

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 decision in the marketplace.

TERHAD

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Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

1 Cor. 15:12, 16-17



Caritas Malaysia comes together to listen and plan

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World Day for Consecrated life

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Capuchins elect new Custos and Councillors

P6

Pope's intention for February: For religious sisters and consecrated women

VATICAN: "What would the Church be without religious sisters and consecrated laywomen? The Church cannot be understood without them."

Pope Francis made that affirmation in his February prayer intention.

He encouraged all consecrated women to discern how best they can respond to the challenges facing humanity.

"I exhort them to keep working and to have an impact on the poor, the marginalised, and all those who are enslaved by traffickers," he said. "I especially ask them to make an impact on this."

Pope Francis also prayed for the many women religious who "show the beauty of God's love and compassion" through their ministry as catechists, theologians, and spiritual guides, even when they encounter obstacles.

"I invite them to fight when, in some cases, they are treated unfairly, even within the Church," he urged, "when they serve so much that they are reduced to servitude — at times, by men of the Church."

When faced with these difficulties, women religious should "not be discouraged," said the Pope. "May you keep making God's goodness known through the apostolic works you do. But above all, through your witness of consecration." —

By Devin Watkins, Vatican News

All have the right to life

VATICAN: People have a right to life, not to death, which must be welcomed but never provoked, Pope Francis said.

"The right to care and treatment for all must always be prioritised, so that the weakest, especially the elderly and the sick, are never discarded," said Pope Francis, during his weekly general audience on February 9.

The Pope also criticised a problem he said is real for older people "in a certain social class" - of not being given all of the medicine or care they need, since they lack the money.

"This is inhumane. This is not helping them, this is pushing them more quickly toward death," he said. They must be cared for and not marginalised.

Pope Francis praised a recent comment by retired Pope Benedict XVI who, at nearly 95 years of age, recognises his own presence before "the dark door of death."

It is "good advice" for everyone, Pope Francis said, because today's "so-called 'feel-good' culture tries to remove the reality of death." People seek to ignore "our finite existence, deluding ourselves into believing we can remove the power of death and dispel fear."

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the reality of death back into focus, he added, and so many people "have lost loved ones without being able to be near them, and this has made death even harder to accept and process."

The Christian faith is not about removing the fear of death; "rather, it helps us to face it" with trust in Christ's promises, he said. Christians know for certain, he said, that Christ is risen and "awaits us behind that dark door of death."

"We cannot avoid death and, precisely for this reason, after having done everything that is humanly possible to cure the sick, it is immoral to engage in futile treatment," the Pope said, referring to the Catechism of the Catholic Church's teachings on the legitimacy of refusing "overzealous" treatment, not to cause death but to accept it (paragraph 2278).

When it comes to the experience of death itself, of pain or of suffering, he said, "we must be grateful for all the help that medicine



An Indian villager receives treatment at a makeshift open-air clinic in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, India, May 16, 2021. (LiCas News Photo/Danish Siddiqui)

endeavours to give, so that through so-called 'palliative care,' every person who is preparing to live the last stage of their life can do so in the most human way possible."

However, the Pope warned against confusing such care with unacceptable interventions that lead to killing people. "We must accompany people toward death, but not provoke death or facilitate assisted suicide."

This ethical principle, he said, applies to everyone, "not just Christians or believers."

At the end of his main audience talk, the Pope reminded people of the Church's celebration of the World Day of the Sick on Feb 11. He asked that all people experiencing illness be guaranteed health care and spiritual accompaniment.

He urged people to pray for those who are ill, their families, health care and pastoral workers, and everyone who helps care for their needs.

The following day, Pope Francis gave a video message to participants attending a webinar on *World Day of the Sick: Meaning, Goals and Challenges*.

The Holy Father took the opportunity to stress the importance of physical and spiritual healing of the body, and the need for effective treatments for everyone.

The Pope noted, "the experience of sickness makes us feel fragile, and it makes us

feel in need of others." Sickness, he said, "raises the question of life's meaning, which we bring before God in faith."

Pope Francis explained that his predecessor St John Paul II, through his own sufferings, instituted the World Day of the Sick 30 years ago and became "a sharer in the sufferings of Christ."

The Pope also underlined that "One must never 'forget the uniqueness of each patient, his or her dignity and frailties'. It is the person in his or her entirety who is in need of care: body, mind, affections, freedom and will, spiritual life... Care cannot be divided; because the human being cannot be divided," he said.

He continued, "The saints who cared for the sick always followed the Master's teaching: heal the wounds of body and soul; pray and act for physical and spiritual healing together."

The Pope also highlighted that even in the field of healthcare, there are "inequalities" where some enjoy so-called "excellence" and many others struggle to access basic treatments.

In order to cure this "social" virus, he said, "the antidote is the culture of fraternity, based on the awareness that we are all equal as human persons, all equal as children of one God". — CNS/Vatican News



For a synodal Church

communion | participation | mission

Prayer for the Synod

Adsumus Sancte Spiritus

We stand before You, Holy Spirit, as we gather together in Your name. With You alone to guide us, make Yourself at home in our hearts; Teach us the way we must go and how we are to pursue it. We are weak and sinful; do not let us promote disorder. Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path nor partiality influence our actions. Let us find in You our unity so that we may journey together to eternal life and not stray from the way of truth and what is right. All this we ask of You, who are at work in every place and time, in the communion of the Father and the Son, forever and ever. Amen.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

On Catechetical Sunday, I highlighted the fact that parents are the primary catechists of their children — preparing the soil and planting the first seeds of faith. Apparently this is not always the case as you'll see when you read the somewhat amusing article 'Faith education – Who's responsibility is it?' (Page 14).

This article will definitely elicit a chuckle or two but, at the same time, it points to a stark, and maybe even scary, reality which begs the question, 'What type of faith foundation are we building for our children?' and whether we are placing equal, if not more emphasis on other academic subjects than we do for religious studies.

This brings us to another reality – are we, as parents, catechists, formators and even clergy, equipped or prepared to respond to the many 'difficult' faith-related questions that our young people are asking today or do we silence their 'whys' with a 'Because the Church says so'?

To cite an example, a growing trend in the Western world, especially among celebrities, is declaring themselves as 'non-binary' (a term used for gender identities that are neither male nor female). While we can rest assured that this is something that will not be officially accepted in our country, some of our young people are, nevertheless, gyrating towards this way of thinking. A youth leader in one of our local parishes recently shared how his WhatsApp message to some male youths, which began with "Hi guys", received a curt response from one of them who said, "Don't assume my gender." This same youth leader, who is a teacher's assistant for catechism, also shared how, when faced with difficult questions from the students, his stand-ard answer would be, "I don't know. I'm just the teacher's assistant."

We cannot comfort ourselves by saying that these are not Asian realities. We cannot say that these are issues that only concern the West. We need to open our eyes to global realities — realities which our young people are being exposed to daily via social media, and realities which they will face head-on if they plan to further their studies abroad.

There are bound to be questions on gender, assisted suicide, euthanasia and many other issues. What do we do? How do we address these challenges? If not already done, perhaps it's time to review our faith syllabus and find ways to integrate faith into social reality. We can no longer give the stand-ard "Because the Church says so" response. If we do, we will only be pushing our young people further away from the Church.



Patricia Pereira



NCRonline.org/cartoons

Walk in truth and in spirit

Today, with the help of apps like Waze or Google Maps, we are able to get directions and find our way even if we are not familiar with the place that we are headed to. With the help of these applications, we are able to avoid traffic jams, or a wrong turn, and find the best way to reach our destination.

Recently, when we celebrated the Lunar New Year, we used the Beatitudes from the account of Matthew to inspire us to continue to choose the "new" way for the new year. Today as we listen and reflect on the Lucan account, we are given the version of Beatitudes with four "life giving" ways and four "life threatening" ways. These ways serve as a guide for us to reach our life's destination – eternal life.

Jeremiah, in the first reading tells us that, in order to achieve true happiness, we need to place our trust in God. The Beatitudes presented by Jesus indeed show us that this trust is to be integrated in our life besides our

prayers. Using the same analogy of the Waze or Google Map, we make our own choices to trust in the direction given by God or to depend solely on ourselves. I recall countless experiences when I was caught in bad traffic due to my own choice of following my way rather than the way shown by Waze. Indeed, how often in my life too, I used my way rather than trust in the guiding hand of God.

Besides the element of trust, the Beatitudes presented in the gospel reading invites us to:

1. Be aware that this new way is not a mere vision or target only but something vital to be carried out in our daily life. When we talk about true happiness or true blessedness, it is alive, active and to be lived out and this is what it means to be called to build the Kingdom of God here and now.

2. Respond to the challenge of the Beatitudes in our daily life. So many people are facing challenges and persecution. Many are homeless, living in poverty — they are not able

to see light in their life. We are called to bring them hope and thus make the promise of life in the Beatitudes become a reality. If we make the effort to share, to care and to be the voice of the voiceless, those who are poor, those who are hungry, those who are weeping, will be able to taste "happiness".

3. Know that our faith is not merely for own salvation but rather, for the salvation of all. We cannot enjoy happiness when our brothers and sisters are suffering. We cannot say we are okay when our brothers and sisters are not.

The Lucan society was facing injustice and a huge gap between the poor and the rich. Luke's version of the Beatitudes was very much from the social context of his time. Today as we reflect on the reading, we will notice that there is not much difference in the context that we live in today. Therefore, we cannot remain indifferent to the plight of the poor and the marginalised who are constantly struggling in the midst of the current pandemic, where injustice is so prevalent and widespread.

Today, the Church needs to look at the Beatitudes as an invitation for us to see whether we are:

- a. A Church of the Poor — where we are concerned with the needs of the marginalised, not complacent or apathetic to their plight.
- b. A Church which is hungry for justice and truth. The desire in seeking truth and justice means not being indifferent to things happening around us but speaking up in defence of the oppressed and the marginalised.
- c. A Church which is weeping with those who are suffering. Therefore, we cannot

Reflecting on our
Sunday Readings
with Msgr Aloysius Tan

6th Sunday of Ordinary Time (C)

Readings: *Jeremiah 17:5-8;*
1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20;
Gospel: *Luke 6:17, 20-26*

remain happy and sweep everything under the carpet. History has proven that a Church which is ready to stand up for the truth and is prepared to suffer as a martyr is the Church that will grow and flourish. d. A Church which is ready to be persecuted because of the Kingdom's values. It is not difficult to be a nice Christian but not easy to be a holy, righteous and truthful Christian.

As individuals and as Church, we are invited to set our eyes on eternal life by building the Kingdom of God here and now. The way and direction to do that has been mapped out for us by God, in and through the words and works of Jesus. We know exactly what that is from the Word of God, from the teachings of the Church and by interpreting them in the light of the signs of the times. All we need to do is to follow the direction!

In the spirit of synodality, the Beatitudes presented by St Luke this week invites us to explore the ways in which we can walk together in our daily living, to walk in truth and in spirit so that we will act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with our God. (cf Micah 6:8)

Msgr Aloysius Tan is the parish priest of the Church of Our Lady of Sorrows, Penang.





KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE
Diary of Archbishop
Julian Leow

February

- 15-16 Clergy Monthly Recollection
- 17 Archdiocesan Finance Meeting
- 18 FABC Office of Education and Faith Formation Meeting
- 24 MCCBCHST Exco Meeting
- 25 Malaysia Catholic Education Council Exco Meeting



PENANG DIOCESE
Diary of Bishop
Sebastian Francis

February

- 16 Opening Address at Discovering Christ Series – Penang Diocesan New Evangelisation Commission
- 17 Meeting with International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC)
- 18 Visit to Pulau Jerejak with Penang Catholic Heritage Preservation Committee
- 20 Mass – Mt Miriam Anniversary
- 22 Council of Priests
- 22-23 Clergy Monthly Recollection
- 23-24 Permanent Deacons Formation

Legal community comes together for Red Mass

SUBANG JAYA: The Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit, commonly known as the Red Mass, is celebrated annually by the Catholic Lawyers' Society, Kuala Lumpur to invoke the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, to guide and nurture lawyers as they commence legal practice in the new year.

This year, the Red Mass was celebrated on January 29, at the Church of St Thomas More, the patron saint of the Catholic Lawyers' Society, Kuala Lumpur. Rt Rev Sebastian Francis was the main celebrant, with Most Rev Julian Leow, Fr Gregory Chan, Fr Patrick Boudville, Fr Edwin Peter, and Fr William Michael concelebrating.

The congregation included 55 Catholic lawyers and their families, a Judge of the High Court of Malaya, foreign dignitaries, local politicians, and parishioners.

In his opening address, Bishop Sebastian reminded those involved in the administration of justice that the colour red, which represents the "fire of the Holy Spirit", is also the colour of Love and Truth, and prayed those who stood on the side of truth be guided by the Holy Spirit.

During his homily, the prelate focused on the life and works of the German Jewish philosopher, Edith Stein (later canonised as St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross), who was inspired by the scholastic, philosophy, and theology of several saints, including St Thomas Aquinas and the mystics, St Teresa of Avila, and St John of the Cross. The bishop said that during her life, St Teresa quoted, "Love and Truth – one without the other is



Members of the legal fraternity with clergy at the Red Mass.

destructive (at every level)" and emphasised that the Holy Spirit in the New Testament is described as "The Spirit of Love and Truth".

Referring to the day's Gospel, Bishop Sebastian reminded the congregation that just as Jesus calmed the storm, we must look to Him with repentance to calm the storms in our lives and embrace love and truth, which comes from the Holy Spirit.

After Mass, the President of the Catholic Lawyers' Society, Kuala Lumpur, Godfrey Fernandez, said the Society celebrates the Red Mass annually to seek God's blessing and to invoke the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Echoing the words of the founding president, the late Cecilia Fernandez, Godfrey said it is his fervent hope and prayer that the Society, as a body of legal professionals, continues to strive to build a community founded on the Catholic faith — a community that supports and encourages each other

to grow in this faith and conviction to live out our faith in how we practice the law.

On behalf of the Society, Godfrey thanked God for His blessings and for being able to hold the Red Mass in-person for the first time since 2020. Godfrey assured the Catholic Community that the Catholic Lawyers' Society and its members will always stand up for justice and uphold the truth. He added that with the recent gazetting of the Undi18 amendments and automatic voter registration, the Society will continue to hold talks on topics such as *Electoral Rights and Responsibilities of the Citizen*.

The Organising Committee also expressed its thanks and appreciation to Fr Patrick, his staff, and parishioners for assistance rendered while preparing for the Red Mass. — *By Stanislaus Cross, Vice-President, Catholic Lawyers' Society, Kuala Lumpur*



Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #76



Greetings and Peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you, dear People of God.

Back home again. Re-entry for most of us, after a welcome break with our families and valued friends. The call to reunion is a call to family and community. Face-to-face is wonderful. There is a return to church. Welcome home, dear friends of Jesus.

