

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.

The Publisher, Editor and Staff of **HERALD** wish our Muslim friends *Selamat Hari Raya*. There will be no issue on April 14. Our next issue will be on April 21.

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.

1 John 5:1



Vocation of a priest extends beyond church walls

■ P4



Bridging communities through care for the vulnerable

■ P7

## Urbi et Orbi Easter message 2024

# Peace outstretched hands open hearts



**R**OME: Amidst the celebratory atmosphere of Easter Sunday, Pope Francis delivered a powerful Easter message from the iconic central balcony of St Peter's Basilica, urging the world to seek peace through compassion and reconciliation.

Addressing a crowd of over 100,000 people and a global audience estimated at over one billion, the Pope in his traditional *Urbi et Orbi* Easter message urged leaders to eschew violence and embrace dialogue to resolve conflicts plaguing regions like the Holy Land and Ukraine.

"At Easter, peace is never made with arms, but with outstretched hands and open hearts," declared Pope Francis, encapsulating the essence of his message. His call for peace was not abstract but grounded in practical measures that could alleviate the suffering of millions affected by conflict.

Foremost among his concerns was the situation in the Holy Land, where the longstanding Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to exact a heavy toll on civilians. Pope Francis appealed for immediate steps to ensure access to humanitarian aid for the besieged population of Gaza, where basic necessities are

scarce amidst the ongoing violence. Additionally, he urged the release of hostages held captive since October 7 last year and called for an immediate ceasefire to halt further bloodshed.

In a bold move, Pope Francis proposed a general exchange of prisoners between Russia and Ukraine, recognising the potential for such a gesture to pave the way for peace in the war-torn region. By addressing the conflict directly and advocating for concrete measures, the Pope underscored his commitment to promoting reconciliation and ending human suffering.

Drawing parallels between the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the quest for peace, Pope Francis invoked the symbolism of the empty tomb as a metaphor for overcoming barriers and forging a path towards reconciliation. He emphasised the importance of forgiveness and fraternity in building a more just and peaceful world.

However, Pope Francis' concerns extended beyond the Holy Land and Ukraine to encompass other regions ravaged by conflict and instability. He lamented the plight of Syria, where a protracted civil war has exacted a devastating toll on civilians, leaving behind a trail of death and destruction. Urging the international community to prioritise efforts to end the suffering of the Syrian people, the Pope underscored the moral imperative of collec-

tive action in the face of humanitarian crises.

Similarly, Pope Francis expressed solidarity with Lebanon, a country grappling with political turmoil and economic hardship exacerbated by recent hostilities on its border with Israel. He called upon the Risen Lord to console the Lebanese people and sustain their resilience in the face of adversity, reaffirming the country's role as a beacon of coexistence and pluralism in a troubled region.

Acknowledging the tensions in the Western Balkans, the pontiff offered a prayer that emphasised unity over division, expressing hope that ethnic, cultural, and confessional differences would be embraced as enriching facets of Europe's diversity.

In echoing his sentiments from Christmas, he reiterated his support for the peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan, urging the international community to aid in facilitating dialogue, supporting displaced populations, respecting religious sites, and expediting a lasting peace agreement.

The pontiff extended his prayers to all those suffering from violence, conflict, food insecurity, and the impacts of climate change globally, including victims of terrorism.

Expressing concern for Haiti, he prayed for an end to violence and bloodshed in the country, alongside progress towards democracy and fraternity.

Pope Francis, who has been to Myanmar and Bangladesh, prayed for the Rohingya people who are "beset by a grave humanitarian crisis" in both lands, and called for "a path to reconciliation in Myanmar, torn for years now by internal conflicts, so that every logic of violence may be definitively abandoned."

In focusing on Africa, he prayed for peace on the continent, particularly for suffering populations in Sudan, the Sahel region, the Horn of Africa, the Kivu region in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the province of Capo Delgado in Mozambique. Additionally, he highlighted the urgent need to address drought-induced famine and hunger.

As the son of migrants, the pontiff emphasised the importance of solidarity with migrants and those facing economic hardships, urging compassion and hope for those in need.

He emphasised the sanctity of life and condemned various forms of violence and exploitation, including human trafficking, calling on political leaders to prioritise efforts to combat this scourge.

As he concluded his address, Pope Francis imparted his Easter blessings to all and reiterated his call for peace, urging the faithful to reflect on the Easter message of hope and to embrace the values of compassion, forgiveness, and reconciliation in building a brighter future for generations to come. — *Agencies*

## HERALD

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Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre  
5, Jalan Robertson, 50150, KL  
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## EDITOR

Patricia Pereira  
editor1@herald.com.my

ASSISTANT EDITOR  
Social Media Coordinator

Sandra Ann Inbaraj  
sandra@herald.com.my

GRAPHIC DESIGNER  
Youth Section

Amanda Mah  
amanda@herald.com.my

BAHASA MALAYSIA  
Melania Liza Magnus

liza@herald.com.my



## MANDARIN

Adelina Wong  
yin4482@gmail.com



## TAMIL

RK Samy  
rksamy3@hotmail.com

Advertisements / Subscription  
advertisement@herald.com.my

MEMORIAM  
memoriam@herald.com.my

LETTERS  
letterseditor@herald.com.my

## EDITOR'S NOTE

In this season of reflection and renewal, the Feast of the Annunciation, traditionally celebrated on March 25, but moved to April 8 this year\*, invites us into a deeper contemplation of God's infinite wisdom and grace. This feast commemorates the moment the Angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would conceive and bear a son, Jesus, marking a fundamental moment in our salvation history. It is a celebration that intertwines divine mystery with the profound dignity of a young woman from Nazareth, chosen to be the Mother of God. This year, the timing of the Annunciation beautifully aligns with Pope Francis' intention for April, which calls us to recognise and advocate for the dignity and worth of women in every culture, urging an end to the discrimination they face around the globe.

The synchronicity of these events provides an opportunity for reflection on the role and value of women in our families, society, the Church, and the world at large. Mary's *fiat* — her yes to God's plan — serves as a testament to the strength, courage, and faith that women exemplify and contribute to the foundational structures of our faith and society. Her role accentuates not only the capability of women to carry and nurture life, but also their ability to be vital agents of change and bearers of God's message of love and salvation.

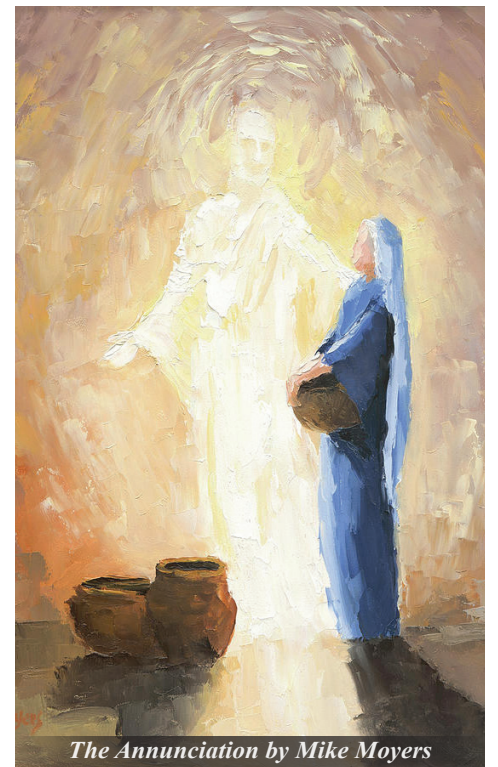
Pope Francis' intention for the month of April is a clarion call to recognise the intrinsic dignity and worth of every woman, reflecting the respect and honour bestowed upon Mary. It is a reminder that the discrimination and injustices women face — whether through exclusion, marginalisation, or violence — contravene the Gospel's message of love, equality, and dignity for all. This call is not merely for acknowledgment but for actionable change within every sphere of human interaction, from our homes to the highest levels of global leadership.

Women's roles in families cannot be overstated; they are often the heart and backbone of the home, providing not just care and nurturing but also leadership and wisdom. In society, women's contributions are equally indispensable, driving progress in science, politics, education, and the arts. Yet, despite these contributions, women often face barriers that limit their participation and recognition, rooted in outdated stereotypes and systemic inequalities.

In the Church, the Feast of the Annunciation is a great reminder of the essential role women play in the faith community. Women are educators of faith, leaders in charity, and proponents of peace and justice. Their voices and perspectives are critical in reflecting the fullness of the Church's mission to bring Christ's love to the world. Echoing Pope Francis' repeated calls, it's imperative for the Church to expand the spaces for a more incisive female presence in the Church. The Holy Father poignantly noted, "Our Lady, Mary, was more important than the Apostles, bishops, deacons, and priests. In the Church, the role of a woman surpasses that of bishops and priests. This significance is what we must further elucidate, as there is a theological clarity yet to be fully unveiled."

Globally, the recognition of women's dignity and the end of discrimination are not just moral imperatives but prerequisites for sustainable development and peace. When women are educated, empowered, and given equal opportunities, societies flourish. Respect for women's dignity can catalyse the transformation needed to address the world's most pressing challenges, from poverty and inequality to climate change and conflict.

As we reflect on the Annunciation and the Pope's intention for this April, let us commit to recognising and championing the dignity and worth of women in every corner of our world. Let this be a time when we actively



The Annunciation by Mike Moyers

work to dismantle the structures of discrimination and build a more just and equitable society, honouring the image of God in every person.

May the example of Mary's faith and courage inspire us all to say our own 'yes' to God's call to love and serve one another, particularly the least among us, with open hearts and willing hands.

Patricia Pereira

\* Should March 25 fall within Holy Week or the Easter octave — the week immediately following Easter Sunday — the celebration of the Annunciation is moved to the first Monday after the Easter octave. Consequently, this year, with March 25 being Holy Monday according to the Roman calendar, the liturgical observance of the Annunciation is scheduled for Monday, April 8.

## Are we living in the freedom and joy of the Resurrection or behind locked doors?

*Alleluia! Christ is risen!  
The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

This phrase flows beautifully, doesn't it? This is our Easter profession of faith, a statement affirming our belief in the Resurrection. Yet, it's also a statement that is often easier said than done. It's one thing to proclaim the words, but another to live them.

There comes a time, however, when we must live the Resurrection. That is not always easy. There are days when we prefer to just stay in bed, pull the covers over our head, and close out the world. Some days it seems easier and safer to lock the doors of our house and avoid the circumstances and people of our lives. Sometimes we just want to run away, hide, and not deal with the reality of our lives.

Every time, however, we shut the doors of our life, our mind, or our heart, we imprison ourselves. For every person, event, or idea we lock out, regardless of the reason, we lock ourselves in. That's what has happened to the disciples in today's Gospel. It is Easter evening, the first day of the week, the day of the Resurrection, the day they saw the empty tomb, the day Mary Magdalene announced, "I have seen the Lord." The disciples are gathered in the house, the doors are locked out of fear. A week later they are in the same place. It is the same house, the same walls, the same closed doors, the same locks.



Nothing much has changed.

Jesus' tomb is open and empty but the disciples' house is closed and the doors locked tight. The house has become their tomb. Jesus is out and about, but the disciples are bound in fear. The disciples have separated themselves and their lives from the reality of Jesus' resurrection. Their doors of faith have been closed. They have shut their eyes to the reality that life is now different. They have locked out Mary Magdalene's words of faith, hope, and love. They left the empty tomb of Jesus and entered their own tombs of fear, doubt, and blindness. The locked doors have become the great stone sealing their tomb. They have locked themselves in. The doors of our tombs are always locked from the inside. All this, and it has been only one week.

One week after Easter, is our life different? Where are we living — in the freedom and

joy of the Resurrection or behind locked doors?

In the Gospel, when John describes the house, the doors and the locks, he is speaking about more than a physical house with walls, doors on hinges, and deadbolts. He is describing the interior condition of the disciples. The locked places of our lives are always more about what is going on inside of us than around us.

What are the closed places of your life? What keeps you in the tomb? Maybe, like the disciples, it is fear. Maybe it is questions, disbelief, or the conditions we place on our faith. Perhaps it is sorrow and loss. Maybe the wounds are so deep it does not seem worth the risk to step outside. For others it may be anger and resentment. Some seem unable or unwilling to open up to new ideas, possibilities, and change.

Jesus is always entering the locked places

### Reflecting on our Sunday Readings with the Editor

#### Divine Mercy Sunday (B)

Readings: Acts of the Apostle 4:32-35;  
1 John 5:1-6;  
Gospel: John 20:19-31

of our lives. Unexpected, uninvited, and sometimes even unwanted, He steps into our closed lives, closed hearts, closed minds. Standing among us He offers peace and breathes new life into us. He doesn't open the door for us but He gives us all we need so that we might open our doors to a new life, a new creation, a new way of being.

In any situation, Jesus appears, bringing peace, offering peace, and being peace itself. In every scenario, Jesus arrives, bringing life, offering life, and being life. Life and peace are the very essence of the Resurrection. They don't necessarily alter the conditions of our lives or the world around us.

Storms will come into our lives; we'll face illness and financial uncertainty, confront poverty and injustice, and mourn the loss of loved ones. However, the life and peace bestowed by Jesus' resurrection empower us to face and endure these realities. He shares with us His peace, His breath, His life, and then He sends us forth. We are set free to open the doors that have kept us confined and step into His life, moving forward with courage and hope.

# Peninsular Malaysia prepares for the Regional Pastoral Assembly

KUALA LUMPUR: The Regional Pastoral Assembly (RPA) for Peninsular Malaysia, scheduled for August 25-27 at Majodi, Plentong, is designed to harmonise the call towards synodality within the rich pastoral heritage of the Church of Peninsular Malaysia.

Msgr Jude Miranda, the chairperson of the Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Team (PMPT), said this during the Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Team (PMPT) core team meeting held in March.

He then presented the pastoral journey from the time of the *Aggiornamento* in 1976, leading towards the Malaysia Pastoral Convention (MPC) in 2026. The MPC will be the first that sees participation from all the dioceses in Malaysia.

Fr Dr Lawrence Ng then continued with the proposed pastoral process for the RPA. He said that the RPA (Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Convention V) is to work towards bridging the pastoral direction of the Peninsular Malaysian Church since 1976, with the call for a Synodal Church so that we may move on with one path in our pastoral orientation.

He then shared on the process for the three days, focusing on:

*Celebrate* (Day 1) - celebrating our History and its Harmony with the call to being a

Synodal Church

*Listen* (Day 2) participating by our Active Listening and Communal Discernment based on what took place at the diocesan assemblies. He put forward a few proposals on how they can proceed with this.

*Walk* (Day 3) Here Msgr Jude said that the process will take us through the journey of conversion, embracing the spirit of communion and enhancing the call for mission as we move towards MPC2026 and beyond.

Fr Lawrence reminded those present that “we have to keep in mind that we want a process that is not ‘top-down’ but flows up from the grassroots to the ‘top’.

