: "And I am convinced that, especially in modern times, humanity needs the solidarity and hope that sound so strongly in the writings of both of our saints."

— CNA

Passionist priest, relative of English princes, William and Harry, takes step closer to sainthood

ENGLAND: A priest related to Princes William and Harry took a major step closer to sainthood when Pope Francis declared him venerable.

Like St John Henry Newman, Passionist Fr Ignatius Spencer is considered one of the towering figures of the 19th-century revival of English Catholicism, often referred to by church historians as the "Second Spring." The Feb 21 announcement means the Catholic Church is satisfied that Fr Spencer lived a life of heroic virtue.

The search will now begin for two inexplicable healings at the intercession of the priest — one to declare him as blessed and the other to recognise him as a saint.

Fr Spencer is related to Prince William, the second in line to the British throne, and to Harry, the sixth in the line of succession, through their mother, Princess Diana.

The Passionist was a great-great-uncle of Princess Diana, and a great-uncle of Sir Winston Churchill.

A former Anglican clergyman who became a Catholic, he raised money to bring Blessed Dominic Barberi — the priest who would receive St John Henry Newman into the Church — to England and petitioned the Passionists to send him.

He also helped found the Passionist Sisters with Mother Elizabeth Prout, whom Pope Francis declared venerable in January.

Fr Spencer's grave is located beside both Mother Prout and Blessed Dominic in the Church of St Anne and Blessed Dominic in St Helens, a town in the Archdiocese of Liverpool.

Archbishop Malcolm McMahon of Liverpool said he welcomed the Pope's announcement with "great happiness," adding that it was a "remarkable grace" for the archdiocese

to have both Fr Spencer and Mother Prout declared venerable within weeks of each other.

"These two Victorian Catholics are as relevant to the mission of the church today as they were in their lifetimes. They show us how to reach out beyond ourselves and respond to suffering due to poverty and deprivation," the archbishop said.

His prayer, he said, was that their shrine "will increase as a centre of devotion and prayer in the archdiocese."

"All three of these great disciples loved the poor and worked tirelessly for their bodily and spiritual well-being," he added.

He noted that Fr Spencer "left behind a life of privilege, devoted himself tirelessly to visiting the poor, giving food and all his personal possessions to those in need."

"His preaching and writings showed him to be a true disciple of

Jesus, and in his daily life he lived out the passion of Our Lord in heroic fashion. His life of service is a true example to his living relatives, Prince William and Prince Harry, and is to be emulated by us all."

George Spencer grew up at the family home at Althorp, where Princess Diana was buried after she was killed in a Paris car crash in August 1997.

He was educated at Eton and Cambridge but turned his back on a life of immense wealth by converting to the Catholic faith a decade after he was shocked by a scene in the Mozart opera *Don Giovanni*, which sees the eponymous anti-hero conveyed to hell by a troop of devils.

Fr Spencer interpreted his experience as a holy warning, and he went to Rome to train as a priest, eventually joining the Passionist order, taking Ignatius as his religious name.

On his return to England, the priest



Father Ignatius Spencer

worked among some of the poorest people in the country, including migrants from the Irish Potato Famine, who were living in caves dug out of mining slag heaps.

He started the Movement for Christian Unity and has been credited for laying the groundwork of the ecumenical movement of northern Europe of the late 20th century.

He contracted tuberculosis from a workhouse in Staffordshire, but he died from a heart attack in 1864 near Carstairs, Scotland, while travelling to visit his godson. — **By Simon Caldwell, CNS**

From Pius XI to Pope Francis: A history of Spiritual Exercises at the Vatican

VATICAN: For nearly 100 years, popes have set aside time for an annual retreat and meditation on spiritual exercises.

Pope Francis and the Roman Curia began a weeklong Lenten retreat Sunday, Feb 21, but for the first time since the Second Vatican Council, this retreat is not taking place as a time of communal prayer due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Instead, the Pope has asked the members of the Roman Curia to make their own arrangements for a private Lenten retreat this year on Feb 21-26. All papal events, including the Wednesday general audience, are cancelled for this week.

Pope Pius XI began the practice of annual spiritual exercises at the

Vatican, inviting Jesuit priests to lead the Ignatian exercises for himself and the Curia in 1925. Pius XI was a great admirer of St Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus, proclaiming him patron of spiritual exercises in 1922.

In his encyclical on promoting the practice of spiritual exercises, *Mens nostra*, Pius XI officially established the Vatican's spiritual exercises as an annual practice in 1929.

He wrote: "For, long since, this Apostolic See, which had often commended the spiritual exercises by word, taught the faithful by its own example and authority, converting the august Vatican temple into an Upper Room for meditation

and prayers; which custom We have willingly received, with no small joy and consolation to Ourselves."

"And in order that we may secure this joy and consolation, both for ourselves and for others who are near us, We have already had arrangements made for holding the spiritual exercises every year in the Vatican."

The spiritual exercises at the Vatican originally took place during the first week of Advent. Among the Jesuits who preached the Ignatian exercises at the Vatican was Fr. Paolo Dezza, who led the meditations in 1942 for Pope Pius XII. Dezza would later become St Paul VI's confessor.

While Jesuits typically led the

annual papal spiritual exercises for 30 years, Pope John XXIII invited other Italian clerics, including a parish priest and a bishop, to lead the meditations for the curia. He also suspended the exercises completely in 1963 due to the meetings of the Second Vatican Council.

Pope St Paul VI moved the annual meditations from Advent to Lent and was the first to select non-Italians to preach the spiritual exercises. He notably invited a young cardinal from Poland to lead the Lenten retreat: Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, who preached in 1976 on "Christ, a sign of contradiction" two years before he was elected pope.

Pope St John Paul II invited Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the future

Pope Benedict XVI, to preach the spiritual exercises in 1983 and in 2000 Msgr. François-Xavier van Thuan preached the year before he was made a cardinal.

Benedict XVI invited cardinals from Africa to preach the spiritual exercises, among them Cardinal Francis Arinze and Cardinal Laurent Monsengwo Pasinya.

Pope Francis was the first to move the spiritual exercises from the Vatican to a retreat house outside of Rome. For the past seven years, the retreat has taken place in a retreat house in the town of Ariccia in the Alban Hills southeast of Rome, although the Pope was unable to participate in 2020 due to a cold. — **By Courtney Mares, CNA**

HERALD

February 28, 2021

Beyond the Apocalypse:
Starting from Baghdad

Accepting the invitation from Baghdad and the local Catholic Church, Pope Francis will make an Apostolic Journey to Iraq from March 5 to 8, 2021, visiting Baghdad, on the plain of Ur, which is linked to the memory of Abraham, the city of Erbil, as well as Mosul and Qaraqosh on the plain of Nineveh.

The programme of the trip will take into account the evolution of the global health emergency – the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pontiff, keeping his gaze fixed on the world, decided that this was the time to plan a trip to Iraq. Why?

The term “COVID19” has become the mirror of a pervasive virus that is very much present in our hearts, a metaphor that reveals a sick world. We refer to a sort of pandemic of the spirit and social relations. The coronavirus has become its symbol and image.

In the context of this spiritual health emergency, the journey to Iraq must be seen as the Church taking up its mission as a “field hospital.” The ideal place to pitch the tent of this hospital is the plain of Nineveh, which was occupied by the self-styled Islamic State between 2014 and 2017, a plain which includes the site of the Chaldean city of Ur, the place of origin of the three Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

On January 25, 2020, Francis received Iraqi President Barham Salih and spoke of “fostering stability and the process of reconstruction, encouraging the path of dialogue and the search for appropriate solutions in favour of the citizens and with respect for national sovereignty.” The Pope gave the president a peace medallion depicting a revitalised desert, that is, a desolate wasteland that has become a garden.

As the gifts were being exchanged, he expressed his own wish: that the President of Iraq would bring him “an identity card” attesting to “Pope Francis, son of the son of the son... of Abraham,” referring to the father of the three monotheistic religions.

This is the point: the pontiff has identified in these months of lockdown and global health crisis a clear focal point of his mission: human fraternity, towards which other religions can offer a “valuable contribution” (cf. Fratelli Tutti [FT], Nos. 271-287). That is why he decided to start again from Baghdad. A thread binds St. Peter’s Square – where, in the midst of the pandemic, on March 27 last year we saw Francis praying alone for the world – and the cities of Mesopotamia, the cradle of ancient civilisation, desecrated by the violence of the Islamic State, by regional and international conflicts, by the persecution of Christians, by the mass exodus of many Iraqis in search of a better life.

We know that Francis has been thinking of visiting Iraq for some time. He spoke about it on June 10, 2019, during an audience granted to the Reunion of Aid Agencies for the Oriental Churches: “An insistent thought accompanies me in thinking about Iraq, that it may look ahead through the peaceful and shared participation in the construction of the common good of all the components of society, including the religious ones, and not fall back into the tensions that come from the never-dormant conflicts of regional powers.”

Baghdad, with the weight of its caliphal past reverberating in today’s world as a junction of imperialisms is an epicentre of apocalyptic visions tending to accelerate the end of time, in a dialectic between millenary tensions and militant mobilisation.

Francis’ challenge has strong “political” value, because it overturns the logic of the apocalypse that fights against the world, because it believes that the world is the opposite of God, that is, an idol, and therefore to be destroyed as soon as possible to accelerate the end of time. It is a challenge to those who find no alternative to being martyrs or apostates.

No! Enough violence, enough war, enough conflicts!

There is another option, the Gospel one: to be brothers and sisters. The Pope’s trip to Iraq will be a cry of fraternity, a yearning for harmony, peace and solidarity!

— By Antonio Spadaro, SJ, *La Civiltà Cattolica*
(<https://www.laciviltacattolica.com/>)

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The free world must match the courage of Myanmar’s people

The courage, creativity and commitment of the people of Myanmar are incredibly inspiring. From the mass protests to the ingenuity of the protest signs, protesters have turned the anti-coup demonstrations over the past three weeks into an artistic performance reflective of the human spirit.

Whether their cars are allegedly broken down on bridges or their bicycle tires need inflating at traffic jams, whether they feel an urgent need to do workouts at junctions or tie up their shoelaces, whether they launch a “floating strike” on Inle Lake or drop shallots at a crossroads, the peaceful civil disobedience movement in Myanmar deserves the applause of the world.

Most of all, the extraordinary ability of people to daub entire roads, lakes and rivers with “We Want Democracy” and “Free Our Leaders” leaves me in awe — and it conveys a totally united, unambiguous and clear message to the world about the will of the people of Myanmar.

Yet the world so far, though it may be hearing, seems to be responding limply. Some sanctions have been imposed, but they have been token. And the generals who staged this coup, though they may be stunned by the way the people have responded, show no signs of backing down.