Time for choosing leaders is here again:

Melaka made its choice. Now it is time for Johor to vote. There are 11 political parties contesting, with four to five corner front fights. So far, all appear to be selling themselves, shooting down each other. They worked together to topple a people-elected government. Now they bite, mock, name-call and deny each other. It is often said that there is honour among thieves, but among politicians, there is only betrayal, treachery and greed.

Who do we vote for? Are they for human rights, anti-hopping laws, serving without fear or favour, do they hear the cry of the poor and creation? Are they for a Malaysian Malaysia? Only the listening serve all — justly, humbly and tenderly. They encounter, enlighten, empower, evoke national pride. For now, many of today's leaders are a national embarrassment.

A Thought for the Week: LOOK INSIDE!

A beggar had been sitting by the side of the road for over thirty years. One day, a stranger walked by. "Spare some change?" mumbled the beggar, mechanically holding out his old baseball cap.

"I have nothing to give you," said the stranger. Then he asked: "What's that you are sitting on?" "Nothing," replied the beggar. "Just an old box. I have been sitting on it for as long as I can remember." "Ever looked inside?" asked the stranger. "No," said the beggar. "What's the point? There's nothing in there." "Have a look inside,"

insisted the stranger. The beggar managed to pry open the lid. With astonishment, disbelief, and elation, he saw that the box was filled with gold.

Something to think about

Many are still looking outside for scraps of pleasure, for happiness, validation, security, or love. Look inside. Take the plunge into the core of your being, and there, waiting for you, you will discover the radiant joy of being, radical peace and contentment.

As someone wisely said, "Never place the key to your happiness in someone else's pocket."

The Gospel says: "The kingdom of God is inside you." Luke 17:21

Announcements for this Week:

1. *COVID-19, the Delta and Omicron variants are on the surge.* Less national control. No lockdowns. Life, work and economy continues. But self-control, self-regulation and self-discipline must accompany our full vaccination status.

2. *On February 2, 2022, the Church celebrated the World Day for Consecrated Life.* We remember the many men and women missionaries out there, serving the poor and needy; the "Talitha Kum", the International Network of Catholic Nuns combatting human trafficking; and St Josephine Bakhita, Sudanese, once a slave, the patron of human trafficking survivors.

3. *February 11 is the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, and also the World Day for the Sick.* The theme is "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36). Pray for the suffering. Comfort the Sick.

4. *The Diocese's World Day for Consecrated Life* will take place on February 12, 2022 at Skudai Catholic Centre at 8.30pm. Pray for the religious men and women serving in MJD.

5. *On February 15, 2022, at 7.00pm, the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, JB, the Mother of all parishes in MJD, will be celebrating her 40th Anniversary Mass with the MJD clergy.*

From February 16 till 18, a Thanksgiving Adoration will be held from 7.00pm to 9.00pm.

6. *Deacon William Pillai will be ordained priest at the Church of St Henry, Batu Pahat on February 22, 2022 at 10.00am.*

This week's Question and Query.

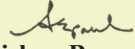
The Q asks: What do you mean by "emerging Church"?

1. Brian McLaren says that the *emerging Church* is a movement of the Holy Spirit. They energise things before they become monuments, museums and machines.

2. One of the signs is the convergence of hopeful and liberating themes, happening on all continents, in all denominations, at all levels and at a rather quick pace.

3. There is also an *emerging Christianity*. It is both, a longing for and a moving towards, a way of following Jesus, that has much more to do with *lifestyle* than with *belief*.

God bless you all. "There is within you a lamb and a lion. Spiritual maturity is the ability to let the lamb and the lion lie down together". Again a blessed CNY to all of you. Let us continue "Building His Kingdom Together".


Bishop Bernard Paul
February 11, 2022

 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jxVbJ4Wpk_0

Coming together to listen and plan

KUALA LUMPUR: Caritas Malaysia (CM) concluded its two days online National Meet on January 22 and 29, 2022 with an average of 72 participants. The purpose of this National Meet was to listen to the voices of everyone and plan for the year.

In his opening speech, President, Bishop Bernard Paul, shared a parable about two miners who were digging for diamonds. One was impatient and kept digging at different locations when he could not find any diamonds and the other was determined and persevered in his dig. He patiently kept digging in one spot and after some time, found a field of diamonds. The take home message was that there is no ready-made Kingdom of Heaven. We have to work hard, be patient, persevere, never give up and we will reap the rewards of what we have sown.

Bishop Bernard built further on the parable, saying that this is the time for us all to hear, listen and start preparing for the long journey ahead. We must be bold, move forward and be the voice of our parishes and dioceses for the future. We have to acknowledge that all parishes and dioceses are different, with differing concerns and priorities – and among all these differences, find out what the common and



Participants at the online Caritas Malaysia National Meet on January 22 & 29, 2022.

regional concerns are. In the next two days, we must go through the survey findings and question if we have been effective, ask ourselves what we have and do not have in place, if we have raised the necessary fundamental infrastructures and how far we are aligned with the vision, mission and values of Caritas – which is the foundation of CM. It is a time for review, assessment and discernment. It is time for us to read the signs of progress, weakness, concerns and priorities that are in front of us.

An Office Review Exercise was held in early November through two surveys targeting Caritas volun-

teers and office bearers. The objective was to assess if CM's activities are in line with the Vision, Mission and Values of Caritas Malaysia, to identify if there are clear structures and roles, are we responding to the mandate to develop the social mission of the Malaysian Church, and to reflect on the present reality and plan for the future.

In December, the diocese directors were asked to reflect on their respective survey findings with their parish coordinators, and later with their board or commission members.

Many found the surveys and discussion relevant as it helped them

and the diocese recognise the challenges faced by the communities and parishes, thus enabling them to identify the concerns and priorities. It also provided a clear direction for their ministry.

On Day 1 of the CM National Meet, each diocese director presented the findings of the surveys. This was followed by a group discussion by regions (Sabah, Sarawak, Semenanjung), facilitated by the Caritas board members, to identify common concerns and priorities. During the week leading to Day 2, each diocese office was asked to meet up again, to discuss and plan their activities for the year using

the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound) method. This method was again used when they met on Day 2 as a region.

Sabah raised concerns on the need for fundraising and administration of funds, accessibility, clarity of structures and procedures, collaboration between parishes and diocese and capacity building.

Sarawak, identified the need for training of volunteers, especially in building and enhancing their skills in management, understanding and creating awareness on Caritas spirituality, building communities resilient towards poverty and natural disasters, education of migrant children, enhancing relationship and communication among social mission groups and attracting our youth in each parish to be involved in Caritas as they are the Church and are needed to build the social mission of Church priorities.

Semenanjung highlighted a lack of understanding on the function and mission of Caritas across all levels. They too wished to attract more volunteers, focus on capacity building, spirituality, organisational skill sets and infrastructure. They suggested to compile best practices which can be shared.

A working framework

The Board also met to reflect on the findings and propose a framework around all the points that were brought up. The executive secretary, Charles Bertille, proposed a framework with three major aspects: programmes and services, organisation – structures, systems and roles, faith and witness. The heart of all these, he said, is the voices or heartbeat of the people – which is also the heartbeat of God – and which corresponds with the vision of CM. All these takes place within local communities in a certain context, with its local needs and challenges, but also with the prevalence of the graces of God which we can tap into. The suggested areas are:

1. Restoring community, relationships and spirituality. It seems there is a deficit of trust and community at every level and we are being called to nurture it by visiting people on the ground, affirming them, supporting their initiatives and existing projects, and assuring them there is “no taking over”. We need to adopt a community-based approach to our work as anything sustainable can only last when it is built on a community, not on individuals or offices.

2. Deepening in Caritas spirituality and the Catholic Social teachings. There are existing methods and tools in social or pastoral work which can be adapted to our social mission. An example is the 4E method (encounter, enlighten, empower, evangelise) that is promoted by the diocese of Malacca Johore. The story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus highlights the steps of 4E – and the same can be used when approaching community work.

3. Communicating, sharing hope and collaboration. The mis-

sion and works of CM has to be communicated to share the hope and also to encourage internal and external collaboration. As shared by the diocese of Penang, we need to build bridges, plant the seeds and promote a buy in. We have to find ways to enhance communication and share news among each other. We are all the voice of the Church in society and need to bear witness to it. We were reminded in the survey feedback to look into various groups which need support but may be overlooked such as those who are in prison, rehabilitation and detention centres; and to “turun padang” to connect and listen to these groups in need. We can initiate conversations around common themes like the Orang Asli, migrants, youth, poverty, etc.

4. Calling and forming a new generation of Caritas volunteers and leaders. Indeed, this is a need felt across all dioceses for the future of the Malaysian Church. We can begin with small groups of committed disciples who can light the fire, pass the faith and make a difference. But we need a method and orientation to do it well. And we can share ideas, resources, and work together with others like the Youth and Campus of-



fices. This priority area is also linked to capacity building of our management, staff and volunteers in various aspects, as mentioned by many.

5. Climate change and disaster preparedness which has to integrate care for our common home. We envisage a pool of resource persons who can be trained and mobilised as a national team to serve any diocese or affected area. Local communities need to learn about different types of disaster preparedness, relief skills, mitigating or reducing disaster risk for the community, and strengthening community resilience.

All the programmes and activities are encouraged to integrate certain cross-cutting themes such as spirituality, communication and safeguarding.

Asian priorities

The 25 countries forming Caritas Asia set as strategic priority the following areas for 2022 – 2025:

1. Inspiring care for creation by practising servant love-based* leadership
2. Reducing impact of disasters by effective emergency preparedness and response across Asia.
3. Upholding dignity of the person for integral human development by global solidarity and promo-

tion of peace

They see as cross-cutting themes: Safeguarding / Youth engagement / Localisation / Women in Leadership / Inter-Faith Dialogue.

* *Servant love-based leadership is the leadership focused on serving people and not on leading people; it is fuelled by the love for humanity and the planet, not by individual or organisational interests.*

What is the Spirit saying?

In his closing remarks, Bishop Bernard reminded everyone to constantly ask ourselves, “What is the Spirit saying to the diocese, the region, as well as the national Caritas?” It is evident, he said, that we are not only local but regional and national as well. We are being challenged to leave behind a legacy, not a curse. When we build what God wants us to build, which is building upon the vision and mission of what God has for Malaysia, there has to be obedience to the Spirit.

Another form of legacy is to have a system of succession as the journey does not end with you and me, we are preparing the next generation of leaders to take over and continue building. However, if we build only on our dreams and agendas, we would not be able to sustain it as Scripture says, “Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain” (Psalm 127) and “whoever does not gather with me, scatters” (Luke 11:23).

The words “Together We Care” also holds something special and is becoming synonymous with Caritas, as that is what we are. We know we are not alone and much can be done if we were to communicate, connect and collaborate more. We need more communication and not competition, and this is not limited to technics and technology but also to building relationships (connecting).

We are also called to a new generation of leadership, to implement new ways of responding and doing things in every area. Coming together as a network of ministries and a network of specialised groups is the way forward. Opportunities to connect and collaborate should be grabbed because we are stronger together than when we are on our own with our

limited resources. Bishop Bernard reminded that when we bring up weaknesses, it does not mean that we have failed but we are working and moving forward with existing resources.

Looking back at the history of the Church, in the beginning everyone did charity. Gradually, as we became more structured, we have sub-contracted charity. Now, the direction in which the Spirit is moving us is towards organising the whole Church for charity and we have to embrace it wholeheartedly by putting aside individual hang-ups and agendas and working towards a specialised network.

It was providential that the closing Mass and Gospel reading highlighted Jesus asking his disciples to “cross over to the other side” and Jesus “calming the storm” that arose on the journey (Mark 4: 35 – 41). The Lord who called us, who started the journey, is there with us in the boat. The storm is outside, why let it enter us? When the storm is inside us, we lose perspective, we lose clarity.

From the evaluation feedback, the participants were able to define their objectives and set new goals. The process taken for the national meet was affirmed as helpful. The SMART planning method aided in envisioning outcomes and specific actions to be taken. They agreed that further skills training is required for all. A number of participants requested for regular meetings, closer accompaniment, updates and coordinated collaboration between all ministries for the common good. With that said, this journey does not end with the two days meeting. Together we are asked to “cross over to the other side.”

WORLD DAY FOR CONSECRATED LIFE

Make God the centre of your lives

KOTA KINABALU: The Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu celebrated the World Day for Consecrated Life at a 9.00am Mass presided over by Archbishop John Wong on February 2.

In his homily, the prelate emphasised on the words spoken by both, Prophet Simeon and Anna, when they encountered the Saviour in the baby Jesus in the temple.

Simeon, a just and pious man, said "Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace for my eyes have seen your salvation... a light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel."

In these words, the prelate said, we must let God increase and we decrease.

"Very often, we try to build our own kingdom rather than His Kingdom. Jesus should be the centre, the light of the world. We are not the centre. We should allow Him to increase, and we should decrease.

"Are we bringing Jesus in our missionary work, and allowing Him to increase and we decrease?" he asked.

Prophetess Anna had been praying all the time for Jerusalem in the temple. The prelate said she had been longing for the coming of the promised Messiah.

She was already advanced in age but from the moment she encountered Jesus, she continued to share the Good News.

The Archbishop called on the consecrated men and women to do the same, no matter whether they belong to a religious congregation or are diocesan ministers.

"Simeon and Anna are symbolic - in all sacred history that represented Israel and all humanity that longed for the promised Messiah.

"He (Jesus) is here today, presenting Himself to you and I.

"The Pope said the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple is also known as the Feast of the Encounter. The first encounter of Simeon and Anna with the baby Jesus.

"What is your first encounter with Jesus? Recall that experience and ask yourselves, where would I meet Jesus again?" said the prelate.

The celebration gathered all consecrated women and men of the Archdiocese at Sacred Heart Cathedral.

Archbishop John thanked all congregations for their service to the Church here.

"Thank you for your presence in this



Religious sisters from various congregations under the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu.

Archdiocese and also for your contribution in one way or another, through your charisma, to build up the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu.

"Let us come together in this Archdiocese to build up the kingdom of God in the different charisms that we have.

"Be assured of my prayers. I always pray for you religious. One way that we can come together and help one another is by praying for vocations, be it joining the congregation or the diocese.

"If we want to continue to serve, we need successors.

"So, pray for one another, especially for our young people, and encourage them to respond to the call of being a religious or a priest," said the prelate.

On that day, the consecrated men and women also renewed their vows of Chastity, Poverty and Obedience to the Most Holy Trinity and her Church. In his turn, the Archbishop then blessed them. — **By Linda Edward, Catholic Sabah**

Journeying together as messengers of Christ

SEREMBAN: World Day for Consecrated Life is celebrated annually on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. The Kuala Lumpur Archdiocese Conference of Religious (KLACR) organised the celebration on February 5 during the sunset Mass at the Church of the Visitation.