Msgr Peter Ng emphasised that the MPC template is a guide, as the process towards MPC is still evolving. The focus of the RPA is on Family, Church, Ecology, and Society (FCES), with each parish contributing to the diocesan pastoral assembly and, subsequently, to the regional assembly.

Msgr Peter explained that the RPA is linked to MPC 2026 and stressed the im-

portance of the Synodal process in fostering conversion, especially through Spiritual Conversations. He stressed the holistic view of all areas as part of the Body of Christ, calling for conversion and communal journeying.

Cardinal Sebastian Francis endorsed the focus on conversion over starting new projects in dioceses, appreciating the discussions on synodality, spiritual conversation, and communion. He noted the heavy workload of the dioceses and was not in favour of further burdening them.

Bishop Bernard Paul expressed support for the pastoral approach of Celebrating, Listening, and Walking for the RPA. He emphasised the significance of celebrating history from 1976 to the present, focusing on remembering, recollecting, and renewing for the past, present, and future. In terms of listening, he highlighted the importance of prioritising key areas due to the limitation of attention, leading to the selection of four focus areas. This listening process involves

understanding what happened, what is currently happening, and what needs to happen in these areas. He suggested that Spiritual Conversations would facilitate the discovery of new narratives within these focus areas. Bishop Bernard linked Walking to the mission and the journey towards synodality. He posed questions about evaluating past practices, identifying areas needing improvement, and considering necessary changes.

Archbishop Julian Leow emphasised the importance of collating the findings from the three dioceses on the four focus areas. These findings should be summarised into a booklet to analyse convergences, considerations, and proposals. Presenting this booklet at the RPA could facilitate progress towards the MPC, particularly considering new advancements and challenges.

The committee agreed that in principle, each diocese (Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Malacca Johore) will be represented by 150 persons comprising clergy, religious and lay leaders. An additional 50 places will be set aside for volunteers.

In conclusion, Msgr Jude said that the RPA aims to affirm the journey of the Church in Peninsular Malaysia, enhancing the common priesthood and emphasising baptismal identity as participants seek concrete takeaways to bring back to their dioceses.



## KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

### Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

#### April

- 15 Meeting — AOHD Board of Management
- 16-17 Monthly Clergy Recollection
- 18 Meeting — Archdiocesan Finance
- 19 Mass, Feast – Church of the Good Shepherd
- 20 Mass, Feast – Church of the Annunciation

## PENANG DIOCESE

### Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

#### April

- 20 Permanent Deacons' Formation – Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam

## MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

### Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

#### April

- 7 Consecration of Divine Mercy Parish at 10.30am – Church of Divine Mercy, Skudai
- 9 2nd Caritas Malaysia Diocesan Directors & Ecclesiastical Assistants Meeting via Zoom

## Muslim Council of Elders host Grand Interfaith Iftar



KUALA LUMPUR: The Grand Interfaith Iftar, hosted by the Muslim Council of Elders, Malaysia on March 20 was graced with the presence of notable guests, including Archbishop Wojciech Zaluski, the Apostolic Nuncio to Malaysia, and Most Reverend Julian Leow, the Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur. This event took place at the Seri Pacific Hotel.

The evening was hosted by Dato' Seri Dr Zulkifli Mohamad al-Bakri, former Mufti of Wilayah Persekutuan and ex-Minister in the Prime Minister's Department for Religious Affairs. The gathering also saw the participation of Dr Omar Obeidat, director of the Project Management Office and Regional Offices, along with Saeid Khattab, coordinator of Regional Offices at the Muslim Council of Elders, Abu Dhabi. The duo was attending on behalf of Dr Ahmed Muhammad El-Tayeb, the Grand Imam of al-Azhar and chairman of the Muslim Council of Elders, as part of their mission across eight countries to engage in *iftars* organised by local branches of the Muslim Council of Elders.

The event was honoured by the presence of YB Senator Dr Zulkifli Hasan, Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Religious Affairs), alongside distinguished religious and community

leaders from the Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, and Sikh communities.

In his opening speech, Senator Dr Zulkifli Hasan quoted Hans Küng, Edward Said and several Muslim figures on the importance of interfaith dialogue in creating peace.

Dato' Seri Dr Zulkifli Mohamad al-Bakri also affirms the need for religious figures to call on their respective religious followers to continue to commit to their efforts to get to know each other.

Archbishop Wojciech Zaluski expressed his appreciation to the Muslim Council of Elders for the initiative in organising this very meaningful *iftar*. He added, this clearly describes the harmony and unity of the multi-religious Malaysian society we all live in.

Representing the Sikhs, Dr Charanjit Kaur emphasised the importance of religious leaders to act swiftly to address the current issues involving religion emerging on social media. What's viral may not necessarily be what's true but it has created a variety of unhealthy perspectives among religious believers.

Buddhists in Malaysia are always committed to cooperation and unity efforts, said Sr Loh Pai Ling, President of the Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia.

She also praised the approach of the Muslim Council of Elders for organising this breaking of fast event as a medium for religious leaders to meet and discuss in a more relaxed manner.

Several individuals and ministry members from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur were also in attendance with other NGO leaders and felt the *iftar* was an opportunity to come together and meet others across an array of backgrounds, underscoring the importance of fostering understanding and cooperation among diverse faith communities.

During the sacred month of Ramadan, a period of introspection and communal devotion, the Muslim Council of Elders underscores the vital importance of solidarity and understanding within their diverse community. Thus, the Grand Interfaith Iftar serves as a conduit for religious leaders to convene, exchange insights, and foster genuine dialogue. Embracing the essence of Ramadan, the event seeks to fortify the ties of kinship and advocate for peace and acceptance within our societies. Amidst global discord, this occasion stands as a poignant reminder of our shared humanity, illustrating the profound capacity for unity and compassion among all individuals. — AOHD

# Vocation of a priest extends beyond church walls

SEGAMAT, Johor: Bishop Bernard Paul emphasised the importance of 'sacrifice' and 'service' to the clergy of the Diocese of Malacca Johore, highlighting these values as fundamental to the ministry of priests to the faithful. He connected these principles to the context of the B.A.N.I. world, emphasising the challenges clergy face and proposing various countermeasures. These remarks were delivered during the Chrism Mass at the Church of St Philip on March 26.

Referring to the first reading (Isaiah 61:1, 3, 6, 8-9), Bishop Bernard highlighted that the prophet Isaiah presents the priest through two fundamental images – as 'Priests of the Lord' (embodying Sacrifice) and 'Ministers of our God' (representing Service), illustrating their inseparable nature. He explained that priests occupy a unique position, serving as a bridge between God and humanity, and also facilitating connections among people themselves. This role enables priests to be conduits for divine grace, allowing God's presence to reach His people and fostering a spirit of communal



Bishop Bernard Paul blessing the Oil of the Sick.

spirituality.

The bishop made it clear that the vocation of a priest extends beyond the church's walls. "We are sent into the world of today, not that of yesterday. Our mission isn't to revive the past but to enliven the present and pave the way for the future. Priests are summoned for the challenges and needs of the present day; let's not carry the past into our current tasks," he stated.

The prelate continued, delving into the concept of the B.A.N.I.

world in which we find ourselves today. He broke down the acronym: "Brittle" – highlighting the fragility of our world, where systems, families, and individual lives seem all too susceptible to breaking apart. In response to this brittleness, Bishop Bernard emphasised the crucial need for religious leaders who possess true "Backbone" – individuals who stand firm, strong, and steady.

Addressing the notion of "Anxious," the bishop observed that people are gripped by uncertainty,

insecurity, and fear, not just within this nation but globally. To navigate these anxious times, he pointed out, the importance of "Alertness" in which clergy must remain vigilant, aware, and prepared to act decisively. "When the situation demands, respond with swift urgency and act out of the box," Bishop Bernard advised.

Describing our existence in a "Nonlinear" world characterised by constant motion, change, and unpredictability, where forecasting and prediction are futile, the prelate emphasised the necessity of embracing "Newness." He urged the clergy to adopt innovative approaches and solutions, cautioning against reliance on archaic and outdated methods. "In 2024, apply 2024 solutions, not those from 1990. Persisting with outdated solutions risks stagnating your parish community. Always prioritise new solutions for new challenges," he emphasised.

Touching on the final acronym, which represents "Incomprehensible", Bishop Bernard said that we live in world that has too many phases, too many levels, one which

is too complexed for us to understand.

"Today the world and the Church needs "Intuition" not incomprehension. What you cannot see with your mind, you must see with your heart, see with your spirit. This is what the Church is trying to tell us – depend on the Holy Spirit. Listen to the life giving spirit that is present in creation, in communities, in one another. Sometimes the answer comes from the heart, from the Spirit," said the bishop

Reflecting on the challenges posed by the B.A.N.I world, Bishop Bernard remarked, "This is the world we must minister to. This is the world we must serve, the world in which we must learn to be priests. Do not attempt to draw people into your world. You must enter theirs. You must immerse yourself in the world that exists. This is what Jesus did. Incarnation means entering the world as it is, embracing it for what it is."

In closing, the prelate reminded the clergy that their calling is not to embody B.A.N.I. principles, but to be Counter-B.A.N.I. priests.

## 'Despite our ordination, we remain human'

KENINGAU: Annually, during the Chrism Mass, priests across the Diocese of Keningau convene with the bishop at Dataran Keuskupan Keningau, renewing their priestly vows and committing anew to deepen their unity with Jesus and to be faithful stewards of the mysteries of God. This year's Chrism Mass was held on March 26.

Bishop Cornelius Piong began his homily by explaining the significance of the Chrism Mass as a cherished tradition of the Church. "The Chrism Mass serves as a reminder of God as the creator of the Eucharist, and to ensure the perpetuity of the Eucharist, God established the priesthood. We express our gratitude for Jesus' presence in

the Eucharist, a sacrament perpetually celebrated and administered by our priests."

He continued, addressing the congregation, "Our gathering at the Chrism Mass transcends the blessing of the oils. I am convinced that your presence here, participating in this celebration, stems from a deep appreciation and gratitude for your priests!"

The bishop urged the congregation to pray earnestly for priests, saying, "Despite our ordination, we remain human — flesh and blood. This reality underscores our need for your prayers and support. Please, include us, your priests, in your daily prayers, asking for our steadfast service in a spirit of unity.

Primarily, pray for our communion with Jesus. It is our belief that our capacity for unity and desire to unite springs from our relationship with Jesus (John 15:4-5). Without a connection to Jesus, the source of our unity and faithfulness, priests cannot truly live in harmony within families and communities.

"In our ministry, let us constantly reflect on Jesus' question: 'What are you looking for?' By answering this question, we can determine who we serve. Do we serve Jesus first or do we put our own matters first?"

"Only when we are always in union with Jesus can we serve others without counting the cost, whatever our role in ministry," said the prelate.



The clergy renewing their priestly vows.

Concluding his homily, the bishop emphasised, "As individuals, we are each created in the image and likeness of God. However, as members of the Body of Christ, it is through our unity with one another

in Christ that salvation is found. In our union with Christ, we forge a synodal Church, journeying together — laity, pastors, and bishop — towards Christ the Lord." — *By Didroy Joneh, KOMSOS*

## Rededication of the Chapel of Christ the King

KUALA LUMPUR: March 24 was a momentous occasion as close to 1000 worshippers gathered in the newly renovated Chapel of Christ the King for the rededication ceremony.

The event started with the symbolic handing over of the chapel key. Andrew Philip, the building committee chairperson, presented the key to Archbishop Julian Leow, who then passed it on to the Parish administrator Fr Peter Anthony. Fr Peter unlocked the doors of the newly renovated chapel, signalling the beginning of a new chapter in its history.

As Archbishop Julian Leow led the rededication celebration alongside 11 priests, his words resonated deeply with the congregation, reaffirming the chapel's significance as a place of

Throughout the ceremony, there was a sense of joy and gratitude among the parish-

ioners. After six years of waiting, their beloved chapel had been restored to its former glory, a testament to their unwavering faith and perseverance.

Founded in 1977, the Chapel of Christ the King served as a place of worship for 200 families in the Selayang and Batu Caves vicinity. Standing proudly for 41 years, this little chapel eventually had to close its doors to worshippers in February 2018 due to safety concerns regarding the structure of the building.

During the six years, Masses, and catechism were held at the Church of Christ the Light. Ministries too carried on their work as normal. Other surrounding churches, namely Church of St Joseph, Church of Risen Christ and Church of St Jude also welcomed our parishioners with open arms during this six-year journey.

Initially, when the decision was made to

close the chapel, the plan was to tear down the old building and construct an entirely new structure. However, this plan just failed to materialise.

After numerous talks and discussions with the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur and the local council, renovation works for the chapel commenced in October 2023. Within a matter of months, the chapel began to transform, with its structure slowly taking shape.

Under the leadership of Fr Peter Anthony, the Chapel of Christ the King was finally completed and ready for use in March 2024.

Yet, amidst the jubilation, the congregation also took a moment to remember those who were no longer with them. Their memory served as a poignant reminder to inspire them to live each day with purpose and gratitude, cherishing the gift of life and the blessings that surround them. The parishion-



Parish leaders holding aloft the plaque.

ers also expressed their gratitude to the late Fr Edward Soosay for his generous contribution that made the new chapel a reality for everyone.

As the rededication celebration drew to a close, there was a collective sense of renewal and hope among the congregation.

# Chrism reminds us of our responsibility

KUCHING: The significance of anointing, as Archbishop Simon Poh explained during the Chrism Mass, March 27 at the Cathedral of St Joseph, lies in its representation of the three-fold mission of every baptised person: to be priestly, kingly, and prophetic.

Through the anointing with Chrism, individuals are consecrated for this mission by the Holy Spirit.

The Archbishop emphasized that while only a few are called and ordained as priests for the ministerial priesthood, all baptised Catholics share in the common calling to be part of the Priestly, Kingly, and Prophetic

People of God. This anointing signifies our identity as chosen by God and sent forth to fulfil His mission.

The architecture of the cathedral, with its design symbolising the church as the people of God gathered around as one family, reinforces this sense of community and pilgrimage. The cathedral's roof, resembling a tent, evokes the journey of the people in Exodus and signifies the pilgrim nature of the Church, as we journey together toward the Father's house.

Through his personal experience of his mother's illness and passing, Archbishop

Simon highlighted the power of prayer and gathering in Jesus's name to bring hope, blessing, and strengthen faith. He emphasised that every baptised individual, regardless of age or vocation, is called to be a missionary disciple of the Lord and to leave a mark through the anointing received from Chrism.

Ultimately, the Chrism Mass is a celebration of our identity and mission as the people of God, anointed by the Holy Spirit to carry out the work of Christ in the world. It serves as a reminder of the power and responsibility bestowed upon us through our baptismal anointing.



Archbishop Simon Poh giving out the oils to the clergy.

## Everyone is called to continue the mission of Christ

MIRI: "Today, all of us are called to continue the mission of Christ." Bishop Richard Ng said during the Chrism Mass on March 13 at the Cathedral of St Joseph.