Until this past weekend, the military regime focused on rounding up and arresting key pro-democracy leaders, either from the legitimate government or from civil society. But perhaps it had not banked on the fact that the entire country

and its population hates the idea of a return to the dark days of military dictatorship and international ostracism. That — along with perhaps some consciousness of international appearances — may explain why we have not yet seen the massacres which are in the military’s DNA, along the lines of 1988 or 2007.

And yet we have seen ominous precursors.

In Mandalay on Feb 20, live ammunition was used, resulting in the death of at least two people, one a 14-year-old — and the death toll may be more than was reported. In Yangon, a nightwatchman providing security for his neighbourhood was shot for no apparent reason. British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab was absolutely right when he tweeted: “The shooting of peaceful protesters in Myanmar is beyond the pale. We will consider further action, with our international partners, against those crushing democracy and choking dissent”.

We have seen the grieving faces of families mourning their loved ones; we have seen the stark images of Burmese soldiers smiling after shooting; and we know, according to Tom Andrews, the UN special rapporteur for human rights in Myanmar, that it was the 33rd Light Infantry Division that was deployed in Mandalay, a division that was at least in part responsible for the Rohingya genocide. The military junta appears to be unleashing a war against the people of Myanmar, and the world needs to wake up to that fact.

And yet the people won’t back down.

What should the Church and the world do?

The Church in Myanmar has always

inspired me. It inspires me by its courage, wisdom and ingenuity. As a tiny minority of the population, it wields a moral influence that far exceeds its numerical strength. It makes its position clear — it is for democracy, justice and human rights, and that is unambiguous — but its hierarchy wisely stands in the shadows, knowing that in a Buddhist-majority country it cannot play the same role the Church played at the forefront of the movements against dictatorship in, say, Poland, the Philippines, East Timor or South Korea, and yet it can play some role.

Its leaders signal a dual message — for truth, justice, human rights and democracy, and yet also ready for mediation, reconciliation and peace. It’s walking a tightrope but doing so well.

Within a few days of the coup, Myanmar’s Cardinal Charles Bo issued a strong statement condemning the military’s action, appealing for dialogue and non-violence, and calling for a return to democracy.

Catholic nuns and priests have taken to the streets to join protests, while the inspiring archbishop of Mandalay, Marco Tin Win, whom I’ve had the privilege of meeting several times, stood with some of his clergy holding a placard with the words “People’s desire — free detained

leaders and oppose military rule”.

These are brave, plucky moves by a minority religion — and they are why I was inspired eight years ago to become a Catholic in Myanmar.

So, what should happen now? The world should step up.

Pope Francis, though he has, rightly, made some remarks, must come right out front and call for prayer for Myanmar. Having visited Myanmar in 2017 — the first pontiff to do so — he must call out coup leader Min Aung Hlaing, call for the release of all those detained, appeal against any further violence and broker dialogue.

The United Nations must prove its critics wrong and show that, contrary to popular perception, it is not impotent. The secretary-general must dispatch — this week, without delay — a delegation from the Security Council to de-escalate the situation, secure the release of detained elected leaders and broker talks.

And the free world must come together to say that even with all the other challenges we face, not least the COVID-19 pandemic, the abortion of the democratisation of Myanmar, however fragile and disappointing that experiment was, cannot be allowed.

The democratic world must say with one voice that the rejection of the will of



A car carrying the body of protester Mya Thwate Thwate Khaing, 20, leads a convoy during her funeral service in Naypyidaw on Feb 21 after she died following being shot during a rally against the military coup. (UCA News photo)

The day after the shooting and killing in Mandalay, people turned out in even larger numbers in ever more peaceful protest. The contrast could not be clearer: unarmed protesters equipped with flowers and jokes, lined up in their hundreds of thousands against trained killers with guns. Yet it’s the people armed with nothing more than flowers and humor that are courageous, and it’s the men in uniform who are cowards. Those who seize power by the bullet and not the ballot are always guilty of cowardice.— By Benedict Rogers, ucanews.com

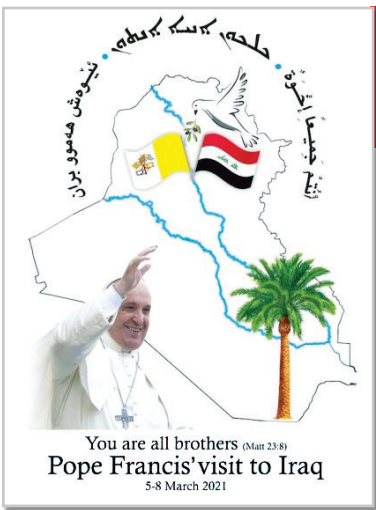
the people of Myanmar isn’t just an assault on Myanmar’s fledgling, fragile, tentative quasi-democracy. It is an assault on all freedom-loving people everywhere and thus cannot stand.

If there’s any silver lining, it is this: that the people of Myanmar, of all ethnicities and religions, oppose this coup and have come out onto the streets to say so. And that their focus is on values, not personalities — that while civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi is still important, and her release is rightly demanded, not everything depends on her any more.

Other leaders to chart Myanmar’s democratic course may perhaps emerge. Let’s hope so. And that this is a cause that binds everyone together — Burman, Karen, Karenni, Shan, Mon, Rakhine, Chin, Kachin, Rohingya and others.

The people of Myanmar have shown extraordinary courage and creativity. It’s time for the international community, including the worldwide Church, to show the same in support. — By Benedict Rogers, ucanews.com

● Benedict Rogers is a human rights activist and writer specialising in Asia. He is senior analyst for the human rights organisation CSW and author of three books on Myanmar, including *Burma: A Nation at the Crossroads*.



Pandemic, terror threats: Iraq papal trip is complicated, even for Francis

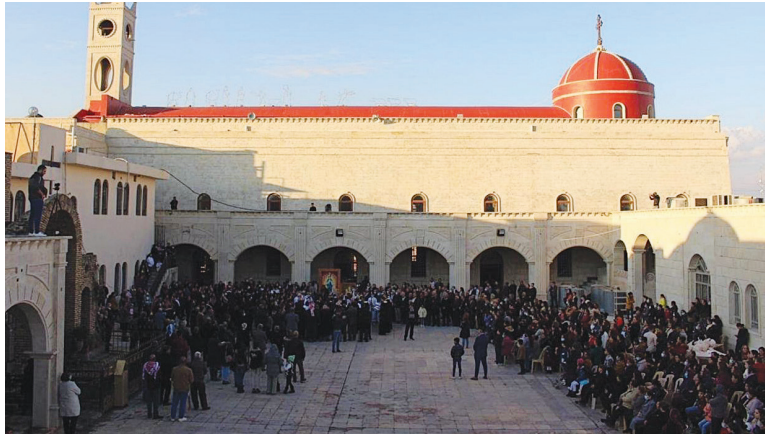
ROME: Travelling during an ongoing global pandemic. Heading to a country where suicide bombings are a threat. Preparing for the first meeting between a pope and one of the world's leading Muslim clerics.

Even for a pontiff who has undertaken some difficult trips abroad, Pope Francis' planned visit to Iraq, March 5 to 8, has more than a usual share of complexity.

Add to the list: encouraging a small but historic Christian community that is still reeling from three years of devastation wrought by Islamic State militants who destroyed churches and forced hundreds of thousands to flee a brutal fundamentalist regime.

Yet, given all the possible difficulties, Iraqis said that the mere fact of the Pope's coming should outweigh any problems.

As Baghdad-based Marsin Alshamary said when asked if Iraqis would be looking for Francis to broach specific subjects or themes while in the country: "The symbolism of the pope visiting Iraq is quite



Crowds surround Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, Dec 28, 2018, as he visits the Syriac Catholic cathedral, St. Mary al-Tahira, in Qaraqosh, a city in the Nineveh Plains, where some 100,000 Christians were uprooted in 2014 by Islamic State fighters. (Vatican Media)

a grand gesture."

"Even if he came and said the very typical things we expect a religious leader to say, it's still something very important and very symbolic that he is doing for Iraq," said Alshamary, an Iraqi and post-doctoral fellow at the Brookings Institution.

Archbishop Bashar Matti Warda, who leads the Chaldean Catholic community in Erbil, also highlighted the simple meaning of the Pope

choosing to come and visit.

"Right from the beginning of his papacy he spoke about the marginalised groups," said Warda. "He is coming to see us face to face, to show us he cares about us."

The Pope told *Catholic News Service* Feb 1 that he would only postpone his planned visit to Iraq if there were a serious spike in coronavirus cases. "I am the pastor of people who are suffering," the pontiff said in ex-

planation for why he feels he must make the trip.

One Vatican official suggested that Iraq's coronavirus prevention measures might bolster the Pope's security. That person, who asked not to be named because they were speaking without permission from superiors, said the measures may limit access to events beyond what otherwise could have been planned.

Encouraging Christian communities Francis' trip to Iraq will be the Pope's 33rd visit abroad since his March 2013 election as pontiff. The itinerary for the visit indicates two main objectives: encouraging Christian communities in the country and pursuing high-level Muslim-Christian dialogue.

The first objective will be the focus on March 7, when the Pope travels north from Baghdad to visit Erbil, Mosul and Qaraqosh (Bakhda).

Mosul and Qaraqosh have historically had significant Christian communities that trace their origins to the earliest decades of the faith, but were decimated under Islamic State group control from 2014 to 2017.

"What the Pope's visit is doing is bringing back some of that hope again," said Kalian, whose work focuses on community reconciliation in the Ninewa province. "The visit is really going to be giving a huge vote of confidence from the pope to the people that they can handle and sustain themselves, despite the challenges."

Christians in Iraq belong to a range of rites and traditions and include Syriac, Assyrian, Chaldean, Armenian and Melkite communities.

While they once numbered about 1.5 million in a total population of about 39 million, their numbers have diminished sharply in the years since the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq and are estimated now to number in the hundreds of thousands.

While in Mosul, Francis is scheduled to offer a prayer at a memorial for victims of Islamic State group violence. In Qaraqosh, the pope is to visit the St Mary al-Tahira cathedral. The largest Syriac-Catholic church in the Middle East, it is still under repair after being looted and set on fire by Islamic State group fighters. —

By Joshua J. McElwee, NCR

Pope Francis' first trip since Nov 2019 Towards Muslim-Christian dialogue

Francis' visit to Iraq, during which he is scheduled to visit six cities over three days, will be his first abroad since November 2019. He cancelled all travel planned for 2020 due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Although Iraq announced a new partial coronavirus lockdown Feb 15, including the temporary closure of all the country's mosques and churches, the Vatican is continuing preparations for the trip and has not yet said whether it might be postponed.

The Pope and those travelling with him are being vaccinated by the Vatican in advance of the journey. Local organisers are also stressing that stringent social distancing and masking protocols are being put in place.

Warda, who is overseeing preparations for a planned March 7 Mass at Erbil's Franso Hariri soccer stadium, said organisers are strictly limiting the numbers of those able to attend, assigning seats, and collecting phone numbers.