Forty priests, brothers, and sisters from the different congregations in the archdiocese participated in the Mass celebrated by Archbishop Julian Leow.

The religious walked in the Entrance procession with lighted candles. The candles represent the light of Christ that we carry into the world, aptly the theme for this year's celebration — *Journeying Together as Messengers of Christ*. The theme reminds us that our religious consecration is a setting apart to be close to Jesus, to know Him, and to love Him and then make Him known to all peoples. It also calls to mind the need to embrace the synodal spirit, a journey that excludes nobody, and is an invitation to walk hand-in-hand, fulfilling the vocation of proclaiming the Gospel to all.

Archbishop Julian, in his homily said, that it is good to reflect on our first inclination towards following a vocation - whether to the married life, single life, religious life, or the ordained ministry. He then asked them, do you recall your first inclination towards this calling? We are not worthy to be His priests, brothers, and sisters and yet, God calls each of us. Archbishop said, to be a follower of Christ as a disciple before we even think of our individual vocation, is to have a personal and intimate relationship with Jesus, and most of all, to recognise that



Archbishop Julian Leow with religious from the different congregations in the archdiocese.

none of us are worthy. He then addressed the young people who are thinking of religious life — to know that are struggles and disappointments but God remains with us! He continues to relate it with the Gospel, giving up everything that the world offers like James, John, Simon and Andrew.

During the offertory, the gifts were brought forward by representatives of the parish, and also representatives of the religious. Firstly, the bouquet of flowers was offered to acknowledge and recognise that all vocations are collectively beautiful gifts of God, rooted in the universal Baptismal consecration. Secondly, the lighted candle was offered to remind everyone that Jesus Christ is the light of the world so that everyone experiences a rich and more fulfilling encounter with our Lord Jesus. Thirdly, the Crucifix reminds us of the fruits of the

Holy Spirit which are manifestations of our life in Christ, to strengthen our commitment to courageously be witnesses of the Gospel through our words and action. Next, the emblems of religious orders and congregations. These emblems signify the variety of religious calling, that bear witness to the multiform manner in which Christ's call to all of us to be His disciples can manifest itself. Moving on, the rule of constitutions is to express the charism of each religious institute, and help regulate the common life of a religious order/ congregation. They help the members of the institute, who come from diverse backgrounds and possess different life experiences, to come together in living out an institute's particular charism in its mission in the Church. Last but not the least is the bread and wine which were brought in by members from the Family

Life Ministry. This is to recognise that families are the seedbed from which vocations are sown, nurtured and ultimately bear fruit.

At the end of the celebration, Bro Raja Manickam (SG), chairperson of the KLACR, addressed the congregation to look on the giver of vocations. He has been faithful in calling and He will continue to do so. Focus on Him and put our trust in Him, as quoted by Pope John Paul. Moving on, Archbishop in his speech thanked each congregation in the Archdiocese for their service and their vocation to the Archdiocese. With that, they had a photo session as they processed out with the recessional hymn.

After the Eucharistic celebration, fellowship was held in the Church Hall. It was indeed a joy and spirit-filled celebration. — **By Sabrina Smith**



Archbishop Simon Poh presiding over the Mass at the Carmelite Chapel, Feb 5, 2022. (Today's Catholic Photo/Ambrose Kon)

Celebrating World Day for Consecrated Life

KUCHING: To commemorate World Day for Consecrated Life (February 2), on the feast of the Presentation of Our Lord, representatives from the religious orders serving in the Archdiocese of Kuching took part in a belated celebration on February 5, 2022, at the Carmelite Chapel.

The morning Holy Mass was presided over by Archbishop Simon Poh, con-

celebrated by Archbishop Emeritus John Ha and Claretian, Franciscan, Jesuit and Salesian priests in the Kuching Archdiocese.

Also taking part in the celebration were Franciscan sisters, Carmelite nuns and the OCDS religious men and women, with Fr Alvin Ng inspiring everyone with his homily. — **By Ivy Chai, Today's Catholic**

Capuchins elect new Custos and Councillors



From left: Second Councillor Friar Gilbert James OFM Cap, Custos Friar Valentine Gompok OFM Cap and First Councillor Friar Michael Raymond OFM Cap.

By Gwen Manickam

CHERAS: After deliberating for three days (January 25 to 27, 2022) at Gethsemane Friary, the Capuchin Friars of the Custody of Malaysia-Singapore voted and elected their new Custos, and two Councillors.

Friar Valentine Gompok, OFM Cap, was elected as the new Custos, with Friar Michael Raymond, OFM Cap, as his First Councillor, and Friar Gilbert James, OFM Cap, as the Second Councillor.

The Sabahan Friar, who has been based in Johor for the last 10 years, said that he attended the deliberation with no expectations and was surprised to hear

his name was on the list, after the straw ballot at the end of the first day.

“After 28 years as a Capuchin Friar, I felt it was not fair if I declined, as I did three years ago when I wasn’t ready. I need to contribute to the custody and accept the task given.”

Friar Valentine relocates to Kuala Lumpur at the end of this month, where he and his two councillors will work towards achieving the custody’s vision and mission for the duration of their term in office, from now till 2025.

“My principle is to work as a team and not run as a lone ranger. We must collaborate, trust each

other and delegate to others,” said the 52-year-old Kg Kalasasan-Mogong, Tambunan native.

On what his first course of action would be as the newly elected Custos, he said, “We can’t do much now because of the pandemic, but we will work towards making progress and putting things in order.

“There will be a minor reshuffle in the composition of the fraternity. We will continue working on unfinished projects, particularly the house in Penang which is currently closed for renovations. Upon completion, the friars who were relocated to Kuala Lumpur and Johor will be able to return home,” he said.

The One who sent me is with me

TAMBUNAN, Sabah: The Transitional Diaconate Ordination of Seminarian Dominico Evan (born Domi bin Duuk) was also held at Pusat Pertapaan CSE St Joseph Tambunan on January 25, 2022.

Deacon Dominico chose “The One who sent me is with me; He has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases Him,” (John 8:29) as his ordination motto. Sharing his vocation journey, Deacon Dominico, the sixth of seven children, said the seed to join the priesthood grew from the tender age of six, due to his parents’ strong spiritual influence. One of his brothers, Fr Gilbert Lasius, is a diocesan priest in the Keningau diocese.

As he was growing up, the deacon said he always felt the call to be a priest while attending Holy Mass on Sunday, and that calling kept echoing in his heart as he grew older. While discerning his calling, Deacon Dominico was an active altar server who later became a lector, and participated in many youth programmes at St Bede Nabawan.

He added, “God’s call is so mysterious. Once God knocked on the door of my heart, the knocking kept echoing wherever I was.” Deacon Dominico hopes his vocation story inspires and ignites the hearts of many youths, especially those called to serve in the Lord’s vineyard.



Bishop Cornelius Piong places the Book of the Gospel in Deacon Dominico’s hands.

Bishop Cornelius Piong, in his message, reminded that our ministry must always be rooted and based on Unity, Loyalty, and Holiness with Jesus. The prelate also hopes that leadership and ministry, especially priests and deacons, produce a community of God’s people who are always proud of their Christian identity, committed to God’s mission, and believe Jesus is the Way, Truth, and Life during their pilgrimage in this world. — *Caroline Kelly Liew*

God chooses and ordains His humble servant

TAMBUNAN, Sabah: The Sacramental Ordination of Deacon Rudolf De Acquaviva, from the Congregation of Carmalite Sancti Eliae (CSE), was held at the Pusat Pertapaan CSE, St Joseph on January 25, 2022.

Bishop Cornelius Piong presided over the Rite of Ordination with 12 priests concelebrating and Deacon Bede Morti assisting. Adhering to the SOP, the celebration was held in a closed ceremony. However, a video of the ordination may be viewed on the Diocese of Keningau’s Facebook page.

In line with his ordination motto, “In Him and through faith in Him we may approach God with freedom and confidence” (Eph.3:12), Fr Rudolf said, “The ordination today is to remind me that the event is possible because it is God alone who chooses and ordains His humble servant, who is fragile and full of weakness.”

Born Rayner Bin Sagulu, Fr Rudolf is the third local priest ordained from this congregation. He joined the CSE Congregation at Pusat Pertapaan CSE in July 2011. He took his first vow on July 16, 2014, and thereafter continued his studies in Theology and Philosophy at the Catholic Seminary High School St. Yohanes Salib, Bandol, West Kalimantan, Indonesia (STIKAS) for three years. Upon completing his priesthood



From left: Deacon Dominico Evan, Bishop Cornelius Piong and Fr Rudolf De Acquaviva on January 25, 2022.

formation, he took his final vows at the Chapel of Mary Mother of Carmel (MBK), Carmel Spiritual Center, Bandol, West Kalimantan on July 20, 2020. Last February, Fr Rudolf was ordained as a deacon at Pusat Pertapaan CSE, St Joseph Tambunan.

Fr Rudolf said at first, he never considered being a shepherd of Jesus. His call to be a CSE priest began in 2008 when three religious Sisters and a Brother from CSE visited him at KUK Tombotuon. The calling was further enhanced while serving as a choir member at a Spiritual Camp Programme.

“During the Spiritual Camp, I was attracted to the CSE Sisters and Brothers’ humble and touching service. This is where God’s

call began to grow. I experienced an encounter of God’s love that I could not fully express with words. Through this hermitage, God healed and touched my heart. This experience of God’s love dared me to forgo my desires, ideals, and future to follow Him”.

Fr Rudolf also called on the young people not to be afraid to give themselves to God, “God calls, and He will make it good. Young people who have a desire to dedicate themselves to God, as priests or religious, pursue your longing. If you already have that calling, don’t let go, be faithful and bravely face the challenges, persevere in hardships until the end of life.” — *Caroline Kelly Liew*

Myanmar children baptised

KUALA LUMPUR: Members of the Myanmar Catholic Community Malaysia (MCCM) were thrilled their children could finally receive the Sacrament of Baptism, as churches head towards a new normalcy.

On February 4, 2022, the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist’s priest in residence, Fr Robert Kham, christened some 90 infants and toddlers in batches. Fr Robert said it took about two

months to organise the event as most parents worked and had different days off.

In the Klang Valley, under the MCCM, there are 17 different communities, defined by the dialects they speak. While most of them do not speak Burmese, they can understand and follow prayers, said the priest from Myanmar.

The Zomi Catholic Community Malaysia is the largest Catholic

congregation with about 1,300 members, most of whom live in and around Sentul. Its representative, Bosco Lian Lam Suai, said they have 14 BECs within their community, and today there were 50 children awaiting baptism.

Parent Hau Kim, who has been in Malaysia since 2013 under UNHCR status, said he was thankful and happy to finally have his 3.5-year-old daughter baptised. — *By Gwen Manickam*



Fr Robert Kham baptises an infant on February 4, 2022.

A dialogue of hope

KUALA LUMPUR: In conjunction with World Interfaith Harmony Week, the Archdiocesan Pastoral Institute (API) organised a meet-up with Professor Dr Tajuddin Mohd Rasdi to dialogue about current issues in Malaysia. Dr Tajuddin is a professor of architecture at a local university. He has written various books on Islam and on Architecture, and is a columnist with *The Star* and *Sin Chew Daily*.

The meet-up was held on February 4, 2022 at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre. It was attended by Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur, Most Rev Julian Leow, as well as directors of API, Fr Eugene Benedict and Fr Edwin Peter.

During the two-hour event, attendees exchanged hopes in the areas of education and race relations, especially relations amongst religious groups and political parties. They also talked about the media and its power in building



Dr Tajuddin Mohd Rasdi discusses education and race relations in Malaysia.

a better Malaysia. The issues discussed were described as interesting, eye-opening and challenging.

Fr Eugene said, "With the challenges we face as a nation, there are possibilities of finding a way forward. Such dialogue fills us with hope that when there is a shared concern, there is hope."

"Prof Tajuddin is a grassroots man who is in touch with the lives of daily Malaysians. This is the

reason his articles and interventions are experiential and practical, with a passion for building a better Malaysia," he added.

Fr Eugene said API will continue to make efforts to dialogue at grassroots levels. He also urged all Parish Ministry of Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Affairs (PMEIA) to undertake similar efforts to build fraternity in their parishes at grassroots levels.

Interfaith Harmony Week 2022

KUALA LUMPUR: Celebrating the World Interfaith Week, the Ambassador and Head of the European Union Delegation to Malaysia, HE Michalis Rokas, and several delegates, called on the Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur, Most Rev Julian Leow at the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist on February 8, 2022.

Also present to welcome the delegates were parish priest of the Cathedral, Fr Gerard Theraviam, Director of the Catholic Research Centre, Fr Clarence Devadass, and Directors of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Institute Fr Eugene Benedict and Fr Edwin Peter.

Fr Gerard guided the delegates on a tour around the parish and later shared a video presentation on the historic church, built around 1883 and then the only Catholic Church in the state.

Following a lively discussion on peaceful coexistence and interfaith harmony in Malaysia, everyone adjourned to tea and a light but scrumptious spread of local delicacies.

Before the courtesy visit ended, HE Rokas signed the guest book, exchanged gifts with Archbishop Julian and posed for pictures to commemorate the event.



HE Michalis Rokas and EU delegates visit the Cathedral of St John, KL.

Reaching out to the Sikh community



Fr Eugene Benedict and four single adults visit the Sikh community at Gurdwara Sahib Main Duab.

KUALA LUMPUR: A second initiative undertaken by the Archdiocesan Pastoral Institute (API) in conjunction with Interfaith Harmony Week was organising a visit to the Gurdwara Sahib Main Duab, located on Jalan Pudu Lama in Kuala Lumpur. The visit was led by Director of API, Fr Eugene Benedict, together with four single adults from the Church of St Anthony in Pudu.

During the visit on February 6, 2022, participants were warmly welcomed by the priest at the gurdwara, together with two of its leaders. They visited the prayer hall and a *langgar* where they joined

the community in a meal of home-cooked chapati, chutney and lassi. A *langgar* is a kitchen in a gurdwara that serves complimentary vegetarian meals to everyone, regardless of religious background or economic status.

For some participants, this was the first time visiting a gurdwara and reaching out to its community. For others, it was a faith-filled encounter.

Sharing her experience of the visit, Tennyncia said, "This was my first time approaching a Sikh community at the gurdwara, and I loved the whole experience. I've always wanted to do something

like this and I feel grateful to be able to visit the gurdwara and meet with good hearted people. Hearing their stories of sincerity in seeking God sparks new light in my heart as my own faith in humanity grows deeper. Any person with sincerity of heart in searching for God must be respected; and respect towards other religions is a sign of love for one's own religion, because we follow Jesus' command to love our neighbour as ourselves."

Another participant, Tasyera M said, "We can all be different and still live in harmony if there is willingness to compromise and accept our differences without prejudice."