Before expounding on the readings of the day, he gave the congregation a short history of what took place in 587 BC. The Israelites were captured and taken into captivity by the Babylonians. Their city and temple were destroyed, and they were in exile.

"Today's first reading taken from Isaiah (written after the exile around 530BC) The Israelites were in captivity and exile in Babylon for about 50 years. When the new king ascended, he allowed them to return to their land.

"Upon their return, they saw their city and temple in ruins. They had to start all over again. Seeing their despair, God sent Prophet Isaiah to give them hope and encouragement to rebuild the city wall as the enemies were still there, the city and the temple. He prophesied that Jerusalem and the temple



Bishop Richard Ng praying over the Oils.

would be rebuilt and true enough, it was rebuilt.

"This prophecy was not fully fulfilled during his time. It took 500 years with the

coming of Jesus for it to begin to be fulfilled."

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus took the Isaiah's prophesy as his mission statement during his public ministry. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

Jesus came to announce the Jubilee year, a time of peace, reconciliation, salvation, and forgiveness. As we hear His proclamation today, we are called to continue His mission and fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah. Through our baptism, we've been anointed with Chrism, imbued with the power of the Holy Spirit. At confirmation, we received an added boost. Are we aware of the responsibility to embody the Good News for others?

To proclaim liberty to captives means freeing those ensnared by their own or oth-

ers' limitations — be it fear, prejudice, or ignorance. As vessels of the Holy Spirit, we must extend forgiveness, seek forgiveness, and offer reconciliation to set people free.

Giving sight to the blind involves guiding those with shallow or absent faith toward Jesus, providing them with hope, courage, and the essence of life's meaning.

We're called to free the downtrodden and declare a year of Jubilee — a year of shalom, characterised by love, peace, and joy.

If the enormity of these tasks overwhelms us, we can start with one action at a time — being kind, generous, or sharing our faith. Mastering one task well allows us to gradually expand our efforts. This approach enables the Holy Spirit to work through us effectively.

We have been anointed. Almost all of us have received at least double power (baptism and confirmation) — we must use it for the Kingdom of God. Only then can we make a difference.

## A shared mission for the ordained and laity

KOTA KINABALU: In his homily at the Chrism Mass on March 21, held at the Sacred Heart Cathedral, Karamuning, for the Diocese of Kota Kinabalu, Archbishop John Wong highlighted the shared mission and priesthood of the Church for both the ordained and the laity, urging all to "...stand as steadfast witnesses in the world, reflecting the salvation that Christ has secured for all humanity."

The prelate urged all priests to remember "the promise, made on the day of our priestly ordination, to dedicate our lives to the mission of announcing the Gospel."

The archbishop also invited all the baptised to support the priests with prayer and closeness in their common apostolic concern, so that even today "the Church may be a light for the world and bear witness to God's love".

He added that every baptised person is anointed with Chrism for a mission to be part of the Priestly, Kingly, and Prophetic

People of God.

"This is our common calling. Only a few are called and ordained as priests to minister to the community, which is called the Ministerial Priesthood for ordained ministers who celebrate Masses and administer the Sacraments. At ordinations, priests are anointed with Chrism on their hands, while bishops are anointed on the head," said Archbishop John.

The homily also underlined the communion, the action of the Holy Spirit, the fact that the priests are called to live among themselves and with the archbishop "to proclaim the Gospel, serve the diocese and all the baptised".

Archbishop John then asked the faithful to pray for their priests and for him, that God may bless them with the fullness of His love and help them to remain faithful, lead others to Him, fulfil their duties, teach and serve, and be a genuine sign of Christ the High Priest and Good Shepherd.



## Set apart to be the sign of God's love and compassion

SIBU: At the Sacred Heart Cathedral, 26 clergy members from the 12 parishes in the Diocese of Sibu came together with more than 2,500 parishioners for the Chrism Mass on March 20. During this significant event, they renewed their priestly vows in the presence of their shepherd, Bishop Joseph Hii.

Bishop Joseph emphasised the significance of the celebration, highlighting its role in demonstrating the fullness of the bishop's priesthood and the close bond shared between the bishop and his priests. The ceremony was marked by the presence of parishioners adorned in traditional attire, accompanied by traditional music and dances as they processed forward with the vessels containing the three Oils.

In his homily, Bishop Joseph reminded the congregation that the Chrism Mass is not exclusive to priests but extends to all baptised individuals who have been anointed by the Holy Spirit. The Chrism Mass is a celebration of identity and mis-

sion, where individuals are anointed to be witnesses of God's presence and grace in the world.

The bishop emphasised the baptismal call of service to humanity, creation, and God. "Like the patron saint of dreamers, St Joseph, we are also called to be great dreamers of bringing the good news to whole of humanity, to bring joy and freedom to the world," said the prelate.

Acknowledging the consecration of the oils and its significance, the bishop said, "Through our baptism, we are set apart to be the sign and agent of God's love and compassion. Every word and deed of ours is to breathe the saving truth that God is with us, that our Blessed Lord accompanies us at every turn. Can we not offer this accompaniment to each other?"

The prelate then expressed gratitude to his fellow priests for their faithfulness and dedication, as well as to the faithful disciples present in the cathedral for their love and support of the Church and its clergy.



The clergy renewing their vows in front of Archbishop John Wong.

## Importance of psychological first aid in times of crisis

PLENTONG, Johor: The Church of St Joseph was a hub of learning and community empowerment recently when Caritas MJD hosted a training session on Psychological First Aid (PFA).

This much needed training initiative, aimed at equipping individuals with the skills to provide immediate support to those affected by natural disasters, was conducted by certified counsellor, Pastor Lydia Goh. Her church, Full Gospel Church Johor Bahru, is a member of the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) Crisis Response Network, which also includes Caritas MJD.

With a turnout of more than 75 enthusiastic participants, including individuals journeying from as far as Segamat, the session proved to be both highly informative and impactful. Pastor Lydia's expertise was evi-



Participants of the Psychological First Aid training.

dent as she delved into the various types of trauma and indispensable counseling techniques for PFA providers.

Attendees were provided with valuable insights into recognising signs of distress in victims and were equipped with the fundamental responsibilities of a PFA provider emphasising the three key action princi-

ples: Look, Listen and Link. Look for basic safety needs, identify pressing concerns and support systems. Listen and offer emotional comfort. Link them to access information, services and social support.

Participant Dr Maria Lee expressed her satisfaction with the training, describing it as "informative and engaging." She empha-

sised the importance of such sessions, stating, "there is a need to have more training sessions like these." Dr Lee's sentiments reflect the growing recognition of the importance of PFA in community response efforts during times of crisis.

The success of this training session underscores the significance of proactive measures in building resilient communities. By equipping individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge, initiatives like these not only empower communities to respond effectively to crises but also foster a culture of compassion and support.

As we move forward, it is imperative to continue investing in such training opportunities and expand their reach to ensure that communities across the region are adequately prepared to face the challenges of tomorrow. — *By Angeline Carol*

# Towards sustainable solutions for the homeless

By Elizabeth Gnanaprasam

PETALING JAYA: Seventy volunteers and collaborators of the Samaritan Hope Home (SHH) attended a Lenten retreat at the Church of St Ignatius on March 16.

The retreat was not merely a gathering but a strategic initiative to inspire and invigorate all involved parties to embrace a more comprehensive approach to addressing homelessness. Fatima Emmanuel, founder of SHH, was evident in her vision to move beyond temporary relief towards sustainable solutions, aiming to empower homeless individuals to regain stability and direction in their lives.

The retreat's theme, *A Servant's heart — God's way to bless the poor with hope and a home*, resonated deeply with the attendees, setting the tone for introspection and action. Renowned speaker Martin Jalleh delivered an enlightening presentation on "The 7Cs of Unity in the Samaritan Hope Home Ministry/Mission," drawing from the timeless wisdom of the paralytic parable. Through concepts such as Compassion, Choice, Creativity, Communication, Co-Operation, Commitment, and Christ-Centredness, he illuminated the path towards effective unity in service.

Martin's inclusion of 20 Bible verses on servant leadership enriched the participants' spiritual journey, fostering reflection and deepening their commitment to the cause.



The volunteers and collaborators of Samaritan Hope Home with Martin Jalleh at the Lenten retreat on March 16.

However, the retreat went beyond theoretical discussions; it provided a platform for practical brainstorming sessions to explore innovative ways to leverage their individual skills and talents to offer reskilling opportunities for the homeless individuals under SHH's care.

Fatima's insistence on sustained dedication from all stakeholders underscored the organisation's long-term vision and commitment to making a meaningful difference in the lives of the homeless. By fostering a culture of compassion, empowerment, and collaboration, SHH continues to serve as a catalyst for positive transformation, offering not just hope but tangible pathways to a brighter future for the marginalised individuals it serves.

Established in 2018 as an independent organisation, SHH provides a measure of hope for the homeless community in and around Kuala Lumpur. Originally centred on providing basic sustenance, the organisation has expanded its mission to em-

brace a broader vision of empowerment and transformation for those in need. Thanks to the tireless dedication of volunteers, donors, and partners, SHH has evolved into a crucial hub addressing the diverse needs of homeless individuals.

## ACIES ceremony in Rawang

RAWANG: This year, the three language groups of the legionaries of the Church of St Jude, with the blessing of parish priest, Fr Vincent Thomas, successfully hosted the ACIES ceremony on March 16. The event also welcomed members from the Chapel of St Michael, Batu Arang and the Church of St Paul the Hermit in Bestari Jaya, bringing the total attendance to approximately 90 members.

The ceremony commenced at 10.00am with the legionaries congregating at St Jude's

shrine before processing into the church, each group bearing their respective flags.

During the event, participants engaged in reciting the Tesser prayer and the Rosary, which was then followed by Mass. The culmination of the ceremony featured an oath-taking segment, led by Fr Vincent in his role as spiritual director. The legionaries then took their oaths in pairs. The programme concluded around 12.30pm after which lunch was served to all attendees. — *By Roseline Kuthariam*



Legionaries from the Church of St Jude, Chapel of St Michael and Church of St Paul the Hermit.

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REST IN PEACE

# Bridging communities through care for the vulnerable

By Josephine Tey

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The Ministry for Migrants and Itinerants of the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development worked together with the KL South District to organise a mobile clinic in a remote area of Kuala Lumpur on March 16.

The objective was to bring medical assistance to the vulnerable and this time we chose to extend our tent to the Cambodian Muslim community. 'Being God's people is a gift for everyone, not just a privilege for us' (Pope Francis).

This initiative not only brought believers together but also showcased their faith through acts of compassion and service. Various individuals from the parishes and groups, including NGOs like Malaysian Red Crescent Society (MRCS) and Our Journey (OJ), businessmen and associations, health practitioners, doctors, youths, migrants and refugees, participated in this event. The sense of soli-



Volunteers from all races and religions lending a helping hand at the mobile clinic.

arity was evident as people dedicated their time, made donations, and offered prayers.

A group of volunteers from various parishes and districts who signed up for this programme gathered for breakfast and prayer before leaving from the Church of the Sacred Heart, Jalan Peel. Although Archbishop

Julian Leow was not physically present, he showed his support by sending his blessings.

Fr Christopher Soosaipillai, ecclesiastical assistant for the Migrants and Itinerants ministry, reminded everyone to allow God to lead, knowing that everything is ultimately for His glory. Over 80 families and an

estimated 130 people, consisting of women, men and children, benefited from the drive, with food packs distributed at the last station.

Despite being from different walks of life, backgrounds, countries and religion, the 50 volunteers, including parishes, MRCS, Migrant and Refugee communities, and Community members, worked well together. It is possible for humans to collaborate and construct our shared abode (LS, no. 13). The drive started at 10.30am and ended at 4.30pm with a closing prayer thanking God for the fruitful experiences. Despite the heat and challenges faced, both giver and receiver were filled with joy as they left the place. Every small action can make a big difference in spreading happiness in our family, community, friends, and society. Let us all continue to be sowers of love, joy, peace and hope to humanity as it does not cost us much. *Let us not grow weary of doing good for, in due season, we will reap, if we do not give up – Galatians 6:9*

## OLOG parishioners mark their 10th Lenten outreach journey

**KUALA LUMPUR:** As the season of Lent calls for us to reflect, repent, and give, our community at the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe (OLOG) embarked on a journey of compassion and service. United by a shared commitment to make a difference, we set out to extend a helping hand to those in need. This year marked the 10th OLOG Lenten Outreach programme.

Our mission began with the generous outpouring of donations from individuals eager to contribute to our Lenten Outreach. From fresh produce to dry ingredients, the community came together to provide the essentials for our endeavour.

The day started with the morning blessing by our parish priest Fr Raymond Pereira who then officiated our 10th Lenten Outreach by packing the first meal for this worthy cause. With hearts full of gratitude and hands ready to serve, our dedicated team gathered to transform these donations into nourishing meals. Many started cooking early in the morning to ensure that the cooked food was ready for packing by 9.00am on March 23, the day for our Lenten Outreach. The OLOG Pastoral Centre buzzed with activity as the food began to arrive and packing started. Even with space limitation, the place was brimming with warmth and love with about 200 Ologians who came to help pack the food, assemble and deliver them.

The menu for the day was biriyani, dhall curry, fried chicken, vegetables, egg sambal and, not forgetting dessert! With efficiency and

diligence, we worked together to prepare 850 packed meals, each one a symbol of love, hope and solidarity.

Then came the time for distribution. With vehicles loaded and spirits high, we set out to reach our target groups in Puchong — the homeless, the poor and the needy, the orphans, the elderly, the refugees, the Orang Asli and the migrant workers who often go unnoticed and underserved. As the teams went out to deliver the food, they also spent some time in fellowship with them as they enjoyed the meal that had been prepared and shared.

We had earlier collated a list of those whom we could reach out to and as we embarked to distribute the food, we knew that we were offering not only sustenance but also a reminder that they are seen, valued, and not forgotten. The smiles of gratitude and the words of thanks we received were a testament to the impact of our efforts — a reminder that even small acts of kindness can make a world of difference.

As we reflect on our Lenten Outreach journey, we are reminded of the true meaning of this season. It is not merely a time of sacrifice but also a time of service — a time to extend a hand to those in need and to embody the spirit of compassion and generosity.

In serving others, we have been served in return — not with material wealth or worldly gain, but with a sense of purpose, connection, and joy that can only come from giving of ourselves for the greater good. — *By Bridget Antoinette Pereira*



Fr Raymond Pereira and the parishioners of the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe at their 10th Lenten Outreach Programme on March 23.



## Legionaries renew their promise to Mother Mary

**PETALING JAYA:** On March 16, the Mother of Church Curia, Petaling Jaya hosted its ACIES event at the Church of St Ignatius, where legionaries came together to reaffirm their annual commitment to Our Blessed Mother Mary.