"God forbid any case would emerge, we would know exactly where this person was and we could inform those who around him or her that there was a case," said the archbishop.

The Vatican has not addressed possible concerns for the Pope's



Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Bashar Warda of Erbil

safety in Iraq. While violent attacks have largely subsided since the Iraqi government drove the Islamic State group underground in late 2017, there was a twin suicide bombing in Baghdad Jan 21 that killed at least 32 people.

There was also a rocket attack against US-led coalition forces near Erbil's airport Feb 15, killing one civilian contractor and injuring others.

Francis has said before that he is not afraid of death or of risking his life in ministry. In a 2015 interview, he said he only asks God that his death not be painful because "I'm a real wimp when it comes to physical pain." — NCR

Pursuing Muslim-Christian dialogue will be the Pope's focus on March 6, when he travels south from Baghdad to Najaf for a private meeting with Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, one of the world's most influential Shiite Muslim clerics.

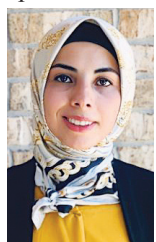
Alshamary and other experts said they expect that visit, the first of its kind, to be of historic import.

"Sistani is such a revered figure in Iraq, such a well-respected religious authority," said Alshamary, who focused her dissertation at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on the involvement of Shia clerics in Iraqi politics. "It's quite important that they meet."

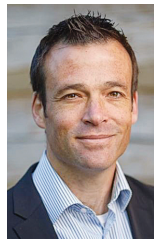
Gabriel Said Reynolds, a theologian at the University of Notre Dame who has focused on Muslim-Christian relations, said simply that Sistani is "widely regarded as the most authoritative religious actor for Shiite Muslims around the world."

Sunni and Shia are the two major branches of Islam.

Francis has been pursuing dialogue with Muslim authorities throughout his papacy, but he has done so especially in the last few years. Iraq will



Marsin Alshamary



Gabriel Said Reynolds



Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmad el-Tayeb, grand imam of Egypt's al-Azhar mosque and university, sign documents during an interreligious meeting in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, Feb 4, 2019. (file photo)

be his ninth visit to a Muslim-majority country. Previous visits have included the first papal trips to Egypt and Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, which was also the first papal trip to the Arabian Peninsula.

Francis has also met several times with the grand imam of Cairo's al-Azhar Mosque, Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb, who is considered a leading authority for Sunni Muslims worldwide.

After hosting Francis in Egypt in 2017, el-Tayeb met the Pope in Abu Dhabi in 2019 to sign a joint statement known as the *Document on Human Fraternity* that committed the two leaders to supporting interreligious dialogue, working to spread a culture of tolerance and disavowing the use of violence.

Reynolds said he did not know if Sistani in Iraq would also be willing to sign the document, but called the text a "revolutionary point" in Muslim-Christian dialogue.

"It opens the door for all sorts of

possibilities of thinking through questions of religious freedom, freedom of expression, [and] cultural freedoms in the Islamic world," said the theologian.

Kalian highlighted the fact that Sistani is known to be selective about the people he chooses to meet.

"Ayatollah Sistani doesn't meet with just anybody," said Kalian. "It is well known and well documented that he only meets with people as a way to send a signal and a sign."

Citing Francis' recent focus on travelling to Muslim-majority nations, Reynolds called Muslim-Christian dialogue something of a "seamless thread" of this pontificate.

"Clearly, there's a trend, and he's deeply concerned about Muslim-Christian dialogue," Kalian said. "It's not just visiting troubled spots like Iraq, which has a political and human rights crisis, but it's specifically Muslim-majority nations. He cares deeply about that." — NCR

• See pg 12 for more

The imperialism of the human soul

In his autobiography, Nikos Kazantzakis shares how, in his youth he was driven by a restlessness that had him searching for something he could never quite define. However, he made peace with his lack of peace because he accepted that, given the nature of the soul, he was supposed to feel that restlessness and that a healthy soul is a driven soul. Commenting on this, he writes: "No force anywhere on earth is as imperialistic as the human soul. It occupies and is occupied in turn, but it always considers its empire too narrow. Suffocating, it desires to conquer the world in order to breathe freely."

We need to be given permission, I believe, to accept as God-given that imperialism inside our soul, even as we need always to be careful never to trivialise its power and meaning. However, that is a formula for tension. How does one make peace with the imperialism of one's soul without denigrating the divine energy that is stoking that imperialism? For me, this has been a struggle.

I grew up in the heart of the Canadian prairies, with five hun-

dred miles of open space in every direction. Geographically, that space let one's soul stretch out but otherwise, my world seemed too small for my soul to breathe. I grew up inside a tight-knit community in an isolated rural area where the world was small enough so that everyone knew everyone else. That was wonderful because it made for a warm cocoon; but that cocoon (seemingly) separated me from the big world where, it seemed to my young mind, souls could breathe in spaces bigger than where I was breathing. Moreover, growing up with an acute religious and moral sensitivity, I felt guilty about my restlessness, as if it were something abnormal that I needed to hide.

In that state, as an eighteen-year-old, I entered religious life. Novitiates in those days were quite strict and secluded. There were eighteen of us, novices, sequestered in an old seminary building across a lake from a town and a highway. We could hear the sounds of traffic and see life on the other side of the lake, but we were not part of it. As well, most everything inside our sequestered



Fr Ron Rolheiser

life focused on the spiritual so that even our most earthy desires had to be associated with our hunger for God and for the bread of life. Not an easy task for anyone, especially a teenager.

Well, one day we were visited by a priest who gave my soul permission to breathe. He gathered us, the eighteen novices, into a classroom and began his conference with this question: Are you feeling a little restless? We nodded, rather surprised by the question. He went on: Well, you should be feeling restless! You must be

jumping out of your skin! All that life in you and all those fiery hormones stirring in your blood, and you're stuck here watching life happen across the lake! You must be going crazy sometimes! But ... that's good, that's what you should be feeling, it shows you're healthy. Stay with it. You can do this. It's good to feel that restlessness.

That day the wide-open prairie spaces I had lived my whole life in and the wide-open spaces in my soul befriended each other a little. And that friendship continued to grow as I did my studies and read authors who had befriended their souls. Among others, these spoke to me: St Augustine (You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.); Thomas Aquinas (The adequate object of the human intellect and will is all Being); Iris Murdoch (The deepest of all human pains is the pain of the inadequacy of self-expression); Karl Rahner (In the torment of the insufficiency of everything attainable, we ultimately learn that here, in this life, there is no finished symphony); Sidney Cal-

lahan (We are made to ultimately sleep with the whole world, is it any wonder that we long for this along the way?); and James Hillman (Neither religion nor psychology really honours the human soul. Religion is forever trying to save the soul and psychology is always trying to fix the soul. The soul needs neither to be saved nor fixed; it is already eternal – it just needs to be listened to.)

Perhaps today the real struggle is not so much to accept sacred permission to befriend the wild insatiability of the soul. The greater struggle today, I suspect, is not to trivialise the soul, not to make its infinite longings something less than what they are.

During World War II, Jesuit theologians resisting the Nazi occupation in France published an underground newspaper. The first issue opened with this now-famous line: "France, take care not to lose your soul." Fair warning. The soul is imperialistic because it carries divine fire and so it struggles to breathe freely in the world. To feel and to honour that struggle is to be healthy. — **By Fr Ron Rolheiser, all rights reserved**



Iraq: Full of historic sites important to understanding Christianity

AMMAN, Jordan: Pope Francis hopes to embark on the first-ever papal visit to the biblical land of Iraq in early March in a spiritual pilgrimage of sorts to the place known in Arabic as the "land of the two rivers" — the mighty Tigris and Euphrates — and once renowned as Mesopotamia, the "cradle of civilisation."

The Garden of Eden is believed, possibly, to have been in ancient Iraq but certainly the famed Hanging Gardens of Babylon and the Tower of Babel were located there. Jews exiled to ancient Iraq in Old Testament times, such as the prophet Daniel, experienced God's miraculous grace; Daniel was rescued from the lion's den and his friends from the fiery furnace.

"The pontiff said he looks forward to visiting our country, which is also where Abraham began his journey," Cardinal Louis Sako of Baghdad said of the March 5-8 trip.

The historically rich country is full of religious sites important to understanding the antecedents of the Christian faith, making the visit significant for Pope Francis. Here's a snapshot of some of these places.

Old Testament patriarch Abraham is recognised as the father of faith in one God by Jews, Christians and Muslims alike and was born in the southern town of Ur. The place, which dates back to 6000 B.C., lies on a former course of the Euphrates

and is one of Iraq's oldest sites.

The Pope will see a dry, flat, and ochre-coloured plain renowned for its well-preserved stepped platform or ziggurat, which dates back to the third millennium B.C. Also, some of the earliest known writing, cuneiform, has been uncovered at Ur.

Around 2000 B.C., Ur was a bustling urban centre, drawing traders from both the Mediterranean and the Indian subcontinent, until its conquest by Alexander the Great a few centuries before Christ. Pope Francis will participate in an interreligious meeting there.

Pope Francis will travel to Najaf, also in the South, for a key encounter with one of Shiite Islam's most authoritative figures, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, as part of his efforts to embrace all of the Islamic world.

Lying 100 miles south of the capital, Baghdad, Najaf is a centre of Shiite Islam's spiritual and political power, as well as a pilgrimage site for Shiite adherents. Its spectacular gold-domed Imam Ali Mosque is considered the third-holiest site for the Shiite Muslims, after Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia.

Flying into Baghdad from Rome, Pope Francis will be received in an official welcome ceremony at the presidential palace. At the capital's Syriac Catholic Cathedral of Our Lady of Deliverance, he will meet bishops, priests, men and women religious, seminarians and catechists. The cathedral was the site of a 2010 massacre that killed 58 people and was claimed by Iraq's al-Qaida



Pope Francis is scheduled to visit Iraq from March 5-8, 2021. (UCA News photo/theblueshield.org)

group, which splintered into the so-called Islamic State.

Mass is scheduled at the Catholic Chaldean St Joseph Cathedral, also in Baghdad, a city with a rich, storied history where some 8 million inhabitants now live.

Heading north, Pope Francis will meet the Christian communities of Ninevah Plain, an area overrun by the Islamic State group in 2014 until its liberation three years later. The Old Testament prophet Jonah, who asked people to repent and return to God, lived in Ninevah.

It's the historic Christian heartland of Iraq, where Christians have lived since Jesus' earthly ministry, when St Thomas brought the Gospel message around AD 35, aided by St Jude. The pair were thought to base themselves in the northern city of Irbil in modern-day Kurdistan, where they preached to the local people.

And it is in that city where Pope

Francis will be welcomed by religious and civil leaders. Irbil and the nearby Christian enclave of Ankawa have hosted tens of thousands of Christians and other religious minorities forced to escape Islamic State atrocities.

Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Bashar Warda of Irbil said "international support for livelihood programmes" is needed "to help families remain in Iraq." Some of those groups include Aid to the Church in Need, the Knights of Columbus and Catholic Near East Welfare Association.

One such programme providing livelihood training is the Christian Aid Programme Northern Iraq (CAPNI) run by Iraqi Fr Emanuel Youkhana, who is a priest, or archimandrite, of the Assyrian Church of the East.

CAPNI has assisted some "8,500 displaced Christian families to return

to their Ninevah Plain towns, helping first to rebuild homes, infrastructure and businesses. Now it is providing English language and vocational training for practical jobs needed in the marketplace," said Fr Youkhana.

He said that while Pope Francis "may not be able to visit the rebuilding projects due to time constraints, he will certainly be informed."

"When he is visiting the churches in Mosul and Qaraqosh, of course, he will be updated on rebuilding efforts," Fr Youkhana said, "because he will ask about that and the destruction that happened there."

An order of nuns now runs a nursery school in Qaraqosh for 130 children, according to the Italian Bishops' Conference. The rebuilding of Mosul's famed Conventual Church of Our Lady of the Hour, along with the Al-Tahera Syriac Catholic Church, is underway.

Rebuilding efforts, including that of Mosul's iconic Al-Nouri Mosque, is to see Muslims, Christians and other communities "work together, to do something positive together," said French Dominican Fr Olivier Poquillon. Then, he said, Christians and other religious minorities must see again that Mosul is "their home and that they are in their own land."

"We know it will be a challenge for everybody to rebuild trust among people, families and communities. But this is our faith. We believe in a God of mercy, and we believe we have this humanity as a common responsibility," Fr Poquillon said. — **By Dale Gavlak, CNS**

Building an empire of kindness: The story of India's Sr Lucy Kurien

INDIA: A pregnant woman came pleading for help to Sister Lucy Kurien at the Sisters of the Cross of Chavanod's convent in the Indian city of Pune. The woman asked for shelter fearing her alcoholic husband, but rules did not allow for a lay person to stay.

The nun asked her to come the next day and told her that she would try to arrange alternate accommodation for her.

Later that night the woman was attacked and she, and her unborn child, would die in a hospital from the burn injuries inflicted by her husband.

The tragedy left Sr Lucy shattered. For years, she wanted to assist many others like the woman but there was nothing she could do as her congregation's ministry was only involved in teaching and nursing.

Her spiritual director, Jesuit Fr Francis D'Sa told her: "If you want to so much help the poor, do something yourself."

But that was impossible as she had no money or education. "I had studied only up to the seventh grade," she said.

However, the priest consoled her. "You have love in your heart. God will show you the way."

Even after Fr D'Sa left for Germany, Sr Lucy would pour out her concerns to him in letters, writing of her inability to help those in need.

Once she wrote "one woman told me how her husband put her hand into a pot of boiling rice and how she and her children starved that night. How can people be so cruel?"

It so happened that an Austrian approached the priest as he wanted to fund a project for women in India.

The priest showed him all of Sr Lucy's letters. He came to India and gave her Rs100,000 (US\$1,370) and promised further help. With the money she bought a small piece of land in the remote village of Vadhu Budruk in Pune district of western Maharashtra state.

Then local people chipped in with whatever they could and from that 'Maher' or 'Mother's House' as it is known in the local language, Marathi, was built in 1997.

Sr Lucy's congregation allowed her to continue as a nun but disassociated itself from her work that developed into the Maher Humanitarian Network which celebrated its 24th anniversary this month.

Maher now includes 50 homes currently sheltering 984 children, 520 destitute women and 123 destitute men in the states of Maharashtra, southern Kerala and Jharkhand and West Bengal in the east.

Maher's mission is to create secure and loving homes for women, men and children and enable women to discover their power within and develop self-reliance.

"We have been given land in southern states of Karnataka and neighbouring Andhra Pradesh, so two more centres will come up soon," she said.

Sr Lucy also founded the Interfaith Association for Service to Humanity and Nature. It has members in 10 countries. She is a featured speaker at interfaith conferences abroad.

Maher youth have led Peace Camps in the United States, India, and Africa.

The nun said that Maher's mission is to create secure and loving homes for women, men and children and enable women to discover their power within and develop self-reliance.

"There are many challenges, but the Divine gives the strength and courage to surmount them," said Sr Lucy, the third among nine children of a farmer from Kerala's Kannur district.

She gave an example of a boy named Rahul who was a street child sent from another home that found him unmanageable.

"One day he slapped the cook. Maher staff from Kerala asked me to decide between Rahul and them. I looked at him, he was nervous and shivering. I just went up and hugged him. Rahul melted and apologised," Sr Lucy said.

"A few years ago, he came to me with his first salary after joining the army. He confided to me 'you hugged and kissed me that day in front of your fuming staff that saved me. I was planning to join a terror outfit and shoot the staff at the home'," she said.

Love does work wonders, said the 65-year-old.

Maher's human resource officer, Gaus Sayyad, is also a product of the home.



Sr Lucy Kurien, founder-director of Maher Humanitarian Network, with dignitaries and donors at the 24th anniversary celebration of her organization at Maher in Pune district of Maharashtra state. (LiCas News photo)



Sr Lucy Kurien, founder-director of Maher Humanitarian Network, meets Pope Francis at the Vatican in 2019. (LiCas News photo)

"At age five I used to clean cars and work at a roadside tea stall to help my family," Sayyad said.

"One day, Sr Lucy asked me if I wanted to go to school. She took me to Maher where I did my schooling, graduation and Master's in Business Administration. I got selected for a firm in the United States."

Then he quit the well-paying job to serve at Maher.

"I will give my life to Maher who added wings to my dreams," said Sayyad.

Manisha Kailashpande said she came to Maher as a young widow with her five-year-old son and three-year-old daughter in 2002. "Sister gave me and my children shelter. My son graduated and joined the police while my

daughter is doing her post-graduation in economics."

"We are proud of Sr Lucy and her work.

She continues to be part of our congregation," said Sr Flory Menezes, one of the councilors from the Pune Province of Holy Cross Sisters.

Their Pune provincial, Sr Bromadine Palokaran, said "like our foundress Mother Claudine Echernier, Sr Lucy

knows no limits in caring and providing for the orphans and those shunned by society."

Maher is home to the abused, neglected, physically challenged and mentally disturbed. It has been rated as one of the top 10 NGOs in India. In 2017, Maher was awarded "Special Consultative Status" by the United Nations.

Sr Lucy has also won numerous national and international awards, including "Nari Shakti Puraskar" (women's strength award) from the federal government for her outstanding contribution to women's empowerment in 2016.

Recently she was named one of the 100 most influential people in the world during the 2020 pandemic crisis by Austrian magazine "OOM". She was 12th on the list.

But for Sr Lucy, the greatest reward are the smiles of the women she sheltered and the children she has educated who now stand tall on their feet. — **By Rita Joseph, LiCas News**

• Used with permission



An inter-faith meeting at Maher in Pune district of western Maharashtra state. (LiCas News photo)

Archbishop Gallagher calls on UN to defend human rights

GENEVA: The Vatican Secretary for Relations with States on February 23 stressed the inalienable nature of human rights, in a video message to the 46th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council hosted in Geneva, Switzerland.

Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher called on the United Nations to “rediscover the foundation of human rights, in order to implement them in an authentic fashion”, as the world continues to take measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

The four-week-long session, held virtually due to the ongoing health emergency, begins with a three-day session in which heads of states and dignitaries representing various countries and regions address the council by video.

Archbishop Gallagher noted that for more than a year, “the



Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher in a video message during the 46th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council. (Vatican Media)

COVID-19 pandemic has been impacting every aspect of life, causing the loss of many and casting doubt on our economic, social, and health systems.” At the same time, “it has also challenged our commitment to the protection and promotion of universal human rights, while at the same time as-

serting their relevance.”

The Archbishop highlighted that the Preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares that “the recognition of the inherent dignity of all members of the human family and of the equal and inalienable rights constitutes the foundation of freedom, jus-

tice and peace.” Likewise, the UN Charter asserts its “faith in fundamental of human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women, and of nations large and small.”

He pointed out that these two documents recognise an objective truth — that every human person is innately and universally endowed with human dignity. This truth, he further stressed, “is not conditioned by time, place, culture or context.”

Acknowledging that this solemn commitment “is easier to pronounce than to achieve and practice,” he lamented that these objectives are “still far from being recognised, respected, protected and promoted in every situation.” — *ICN*

Source: Vatican News/UNHRC

Pope appoints Cardinal Tagle to another key post



MANILA: Pope Francis has appointed Cardinal Luis Tagle (*pic*) as a new member of the Administration of the Patrimony of the Holy See, the body that manages and deals with church assets.

The former archbishop of Manila is the current dean of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples, also known as Propaganda Fide, at the Vatican.

Pope Francis also appointed Ghanaian Cardinal Peter Turkson to the same body. The Vatican announced the appointments on Feb 22.

Cardinal Tagle’s appointment was greeted warmly by Filipino Catholics.

The Holy Father has once again appointed Luis Antonio G. Cardinal Tagle as a member of the Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See.

His new responsibilities now include managing the Catholic Church’s assets around the world, including priceless works of art at the Vatican and elsewhere. — *By Joseph Peter Calleja, ucanews.com*

Engage with religious leaders

GENEVA: In the face of the current COVID-19 pandemic, Archbishop Gallagher said that some measures implemented by public authorities to ensure public health impinged on the free exercise of human rights.

In this regard, he proposed that “any limitations on the exercise of human rights for the protection of public health must stem from a situation of strict necessity,” because “a number of persons, finding themselves in situations of vulnerability — such as the elderly, migrants, refugees, indigenous people, internally displaced persons, and children— have been disproportionately affected by the current crisis.”

Any limitations imposed in an emergency situation, he insisted, “must be proportional to the situation, applied in a non-discriminatory fashion, and used only when no other means are available.”

Archbishop Gallagher also reiterated the urgency of protecting the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, noting in particular that “religious belief, and the expression thereof, lies at the core of the dignity of the human person in his or her conscience.”

Highlighting that the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic reveals that “this robust understanding of religious freedom is being eroded,” the Archbishop re-echoed the Holy See’s insistence that

“freedom of religion also protects its public witness and expression, both individually and collectively, publicly and privately, in forms of worship, observance and teaching,” as numerous human rights instruments recognise.

To respect the inherent value of this right, therefore, the Archbishop recommends that political authorities should engage with religious leaders, as well as leaders of faith-based organisations and civil society bodies committed to promoting freedom of religion and conscience.

Archbishop Gallagher noted that the current crisis presents us with a unique opportunity to approach multilateralism “as the expression of a renewed sense of global re-

sponsibility, of solidarity grounded in justice and the attainment of peace and unity within the human family, which is God’s plan for the world.”

Recalling Pope Francis’ invitation in *Fratelli Tutti* encouraging everyone to acknowledge the dignity of each human person in order to promote universal fraternity, he encouraged all to be willing to move beyond that which divides us in order to effectively combat the consequences of the various crises.