Chilean Ambassador visits Minor Basilica of St Anne

BUKIT MERTAJAM: Despite the pandemic, the recently elevated Minor Basilica of St Anne is seldom short of visitors, be it local or from as far as the Americas. It was an honour to welcome the Ambassador of Chile to Malaysia, HE Diego Velasco von Pilgrimm, and his Indonesian wife, Dr Raden Ayu Ambara Baratawidjaja, to the Shrine of Harmony.

Bishop of Penang, Rt Rev Sebastian Francis, was present to meet the couple and give first-hand information about the pilgrim church. The dashing pair were happy to meet

fellow Indonesians and it made Dr Raden's day when they sang several songs in her local language. It was a joyous and heart-warming time as the visitors soaked in the lush greenery, the treehouse, and experienced the Penangite hospitality which we hope will be embedded in their memories forever.

Visitors from all walks of life come to the Shrine to pay homage - for some, it is a daily ritual before going to work while others check-in to place a petition, ask for blessings, or spend quiet time with St Anne.



Bishop Sebastian Francis blesses HE Diego Velasco and wife, Dr Raden.



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Chinese-speaking Catholics begin Lunar New Year with Mass

KOTA KINABALU: After a two-year lapse of physical Mass to welcome the lunar new year, the Chinese-speaking parishioners of Sacred Heart Cathedral grabbed the opportunity to worship in church on February 1, to usher in the year of the tiger. About 800 people filled the Cathedral, with SOP compliance, on a first-come-first-serve basis.

The church was beautifully decorated with red lanterns and colourful cherry blossoms at the sanctuary denoting springtime.

‘Be filled with wisdom and courage like the tiger (Year of Tiger)!’ said Archbishop John Wong in his homily.

Taking the second reading from the letter of St Paul to the Ephesians

(4:22-24), he added, ‘You are to put aside your old self, which belongs to your old way of life and is corrupted by following illusory desires. Your mind is to be renewed in spirit so you could put on the New Man created on God’s principles, in the uprightness and holiness of the truth’

Based on Scripture, the prelate emphasised the transformation of our inner hearts by living a simple lifestyle through readjustment of our way of consumerism and resetting our financial planning or goal so the health of our body and mind are safeguarded.

He said wealth, power, fame, and deceitful desires do not belong to our hearts. Tune our hearts to the Kingdom of God as exhorted in the Beati-



The priests with Archbishop John Wong walk in procession at the start of the Mass. (Catholic Sabah photo/Michael Wong)

tudes – the poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those persecuted for righteousness, and those who are reviled and persecuted for the sake of Christ – to attain true blessedness in life.

Mass ended with Archbishop John

asking the Lord to grant us wisdom and courage to live the Beatitudes — to love God, our neighbour and ourselves — before inviting the clergy and congregation to kneel and give thanks to the Lord.

The prelate blessed mandarin oranges as a symbol of God’s blessing to those who received them with

good faith. The oranges, which were distributed after Mass, followed the Chinese custom of thanking the Lord for the past year and thanking the priests for their services.

Angpows were given to the prelate, priests, and religious sisters by the congregation. — **By Catherine Wan, Catholic Sabah**

Lion dance at OLF

KUALA LUMPUR: The parish of Our Lady of Fatima (OLF) welcomed the Chinese New Year with a lion dance performance around the church grounds, after the sunset Mass on February 5. Thirty young boys from the Hong Wei Dragon and Lion Dance Team made up the dance troop. The three colourful lions wiggled, jumped, and bowed to the sounds of traditional drums, gongs, and cymbals. As the dancers performed, parish priest Fr William Michael lit firecrackers at the gate

entrance, adding to the cacophony of sounds around the church.

The captivating lion dancers attracted passers-by and some stopped outside the church to watch. The performance ended with the lions presenting Fr William with a basket of mandarin oranges, pineapples, and pomelo. Parishioners also eagerly gathered to take photos with the adorable lions. It was an unforgettable event to mark an auspicious beginning to celebrate the year of the tiger. — **By Connie Stephen**



The lion dancers with Fr William Michael.

Rawang church ushers in the Year of the Tiger

RAWANG: *Gong Xi Gong Xi Gong Xi Nie ...* this well-known refrain of an evergreen Chinese New Year song was echoing through the Church of St Jude Thaddeus, as it ushered in the Year of the Tiger with Mass on Sunday, February 6, 2022.

The Mass was celebrated by parish priest Fr Vincent Thomas with Fr Surain Durai Raj concelebrating. After the final blessing, both priests conducted a ceremony to pay respects to the ancestors; not only the Chinese ancestors, but also all ancestors, irrespective of race or creed. This practice, sanctioned by the Roman Catholic Church, has been a unique feature in St Jude’s church for the past few years.

The celebration ended with the distribution of *angpows* and Mandarin oranges to the parishioners



Frs Vincent Thomas and Surain Durai Raj at the Mass.

by the celebrants and seminarians Vincent Susei and John Robertson, while the choir sang a medley of classic Chinese New Year songs. — **By John Chuah**

Youth welcome CNY with song

LABIS, Johor: The Church of St Simon celebrated a Mass in Mandarin for Chinese New Year on February 1. There were about 70 parishioners who participated in the 11.00am celebration. New Year decorations of Chinese lanterns, door couplets and oranges added to the festive liturgy.

Parish priest of St Simon, Fr Jason Wong, was the main celebrant, with Fr James Rajendran of St Philip Church in Segamat concelebrating. During the homily, Fr Jason used the parable of the ‘old wine into new wineskins’ to illustrate the importance of transforming family life into a new life in the Lunar New Year.

After Mass, the Catholic Rite of Chinese Ancestor Veneration, which is approved by the Holy See, took place on a specially constructed altar. A joss stick was offered during the commemoration, and the faithful



The youth of the Church of St Simon singing Chinese New Year songs.

bowed three times before the ancestral tablet. Gifts of flowers, wine, and oranges were offered as symbols of love, life, and adoration, respectively. Parishioners participated in this tradition with great reverence.

We pray that families in our diocese live in unity, peace, and harmony and that one day, we will be united with our ancestors, relatives, and friends in Heaven.

The priests blessed mandarin oranges and distributed them with *angpow* packets to the congregation. The youth sang popular Chinese New Year songs, and the faithful joined in the festivities.

We were overwhelmed by the generosity of the parishioners and their spirit of love and friendship. *XIN NIAN KUAI LE* — **By Anna and Deacon James Anthony**

The season of Spring to celebrate new life

KUCHING: The Archdiocese of Kuching’s live-telecast of the Chinese Lunar New Year Thanksgiving Mass from St Joseph’s Cathedral was celebrated with about 360 parishioners on February 1, 2022.

The Mass was presided over by Archbishop Simon Poh, with Archbishop Emeritus John Ha, Fr Galvin Ngumbang, Fr Mark Bonchol, Fr Alvin Ng and Fr Stanley Goh concelebrating.

At the bilingual Chinese/English language Mass, Archbishop Simon likened the Chinese New Year to spring, with the growth of new life. ‘We use the character 春 spring to celebrate new life,’ he said.

The prelate explained that the thanksgiving Mass was ‘to give thanks to God, seek the Father’s will and his blessing that we may receive the true blessedness that comes from our Father.’ He added that to find true everlasting happiness that our Father wants to give us, we have to follow the teach-

ings of Jesus in the Beatitudes.

Parishioners were pleasantly surprised to find red *angpow* packets and oranges placed at the pews for everyone. Later, they held up the oranges to be blessed by the archbishop.

The celebratory Mass concluded with a dance performance to the music *Give Thanks* presented by the Chinese youth. Online viewers were treated to a lion dance video

from St Joseph’s Private School lion dance troupe.

Meanwhile, all other parishes in the Archdiocese of Kuching also celebrated CNY thanksgiving Masses for their communities. Some churches offered Masses on the eve of Chinese New Year so they could have separate English and Chinese language Masses for their congregations. — **By Ivy Chai, Today’s Catholic**



Archbishop Simon Poh (centre) flanked by (from left) Fr Mark Bonchol, Fr Alvin Ng, Archbishop Emeritus John Ha, Fr Galvin Ngumbang and Fr Stanley Goh, February 1, 2022. (St Joseph’s Cathedral photo)

Pope asks men to join fight against human trafficking

ROME: Pope Francis called human trafficking a form of violence and asked all to join in fighting it.

Male-female relationships based on “discrimination and submission” lead to the exploitation and humiliation of thousands of women and girls each year, Pope Francis said.

“Human trafficking, through domestic or sexual exploitation, violently relegates women and girls to their supposed role of subordination in the provision of domestic or sexual services and to their role as providers of care and dispensers of pleasure, which proposes yet again a model of relationships marked by the power of the male gender over the female,” Pope Francis said in a video message.

Marking the February 8 International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking and the feast of St Josephine

Bakhita, a former slave, Pope Francis insisted, “The violence suffered by every woman and every girl is an open wound on the body of Christ, on the body of all humanity; it is a deep wound that affects every one of us, too.”

“The thousands of women and girls who are trafficked every year denounce the dramatic consequences of relational models based on discrimination and submission,” the Pope said, “and it is not an exaggeration — there are thousands of them!”

Praising the women and women religious around the world dedicated to fighting human trafficking, coerced prostitution, forced marriage and slave labour, Pope Francis said men must get involved as well, “opposing with all our might every form of exploitation in human trafficking”. — **By Cindy Wooden, CNS**



Pope Francis meets participants at an international conference on human trafficking in 2019. (Vatican Media)

Korean Church supports struggling single mothers

SEOUL: The Archdiocese of Seoul continues to sponsor single mothers struggling to maintain their families as part of its pro-life activities via the *Courage and Hope for Single Mothers* programme.

The Church will stand with families in their difficult times, its officials said during a ceremony to deliver sponsorship certificates to 20 beneficiaries and heads of single-parent families in the capital city recently.

In 2018, the Unwed Parent Fund Committee under the Committee for Life of Seoul Archdiocese started the sponsorship programme for single mothers in collaboration with Church-run Catholic Newspaper and Catholic Peace Broadcasting Corporation (CPBC).

Each sponsored family receives a subsidy of 500,000 won (RM1751) each month for one year. It can be extended if necessary.

The sponsorship fund covers accommodation for the family, cost of living, medical expenses, and also preparing for employment during the period.

“It gives opportunities to mothers who are struggling economically and emotionally,” said Fr Remigio Lee Dong-ik, head



A priest baptises a child in a Catholic church in South Korea in 2020. (UCA News Photo/Catholic Times of Korea)

of the programme.

The priest applauded single mothers for their decisions to protect lives despite their hardships.

“In a society where many decisions are made to destroy lives, thank you for cherishing and protecting life. We will continue to subsidise expenses for single-mother and single-parent families, even to fulfil

their desire to go on a picnic. Together we pray for each other,” Fr Lee added.

While attending the sponsorship ceremony, Archbishop Peter Chung Soon-Tai-ck of Seoul, chairman of the Archdiocesan Committee for Life, said the Church will continue to support initiatives to protect life, which is a gift and blessing from God. — **ucanews.com**

Bishop in drug trafficking zone receives death threats

BUENAVENTURA, Colombia: Since 2017, Bishop Rubén Darío Jaramillo Montoya has led the Diocese of Buenaventura, centred on one of Colombia’s main seaports. His work announcing the Gospel and denouncing violence, drug trafficking, and organised crime has drawn more than one death threat.

The threats have recently re-emerged, prompting the Colombian Bishops’ Conference to post a video on February 7 expressing the bishops’ great concern for the personal safety of Bishop Jaramillo.

“He, as a good shepherd and carrying in his heart the suffering of his people, has denounced what is happening there: how the armed gangs are acting viciously in this region against that population,” stated Fr Darío Echeverri, secretary general of the National Conciliation Commission of the Colombian Bishops’ Conference.

“And since he had the courage, the prophetic bravery to denounce what is happening there, now he is the victim. They have forbidden him to go to areas of his diocese. They’ve banned him from certain places,” explained the priest.

Buenaventura and the surrounding territories are exposed to the violence of criminal gangs and armed groups that are disputing this strategic area to move out illegal substances and contraband.

Speaking to *ACI Prensa*, CNA’s Spanish language sister agency, Bishop Jaramillo said that he was not afraid.

“I’m not afraid because he who is with God remains strong. I am not interested in my own life, but in the life of the entire community. I’m not afraid, I continue to walk the streets, going from one place to another,” the prelate stressed.

“I’m certainly not going to hole up somewhere or flee. I am at the head of a community that needs someone to speak, someone to raise his voice, and here we will continue with God’s protection and what the Colombian state provides us,” said the bishop, who has had four security guards for some time now. — **CNA**



Bishop Rubén Darío Jaramillo Montoya of Buenaventura.

Indonesian diocese bans wedding ritual of sacrificing animals

JAKARTA: An Indonesian diocese has banned Catholics from carrying out a traditional marriage-related ritual involving animal sacrifice, saying it is contrary to the Catholic faith and has no basis in the socio-cultural life of the community.

Bishop Dominikus Saku of Atambua in East Nusa Tenggara province announced the

ban against the *hel keta* ceremony which is usually practiced by Dawan indigenous people from West Timor.

The ban was announced in a February 5 circular addressed to Catholics in the diocese.

The ceremony is usually performed by the Dawan people when someone marries into

another indigenous group.

It involves the slaughter of a sacrificial animal such as a chicken or a pig, which is claimed to be a symbol of purification for the couple from the past sins of their ancestors.

Bishop Saku said in his letter that the ceremony was against the Catholic faith and was superstition and mystical practice that had no basis in socio-cultural life. He also said it harmed kinship and human relations and added to the heavy economic burden on families and society.

“If the *hel keta* ritual is practiced, both by the couple who are getting married and by the family carrying it out, then the wedding blessing in the Church will be cancelled,” he said.

“I ask that parish priests, administrators, assistants and all pastoral agencies pay attention to this and announce it to all people in their respective service areas to be known and implemented,” he said. — **By Ryan Dagur, ucanews.com**



The Dawan people of West Timor perform a ‘hel keta’ ceremony. (UCA News photo)

Lourdes — What made it such an important symbol of hope and healing?

By Fr Dorian Llywelyn, SJ

Thousands of apparitions of the Virgin Mary have been reported by Christians across the world, from fourth-century Asia Minor, which is now Turkey, to contemporary California. Of all of these, the most renowned are the visions of Our Lady of Lourdes, reported in the mid-19th century by a teenage girl in the French Pyrenees mountains.

Ever since, devotion to Our Lady of Lourdes has gripped the Catholic imagination. Lourdes is one of the very few apparitions the Vatican has officially commended as worthy of belief, with its own feast day, February 11, in the Church's annual liturgical calendar.

Some six million pilgrims come to the shrine in Lourdes, France, each year to pray and seek healing.

