

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

Assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.

Ephesians 3:2-3



Clergy transfers in Kuching

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Celebrating the birth of Christ

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SIC's youth rally is back

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What did we learn from the pandemic?

VATICAN: In a message sent to heads of state across the world, Pope Francis has asked leaders to reflect on what lessons can be learnt three years after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Pope, in his 2023 World Peace Day message posed a series of questions:

"What did we learn from the pandemic? What new paths should we follow to cast off the shackles of our old habits, to be better prepared, to dare new things? What signs of life and hope can we see, to help us move forward and try to make our world a better place?"

Pope Francis wrote in the message that "certainly after directly experiencing the fragility of our own lives ... the greatest lesson we learned from COVID-19 was the realisation that we all need one another."

He added: "We also learned that the trust we put in progress, technology, and the effects of globalisation was not only excessive but

turned into an individualistic and idolatrous intoxication, compromising the very promise of justice, harmony, and peace that we so ardently sought."

The Pope underscored that "in our fast-paced world, the widespread problems of inequality, injustice, poverty, and marginalisation continue to fuel unrest and conflict, and generate violence and even wars."

"We cannot continue to focus simply on preserving ourselves; rather, the time has come for all of us to endeavour to heal our society and our planet, to lay the foundations for a more just and peaceful world, and to commit ourselves seriously to pursuing a good that is truly common," he said.

The World Day of Peace — instituted by St Paul VI in 1968 — is celebrated each year on January 1, the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. The message is sent by the Vatican Secretariat of State to governments around the world.

The Pope's message for the 2023 World Day of Peace, the 56th celebration, is titled *No one can be saved alone: Com-*

batting COVID-19 together; embarking together on paths of peace.

In the text, Pope Francis included one paragraph about the ongoing war in Ukraine, which he described as "a setback for the whole of humanity."

"At the very moment when we dared to hope that the darkest hours of the COVID-19 pandemic were over, a terrible new disaster befell humanity. We witnessed the onslaught of another scourge: another war, to some extent like that of COVID-19, but driven by culpable human decisions ... Clearly, this is not the post-COVID-19 era we had hoped for or expected," Pope Francis said.

The Pope also noted: "While a vaccine has been found for COVID-19, suitable solutions have not yet been found for the war."

Canadian Cardinal Michael Czerny, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, presented the message at a news conference and spoke to *Catholic News Service* afterward.

"The message gives me hope because it puts a finger on not what some impor-

tant person needs to do but what each of us needs to do, which is just to take the time to ask ourselves, 'What did I learn or not learn? And how is my life going to change from there?' the cardinal said. "Hopefully, the lessons will be for the good of everyone."

People's experience of the pandemic, the lockdowns, the possibility of continuing to work and the scrambling for vaccines were different around the world, he said, but that experience loses its power if people do not reflect on it and share it.

Pope Francis' message, he said, is a reminder "that we are too quick to forget" and then humanity is forced to move on to the next disaster without having made changes to alleviate suffering.

Salesian Sr Alessandra Smerilli, secretary of the dicastery, told reporters the Pope was asking people "to return for a moment to those frightening, difficult and painful moments" at the beginning of the pandemic in early 2020. "This is the time to ask ourselves whether, as individuals and as a community, are we better or worse off three years later?" — *CNA/CNS*



Pope Francis meets the famous Puerto Rican Kings of Juana Diaz during the General Audience on December 21, 2022 at Vatican. (Vatican Media)



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GUEST EDITORIAL — TONY MAGLIANO



No one can be saved alone
We all need one another

What is the greatest lesson you learnt from COVID-19? For Pope Francis it is that “we all need one another.” So true, and yet, so often ignored. With this essential, foundational life-lesson, the Holy Father builds a New Year’s invitation for global peace.

In his January 1, 2023 World Day of Peace message entitled *No one can be saved alone. Combatting COVID-19 together, embarking together on paths of peace*, Pope Francis challenges us to travel on new paths that allow us to cast off the chains of our old habits, and to be better prepared to dare new things.

“Certainly, after experiencing the fragility of our own lives and the world around us,” Pope Francis emphasises that indeed, “we all need one another. That our greatest, and yet most fragile, treasure is our shared humanity as brothers and sisters, children of God. And that none of us can be saved alone.”

The inspiring, and even heroic, efforts of many during the pandemic gives cause to hope for a better way going forward. But yet, at the same time, the old deadly habits persist.

Pope Francis reminds us that “At the very moment when we dared to hope that the darkest hours of the COVID-19 pandemic were over, a terrible new disaster befell humanity.” He lamented the tragic war in Ukraine, and the tragedy of the dozens of armed conflicts around the world. “While a vaccine has been found for COVID-19, suitable solutions have not yet been found for war. Certainly, the virus of war is more difficult to overcome than the viruses that compromise our bodies, because it comes, not from outside of us, but from within the human heart corrupted by sin” (see: Mark 7:17-23).

In order to successfully pursue the good of all, Pope Francis under-

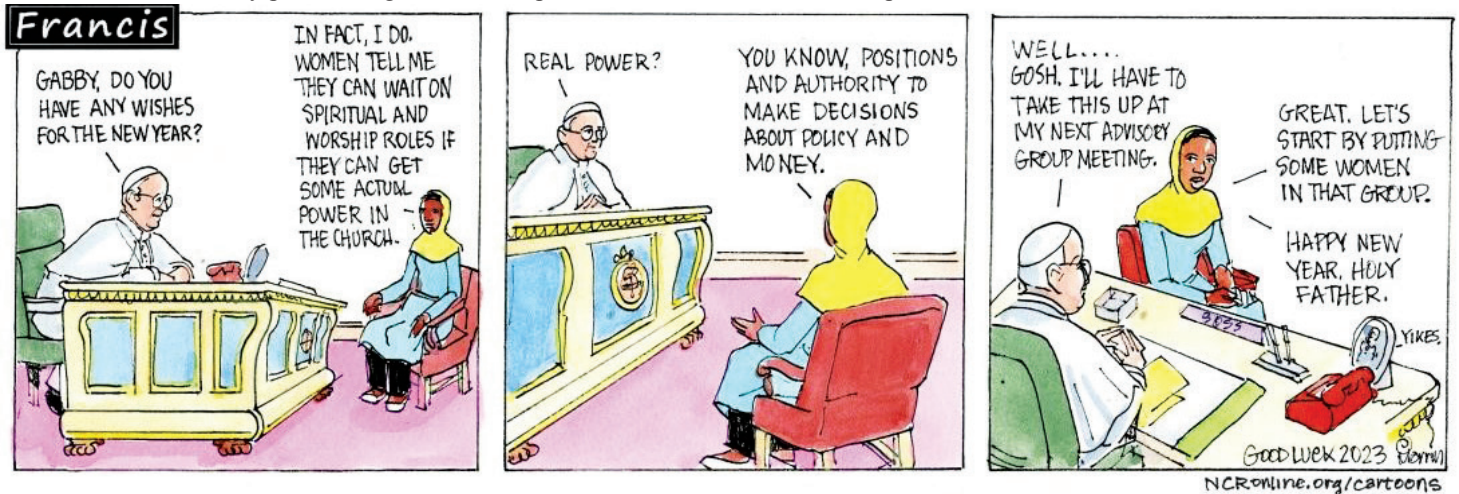
scores an essential fact that the many moral, social, political and economic crises we are faced with are all interconnected. “And what we see as isolated problems are actually causes and effects of one another.”

The Holy Father thus urges us to meet these crises head-on with responsibility and compassion. He asks us to pray to Mary Immaculate, Mother of Jesus and Queen of Peace for her intercession, and to commit ourselves to work for peace, universal public health care, the environment, the reversal of climate change, dignified work for all, an end to the scandal of starvation, and for humane policies that welcome and integrate migrants and all other human beings who find themselves discarded by societies.

Pope Francis puts to us this key question: “What then is being asked of us?” He reflects, “First of all, to let our hearts be changed.” He challenges us to let God transform the usual way we view the world; to no longer think in exclusively personal and nationalistic terms. Instead, Francis points us toward the way of God: towards thinking in terms of the common good, a global community, and to “opening our minds and hearts to universal human fraternity.”

Pope Francis adds that we cannot continue to focus simply on preserving ourselves; rather, the time has come for all of us to endeavour to heal our society and our planet, to lay the foundations for a more just and peaceful world, and to commit ourselves seriously to pursuing a good that is truly common.”

In inspiringly poetic and wise prophetic agreement with Pope Francis, the late French palaeontologist, and fellow Jesuit Fr Teilhard de Chardin wrote, “The age of nations is past. The task before us now, if we would not perish, is to build the earth.”



Immanuel, God with us

Science deals with the concrete physical realities of nature, their interrelationship and the consequences of their interaction. Faith delves into the spiritual world and the invisible realm of the divine. Are these two fields of human experience mutually exclusive or contradictory? Or are they compatible, or even interrelated?

The Gospel for today’s feast, the Feast of the Epiphany, provides an indication of an answer. Its story is about some Magi from the East making their way to do homage to the “infant king of the Jews”. Magi were a priestly caste from Persia dedicated to the interpretation of dreams, especially with regard to the births or deaths of great figures.

The birth in our Gospel was that of the “infant king of the Jews”. The Magi who undertook the search for this infant king followed a star. This piece of information likely indicates their engagement in a study of the movement of stars to corroborate or clarify details about the events interpreted in their dreams. That astral study was a field of science in its own right. But it did not rule out the role of faith. For the Magi, in fact, it did exert an impact on their faith and became a vehicle for them to seek divine revelation. In the Gospel story, the mystery their astral science pointed to concerned the king of the Jews.

When these Magi arrived in Jerusalem, they had to stop as their star had disappeared. They were therefore obliged to seek further information regarding the “infant

king of the Jews”. To this end they approached King Herod. It must be noted that Herod was the king of the Jews. Fearing the rise of a potential rival, the king took the matter very seriously. He consulted the chief priests and the scribes “about where the Christ was to be born.” These were Scripture scholars, that is, experts in the study of the Word of God.

The two titles, “king of the Jews” and “Christ”, referred to the same person. The first one was used by the Gentiles represented by the Magi; the Jews used the second one and so Herod used it when addressing the chief priests and scribes.

The answer Herod received was cited as “from the prophet”, meaning from the Scriptures, that is, from the Word of God revealed through His prophets. “Bethlehem, in the land of Judah” was the place of Christ’s birth. The Word of God prophesied that the Christ would be “a leader who would shepherd His people.”

With that revelation, the Magi proceeded on their journey, naturally intending to head for Bethlehem. At this stage, the star reappeared to guide them and “halted over the place where the child was.” The Gospel states: “The sight of the star filled them with delight”, for they felt reaffirmed in their search of the child.

Seeing the child and His mother Mary, they “fell on their knees, did Him homage and offered Him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.” This gesture and these gifts of

theirs expressed their acknowledgement of the full identity of “the infant king of the Jews”. For sure, they acknowledged that He was God. That was why they fell on their knees to worship Him. When they met Herod in Jerusalem, they told him that they had come to do homage to the infant king of the Jews. Doing homage with bowing prostration conveyed profound respect for a person of authority who, in the Gospel, was the king of the Jews. But in today’s Gospel, it involved falling on the knees. It amounted to worship and thus acknowledgement of Jesus as God.

Through their astral study and the knowledge received from inspired Scriptures, the Magi came to find and acknowledge the infant Jesus as the **king of the Jews** and **God**. Their gifts expressed their faith. Frankincense conveyed their faith in the divinity of the child. Gold reiterated their acknowledgement of Him as king which they had come to know through their science of stars and following the one that guided them. Myrrh, associated with burial, indicated their acknowledgement of the child as a true human person.

From the story in today’s Gospel, it seems clear that science and revelation in the Scriptures worked hand-in-hand to lead the Magi to a knowledge of the infant king of the Jews and further discovery of the place of His birth, as well as His full identity. The Magi’s experience reflects that of many a believing scientist. Their scientific knowl-

Reflecting on our
Sunday Readings
with Archbishop Emeritus
John Ha

Epiphany of the Lord (A)

Readings: Isaiah 60:1-6;
Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6;
Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

edge leads them to acknowledge God’s existence and work in creation. Their faith complements their scientific discovery and brings them to a deeper knowledge of God. The complementarity between science and faith is rooted in the fact that God is the Creator, the source of the entire universe, and He is also the source of all revelation in the Scriptures. He reveals Himself through both science and faith.

Epiphany celebrates the almighty, infinite and invisible God revealing Himself in the powerless, finite and visible baby Jesus. Indeed, the divine Godhead beyond our grasp becomes a human person in Jesus, Whom we can see, touch and relate to. The historical Jesus, Whom science has verified, has led us to the Jesus of faith. Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Immanuel, God-with-us.

Archbishop Emeritus John Ha is from the Archdiocese of Kuching





KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

January

- 9** Inauguration of the Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam, Penang at 6.00pm
- 10-13** Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, Singapore & Brunei – Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam
- 14** Parish Pastoral Assembly – Church of St Francis of Assisi, Cheras



PENANG DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Sebastian Francis

January

- 9** Inauguration of the Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam, Penang at 6.00pm
- 10-13** Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, Singapore & Brunei – Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam
Conference of Major Religious Superiors (CMRS) Meeting
- 13** Penang Diocesan Heritage Committee Meeting & Appreciation Dinner at 6.00pm
- 15** Sacrament of Confirmation – the Church of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, Ipoh at 8.00am
- 17** Council of Priests (COP), Stella Maris at 10.00am
- 17 & 18** Clergy Monthly Recollection (CMR), Stella Maris
- 18** Eucharistic Celebration – 25th Sacerdotal Anniversary of Fr Arulnathan Joseph, Church of St. Anthony, Nibong Tebal at 7.00pm
- 18 & 19** Permanent Deacons' Formation, Stella Maris



MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

January

- 9** Inauguration of the Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam, Penang at 6.00pm
- 10-13** Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, Singapore & Brunei – Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam
- 17-19** Annual Clergy Discernment 2022/Clergy Month Recollection



DIOCESE OF SIBU

Bann of priestly ordination



Rev Deacon Johanaz Ling will be called to the Order of Presbyters on January 25, 2023. The Mass of ordination to the Presbyterate will be presided over by His Lordship, Rt Rev Bishop Joseph Hii at Sacred Heart Cathedral at 3.00pm.

Canon Law (1051.2) requires Catho-

lics to review any impediments or circumstances that would prevent Rev Deacon Johanaz Ling from receiving the Sacred Order and to contact the Chancery or Bishop Joseph Hii with such information as soon as possible.

Let us offer our prayerful support for Rev Deacon Johanaz Ling as he pre-

pares himself for his priestly ministry and service in the Diocese of Sibiu.

Fr Alphonsus Tang
Chancellor

December 27, 2022



ARCHDIOCESE OF KUCHING

Clergy transfers and appointments

Rev Fr Patrick Heng is appointed as the Rector of St Peter's College, effective January 1, 2023. The handing over from former Rector Fr Nicholas Ng was conducted during the closing of the Academic Year Mass on December 16, 2022. The Installation of new Seminary Rector Fr Patrick Heng will be held on Monday, January 30, 2023 at 6.00pm during Mass for the Opening of the Academic Year in St Peter's College Seminary Chapel, Kuching.