This Curia unites legionaries from five parishes within the Petaling district — Church of the Assumption, Church of St Francis Xavier, Church of St Ignatius, Church of St Thomas More, and Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Fr Lawrence Ng CDD, the parish priest of the Church of St Ignatius extended a warm welcome to the legionaries from the various parishes, applauding their dedication to assisting priests and serving the community. Fr Lawrence inspired the legionaries to persist in

their weekly gatherings, to engage in prayer, to reach out to the sick and those in need, and to stay true to their vocation.

Peter Pereira, the President of the Curia, shared insights from the Legion's spiritual director in Malaysia, Fr Paul Cheong, OFM Cap who emphasised the significance of being on time, maintaining regular attendance at weekly meetings, reading the Bible daily, and serving the Legion with fire.

The Legion warmly welcomes all Catholics into its community. Its members foster a sense of deep camaraderie, serving others and each other with love, fellowship, and joy. Those interested in joining the Legion are encouraged to reach out to their local parish for more information.

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# Easter rekindles hope for Korean unification

SEOUL: The feast of Easter that celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ offers hope for the unification of the Korean Peninsula despite the entrenched division and ongoing confrontations, Archbishop Peter Chung Soon-taick of Seoul said in his Easter message.

Despite the partition and persistent confrontation in the peninsula, "a glimmer of optimism" remains that the longstanding schism on the Korean Peninsula may metamorphose into "a renaissance of harmonious cohabitation and shared prosperity," said Archbishop Chung.

The March 25 message called for "genuine dialogue" that holds the potential to transcend conflicts and rifts, fostering empathy and understanding towards others.

He wanted political leaders to "shoulder a profound duty in steering the trajectory of their nations towards development and the col-

lective well-being of their people" and to prioritise "the welfare of the people over partisan agendas."

As citizens of a democratic society, Koreans are called to exercise "judicious discernment" in the forthcoming electoral process, electing leaders who are "unequivocally dedicated to serving the people's interests."

Christians, who believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, should steadfastly cling to hope, unwavering even in the face of life's most formidable challenges, he said.

"The resurrection of Jesus gives us hope that such "deaths" are not conclusive endpoints but, rather, a new beginning infused with divine strength."

He wished the transformative power and hope that the Resurrection offers "envelop all those grappling with adversity, particularly our brethren in the North."



Archbishop Peter Chung Soon-taick celebrates Holy Mass at Myeongdong Cathedral in South Korean capital Seoul in this undated image. (UCA News Photo/Archdiocese of Seoul)

"Belief in the resurrection of Jesus is not like opium that helps us escape from this troubled world, as illustrated by Karl Marx but rather, entails a profound acknowledgment that our lives in this temporal realm

are intertwined to the eternal," said the archbishop.

Humans are called to realise their "inherent responsibility" in cultivating this world into a harmonious place where "God saw that it was

good," he said.

The spring season unfolds, ushering in renewal across all of creation. As the blossoms and grasses adorn the mountains and fields, they proclaim the emergence of life within the earth and the natural world, he added.

Koreans enjoy a longer life span now and it should convert to a "commitment to embracing life in its entirety, even amidst the trials of adversity, failure, illness, separation, and the erosion of love," Chung noted.

The feast of Easter in the Spring "serves as a profound testament that our mortal existence transcends the temporal confines of this world but is connected to eternal life. Its significance transcends the extension of our physical and anticipated lifespan, but in connecting our lives to eternal life!" he said. — *ucanews.com*

## Pauline nuns spread Lenten message through Mary's eyes

BANDRA, Mumbai: The Daughters of St Paul concluded their 36-day programme of spreading the message of Lent through Mother Mary's perspective on March 22.

"During Lent we wanted to communicate the love of Jesus. Nothing else can demonstrate God's love more powerfully than the cross where Jesus revealed the love of God. So, we decided to enact the Way of the Cross as the best way to convey this message," said Sr Matilda Rose, who initiated the programme.

The nuns, based in Mumbai's Bandra, the congregation's Indian headquarters, formed a team and Sr Anna Kipunamai prepared the text of the *With Mary on the Way of the Cross*.

Starting at St John the Baptist Church in Mumbai's Marol, on February 16, the first Friday of Lent, the congregation staged the Way of the Cross in 12 parishes in Bombay archdiocese and the dioceses of Vasai and Nasik. It ended on the 40th day of the Lent, at Gonsalo Garcia parish in the diocese of Vasai. More than 200 people watched the programme in each parish.

Gonsalo Garcia parish priest Fr Peter Almeida said with joy, "I saw tears in the eyes of our people. Women were wiping their tears with their handkerchiefs. I controlled my tears. What was touching was the expressions on the faces of Jesus and Mary."

He found the scene where Jesus is taken down from the Cross breathtaking. "We all were waiting anxiously. The way they carried the body of Jesus was quite impressive," the priest said and commended the team for completing the scene in the allotted half an hour, keeping the sanctity of the place.

Sr Matilda D'Souza, the



The Way of the Cross play. (Matters India photo)

congregation's Indian provincial, said a 17-member team comprising sisters, novices and aspirants enacted the Way of the Cross. A young couple from St Theresa's parish, Bandra, also joined them.

"With melodious singing and acting apt for the Way of the Cross, the team made the parishioners pray with deep faith, recalling their own way of the cross in life," the provincial claimed. According to her, Lent is the best time to motivate people to repent of their sins and receive Jesus' unconditional love in their life.

The nuns travelled to the parishes mostly in two vehicles, keeping the novices on their lap. They also had to carry the costumes and a big cross.

Driving to parishes in Nasik and Vasai dioceses took long hours. They hired a larger vehicle to go to Nasik as one group.

"We had to reach a place one hour early to dress up. Though tired and sick, we felt refreshed after the programme, especially when we noticed people's response," said Sr Sushma Kullu, the novice director.

Sr Naomi Ngade, a provincial counsellor who was part of the team, said they practised the programme a month ahead. "It took a lot of time. We were so tired that we could not

function well next day."

The nuns had staged the programme in 2020, but had to call it off after three parishes because of the COVID pandemic.

Mark Anthony Hopkins, who acted as Jesus, said he had "an unbelievable experience." The nuns treated "me and my wife like one of them. We felt at home."

The only layman in the team said he thought the programme was only for a parish when he asked to play Jesus. "It was a shock to me when I realised we would do it in 12 parishes," he said.

Hopkins said he was happy to be a part of the team that touched many hearts.

Sr Kipunamai said she felt privileged and challenged to play Mother Mary, the Mother of God, who personified strength and grace in the face of adversity. She was also human, deeply familiar with pain and sorrow.

"I chose to get into the latter aspect of her character to connect with and empathise with the countless mothers of today. The role was profoundly emotional, as it reminded one of the plight of today's mothers who endure similar situations."

— **By Lissy Maruthanakuzhy, Matters India**

## Garo Catholic receives Bangladesh's highest award

DHAKA: The Swadhinata Purashkar 2024 (Independence Award), Bangladesh's highest national civilian honour, was bestowed upon several individuals during a ceremony held on March 25 at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium in Dhaka.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina presented the award to Aronno Chiran (pic), a 43-year-old Catholic, alongside nine other recipients, in recognition of their outstanding contributions to society. Chiran, a native of Bhalukapara Parish of St Teresa's Church in Mymensingh, has distinguished himself as a social activist, organiser, writer, and youth leader.

Cabinet secretary Mahbub Hossain highlighted Chiran's remarkable achievements in social services, including his efforts in supporting vulnerable hospital patients, combating child marriage, and advocating for the development of marginalised communities. Hossain also praised Chiran's endeavours in preserving endangered tribal cultures, such as organising the Wangala festival for the Garo tribe and cultural programmes for the Hajong community, as well as establishing tribal museums.

Chiran's commitment to social causes dates back to his student days, where he actively engaged in ecclesial activities and served as president of the Bangladesh Catholic Students Movement in the diocese of Mymensingh. Since 2011, he has been instrumental in coordinating various intervention activities for

the NGO Sara (Social Association for Rural Advancement) and holding leadership positions in several welfare associations.

Reflecting on his work, Chiran stated, "I have assisted numerous individuals in accessing healthcare, distributed educational materials, and facilitated scholarships for deserving students, often relying on donations from philanthropists." His dedication to serving the underprivileged was lauded by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who emphasised the importance of recognising unsung heroes who contribute selflessly to society's well-being.

In her address, the prime minister encouraged others to acknowledge and honour individuals working tirelessly in communities, noting that true fulfilment lies in altruistic acts that benefit others. Chiran humbly expressed his commitment to the welfare of society, while Sheikh Hasina congratulated all awardees, expressing hope that the Swadhinata Purashkar would inspire others to strive for societal and national betterment.

The award ceremony also brought joy to the Garo Christian community in the diocese of Mymensingh, a minority group in Bangladesh. Fr Anjon Julian Jambil commended Chiran's exemplary service, underscoring the community's pride in his achievements and dedication to serving those in need.

Each awardee received a gold medal, a certificate and an honorarium of Tk 300,000 (RM 12,803.62). — **By Sumon Corraya, AsiaNews**



# 'We are not alone, abandoned or afraid'

JERUSALEM: When Christians gathered in Jerusalem to remember Jesus' entry into the city, it was one of a few joyful moments in the Holy Land, "crushed by so much hatred" in the months following the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel.

"Despite the war and everything going on around us this year, we have once again chosen to celebrate Jesus' triumphal entry into the Holy City," said Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, as the traditional Palm Sunday procession moved through the streets of the city.

"We have joined our voices with those who sang in Jerusalem two thousand years ago: 'Hosanna Filio David,' Hosanna to the Son of David," he said. Especially now, it is "even more important and necessary to shout strongly that Jesus is our Messiah, He is our Lord," the patriarch said March 24.

Over the past months, Cardinal Pizzaballa said, many felt "lost or alone and without reference points," and "crushed by so much hatred."

"This war, which is so terrible and seems never-ending, sometimes leads us to fear for the future of our families," he added.

Walking through the unusually empty streets of Jerusalem given the Holy Week and Easter time, the patriarch emphasised that the celebration this time, when many of



Altar servers process during Palm Sunday Mass at Holy Family Church in Gaza City March 25, 2024. Over 500 Christians shelter in the parish amid the ongoing Hamas-Israel war. (OSV News photo/courtesy Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem)

the dioceses "could not join us," makes it all the more important to "shout with strength and faith that we have a point of reference, Jesus Christ."

"We are not alone, we are not abandoned and, above all, we are not afraid!" the Church leader emphasised in his message for Palm Sunday.

"Following Jesus also means accepting the

way of the cross," something Christians in the Holy Land "unfortunately know well," he continued, because their "ordinary life is often a 'Via Crucis,' a painful road, marked by many obstacles, misunderstandings, rejections and hostilities of all kinds."

"Yet this does not discourage us," the patriarch said.

Cardinal Pizzaballa said the thoughts of

Christians present during the Palm Sunday celebration were with "those who cannot be here with us today, and especially with our brothers and sisters in Gaza," to whom he had a message of closeness: "You are not alone," assuring them of prayer.

"The whole Church in Jerusalem is united with you, embraces you and appreciates your testimony of strength and courage," the patriarch emphasised.

"We know well how difficult it is, after almost six months, to stand amidst this terrible dark night that never seems to end, to stand united and steadfast, amidst the hunger and violence that surrounds you," Cardinal Pizzaballa said, adding, "For you, too, as for all, will come the dawn of the third day, the news of the Resurrection."

The patriarch also urged pilgrims to return to the Holy Land: "We are waiting for you. Do not be afraid, return to Jerusalem and to the Holy Land! Your presence is always a presence of peace, and we sincerely need peace today, may you come and bring us your peace."

As the Church entered "the week of the Passion," Cardinal Pizzaballa asked that the days "give us strength," and reminded all that this time of the year shows everyone the Lord "does not leave us alone." — **By Paulina Guzik, OSV**

## Cuban archbishop pleads to Virgin Mary for electricity, food, freedom

CUBA: The Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba, Dionisio Guillermo García, offered a lengthy prayer before the nation's patroness, the Virgin of Charity of Cobre, on Palm Sunday, imploring the Virgin for the needs of the people, hoping that they find freedom and the light of faith amid adversity.

"Our people have said and repeat what we all know: electricity and food. Is that unattainable? Is that asking too much? No, no, no! Our people also ask for freedom, so that everyone can reach their goals in life and ensure that their children benefit the most."

In an atmosphere of silence, the archbishop offered his prayer in the emblematic National Shrine of Our Lady of Charity of Cobre Basilica.

This took place a week after crowds in several cities in Cuba took to the streets to demand a change in the system, due to the continuous power outages and food shortages

on the island, where people have been living under a dictatorship for more than 60 years.

Continuing his prayer, García invoked the intercessory role of the Virgin Mary on behalf of the Cuban people's hopes and aspirations: "I beseech you to heed the pleas of those who come before you in pilgrimage... We desire to live free from the burdens that weigh us down, to lead lives of normalcy where each person can pursue their dreams and aspirations."

"We long to invest our time in pursuits of knowledge and in acts of service, yet, too often, we are consumed by the relentless struggle for life's necessities, which remain elusive. Nights stretch endlessly without power. Grant us, O Lord, the strength from within," he continued.

Addressing the imperative of quelling street violence and fostering mutual respect among citizens, García implored: "Mother,



Archbishop Dionisio Guillermo García of Santiago de Cuba prays before an image of Mary in the sanctuary of the National Shrine Basilica of Our Lady of Charity on March 24, 2024. (CNA photo/Archbishopric of Santiago de Cuba)

instil in us unity and mutual respect... As we embark on Holy Week, let us walk alongside the sacrifice of Jesus."

"Grant us the hope of those who awaited the Messiah. May we believe that one day, the dawn will break upon our nation, bringing inner illumination. Help us grasp that straying from God's will, which is goodness, is to falter in life," he prayed.

"Father, illuminate the path toward resolution of our challenges. May we all find the beacon of faith, guiding us to comprehend the intricacies of existence," he added.

Concluding his entreaties, the archbishop offered a Hail Mary for peace and solidarity: "Let us beseech for the Cuban people and their unwavering faith... Let us pray." — **CNA**

## Assisted suicide – a moral and spiritual challenge

LEICESTER, United Kingdom: Archbishop John Wilson of Southwark (pic) in England says society is called to care for the suffering, "not to bring about their death."



The archbishop issued a pastoral message on assisted suicide as the British Parliament is facing pressure to legislate on the procedure.

In England and Wales, the 1961 Suicide Act prohibits aiding or encouraging suicide, while similar laws in Scotland and Northern Ireland block medically assisted dying requests. Despite numerous campaigns to legalise euthanasia or assisted suicide across the UK, resistance remains strong.

The archbishop of Southwark emphasises the Catholic Church's stance that every life holds value, regardless of physical or mental condition, firmly opposing euthanasia and assisted suicide. He advocates for supporting individuals, families, and healthcare workers to uphold life's intrinsic value.