This popular pilgrimage is one of the most visible examples of the devotion of many Catholics to Mary. I am a Jesuit priest and theologian whose research focuses on Mariology, the academic study of ideas about Mary in Christian history.

The Lady in the Grotto

In 1858, a 14-year-old girl named Bernadette Soubirous reported having 18 visions of a beautiful “young lady” in a cave near Lourdes, which was then a provincial town. Soubirous said that the figure identified herself as “the Immaculate Conception” and instructed the girl to dig into the earth and drink the water she found there. In other messages, the lady asked for a church to be built there so priests could come in procession.

Reports of the events drew large crowds who believed them to be apparitions of the Virgin Mary, and many people began attributing healing properties to the waters of the spring. These extraordinary events soon attracted the notice of the Parisian press and gained the support of the French imperial court.

Many Catholics interpreted the apparitions as confirming the doctrine of Immaculate Conception, which Pope Pius IX in 1854 had declared to be an essential element of Catholic faith. This teaching holds that Mary, as the mother of Jesus, was conceived without original sin — the incomplete union with God that,



Caregivers push the sick and disabled at the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes in southwestern France in this May 16, 2014, file photo. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

according to Catholic belief, all people are born with as a result of Adam and Eve disobeying God in the Garden of Eden.

Church officials were quickly alerted to Soubirous' experiences and were initially concerned about the truth of her account. After investigating, the local bishop became convinced that Mary had indeed appeared to the young woman. Popes later encouraged veneration at Lourdes, and in 1933, Soubirous herself was canonised as St. Bernadette.

Catholic churches, schools and hospitals soon began to be dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes, and replicas of the cave, or “grotto,” are today found throughout the world. These sites are built for worshippers who cannot make the pilgrimage but who seek to share in the experience of Lourdes.

Lourdes water

Researching popular Catholic devotions has taught me that apparitions attract sceptics as easily as they do crowds of enthusiastic believers. They also stir up religious and political controversy.

From the start, Church officials at Lourdes sought to deny claims of direct supernatural intervention for cures that could be scientifically explained instead. Today, physicians

at the International Medical Committee of Lourdes run a rigorous process of investigating claims of miraculous healings there.

Most reported healings turn out to have purely natural causes, but if the committee does not find a medical explanation, it refers the case to the local bishop for investigation. Since the 1860s, Church officials have formally declared 70 of the Lourdes healings to be miracles. The most recent case, which they confirmed in 2018, involved the healing of a French nun who had been using a wheelchair and suffering severe pain for almost 30 years, but recovered soon after her pilgrimage to the grotto.

Over the course of the 20th century, the number of new miracles confirmed in Lourdes has gradually slowed because of growth in scientific understanding.

In 2006, Church officials declared that, beyond “miracles,” they would recognise three additional categories of healing at Lourdes, in light of advances in medical knowledge: “unexpected,” “confirmed” or “exceptional” healings. The new categories relax the previous strict division between “natural” and “supernatural” healings, with the implication that God intervenes in many cases in which health is restored, even those that do not strictly

qualify as “miracles” in the sense traditionally used by the Catholic Church.

Devotion goes digital

If the number of officially recognised miracles has declined, grassroots faith in Lourdes is as strong as ever. An understanding that sickness and healing involve psychological, emotional and spiritual aspects, as well as physical ones, helps explain some of Lourdes' continuing appeal for many contemporary Catholics.

Devotional practices involve the sensory experiences of seeing, touching, tasting and hearing. Visitors travel from all over the world to light candles in the grotto, touch the rock where Soubirous said the Virgin appeared, join in the chants of the twice-daily processions, attend Mass, take Communion, and bathe in and drink the holy waters of the spring.

Psychologically, being in the company of large crowds of fellow believers strengthens social faith identity, as does seeing sick pilgrims treated with dignity and honour.

Many families, friends, spiritual advisers and volunteers from international Catholic organisations, such as the Order of Malta, accompany visitors too ill to travel alone. The physical work of caring for the sick affects people spiritually. I have visited Lourdes several times, both as helper and chaplain and heard many confessions there. I know that many of those who volunteer their time as helpers — including people who are not practising Catholics or even Christians — return home with deeper gratitude for their own health and a livelier faith.

For two months in 2020, the shrine at Lourdes closed for the first time in its history because of the pandemic. Since then, live-streaming of the grotto has attracted an even wider audience. Its dedicated YouTube channel and other social media are 21st-century virtual equivalents of the replica grottoes built in church grounds, schools, hospitals and homes around the world.

Sceptics will likely continue to dispute claims of miraculous healings and apparitions of the Virgin Mary. For millions, however, Lourdes will indisputably continue to be an important faith symbol of comfort and care, and a byword for healing and hope. — (The Conversation), americamagazine.org

A personal confession from the bottom of the heart

As promised, Benedict XVI has spoken. He spoke as a Christian. A nearly 95-year-old Christian, who is living the final years of his long life increasingly frail in body, with a feeble voice but lucid mind, and who has found himself once again at the centre of accusations and controversies.

His brief and heartfelt response stems from his deep gaze of faith. Ratzinger took his cue from the penitential act of daily Mass to express his personal and moving “confession”.

At the beginning of every Eucharistic liturgy, the celebrant and the faithful repeat the “mea culpa” ending with the words “my most grievous fault”. It is the consciousness of being sinners and therefore in need of imploring mercy and forgiveness.

This “penitential” attitude is far from both the triumphalism that considers the Church an earthly power and the corporatist style that reduces its existence to organisation, structure, and strategies. It is also far from the widespread attitude of always judging others and their faults, instead of questioning one-

“Mea maxima culpa” for the abominable sin of abuse and the errors that occurred. The Christian gaze of the Pope Emeritus expressing “profound shame”, “deep sorrow”, and a “heartfelt request for forgiveness”.

self about one's own.

Joseph Ratzinger, as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, at the beginning of the new millennium waged a struggle against clerical abuses. As Pope, he enacted very harsh laws to combat this abominable scourge. However, in his letter he neither recalls nor lays claim to any of this.

The days following the publication of the Munich report were an opportunity for him to make an “examination of conscience” and a personal “reflection” on what happened.

The Pope Emeritus says he has gazed into the eyes of “the consequences of a most



Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI

grievous fault” in his encounter with those who have been abused, and learned that “we ourselves are dragged into this most grievous fault when we neglect it or when we do not face it with the necessary decision and responsibility, as too often has happened, and happens.”

He expresses “profound shame, deep sorrow”, and a “heartfelt request for forgiveness” for all the abuses and errors, including those that occurred during his time in office in the respective places where he served, in Germany and Rome.

He writes, without subtracting himself, that he himself feels challenged by the attitude of those who still today underestimate the phenomenon, that is, by those who slumber, just as the Apostles slept on the Mount of Olives, leaving Jesus alone to pray and sweat blood in the face of the abyss of sin. He asks the “brothers and sisters” to pray for him.

The words of Benedict XVI in the letter are those of a helpless old man, who now senses the nearness of the encounter with God whose name is mercy. They are the words of a “humble worker in the vineyard of the Lord”, who sincerely asks for forgiveness without escaping the concreteness of problems, and invites the whole Church to feel the bleeding wound of abuse as its own. — By Andrea Tornielli, *Vatican News*



Synod of Bishops offers initial assessment of synodal process

The Synod of Bishops releases an initial report on the synodal process currently being held at the diocesan level, and lays out the criteria for reports prepared by dioceses, Bishops' Conferences, and Synods of Eastern Churches.



Pope Francis meets with the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops on October 11, 2021 (Vatican Media)

About three months after the opening of the synodal process, the 15th Ordinary Council of the Synod of Bishops expressed great satisfaction with the headway being made by the process at the local level. Close to 98 per cent of the Episcopal Conferences and Synods of Eastern Churches worldwide have appointed a person or an entire team to implement the synodal process.

The Ordinary Council's assessment was bolstered by the results that emerged from exchanges during some 15 online meetings with synod appointees from around the world, organised by the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops from November-December in 2021.

The Synodal process at the global level

The Church is on the move! Dioceses and both the laity (organised or not) and consecrated life, in particular, are showing great enthusiasm, which is being translated into a myriad of initiatives promoting consultation and ecclesial discernment. This is confirmed by the numerous testimonies received by the General Secretariat from all over the world, some of which are published periodically on the website *synodresources.org*. In addition to being reasons for hope, they are also a sign that the Holy Spirit is at work. Those who have experienced this synodal process in action testify to an experience that brings joy and speaks of a true transformation in their feeling of belonging to an ecclesial community.

In general, the timing, the modalities employed in the consultation, and the participation of the People of God, vary from region to region. The synodal process has been particularly welcomed with joy and enthusiasm in several African, Latin American and Asian countries. In places where a diocesan or national synodal process was already underway or about to begin, the two synodal dynamics have been successfully harmonised. The extension of the listening phase of the People of God has been particularly appreciated.

The documents published by the General Secretary have been well received, and commendable efforts have been made to

translate them at the local level. In some countries, this task is further complicated by multiplicity of local languages and the distances between ecclesial communities.

The ecumenical dimension has been well integrated and follows the indications suggested in the joint letter of October 29 written by Cardinal Koch and Cardinal Grech. Even on the part of the other Christian confessions, there is a certain enthusiasm and desire to contribute to the synodal journey undertaken by the Catholic Church. The interreligious dimension has become a natural part of this process in countries where Christians are in the minority.

A consistent effort has been made to promote communication through various media and online platforms. Many dioceses and Episcopal Conferences have provided websites and social network pages recount the journey within their own realities. For its part, in addition to the institutional website *synod.va*, the General Secretariat communicates through a variety of instruments, such as a weekly newsletter, a website to collect experiences and resources produced at the local level (*synodresources.org*) and a prayer site for the synod (*prayforthesynod.va*) created together with the Pope's World Prayer Network and the International Union of Superiors General.

Challenges

Many of the faithful perceive the synodal process as a crucial moment in the Church's life, as a learning process as well as an opportunity for conversion and renewal of ecclesial life. At the same time, various difficulties have also emerged. In fact, fears and reticence are reported among some groups of the faithful and among the clergy. There is also a certain mistrust among the laity who doubt that their contribution will really be taken into consideration.

Furthermore, the current pandemic has constituted a significant obstacle, limiting the ability to meet in person. The consultation of the People of God cannot be reduced to a mere questionnaire because the real challenge of synodality is, precisely, mutual listening and communal discernment.

Other recurring challenges are:

- 1) the need for formation, especially in listening and discernment so that the Synod is authentically a spiritual process and not reduced to a parliamentary debate;
- 2) avoiding the temptation to be self-referential in group meetings so that this mutual listening, which finds its foundation in prayer and listening to the Word of God, will lead to opening ourselves to others with a view to proclaiming the Gospel. A synodal Church is a missionary Church where every single baptised person feels co-responsible for the mission of the Church;
- 3) finding ways to improve the participation of young people;
- 4) involving those who live on the margins of ecclesial institutions;
- 5) the reluctance of some clergy.

Conclusion

In summary, while it seems that the novelty of the synodal process has given rise to much joy and dynamism, a number of uncertainties must also be addressed. There is growing awareness that the synodal conversion to which all the baptised are called is a lengthy process that will prolong itself well beyond 2023.

The desire all over the world is this synodal journey, which has begun at the local level, continue well beyond Synod 2021-2023 so that tangible signs of synodality might increasingly be manifest as constitutive of the Church.

Note for the preparation of reports

In response to the numerous requests received by the General Secretariat, a note is being prepared for dioceses and Episcopal Conferences regarding how they are to prepare the "reports" that they will submit to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops.

It is a tool at the service of the various ecclesial realities that will be engaged in the coming months in drawing up the results of their ecclesial discernment. The note proposes the idea that the drafting of the report is itself an act of discernment, i.e. the fruit of a spiritual process and teamwork. — *Vatican News*

Latin American religious reaffirm commitment to synodality

On the occasion of the World Day for Consecrated Life, which was celebrated on February 2, the Latin American and Caribbean Confederation of Religious (CLAR) reiterated its commitment to promoting change in the exercise of authority in the Church and to restore the spirit of Christian service so as to fulfil its prophetic role in society.

Learning a new way of being Church

In a message ahead of the celebration, the leadership of CLAR remarked that, with their "lifestyle bearing witness to the love of Christ" in all fields of ecclesial and social life and their "quest for the Absolute", consecrated men and women offer "a spiritual therapy for the evils of our time."

"We live the current uncertain times intensely as we try to give answers to the many questions surrounding us. We are inaugurating and learning a new way of being Church, a synodal Church, which spurs us to recover prophecy, having the Gospel as the sole rule of life."

Encouraging co-responsibility

According to the leadership of CLAR, the time has come "to serve humanity, to abandon all abuse — be it of power, conscience or sexual — to get freed from all forms of slavery" and to "promote synodal relations" in men and women religious' work.

"It is time for us to go forward by making ourselves small with the people, to promote the dynamics of collaboration and co-responsibility, to articulate the participation of all," they added.



Supporting dialogue in the Church

In this regard, the letter highlights that the first Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean, which was held in autumn last year, recognised that CLAR has long contributed "to generating a growing synodal mentality and practice" in the local Church.

This recognition "confirms our commitment to cultivating dialogue between our bishops, priests, deacons, religious and laity," so as to carry out our common mission with one soul and heart focused on God", and "to promoting a new leadership in the ecclesial body, especially of women and lay people", the letter concluded. — *Vatican News*

RUMINATIONS

I found my passion in serving

A few days ago, I was at an Altar Boys training and our new Assistant parish priest, Fr Bernard Arputhasamy, asked us to introduce ourselves and also how long we had been servers. I realised that I have been an altar boy for about 12 years, which is more than half my life! This got me thinking about what's next in terms of serving God and His church after I pass on my duties to the younger guys.

As a cradle Catholic, I was used to the idea of serving in church, as my dad and cousins actively served in their respective parishes. I still remember seeing my elder brother add his name to the altar boys' ministry after he received his First Holy Communion. As I grew older, I found myself serving in other ministries such as the youth ministry, choir, charismatic renewal and lately, social communications. My mom, who was only baptised into the faith after I was born, often said that it is important to serve in any way possible. But one question I often find myself asking is, "Why do I serve?"

From a few years of serving in various ministries, I can answer this question with two reasons. The first is that I serve because I am made to serve. In Deuteronomy 11:1 it says "Love the Lord your God and keep his requirements, his decrees, his laws and his commands always." As Christians, we learn that we are made in the image and likeness of God and that we are to serve Him. We serve Him not because He needs this service but because we need it for ourselves. Through serving we encounter God, which helps us to encounter ourselves.