Rev Fr Nicholas Ng is appointed as Rector and will reside in St Joseph's Cathedral, Kuching. Installation will be on Saturday January 7, 2023 at the 6.00pm Sunset Mass.

Friar Don Don Ramirez, OFM, is appointed as Rector of St Ann's Parish, Kota Padawan, assisted by Friar Joseph Lee and Friar David Au. The Franciscan Custos in Singapore also appointed Friar Joseph Lee as Guardian of St Francis of Assisi Friary; Friar Don Don Ramirez as Vocation Promoter for Sarawak and Friar David Au as Custody Councillor. The period of appointment by Franciscan Custos is from January 1, 2023 – December 31, 2025. The installation of Friar Don Don Ramirez as Rector of St Ann's Parish will take place on Sunday January 8, 2023 at 10.30am Mass in St Ann's Church, Kota Padawan.

Rev Fr Leonard Yap is appointed as Rector of Blessed Sacrament Church, BDC. Handing over and Installation will be on Sunday January 15, 2023 at the 10.30am Mass.

Rev Fr Lazarus Swinie is appointed as Rector of St Theresa's Parish, Serian. He has completed five years serving as *Fidei Donum* priest in Miri Diocese and will return to Kuching Archdiocese. Handing over and installation will be in St Theresa's Parish Church, Serian on Sunday January 29, 2023 at the 9.00am English/Bidayuh Mass.

Rev Fr Eugene Maglasang, SDB, is appointed as Rector of Holy Trinity Parish, Kenyalang Park. Handing over and installation will be in the Holy Trinity Church on Sunday February 5, 2023 at the 7.30am Mass.

Rev Fr Larry Tan, SJ, has been appointed to be the priest-in-charge of the SJC Counselling Centre. He will not be functioning as Assistant Priest in St Joseph's Cathedral but will continue to supply and celebrate Masses and Sacraments in the city parishes.

Rev Fr Joseph Liew is appointed to work full time in the Metropolitan Tribunal of Kuching, PSO Office located at the ACCPC, and as external lecturer in St Peter's College, Kuching. He will assist to coordinate with the Chinese speaking community at Holy Trinity Parish, Kenyalang Park, and reside in Blessed Sacrament Church, BDC.

Rev Fr Lucas Ng, CDD, is appointed to the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council (APC) Commission for Bible and Faith Formation to look after the Chinese-language ministry. He will not be functioning as Assistant Priest but will continue to reside in Sacred Heart Fathers' House, Kota Sentosa. He will take up teaching duties in St Peter's College and Faith Formation in APC Commission after returning from his sabbatical leave on February 1, 2023.

Rev Fr Christopher Laden is appointed as Assistant Priest in St Peter's Parish, Padungan. He will have his office and residence in St Peter's Church, Padungan.

Rev Fr Robert Jissem has been granted study leave for a Course on Pastoral Leadership and Management for Mission (PLMM) at the East Asian Pastoral Institute (EAPI) in Manila, Philippines from January 11 to June 30, 2023.

Rev Fr Benard Jim Bujang has applied and been granted two-year leave from priestly ministry, effective January 1, 2023. During this leave period, he will not be exercising the ministerial priesthood with regard to celebration of Masses, Sacraments or sacramentals.

I would also like to acknowledge that during his seven years of ministry in St Stephen's Church, Bau (2015-2020) and St Joseph's Cathedral, Kuching (2020-2022), many have received Baptism, Holy Communion, Reconciliation, Anointing, Holy Matrimony and Funeral Rites. For these blessings, we are grateful and let us keep him in our prayers during his leave.

Kuching seminarians on Pastoral Work in our parishes 2023

Dannie Luis Romanus (From Lundu, fourth year Theology in St Peter's College 2023)

● Four-month Pastoral Work in Sacred Heart Parish, Kota Sentosa: Jan 10 to May 14, 2023.

Addie Frank (From Serian, third year Theology in St Peter's College Kuching 2023)

● Four-month Pastoral Work in St Joseph's Cathedral, Kuching: Jan 10 to May 14, 2023.

Cantona Cyril (From Holy Trinity Kuching, first year Theology in St. Peter's College)

● No pastoral after completing one-year regency in Divine Mercy Church, Shah Alam.

Boniface Chang (From K. Padawan, second year Philosophy. College General Penang 2023)

● One-month Pastoral Work in St. Theresa's Parish, Serian: Jan 3 to 21, 2023.

Kenny Geddi Sonti (From Serian, second year Philosophy in College General, Penang 2023)

● One-month Pastoral Work in St Stephen's Parish, Bau: Jan 3 to 21, 2023.

All appointments will take effect from January 1, 2023. The installation and handing over will be carried out at later dates in various parishes.

This is to ensure a smooth transition for outgoing and incoming rectors while parish responsibilities and pastoral care

are always being provided for.

Let us keep all our priests and seminarians in prayer.

I take this opportunity to wish all priests and Catholics a Holy Christmas 2022 and Blessed New Year 2023.

Pastor Cordis Christi

† Simon Poh

Most Rev Simon Poh
Archbishop of Kuching

December 22, 2022

Sharing the Christmas spirit with people of other faiths

SUBANG JAYA: After a three-year lapse, the Church of St Thomas More (STM)'s Parish Ministry for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (PMEIA) organised a pre-Christmas high tea with leaders of other religions from its neighbourhood of Subang Jaya, USJ, and Putra Heights, on December 10.

Aimed at rekindling friendship and sharing the love, joy, and peace of Christmas with its non-Catholic friends, the event was also attended by the ADUN of Subang Jaya, YB Michelle Ng. In her speech, she encouraged such activities and pledged her support for future

events. The Ecclesiastical Assistant of the Archdiocese Ministry for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Affairs (AMEIA), Fr Xavier Andrew, was also present.

STM parish priest Msgr Patrick Boudville met the various religious leaders for the first time since he joined the parish. After Msgr Patrick's welcome address and a short update by PMEIA's chief coordinator, Angeline Lesslar, guests were taken on a guided tour of the church.

To add to the spirit of the occasion, carollers entertained the guests with popular Christmas

songs throughout the tea party.

An inter-faith council comprising representatives from the Catholic and other Christian Churches, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, and members of the Bahai faith will soon meet to plan activities for this year. Due to COVID-19 lockdowns, plans made by this council, set up in 2020, were aborted.

The future looks positive, with hope that over time, more bridges will be built and fraternity enhanced between the various religious groups involved. Each can play a role in making a difference in the neighbourhood.



Msgr Patrick Boudville gives the welcoming address.

Giving a gift of love

KUALA LUMPUR: The Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish Ministry of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (PMEIA), in collaboration with Yayasan Bena Nusa, organised its seventh annual *Christmas Gift of Love 2022* on December 17.

Attended by the chairman of Yayasan Bena Nusa, Datuk Seri Johari Abdul Ghani, PMEIA members, guests, well-wishers, and parishioners, the event, held at Dewan Yayasan Bena Nusa, Taman Maluri, aimed at benefitting some 200 people from all walks of life.

Datuk Seri Johari, a Member of Parliament for Titiwangsa, sponsored groceries worth RM100 and RM100 in cash each for the 200 people present.

The morning programme started with everyone singing the *Negara-Ku*, followed by an opening prayer in Bahasa Malaysia by PMEIA member, Catherine Mak from Sarawak.

PMEIA coordinator, Dr Florence John, spoke briefly on unity in diversity. She said Datuk Seri Johari has supported and hosted this pro-



PMEIA members with Datuk Seri Johari Abdul Ghani.

gramme at Yayasan Bena Nusa since 2016. Dr Florence added that this programme is an opportunity for all to grow in understanding of the various cultures and traditions and thus acknowledge the diversity of values as one people and one nation.

In his speech, Datuk Seri Johari said that as an MP for the people, he will take care of everyone in the Titiwangsa constituency equally and fairly. He also emphasised the educa-

tion and development aspects in his constituency.

PMEIA members melodiously rendered Christmas carols in English, Bahasa Malaysia and Tamil to entertain the guests. The event ended with a thank you speech by PMEIA treasurer, Betsy Glorin.

The PMEIA team thanked parish priest, Msgr Stanislaus Soosaimariam, for his support and encouragement. — *By Bernard Anthony*

Celebrating the Nativity with the elderly and infirm

PERMATANG TINGGI, Penang: The elderly and infirm parishioners of the Church of the Holy Name of Mary were treated to the winter solstice and early Christmas

celebration on December 22 at the parish.

Parish priest, Fr Louis Loi, and members of various parish ministries pulled together a fun after-

noon which included Confession, Mass and anointing, lunch, and light entertainment for some 143 guests. Fr Louis, Fr Augustine Wong, Fr Henry Rajoo, and Fr Nelson Joseph administered the Sacrament of Confession and Anointing.

During the homily, Fr Henry reminded the congregation that "our life's journey is toward heaven, not the grave. We inevitably experience pain and suffering, just like Jesus. However, being healthy or sick, we have a mission as long as our lives have not ended. We should not let our pain and suffering go to waste but lift it to our Father in Heaven instead, as Jesus did when He offered His suffering on the cross to save us".

After Mass, the guests enjoyed a packed lunch and light entertainment from other parishioners. The event ended with Santa giving out gifts and sweets. — *By Anne Lee*

St Peter's strives to be a loving parish



Fr Lionel Thomas gives a muffin and sandwich each to the people.

MELAKA: Christmas 2022 witnessed many Catholics flocking back to churches and chapels for the Christmas Masses to worship the new-born Saviour and give thanks for the year that was and being able to attend Mass in full force.

At the Church of St Peter, the oldest functioning Catholic church in the country, parishioners and visitors from Singapore, Ipoh, and Kuala Lumpur filled the pews during the two Christmas Day

Masses, celebrated by the parish priest, Fr Lionel Thomas.

After both Masses, Fr Lionel, with several lay leaders, greeted the congregation outside the church and presented them with a muffin and a sandwich each. The kind gesture was well received by all and made the visitors feel extra welcome.

Fr Lionel continues to make the parish motto, *Becoming A Loving Parish* a reality. — *By Bernard Anthony*

Making space for Christ in our hearts

KUALA LUMPUR: The Church of the Good Shepherd's Cherubim Choir rang in the birth of our Lord on Christmas Eve with their angelic rendition of carols, reminding us that God, in His love for us, sent His Son to be one of us.

The choir comprised children aged four to 12 years old, and accompanying them were also children on the piano, keyboards, and percussions.

The carollers began with all-time favourite hymns like *Silent Night*, *O Holy Night*, *O Come All Ye Faithful*, *Angels We Have Heard on High*, and *Do You Hear What I Hear?*

Michael Joseph then led some of the carollers' parents in a play depicting the Nativity of Jesus to remind the congregation to put their trust and faith in Jesus in all areas of their lives.

During his homily, parish priest Fr Mitchel Anthony Joseph



The carollers' parents participate in the Nativity play.

stressed the importance of bringing Christ into our lives, as our despair will turn to hope when we welcome Christ into our hearts. The birth of Jesus is crucial in our lives because God became man for us and lives inside us. — *By Rosalind Michael*



Fr Louis Loi with the other clergy members anoint the elderly and infirm.

Kuantan church celebrates Christmas with Orang Asli, migrants

By Dr Francis Leong

KUANTAN: After two years of low-key or muted Christmas celebrations, the parish community of St Thomas was once again able to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

Preparations began at Advent with the church premise illuminated with twinkling lights. The Nativity of our Lord, Christmas tree, and other Yuletide decorations were adorned in stages by the East Malaysian parishioners and a few locals.

To share the joyous festivities, Orang Asli families, migrant Indonesian and Vietnamese workers, and university students, were invited to attend the Christmas Masses. About 150

Orang Asli from Kuala Rompin were brought to Kuantan in two buses and given overnight accommodation at the Parish Community Centre.

For the first time, carolling was in four languages at the Christmas Eve Mass. The invitees enjoyed catered meals and potluck dishes prepared by parishioners, with some joining them in fellowship.

After the Christmas morning Mass, 250 goody bags were distributed to the children as one of the gifts, amongst others.

We are thankful to God for the fine weather that enabled everyone to have a remarkable celebration this year. There was overwhelming participation and many outstation visitors at the Christmas Masses.



Fr George Packiasamy with the children.

Christmas surprise in Pontian



Parishioners receiving communion.

PONTIAN, Johor: Parishioners from the Chapel of the Immaculate Heart arranged a Christmas surprise to welcome their parishioners and the 100-odd people comprising Skudai Catholic Centre (SCC) university students and parishioners who attended Christmas Mass at their chapel.

About 20 families in Pontian planned a warm welcome for their guests by pooling resources to cater food for about 200 people and to buy gifts for the lucky draw. Tents were set up as the chapel could not accommodate everyone.

After the morning Christmas Mass, the congregation participated in a fellowship meal and lucky draws.

Many were pleasantly surprised at their hospitable Christmas welcome. Universiti Teknologi Malaysia's final-year student and vice-president of the students, Eunikaa Lominus, said some students were there because they wanted to experience Christmas in a small town. Most students were from Sabah and Sarawak and they said Christmas in Pontian felt like home.

Parish Pastoral chairperson, Patrick Loh, was thankful for the many Pontian parishioners who came forward to help and contribute generously. Patrick noted that this was the first time Pontian had a morning Christmas Mass.

SCC parish priest, Fr. Lawrence Ng, said that since early 2022, two chapels came under the care of the SCC parish — Pontian and Our Lady of Lourdes in Pekan Nanas. Fr Lawrence intentionally schedules Masses in Pontian instead of SCC to encourage SCC parishioners to be better acquainted with Pontian, as they are now within the SCC family.

He said it was nice that everybody enjoyed the Christmas festivities and stayed for quite a while, enjoying each other's company before departing for home. The travel time between the Pontian chapel and SCC is about an hour. — *By Y.K.Ng*

Celebrating the birth of Christ with the poor

SEREMBAN: The Church of the Visitation collaborated with Matrix Concepts Holding Berhad for their CSR Christmas event at Matrix D'Tempat Sendayan on December 10.

The collaboration was led by Eddie Charles and Albert Ezuli from the parish's Ministry of the Poor and Orang Asli Ministry, respectively.

Guests at the event were children from underprivileged families in Kg Sebir and the Ministry of the Poor's adoptees. Some 45 children and their parents had a great evening filled with joy, laughter, games, and food sponsored by Matrix.

The event ended with Christmas gifts and red packets distributed to the children. Matrix Concepts Holdings Berhad also presented the parish with a Christmas donation of RM3,000.



The underprivileged and the Orang Asli children at the CSR Christmas event.

Spending time with prison inmates

SEREMBAN: The Catholic Prison Ministry (CPM) of the Church of the Visitation organised a Christmas fellowship at the Seremban Prison for 30 Christian inmates on December 15. Also present were parish priest Fr Xavier Andrew

and prison officers. The programme began with prayer and a Christmas message by Fr Xavier.

The food and drinks were prepared by CPM. The Prison Director was appreciative of our efforts. — *By David @ K.Allymothu*



Fr Xavier Andrew together with the prison officers and Christian inmates.