Concluding his message, the Archbishop reaffirmed the Holy See’s commitment to engage corroboratively to this end. — *ICN*

Source: Vatican News/UNHRC

Focolare elects Arab woman as new president

ROME: Margaret Karram from the Holy Land was elected president of the Focolare Movement, an international organisation that promotes the ideals of unity and universal brotherhood.

The 58-year-old Arab Catholic woman won more than two thirds of the votes cast in the movement’s 359-member General Assembly held on January 31.

Karram succeeds the founder Chiara Lubich and Maria Voce who was in office for 12 years (two terms).

Karram was born in Haifa and graduated in Judaism at the Hebrew University of Los Angeles (USA). She has held various positions of responsibility for the Focolare in Los Angeles and in Jerusalem.

Her past experience includes membership of various commissions and organisations for the promotion of dialogue between the three monotheistic religions, such as the Episcopal Commission for Interreligious Dialogue, the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy

Land and the ICCI (Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel). She worked for 14 years at the Consulate General of Italy in Jerusalem.

Since 2014, she has been at the International Centre of the Focolare as councillor for Italy and Albania and has been co-responsible for Dialogue between Ecclesial Movements and New Catholic Communities.

She speaks Arabic, Hebrew, Italian and English. In 2013 she received the Mount Zion Award for Reconciliation, together with the Jewish scholar and researcher Yisca Harani, for commitment to developing dialogue between different cultures and religions.

In 2016 she received the St Rita International Award for having promoted dialogue between Christians, Jews, Muslims, Israelis and Palestinians, starting from people’s everyday life.

Karram’s election was approved by the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life on February 1, as envisaged by the General Statutes of the



Margaret Karram

Focolare Movement.

The document expresses the hope that the new president will be able to carry out her task “with faithfulness, in a spirit of service and ecclesial sensitivity, for the good of the members of the Movement and of

the universal Church.”

According to the movement’s General Statutes, the president is chosen from among the focolarine (consecrated women with perpetual vows) and will always be a woman. The Statutes further say that the president “is the sign of the unity of the Movement.”

The president represents the great religious, cultural, social and geographical variety of those who adhere to the spirituality of the Focolare in the 182 countries and who identify with the message of fraternity that the founder, Chiara Lubich, drew from the Gospel: “Father, that they may all be one” (Jn 17:20-26).

There are many commitments and challenges awaiting Karam in the coming years, such as the task of governing and directing a worldwide movement like the Focolare, which is deeply immersed in local and global realities and the challenges of humanity, starting from this time of pandemic. The Statutes also indicate the “style” that should distinguish the work of the

president: “Hers is to be, above all, a presidency of love (...they state ...) because she must be the first in loving and, therefore, in serving her own brothers and sisters, remembering the words of Jesus: “Whoever wishes to be first among you must be the servant of all (Mk 10:44).”

The primary commitment of the President, therefore, is to be a builder of bridges and a spokesperson for the central message of the spirituality of the Focolare, ready to practice and spread it, as we read further on, even at the cost of her own life.

The next steps of the General Assembly of the Focolare are the election of the Co-President this afternoon and of the councilors on Feb 4.

The word “Focolare” is Italian for “hearth” or “family fireside.” While Focolare is the common sobriquet given to the organisation, its official name when approved in 1990 as an International Association of the Faithful of Pontifical Right, was “Work of Mary.”

Source: *indcatholicnews.com*

Little Catholics' Corner

Dear children,

Jesus knew He was going to die, and He knew the apostles were going to be afraid.

So He decided to show some of them something that they would not be able to forget. He took Peter, James and John up a mountain and suddenly He became dazzlingly bright, like the sun!

The Apostles were terrified. Then Jesus began to talk with Moses and Elijah, who stood beside Him.

Afterwards, Jesus told Peter, James and John not to tell anyone what had happened until after He rose from the dead.

They were confused because they didn't understand that Jesus had to die. But now they knew that Jesus was not just a normal man. They had seen some of the awesomeness of God.

Later on, when Jesus was taken and killed, the apostles were very sad. But some of them knew something amazing about Jesus.

Like those apostles, when we are having a hard time we just need to think about Jesus.

He is awesome and amazing, and waiting for us to come to Him in Heaven.

The bad times will come, but Jesus is always there - we just need to remember Him!
Aunty Eliz

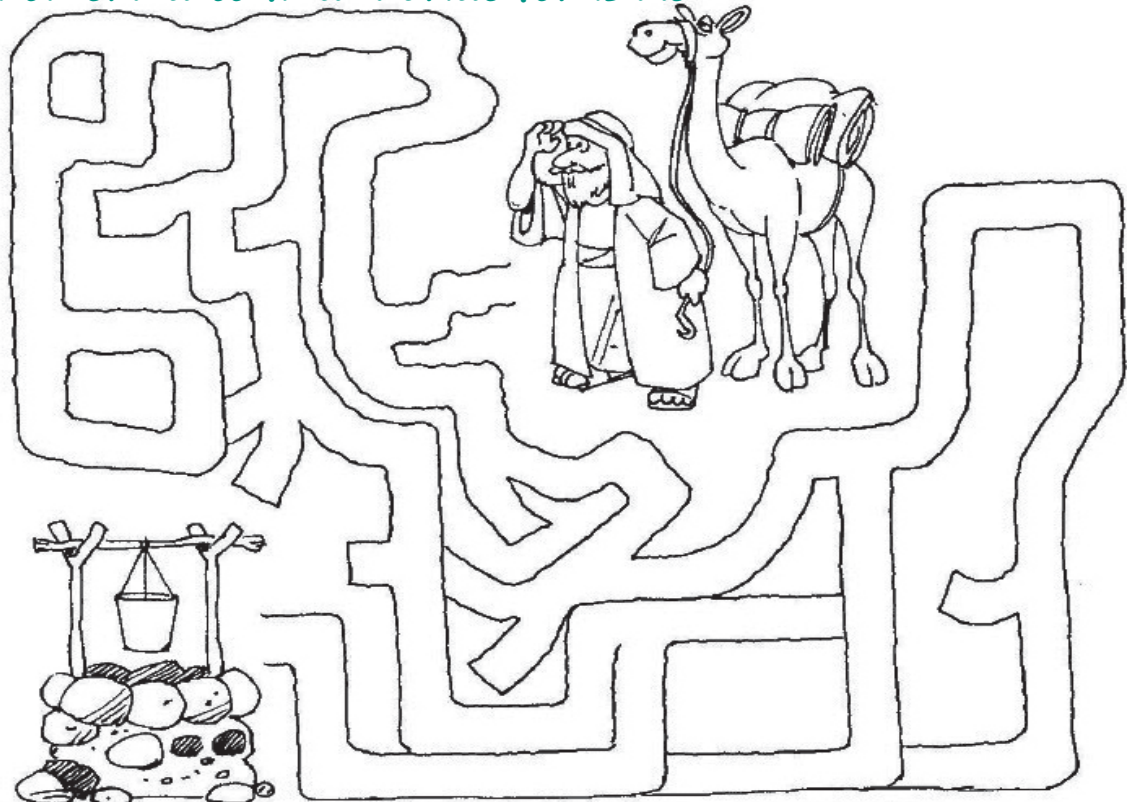
Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" (Mark 2:7)



Find these objects hidden in the picture below: **bucket, jug, leaf, magnet, needle and thread, plate, ring, saw, spoon, star**

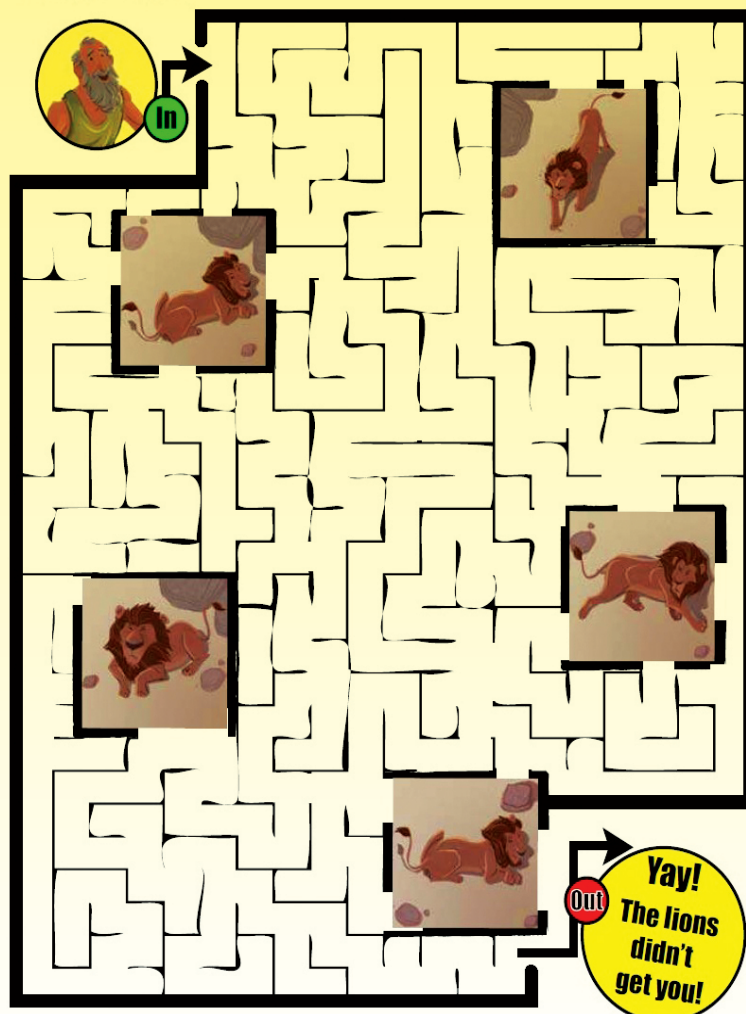


Help Abraham's servant find his way to Abraham's homeland to find a bride for Isaac.



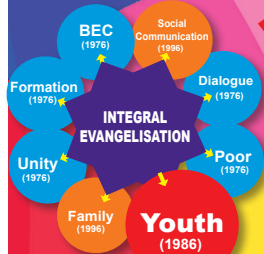
The Lions' Den

Can you be as successful with the lions as Daniel was? Find your way through the maze without going through any lion cages.