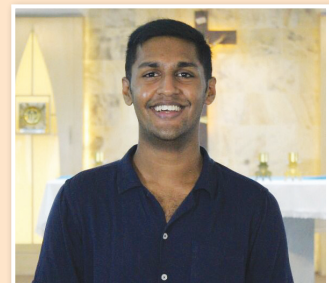
I have been blessed to serve as an altar boy which has allowed me to encounter God in many ways such as through the priest, my fellow altar boys, and the Eucharist. I have been blest to learn so much about the Mass from the formations done by my parish priests, especially on the Eucharist. Understanding such a great mystery and knowing that we humans are nothing without it, is truly amazing and it has helped me to grow as a person, both in and out of the church. One thing that I will always remember when serving is what my previous priest taught us, in his first few months with us and that is *Deo Optimo Maximo*, which means to give the best and the greatest to God.

The second reason why I serve is that, I serve for my brothers and sisters. I have been blest to work with many wonderful and dedicated people in organising talks, camps and other activities for the youth in Kristus Aman. Even though it can be physically and mentally tiring to organise these formations, the feeling when you hear a youth group member say they encountered God or developed a relationship with Him is just unexplainable.

While serving in the youth ministry, I have seen so many young people leave camps and talks saying they want to do more and that they want to develop a greater prayer life. One such incident was in 2015 when a friend came to a youth gathering that we used to have once every two weeks. The topic for this youth gathering was on sin and repentance. The speaker did an amazing job and many of the youth who were present that night went for Confession with our then parish priest, Fr Michael Chua, who was there that night. After the gathering, a friend told me that this was only the second time he had been to Confession since receiving his First Holy Communion. The feeling I had when he told me this was pure joy as I was able to contribute in a small way in helping him receive the sacraments.

Now that I think about it, the Church has done for me more than I can ever do for her through service. The blessings she has given and the knowledge I have gained is incomparable to the little that I have done in serving her and her people. Through service, my faith has been rooted in the Lord and the teachings of His Church, which is something I will forever be grateful for.

To end this reflection, I would like to share a quote by St Teresa who gave her life in service of God and others: "A sacrifice to be real must cost, must hurt, and must empty ourselves. Give yourself fully to God. He will use you to accomplish great things on the condition that you believe much more in His love than in your weakness."



Tomas Arun Dourado is a recent graduate from UTAR. The younger of two siblings, he loves to run and also spend time in the garden. When not carrying out his hobbies, you can almost always find him serving in some way or other in the Chapel of Kristus Aman.

Educating Papua's marginalised children



Children in Nabire district are taught by volunteers from the Papua Teaching Movement. (UCA News photo)

Stories from Jayapura street vendors who didn't have time to tend to their children's education inspired Agustinus Kadepa and his colleagues to think about taking concrete steps to help those children in the capital of Indonesia's Papua province.

"Because those mothers are busy making a living, they barely have time to take good care of their children," he said.

Many of these children fall behind in school compared to other children of their age.

"Even though they have reached the final grade of elementary school, many cannot read, write and count," the 31-year-old lay Catholic said. "Besides that, there are also those who then quit school and wander the streets."

This sorry situation moved him and his colleagues — students, activists and civil servants — to discuss solutions.

"In the course of time, we finally agreed to take concrete steps by pioneering what we call the Teaching Papua Movement," Kadepa said.

The movement, which was launched in Jayapura in 2013, started by opening a reading park where they invited children to gather to be taught how to read, write and count.

The children were divided into three groups, ranging from those who could not read at all, those who had a little more understanding and those who were fluent.

They also provide a wide selection of reading materials obtained from donors including volunteers, NGOs and the local church.

"We do a lot of activities every afternoon after formal schooling. Initially, only 24 children attended, but gradually it continued to grow," Kadepa said.

The movement has reached five

districts in Papua province — Jayapura, Nabire, Paniai, Dogiyai and Deiyai — with 24 learning centres managed by 72 volunteers.

"There is no special place that is used as a learning location. Some use the churchyard, some use people's homes," said Kadepa, who graduated from Jayapura's Cenderawasih University.

“Each year, about 20 per cent of Papua's special autonomy fund goes to education. During 2020, funds for education reached 2.09 trillion rupiah (US\$145 million) of the 6.99 trillion in special autonomy funds for two provinces — Papua and West Papua.

However, the easternmost region is still consistently ranked the lowest in the human development index of 34 provinces, one of which is the level of education.

The Central Bureau of Statistics also shows that 476,534 (34.58 per cent) of the school-age population in Papua have no education. The area is also experiencing a shortage of 20,147 teachers from elementary to high school levels.

Aleks Giyai, 31, one of the volunteers who is now working in Jayapura, said they not only reached out to children but also to parents and community leaders.

"We consider that attention to education must be a shared concern," he said.

"Therefore, in places where we are present, we always approach traditional leaders and church leaders first. We give them an understanding that what we are do-

ing is not in our interests but for the future of the Papuan children."

Meanwhile, they always emphasise to parents that education is the key to Papua's progress.

Giyai said their goal is to spread this movement throughout Papua. "We can't just rely on the government, as well as formal schools, even though the government budget for education is very large," he said.

Giyai said, from the start, they had been operating on the basis of voluntarism without any financial support from the government. "If we get help, it's because there are donors who spontaneously help," he said.

Kadepa said the thing that strengthened them to keep moving was that many children wanted to continue their schooling. Some who were assisted by them have now become volunteers.

He hopes that their small steps can bear fruit with the emergence of intellectuals fighting for Papua.

"We hope there will be a successor generation for figures like Fr Neles Keadabi Tebay and Rev Benny Giay," he said, citing two highly respected Papuan Church leaders.

Fr Tebay was a lecturer, writer and head of the Papua Peace Network who died in 2019, while Rev Giay was a prominent figure and chairman of the Synod of the Kemah Injili Church.

Kadepa said Papua is facing many problems such as human rights violations and marginalisation accompanied by expansion in various sectors by outsiders.

"If this change is not followed by a movement to raise awareness about the importance of education, then we Papuans will continue to be marginalised in our land," he said. — **By Ryan Dagur, ucanews.com**

The duality of life and prayer

The dual nature of Jesus is something I have always been fascinated by. I have no problems believing that He is true God and true Man. That belief is not something I struggle with, because I live a kind of duality each day. The praying me, the godly me, is the one who wakes before the dawn in order to sit at the altar to pray. I pray for comfort if I wake with emotional pain. I pray for help in the trials of my day, for wisdom to make correct choices, for generosity of spirit, to not be slighted by the carelessness of others.

And yet, most days, I leave the praying me at the altar, and the earthly me rises to love and do battle with the world. Unless I am very aware, I rarely consult with the praying me as I go towards my day.

This is where I envy Jesus. In his duality, He is fully God, and fully Man. His human weaknesses are overlaid by his Godhead. In Him, I feel, two streams of consciousness run parallel, and bisected, availing Him supernatural knowledge while clothed in the weakness of human form.

I don't covet His divinity, but I certainly want to be able to tap into the godliness in myself more. I am not alone when I lament to my friends and BEC members about how I start off with the best of intentions of bringing God into whatever I do, only for that to be relegated to a closed off part of me whenever I find myself engaged in difficult, human situations.

This knee-jerk response, propelled by ego and the flawed belief that I am, by myself, well-equipped enough to be able to handle the challenges of the day, is something I am trying hard to overcome.

At first, I told myself that I would breathe



Word In Progress

Karen Michaela Tan

deep and exhale before I responded to someone who aggravated me. The trouble is, I am as much a Daughter of Thunder, as James and John were Sons. I am aggressive, impetuous, quick to take insult, and as quick to retaliate.

Deep breathing does not work for me because sometimes I speak before I breathe, many times to my detriment, as I would ruefully confess the morning after at my altar. This is when I decided that I needed more tangible reminders of my daughtership in Christ. To be the child of the Most High meant that I am called to reflect the radiance of the Almighty. If God is Light, then I am a prism, a magnifying glass. My calling on earth is to be an amplifier of the Light. I am not the Light, but one who speaks for and of the Light. And because I speak for the Light, I need to ensure that the words that I say are Spirit-guided.

This means a constant checking in to my praying self, the part of me that is most in union with Christ and His holy Church. I do this in the most physical of ways. When I am angered, ready to speak unkindly; or if I am hurt, and retaliating from a place of shame or fear, I make it a point to reach for the cross.

For the longest time, I have deigned not to wear this simple symbol of my faith because

I felt that I was not worthy of it. I feared being called out. I was afraid that someone would catch me on a nasty day where I was being a cantankerous pain, see the cross around my neck and snort, "Well! If that's being a Catholic, I want none of it."

Neither did I want to use the symbol of redemptive suffering as adornment. As much as I disagree with people who string crosses from ears, wrists and necks, I also dislike ostentation in the name of religiosity, where crosses are platinum and diamond studded, their shine taking away from the true sacrifice of a rough, wooden instrument of torture.

So, I tried other physical reminders of my faith: a WWJD bracelet (water from frequent handwashing gathered under the band and made me itch), a dove brooch (I said very rude things when I pricked myself on it), a rosary bracelet (caught it in the door and nearly took my hand off). In the end, the safest thing to do was to wear a little cross on a plain chain on my neck.

I have trained myself to surreptitiously bring my hand to my neck when I need to check in with my praying self. The action grounds me, and brings earthly me and praying me into the same space and consciousness again. The subtle grasp on the hard edges of the cross reminds me that I have a choice: to speak as me, or to bear Christ in my words and actions. In the same time that I know that I am a being of free will, is the remembrance that Jesus too had free will. He could have forsaken the cross, but He chose that road to that hill for me.

When my frustrated fingers clamp down on my cross, I recall how Jesus' hands must have clenched in pain when the nails were

pounded into them. In recalling His suffering for me, I breathe deep, and beg the Holy Spirit for counsel, for the right use of my talents, whether in word or by speech. Many times, when the praying me and the earthly me reside in the same space, I find I am better equipped to deal with whatever trials come my way. In my head I may mutter, "Imbecile!" But that is followed by the chiding in my spirit that says, "Jesus died for us ALL. He came to the sick because only the ill have need of healing. You are a conduit to God's healing. Put on the mind of Christ, the heart of Christ, and then look at the person before you."

In every instance that I have united my praying self and my earthly self, I have felt a profound outpouring of grace. Grace that helps me to be kinder, gentler, nicer. Grace that enables me to see another as also a beloved child of Christ. Grace that strips away enmity and encourages dialogue and openness.

More times than not, when I respond with grace, from a place of seeking to understand, I find that anger is banked, tempers cool, and there is a greater chance of coming to a place of neutrality, if not acceptance and safety. This is only possible when I take on the mind and heart of Jesus. This is why I wear the cross of Jesus, so that I can share in the duality of the nature of the God who saves me.

● **Karen-Michaela Tan** is a poet, writer and editor who seeks out God's presence in the human condition and looks for ways to put the Word of God into real action. You can connect with her at: karenmichaelatan@gmail.com

Enriching interfaith encounters at the workplace

"The Church therefore, exhorts her children, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognise, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among them." – Pope Paul VI, Nostra Aetate

People who live in a multi-religious country like Malaysia have numerous opportunities to encounter people of different faiths. As an employee in the corporate sector who has colleagues from various religious backgrounds, interfaith encounters are enriching for me.

Mutual respect

Every year, the organisation that I work for will announce a list of staff who are to be promoted. One particular year, a group of Muslim staff, in thanksgiving for their promotion to senior levels, decided to collectively sponsor *satay* for a Hari Raya Aidilfitri staff gathering. One of the Muslim staff said that he will chip in on condition that only chicken *satay* is served. No beef *satay* must be served at all. As organiser of the event, I enquired why he made such a request. He explained that if pork and non-halal food are not served out of respect for Muslims, the Muslims in turn should not serve beef *satay* out of respect for Hindu staff. It is mutual respect, he emphasised.

After much negotiation (and grumbling), the rest of the Muslim staff in the group relented and only chicken *satay* was served at the gathering. I thought that this was a courageous act by a Muslim in standing up for his non-Muslim colleagues; therefore, when the Human Resources Department organ-

ised a campaign for staff to write affirmation notes to each other, I commended his stand on having mutual respect for staff from different religious backgrounds.

There was also a time when I asked this same colleague why Muslims detest the LG-BTQ community. In a nutshell, he explained that Allah had created every individual as male or female. If the individual decides to transform his or her gender, it is tantamount to going against the will of Allah, and therefore is akin to insulting the Almighty. His explanation certainly helped shed some light on the Muslim point of view on this issue.

Lent and Ramadhan

Fasting is a common act of penance amongst Catholics and Muslims. The Catholic way of fasting is to have one full meal and two small meals that together are not equal to a full meal. The Muslim way of fasting is more challenging, having to abstain from all forms of food and water from dawn to sunset. And they do it for 30 consecutive days in the holy month of Ramadhan. This year, since Holy Week overlaps with the first two weeks of Ramadhan, I am contemplating fasting for a day – the Muslim way, a feat which will require the strength of mind over matter.

On Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, which are days of fast and abstinence, I will inform my lunch buddies that I won't be joining them. They will then ask questions about fasting. I remember one colleague who felt sorry for me because I was depriving myself of food. She wondered why people put themselves through such torture. Nevertheless, it was a good opportunity for me to share about the Catholic faith. For certain Muslims, it is interesting to learn that



Faithfully Speaking

Julie Lim Seet Yin

fasting is also common amongst Catholics, though not much explanation is needed as they already understand the meaning of fasting and the graces that it brings.

Honesty and Forgiveness

A colleague who is Taoist once told me that she has never met a Christian who lies. She claims that her Christian colleagues and friends are always truthful, even if it means getting into trouble for speaking the truth. It was amusing to hear that, and I thought that we Christians must give ourselves a pat on the back for being true witnesses to the Gospel through the lives that we lead.

The same colleague also asked why Christians are so forgiving. She was referring to one of her subordinates, a young Christian girl, whom she reprimands harshly each time she makes a mistake in her work. In spite of that, the subordinate is always friendly and never gives her the cold shoulder, as certain staff may do whenever the boss reprimands them. I explained that the Bible teaches us to forgive seventy times seven (Matthew 18: 21 – 22), which means to forgive and forgive always. She was amazed when I shared that. She wondered how one could forgive so easily and regularly.

Ambassadors for Christ

With enriching interfaith encounters at the workplace, it is important for Catholics in

the secular world to be living witnesses of the Gospel. Members of the clergy, religious brothers and sisters, and the laity who work in the Church may have limited opportunities to witness to people outside the faith as their daily lives are largely confined within the Catholic community. This is where Catholics in the secular world need to become ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor 5:20) as we are in direct contact with non-Christians at our workplace and in our daily lives. Apart from witnessing for Christ through our lives, we must also have knowledge of the Catholic faith in order to share it with others. Reading and formation are good ways to build such knowledge.