Catholic Lawyers' Society gives back

KUALA LUMPUR: The Catholic Lawyers' Society (CLS) headed to Kilang Papan, Sg. Lalang, Semenyih, on December 17, 2022, to help spread Christmas cheer to the migrant and Orang Asli community.

It was an adventure for the volunteers as they travelled through muddy, rocky, and bumpy roads in a four-wheel drive, but the community's warm welcome upon their arrival brushed aside the discomfort of the rough ride there.



Some of the Orang Asli guests.

The gathering started with Mass by Fr. Nicholas Hoh, OCD. Sitting on the cool wooden benches of a simple open area in Kilang Papan, the migrant and Orang Asli community members, both young and old — including mothers with children, prayed together in Bahasa Malaysia.

After Mass, the community enjoyed a scrumptious Christmas feast of chicken biryani before the CLS president, Godfrey Fernandez, and Fr Nicholas handed 35 bags of groceries (sponsored by the society) to members of the community.

The children were also delighted to receive early Christmas gifts of stationery and delicious treats. The committee members sang carols for them and played fun-filled games with the children.

The project was a great success for the CLS as they had support from volunteers who worked as a cohesive and committed team to ensure the gathering ran smoothly and made it meaningful and memorable. — *By Anne Malarvani*

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OLOG aims to rebuild relationships

By Bridget Antoinette Pereira

PPUCHONG: The parish of Our Lady of Guadalupe (OLOG) held its Pastoral Assembly on December 17, 2022. As the church premises is undergoing renovations, OLOG had to carry out its Discernment and Study Day online. It was not an easy feat considering the circumstances, but it was achieved by leaders who dedicated their time and effort to prepare for the assembly.

During the Study Day, four main areas of concern were identified - community, BEC, leadership, and relationship. Several

leaders are experiencing burnout as they were asked to continue in their respective roles due to the renovations.

In recent months, while awaiting completion of the renovation, the relationships built amongst its multi-ethnic members since 2006 have been difficult to maintain as the parish is currently operating from a shop lot nearby.

Many are travelling to neighbouring parishes for weekly Masses due to limited seating at the current location. The pandemic did not help much either. Several parishioners were ill-equipped to have online BEC gatherings, and some have become so comfort-

able with not attending Masses physically that they continue to remain at home.

This year, each BEC should strive to have physical meetings once again.

Thus, the parish's focus for 2023 will be to rebuild relationships between the parishioners and instill a deeper sense of belonging.

Parish priest, Fr Raymond Pereira, in his message said the parish will continue to journey together towards 2023 with full communion, participation and realising our mission to build God's kingdom at OLOG.

He encouraged everyone to continue being led by the Holy Spirit



During one of the group discussions.

to discern the four highlighted areas discussed.

Archbishop Julian Leow, in his address, mentioned the youth present and encouraged them to take up more leadership roles in the parish. The prelate invited

each parishioner to take baby steps towards addressing what was discerned during the group discussions at the PPA into quantifiable and measurable moves as we move towards building God's kingdom in Puchong.

Archbishop Julian renders support at Relay for Life

KUALA LUMPUR: The international Relay for Life (RFL) event is organised annually by the National Cancer Society Malaysia (NCSM) to bring communities together to celebrate cancer survivors, remember those who have passed on and raise funds for cancer prevention and support services.

Last year the event was held in Kuala Lumpur, Melaka, and Penang on December 4. Participants started the day with a fun run/walk. The event continued with various on-the-ground activities like free health and cancer screenings, educational booths, games, and food trucks before ending with the Luminaria event in the evening.

The Sultanah of Perak Darul Ridzuan, Duli Yang Maha Mulia



Archbishop Julian Leow with members of Sisters in Christ.

Tuanku Zara Salim, officiated the Kuala Lumpur leg of the event at the Malaysia Tourism Centre (MaTiC). Also present was the Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur, Most Rev Julian Leow.

The prelate has made time in the past few years to attend and render

his support by meeting survivors, doing the laps, and joining the Luminaria session.

Members of Sisters in Christ, a Catholic cancer support group, appreciate the archbishop's support and feel blessed by his presence.

— By Mary Sebastian

A day of festivities at parish feast day

JOHOR BAHRU: The Church of the Immaculate Conception (CIC) parishioners were thrilled to celebrate their feast day in person, after the two-year lull. The feast, which is usually marked with a grand Family Day festival, was held on December 18, to coincide with MJD's 50th anniversary celebration at the parish level.

The day started with Mass, followed by many activities including the opening ceremony, firecrackers display, photos booth, fingerprinting on the CIC family trees, lucky draws with 38 prizes, and game stalls. Breakfast and lunch were provided for the 1,000 plus parishioners in attendance.



Children dressed as saints at the Family Day.

Christian Institute for Theological Engagement presents research grant to academicians

KUALA LUMPUR: The Christian Institute for Theological Engagement (CHRISTE)'s Cornelius Cardinal Sim Professorial Chair of Theology and Dialogue presented funding for a research project entitled *Are Malaysian and Singaporean Christians flocking back to church or flying away? A comparative study on Christian Churches in Malaysia and Singapore in the COVID-19 recovery phase* at Sunway University on December 9, 2022.

Representing CHRISTE, permanent deacon of the Catholic Church, Professor Dr Sherman Kuek OFS presented the research grant to Sunway University Associate Professor Dr Pauline Leong, Monash University Malaysia Senior Lecturer Dr Tan Meng Yoe, and Infrastructure University Kuala Lumpur Academic Development and Quality Assurance Director Dr Lim Hock Ann, who will be jointly embarking on



Deacon Professor Dr Sherman Kuek awarding the research grant to Associate Professor Dr Pauline Leong, Dr Tan Meng Yoe, and Dr Lim Hock Ann.

the project.

Also present at the simple ceremony were Sunway University's School of Arts Dean, Professor Dr Matthew Marshall, and their Department of Communication's Head, Dr Padma Pillai.

This study is in light of social-scientific scholars' observation that post-COVID-19, despite Christian communities around the region opening their churches for the faithful to return to worship and pray,

significant portions of the Christian population have yet to return to their churches; perhaps some never will.

Dr Sherman is the Cornelius Cardinal Sim Professor of Theology and Dialogue for CHRISTE, an ecumenical and cross-disciplinary research institute chartered under a United Nations treaty. It is also affiliated with the School of Theology and Interfaith Studies of *Polê Universitaire Euclide* which specialises in postgraduate education for dip-

lomats, government officials from various continents, and staff members of the United Nations.

In his brief speech, Dr Sherman emphatically noted that Christian Theology must be in collaborative dialogue with the social-scientific disciplines if pastors and theologians desire to understand the lived realities of Christians in society. Otherwise, he explained, Christian leaders would merely be reflecting upon misperceived and falsely con-

structed realities that do not accurately reflect people's lives.

The deacon said that, as a minister in the Catholic Church, he found the Pope's call for synodality implied the importance of listening to the lived experiences of society by way of social-scientific discoveries, interpretation, and analyses, so the Church could respond intelligently to challenges faced by human society.

This gathering of scholars was small but significant in that it represented collaborative dialogue between Christian Theology and the Social Sciences in a formal and secular academic setting, hopefully, one of many other such occasions to come.

The proposed research project will last for one year before it is expected to yield concrete findings that will be published in various forms by the scholars concerned.

— By Jennifer Chong

Jokowi greets Christians with call for stronger ties

JAKARTA: Indonesian President Joko Widodo called on Christians in the predominantly Muslim country to strengthen “bonds of brotherhood” and protect the environment in a Christmas message.

The president addressed the faithful on Christmas Day during a visit to the cathedral in Bogor, West Java.

“Let’s continue to strengthen the bonds of brotherhood and our environment for the rise of the unitary state of the Republic of Indonesia,” Widodo was quoted as saying.

Fr Yohanes Suparto, vicar general of the Diocese of Bogor, said

he was pleased that Widodo visited the church.

“We were very, very surprised at how happy everyone really felt when Jokowi entered the church, after all, Jokowi turned out to be a person who always wanted to be close to anyone,” said the priest.

Widodo is popularly known in Indonesia by his nickname “Jokowi.”

Fr Suparto said the president’s visit “is history ... because it is only Jokowi who has ever come as president to enter our church.”

“Jokowi’s message was also powerful for us, so we must keep being united and tolerant for the



President Joko Widodo poses with Catholic priests for a photograph during a visit to Bogor Cathedral Church on Christmas. (UCA News Photo/Kosmos Cathedral Bogor/Radio Veritas Asia)

sake of the rise of the Indonesian country we love,” said the priest.

Rita Marcia, a choir member at the Bogor Cathedral Church, said the president’s visit was “amazing,” adding that the moment was “the most beautiful gift” during the Christmas celebration.

“This is the most wonderful Christmas gift for the people of the Bogor Cathedral. It is a beautiful present for us,” she said.

“A president who visits with humility, with all of the rites he must observe in the church. He had waited to enter. It’s most hum-

bling, most appreciative, and most extraordinary for us,” said Marcia.

Muslims comprise more than 80 per cent of the country’s 273 million people. As of June 2021, there were 28.82 million Christians in the country with about 8.5 million Catholics. — *LiCAS News*

Indonesian cathedral exhibits 100 nativity scenes

JAKARTA: A cathedral in Indonesia kicked off the country’s first-ever exhibition showcasing 100 nativity scenes, as Christians resumed public Christmas celebrations in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 17-day event at Beatae Mariae Virginis Cathedral Church in Bogor in West Java province ran from Dec 23 to Jan 8, a church official said.

The event took inspiration from Pope Francis’ invitation to maintain the holy traditions of the Catholic Church as highlighted in his 2019 Apostolic Letter *Admirabile Signum* on the *Meaning and Importance of the Nativity Scene*, said Fr Alfonsus Sombolinggi, coordinator of the exhibition

The Pope said that “as we contemplate this aspect of the nativity scene, we are called to reflect on the responsibility of every Christian to

spread the Gospel” and “each of us is called to bear glad tidings to all, testifying by our practical works of mercy to the joy of knowing Jesus and his love.”

Fr Sombolinggi said the event was aimed to help people realise the significance of the birth of Jesus.

“We wanted Catholic families to see this Christmas moment as a treasure for their children to have a better understanding of the birth of Jesus. We also wanted to make this Christmas a special moment for them,” the priest said.

“How beautiful it is to see them coming to this exhibition altogether. How beautiful it is to see them all enjoying the Christmas joy together.”

The priest said Catholic individuals and families as well as Catholic school children took part in making the nativity scenes with various ma-



A nativity scene on display at Beatae Mariae Virginis Cathedral Church in Bogor of Indonesia’s West Java province. (UCA News Photo/Beatae Mariae Virginis Cathedral Church)

terials, such as used cardboard and cement.

The exhibition is the first of its kind in Indonesia and is open to all, he said

“It is open to followers of all other religions. It is religious tourism for all the faithful. We invited the Bogor mayor, who is a Muslim,” he said.

Bogor City Mayor Bima Arya Sugiarto hailed the exhibition.

“Jesus shows a universal value to the world. I think every religion has such value, which is the value of simplicity. And I think this is the substance of the exhibition — the symbolisation of simplicity which is facing a degradation,” said Sugiarto.

“We have drifted away by the worldly goods, luxury and hedonism. So, I think the exhibition of [the Catholic Church] reminds us about the value of simplicity.”

He also said the exhibition helps deepen mutual understanding among people of various faiths.

“They come to the exhibition to get a better understanding [of the Catholic faith] and to improve mutual respect,” he said. — **By Katharina Reny Lestari, ucanews.com**

Christmas day floods force thousands to flee homes in Philippines

MANILA: Christmas Day floods in the Philippines forced the evacuation of nearly 46,000 people from their homes, said civil defence officials.

Two people were killed and nine others were missing after heavy seasonal rain inundated parts of the southern region of Mindanao, the officials added.

The disaster dampened celebrations on the mainly Catholic nation’s most important holiday.

“The waters rose above the chest in some areas, but today the rains have ceased,” civil defence worker Robinson Lacre told AFP by phone from Gingoog city, which accounted for 33,000 of the 45,700 people evacuated from their homes.

The coastguard said it rescued members of more than two dozen families in Ozamiz city and Clarin town at the height of the flooding.

Photos released by the coastguard showed its orange-clad rescuers cradling toddlers plucked from homes in waist-deep floodwaters.



This handout photo taken on December 25, 2022 shows rescuers evacuating a child from a flooded area in Ozamiz City, Misamis Occidental. (UCA News photo)

Two deaths were reported in the town of Jimenez.

The central and southern Philippines have been hit with bad weather as the disaster-prone nation of 110 million people began a long Christmas holiday.

Millions of people travel to their hometowns for family reunions during this period.

The coastguard also said strong winds and big waves sank a fish-

ing boat on Christmas Day off the coast of the central island of Leyte. Two crew members drowned, while six others were rescued.

The Philippines is ranked among the most vulnerable nations to the impacts of climate change.

Scientists have warned that storms are becoming more powerful as the world gets warmer. — *ucanews.com*

Indian Church works on final draft of document for ‘continental stage’ of synod

BANGALORE: The Catholic Church in India started a three-day meeting on December 28 to decide on the final draft of the document for the “continental stage” of the synodal process.

The six-member drafting committee, which is meeting in Bangalore, is expected to come up with a 10-page synthesis from the 101 syntheses collected across the country.

Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrão, president of the Conference of Catholic Bishops in India, earlier said that the synthesis “has to be the work of the Holy Spirit, not of the individuals present.”

He urged the members of the committee to take care “not to put our own opinion into the text.”

The “continental stage” of the Synod for a Synodal Church began in October 2022.

Fr Yesu Karunanidhi, national coordinator of the synod in India, said the message of the synod is that “we are learning to walk together and to sit with one another to break the

one bread, so that everyone can find their place.”

“Everyone is called to take part in this journey, no one is excluded,” he said, adding that “We feel called to this so that we can credibly proclaim the Gospel of Jesus to all peoples.”

“This is the road we seek to continue along on the continental stage,” said the priest.

The Document for the Continental Stage (DCS) is the result of “listening and discernment” and aims to enable “dialogue between local Churches and between the local Church and the universal Church.”

The 10-page synthesis will be sent later to the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences that will convene the “continental stage” of the synod in February 2023.

The document that will come out will help the general secretariat of the synod to create a working document for the first session in October 2023. — **By Rita Joseph, LiCAS News**

2022 was the worst year for the Catholic Church in Nicaragua

MANAGUA: Lawyer and researcher Martha Patricia Molina Montenegro reported that “2022 was the most disastrous year for the Nicaraguan Catholic Church.”

In a text shared with *ACI Prensa*, *CNA*'s Spanish language sister news agency, Molina wrote that in one year the Church was the target of “140 attacks from the Sandinista dictatorship.”

President Daniel Ortega and his wife Rosario Murillo have been ruling Nicaragua as a dictatorship since 2007.

Molina pointed out that among the attacks “there are unjust criminal proceedings that do not adhere to what the laws mandate, confiscations, kidnappings, hate speech and the prevention of freedom of movement”.

In addition, the regime shut down non-profit religious organizations and religious media outlets.

The lawyer also said that the dictatorship has deported, exiled, and expelled people; perpetrated desecrations and robberies; car-



Bishop José Álvarez Lagos surrounded by police officers on August 4, 2022. (CNA photo/Diocese Media TV Merced)

ried out sieges; made threats and prohibited processions.