Assisted suicide and euthanasia, though related, differ fundamentally; the former involves helping someone end their life, typically by providing lethal substances, and the latter entails actions or omissions intended to cause death to alleviate suffering. The archbishop argues both presuppose life as unworthy when suffering, raising ethical concerns about societal and familial pressures, the potential duty to die, and the alteration of healthcare roles from caregivers to life enders.

Highlighting the dangers of coercion and the shifting dynamics in healthcare should assisted suicide be legalised, the prelate points to the risk of vulnerable groups feeling compelled to end their lives, thereby straining patient-caregiver relationships.

Archbishop Wilson counters the push for assisted suicide with a call for enhanced palliative care, highlighting the necessity of better funding, training, and access to palliative services to address end-of-life suffering without resorting to assisted dying.

He also voices concerns over broader societal issues, including proposed amendments to allow abortion up to birth, viewing them as part of a wider array of threats to human dignity, from violence and poverty to environmental crises. These challenges, he notes,

extend beyond the physical to encompass moral and spiritual dimensions, impacting our collective understanding of human life's value and dignity.

"We are witnessing an increasing number of threats to the dignity of the human person. These range from violence and war to poverty and disease. Our global climate is in crisis. Some of these threats may seem distant to us. They happen to other people in other countries; but the human family is one," the archbishop said.

"These threats are not only physical. They are also moral and spiritual. They may involve individuals, but their impact is much more extensive and challenges our very understanding of the value and dignity of human life," he added. — **By Charles Collins, Crux**

# Many teens feel forced into Confirmation

## We can still make Jesus real in their lives

The Sacrament of Confirmation is the pathway to an adult faith life for young people. As their catechists, it is our job to help today's confirmands meet and love Jesus and live His Gospel. But our job today poses unique challenges. The young people we teach breathe an air saturated by secular social media. Their school lives were transformed for several years by COVID-19. They inhabit an online world for formal and informal learning, for social relationships, for entertainment. Studies show they have lost trust in once-sacred institutions, including our Church and our democracy.

The world of trust and truth has changed. The standing of the institutional Church, bishops and priests has been damaged by the scandal of sexual abuse by members of the clergy. Trust in the Boy Scouts of America, sports coaches and even doctors, has also been harmed by extensive sexual abuse of young people. On top of such scandals, the political climate in the United States has destabilized the presidency, Congress and even the courts. Fundamentally, "truth" can take on a whole new meaning for today's confirmands. Each day they confront a world of "alternative facts."

So why do today's youth show up for Confirmation class at all? Last year, for the first time after six years of teaching Confirmation class, we asked our students on day one: What brought them to seek confirmation? We were not entirely surprised when all the students admitted they were present only because someone at home had forced them to attend and be confirmed in May. Not one of them was personally committed to receiving the sacrament, the Holy Spirit, or to embracing their adult Catholic life—at least not yet. The most frequent answer to my question: "Abuela (or Nonna, or my grandmother) said I had to be confirmed!" Yet, each year now, we see the astonishing power of the Holy Spirit transforming today's young people as

they not only grow in their understanding of the Sacrament of Confirmation but embrace it.

We teach at St Paul the Apostle Church, a Paulist parish in New York City, where our Confirmation classes each year include 12 to 16 young teens aged 12 to 14. They represent in many ways the racial, ethnic and language diversity of Manhattan. Our teaching team is diverse as well. But our interns are the most powerful feature of our team. These young people were members of our class in prior years and have been confirmed. They now volunteer to co-teach with us. They dedicate time each week to help us prepare and teach an hour-long class on Sunday. Their witness, their stories, animate what it means to be young and Catholic in today's society.

### Our Approach

Our team's experience over the years suggests that catechists should aim to bring the unique wisdom and beauty of God's love and our Catholic faith to our new confirmands rather than simply bringing the students to church. We use two major approaches to pursue this central goal. First, we have found that these teens need to know themselves better. We try to introduce them to their own powers. Second, our students also need vivid ways to meet the loving, transforming Jesus in their daily lives, online, in games, on sports fields, in classrooms and at home.

As they come to understand their personal gifts from God and learn how Jesus can provide them clear direction for their daily lives, they are captivated by this Jesus. In class, they learn how to make the Beatitudes matter to real people. They learn to be the peacemak-

Catechists should aim to bring the unique wisdom and beauty of God's love and our Catholic faith to our new confirmands rather than simply bringing the students to church



(America photo/Skynesher)

ers, be the merciful, be the righteous who seek justice for others.

We tell them God needs them to be Jesus for others by living as Jesus did and as Jesus calls us to live for others. These actions make the presence of Jesus at Mass and in the Eucharist more real for them. They begin to see the importance of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that they will receive in Confirmation. They see how useful courage, wisdom, understanding and the other gifts will be as they pursue the work God will give them.

Few young people we encounter seem to have thought much about their own priceless abilities. We stress how unique each of them is, made, like every other person, in God's very image. We stress how much God loves them as they are, wants them to be happy and wants to help them become the best versions of themselves.

We use language they know to explain how God will communicate with them. We sometimes talk about prayer in terms of a spiritual smartphone. Prayer allows them to communicate with God from the moment they wake in the morning, stand up and thank God for a

new day to help others. It can take their smallest thoughts to God, any worries or needs they have. They have the ability to hear and feel God's responses all day long. They just need to listen, to stay tuned in to the voice of God with them.

We explore with them the amazing gifts God has given to each of them: their conscience, their self-awareness, their own free will. We review how these remarkable capabilities, working together, create their agency. Agency is their ability, their power, to know and act: to see right from wrong, to make decisions, especially decisions to be Jesus for others. Through their agency they can admit errors, ask for forgiveness, forgive others, experience God's forgiveness and learn from their mistakes. For many of them, this is an eye-opener.

Students learn that their abilities provide their spiritual superpowers against the negative forces around them. These superpowers enable them to choose to be positive forces, regardless of what is going on around them. That is how Jesus was, and still is. They learn that they are never alone, and always are loved and needed by God. Class time spent exploring each of these gifts seems to give our students a clearer personal self-understanding, even self-appreciation. One young man told me last January, "I never knew God needed my help. I feel different about myself now."

## A daily encounter of the Gospel

For the past seven years, the other major focus of our team has been wrestling with how to make the Gospel a vital story present daily in each encounter all day, wherever they are. Each week, catechists and interns review the spiritual concept to be presented in the upcoming class. We then share moments from our own real lives in which the concept's ideals have been challenged by cultural values or by the influence of friends, creating conflicts for us in what we chose or how we proceeded.

When interns share their stories with Confirmation students during class, they share the problems, successes, and even failures, they have faced living their faith in their own daily lives. This has a huge impact on the younger Confirmation students. Over months of classes, confirmands become braver about recalling their own stories once they have heard interns' stories about what they did: When they felt afraid to stop a bully, but knew Jesus would have, for example. Jesus' Beatitudes are animated in students' real lives.

We believe scenario-building (and sharing) reinforces each student's self-knowledge, their comfort with self-examination and their ability to see Jesus, and then *be* Jesus for others each day. Using this approach, everyone shares successes as well as failures. The idea is for students to become more comfortable

with self-examination and learn how people just like themselves deal with modern life as real Christians. They begin to consider and critically observe instances in their own lives when some contemporary cultural values contrast with the values and expectations of the Gospel. In the process, Jesus' decisions and stories become real and absorbable as a part of everyday life, too.

### Witnessing the work of the Holy Spirit

Gradually, over the months of class, we watch the Holy Spirit transforming our students' commitment to Jesus, to their Catholic faith and to a healthier sense of themselves in modern, secular society. We know this because we almost never have an absence from class. Every year, we have new confirmands who want to become interns. Some interns have served for several years. Perhaps more important, each year parents offer reports: "Thomas has changed since Confirmation class started." "Teresa treats us differently at home now. Great thanks."

Anytime our teaching team thinks we are leading our Confirmation students, God shows us He is out ahead of us moving along with the younger people. A few years ago,

a gifted musician named Anthony chose St Cecilia as his patron saint. The bishop was a bit surprised, but Anthony said how much he would rely on St Cecilia for guidance and inspiration with his music. This year, a shy young woman asked if she could choose St Jude as her patron saint. She said of all the saints she had read about, his commitment to asking God for apparently impossible graces attracted her spirit. She said she wanted his inspiration to ask God for even impossible gifts for other people. We told her St Jude was a fine choice. One young woman's love of animals and concern for climate change brought her to choose St Francis of Assisi. The spiritual gifts of the saint, not the saint's gender, had directed these choices.

Finally, several years ago, as we reviewed our students' letters to the bishop explaining why they were requesting to be confirmed, we saw that the letters talked about the real-life Jesus they had met in class and brought to their everyday lives. When we explained that the bishop would ask them questions about their faith during their Confirmation Mass, they proposed suggesting some important questions of their own for the bishop to consider asking them. We asked them what they had in mind. They scrambled and produced their first question together: "Can you outline

some of the ways contemporary society leads young Catholics away from what Jesus teaches?" We were stunned. To his credit, after a bit of urging, Bishop John O'Hara agreed to pose the question and the students were ready with some powerful responses. Their families at the Confirmation Mass were duly impressed, as were we all. The Holy Spirit carried the day!

Each year, we watch the Holy Spirit work through these students. We adults need to actively enter into their world too, so that the Jesus we know becomes the Jesus they know, too, as they form a unique relationship with Him in our shared Catholic Church. As it was so beautifully and directly expressed by one of our students in her letter to the bishop, this younger generation of confirmands is "looking forward to the sacrament of Confirmation and to being an even more...involved member of my parish...[to] think more deeply about my new saint's name and what it means to be Catholic in America in the 21st century. I look forward to what's next for me as a believer."

Yes, indeed, our youth are seeking to bring their faith into the 21st century, and as their teachers, we have a duty to help build that bridge. — **By Stephanie Berrios & Claire Gaudiani, America**

# For the role of women

## Pope's prayer intention for April

**“I like to think that if women could enjoy full equality of opportunity, they could contribute substantially to the necessary change towards a world of peace, inclusion, solidarity and integral sustainability,”** said Pope Francis in the preface of a book entitled *More Women's Leadership for a Better World: Caring as the Engine for Our Common Home*. He said that women need to get equal remuneration with men for equal roles and described ongoing pay gaps as **“a serious injustice”**. He condemned the “plague” of violence against women, recalling a speech he delivered in 2021 when he called it **“an open wound resulting from a patriarchal and macho culture of oppression”**.

Amidst the backdrop of pervasive discrimination and marginalisation faced by women worldwide, Pope Francis's prayer intention: **FOR THE ROLE OF WOMEN**

**We pray that the dignity and immense value of women be recognised in every culture, and for the end of discrimination that they experience in different parts of the world,** takes on a heart-rending significance.

Discrimination against women has been a persistent issue since the dawn of civilisation, manifesting in various forms across all corners of the globe. For example, in the US, women earn 82 cents for every dollar men earn, while India ranks 140th out of 156 countries in gender equality. In Japan, women earn 73 per cent of men's wages and hold only 10 per cent of managerial positions. South Africa faces gender-based violence and economic disparities, with one in five women experiencing physical violence and lower rates of employment and earnings compared to men. Saudi Arabia's legal system perpetuates gender inequality through discriminatory laws, including unequal treatment in marriage, divorce, and legal proceedings. These examples emphasise the urgent need for global action to promote gender equality.

In Malaysia, the plight of refugee wom-



### PRAYER PRISM

Fr Fabian Dicom

en, plantation workers and migrant domestic workers, underlines the urgent need to address systemic inequalities. These women endure exploitation, abuse, and marginalisation, highlighting the stark reality of gender-based discrimination in Malaysian society.

Glorene Das, Executive Director of Tenaganita, a Malaysian human rights organisation, in her statement *Recognising Shared Struggles of Refugee and Plantation Women in Malaysia for Women's Day 2024*, sheds light on the experiences of women in Malaysia, particularly those from refugee and plantation communities.

According to Glorene, refugee women in Malaysia face significant challenges due to displacement from their homelands. They often encounter barriers to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, exacerbated by Malaysia's non-signatory status to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. Discrimination and marginalisation further compound their struggles, making it imperative for their dignity and value to be recognised and respected.

Similarly, plantation women in Malaysia work tirelessly in challenging conditions, contributing significantly to the nation's economy. However, their contributions often go unnoticed, and they face issues such as long hours and minimal job security. Despite their vital role in sustaining the plantation industry, they experience discrimination and lack of acknowledgment for their efforts.

According to an article titled *Migrant Domestic Workers in Malaysia*, Malaysia hosts an estimated 300,000 to 400,000 individuals, as reported by the International

Labour Organisation (ILO). These migrant workers fulfil an essential role in sustaining families' livelihoods and contributing significantly to the economy. Despite their significant contributions, they face extensive exploitation, abuse, and violence, with many cases going unreported due to their marginalised status. These workers are excluded from key labour protections, rendering them vulnerable to various forms of mistreatment.

Despite occasional attempts to address these issues, such as proposals to improve working conditions and legal recognition, enforcement remains inadequate. The prevailing impunity enjoyed by abusive employers perpetuates a cycle of exploitation and reinforces the perception of domestic workers as disposable commodities rather than valued members of society.

In the context of Catholic Social Teaching, the dignity of women refers to the recognition and affirmation of the inherent worth, equality, and God-given rights of women as individuals and as members of society. This concept is grounded in the belief that women, like all human beings, are created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27) and are therefore endowed with intrinsic dignity that must be respected and upheld.

The Catholic Social Teaching emphasises the equal dignity of men and women (CCC 2334) and rejects any form of discrimination, oppression, or violence based on gender. It recognises the unique contributions and gifts that women bring to families, communities, and society as a whole, and emphasises the importance of ensuring that women have the opportunity to participate fully and equally in all aspects of social, political, economic, and religious life. (*The Joy of the Gospel* 103-104, 212, 214; see also *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, Apostolic Letter on the Dignity and Vocation of Women*)

Despite the persistent challenges and injustices faced by women, there is a growing sense of hope and progress towards

recognising and upholding their rights. This hope is evidenced by the increasing awareness and advocacy for women's dignity and welfare, both domestically and on the international stage. In Malaysia alone, nearly 50 women NGOs are actively working to support and empower women, reflecting a collective commitment to equality and justice. As more voices join in solidarity and action, the momentum for positive change continues to build, offering a beacon of hope for a future where women's rights are fully respected and upheld.

Anna Amandus, a dedicated pastoral minister and fervent advocate for Mother Earth, shared encouraging insights gleaned from her diverse experiences in pastoral ministry across various facets of Church life in Sabah. She observes with admiration how women exhibit incredible resilience and strength, effortlessly assuming leadership roles in various spheres despite societal limitations. Initiatives like *Puncak Kepimpinan Wanita* advocate for greater female representation, amplifying women's voices in decision-making processes. Their impactful efforts, from championing rights to environmental conservation, highlight the life-changing power of empowered women. Despite ongoing discrimination, the vision of women complementing men in creating a harmonious world endures, fuelled by their unwavering determination and passion for meaningful action.