To end this article, I would like to leave you with words from Mahatma Gandhi. When asked in an interview what Christians should do to contribute to India's uplift and redemption, Gandhi, who was a Hindu said, "I would suggest four things: First, that all you Christians, missionaries and all, must begin to live more like Jesus Christ. Second, that you practise your religion without adulterating it or toning it down. Third, that you emphasise love and make it your working force, for love is central in Christianity. Fourth, that you study the non-Christian religions more sympathetically to find the good in them, to have a more sympathetic approach to the people."

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

When our world is falling apart

The early years of my adulthood and priesthood were spent teaching theology at Newman Theological College in Edmonton, Canada. I was young, full of energy, loved teaching, and was discovering the joys of ministry. For the most part, these were good years.

However, they weren't always easy. Restlessness and inner chaos find us all. The demands of ministry, the tensions inside community, the obsessions I'm forever prone to, the not-infrequent departure of cherished friends from the community, and the constant movement of people through my life, occasionally left me in emotional chaos, gasping for oxygen, struggling to sleep, wondering how I was going to still my soul again.

But, I had a little formula to help handle this. Whenever the chaos got bad, I would get into my car and drive four hours to our family farm just across the border in Saskatchewan. My family still lived in the house I'd grown up in and I was able to eat at the same table I'd eaten at as a child, sleep in the same bed I'd slept in as a boy, and walk the same ground I'd walked while growing up. Usually it didn't take long for home to do its work. I'd only need a meal or an overnight stay and the chaos and heartache would subside; I'd begin to feel steady again.

Coming home didn't cure the heartache but it gave the heart the care it needed. Somehow home always worked.

Today, the same kind of emotional chaos and heartache can still unsettle me on occasion and leave me unsure of who I am, of the choices I've made in life, and



Fr Ron Rolheiser

of who and what to trust. However, I cannot drive to my childhood home anymore and need to find the steadying that going home once gave me in new ways. It isn't always apparent where to find this, even amidst a good community, a still supportive family, loving friends, and a wonderful job. Home can be elusive on a restless night. What one needs to steady the heart isn't always easy to access. Once you've left home, sometimes it's hard to find your way back there again.

So what do I do now when I need to go home and retouch my roots to steady myself? Sometimes a trusted friend is the answer; sometimes it's a call to a family member; sometimes it's a family that has become family to me, sometimes it's a place in prayer or in nature, sometimes it's immersing myself in work, and sometimes I can't find it at all and have to live with the chaos until, like a bad storm, it blows over.

Through the years, I've discovered that a special book can take me home in the same way as driving there once did. Different people find home in different places. One of the books that does this for me, almost without fail, is *The Story of a Soul* by Therese of Lisieux. Not surprising, it's

the story of a recessive journey, the story of Therese's own effort at recapturing what her house, home, and family once gave her. But the recessive journey in itself is not what gives this book (which I highly recommend for anyone whose heart is aching in way that unsettles the soul) such a special power. Many autobiographies unsettle more than they settle. This one soothes your soul.

However, remembering alone doesn't necessarily care for the heart and sometimes our memories of home and childhood carry more pathology and pain than steadying and healing. Not everyone's home was safe and nurturing. Tragically, one's initial home can also be the place where our trust and steadiness are irrevocably broken, as is the case often in sexual and other forms of abuse. I was fortunate. My first home gave me trust and faith. For those who were not as lucky, the task is to find a home, a place or a person, that caresses a wounded soul.

What makes for a home that caresses the soul?

Home is where you are safe. It's also the place where you experience security and trust and where that steadiness enables you to believe in the things of faith. I used to drive four hours for a meal or a night's sleep in order to find that. Today, I need to make that recessive journey in other ways.

It's a journey we all need to make in times of chaos and deep restlessness in our lives, namely, to find a place, a space, a friend, a family, a house, a table, a bed, a book, or something that grounds us again



in security, trust, stability, and faith.

Of course, there are headaches and heartaches for which there is no cure; but the soul doesn't need to be cured, only properly cared for. Our task is to go home, to find those people, places, prayers, and books that caress our souls at those times when our world is falling apart. — *All rights reserved.*

Faith education – who's responsibility is it?



Fr Patrick Massang, CSSR

I would like to blame the pandemic for everything beyond our control. But when it comes to the failure in the transmission of faith and the instilling of Gospel values, the COVID-19 virus is not at fault.

Recently I had to face the wrath of some parents because their children did not qualify for pre-Confirmation classes because they did not attend the on-line classes, do any required homework or show interest in their faith. Parents wanted the teachers to put in extra classes for their unfortunate children. I could not burden my catechists and impose more working hours as they are only volunteers.

I decided to give these students an oral test in the presence of their parents so that the parents could see for themselves the religious knowledge of their children. I decided on three simple questions.

- 1) Tell me the story of Jesus that is inspiring.
- 2) What are the sacraments?
- 3) Why is the sacrament of Confirmation important for you?

I got "million-dollar" answers from some of them, besides the blank stares as



AsiaNews photo

if they had never heard about Jesus.

"Tell me the story of Jesus." I thought the student would begin from the birth of Christ but lo and behold a profound answer ensued. "Jesus died"... and there was dead silence after that as if in respect of the death of Jesus. I had to ask the next important question to break the silence, "How did He die, was it old age or did He

meet with an accident?" I thought a little humour would be helpful.

"Jesus died because of Jacob." I almost fell off my chair. Other students were more entertaining as they could not recall the life of Jesus. So, I prompted with more leading questions. "Name me a miracle that was amazing" Another thought-provoking answer. "Jesus washed the feet of

his disciples" With this answer, I was not sure whether to jump from the bell tower or not.

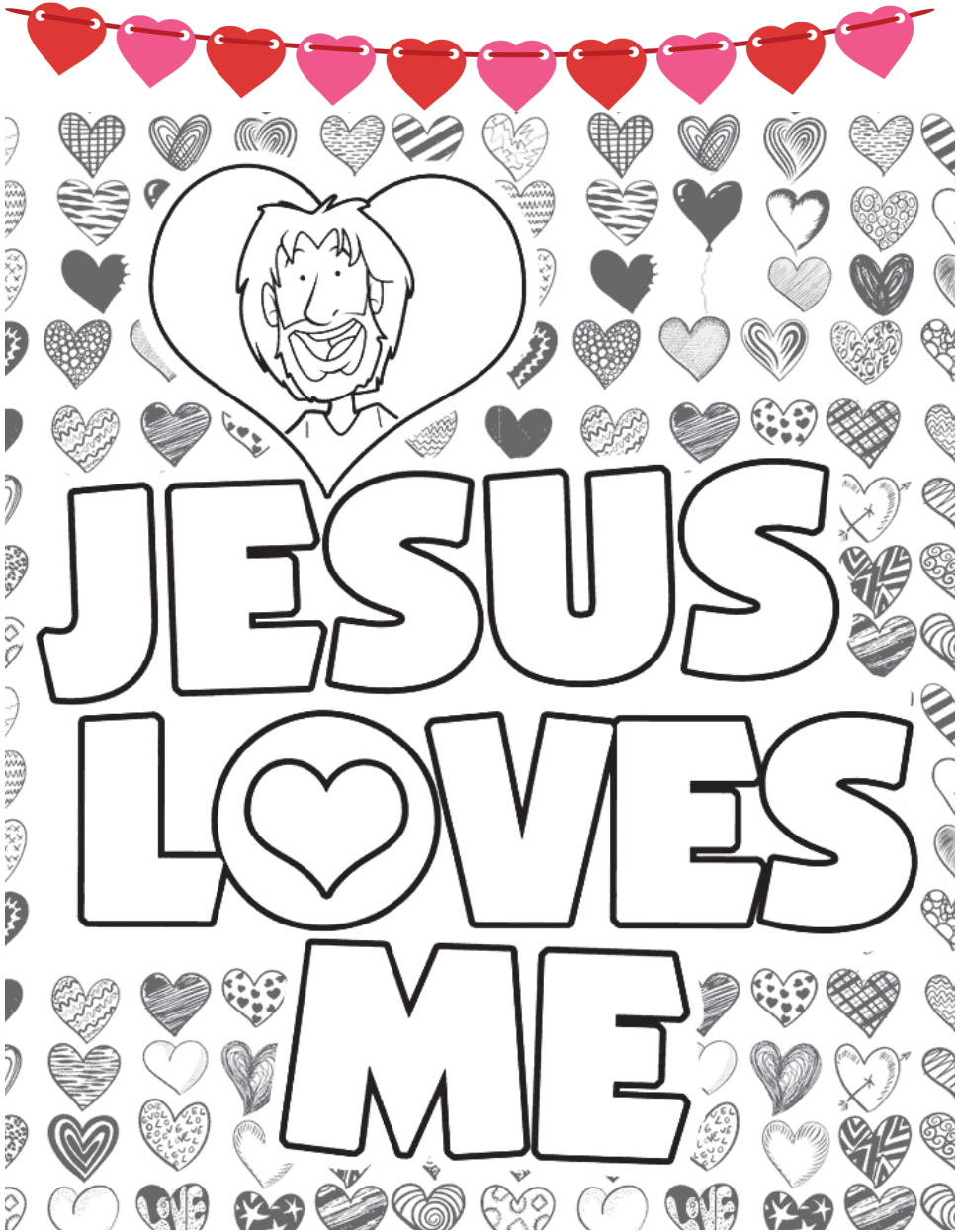
"Why do you want to be Confirmed?" Remember these students are around 14 years old and who would argue with this brilliant reply. "Because I want to get married." His mother was stunned and said "I did not know he wanted to get married". I was saying to myself, "Mother, you better be prepared to be a grandmother".

I will be seeing another mother soon for her child who is in primary school and did not qualify for First Holy Communion because the child did not attend any classes. Let's see how he does with more simple questions like "What are we really receiving at Holy Communion?"

Maybe I should give the oral exams to parents because they feel that it is the duty and responsibility of catechists to share the faith. Pope Francis insists that parents must teach and live out their faith. They are the primary and best catechists. One of the reasons I became a priest is because of the transmission of faith handed down with great conviction (and faith) by my parents. That is priceless. Unless we transmit our faith in God to our children, we will be transmitting another more dangerous virus, which is indifference.

● Fr Patrick Massang CSSR is the parish priest of the Church of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, Ipoh.

Little Catholics' Corner



Dear girls & boys

It may seem strange that Jesus says those who are poor, or hungry, or even those who are sad, will be happiest. Likewise, it may seem weird that Jesus says those who are rich and happy with lots to eat will end up sad. It seems a bit upside down, doesn't it?

Remember, it's not Jesus' thinking that's upside down but ours. He doesn't want us to think the only way we can be happy is to have lots of money and all the best toys and latest stuff. Jesus loves all people, but he has a special love for those who are poor, hungry, sad or picked on. And he asks us to be the same.

We are called to do what we can to help all people in our world to be happy. What do you think we can do to help people who are poor, hungry, sad, or treated badly by others?

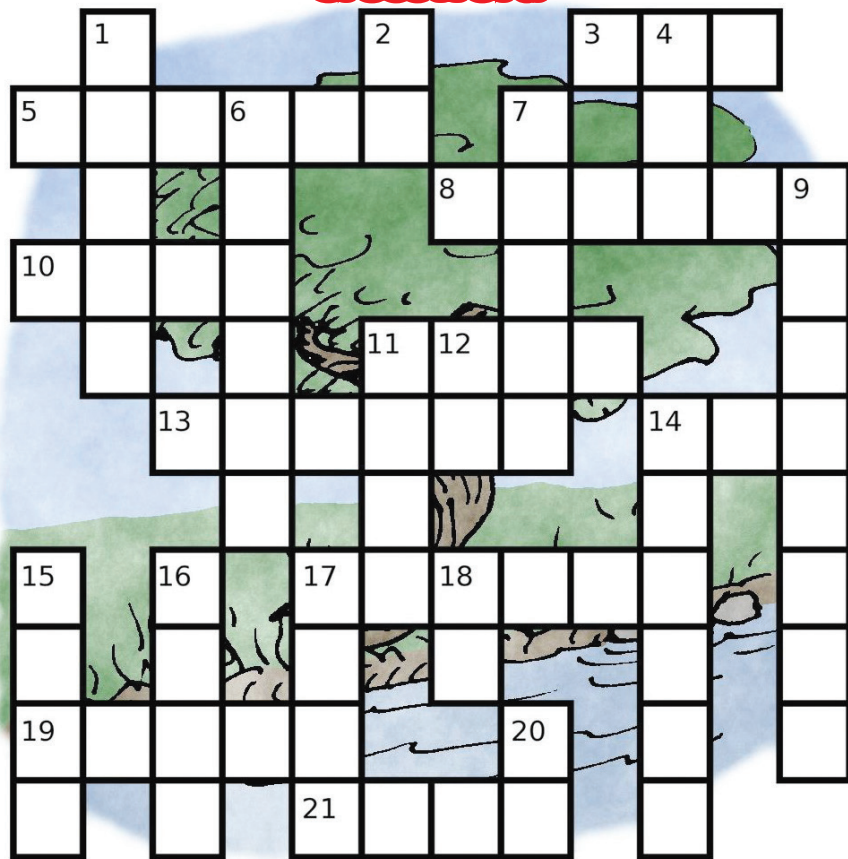
We can share what we have, we can comfort them. We can stick up for them and try to change the world to make it more accepting of everyone.

Happy Valentine's Day!
Aunty Gwen
gwen@herald.com.my



Trust in the Lord Crossword

Prayer:
God of love, open our hearts to others, that we may bring comfort to those who are sad, and share what we have with those who are in need. Help us to remember that we can never find happiness by seeking the things this world has to offer. True happiness can only be ours by following Jesus. Amen.



- | | | | | | |
|----------|--------|--------|------|-----|------|
| beings | trusts | barren | it | who | bush |
| distress | cursed | green | tree | he | Lord |
| stream | beside | heat | is | in | that |
| human | roots | year | but | his | from |

Here is today's first reading, from Jeremiah.

Fill in the blanks using the words from the list and fit them into the puzzle.

Thus says the Lord:

8a _____ is the one who trusts in 7d _____

17a _____, 3a _____ seeks 4d _____ strength

18d _____ flesh, whose heart turns away

16d _____ the Lord.

12d _____ is like a 13a _____ 17d _____ in

the desert 11a _____ enjoys no change of season,

14a _____ stands in a lava waste, a salt and empty

earth. Blessed is the one who 5a _____ in the Lord,

whose hope is the 15d _____.

He 2d _____ like a 11d _____ planted 14d _____

the waters that stretches out its 19a _____ to the

6d _____: it fears not the 21a _____ when

20d _____ comes; its leaves stay 1d _____; in the

10a _____ of drought it shows no 9d _____ but still

bears fruit.

YOUTH

FEBRUARY 13, 2022

Akash Bashir named as Pakistan's first 'Servant of God'

LAHORE, Pakistan: When a suicide bomber attempted to enter a Catholic church in Pakistan in 2015, a 20-year-old volunteer security guard blocked him.