All this because the Church in

Nicaragua preaches “the Gospel that is in itself an announcement and denunciation of the arbitrariness of the powerful of the day”.

“The dictatorship has been incessant and doesn't give respite to

the prelates,” she said.

The lawyer also referred to the second instalment of her report *Nicaragua: a persecuted Church?* which details 396 attacks against the Catholic Church in the country from 2018 to October 2022.

Among its more egregious attacks, the Ortega dictatorship abducted Bishop Rolando Álvarez of the Diocese of Matagalpa in August and has held him under house arrest ever since as he awaits trial.

The bishop was charged with “the crimes of conspiracy to undermine national security and sovereignty and the propagation of false news through information and communication technologies to the detriment of the Nicaraguan State and society”.

In addition, the dictatorship has arrested and exiled several priests.

The regime expelled the apostolic nuncio, Archbishop Waldemar Stanisław Sommertag in March and Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity in July. — **By Walter Sanchez Silva, CNA**

Zambian president commended for abolishing the death penalty

VATICAN: The Community of Sant'Egidio has expressed great satisfaction with the decision by President Hakainde Hichilema of the Republic of Zambia to abolish the death penalty.

Signing the legislation, two days before Christmas day, Zambian President Hakainde Hichilema said that the abolition was a fulfilment of his campaign promise to amend laws that inhibit the growth of democracy, good governance, and human rights in Zambia.

“Fellow Zambians, during our

campaigns for the presidency, we promised to amend all laws that inhibit the growth of democracy and good governance, impede human rights and basic freedoms. Today we have delivered,” said Hichilema.

The abolition of the death penalty is among the key areas of global engagement by one of the Catholic Church's most influential movements led by lay people – the Community of Sant'Egidio. The organisation is dedicated to evangelisation, social justice and charity in more

than 70 countries worldwide.

In a statement, Sant'Egidio expressed satisfaction with developments in Zambia and said in 2011 and 2018, delegations from Sant'Egidio travelled to Zambia to meet with state officials and other actors as part of the abolitionist campaign. It said the abolition of the death penalty in Zambia was a step forward for Africa to become a capital punishment-free continent.

The Law Association of Zambia (LAZ) also praised President Hakainde Hichilema for abolishing the death penalty. OHCHR, the lead United Nations entity mandated to promote and protect human rights, also joined in praising Zambia for the abolition.

Amnesty International said the announcement by President Hichilema was a good and progressive move that shows the country's commitment to protecting the right to life.

In effect, Zambia has been abolitionist in practice since 1997. Although the country's courts continued to pass the death sentence, no Zambian President has issued a death warrant in the last 25 years.

On December 23, 2022, Zambian President Hakainde Hichilema codified into law the abolition by assenting to the Penal Code (Amendment) Bill 2022 abolishing the death penalty in Zambia. — **By Paul Samasumo, Vatican News**



President Hakainde Hichilema of Zambia amending the law on the death penalty.

Christian Aid condemns Taliban ban on female NGO staff



Women have been banned from working with NGOs in Afghanistan.

KABUL: The Taliban government in Afghanistan has announced a ban on NGOs employing women in Afghanistan. The ruling came in a letter on December 24, 2022 from the Ministry of Economy to all NGOs working in the country. It threatens to cancel the licences of any organisation that does not comply quickly. This ruling comes just days after all female students were barred from attending universities in Afghanistan.

Christian Aid's Head of Asia, Middle East, Latin America, Caribbean and Global Programmes Ray Hasan commented: “Millions of people in Afghanistan are on the verge of starvation. Reports that families are so desperate they

have been forced to sell their children to buy food are utterly heartbreaking.

“Imposing a ban on female aid workers will only curtail our ability to help the growing number of people in need, and risks compounding the dire humanitarian crisis that women and girls face. Moreover, this ruling will deeply trouble families relying on the income of female aid workers amidst Afghanistan's severe economic crisis.

“Christian Aid is rapidly seeking clarity on this announcement and urging the authorities to reverse the ban. Whilst we do this, we are unfortunately pausing the work of our programmes.” — **ICN**

Love comes first, Pope says in letter on teaching of St Francis de Sales

VATICAN: The most important question a Christian can ask when making any decision in life is “where the greatest love is to be found,” Pope Francis wrote in a letter marking the 400th anniversary of St Francis de Sales, a doctor of the Church.

Thinking about the legacy of St Francis, who was born in France in 1567 and died in 1622, Pope Francis said he was convinced that the French saint’s “flexibility and his far-sighted vision have much to say to us,” especially in recognising the real-life struggles of ordinary people and judging faith by love.

The Pope’s letter was titled *Totum Amoris Est (Everything Pertains to Love)* and was released by the Vatican December 28, the 400th anniversary of the death of St Francis de Sales, who was bishop of Geneva, Switzerland, co-founder of the Visitation Sisters and a prolific writer, including of tracts he would slip under the doors of people’s homes.

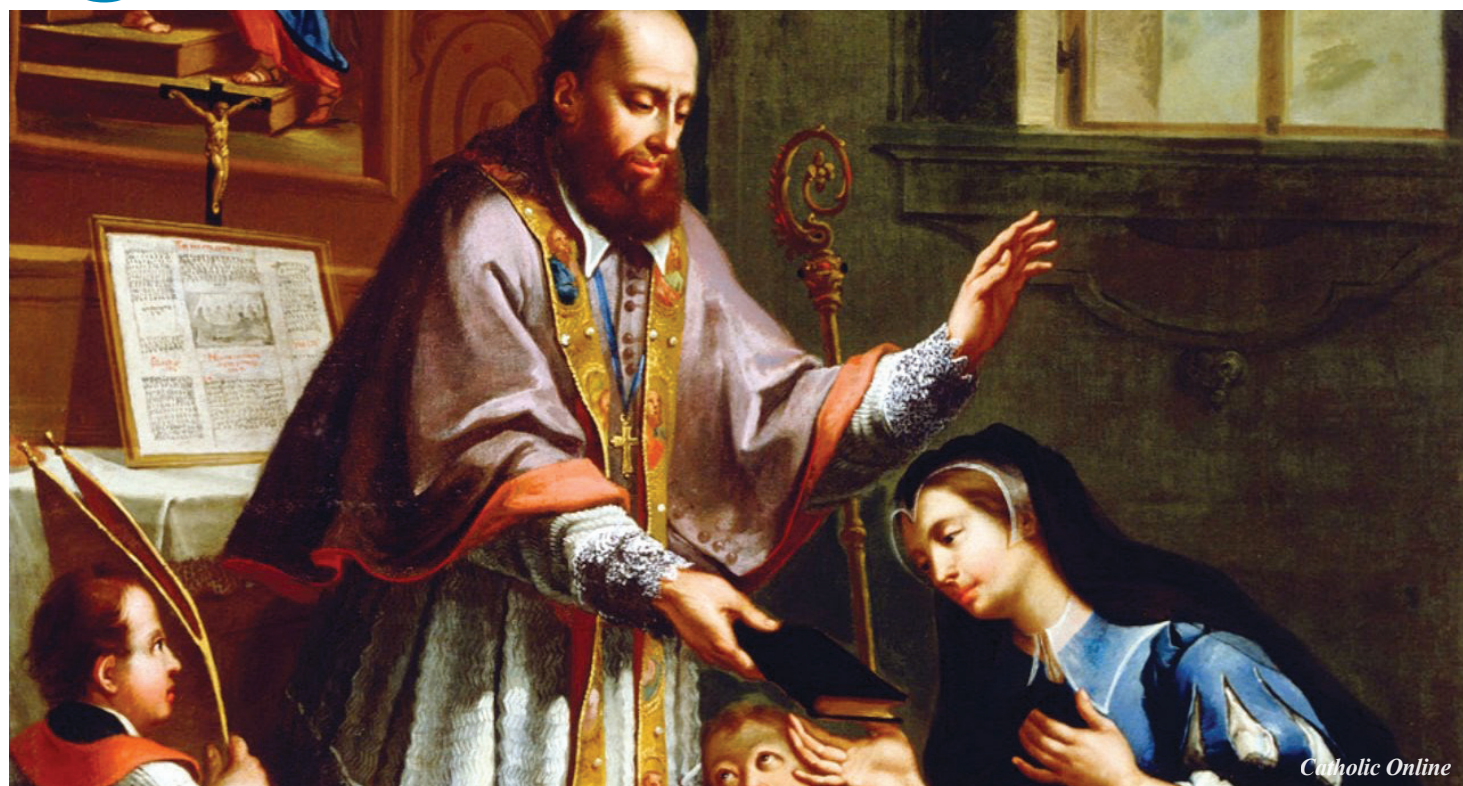
In a letter that quoted heavily from St Francis’ books, *Treatise on the Love of God* and *Introduction to the Devout Life*, but also from his own exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis said the saint has much to teach the Church today.

“We are challenged to be a church that is outward-looking and free of all worldliness, even as we live in this world, share people’s lives and journey with them in attentive listening and acceptance,” the Pope wrote. “That is what Francis de Sales did when he discerned the events of his times with the help of God’s grace.”

“Today he bids us to set aside undue concern for ourselves, for our structures and for what society thinks about us, and consider instead the real spiritual needs and expectations of our people,” the Pope said.

Returning in 1602 to Paris, where he previously studied, St Francis de Sales saw a world changing around him, the pope said, and he knew that he must respond theologically and pastorally.

“This was certainly not the first time that he had encountered individual fervent Christians, but now things were different,” the



Catholic Online

Pope said. “Paris was no longer the city devastated by the wars of religion that he had known in the years of his education, or by the bitter conflicts that he had seen in the Chablais,” a region on the border of France and Switzerland.

“He encountered something unexpected: a flood ‘of saints, true saints, in great numbers and in all places,’” as St Francis described them. “There were men and women of culture, professors of the Sorbonne, civil authorities, princes and princesses, servants and maids, men and women religious. A whole world athirst for God in a variety of ways.”

The saintly bishop developed a new approach to spiritual direction, the Pope said. “It was a method that renounced all harshness and respected completely the dignity and gifts of a devout soul, whatever its frailties.”

Like the Second Vatican Council would teach 350 years later, the Pope wrote, St

Francis de Sales knew that every person was called to holiness and that the call was specific to each person and his or her talents, shortcomings and state in life.

And, he said, the saint knew that the call was a grace, poured out with love.

“At the same time, this grace never makes us passive. It leads us to realise that God’s love radically precedes us, and that his first gift consists precisely in our acceptance of that love,” the Pope wrote. “Each person therefore is responsible for cooperating with his or her own fulfilment, with spreading his or her wings with confident trust before the gust of God’s wind.”

“More important than any kind of useless rigidity or self-absorption,” Pope Francis wrote, St Francis de Sales encouraged the faithful “to keep asking at every moment, in every decision, in every situation in life, where the greatest love is to be found.”

St John Paul II, he noted, referred to St Francis de Sales as the “Doctor of Divine Love,” not primarily because he wrote about divine love, but because “he was an outstanding witness to that love.”

“His writings were no theory concocted behind a desk, far from the concerns of ordinary people,” Pope Francis said. “His teachings were the fruit of a great sensitivity to experience.”

“To live in the midst of the secular city while nurturing the interior life, to combine the desire for perfection with every state of life, and to discover an interior peace that does not separate us from the world but teaches us how to live in it and to appreciate it, but also to maintain a proper detachment from it — that was the aim of Francis de Sales, and it remains a valuable lesson for men and women in our own time,” the Pope wrote. — **By Cindy Wooden, CNS**

Ukrainian women meet Pope, ask for liberation of prisoners-of-war

VATICAN: “We are going to try all that we can to save soldiers who are now hostages.” Victoria is one of the members of the delegation of mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, and aunts of Ukrainian prisoners-of-war who met with Pope Francis at the end of the Wednesday General Audience on December 28, handing him a traditional Ukrainian blanket and asking for the liberation of their relatives.

“My husband has been kept hostage for eight months,” Victoria recounted in an interview with *Vatican News*. “From Mariupol,” where she lived before the outbreak of the conflict, “we moved to Kyiv,” where she has worked constantly for her husband’s liberation.

The delegation first met with the Ukrainian Ambassador to the Holy See, intending to have the embroidered blanket, which symbolises care “for the birth of a child, baptism, wedding, for a long journey and for the last journey,” sent to Pope Francis.

On Wednesday, the women were able to personally hand the blanket to the Pope. “Both in joy and in grief, this embroidered cloth accompanies us everywhere as a talisman, as something that has great power and strong meaning,” Victoria affirmed, recalling the official statement provided by the group of women.

“We embroidered it as a prayer with heavy thoughts about our relatives.”

Victoria spoke about the frustration of not knowing where her husband, and other hostages, are being held. “That is why we chose an unbleached, gray, home-made cloth for our blanket, because we have the same mood and outlook — not clear, obscured.”

“We chose an ornament from an ancient Podil cloth, where women stand together, holding hands tightly, as a symbol of our unity in common trouble, struggle, prayer and common appeal, and the decoration with stars — as a symbol of hope.”

The group of women asked the Pope “to help protect and return our loved ones, to act as a neutral third party to establish contact between prisoners and their relatives. To give prisoners warm things, medicine and everything necessary.”

“The question arises: is there a place for mercy in the world in the 21st century?”

Victoria concluded by expressing her gratitude toward Pope Francis for his continuous appeals for peace, speaking “against all forms of violence and against war, reminding believers and non-believers alike that peace is the core value of all peoples.” — **By Edoardo Giribaldi, Vatican News**



Pope Francis receiving the traditional Ukrainian blanket. (Vatican Media)

How was the Pope's Christmas?

As ever, it depends on who you ask

By John L. Allen Jr

Probably the single most commonly asked question in casual conversation, in grocery store lines and post offices, in telephone calls and messages on WhatsApp, and pretty much everywhere else humans interact, is some version of the following: "So, how was your Christmas?"

For most of us, answering that question requires a fairly simple equation involving family, food and fun, maybe with a dash of faith thrown into the mix. For a Roman pontiff, however, the math is always far more complicated, and that was certainly the case for Pope Francis in 2022.

As ever, judging what kind of Christmas Francis had depends on who you ask.

If you were to put the question to "Anna," for example, the pseudonym employed by the Italian publication *Domani* for a Slovenian ex-nun who says she was abused sexually and spiritually for nine years by Jesuit Fr Marko Rupnik, she might not be terribly enthusiastic.

Peace talks and liturgy

To take a different point of view, if you were to ask Francis' top diplomatic advisors how Christmas went this year, they might profess delight that somebody has finally signalled 'open to peace talks to end the war in Ukraine', but also a bit of melancholy that nobody seems interested in the Vatican's offer to mediate that dialogue.

Since the beginning of the war, Francis has aspired to play the role of peace-maker, and Italian Cardinal Pietro Parolin, his top diplomat, has publicly and repeatedly volunteered the Vatican's mediation services. A recent apology to Moscow after Francis raised hackles by linking two ethnic minorities allied with Russia, the Chechens and Buryats, to war crimes, was intended to keep that possibility alive.