In conclusion, the call to prayer serves as a catalyst for meaningful action. The Catholic Church must lead by example, advocating for women's rights and actively partnering with others to effect positive change. This can only begin to happen by shifting our paradigm to view marginalised individuals as equals, recognising the dignity and immense value of women in every culture, and working together to create a world where all are treated with the respect and dignity which is inherently theirs.

● **Fr Fabian Dicom** is the National Office Director for Caritas Malaysia.

## SOCIAL JUSTICE



### Making a Difference

Tony Magliano

## From crucifixion to resurrection

**C**hrist is risen! Truly, He is risen! Jesus Christ has conquered sin and death. We know that God has the final word. And that word is love. For “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:8).

The kingdom of God which Jesus ushered into the world, is at hand. But, and this is an all important critical “but,” we must repent, and believe in the Gospel. Walking in the footsteps of Jesus, we must, to the best of our ability, think, feel, speak and act as He did. And we need to do it now. For this day, this moment, is the time of fulfilment (Mark 1: 15).

But during this in-between-time of the presence of the kingdom of God being here, but not yet here in its completion – what theologians refer to as “here but not yet” – we have the privilege and responsibility to help advance the love, justice and peace of the kingdom of God ever closer to that day

when God will be all in all.

So, while we should joyfully live the “here” of the 50-day-long Easter celebration of Jesus' resurrection, we mustn't forget the “not yet” of His crucifixion still being hellishly experienced by countless suffering brothers and sisters.

Abortion, hunger, starvation, poverty, homelessness, euthanasia, human trafficking, sweatshops, torture, illiteracy, environmental degradation and climate change, untreated illness, loneliness, war, war preparation, and all other forms of violence continue to nail our Lord to the cross (see: <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/>).

It is part of the paradox of the loving mystery of Christ Jesus who, while gloriously resurrected, remains yet united with us in our sufferings, our crosses – especially with those who suffer the worst forms of man's inhumanity to man.

During Lent I was reading a deeply inspiring book *The Mystery of the Cross*, by the late Cardinal Basil Hume, OSB, former archbishop of Westminster, England. He wrote about a time during a visit to Ethiopia when a small boy in search of food came up to him. He “took hold of my hand and rubbed it against his cheek, while with the other hand he put a finger into his mouth indicating his hunger. He made these two gestures several times. I had nothing to give and could only promise through an interpreter that I would send food to him when I got home.

“As I moved away the child stood staring at me, almost reproachfully, I thought, for I had not given him food, and what love I could give I now gave no more. The look in that child's eyes has haunted me ever since. But I had learned, in a new way altogether, how there are two things we humans need above all: food and love. Without both of

these we cannot live.”

What an invaluable insight from this holy man of God. As beings comprised of flesh and spirit, we need nourishment for both – food for the body and love for the soul.

During this wonderful Easter season, let us deeply pray and tirelessly work to end the horrible sufferings of our dear brothers and sisters near and far. Let us pull out the nails that bind them to their crosses. Let us soothe their wounds, feed their hunger and embrace them with God-like love.

Then, with Gospel integrity, we will be able to joyfully proclaim with St Augustine of Hippo, “We are an Easter people and ‘Alleluia’ is our song!”

● **Tony Magliano** is an internationally syndicated Catholic social justice and peace columnist. He can be reached at [tmag6@comcast.net](mailto:tmag6@comcast.net).

# Parishioners purchase historic church from Pennsylvania diocese

A group of parishioners in the Diocese of Allentown, Pennsylvania, are celebrating after acquiring a historic church from the diocese and preserving it as a chapel and place of worship.

The Society of St Joseph of Bethlehem (SSJB) in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, announced recently that the society had purchased St Joseph's Church, which opened more than a century ago, from the Allentown Diocese.

"The desire to preserve the church by former parishioners has been steadfast since the church was closed in 2008," the society's board said in a letter announcing the purchase. "It has taken time and energy over the years to enter into an agreement with the Diocese of Allentown."

On its Facebook page, the SSJB says its mission is "to restore and preserve the Church of St Joseph as a sacred place of worship and a testament to the history and cultural heritage" of the area.

Lina Tavarez, a spokeswoman for the diocese, said the parish "was closed in 2008 because of a merger of several local parishes".

"It hosted only one regular Mass per year — on the feast day of St Joseph — and was available for funerals for former parishioners," she said.

Paula Kydonieffs, the president of the board of directors of SSJB, said that the group was established "solely for the purpose of buying this church, taking care of it, and sponsoring events." The church, historically attended by the local Slovenian/Windish community, had its cornerstone laid in 1914 and fully opened in 1917.



The exterior of St Joseph's in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. (CNA photo/Paula Kydonieffs)

Kydonieffs explained that the decision to purchase the property originated several years ago, during a period when the diocese was in the process of merging local parishes.

"In 2008 they were consolidating, and this was one of five churches that was being closed as a parish," she said. "St Joseph's parishioners fought that and appealed it and ended up taking it to the Vatican."

The Vatican eventually ordered that the parish remain open for use, Kydonieffs said. In 2011 then-Bishop John Barres "gave the parish the ability to have an annual Mass and have funerals of former parishioners."

The church was used "only occasionally" in this capacity, Tavarez said. In 2023 the

diocese moved again to sell the church.

"We went back to the diocese," Kydonieffs said. "It's a minor miracle. It was last-minute."

"They had already announced they were going to sell it. They could have just told us no," she said. "But, credit to them, they said: 'If you can come up with \$175,000 (RM827,137.50) quickly, you can purchase it.'"

Kydonieffs said "several minor miracles, and maybe major miracles" followed, with a benefactor — the James Stocklas Family Trust — quickly coming forward to donate "the whole \$175,000 (RM827,137.50)."

"Financially we're independent, and we're totally responsible for the care and

upkeep and maintenance of the church," Kydonieffs said.

"According to canon law, it's a chapel," she said. "It's still a Catholic church, it's still affiliated with the diocese in that way. The diocese has the jurisdiction over what public worship services we can do there."

"They've told us that we must have two Masses a year, one on the feast day of St Joseph [March 19] and one on Oct 28, the anniversary of the consecration of the church," she added.

Presently the church is not suited for occupancy, Kydonieffs said, with inspectors finding several code deficiencies in need of updating. Regulators did work with the community to develop a stopgap mitigation plan that allowed the church to celebrate the feast of St Joseph on March 19.

The church "does need a lot of work," she admitted, but she said the SSJB is prepared to see the building restored and utilized for regular community and religious events "at least monthly."

"We've got a lot of ideas," she said. "We really want to see this church being used again."

In a letter issued upon the church's reopening, meanwhile, the SSJB wrote that "as heartbreaking as it was a year ago, to hear that our cherished St Joseph's Church was to be permanently closed and sold on the open market — hearts filled with joy and thanksgiving!"

"To the Church of St Joseph community," the letter said, "welcome home!" — **By Daniel Payne, CNA**

## Remote Siberian town kept faith for 62 years without a priest

Vershina, populated by descendants of Polish migrants, spent six decades without a priest under Communist rule, but the people kept the faith alive.

The village of Vershina is located in Siberia and is inhabited almost exclusively by people of Polish descent. It lies in a small valley surrounded by mountains, and the soil is fertile.

There's actually only one road leading to Vershina, and a very bumpy one at that. Winters are very cold — temperatures as low as -48°F occur. In the entire village, there's only one place with cell phone coverage: the cemetery. There is no internet access. The conditions are quite extreme, but you can get used to them.

### All holidays except ... Easter

Vershina was founded in 1910 by Polish settlers who emigrated there. The village, located about 87 miles from Irkutsk, is a phenomenon: In remote Siberia, its residents have preserved the language of their ancestors for generations.

There's also a Polish parish in Vershina. St Stanislaus Church was built by Polish immigrants as early as 1915. It functioned until 1928 or 1929, when the Communist authorities decided to demolish it. However, this intention was abandoned as a result of protests by residents. Nevertheless, eventually the Bolsheviks closed the church and devastated its interior.

The faith survived, cultivated secretly

within families. No Eucharist was celebrated there for 62 years. During that time, one of the residents, Magdalena Mycka, baptised the town's children, and the residents prayed on their own, thus saving the Polish language and native piety.

They also tried to keep Catholic holidays, with the exception of ... Easter. "They had no contact with Poland, so they didn't have calendars and they didn't know when Resurrection Sunday fell," says Fr Karol Lipinski, OMI, the current pastor of the Polish parish in Vershina.

### Revival of the liturgy

The parish was reborn after the fall of Communism in Russia. The first priest to revisit the village was the then pastor of Poles in the USSR, Fr Tadeusz Pikus (later bishop). He celebrated Mass in the Vershina school building in 1990. He also negotiated with the local authorities to give the church building back to the faithful and restore its sacred character, instead of the government proposal of creating a Polish-Buryat museum at the site.

"A lot of people came to that first Mass. Many adults saw a priest for the first time in their lives. Those who were born after the church closed may have been in their 60s and had never been to Mass," Fr Lipinski explains.

Two years later, on December 19, 1992, the first Mass was celebrated in the restored church. It was presided over by the current



(Aleteia/KamperManiak | YouTube)

Ordinary of the Transfiguration Diocese of Novosibirsk, Bishop Joseph Werth.

This is how the liturgy was reborn in Vershina. The reality of the resurrection and the presence of Christ in bread and wine is there again after many years of hiatus. Although the town's residents don't always appreciate this gift, the daily Mass certainly contributes to the sanctification of the local church.

### "Can I manage alone?"

Fr Karol Lipinski OMI went to Vershina when he retired; he was already in his 70s.

"There was only one thing I was afraid of when I came here: whether I would manage alone. Since the novitiate, I had never been in a community of fewer than 12 people. When I was the treasurer in the seminary, there were 180 of us, and at Holy Cross novitiate there were more than 40. And now

I'm alone, like a hermit. But the Lord God always gives us as much strength as we need," says the missionary. "The nearest priest is almost 100 miles away," he points out.

At present, there are more than 500 people living in Vershina. The youngest of them are the sixth generation of descendants of Polish emigrants.

"During Christmas, I visited 111 families. Nine families were not at home. So, there are 120 families in the village. I went with an altar server who is 70 years old. Mass attendance is low. The residents of Vershina are not taught to go to church, although they emphasise their devotion to God," says Fr Lipinski.

Vershina is located in the world's largest diocese, 32 times the size of Poland. In the Irkutsk decanate to which it belongs, parishes are up to 1,200 miles apart. — **Aleteia**



## ON THE FENCE

Jacelyn Johnson

So, a couple of years ago, me, the 'hanging-in-there-Catholic,' met this amazing 'I'm-Methodist-but-haven't-gone-to-church-in-20-years-but-my-parents-are-pastors' kind of man — and we hit it off pretty well, to the point that we got married a year later.

The whole religious (rather denomination) beliefs did not strike a nerve with either side of our staunchly religious families — perhaps because of our wildly old age, there was a nonchalant attitude that something was better than nothing. His dad told us, "as long as you believe in Jesus Christ, it is fine," so we left it at that, and we had a beautiful Catholic church wedding service.

Throughout our relationship, the topic of either converting to the other denomination was never a point of contention or conversation. I have never once asked my husband to become Catholic, as I definitely did not want to be asked to consider becoming Methodist.

We were both not wildly religious, but my husband was very well versed in Scripture, as he was brought up with the practice of daily Scripture reading. He is more of a spiritual person, and rather knowledgeable about the beliefs and practices of various world religions, particularly Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism. He was not a fan of worship sessions, or Sunday service, so he just never went to church, but he did bring with him the practice of saying grace before meals.

I, on the other hand, was simply 'culturally Catholic.' I started going to church more often after getting married, mostly because my mom would make plans to meet in church for Mass, or because I had to accompany her to church, or she wanted me to take her for all the feast days in random churches, and we

# Rediscovering Catholicism

would make a trip out of it. My husband had the option to not come along, but he always chose to come with me. Through this, he got acquainted and accustomed to the Catholic Church, and was rather fascinated with it — he enjoyed the choir singing, and was particularly enthralled when the priest sang the Gregorian order of Mass. He was quite sceptical about all the saints, probably still is, but the whole Mass just taking one hour took the cake.

After every Mass, my husband's biggest grump was about not being able to receive Holy Communion. He hated that he was not part of this exclusive 'membership' as he often put it. He even took personal offence with the projector showing 'Only baptised and practising Catholics are allowed to receive Communion.' Apparently, all are welcome to receive Holy Communion at the Methodist church, as there is no consecration. My mom would tell him that he would have to go for this thing called RCIA if he wanted to receive Holy Communion, and I would always brush it off.

Unbeknownst to me, one day, when we had a random dinner with a priest on a Friday night, he just asked the priest — how to become Catholic. And the priest, knowing my husband, just said come join us this weekend, and see how you feel. We went. We were half an hour late for our first class, but we made it, and since then, my husband did not miss a single class.

Through this whole journey, I was still sceptical of what would unfold, because, to me, if at any point he did not feel like it, we would not have to continue. Of course, in my mind, it was him just doing this for me — and I strongly did not want that. But, to my surprise, my husband enjoyed every single class, engaging, questioning and was just excited for each week. And astonishingly, I was enjoying this journey with him, and I probably learnt so much more in these six



Elect being prayed over during their retreat.

months, than I have learnt in 10 years of catechism — I mean, I was even a catechist for many years.

My biggest takeaway from this journey was at our RCIA retreat, where the theme centred around the seven last words of Jesus:

To God: "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do."

To the good thief: "... today, you will be with me in paradise."

To Mary, his mother: "Woman, behold your son," and to John: "Behold your mother,"

To God, His father: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

To all: "I am thirsty,"

To the world: "It is finished,"

To God: "Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit."

Even on the cross, at the hour of death, Jesus' last words to different people, focused on relationships — forgiveness, love, ensuring continuity of familial bonds, and mostly very human in nature. As I sat through the day-long session — I pondered on these words and sharing by the facilitators as well as group sharings with the catechumens, it occurred to me that the Catholic Church's focus and concentration on the importance of family and relationships is what makes a difference to all who chose to come and chose to believe — it is the cornerstone of the Church's teachings. Yes, it took people who

are not yet Catholic to show me what being Catholic is all about.

It was humbling to see and hear of how many are broken inside, and long for a sense of belonging, they thirst for a sense of familial love, ego and pride disguise their sense of humility, and above all, forgiveness — forgiving others, and learning to forgive yourself is an unfamiliar and distant concept to many.

It is a common understanding that Catholics are just not as well versed in their Bibles compared to our Protestant friends, and our formed prayers are pretty structured and repetitive as opposed to free-flowing thoughts. But does this matter? I learnt, rather realised that day, that as a Catholic, the focus is on being Church, being family, being that brother or sister to that next person — and being the embodiment of 'love your neighbour as you love yourself,' — and I am pretty proud to be Catholic.