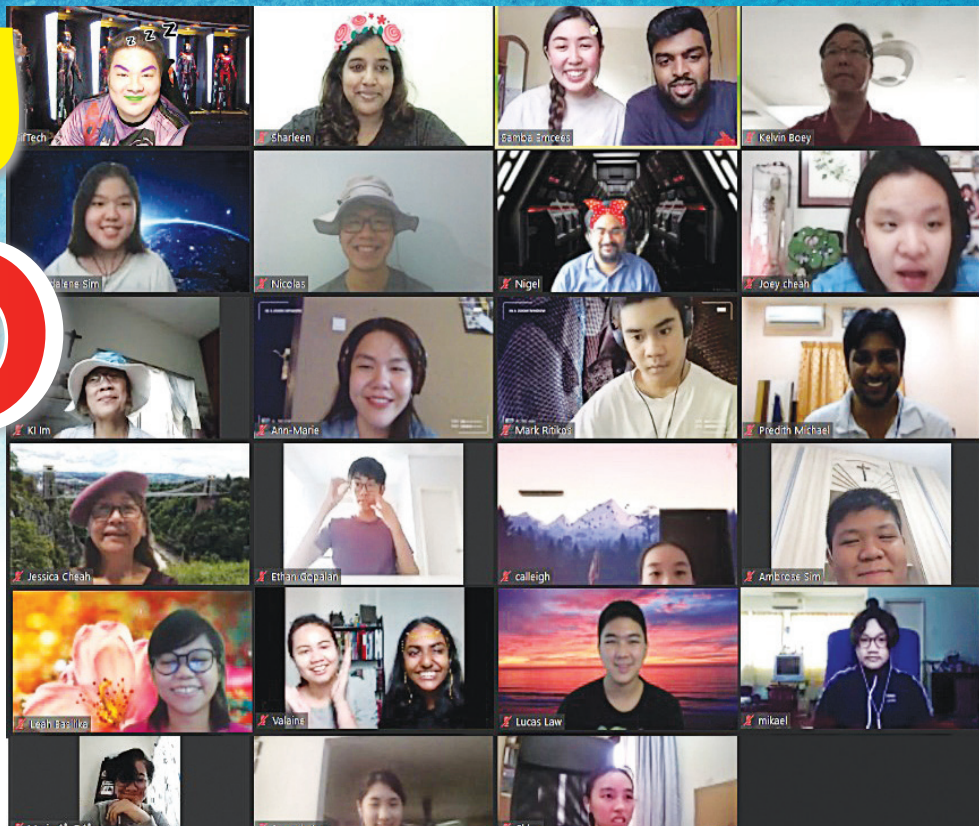


YOUTH

February 28, 2021



PHYSICALLY DISTANT yet socially CONNECTED



PETALING JAYA: In spite of the uncertainty of MCO 2.0, the Life Teen Ministry of the Church of St Francis Xavier (SFX) continues to spread God’s word and promote fellowship among the teens of the parish.

Having only conducted one physical session in February 2020 before the first Movement Control Order (MCO) was announced, the Life Teen Ministry of SFX has since then conducted all their sessions online.

Rather than dwell in despair, the ministry continues to make full use of Zoom’s tools, such as the breakout room, annotation and poll functions, to host engaging virtual gatherings.

This year alone, they have already conducted three virtual sessions which focuses on sharing about God and the Church as well as building connections with the teens of the parish. There are usually two sessions a month, which are conducted on the second and fourth Saturdays of the month.

This year started off on a good note with a *Come to the BOAT* session to welcome the new year. The figurative BOAT stands for the ministry’s aspirations: which is to be a place for Bonding where people can be Open, Accepting and True with one another.

The session began with a virtual praise and worship session, followed by a video sharing and an opportunity for discussion and reflection among the participants. The group then took part in a communal drawing activity using Zoom’s Annotate feature to share their hopes for 2021. There were a lot of similarities in their aspirations, as most said they wanted to do well in their studies, meet their friends again in a COVID-free world, and even to turn over a new leaf!

The Life Teen Ministry has also just recently completed a series of Life On-lines on the Dignity of the Human Person, focusing on our inherent value as God’s creation and how we can love ourselves and those around us through creating boundaries and building healthy relation-

ships with one another.

Both these sessions were conducted in accordance with Life Teen’s system of Gather, Proclaim, Break and Send, which is derived from the flow of the Mass, but adapted in order to make it work on a virtual platform. Typically, the Gather consists of an ice-breaker game or a skit to allude to the topic of the day, while the Proclaim is a sharing conducted by the ministry’s core team members. The Break is used for group discussion, during which the breakout room function on Zoom is utilised. This is followed by the Send, which is usually either a communal prayer, blessing from the parish priest Fr Norris Seenivasan, SJ, or a take-home activity.

So, in spite of the uncertainty of the pandemic, this Life Teen Ministry plans to continue building connections and leading teens closer to Christ, albeit virtually for the time being.

Other than hosting a prayer box and virtual prayer gatherings, they have also organised virtual Life Nights, called Life Online sessions, aimed at equipping the parish’s teens with sound knowledge of the Bible and the Church’s teachings. They have conducted these sessions since last year, and the topics previously covered include understanding

and finding our vocation in life, as well as real ways of living out our faith – namely, being Christlike in the words we speak as well as in the media we consume and put out into the world.

The ministry’s activities are supported by a small Core Team of adults who have undergone formation since April 2019 (almost an entire year before the ministry was officially re-launched in February 2020!), in order to better equip themselves to serve the youth of the church.

They welcome any teen in secondary school to join their virtual sessions for the rest of the year. The following sessions on Feb 20, Mar 13 and Mar 27 will be focused on the Lenten season. — *By Ann-Marie Khor*

Feedback from the teens who regularly attend the online sessions has largely been positive.

“Everyone is nice and the sessions are helpful. We have fun sessions about current issues and also about God,” said Calleigh Lim, 15.

When asked about what was the most memorable message she has taken home from a Life Online session, Calleigh shared that it was this: “God has created me for a reason and I am worth being here. I also learned to avoid staying quiet and to stand up for myself and others in need.”

For Mikael, 14, the sessions in Life Teen have allowed him to connect with people who have the same interests, as well as hopes and dreams, as him.

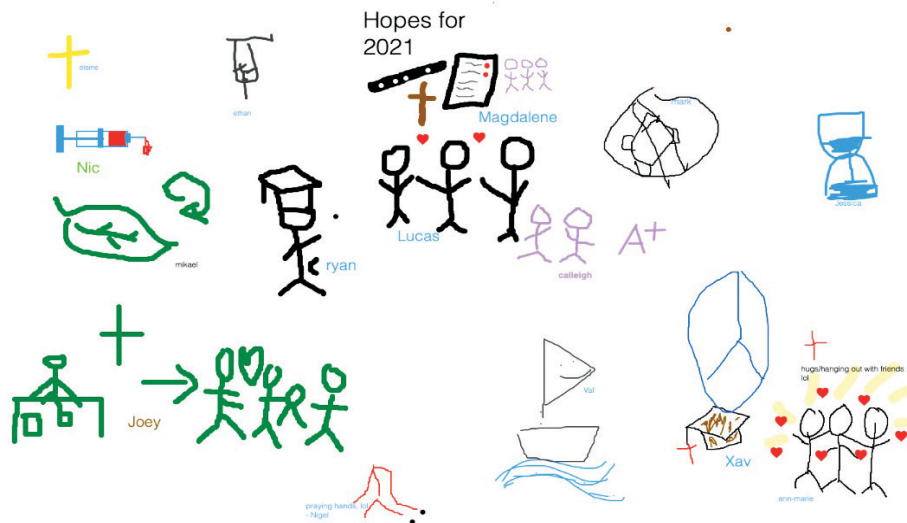
“It’s a safe space where we don’t judge anyone, and anything that is shared in the session, stays in the session,” said Mikael. “I usually feel great because I get to talk to people that aren’t from my school. I come back regularly because I feel safe and happy here. It’s like an escape from stress.”

Magdalene Sim shared that she enjoys the sessions as well. “We get to meet new friends, communicate freely and express ourselves a lot during this time. It’s a place where I can be myself, relax and learn more about my faith and God in a comfortable environment,” said the 15-year-old.

Reach out and follow their adventures @ [lifeteensfxpj](https://www.facebook.com/lifeteensfxpj) on Facebook and Instagram!

www.facebook.com/lifeteensfxpj

www.instagram.com/lifeteensfxpj



The teens share their hopes for 2021

SOS KUCHING ARCHDIOCESE YOUTH'S LENTEN PROJECT



Christ's **SUFFERING** is an **OFFERING** for our **SALVATION**

episode 1 **FEB 20** episode 2 **FEB 27** episode 3 **MAR 6** episode 4 **MAR 13** episode 5 **MAR 20**

KUCHING: The youths from Kuching Archdiocese has launched SOS... Suffering, Offering, Salvation (Save Our Ship, Save Our Souls).

This season, we acknowledge our big need for God. And we cry out to Him, "Save our ship, Lord. We are at sea being tossed by the waves of the world's problems and are being stormed by our own weaknesses and sins. Save our souls, Lord. Through your suffering, you are offering us salvation."

PART ONE:

THEMES / The Five Sorrowful Mysteries:

Episode 1 Feb 20/ First Sun
AGONY IN THE GARDEN

Episode 2 Feb 27/ Second Sun
SCOURGING AT THE PILLAR

Episode 3 Mar 6/ Third Sun
CROWNING WITH THORNS

Episode 4 Mar 13/ Fourth Sun
CARRYING OF THE CROSS

Episode 5 Mar 20/ Fifth Sun
CRUCIFIXION AND DEATH OF CHRIST

PART TWO:

THEMES / The Seven Last Words:

Mar 27 / Palm Sunday

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Lk 23:34

Mar 28 / Holy Monday

"Truly, I say unto you, today, you shall be with me in paradise." Lk 23:43

Mar 29/ Holy Tuesday

"Woman, behold your son. (Disciple) Behold your mother." Jn 19:26-27

Mar 30/ Holy Wednesday

"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Mt 27:46 / Mk 15:34

Mar 31/ Holy Thursday

"I thirst." Jn 19:28

Apr 1/ Good Friday

"It is finished." Jn 19:30

Apr 2/ Holy Saturday

"Father, into Your hands I commend my spirit." Lk 23:46

FORMAT:

- Introduction - Taize themed with Candles indicating each episode (5 total)
- Prayer & Scripture Reading
- Sharing (5 to 10 mins)
- Reflection Question/s
- Song (either by a person or a group or from youtube)
- Final Blessing

Or a SIMPLE FORMAT:

- Photo with verse posts
- Sharing only

Kuching Archdiocesan Youth Commission Youtube:
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXxuDyxqtxNx6msgv9vKnSsQ>

Catch the first episode here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Vpw-gKLNgDk>

Little Green of Hope

Lenten Project (Second week)

LITTLE GREEN Lenten Project

2ND WEEK OF LENT:
Sunday: 28 February, 2021

Many people have the tendency to rely on something or become addicted to something. Some people depend on coffee, dessert, or rely on social media, watching tv, shopping and eating to vent our emotions. Take this week a time to train yourself, letting go of all these behaviours so to have a total inner freedom.

exercise
INNER FREEDOM

#littlegreen #jciathome2021 #newlife #hope2021#sdyd Lenten Project

WEEKLY READING PLAN

1ST READING: Gn 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13,15-18
God tests Abraham

2ND READING: Rom 8:31b-34
God did not spare his own son

GOSPEL: Mk 9:2-10
Jesus was transfigured before them

SIBU: This Little Green of Hope – Lenten Project of Sibiu Diocesan Youth Day II (SDYD II) Lent project is a sign of life and hope of resurrection.