Yet on December 26, when Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba proposed that talks take place in February, he made it clear that Ukraine sees UN Secretary-General António Guterres, not the Pope, as the right broker.



Pope Francis presides over Mass during the Night for the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord, December 24, 2022. (Vatican Media)

Two days before the holiday, the Pope's hand-picked Vicar for Rome, Italian Cardinal Angelo De Donatis, announced that the diocese probably will have to take a series of unspecified "measures" to restrict Rupnik's activities in the Eternal City, especially at

the Centro Aletti, a centre for art and theology founded by Rupnik in 1991 and inaugurated by Pope St John Paul II in 1993.

Yet De Donatis also insisted that Rupnik deserves the benefit of the doubt, declaring that "we ministers of Christ can't be less

committed to the due process of law, and less charitable, than a secular state, automatically transforming an accusation into a crime."

"The judgements that we see spread by many with particular vehemence," De Donatis said in his statement, "don't seem to manifest either an evangelical criterion of the search for truth, or a basic criterion upon which every law-based society is founded, *a verbis legis non est recedendum* ("there must be no departure from the words of the law")."

De Donatis is widely seen as a key papal loyalist, and thus his words are presumed to reflect the Pope's thinking. Critics have wondered aloud if Francis is showing his fellow Jesuit special treatment, raising new questions about the handling of the abuse crisis, especially as it applies to offences against women. An Italian advocacy group called "Women for the Church" warned that Rupnik is merely "the tip of the iceberg."

For those folks, Christmastime 2022 probably won't be counted among this Pope's finest hours.



Ukrainian flags held aloft in St Peter's Square. (Vatican Media)

Most observers consider a February summit highly unlikely anyway, since Kuleba premised the proposal on Russia first facing a war crimes tribunal, something the Kremlin has rejected on principle. Still, it was at least a hint of openness, albeit one that would appear to suggest a cold shoulder to the Vatican's obvious eagerness to play a key role.

On the other hand, Francis' Christmas certainly had its bright spots.

The Pope's Christmas eve liturgy drew a 'standing room only' crowd of 7,000 souls inside St Peter's Basilica and several thousand outside in the square watching the Mass on Jumbotron. (The Vatican, unlike most of the United States, benefitted from unusually mild weather over the Christmas holiday.)

The Pope's warning about "people hungry for power and money" who end up "consuming" their neighbours drew wide play in the global media, especially in light of ongoing images of destruction in Ukraine.

Like wise, the Pope's lament about a "famine of peace" in his Christmas Day *Urbi et Orbi* address, delivered before a crowd in St Peter's Square estimated at 70,000 people, led news broadcasts that day all around the world. In part, that's because in a moment when most public figures turn upbeat and even a bit sappy, Francis has always been willing to deliver an eyes-wide-open Christmas message, mixing hope with realism.

Then there's Giacomo Cofano who, if asked, would probably tell you Pope Francis had a Christmas that bordered on the miraculous.

Cofano was, up until recently, a manager at a hotel in southern Italy near the city of Brindisi, while his wife, Viviana Delego, was an English teacher in town. Just before Christmas, she went into the hospital due to complications with her pregnancy. Despite the best efforts of her medical team, she died of haemorrhaging on December 22 after having given birth to twins, one boy and one girl, a few days before. In addition to the newborns, she also left behind a six-year-old little girl.

Distraught by grief over the death of his wife, Cofano turned to his parish priest, Fr Donato Liuzzi. In addition to offering his own consolation, Liuzzi also quietly informed Fr



Pope Francis delivers his Christmas "Urbi et Orbi" address on Dec 25, 2022. (Vatican Media)

Fabio Salerno, a private secretary of Pope Francis, of what had happened, knowing that sometimes Francis likes to reach out directly to people suffering tragedy.

Without explicitly tipping his hand, Liuzzi also advised Cofano that if he got any calls over the holidays from unrecognised numbers, he should answer. At 7.20pm on Christmas Day, the phone rang. Cofano later told reporters that he had just walked back into the house from the hospital, where he was able to pick up his newborn son, Edoardo Maria, and was amazed to hear the Pope's voice on

the line.

"He understood the tragedy of a mother who gave her life for her children, and the anguish that's struck my family," Cofano said.

"I don't remember the exact words, but I was stupefied by the fact that he thought of me and found the time to call," he said of Pope Francis. "I swear, it seemed like talking to somebody who's close to me, a friend. It was almost like a confession."

"I know it seems absurd to say it, but it was a beautiful Christmas," Cofano said. "He gave it meaning."

Then he noted a striking coincidence: His twins were born on Dec 17, which was also Pope Francis' 86th birthday, so their lives will be forever intertwined.

So, to sum up: Christmas 2022 for Pope Francis was, alternatively, a disaster, a disappointment, a PR success or a pastoral bravura, all depending on the eye of the beholder. In reality, it may well have been all those things at once — a reminder, perhaps, of the complexity of the papacy, and why we should all consider it another Christmas gift that such a crushing burden doesn't fall on us. — *Cruz*

I saw Archbishop Romero on a stretcher

Salvadoran cardinal looks back in new book

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador: In a candid account of his five decades in the Salvadoran church, the country's first cardinal tells of calumnies against El Salvador's St Oscar Romero, but also of slights against him by other prelates, including one bishop who said, in notes to a Vatican ambassador, to not even "think of giving me a diocese."

Salvadoran Cardinal Gregorio Rosa Chavez has had one reason after another to despair in his 52 years as part of the Catholic clergy, but if there's one thing he said he has learned in that time, it's that "God writes straight in crooked lines," as an old Spanish saying goes. That could easily have been the title of a long-form interview turned into a book by Rome-based Fr Ariel Beramendi, a Bolivian priest who works on Spanish-language communications at the Vatican. He turned a series of questions and the cardinal's recorded answers into the Spanish-language *Conversations with Cardinal Rosa Chávez*, published in El Salvador in late November.

In it, a broad, non-chronological landscape appears in the life of the Salvadoran cardinal, now 80 and recently retired after 40 years as the auxiliary bishop of San Salvador, and his brushes with the country's martyrs: St Oscar Romero, with whom he worked, as well as the recently beatified Jesuit Fr Rutilio Grande. It was a time of brewing violence and persecution against members of the Catholic Church who stood up for the poor and against injustice.

He describes his front-row seat to the evening of the "red martyrdom," the March 24, 1980, assassination of St Romero, his archbishop, and

the saint's "white martyrdom," a campaign of calumny against the future saint from inside the church.

The cardinal's answers, direct but with serenity, point to never losing hope, nor harbouring resentment no matter what surrounded him: war, ideological attacks, calumny.

"I saw Archbishop Romero on a stretcher with his purple priestly vestments, lifeless, a serene face ... when I went out into the streets, I heard celebratory fireworks in the affluent parts of the city, and I later heard that someone had said, 'Finally, they killed the communist,'" he recounts.

Against that drama, the cardinal almost hides his own rough seas in Church waters, including with a Spaniard who ascended in 1995 to the Salvadoran archbishop's post that St Romero had occupied.

"You're adults. You have your own judgment. Don't be disabled. Get out from under the skirts of the Church," the cardinal describes Archbishop Fernando Sáenz Lacalle as saying in one of his first interactions with the press after his 1995 installation as archbishop of San Salvador.

The cardinal's answers, direct but with serenity, point to never losing hope, nor harbouring resentment no matter what surrounded him: war, ideological attacks, calumny. He said he was grateful that St Romero died with "grace," since he was taking part in the Eucharist when killed, and that has given him peace.

When Archbishop Lacalle, who died in 2022, told him to leave his residency, a room at the archbishop's house, and assigned him to become the pastor of a church on



Cardinal Gregorio Rosa Chávez.

the outskirts of the capital of San Salvador — even though he was San Salvador's auxiliary bishop — the cardinal sees the moment as a blessing. It allowed him to grow closer to the poor, he said, but also mentions that other brother bishops saw the move as a punishment and "exile."

From that parish, where he still lives, he said in a Dec 16 interview that he decided to collaborate with Fr Beramendi because of "great worry that I haven't written anything on my experience as a bishop." He said he believed his account should be on the record because there is confusion and even attempts at erasing or offering a different version of what happened during an important time in the life of the Catholic Church in El Salvador.

"I wanted it to be out there for the record," said Cardinal Rosa Chavez, who studied communications at the University of Louvain in Belgium

and, for decades, directed Church communications at the archdiocese. He said he wanted a clear record about what happened when it came to St Romero's conversion, his assassination and that of Fr Grande, the role of the Catholic Church in El Salvador's peace accords, whose meetings he attended, as well as his close relationship with St Romero's immediate successor, Archbishop Arturo Rivera Damas.

The book relives the turmoil in the Church, which reflected Salvadoran society, and the political polarisation, which entered the institution. He also presents his humble upbringing as the son of a merchant whose dream of being a priest was fulfilled via his son.

He also tells of finding a note, while reviewing documents ahead of a visit by St John Paul II to El Salvador, in which a Spanish bishop, now dead, tells the nuncio not to assign him as the head of a diocese. "He always greeted me ami-

ably," when they ran into one another in Rome, he said, "never having imagined that I read his note. I supposed he did it with honesty because he saw me as a dangerous bishop, a rebel, not apt to direct a diocese."

But the book roots itself into the insight the cardinal has of St Romero, those who influenced him and remained loyal to him and his figure as a prophet and those inside the Church who dismissed the saint as a communist.

"For 20 years, Rome was misinformed on the matter of Romero," including by some in the Salvadoran government who never had anything good to say about him, the cardinal said.

He said he is happy with the book, because it puts on paper matters that need clarity, but hopes to work on something more in-depth.

"This is kind of an appetiser," he said. —By Rhina Guidos, CMS

The Messi Family: The most powerful message



(Exaudi Photo/Antonela Rocuzzo-Messi's Facebook profile)

What a family in harmony can mobilise

It is impossible for me to see the photo of Messi's family and not feel: "this is the most powerful message."

How much we could say about this photo!

A family in harmony can mobilise more than a thousand psychology treatises.

The best soccer player in the world is the most humble.

I would like to quote an anonymous text, disseminated by social media, accompanying the photo of this article:

"Of all the images that reached us, I'll keep this one: Messi sharing his joy with his family, his greatest cup.

Messi said 'God allowed me to win this cup.'

He puts God in his place of superior instance and he puts himself in the place of the mortal which corresponds to him.

Maradona was made to believe he was God, and he felt he was God and they ate his soul.

Good for Messi!

The man with a mission to fulfil, a gift to administer, and the grace to understand where the important thing is, what place God occupies and what place a man occupies who was given everything that any mortal could wish to be.

And he chooses to be first a father; husband, brother, son, friend, companion, humble, and above all a believer.

That is no small thing in this world."

Few posts in the history of my Facebook profile have moved as many hearts as this one.

In the face of such formidable words, I would only like to add:

A man and a woman, with their children, without speaking, give us the image of a family with healthy human bonds: faithfulness, respect, motivation, companionship, joy, overcoming crises as a couple and as a family... and to top it off... deep love for God.

The photo is a poem, a hymn to life, a hymn to God.

God is present in the heart of the families, of the day to day, of love and of the struggle to strengthen the relationship in mutual dedication, in good and in bad times.

They are not perfect. They are human. And the most beautiful thing... they are very human. How much we have to learn that the most wonderful things lie in the simplest things.

Phone call for family ministry!
"In and among families, the Gospel message should always resound; the core of that message [...] is what is most beautiful, most excellent, most appealing and at the same time most necessary." — Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* #58

Not so much theory and badgering with what "has to be done." More testimony and sharing of life, which is what generates changes of the heart. — By Enrique Soros, Exaudi

RUMINATIONS

Dying to self and picking up the Cross

If I were to sum up the year 2022 in three words, it would be: **ASTONISHING. LIFE-CHANGING. BREAKING.**

The year started with a bang. Getting reconnected with God after two years of not doing so, finding ways to up my career game and hey! landing a job in Maxis which I am super grateful for. I had my ambitions, hopes, dreams and plans set for the year!

However, as they always say, “Man proposes, God disposes”. God disrupted what I thought was a seemingly awesome life with a reality check and I was made to choose that day who I would serve till my last breath. I remember I was caught up with the rhythms of this world but God somehow inclined my ear to the song of heaven beckoning me to come home and serve Him. Somehow, I found myself at that moment. I never knew that all I had to do was say yes!

It was blissful. I thought life with God now (again) would take me to the most joyful places. However again, “Man proposes, God disposes.” I found myself being broken. I had to let go. I had to let go of people, moments, plans and dreams. My pride was dismissed and true to the verse, I found myself dying to self and picking up the cross, following. I found myself distraught, knowing that I had broken several people in the past, made wrong choices, and the reality hit me. I was at my lowest. I had nowhere to turn and no one to lean on. Knowing that you are the perpetrator who messed it up for others rips a huge chunk from within you and you can only find yourself by bowing your head in humbleness.

I never understood when people said God is closest to you when He is silent. I always thought it was nothing but a consoling phrase. Now I am an advocate of that cliché. God indeed was close to me every step of the way. He picked me up, turned me around and set my feet on solid ground.

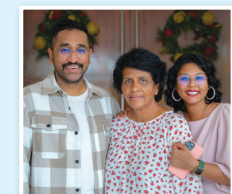
I had nowhere to turn and I knew nothing or anyone who could pull me up, apart from Jesus. Only He did it. He gave me a call, re-established my identity, and now calls me on an assignment to serve Him. It was a glorious moment, liberating and free.

At that point, I thought that, that was enough, but somehow again, “Man proposes God disposes.” He had more plans for me. The choir is one of them and truly it was one of the best 2022 moments of my life. Singing for the Lord with a bunch of people hungry for Him and touching lives through worship and prayer was amazing! What I thought was going to be a mediocre process and a choir that would be *mehhh*, turned out to be a life-changing experience not only for me but also for those in the choir and those who listened to us.

I remember how we were all in tears after we finished singing, practices were so full of joy and the deep hunger for God in each of us made us worship Him in Spirit and in Truth. People rushed to greet us after we finished singing to affirm and bless us. We were in awe. It was truly uplifting for all of us. It could not have been done by anyone but only through God.

I can now officially say that when you place your hands in His, He will take you through and in the end, He will turn your mourning into dancing. I thank God for the moments in 2022 and I wait with expectation for 2023. To all of you who were in the choir! You guys were amazing! I love you guys so much and I would always choose to sing with all of you over again.

To you who are reading till the end, I challenge you to take the step to say God I need you to come and transform me. If He can change a wretched sinner, an insolent man like me, imagine what He can do for you! Go on an adventure with Him, it will be the best one ever!



Dominic Norman Vincent is a parishioner of the Church of Jesus Caritas, Kepong.

Introvert turns international award-winning activist

By Gwen Manickam

The Centre to Combat Corruption and Cronyism (C4 Centre) Founding Director Cynthia Gabriel was recently conferred the Anti-Corruption Champions Award 2022 by the US State Department in recognition of being an Anti-Corruption Champion.

According to the C4 Centre website, this year’s award was given to eight honorees who demonstrated “leadership, courage, and impact in preventing, exposing, and combating corruption”. The award ceremony, held in Washington DC, coincided with the International Anti-Corruption Day, December 9.