The RCIA journey is not the end, but the beginning of being practising Catholic, and it is a challenge I take on, at least to be that example to my husband, as he begins his newfound 'membership.'

● **Jacelyn Johnson** enjoys the occasional religious discourse and says it as it is, in an attempt to diffuse stereotypical observations.



## WORD MADE FRESH

Nicholas Lye

At a family workshop I had recently conducted involving parents and their children, I introduced a game called 'Reverse Charades' where, instead of having one person act out a series of words for the rest of the group members to guess, the game required one person to guess a series of words that was to be individually acted out by the rest of the group all at the same time. The intention was initially to promote the idea that different people can offer different actions or perspectives that can help someone come to the same word or truth.

During one such round when it was a young boy's turn to guess, while the rest of the group members were trying to act out the words in various ways, one participant noticed that the boy kept looking at his own father for clues, especially when the many different actions of others seemed to be confusing him rather than helping him. This observation really struck me, for it also got me to think about how often I actually turn to my Heavenly Father for clues to make sense of my life, rather than turning my attention to others whose words and actions may sometimes confuse me or even hurt me.

As we enter the season of Easter, I have been reflecting on what new life God has been bringing to me in this season. Through the game above, I realise how I can be very

## Looking through my Father's eyes

caught up by the actions or lives of others, and end up feeling small or worthless when comparing my own life to theirs. There are also other times when I have allowed the words, actions and even judgements of others put me down or invalidate my worth and value. In a world where our worth and value is often found in the opinions of others, or in meeting standards and benchmarks set by others, or by how others view us or act towards us, we can often get a lot of mixed messages that, at times, can be very hurtful and damaging to our own self-image, self-esteem and self-worth.

"Islands, listen to me, pay attention, remotest peoples. The Lord called me before I was born, from my mother's womb He pronounced my name... He said to me, 'You are my servant in whom I shall be glorified'; while I was thinking, 'I have toiled in vain, I have exhausted myself for nothing'; and all the while my cause was with the Lord, my reward with my God. I was honoured in the eyes of the Lord, my God was my strength." (Isaiah 49:1,3-4)

When I read the above

reading during Lent, it seemed addressed to everyone who felt like they were on a remote island, rejected and marginalised by everyone else, looked down upon or pushed to the fringes of society, just as I sometimes feel. It also invited me to turn to my Father, and see myself the way my Father looks at me, and look at the clues He is offering me that reveals who I truly am in His eyes, and how much value and worth He had actually placed in me. Whenever I feel exhausted by my comparisons to others, whenever I feel like my life amounts to nothing compared to the lives and actions of others, I am invited to look to Him and find my cause and reward in Him, to receive honour and strength from Him alone.

Indeed, in recent years, as I struggle with my own self-worth and self-doubt, God continues to invite me to turn to Him and see myself through His eyes. Slowly, He reveals to me that though my ways are different from the world, though my lifestyle may be out of the ordinary, I am far from ordinary. As He continues to bring me to 'remote places' where my life truly becomes a gift to others who appreciate my uniqueness, I begin to also appreciate my

own worth and value.

What I also discovered, in connection with the game above, was that while the words and actions of some others may confuse or hurt me, there are also others whose words and actions do affirm and honour me. These are the people who also see me through the eyes of the Father, and convey the same truth that God my Father desires for me to receive. It is through a community that can love, accept and appreciate me the way God does that I can also receive and experience the same truth of my worth and value.

This Easter, I pray that we may learn to look to the right people to provide clues to our true worth and identity. I pray that we may also look to God our Father for clues to the truth of who we really are in His eyes, and find encouragement and strength through Him to live out our unique and extraordinary lives. I pray that as God slowly helps us discover our true value and worth, we can more fully and deeply live out the new life that God came for us to receive, and truly be the Easter people that we were originally meant to live out. Let us reverse the ways of the world, and let our lives reveal to others the truth of how God our Father sees us, and how we can see others in the same glorious light.

● **Nicholas** is a lay missionary and creative evangelist who loves to use creativity and various art forms to share the faith and help people encounter God's truths in a fun and meaningful way.





Fr Ron Rolheiser

# The Passion of Christ as Passivity

We speak of that section in the Gospels which narrates Jesus' life from the Last Supper until His death and burial, as chronicling His "Passion". On Good Friday, the lector begins the Gospel with the words: "The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ According to John".

Why do we call Jesus' suffering just before His death His passion?

Generally, this is not properly understood. We tend to think that "passion" here refers to intense suffering, as in "passionate suffering". This isn't wrong but misses a key point. Passion comes from the Latin, *PASSIO*, meaning passiveness, non-activity, absorbing something more than doing something. Hence, the "Passion" of Jesus refers to that time in His life when His meaning for us was not defined by what He was doing but rather, by what was being done to Him. What's being said here?

The life and ministry of Jesus can be divided into two distinct parts: scholars estimate that Jesus spent about three years preaching and teaching before being put to death. For most of that time, in fact for all of it except the last day, He was very much the doer, in command, the active one, teaching, healing, performing miracles, giving counsel, eating with sinners, debating with

church authorities, and generally, by activity of every sort, inviting His contemporaries into the life of God. And He was busy, so pressured that at times He didn't have time to eat. For almost all His public life, Jesus was actively doing something.

However, from the time He walked out of the Last Supper room, that activity stopped. He was no longer the one who was doing things for others, but the one who was having things done to Him. In the garden, they arrest Him, bind His hands, and lead Him to the high priest, then to Pilate. He is beaten, humiliated, stripped of His clothes, and eventually nailed to a cross where He dies. This constitutes His "passion", that time in His life and ministry when He ceases to be the doer and becomes the one who has things done to Him.

What is so remarkable about this is that our faith teaches us that we are saved more through His passion (his death and suffering) than through all His activity of preaching and doing miracles. How does this work?

Allow me an illustration: some years ago, my sister Helen, an Ursuline nun, died of cancer. A nun for more than thirty years, she much loved her vocation and was loved within it. For most of those thirty years, she served as a den-mother to hun-

dreds of young women who attended an academy run by her order. She loved those young women and was for them a mother, an older sister, and a mentor. For the last twenty years of her life, after our mother died, she served in that same capacity for our family, organising us and keeping us together. Through all those years she was the active one, the consummate doer, the one whom others expected to take charge. And she relished the role and was born for it. She loved doing things for others.

Then, nine months before she died, cancer struck her brutally and she spent the last months of her life bedridden. Now things needed to be done for her. Doctors, nurses, the sisters in her community, and others, took turns taking care of her. And, like Jesus from the time of His arrest until the moment of His death, her body too was humiliated, led around by others, stripped, prodded, and stared at by curious passers-by. Indeed, like Jesus, she died thirsty, with a sponge held to her lips by someone else.

That was her passion. She, who had spent so many years doing things for others, now had to submit to having things done to and for her. But, and this is the point, like Jesus, she was able in that period of her life when she was helpless and no longer in charge, to give life and meaning to others

in a deeper way than she could during all those years when she was active and doing so many things for others.

That is the mystery of the fruitfulness of passivity, of helplessness. And there's an important lesson here, not the least of which is the potential fruitfulness of the terminally ill, the severely handicapped, and the sick. There's a lesson too on how we might understand what we must give to others when we are ill, helpless, and in need of care from others.

The passion of Jesus teaches us that, like Jesus, we give as much to others in our passivity as in our activities. When we are no longer in charge, beaten down, humiliated, suffering, and unable even to make ourselves understood by our loved ones, we are undergoing our passion and, like Jesus in His passion, have in that the opportunity to give over our love in a very deep way.

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



As I was contemplating

Fr Gerard Steve Theraviam

"We are an Easter people,  
Alleluia is our song"

The poignant drama of Holy Week and the Sacred Triduum, and the feelings and emotions that are evoked, can dissipate soon after Easter Sunday as we move on with life... if we are not careful. Our songs of praise to God can slowly become dirges and laments when life is hard. The real enigma is how we are to continue living the New Life of Easter throughout the year. The Lord wants us to experience abundant, overflowing life, and this is not to be momentary. Our Alleluias must joyfully ring out unceasingly, in season and out of season.

*I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly. (John 10:10)*

The risen life is lived even when we go through the dark and bitter valleys of life that we encounter, but we move on, buoyed by the hope and trust of the Risen Lord. Thus, we may be experiencing crisis, loss and pain on the outside but within us, God's presence and grace gives us the strength and courage to joyfully carry on.... **from helplessness to hope**. We are to always live life victoriously because we are fuelled by the Holy Spirit, instead of only relying on our own resources.

The risen life we live needs to not be hoarded for our own selves or kept secret, but generously shared with all and sundry. We move **from despair to declaration**.... The Good News needs to be infectious, to touch the lives of others so that they might ask us the reason for our joy. It is no secret!

It is to be shouted from the mountain tops!

And so, we joyously sing:  
*Because He lives, I can face tomorrow!  
Because He lives, all fear is gone! Because I know He holds the future  
And life is worth the living, just because He lives!*

The Resurrection brings us out from **Fear to Freedom** of the children of God!

That doesn't mean everything is going to be easy-peasy. The Cross does not somehow disappear! No pain, no gain! We will still have to confront our fears, real or imagined. Yet we do so never alone, knowing that we have been strengthened by God's grace and power to carry our crosses. *If we have died with Him, we shall also live with Him. (2 Timothy 2:11)*

The Cross is not to be feared or rejected, but accepted and lovingly embraced as it leads us to the Resurrection. Easter does not happen without Good Friday! We will have to die to our selfish wants and desires, and even pet sins and allow God to give us new hearts that live through Him, with Him and in Him.

The Resurrection helps us to move away **from self-centredness and self-absorption towards service towards others**. We are called to move **from being cocooned individuals to being Community**. After all, we carry our crosses with the support, help and encouragement of our sisters and brothers in the community and, sometimes, even strangers. Hence, it is also right that we learn to reciprocate in love. The washing of the feet on Holy Thursday compels us towards humble service to all people. The

## Living the NEW LIFE of Easter ...to the fullest!

Eucharistic words of Christ to Take, Bless, Break and Give is not just about Holy Communion but also about how we are to **live Communion** in our lives, to allow God to **take** us and use us a **blessing** for others. We are to allow God to break us - to break us from our old ways of thinking and living, to **break** us from selfishness and sin and to **give** us as food to a hungry world.

All this needs to be sustained as we move **from mere ritual to relationship with God**. It is not enough to just *say* prayers, but genuine prayer will lead us to a living and loving relationship with God. This then also changes the way we relate with our sisters and brothers and all of creation. Just as Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane asked that we might accompany Him for an hour in prayer, likewise, prayer must be a part our daily reality in order that we might sustain that relationship with God. This current Year of Prayer is an invitation for us all not just to pray but to also deepen our prayer life through perhaps discovering new ways to pray that we might further seal our relationship with God.

Many persons are crippled by a fear of death. Perhaps we are not ready to leave behind our loved ones or our unfinished projects. Yet our Christian faith tells us that this present life is not all there is to Life. We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and that, in the same way, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. (1Thessalonians 4:14) Thus, Life is to be experienced even more fully beyond our current earthly realities. We are citizens of heaven! We are here on earth

temporarily but we can already celebrate and live Life as we hope to be welcomed into our heavenly home. With St Paul, we should be able to bravely declare: *Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:55,57)* The first Preface to the Eucharistic Prayer of the Funeral Mass that is commonly used boldly states: *Indeed, for your faithful, Lord, life is changed not ended, and, when this earthly dwelling turns to dust, an eternal dwelling is made ready for them in heaven.*" Thus, let us look at death with hope and trust and welcome and celebrate it when it inevitably comes because we will have prepared for it well, having lived Life well.

To live out Easter joy at all times, we need to have a renewed mind-set. No longer should we moan and groan that *Life is hard!* Instead, *Life is beautiful!* It is beautiful despite the ups and downs because the light of the Lord shines on us all.

*I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, (Deuteronomy 30:19)*

May we always CHOOSE LIFE....and live it to the fullest!

A Blessed Eastertide!

● **Fr Gerard Theraviam** is the Parish Priest of the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist in Kuala Lumpur, as well as the Spiritual Director to the World Community for Christian Meditation, Malaysia.



# YOUTH

April 7, 2024

## Youth invited to 'Come Discover' their calling

**NIBONG TEBAL:** Inspired by Ephesians 4:11-12, which speaks of the diverse gifts bestowed by Christ — apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers — to prepare God's people for service and to build up the body of Christ, a group of 39 young people, aged 12 to 20, gathered at the Church of St Anthony.

They were there to deepen their understanding of vocation and what it truly means to respond to God's call.

With the collaborative efforts of the Penang Diocese Vocation Team (PDVT), St Anthony's parish priest, Fr Arulnathan Joseph, had initiated the vocation rally themed *Come Discover '24*, which took



The Capuchins giving their sharing.

place on March 2 from 9.30am to 1.00pm.

Present to facilitate the sessions were diocesan clergy Fr Louis Loi, Fr Raymond Raj and Fr Arulnathan; the Capuchins, Fr Gilbert James and Brothers Aldrin and

Joshua, Sr Jessica from the Little Sisters of the Poor as well as Emmanuel and Victoria Dorai from the PDVT.

The sessions were concentrated on the in-depth personal testimonies of the religious

and priests; on how they heard God's Call, the events in their lives that unfolded after that and how they answered His Call. Their sharings were followed by questions by the presenters as well as some important questions by the youth.

Participants were urged to dedicate themselves to their studies and to discover their areas of strength, thereby gaining the knowledge necessary to develop their unique gifts and talents. Through this process, they can better understand how to dedicate their lives to glorifying God. While one could be a great spouse and parent, they may also discover a calling that leads them to serve as a member of the religious community or as a priest.

We fervently pray that as our youth navigate the path of life, they may heed their distinct vocational calling and faithfully answer, thereby fulfilling their highest potential to glorify God in all aspects of their lives.

### Understanding the Church's teaching on sexuality

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Over the weekend of March 9 and 10, the Form 4 and 5 students from the Church of St Joseph, Sentul, attended a camp on the Theology of the Body (TOB). They were joined by several youths from the Church of St Francis Xavier, Petaling Jaya.

The camp was coordinated by the Archdiocesan Catechetical Ministry TOB Team, led by Sr Retta Savariannan, FdCC.

During the sessions, we learned a lot about TOB. From our understanding, TOB is a scriptural reflection on the human experience. We also realised that sexuality is a gift received from God. Having a foundation in the teachings of Theology of the Body can help us to stand strong in the truth against harmful influences.

We also participated in many group discussions. Not forgetting we made new friends too. It was a fantastic time. In addition, we also learned how each person is created out of love. Personally, during this session, we had our greatest time sharing our thoughts and opinions. In today's culture, young people are bombarded with messages that often distort the meaning and purpose of human sexuality. This is why it is important to learn the TOB.