This week we will focus on the second week of Lent theme: Exercise inner freedom and daily routine.

Let's take this time of 'waiting' to renew our life through prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

Follow our instagram www.instagram.com/sibudiocesanyouthapostolate/ for more updates.

We will share the themes and reading plans for the following week including some daily routines and weekday challenges in the next issue.

Daily Routine (From Monday to Sunday)

STEP 1 Opening Prayer/ Song: Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit		STEP 3 Give "Little Green" water & expose to the sunshine.	
STEP 2 Do a kind act at least to one person or to the environment.		STEP 4 Reflect & note down your experience of the day by reading Daily Gospel (Youcat Daily Apps)	

UMS Catholic students renew their spirit of serving

KOTA KINABALU: The Catholic Students Group of Universiti Malaysia Sabah (CSG-UMS) has organised an online programme "CSG Youth Camp (CYC) 2021" on Jan 16-17 and Jan 23-24 via Zoom.

It aimed to bring the students together to renew their spirit to serve others and also for them to grow and present their inner gifts.

The first session by Cherlanne Patrick from the non-governmental organisation of Youth-Prep Centre spoke on "How do I Listen? How do I Speak Out?" which focused on the empowerment of children, youth and women.

An unhealthy environment or relationship will lead to communication barriers and an individual will find it difficult to achieve their goals due to lack of self-confidence, explained Cherlanne. Further, she also gave tips on how to be a listener and to voice support for them.

Crietal Eviany Philip, Youth & Campus Coordinator from Pen-

ang Diocese, shared the meaning of service as a Catholic youth in "My Youth Service" session. Crietal invited her audience to reflect on the biblical passage from John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life", which is the ministry of Jesus in the world and exemplifies the meaning of serving others.

They also had various exciting events such as Virtual Campfire and Online Concert. In the Virtual Campfire event, the organisers hosted a Live Busking session to liven up the Campfire Night atmosphere via Zoom which was also accompanied by sharings from the alumni.

Meanwhile, the Online Concert event also featured performances from ten CYC Family groups consisting of the students. Various exciting performances such as Short Film, Virtual Choir, Fashion Show, Sign Language and dance enlivened the night of the Online



Catholic Students' Group of Universiti Malaysia Sabah had their CSG Youth Camp 2021 via Zoom.

Concert on the last day of CYC.

The CSG-UMS hope the participants found this online youth camp a meaningful one in renewing their spirits in their ministry especially during the pandemic and that it will encourage them to continue to use their gifts to serve others.

Sharing from the students

CYC has changed the way I see the world. The world I see now is filled with the love of God. It has given me a boost in various aspects especially from the sharings and sessions. Although the performances were entertaining and sad, I could still see something that I could reflect on from the performances. — **Francesca Joseph**

This CYC programme has uncovered our hidden talents. In a short time, I saw many people have become more open in interacting especially during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic. — **Anonymous**

Tribute to Fr Enda McDonagh

“It was with great sadness that I received the news of Fr Enda McDonagh’s death in St Vincent’s Hospital, Dublin. A colossus on the Irish theological landscape for more than six decades, he continued to research, write, and inspire throughout his distinguished teaching career and during the years of his retirement.

“Fr Enda was known and respected by people of all theological hues and none, and because of the way he wore his learning so lightly, and because of his genuine humility and personal warmth, people felt comfortable in his presence, and enriched by the encounter. While

Fr Enda McDonagh, priest, theologian and a towering figure in influencing the life of the Catholic church and of Christianity in Ireland and beyond, died on February 24, aged 90, in St Vincent’s hospital, Dublin, where he was admitted following a fall. Here is a tribute from Archbishop Michael Neary.



he had well thought-out opinions of his own, he was always utterly respectful of those who had different and sincerely held opinions, and

his good-humoured and personable manner always saw to it that nobody felt belittled in a discussion or debate.

“While the Archdiocese of Tuam was always proud of the fact that he was a priest of this diocese, he was at home in every diocese because of the simple fact that he taught generations of Irish priests, most of whom served in Ireland, some of whom brought the Gospel to the very ends of the world. Many will point to Enda as the person who opened their minds in the quest for faith seeking understanding.

“Born on June 27, 1930 in Began, Co Mayo, Fr Enda attended the local primary school where his parents were teachers. He received his secondary education at St Jarlath’s College, Tuam, and from there he went

to Maynooth in 1948 where, as things turned out, he was to spend the rest of his life. He was ordained to the priesthood in the College Chapel of St Patrick’s College, Maynooth, on June 19, 1955. He took undergraduate degrees in science and theology before embarking on postgraduate work in theology culminating in a Doctorate in Divinity (DD) in 1957. He continued his studies in Rome and Munich and was conferred with the Doctorate in Canon Law (DCL) in 1960. Already, in 1958, he was appointed Professor of Moral Theology in Maynooth, a position he was to hold until his retirement in 1995.

“Despite his high profile as a scholar, theologian and intellectual, and despite his being in demand by so many educational institutions and public personalities, Enda never forgot his native place and maintained contact with his brother priests in the Archdiocese of Tuam. During his retirement it was more convenient for him to attend various diocesan functions and celebrations, and he was always perfectly at ease and thoroughly entertained by the stories and anecdotes from pastoral ministry - for which he prepared many, but never had the opportunity to experience for himself.

“*Tá laoch ar lár. Go raibh leaba aige i measc na naomh.*

“*Requiescat in pace.*” — ICN

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Thanksgiving Prayers

Thanksgiving to St Anne

Glorious St Anne, filled with compassion for those who invoke in thee, and with love for those who suffer, heavily laden with the weight of my troubles, I cast myself at thy feet and humbly beg of thee to take the present affair which I recommend to thee under thy special protection.

Vouchsafe to recommend thee to thy daughter the Blessed Virgin Mary and lay it before the throne of Jesus, so that he may bring it to a happy issue. Cease not to intercede for me until my request is granted. Above all, obtain for me the grace of one day beholding my God face to face, and with thee and Mary and all the saints, praising and blessing Him for eternity.

Good St Anne, mother of her who is our life our sweetness and our hope, pray to help us and obtain our request. — *Anthony Marshall*

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St David of Wales

According to tradition, St David was the son of King Sant of South Wales and St Non. He was ordained a priest and later studied under St Paulinus.

Later, he was involved in missionary work and founded a number of monasteries. The monastery he founded at Menevia in Southwestern Wales was noted for extreme asceticism.

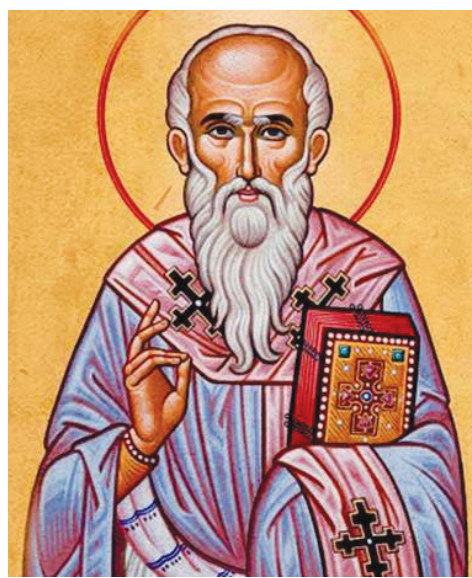
David and his monks drank neither wine nor beer — only water — while putting in a full day of heavy manual labour and intense study.

Around the year 550, David attended a synod at Brevi in Cardiganshire. His contributions at the synod are said to have been the major cause for his election as primate of the Cambrian Church.

He was reportedly consecrated archbishop by the patriarch of Jerusalem while on a visit to the Holy Land. He is also said to have invoked a council that ended the last vestiges of Pelagianism.

David died at his monastery in Menevia around the year 589, and his cult was approved in 1120 by Pope Callistus II. He is revered as the patron of Wales. Undoubtedly, St David was endowed with substantial qualities of spiritual leadership.

What is more, many monasteries flourished as a result of his leadership and good example. His staunch adherence to monastic piety bespeaks a fine example for modern Christians seeking order and form in their prayer life. His feastday is March 1. — *CNA*



Daily Short Reading

Sunday, February 28
(Nehemiah 8:9,10)

This day is sacred to the Lord your God. Do not be mournful, do not weep. For this day is sacred to our Lord. Do not be sad: the joy of the Lord is your stronghold.

Monday, March 1
(Exodus 19:4-6)

You yourselves have seen what I did with the Egyptians, how I carried you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself. From this you know that now, if you obey my voice and hold fast to my covenant, you of all the nations shall be my very own for all the earth is mine. I will count you a kingdom of priests, a consecrated nation.

Tuesday, March 2
(Joel 2:12-13)

Come back to me with all your heart, fasting, weeping, mourning. Let your hearts be broken, not your garments torn, turn to the Lord your God again, for he is all tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in graciousness, and ready to relent.

Wednesday, March 3
(Deuteronomy 7:6,8-9)

It is you that the Lord our God has chosen to be his very own people out of all the peoples on the earth. It was for love of you and to keep the oath he swore to your fathers that the Lord brought you out with his mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know then that the Lord your God is God indeed, the faithful God who is true to his covenant and his graciousness towards those who love him and keep his commandments.

Thursday, November 10
(2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

I shall be very happy to make my weaknesses my special boast so that the power of Christ may stay over me, and that is why I am quite content with my weaknesses, and with insults, hardships, persecutions, and the agonies I go through for Christ's sake. For it is when I am weak that I am strong.

Friday, March 5
(Isaiah 53:11b-12)

By his sufferings shall my servant justify many, taking their faults on himself. Hence, I will grant whole hordes for his tribute, he shall divide the spoil with the mighty, for surrendering himself to death, and letting himself be taken for a sinner, while he was bearing the faults of many and praying all the time for sinners.

Saturday, March 6
(Isaiah 1:16-18)

Wash, make yourselves clean, take your wrongdoing out of my sight. Cease to do evil. Learn to do good, search for justice, help the oppressed, be just to the orphan, please for the widow. Come now, let us talk this over, says the Lord; though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.

St Katharine Drexel

On March 3, the universal Church celebrates the feast of St Katharine Drexel, a Philadelphia heiress who abandoned her family's fortune to found an order of sisters dedicated to serving the impoverished African American and American Indian populations of the United States.

Katharine was born November 26, 1858 into a wealthy and well-connected banking family. The family's wealth, however, did not prevent them from living out a serious commitment to their faith.

Her mother opened up the family house three times a week to feed and care for the poor, and her father had a deep personal prayer life. Both parents encouraged their daughters to think of the family's wealth not as their own, but as a gift from God which was to be used to help others.