Cynthia received the award from the US Secretary of State, Senator Anthony Blinken. In a Twitter post, the department said, “Despite harassment by the authorities, she remains undeterred and continues to expose corruption and corrupt practices, including in government procurement, environmental exploitation, and political financing.”

“It’s a proud moment and a big honour to be recognised globally. It is a boost and I hope this award motivates younger people to come forward and get involved. I also hope they realise doing non-profit work is not a bad thing. It’s not just about scrambling to climb the corporate ladder to be successful, but to be a successful Malaysian citizen,” said Cynthia, who was also nominated for the 2022 International Women of Courage Award by the US embassy in Kuala Lumpur.

An SMK Assunta alumni, Cynthia first graduated with an engineering degree in analytical chemistry but soon shifted gears. As she became interested in issues related to human rights, society, justice, anti-corruption, and people, some 20 years ago, pursuing a law degree seemed like a natural progression, and she has not looked back.

“I worked with non-profits for a long time, and it has been a different journey, compared to my friends who opted for the commercial world. However, it comes with a lot of growth and development in my personality.

“From a shy, quiet girl in school, unprepared for any form of public speaking, my work compelled me to become bolder and more confident in addressing various issues. It was not possible to sit behind a computer and hide behind these issues, as it required a lot of confidence and courage to stand and speak up for our rights.”

Cynthia said several defining moments triggered her to take on this line of service. While working with the human rights group Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM) some 30 years ago, she almost lost her life during a critical, fact-finding mission in Sarawak, was one such moment.

“The boat we were on capsized and our colleague drowned. I almost drowned too. Over time, I believe that calamity gave me a sense of purpose and I felt I’d been given a second chance. I was drawn to do something more useful.

“I learnt to look at life from a different perspective, to celebrate and not to take things for granted.”

As work got more intense, Cynthia realised fighting for justice and human rights can’t be done by sitting in an office.

“It made me see things for real – injustices, abuse, violation. We also became victims when we were tear-gassed and ar-



Cynthia Gabriel receives the Anti-Corruption Champions Award 2022 from the US Secretary of State, Senator Anthony Blinken in Washington DC, USA on December 9, 2022.

rested during protests.

“Going through the many cycles of *Bersih* protest made us realise there is nothing wrong with going out there and making a position. But it seemed like the authorities and police were trying to make us look like enemies of the state.

“It was daunting, and so frightening at first, but after a while, when you recognise what is at stake, you understand the power and mechanics of people in power, and how they violate the rights of citizens to stay in power.”

Cynthia said that it is a vicious circle – power is linked to money, and power is linked to structures in which they can hold on to more money and resources, which in turn, gives them more power.

As an activist, Cynthia sacrificed her security and material wealth. But she says it’s not about making money and becoming rich. It’s having a bigger objective and living a more purposeful life.

“I have nothing to regret, my work made me more actualised. It also enabled me to travel and learn that it isn’t just Malaysians struggling, but people in Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, and other continents as well,” said the married Kelana Jaya resident.

Cynthia said, along the way, she’s built solidarity with international counterparts. “It is gratifying to have friends in other communities who are also struggling for the same courses.

Her other defining moment was serving in the Petaling Jaya town council (MBPJ) as a non-politician in 2008, under the then-new local government.

This anti-corruption activist was directly exposed to how the government’s administrative functions. She witnessed many issues of poor governance, lack of law enforcement, poor transparency, a lot of secrecy, and sometimes blatant corruption. It was one of her motivating factors behind setting up the C4 Centre.

“Being on the inside I was exposed to the real challenges. I learnt where the system failed the people and where and how it needs to be strengthened.”

“It’s taken me on a different journey of how money and power lead to bad values of greed and poor integrity. It taught me about corruption. How to follow the taxpayers’ money and learn why it was so easy for ‘them to steal’ taxpayers’ funds for personal

gain.”

Home-grown corruption became difficult to contain as it was cross-bordered and transnational, similar to how the 1MDB scandal unfolded – and, 1MDB is not an isolated incident, it’s just one of the bigger ones exposed. There are many, many others, said Cynthia.

“There are currently many scandals and instability in government but it’s not only up to activists and civil society to pick it up but the responsibility of all citizens. We have to demand some degree of accountability. We are paying taxes so we should have answers as to how tax monies are utilised. Every Malaysian should be asking, ‘Are we getting better public transport, better hospitals, better schools?’”

In the 20 years Cynthia has been an anti-corruption activist, the lawyer said the situation in the country has gotten worse.

Besides Malaysia, Cynthia is involved with different international groups and works on anti-corruption at a global level.

“I am involved in the world economic forum think tanks to inform them on governance issues.”

A Church of St Ignatius parishioner, Cynthia said without the strength of God and her faith, she would not have come this far.

“Only the hand of God has brought me to this point. The work of exposing corruption is hazardous. It gets you into trouble all the time.

“I’ll never claim to have any strength to sail through all this without strong faith. It is something I am very grateful for.

“However, it is also important not to bring religion into work as it may create animosity. It is something that should embolden and strengthen us in everything we do, but should not be brought into societal issues.”

Cynthia added we should live on the values of Christianity and Catholicism in the work that we do, by walking the talk, as the faith challenges us to do. But we should not threaten anyone with another ideology or type of reasoning that may make someone else feel uncomfortable. It is important to have mutual respect and space for different faiths to be present, but it should not be the centre of what the cause is about. The cause must be something that unites.

For more information on C4 Centre, visit <https://c4center.org>

The God of consolation

I was happy to see 2022 end. It had been an exceedingly difficult one for me, with my constant companions being anger and anxiety. The dark humour about this is that I get even more angry and anxious *because* I am angry and anxious. You reap what you sow, you see.

People who love me try to tell me that what I struggle with currently warrant these feelings of anger and anxiety. My mother succumbed to the dementia that plagued my grandmother, but this blow was made more cruel in that Parkinson's had seized mum's body, robbing her of mobility, and thus necessitating her placement in a care home, because my 80-year-old father was unable to lift her in order to care for her physical needs.

My father, finding himself alone in his so-called golden years, became bitter and a little reclusive, which saw me having to deploy my shrinking time and emotional resources to be around for him. The pandemic and the new financial burden of my mother's nursing home fees had eaten so savagely into my savings that at one point, I was down to RM3,000 in my bank account. So, when my teen asked for psychiatric intervention due to her poor state of mental health, the private consultation fees went right on my credit card, all RM700 a session, bi-weekly.

While all this was happening, I was still soliciting clients, trying to sustain a private feeding initiative for the hard-core poor, and attempting to be supportive and participatory in the life of my community and friends.

Twice in the year I had seriously considered suicide, held back only by two things: how my father and daughter would react, and how I really did not want some unfortunate sods to have to scrape my bashed up body from



Word In Progress

Karen Michaela Tan

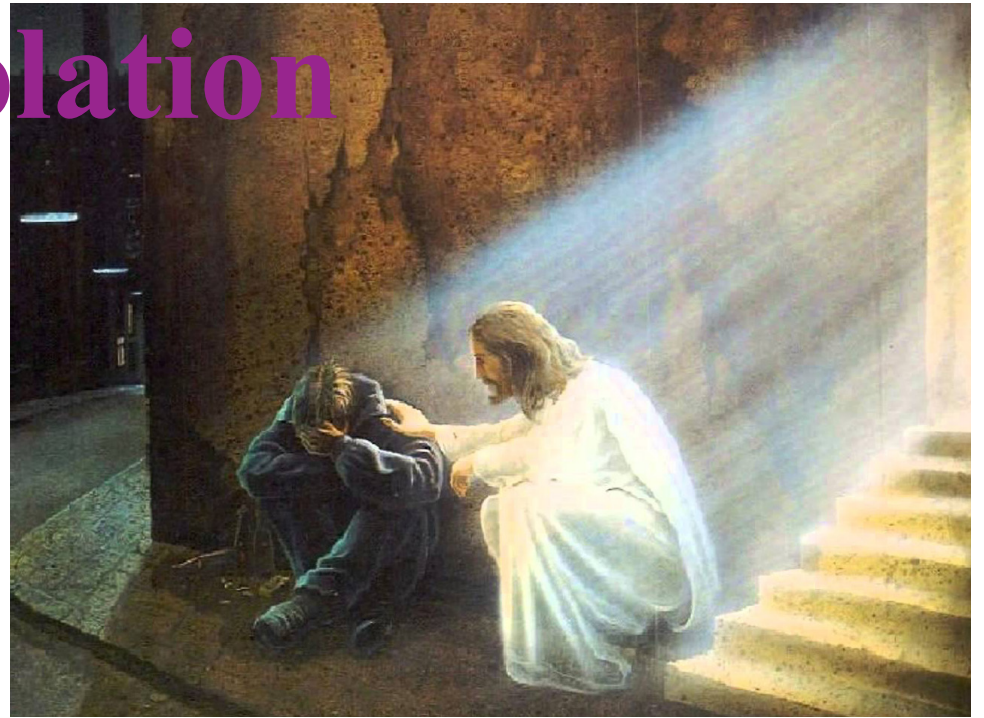
some pavement. I'm a sizeable person, and the splatter would be greater than average. Considerate to the end, that's me!

I'm able to still write this not because an angel appeared to berate me for the folly of my ways, but rather, because my relationship with God is multidimensional. My faith is one which I chose. Unbaptised at birth, born to a Catholic mother, and non-Catholic father, I was convent-schooled, and Mass-brought, but unable to fully participate in the Eucharistic feast until I took the decision into my own hands and attended RCIA.

My father asked me why it was so important for me to be identified as Catholic when I was already living as one. At 24, I shocked my father when I told him that I wanted to be Catholic at least to know where I would go when I died. Dad proceeded to enrol in RCIA with me, and we were baptised together 20 years ago.

These two decades have been made out of days of walking with God ("Teach me your way, O Lord, so I may walk in your truth"), running away from God, being petulant with God ("I don't want to pray to you, you don't give me what I want!") and being secure enough in my relationship with God that I dare to be angry with Him.

Many Catholics live with a belief of unworthiness. It may have come from years of "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter



under my roof," or hymns that remind us that "I am not worthy, that thou should come to me," but this narrative of unworthiness sometimes belittles the great love God bears mankind.

God does not love us because we are perfect. He doesn't expect perfect love from us. He has the angels for that. What God seeks of us is relationship. And for a relationship to be strong and enduring, it has to be honest, brave, and willing to see the viewpoint of the other.

A good relationship with God is what has sustained me in the dark times of this year. I have never had in my imagination the punishing God that many Catholics secretly worship and try to appease. I have never bought into the unworthiness narrative, and it is thanks to my ability to question, be angry, and wrestle with God that I have managed to see the year through.

Far from being stayed by the fear of judgement for taking my own life, I choose to live to fight another day because I am convinced of my worthiness. I believe that God did indeed love the world so much that He gave His only Son. Jesus wasn't given to us because we were worthy. He was given to us because we are loved, and by virtue of being loved, we deserve the best gift of all.

In Jesus we have the human extension of a father's love, as well as an example of the amazing things love can do, when hearts are opened to its power. Love gives strength, and strength begets courage. And courage helps me carry on.

● **Karen-Michaela Tan** is a poet, writer and editor who seeks out God's presence in the human condition and looks for ways to put the Word of God into real action.

Change is inevitable, hope springs eternal



Faithfully Speaking

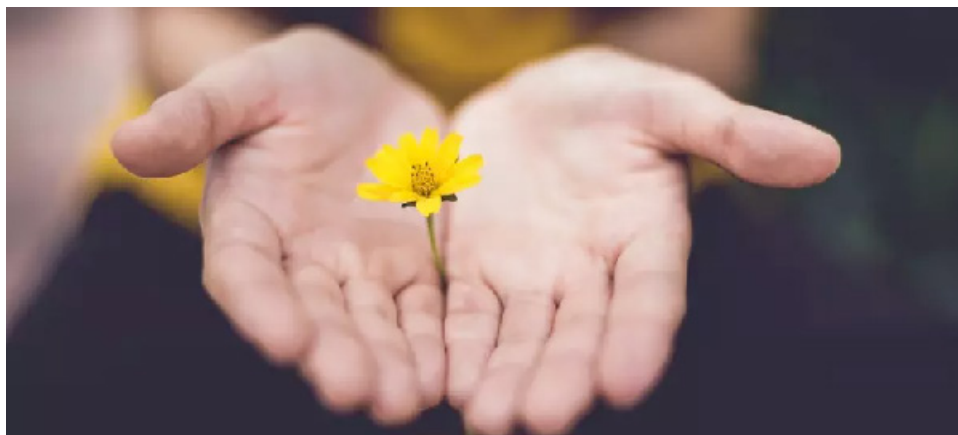
Julie Lim Seet Yin

When the editor sent me a reminder on the deadline for this column, she said that I could change my mugshot too. I thought that if I decide to do so, I would be letting readers watch me age over time. But growing older and facing changes is something that everyone has to go through, especially if you are born early in the year, particularly in January.

A year older and nearing the end

January is my birthday month. The thing about being born towards the end of January is that, most of the time, my birthday falls during the Lunar New Year. When that happens, my family and friends will celebrate my birthday together with Chinese New Year. The beauty of a dual celebration is that I get to toss *yee sang* on my birthday, and that is something I look forward to. My birthday is also on Australia Day and because of this, my aunt in Australia and my Australian friends never fail to send me birthday wishes every year. It is like being born on Christmas Day or on Malaysia's Independence Day – people tend to remember your birthday because it is a holiday and an easy date to remember.

Amidst the joy of celebrating birthdays, the reality is that we are growing older. Now that time seems to be passing by so quickly, the road towards the end of life seems to be drawing closer too. Benjamin Franklin nailed it when he said that nothing in life



is certain except death and taxes. Death is something that everyone has to face at some point and we must be prepared for it at all times. Financial institutions and insurance companies remind us about the importance of being financially prepared for retirement. But the Church provides spiritual nourishment and guidance to prepare us for our inevitable earthly death.

Change is inevitable

In his bestselling book released in 1998, *Who Moved My Cheese?*, Dr Spencer Johnson wrote that change is inevitable. Proactive people monitor change, anticipate it, adapt to it, learn to embrace it and enjoy it. If we resist change, we will be at the risk of becoming extinct. And if we do change, we will suffer less stress and unhappiness. We will also enjoy more success and fulfilment in every aspect of our lives.

However, many of us dislike change and resist it. We continue living in our comfort zones and carry on with our lives hoping that things will remain where they are in perpetuity. When life becomes difficult, we lose faith and hope in God and in our family and

friends. Why do we lose hope and faith so easily? Shouldn't our faith be anchored in Jesus Christ?

Hope springs eternal

As I was scrolling through social media towards the end of last year, I came across an image that described 2022 as the year for those who had been in waiting for a long time. The message referred to the ascension of Prince Charles as king of the United Kingdom, the election of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim as prime minister of Malaysia and Lionel Messi as FIFA World Cup hero. I thought that image captured 2022 well, particularly the election of Anwar as the 10th prime minister of Malaysia.