Finally, in the closing session, we engaged in an interactive segment where the girls had questions for the boys, and the boys had questions for the girls. This activity fostered a strong sense of camaraderie among us. The Church truly teaches and believes that human sexuality is important, good, and beautiful. It serves as a guide, directing us towards heavenly life.

I'd like to extend my gratitude to the speakers for their invaluable assistance in deepening our understanding of the Theology of the Body. They were not only knowledgeable but also approachable and friendly in their communication. We, the Form 4 and Form 5 students, will continue to keep them in our prayers. — *By Latisha Lopez*



## Our Lady of Guadalupe youth journey through TOB

**PUCHONG:** A recent camp experience proved transformative for confirmands who were seeking deeper understanding and connection with their faith. With the aim of delving into the profound teachings of the Theology of the Body (TOB), our camp embarked on a two-day journey of discovery and reflection, illuminating truths about the human person, love and relationships.

During the camp, the participants,

found themselves exploring the foundational principles of TOB. Guided by passionate facilitators, discussions unfolded on the inherent dignity of the human person, the beauty of masculinity and femininity and the sacredness of our bodies as gifts of God. Through thought provoking teachings and discussions, eyes were opened to the profound depth of God's design for humanity.

Building upon the foundation laid ear-

lier in the day, the camp delved deeper into the TOB teachings, focusing on the nature of love, relationships, and human sexuality. Honest conversations ensued about the challenges of living out chastity in a culture that often distorts the true meaning of love. Some of the students grappled with the unique call to authentic love, rooted in self-giving and sacrifice.

As the camp drew to a close, the impact of the experience was palpable. The students emerged with a newfound appreciation for their faith and a deeper understanding of their identity as beloved children of God. Many expressed gratitude for the experience they encountered and the opportunity to explore TOB teachings in a supportive and enriching environment, recognising the profound relevance of these truths to their lives.

Bridget Antoinette Pereira, a facilitator and teacher, shared her reflections: "Witnessing the transformative journey of these young students was truly inspiring. The Theology of the Body is not just a theological concept; it's become the blueprint for living life to the fullest in accordance with God's loving plan."

As we concluded, we encouraged the students to continue faithfully on this journey, to delve deeper into the riches of our faith, embracing the truths of the Theology of the Body with open hearts and minds. For in understanding God's plan for our bodies and our relationships, we discover the true beauty and purpose of our existence.



The participants during the sessions.



# OMPH youth experience REVIVAL AND RENEWAL



By Ashley Shammah Edward

IPOH: The Youth Ministry of the Church of Our Mother of Perpetual Help (OMPHY) experienced a renaissance following a prolonged dormancy during the pandemic. Despite facing numerous challenges akin to navigating treacherous mountains and valleys, the ministry was recently revitalised, symbolising a journey of resurrection and renewal.

Our ministry, comprising 89 members aged 13 to 26 and steadily growing, is dedicated to making a profound impact within our parish. Our goal is to inspire the younger generation to follow in our footsteps while actively serving in various capacities within the church. Utilising the talents bestowed upon us by God, we strive to be omnipresent, contributing to multiple ministries.

Rather than confining ourselves to a single realm of service, we have embraced diversity and expansion. Our members participate as lectors, altar servers, choir members, hospitality ministers, IT support, catechists, Caritas activities and even lead monthly praise and worship sessions with the Charismatic (CCR) group.

Through the grace of our heavenly Father, we've experienced blessings beyond words, transforming our parish into a welcoming

home where boundless love reigns supreme. We've evolved into a tight-knit family, bound by a shared commitment to service and faith.

This year, we made a pact to challenge perceptions and elevate the role of young people within our parish community. Our endeavours have been nothing short of ambitious. We kicked off the year with the youth choir (The Sacred Melodies) enchanting the congregation during Mass, followed by a successful fundraising coffee morning. Our journey continued with fervent praise and worship alongside the CCR.

In February, our impact was indelibly marked with the launch of the Lenten campaign. Through a thought-provoking play and a reflective Way of the Cross, we engaged the parish in profound spiritual reflection. The pinnacle of our efforts culminated in the presentation of the Passion Play, a first for our parish, despite the academic pressures faced by many of our members.

Throughout this journey, our presence on the church grounds has been constant, a testament to our dedication and faith. Despite the challenges encountered, our faith has only grown stronger. We've experienced moments of deep emotional resonance, akin to the wilderness described in the Bible, leading us to personal

encounters with Jesus.

As we faced trials, our bonds were fortified, and our gratitude deepened. We encountered obstacles that tested our faith, but through prayer and perseverance, we overcame. Our unity prevailed, strengthened by the divine intervention that guided us through every trial.

In the face of adversity, we emerged not weakened, but emboldened by the presence of Jesus in our midst. The devil may have attempted to sow discord, but in the end, it was the unwavering presence of Christ that triumphed, reinforcing our resolve and fortifying our faith.

Our Passion of Christ play took place at 5.00pm on Sunday, March 17, with numerous individuals working tirelessly behind the scenes. As we prayed backstage before each scene, our fervent hope was that Jesus would use us to convey His boundless love to the audience. Each participant in the play was deeply immersed in their role, striving to make the portrayal as authentic as possible.

Following the play, we were blessed to host our first praise and worship session, led by Mary Juliet and supported by our talented musicians and dedicated youth members. The atmosphere was electrifying, filled with the palpable presence of the Holy Spirit. Tears flowed

freely as we lifted our voices in praise, feeling as though we were basking in the divine presence of God Himself. It was a deeply personal and profound experience for all of us, a testament to the power of answered prayers and the unwavering love of our Heavenly Father.

Moving forward, we remain steadfast in our commitment to serve as disciples of Jesus, both within our parish and beyond. We aspire to be a shining example to the youth ministries of other parishes, demonstrating the transformative power of faith and service. Our parish provides us with a nurturing environment to grow in our relationship with God and develop our ministry, for which we are truly grateful.

We are immensely thankful to our parish priests, Fr Joseph Stephen, CSSR, and Fr Patrick Massang, CSSR, as well as our parent advisers, elders in the parish, and our own families. Their guidance and encouragement have been instrumental in our journey.

At the heart of our mission lies a yearning to rekindle a sense of belonging within our parish community. No matter where life takes us, we find solace in the sanctuary our parish provides — a place we can always call home. Through our shared experiences, we have grown into a close-knit family, bound together by a love that knows no bounds.

## THE SIMPLE LIFE...

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

For enquiries, please contact:  
Email: [memoriam@herald.com.my](mailto:memoriam@herald.com.my)  
Tel: 03-2026 8291

MEMORIAM



**2nd Anniversary  
In Loving Memory of  
Our Dearest Father,  
Thomas Pee Tian Cho**  
Departed: 12th April 2022

*Two years went since you left us,  
How nice if you were still here,  
Yet we know it is not to be,  
For God makes and takes,  
And we pray dear Lord,  
Your will be done.*

*Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord,  
And let perpetual light shine upon him.*

*Not a day goes by that you aren't in my heart and in my thoughts.  
But I seek comfort in these words*

*"May we comfort one another with our faith, until we all meet in Christ, and  
are with you and Mom forever. Through Christ our Lord." Amen.*

We Shen Ray Leanne always remember.

**15th Anniversary  
In Loving Memory of**



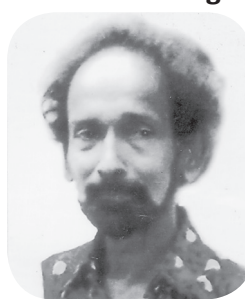
**Mdm Elizabeth Samy  
Raj (PJM)**

(Ex-teacher of Mak Mandin  
Tamil School)

Departed: 09-04-2009

Deeply missed and  
fondly remembered by  
Sons, daughters, sons-in-law,  
daughters-in-law,  
grandchildren, relatives,  
friends and loved ones.

**14th Anniversary  
In Loving Memory of**



**ANTHONY  
SATHIAN S/O R. P.  
ALWAR**

**19 August 1949 to  
8 April 2010**

*"Miss you Pappa"*

*I miss you more than ever.  
Your guidance and your love.*

*But, I know you're still watching silently from above  
The love you gave still warms me the way it always will  
But leaving left an empty space that time can never fill  
From heaven you're still giving the love you always had.  
I know you hear me talk to you.  
I will always love you Pappa.*

Fondly remembered by your daughter, Maggie S.

**3rd Anniversary  
In Loving Memory of**



**Marianthony Peter s/o  
Marianthony**

21/11/1925-09/04/2021

*No matter what we do to  
move on from this pain,  
deep inside, we always  
know death leaves a  
heartache no one can heal  
and love leaves a memory,  
no one can steal.*

Deeply missed and  
cherished by loved ones.



**1st Anniversary  
Mr Paul Thanaraju Devasahayan**  
(St Vincent de Paul member of  
St Andrew Church Muar, Johore)

**Born: October 6, 1952  
Reunited with the Lord: April 9, 2023**

*Life will never be the same  
without you with us.  
We are missing you dearly  
and trying to learn to live without you here.  
We hold you close within our hearts,  
and there you shall remain.  
To walk with us throughout our lives  
until we meet again.  
We love you, Appa!*

Memorial Mass at the Church St Thomas More,  
Subang Jaya at 7.30pm on Tuesday, April 9, 2024.

He is fondly remembered and missed by  
wife, children, sons-in-law, daughter-in-law,  
and his lovely seven grandchildren.

**In Loving Memory of**

**17th Anniversary 7th Anniversary**



**Mr. A  
Savarinathan**  
25/10/1921 to  
14/04/2007



**Mrs. Anamah  
Savarinathan**  
29/09/1938 to  
12/04/2017

*You were both very special people to us.  
You were individuals of few words,  
but by your actions and deeds,  
you radiated your warmth and love for us.  
Thank you for your loving and thoughtful  
deeds which are still afresh in our memories.*

*We miss you.*

The 17th and 7th Anniversary Memorial  
Service for our beloved parents will be  
celebrated at St. John's Cathedral, Jalan Bukit  
Nanas, Kuala Lumpur on 12th April at 1.00pm  
and 14th April at 8.00am.

Prayers will also be held at our residence,  
No. 22 Jalan 9, Ampang Jaya, Selangor on  
both days at 8.00pm.

Your prayers and presence  
will be much appreciated.

From: Loving Children, Daughters-in-law,  
Grandchildren, Relatives and Friends.

**In Loving Memory of**



**Mr S. Ambrose**  
Departed on  
30th April 2010



**Dr. Herbert Ambrose**  
Departed on  
7th April 2013

More than a decade may have passed, but the legacy  
of your love and wisdom continues to illuminate our  
lives. Your names are etched in our hearts,  
guiding us with strength and grace.

Forever remembered, forever cherished.

**39th Anniversary  
In Loving Memory of**



**Emile Victor Lessler**  
Departed: 07-04-1985

*"Give thanks to the Lord,  
for he is good; his steadfast  
love endures forever."*

Lovingly remembered by  
children - Julie, Rita, Bunny,  
Linda, Hazel, Gerard, Kelly,  
Selena, their spouses,  
grandchildren and  
great-grandchildren.



**In Loving Memory  
Beloved Husband and Father**



**Freddie V. Miranda**  
Age: 86

From the Lord: 10 June 1934  
To the Lord: 8 April 2020

*Your life was a blessing,  
Your memory a treasure,  
You are loved beyond words  
and missed beyond measure.  
You will remain forever in our  
thoughts and hearts.  
Love you now and always.  
Rest in Peace.*

Masses for the fourth anniversary of his passing  
will be celebrated on the 7th April 2024  
(Divine Mercy Sunday) at the following churches:  
Church of the Immaculate Conception, Penang (8.30am)  
Church of the Divine Mercy, Shah Alam (3.30pm)  
Church of St Patrick, Kuala Kangsar (10am)  
Taiping Catholic Church (9am)

With Love and Gratitude  
Mary Unna & Children, Donald, Gerard, Gemma,  
Rev Monsignor Jude, Tina & Brian.

*40th Day Memorial*

*loving memory of  
Wialamary Theresa Ratnam*  
October 02, 1947 - March 4, 2024  
Beloved wife, mother,  
grandmother and Sister

**A memorial mass will be celebrated on  
Friday 12th April 2024 at 7pm  
in The Church Of The Sacred Heart Of  
Jesus Jalan Peel Kuala Lumpur followed  
by prayer and dinner at the Church Hall.**

**NOTICE**

**The cost for  
placing a  
memoriam is  
RM100  
per column.**

*For enquiries  
please contact us:*

Tel/WhatsApp:  
**03-2026 8291**

Email: [memoriam@herald.com.my](mailto:memoriam@herald.com.my)

**19th Anniversary  
In Loving Memory of**



**Ronald Ravinder  
Kumar**

**Returned to the Lord:  
17-04-2005**

Lovingly remembered and  
cherished by:  
Wife - Regina,  
Son - Reuben Nevin  
Kumar and loved ones.



**1st Year Anniversary  
Invitation**

**In Loving Memory of  
Xavier @ Savuriar Annandan**  
July 26th, 1939 - March 27th, 2023

On this solemn anniversary, we gather to  
honour Xavier @ Savuriar Annandan's  
memory. His presence graced our lives and  
his spirit continues to inspire us.

Let our prayers reflect the love and cherish  
moments shared with him. May his soul find  
eternal peace, and his memory be a blessing  
that shines brightly in our heart forevermore.

One year anniversary prayer will be held at  
**St Mary's Church Hall, Tapah, Perak on 13th April 2024 (Saturday) at  
6.30pm followed by dinner at 7.00pm at the same place.**

For directions, please call at  
012-5759191 (Gabrina Elizabeth) | 017-3008041 (Raymund Francis)

**For the Role of Women**  
We pray that the dignity and worth of women be recognized in every culture, and for an end to the discrimination they face in various parts of the world.

**CLICKTOPRAY**  
TOGETHER, WE MAKE EACH DAY DIFFERENT

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# Paschal Triduum in Malaysia

## Holy Thursday



Bishop Julius Dusin Gitom of Sandakan washing the feet of a parishioner.



Cardinal Sebastian Francis of Penang praying at the altar of repose.

## Good Friday



Bishop Joseph Hii of Sibuan prostrating in front of the altar.



Bishop Cornelius Piong of Keningau venerating the cross.



Members of 'Irmaos da Igreja' serving as pallbearers carrying the statue of the Dead Lord during the Good Friday procession at the Church of St Peter, Melaka.

## Easter Vigil



Archbishop John Wong of Kota Kinabalu lighting the paschal candle from the new fire.



Archbishop Simon Poh of Kuching lowering the paschal candle into the baptismal water.



Archbishop Julian Leow of Kuala Lumpur raising the paschal candle.



Bishop Richard Ng of Miri anointing a newly baptised with the Oil of Chrism.

## Easter Sunday



Archbishop Julian Leow of Kuala Lumpur blessing the congregation.