During the summer months, Katharine and her sisters would teach catechism classes to the children of the workers on her family's summer estate. The practice would prepare her for a life of service, with a strong focus on education and attention to the poor and the vulnerable.

While travelling with her family through the Western US, Katharine witnessed the poor living conditions of the Native Americans. Eventually, while still a laywoman, she would give much of her own money to fund the missions and schools in these seriously deprived areas.

Eventually, however, the young heiress would give more than just funding to these much-needed missions and schools. She would decide to

Feastday: March 3

Patron Saint of:

- Racial justice
- Philanthropists



devote her whole life to the social and spiritual development of black and American Indian communities.

The inspiration for this work came to her during a visit to Rome, where she was granted an audience with Pope Leo XIII. During that time,

Katharine had been considering a vocation to cloistered contemplative life as a nun. But when she asked Pope Leo XIII to send missionaries to Wyoming, he told Katharine she should undertake the work herself.

In February of 1891, she made her first vows in religious life — formally renouncing her fortune and her personal freedom for the sake of growing closer to God in solidarity with the victims of injustice.

Although African-Americans had been freed from slavery, they continued to suffer serious abuse and were often prevented from obtaining even a basic education. Much the same situation held in the case of the native American Indians, who had been forcibly moved into reservations over the course of the 19th century.

Katharine founded the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for the purpose of living with these communities while helping them acquire education and grow in faith.

Between 1891 and 1935, she led her order in the founding and maintenance of almost 60 schools and missions, located primarily in the American West and Southwest. Among the prominent achievements of Drexel and her order is New Orleans' Xavier University, the only historically black Catholic college in the US.

Katharine was forced into retirement for the last 20 years of her life after she suffered a severe heart attack. Although she was no longer able to lead her order, she left the sisters with her charisma of love and concern for the missions. — *CNA*

St Casimir of Poland

On March 4, the Catholic Church honours St Casimir Jagiellon, a prince whose life of service to God has made him a patron saint of Poland, Lithuania, and young people.

In 1984, Pope John Paul II addressed Lithuanian pilgrims commemorating the 500th anniversary of the prince's death. He said the Church "proclaimed Casimir a saint and placed him before us not only to be venerated but also that we might imitate his heroic virtues and follow his example of holiness."

"His witness of great faith and fervent piety continues to have special meaning for us today," the Pope said, noting especially the "challenging call" he offers to young people.

"His life of purity and prayer beckons you to practice your faith with courage and zeal, to reject the deceptive attractions of modern permissive society, and to live your convictions with fearless confidence and joy."

Casimir Jagiellon was born in 1458, the third of thirteen children born to Poland's King Casimir IV and his wife Elizabeth of Austria. He and several of his brothers studied with the priest and historian John Dlugosz, whose deep piety and political expertise influenced Casimir in his upbringing.

The young prince had a distaste for the luxury of courtly life, and instead chose the way of asceticism and devotion. He wore plain clothes with a hair shirt beneath them, frequently slept on

the ground, and would spend much of the night in prayer and meditation on the suffering and death of Christ.

Casimir showed his love for God through these exercises of devotion, and also through his material charity to the poor. He was known as a deeply compassionate young man who felt others' pains acutely.

The young prince was only 13 years old when his father was asked by the Hungarians to offer his son as their new king. Casimir was eager to aid the Hungarians in their defence against the Turks, and went to be crowned. This plan was unsuccessful, however, and he was forced to return to Poland.

After his return, Casimir resumed his studies with Dlugosz, while developing a canny grasp of politics by observing his father's rule. In 1479, the king left Poland to attend to state business in Lithuania, leaving Prince Casimir in charge of the realm between 1481 and 1483.

Advisers to the prince joined his father in trying to convince Casimir to marry. But he preferred to remain single, focusing his life on the service of God and the good of his people.

After experiencing symptoms of tuberculosis, Casimir foresaw his death and prepared for it by deepening his devotion to God. He died en route to Lithuania on March 4, 1484, and was buried with a copy of a Marian hymn he frequently recited. Pope Adrian VI canonized him in 1522.



Feastday: March 4

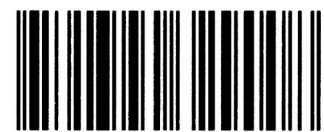
Patron Saint of: Lithuania, Poland and Russia

Five centuries after his death, Pope John Paul II recalled how St Casimir "embraced a life of celibacy, submitted himself humbly to God's will in all things, devoted himself with tender love to the Blessed Virgin Mary and developed a fervent practice of adoring Christ present in the Blessed Sacrament."

"To all," the Pope said, "he was a shining example of poverty and of sacrificial love for the poor and needy." — *CNA*



Download the Click To Pray updates now.



Parishes should plan now how to welcome parishioners back to church

WASHINGTON: Even with many recent hopeful signs on vaccinations and the reduction in the number of COVID-19 cases, there is no definite date at which the coronavirus pandemic will be declared over.

That should not stop parishes from planning now to welcome parishioners back to Mass in the future.

"You can't be thinking, 'What will we do after the pandemic?' You have to be doing it now," said Dominican Sr Teresa Rickard, president and executive director of Renew International, which has been offering parish renewal programs since 1976.

"I would be doing things leading up to the fall and going into next Christmas," Sr Rickard added. "People have to be creative, innovating. It can't be about maintenance it's got to be about mission."

"Don't dwell on what you can't do, focus on what you can do," said Jack Beers, content director for Dynamic Catholic, which sees as its mission "to reenergise the Catholic Church in America by developing world-class resources that inspire people to rediscover the genius of Catholicism."

There had long been a "gravitational pull toward the parish — the social life- educational life, the worship life — all revolve around the parish," said Beers in a Feb 18 phone interview. "That's not true anymore. Worse than that, because of the pandemic, people are reluctant to come back. There's a fear to (come back)".



The main reason that people will come back to church is for community. (UCA News photo)

The main reason for people to return to church is community

"There needs to be something to get them over the hump to come back, to sort of overcome the repellent."

"The main reason that people will come back to church is for community," said Amy Ekeh, director of Little Rock Scripture Study, a small-group Bible study programme serving Catholic parishes. "If they were already experiencing community as a parish, they'll come back to that. Small groups is one way in parishes to experience that community."

Asked whether there is a carrot-or-stick approach needed to entice pandemic-shy Catholics to return to church, Ekeh replied, "I think the carrot already had to be there," referring to the sense of community parishioners feel. "They're self-motivated by that. I don't know if

you can create a carrot if it wasn't already there. And don't even try the stick!"

Nor is it likely that Catholics would embrace "back to church" on a set date any more than they would for "back to school" for their children, according to Peter Dwyer, director of Liturgical Press.

"It's probably healthier to think about gradually," Dwyer said. "I too have thought about 'we're back' the first Sunday we're all back, but that's not likely to happen because people will not feel comfortable."

He added, "We have to be attentive to people who are not afraid and people who are very afraid. I think a parish leadership needs to be attentive to ... what makes them feel welcome? It's a tough call."

Jack Beers, content director for Dynamic Catholic said imitating the model of Jesus can be a big help. "Jesus didn't wait on people," he said. "He went to the people and went to the people — to go to the people and tell them to return to God."

He added, "Most people's first move toward going (back to church) isn't a faith step, it's a selfish one. What we've found in our work with parishes is that people miss a connection. ... Many people start asking the question of what's missing in my life, how can I gain this connection. What opportunities are there for us as a church? We have the only thing that can fill people's lives, and that's God. There's a God-sized hole in people's lives."

Start phoning parishioners now

Both Jack Beers and Sr Teresa Rickard of Renew say parishes should be phoning parishioners right now.

Beers calls it "a simple act of just connecting with people," and not just making one call and thinking the job is done.

"Check in: 'How are you doing. Can we pray for you? What's an obstacle for you at this time in your life?'" he said. "Some things are just practical, that people need a bridge. Or people need the Eucharist but they don't know how, and they're afraid: 'How safe is Mass? Have you had any cases (of COVID-19)?' But in most cases, they don't want anything from you and are just concerned about how things are at church."

"Check in: 'How are you doing. Can we pray for you? What's an obstacle for you at this time in your life?'"

"You've got to do the personal touch. You've got to start encouraging people," said Sr Rickard. "Soon, more people will be coming to Mass. And you've got to be making your case about why you should be going to Mass." And that case, she added, cannot be "you're going to hell if you don't go." — **By Mark Pattison, CNS**

Pope Francis' guide for Lent: The call to pastoral conversion

VATICAN: In his 2013 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*), Pope Francis spoke of his dream for a "missionary option" (No. 27). To Pope Francis, this "option" is a new order of priorities in the everyday reality of ministry within the life of the Church that moves from an outlook of self-preservation to evangelisation.

What might this missionary option mean for us this Lent?

The Pope's greatest dream is that we are a Church that does not stop to navel gaze. Instead, he envisions a community that "seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: 'We have always done it this way'" (No 33).

Pope Francis notes that this option does not look like small changes, like the addition of a new ministry program or change in a personal prayer routine; rather, what he dreams of is

an entire change of heart and reorienting of attitude.

He envisions a pastoral conversion that transforms everything from the root, including "customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures" to make the Church "more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself" (No 27).

Pastoral conversion requires us to shift our gaze from ourselves to the world in need around us, from those closest to us to those furthest away.

As pastoral ministers, Pope Francis' call to pastoral conversion may seem like an exercise mainly aimed at making changes in our ministerial life. However, Pope Francis'

exhortation to transform everything with a mission-focused mindset is an invitation not just directed at the Church — it is a call to a dramatic shift in our own priorities, intentions and practices to become personally mission-minded.

What wisdom does this call to pastoral conversion hold for our journey through Lent as pastoral ministers?

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis notes that a "missionary option" is one that radically transforms everything. What Pope Francis advises is not a quick fix, but a wholesale process of discerning everything, considering if it truly leads to a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ.

A Lent reimagined according to Pope Francis' call to pastoral conversion involves considering our present spiritual habits and practices, evaluating them for their fruitfulness, before adding new practices or



Jesuit volunteers serve cooked food in a village in Bihar state, India. (UCA News photo)

subtracting others.

After looking inward, Pope Francis' vision for pastoral conversion encourages us to then look outward. He reminds us: "It (is) clear that the Gospel is not merely about our personal relationship with God" (No 180).

In other words, the Pope calls us to take stock of our spiritual life not just as an exercise in itself, but to consider how our spiritual practices and habits form us to be in relationship

with others and God. Do our spiritual practices inspire and prepare us to love and accompany others in our life and ministry?

After reflecting and discerning, Pope Francis' call to pastoral conversion requires us to take action. He reminds us that being on mission involves "taking the first step" (No. 24). In our life and ministry, pastoral conversion requires us to take initiative and get involved. — **By Colleen Campbell, CNS**