Anwar's political career had been nothing but turbulent. When I watched him hail shouts of *Re-for-ma-si!* after his first press conference as prime minister of Malaysia, it reminded me of 1998 when Anwar was sacked from the Malaysian cabinet and subsequently arrested and detained under the Internal Security Act. There were riots around Kuala Lumpur protesting his arrest. I was returning from college and travelling

on the non-air-conditioned, rickety SJ Bus along Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman when suddenly traffic came to a standstill for hours because of the riots. The Federal Reserve Unit deployed water cannons to dispel protestors who were shouting *Re-for-ma-si!* As people were running helter skelter, I watched from the bus, trying to figure out what was happening. There was no social media at the time and only later on did I get the full picture from mainstream media. When Anwar was finally sworn in as the 10th prime minister of Malaysia on November 24, 2022 at the ripe old age of 75, I thought that his journey to the premiership had been a ride of never-ending hope and faith.

As we step into 2023, analysts, economists and politicians have predicted that it is going to be a challenging year, with an impending recession and other uncertainties. But I say that come what may, we will journey on together in hope and faith because even though changes (and uncertainties) are inevitable, hope springs eternal.

The key is to hope for the best but be prepared for the worst. We have survived three years of pandemic with varying degrees of outcome – some of us better than others, and some of us battered and bruised. But whatever life may throw at us, may we always place our hope and faith in God for brighter days ahead.

● **Julie Lim Seet Yin** believes that a satisfied life measured by one's heart, mind and soul is better than a successful life measured by worldly yardsticks. She works for a Japanese bank and is responsible for its Public Relations and Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives. She serves in various church ministries and charities and can be reached at: limseetyin@gmail.com

My top 10 books for 2022

The book you need to read finds you, and finds you at that time in your life when you need to read it. I believe that old axiom, and offer it here as an apologia for my selection of books for 2022. Good art and good literature always have an objective element to them, a depth and an aesthetic that are not contingent on the eye of the beholder, but an old axiom also asserts that whatever is received is received according to the mode of the receiver.

Hence, there is always a subjective element in how we judge or evaluate anything. All of this is to say that these are the ten books that most spoke to me during this past year. Their practical claim to my top ten list is that they found me and spoke to me.

In the area of spirituality, both in its restricted and its wider sense, I found these books particularly meaningful.

Jim Forest, *At Play in the Lion's Den, A Biography of Daniel Berrigan*. A well-written biography of Daniel Berrigan by a man who knew him well, supported all his causes, went to prison with him, but still kept a critical distance from him.

Robert Ellsberg, *Dearest Sister Wendy, A Surprising Story of Faith and Friendship*. A delightful, warm, touching, intimate book, sharing some of the letters between the renowned art critic Wendy Beckett (who died in 2018), and Robert Ellsberg the publisher of Orbis Press. Their conversations touch on all points



Fr Ron Rolheiser

religious.

Maria Ruiz Scaperlanda, *The Shepherd Who Didn't Run, Blessed Stanley Rother, Martyr from Oklahoma*. A very good biography of Stanley Rother's path to becoming a prophet and a martyr for the poor. Hagiography for today.

Sherry Turkle, *The Empathy Diaries*. Turkle is a first-rate scientist and penetrating writer of soul. This is essentially an autobiography, but in sorting herself out, she helps us to do the same thing. The title of the book bespeaks its thesis.

Amia Srinivasan, *The Right to Sex – Feminism in the Twenty-First Century*. A strong book that takes no prisoners. I don't always agree with her on some major points, but she asks the right questions and answers many of them in a way that falls between the ideologies of both the right and the left.

Jane Goodall and Douglas Abrams, *The Book of Hope, A Survival Guide for Trying Times*. Just the name, Jane Goodall, says why this book should be read. Abrams adds his own colour, including the assertion that creating the human spe-

cies may be the biggest mistake evolution ever made.

Roosevelt Montas, *Rescuing Socrates – How The Great Books Changed My Life and Why They Matter For A New Generation*. This is a powerful apologia for liberal education, akin to John Henry Nouwen's, *The Idea of a University*, save that Newman didn't have to deal with the many hyper-sensitive contemporary critiques of classic Western thinkers.

Among the novels I read, three stand out.

Sally Rooney, *Beautiful World, Where Are You?* Set in post-modern and (mostly) post-Roman Catholic Ireland, this novel chronicles the conversations (emails and texts) between two young, emotionally sensitive women. They are trying to make sense of their lives and of the times against the backdrop of a cultural Catholicism that still helps define who they are and a set of friends and a workplace that would define them in a new way. What comes after one lets go of an explicit faith, but is still struggling with an inchoate one?

Valerie Perrin, *Fresh Water for Flow-ers*. A translation from French, this is a masterpiece, a work of art, a beautiful painting. Nothing much happens in this story, except that it is beautiful.

Jeanine Cummins, *American Dirt*. Cummins received a lot of negative reaction to this book, not because it isn't a well-written, gripping story, but because she, its author, is not Hispanic and thus

her writing "someone else's story" is considered by some to be both patronising and a certain act of theft. Be that as it may, this is a gripping story of a mother and her young son facing death in Central America and fleeing for the USA border.

That's ten, but there's an honourable mention:

Joyce Aitken, *Sincere Condolences – What to Say When You Don't Know What to Say*. Aitken lost her husband to suicide and found that, in its wake, many people found it awkward to talk to her about it, even though that is exactly what she, in her grief, needed. The book is insightful and practical. Don't we all find ourselves in situations that leave us awkward, not knowing what to say? As well, commenting on her inability to prevent her own husband's suicide, she adds a line that needs to be heard by anyone who has ever lost a loved one to suicide: *The Will to save a life does not constitute the Power to prevent a death*.

These are my favourite ten books for 2022.

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

THE SIMPLE LIFE by Dr. Steven Selvaraju



Created by Dr Steven Selvaraju, this is a comic strip that wishes to tell simple stories of life and faith.

Well Joshua, it's the start of another new year.

I've drawn up a long list of resolutions for this year.

But drawing up resolutions is easy, it's keeping them that's really hard.

I agree.

Joshua says...

Having resolutions at the start of the year is good.

However, I have decided to choose one key bible verse to guide me during the year.

Below is my key bible verse for 2023. Perhaps, you may want to choose one too.

Have a blessed year!

"Let your hope keep you joyful, be patient in your troubles, and pray at all times" (Romans 12: 12)

Little Catholics' Corner

Hello dear children,

I hope you had a great Christmas and New Year with family and friends.

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany, where the Magi from the East came with gifts to visit baby Jesus.

As we start the New Year, let us learn about the first sacrament we receive — Baptism, because on January 9, we celebrate the Baptism of Jesus.

In case you don't know, a sacrament is an outward sign of the grace God gives us in our

souls.

At Baptism, which most of us receive as young children, water is poured on our heads as a symbol of original sin washed out of us.

Babies are baptised not because they have sinned but because Baptism takes away original sin, which comes to us from Adam and Eve, and also gives them grace when they need it.

Jesus was without sin, but He was baptised by John the Baptist as an example for us.

Love, Aunty Gwen

Circle the correct Baptism symbols



Epiphany

Word Search

Directions: Find and circle the vocabulary words in the grid. Look for them in all directions including backwards and diagonally.



- BABY
- BALTHAZAR
- BAPTISM
- BETHLEHEM
- CASPAR
- CHRISTIAN
- EPIPHANY
- FEAST
- FIRST MIRACLE
- FRANKINCENSE
- GOLD
- HEROD
- HOLIDAY
- HOPE
- JANUARY
- JESUS
- MAGI
- MELCHIOR
- MYRRH
- REVELATION
- STAR
- SUNDAY
- THREE KINGS
- TWELFTH DAY
- WISE MEN

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



COLOUR THIS PICTURE OF THE MAGI FOLLOWING THE STAR THAT LEADS THEM TO BABY JESUS.



Let us make a craft piece to show how John baptised Jesus in the River Jordan

You need:

- Two paper plates
- Colouring pencils and magic marker pens
- Tape, blue tac, stapler, and scissors
- One ice cream stick or wooden skewer
- Print or draw two male figures to represent Jesus and John - both cut out and coloured in.



Instructions

1. Cut one plate into the sky and water - making a gap between them.
2. Attach 'John' to the paper plate and 'Jesus' to the popsicle stick.
3. Attach the plates with a stapler leaving enough space for the ice cream stick/skewer to move so you can demonstrate the Baptism.

YOUTH

JANUARY 8, 2023

SIC's Youth Rally returns after three years

PETALING JAYA: The Church of St Ignatius Youth Ministry (SI-CYM) held its first physical Youth Rally in three years at Grand Kampar Hotel, Perak, from December 16 to 18, 2022.

The camp was an amazing experience for both, the participants and the team members, as many newer members had not experienced a physical youth rally. There were 90 participants from the age of 13 to 20 years old. Some signed up with their friends, while others came on their own. Regardless, the participants made many new friends during meal times, icebreaker games, and group discussions.

During the opening night, the youths were caught up and amused by the performances prepared by the team members.

In addition, the youths also participated in morning exercises and games which allowed them to move around and be active. They bonded with each other in a spirit of teamwork in their individual groups. The pace of the activities were a great change compared to the online games held during the past year's virtual rally.

The youths became more open to the Word of God after listening to sessions given by outstanding speakers, who were the former Youth Ministry team members: Andre, Benny, Carmen, Roeshan and Victor. Their sessions were centred on this year's theme, "Mary arose and went with haste". The participants also gradually opened their hearts to God through Praise and Worship sessions.

Most importantly, the youths were able



to experience a night of inner healing while in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, giving them an opportunity to reach out to God to ask for His forgiveness. It allowed them to build a stronger relationship with God through receiving His grace and letting Him work in every area of their lives.

Last but not least, the youth rally ended with Family Night, where everyone, including the participants' families, was invited to join in the fun. The crowd was amazed by the icebreaking skit performed by this year's outreach team.

There were heartwarming messages by Roeshan and parish priest Fr Lawrence Ng.

Finally, the night ended with a praying-over session for the families.

Since coming out of the pandemic in the middle of the year, the organising team managed to pull off this year's youth rally in a short time, with God at the centre of their preparations. With the many struggles and challenges, the team managed to draw closer to Him and relied on Him throughout the year, knowing that through Him, nothing is impossible. — *By Bryan Kam*

To learn more about the SIC Youth Ministry, visit their Instagram page: [@sicym](#), or their Facebook page: [SIC Youth Ministry](#).



Ninety youth attend SIC's first physical youth rally in three years

Pope's 15 tips to be happy

In a book published in November 2022, Pope Francis talks about how to achieve happiness and reminds us that God, as our creator, wants the best for our lives. The book is only available in Italian for now and is titled "I want you to be happy: The hundredfold in this life," (*Ti voglio felice. Il centuplo in questa vita*, Pienogiorno). In the first chapter the Argentinian Pontiff offers 15 "steps towards happiness." Here they are!

1. "Read inside yourself"

Pope Francis explains that "our life is the most precious book that has been given to us" and it is precisely within those pages that we can find the truth and happiness that we long and search for. The Pontiff cites St Augustine who said "return to within yourself; truth dwells in the inner man." He invites everyone, including himself, to read their own lives and journey "with serenity."

2. "Remember that you are unique"

"Each of us is, and is in the world to feel loved in our uniqueness and to love others as no one else can do in our place," the Head of the Catholic Church exhorts, adding that we should not sit on the bench, waiting to be called as someone's backup. It is through our uniqueness that we learn to love. "Each person is unique in God's eyes." Remember "we are in the world to live a love story, a love story with God, to embrace the boldness of strong choices, to venture into the wonderful risk of loving," the Pontiff explains.

3. "Bring out your beauty"

The Bishop of Rome states that "beauty is one of the privileged ways to reach" God, who is "inseparably good, true and beautiful." This beauty is not "according to the fashion of the

worlds," or "turned in on itself," or one which "comes to terms with evil," he specifies. He cites Narcissus and Dorian Gray, as examples of those who sought the wrong kinds of beauty. "I speak of the beauty that never fades because it is a reflection of divine beauty," Francis explains.

4. "Learn to laugh at yourself"

In a world which is constantly pressuring us to be perfect, Pope Francis recommends "occasionally looking in the mirror and laughing at yourself!" "It will do you good," he adds.

5. "Live a healthy restlessness"

The Pontiff warns against becoming "a Peter Pan who doesn't want to grow up" and stays locked up in his room. He encourages us to live a healthy restlessness in our "desires and intentions." "That restlessness that always pushes you to change, to never feel like you have 'arrived,'" he explains.

6. "Learn to apologise"

We are all aware that in our roles as mothers, fathers, friends, sons, daughters, etc we sometimes fail to live up to our and others' expectations or aspirations. "We are all 'in deficit' in life," explains the Pontiff. However, he adds that "we all need mercy" and in fact reminds us that "God always goes before you and forgives you first."

7. "Learn to read your sadness"

In a world where sadness is seen as "an evil to be escaped at all costs," Pope Francis offers a different view. He sees sadness as an "indispensable wake-up call." "Sometimes sadness works like a traffic light, telling us: it's red, stop," he explains, calling us to embrace this essential emotion.

8. "Have big dreams"

"The Lord does not want us to narrow our horizons, he does not want us parked on the sides of life, but running toward high goals with joy and boldness," the Pope exhorts. Additionally fulfilling God's dreams for us needs to occur in our everyday lives, not just on weekends or vacations, the Pontiff underlines. Dreaming is how we can embrace the beauty of life, he says.

9. "Don't listen to those who sell illusions"

Pope Francis warns against those who "talk about dreams and sell illusions," as they are "manipulators of happiness."

10. "Be revolutionary, go against the tide"

In a society where the norm is to enjoy the moment and not worry about taking concrete and definitive decisions, the Head of the Catholic Church asks us to be "revolutionary, to rebel against this culture that basically believes you are incapable of taking responsibility." "Have the courage to be happy," he urges.

11. "Take risks, even if you end up being wrong"

In order to be happy the Pontiff says we must be active in our lives and not observe it "from the balcony" or be like "a parked car." "Don't confuse happiness with a couch," he says, encouraging us to take risks and to overcome our fears so as to not live with an "anaesthetised soul."

12. "Walk with others"

Pope Francis underlines the importance of having a community and close knit relationships to allow us to be happy. "Walk in community, with friends, with those who love you: this helps you get to your goal. And if you fall, get back up," he states, saying that the importance is to not "remain fallen."

13. "Live gratuity"

Pope Francis encourages us to learn from God who "gives freely, to the point that he even helps those who are not faithful." He calls on us not to be constantly measuring what we give and receive in return. "We received life for free; we did not pay for it. So we can all give without expecting anything," the Pontiff explains.

14. "Look beyond the darkness"

"Do not stop looking for the light in the midst of the darkness we so often carry in our hearts and see around us," Francis encourages. He invites us to "look up" so as to "overcome the temptation to remain lying on the floors of our fears."

15. "Remember that you are destined for the best"

Finally, for the last tip, Pope Francis reminds us again that

"God wants the best for us: he wants us happy." God does not

ask us for anything but simply

leaves in our hearts a joy that is

"full and unselfish" and

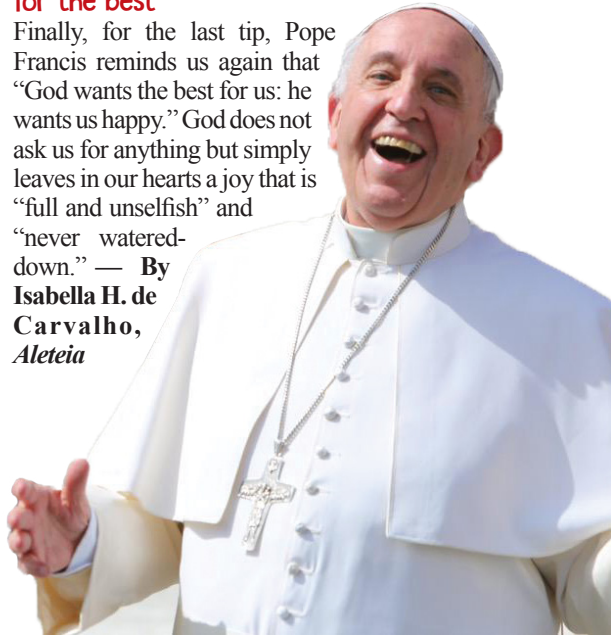
"never watered-

down." — By

Isabella H. de

Carvalho,

Aleteia



Pope praises heroic example of Blessed Isabel Cristina Mrad Campos

Isabel Cristina Mrad was only 20 years old when she was killed for "defending her dignity as a woman" and the "value of chastity", Pope Francis said in remembering her in his greetings after leading the *Angelus*.

"May her heroic example inspire in particular the young to render generous witness of faith and adhesion to the Gospel."

Beatification in Brazil

On December 10, Cardinal Raymundo Damasceno Assis beatified the young Brazilian virgin and martyr from the State of Minas Gerais. In October 2020, Pope Francis had recognised her martyrdom but the pandemic delayed her beatification. The celebration finally took place in Barbacena, located in the Archdiocese of Mariana, at the Shrine of Our Lady of Mercy.

A life of study and prayer

Born into a family of modest economic means, Isabel attended her parish church from an early age. She was part of the Youth Group of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, where a spiritual director shared with her the spirituality of the *Cursilhos de Cristianidade* and the Vincentians. She also frequently attended the Visitation Monastery, practised family prayer, went to



A photo of Isabel Cristina Mrad Campos, killed in hatred of the faith in 1982.

regular confession, and participated in campaigns organised by the Vincentians.

She hoped to become a paediatrician, and after attending a specialised course she obtained her Professional Qualification Diploma on Dec 8, 1980. When she moved to Juiz de Fora (Brazil) to begin her medical studies, she went to live with her brother in a house purchased by the family. On the evening of Sept 1, 1982, her brother returned home to find her murdered with signs on her body of attempted sexual violence. She was 20 years old.

After the criminal trial began, Maurílio Almeida Oliveira was found guilty of the murder. According to the investigation, he went to Isabel's house and attempted to rape her. According to the autopsy, she resisted this aggression, keeping her virginity intact. The defendant was sentenced to 19 years in prison. Maurílio Almeida Oliveira always denied being the perpetrator of the murder. After several years in prison, he escaped from jail and remained a fugitive. Some relatives claim he is now deceased.

The body dies, not the soul

Regarding the martyrdom, the process for beatification and canonisation established that the attack was not a sudden crime of passion, but a planned murder having to do with the victim's faith. The young woman's witness that led to martyrdom became known immediately. In his homily, Cardinal Damasceno Assis recalled Jesus' words in Matthew's Gospel (10:28), when He says: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul." And he recalled that, as Tertullian said, the blood of the martyrs is the seed of new Christians. The Cardinal also appealed for an end to all violence against women in the world. — *Vatican News*

Bringing Christmas joy to many



The youth on the final day of house-to-house caroling.

KAMPUNG PANDAN: This Christmas, after a hiatus of two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the youth from the Chapel of Our Lady of Good Health came together to herald the birth of Christ. They spent three days caroling, from December 18 to 20. Thirty youth from the chapel went to many of the Catholic homes around the Kampung Pandan area to belt out carols in both English and Tamil, with light musical instruments. The young carollers were led by

Sara Andriana and Ezekial Martin. Santa was also present to hand out sweets to the children they met at the homes visited.

On the final day, the youth were invited by the St Bridget BEC members for a supper fellowship in Pandan Mas 2 Apartment at 11.00pm.

There were more joyful moments as the youth, once again, used their God-given talents to bring some Yuletide cheer to others. — *By Bernard Anthony*

Pioneer of Claretian missions in India dies on X'mas Day

KURAVILANGAD, India: The pioneer of the Claretians in India, Fr George Vanchipurackal (79) died on December 25 after celebrating Christmas with his family members.



Fr George was a pioneering formator and mentor for the Claretian priests in India after he was ordained a Claretian priest in Rome in 1969. He was part of the second batch of students sent by the then Palai bishop Sebastian Vayalil to the Claretian seminary in Germany.

He served as Prefect of Formation of Bangalore Province in the early 90s and played a key role in forming Claretian Missionaries in the beginning phase of the Claretians Congregation in India.

He served as the first Rector of Claretian Seminary, Bangalore and formed the first batch of Claretians in India. Then he served as the rector of Claret Villa, Shillong, the formation house for theology.

Later he went to Germany to serve the Province there. After several years of service in Germany, he was re-incardinated to the Province of St Thomas Syro-malabar Province in 2013.

Fr George was born on September 26, 1944. He completed his initial formation in Germany. His First Profession was on May 1,

1964 and Perpetual Profession on May 1, 1968. He was ordained on July 26, 1969 in Rome.

He wrote and published a few books and articles like *Kidavilakku* on the life and mission of the founder, St Antony Mary Claret and *Why the Mission?* are most wanted even today.

Fr George was a Professor at St Peter's Pontifical Seminary, Bangalore and his classes on Holy Eucharist, his writings and weekly conferences on etiquette of life and religious life are still echoing in the ears of all who were formed by him. — *Matters India*

MEMORIAM

For enquiries, please contact:
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2nd Anniversary In Loving Memory of



Gary Reginald Gomez
April 16, 1972 – January 11, 2021

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." – John 3:16

Always remembered and loved by your wife, son, relatives and friends

9th Year Anniversary In Loving Memory of Selver Pakiam @ Annamal Sebastian

Feb 08, 1941 - Jan 05, 2014

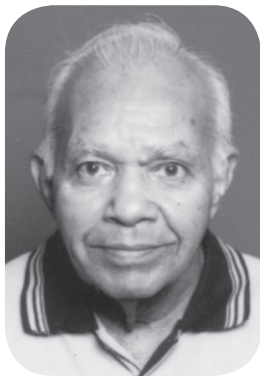


*We had a wonderful mother,
One who never really grew old;
Her smile was made of sunshine,
And her heart was solid gold;
Her eyes were as bright as shining stars,
And in her cheeks fair roses you see.
We had a wonderful mother,
And that's the way it will always be.*

Deeply missed and forever cherished by family, relatives and friends.

*The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want.
(Psalm 23:1)*

Fifteenth Anniversary In Loving Memory of



CHARLES DE SILVA
called home to be with the Lord on 11 January 2008

Fifteen years have passed since you left us, leaving behind your sweet thoughts and memories. You may no longer be here but your memory will always be with us to love and cherish each and every day.

Dearly missed by loving wife, children, their spouses and grandchildren.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF



Andrew Rapson Edmonds
6 December 1919 – 28 January 1991



Eva Josephine Edmonds
16 January 1929 – 1 December 2018

Always in our hearts, your beloved family.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



The family of the late Margaret Andrew wishes to express their deep appreciation to Archbishop Julian Leow, Rt Reverend Datuk Seri Sebastian Francis, Father Anthony Liew, Priests, Religious, relatives and friends for their presence, prayers, love offerings and floral tribute during their recent bereavement.

30th Anniversary In Loving Memory of



V. Samy Raj
Departed: 05-01-1993

Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him. May his soul rest in peace. Amen.

Deeply missed and fondly remembered by: Sons, daughters, sisters, daughters-in-law, sons-in-law, grandsons, granddaughters, relatives & loved ones.



**30th Day Memorial
In Loving Memory of
Damasus Ivan P M Pereira**
11/12/1940 - 17/12/2022

"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to Thy word" (Luke 1:38)

Deeply missed by wife, children, grandchild, family, relatives and friends.

Memorial mass will be offered at

Venue: St Ignatius Church, Taman Mayang, Petaling Jaya
Date: Saturday, 14th January 2023
Time: 6.00pm

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Georgina Benedict Nair



Kunnath Swaminathan Benedict Nair

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4 Jan 1993

27 May 1983

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For educators
We pray that educators may be credible witnesses,
teaching fraternity rather than competition and
helping the youngest and most vulnerable above all.



St Anne's — a shrine of harmony

BUKIT MERTAJAM: The Church of St Anne, long a shrine for pilgrims from all over the region, will officially be proclaimed a Minor Basilica on January 9, three years after receiving the decree from Pope Francis.

The church was unable to hold the celebration earlier due to the lockdowns arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

On Jan 9, a special Mass will be held to celebrate the elevation of her status.

St Anne's is the only church in Malaysia to be bestowed the honour.

Basilica honours are assigned by the Pope to a certain church because of their antiquity, dignity, historical importance or their significance as centres of worship.

During Mass, the church will have the honour of displaying the papal symbols: the *ombrellino* (little umbrella) as well as a silk canopy with yellow and red livery marking the papal traditional colours.

The church will also display a *tintinnabulum* (bells) mounted on a pole to signify its link with the Pope. The logo of the crossed keys of St Peter will be displayed on the church's banners, furnishings and on the seal of the Minor Basilica. The keys refer to the promise of Christ to Peter and symbolises the continuous relations between the Basilica and the Pope.

Bishop Sebastian Francis said his application



to the Holy See to elevate the church was not because of its nearly two century old existence, but more for its ability to draw the crowds from all walks of life.

"If you look at the testimonies, the church has had an effect on everything under the sun, from people overcoming financial difficulties to finding jobs, finding their life partner, and having children.

"My application to elevate the church to a Minor Basilica is not because of its huge building or antiquity. It is about the harmony that exudes from this great place.

"It's not about religion, it's about life. It's about spirituality. It's about blessing us. That is why I named St Anne as the Shrine of Harmony, to instil, to ingrain and impress the bond of humanity among all of us," he said.

Every July, hundreds of thousands of people flock to the church for a nine-day prayer to recite the rosary, participate at Mass, make their confessions, and attend the candlelight procession held on the eve of the feast day.

Before COVID-19, over 250,000 people thronged the church grounds for the Feast of St Anne. The feast day is celebrated on the Sunday on or immediately after July 26.

The church was founded in 1846 by French missionaries from the Society of Foreign Missions of Paris. — **By Predeep Nambiar, FMT**



SOLEMN DECLARATION

THE MINOR BASILICA OF ST. ANNE

BUKIT MERTAJAM, PENANG, MALAYSIA

Granted by the Dicastery for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments, Holy See, by Decree Prot. N 42/19 dated 5 September 2019

With joy, praise and thanksgiving to God,
His Lordship Rt. Rev. Dato' Seri Sebastian Francis D.D.,
Bishop of Penang Diocese, Clergy, Religious and Lay Faithful,
cordially invite you to the occasion of the **SOLEMN DECLARATION** made in the
name of our **Holy Father POPE FRANCIS.**

**EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION
FEAST OF THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD**

09 JAN 2023 | MONDAY at 6PM

See how good and how pleasing it is for brothers and sisters to be living together in harmony. ~ Psalm 133:1

Catholic Pilgrimages

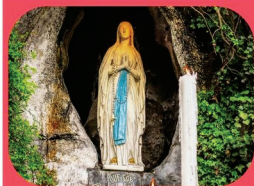
A Journey of Faith

2023 Group Departures

All Inclusive + Hassle Free +
No Hidden Cost

14D Marian Shrines

Italy - France - Spain - Portugal



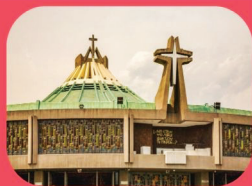
RM13,900

Immerse yourself in
Papal's blessing and
venerate before the
shrines of Our Lady

28 May | 11 Sep | 9 Oct
Fr Joe | Fr Victor Louis | Fr Richard A.

15D Our Lady of Guadalupe

Mexico



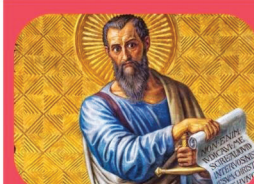
RM15,500

Gaze upon the face
of Our Lady and
explore the exciting
Mexican culture

20 Apr | Nov
Fr William Michael | TBA

16D Journey of St Paul

Turkey - Patmos - Greece



Discover the
footsteps and
preachings of
St Paul

RM15,500

12 Apr | 4 Oct
Fr Valentine | TBA

14D Franciscan Shrines of Italy

Milan - Venice - Padua - Florence - Pisa - Assisi - Lancia -
Loretto - Manoppello - San Giovanni - Rome

- St Anthony of Padua
- St Francis of Assisi
- Padre Pio



RM12,900

8 Oct
Fr Christopher

2023 holds important events for the Pope

VATICAN: Pope Francis will soon pack his bags for his first foreign trip of 2023, a year that promises to be as busy as ever.

The Pope, who celebrated his 86th birthday December 17, can move quickly — in a wheelchair — and keeps saying in interviews that a functioning head and heart — not a well-functioning knee — are essential to the exercise of the papacy.

And, so, his appointment book for 2023 is starting to fill up, although he usually agrees to appointments with the caveat of "God willing."

Several events are already inked in:

- A pastoral visit to violence-torn Congo Jan 31 to Feb 3, followed by an ecumenical pilgrimage for peace to South Sudan Feb 3 to 5 with Anglican Archbishop Justin Welby of Canterbury and the Rev. Iain Greenshields, moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

- Pope Francis celebrates his 10th anniversary as Pope March 13.

- He is scheduled to join perhaps one million young people from around the globe for World Youth Day Aug 1 to 6 in Lisbon, Portugal.

- And the first session of the world Synod of Bishops meeting on "synodality" is scheduled for Oct 4 to 29 at the Vatican.

His constant pleas for peace in Ukraine will not end until the war does.

And while Pope Francis indicated Dec 21 that he had reached, or at least was reaching, the end of a series of general audience lessons about spiritual discernment — what it is, how it is done and how the results are judged — his emphasis on teaching Catholics how to listen to the Holy Spirit when making decisions individually or communally will continue as the synod process does.

In October, saying he did not want to rush the process of discerning how the Holy Spirit is calling the church to grow in "synodality," the Pope announced that the assembly of the Synod of Bishops would take place in two sessions. The gathering scheduled for 2023 is only the first session.

Having published his constitution reforming the Roman Curia in June, Pope Francis is expected to make some changes in the top positions of Curia offices in the coming year.

The normal retirement age for cardinals and bishops working in the Curia is 75, but the Pope has often kept cardinals who are prefects of dicasteries in place beyond their 75th birthdays.

In 2023 Pope Francis also will hear continuing calls to address the clerical sexual abuse scandal and, especially, to ensure greater consistency in dealing with abusers and greater transparency in how the Vatican has handled the cases. — **By Cindy Wooden, CNS**

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