"I will die but I will not let you go in," he reportedly told the terrorist armed with explosives. The attacker then set off a bomb, immediately killing himself and the man now recognised as a candidate for canonisation: Akash Bashir.

Because of his actions, the church — with more than 1,000 Catholics inside — was saved from a direct blast.

Bashir died on March 15, 2015, when suicide bombers attacked St John's Catholic Church and Christ Church of the Church of Pakistan. Located in Lahore, the churches stand in one of the country's largest Christian neighbourhoods.

Terrorist group Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan Jamaatul Ahrar (TTP-JA) later claimed the attacks that killed 17 people and injured more than 70.

Those numbers might have been greater if Bashir had not guarded St. John's Catholic Church.

Nearly seven years later, on Jan 31, Archbishop Sebastian Shaw of Lahore announced that the Vatican had accepted Akash Bashir as a Servant of God, the title given to a candidate for the sainthood while his or her life and work is closely examined.

The archbishop made the announcement about Bashir, an alumnus of the local Don Bosco Technical Institute, on the feast of St. John Bosco.



Akash Bashir

Fr Francis Gulzar, vicar general of Lahore archdiocese, responded by calling it a "great day for the Catholic Church in Pakistan".

"He offered his life as a sacrifice to save the lives of the Christian community at St John's Catholic Church," the vicar general said. "He is the first Pakistani Christian who has been raised to the rank of the Holy People of God."

Akash Bashir's father, Bashir Emmanuel, said he did not initially know the news about his son.

"One of my sons shared that there is a special Mass at the church," he said. "This is a very big honour for us. Akash symbolises the strength of the Christian faith in our country. I pray for the clearance of all steps to sainthood."

The Congregation for the Causes of Saints authorised the Lahore archdiocese to open the cause of the martyrdom of Akash Bashir last November.

Bashir's mother, Naz Bano, previously



The family of Servant of God Akash Bashir, along with a priest. (Vatican News photo)

told Aid to the Church in Need that her son first joined the volunteer security guards at their church in November 2014.

"All denominations were recruiting youth following the 2013 suicide bomb attack at All Saints Church in Peshawar City," she said. "Akash used to discuss it with his friends and kept insisting for three months that he wanted to guard the church. He was ready to sacrifice his life if God gave him a chance to protect others."

She remembered hearing explosions the day he died.

"The streets were filled with people," she recalled. "Hearing the second blast, I rushed with my youngest son towards the Catholic church."

"I was searching for Akash among the

boys standing near the church gate," she said. "But he was lying down in the dirt. His right arm was almost ripped off. I could not believe my eyes."

Today, she said, another one of her sons, Arsalan, guards the church "to take the place of his brother."

"We did not stop him," she said. "We cannot prevent our sons from serving the Church. It is their choice."

She described her son, Akash, as a "part of my heart."

"But our happiness is greater than our grief," she told ACN. "He was a simple boy who died in the path of the Lord and saved the priest and worshippers. People love him. Akash is already our saint." —

By Katie Yoder, CNA



India's 'Carlo Acutis' inspires many

KERALA, India: A 27-year-old woman who died fighting cancer is emerging as a possible saint from India, with people seeking her intercession for wayward youth.

Ajna George, a member of the Jesus Youth movement and an assistant professor, died January 21 in Kochi, the commercial capital of Kerala, southern India.

At the funeral on January 22, Fr Jean Felix Kattassery, Ajna's spiritual director for nearly two decades, compared her to Carlo Acutis, an English-born Italian who died of blood cancer October 12, 2006, and was beatified 14 years later.

Fr Kattassery, parish priest of St Patrick's Church, Vyttila, under the archdiocese of Verapoly, said like Blessed Carlo, Ajna had set apart her life for "devotion to the Holy Eucharist from a very early age, forbearing acceptance and offering of the excruciating

“Ajna had set apart her life for devotion to the Holy Eucharist from a very early age, forbearing acceptance and offering of the excruciating pains of cancer for the glory of God, embracing the Eucharistic Lord with a smile even as death drew close.”

pains of cancer for the glory of God, embracing the Eucharistic Lord with a smile even as death drew close."

She was a former coordinator of Jesus Youth in Sacred Heart College at Thevara, a

Kochi suburb. She was part of the Ernakulam Teens' Team and the All Kerala Music Central Team, says the Jesus Youth's Facebook page.

"An inspiring life... and death. Oh holy Ajna, pray for us," writes Bella Rajan, headmistress of St Gabriel School, Ranjhi near Jabalpur in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, in the Jesus Youth Facebook page.

Don Bosco Fr Jose Koonanickal, who is in Andhra Pradesh's Peddaboddepalli, writes, "Wonderful heroic life. May the Good Lord take her home to heaven. May she enjoy rest and happiness with God."

Dora Lobo, another Facebook subscriber, exclaims: "How holy to welcome such suffering, in spite of youth. May she pray for all wayward youth. RIP holy one." — By Jose Kavi, Matters India

CICJB youth say hello to 2022!

Many people will walk in and out of your life, only true friends leave footprints in your heart.

Eleanor Roosevelt

JOHOR BAHRU: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the English-speaking student youths from the Church of the Immaculate Conception Johor Bahru (CICJB) had been meeting virtually. We were finally reunited physically during our first face to face Youth Meet after two years on January 29, 2022. It was organised by the Core Team with a wonderful turnout of 35 participants.

The Youth Meet started off with an action packed praise session where everyone got on their feet to sing and dance their praises to God. This was followed by a warm welcome and birthday babies celebration. Next we continued with a group session where we shared about last year's victory stories, as well as our hopes and dreams for this year.

We then played a game called 'Tray Pong' which was bouncing ping pong balls into egg trays. It sounds easy but trust me, it was a test of patience! But we did enjoy ourselves amidst the chaotic fun.

We wrapped up the Youth Meet by praying the song "10,000 Reasons" and the *Totus Tuus* prayer to bless and guide our 2022. Last but not least, we took photos



Top photo: A group photo of the CICJB youth. Right photo: Praise and worship session.

wearing our new Youth shirts in front of our beloved parish and dearest Mother Mary!

This meet was possibly one of the best Youth Meets we have ever had. It was truly a grace filled time powered by the Holy Spirit.

We pray we can continue our physical Youth Meets, and enjoy our face to face and heart to heart sessions. — *By Lylendra Lee*



Many of us love to take photos of food, buildings, scenery, people and eherrmm ourselves (selfies) too.

Do you know that this skill is also useful in your parish? Whether you use your smartphone, regular camera, or a DSLR, the images from these gadgets will be useful to your parish, ministry or BEC.

Why don't you take this opportunity to be part of your parish media team? Use your ability and creativity for the greater glory of God.

Go ahead, snap photos and praise His name!

Amanda
amanda@herald.com.my

Let's catch up on Milo Session

SEREMBAN: The youths of Visitation organised a gathering, after two years of not meeting physically, on January 30, 2022. A simple, yet meaningful gathering. Meeting people face to face is so much more rewarding than meeting online.

We chose the theme *Youth Milo Session* because, after always having coffee or tea, we decided to go with milo! After two years of lockdown and MCO, we saw about 50 youths coming together. We thank God for making

this day possible. For without Him, we are nothing. The special guest for this event was ASAYO and none other than our seminarian, Bro Anthony Robert. Bro Anthony who is doing his one month pastoral in our parish before he leaves to Kuching to continue his theology studies. Fr Xavier Andrew, our parish priest and Fr Kenneth Gopal OCD our assistant parish priest, were both present at the beginning of the event to give us their blessings and support as well.

We started off with fellowship and thereafter, the opening prayer by Fr Kenneth Gopal, OCD followed by the introduction session by Bro Anthony. We then had praise and worship followed by an ice breaker to get to know one another. Moving on, ASAYO took the stage to give us a little input on *Christus Vivit*. We then had questions to be discussed during in groups. The session ended with a closing prayer by Bro Anthony. Indeed it was a spirit-filled session. — *By Sabrina Smith*



Visitation youth with the ASAYO team.

171 students receive the Sacrament of Confirmation



The Sacrament of Confirmation will unite us more firmly with Christ as children of God said Archbishop John Wong.

PAPAR, Sabah: Archbishop John Wong began his first pastoral visit in 2022 to Papar to confirm 171 students coming from St Joseph's Parish Station.

Archbishop John Wong was the main celebrant with Fr Thomas Yip concelebrating and Deacon Peter Chung assisting.

After Mass, the congregation moved to the parish hall for lunch, cake cutting and presentation of certificates. Also enlivening the ceremony was Fr Rayner Bisius who came from Holy Rosary Limbahau Parish. — *By Christine Majalut*

For enquiries, please contact:
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Tel: 03-2026 8291

MEMORIAM

8th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of
Hazel Renee



16.04.1958 – 14.02.2014

*God called your name so softly,
That only you could hear
And no one heard the footsteps,
Of angels drawing near.
The golden gates stood open,
God saw you needed rest
His garden must be beautiful,
He only takes the best.*

Deeply missed and forever loved.

In Ever Loving Memory of

34th Anniversary
PETER ANTHONY
CARVALHO

1st November 1988



20th Anniversary
ESMERALDA
CARVALHO

16th October 2002



10th Anniversary
FILOMENA
A. CARVALHO

12th February 2012



6th Anniversary
SUGUMARAN
KUNJAN

6th June 2016



19th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of



Antony Peter Silva
With the Lord:
16th February 2003

*19 years have passed and
you still live in the hearts
and minds of the loving
family you left behind.*

Deeply missed and
cherished by Loved ones.

Forever missed, forever loved by family members.

*Eternal rest grant to them O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them.
May their souls rest in peace. Amen.*



From the Lord: 25-11-1984
To the Lord: 12-02-2016

In Loving Memory of Christie Aloysius

*The Day God Took You Home
A million times, I've needed you
A million times I've cried, If love alone
Could have saved you, you never would have died.
In life I loved you dearly, In death I love you still.
In my heart you hold a place,
No one else can ever fill.*

*It broke my heart to lose you, But you didn't go alone
Part of me went with you, The day God took you home.*

In your love:

Wife: Stephanie Angelina

Masses for his repose soul of Christie Aloysius on 12th February 2022
at the Church of St Joseph at 6.00pm (Novena at 5.30pm),
Church of St Anthony at 6.45am and
Minor Basilica of St Anne, Bukit Mertajam at 6.30pm (Novena at 6pm).

40th Day Memorial Prayer
In Loving Memory of



MARGARET SEBASTIAN
(8.1.1963 – 2.1.2022)

*"If we have died in Christ
we believe that we shall live with Him"*
Roman 6:3

Come celebrate her life as we commemorate the
40th day memorial to be held on 12 February 2022.

Mass: 6.30am at the Church of Our Lady of
Lourdes, Ipoh.
Prayer & Fellowship: 7.00 pm at
No. 48, Jln Raja Perempuan Mazwin (Jln Rishah 4),
Taman Rishah, Silibin, Ipoh.

We wish to express our sincere and heartfelt thanks
to all our relatives and friends for their assistance,
attendance, memorial contributions, floral tributes
and kind words of condolences
during our recent bereavement.

Deeply missed and forever remembered by:

Parents (Deceased)

Mr Sebastian & Mdm Pitchayammal

Siblings & Spouses:

Francis & Rani

Mary & James

Martin & Elizabeth

Louis & Theodora

Egnesh & Gandius (late)

Alexander & Margrith

Nieces, Nephews, Relatives, Friends & loved ones.

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2nd Anniversary
In Loving Memory of



Alicia Lai Keow Moy
(07.09.1941 – 03.02.2020)

*Deeply missed and remembered by
family members.*

1st Anniversary
In Loving Memory of



Arulnathan a/l Sebastian
3.3.1940 – 15.2.2021

*1 year has passed so quickly and we miss you.
Your life was a blessing to us
and your sacrifices are not forgotten.
You are forever in our hearts Appa.*

*The Lord is my light and my salvation;
I will fear no one. – Psalm 27*

Forever loved and dearly missed by
Wife, Children, Grandchildren,
Daughters-in-law, relatives and friends.



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A Catechesis on the Letter to the Galatians: The fruit of the Spirit

St Paul's preaching is completely centred on Jesus and his Paschal Mystery. In fact, the Apostle presents himself as a proclaimer of Christ, and Christ crucified (cf. 1 Cor 2:2). He reminds the Galatians, tempted to base their religiosity on the observance of precepts and traditions, that the centre of salvation and faith is the death and resurrection of the Lord. He does so by placing before them the reality of the cross of Jesus. He writes thus: "Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?" (Gal 3:1). Who has bewitched you so that you would move away from Christ Crucified? It is an awful moment for the Galatians.

Today, there are many who seek religious security rather than the living and true God, focusing on rituals and precepts instead of embracing the God of love with their whole being. And this is the temptation of the new fundamentalists, of those who seem to be afraid of the path to be taken and who do not move forward but backwards because they feel more secure: they seek the security of God and not the God of security. This is why Paul asks the Galatians to return to what is essential, to God who gives us life in Christ Crucified. He testifies to this in the first person: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). And towards the end of the Letter, he affirms: "Far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (6:14).

Hold the crucifix close

If we lose the thread of spiritual life, if a thousand problems and thoughts assail us, let us heed Paul's advice: let us place ourselves before Christ Crucified, let us begin again from Him. Let us take the Crucifix in our hands, holding it close to our heart. Or

let us pause in adoration before the Eucharist, where Jesus is Bread broken for us, Crucified, Risen, the power of God who pours out his love into our hearts.

And now, still guided by St Paul, let us take a further step. Let us ask ourselves: what happens when we meet Jesus Crucified in prayer? The same thing that happened under the cross: Jesus gave up his Spirit (cf. Jn. 19:30), that is, He gave his own life. And the Spirit which flows forth from Jesus' Passover is the origin of spiritual life. It is He who changes our hearts: not our works. It is He who changes our heart, not the things that we do, but the action of the Holy Spirit in us changes our heart! It is He who guides the Church and we are called to be obedient to his action, that blows where and how He wills. After all, it was precisely the awareness that the Holy Spirit had descended over everyone, and that his grace was at work without any exclusion, that convinced even the most reluctant of the Apostles that the Gospel was meant for everyone and not for a privileged few. And those who seek security, the small group, the things that were clear as they were back then, they distance themselves from the Spirit, they do not permit the freedom of the Spirit to enter into them. Thus, the life of the community is regenerated in the Holy Spirit; and it is always thanks to him that we nourish our Christian lives and continue to engage in our spiritual battle.

Works of the flesh

It is precisely the spiritual combat that is

another important teaching in the Letter to the Galatians. The Apostle presents two opposing fronts: on the one side, the "works of the flesh", and on the other, the "fruit of the Spirit". What are the works of the flesh? They are behaviours that are contrary to the Spirit of God. The Apostle calls them works of the flesh not because there is something wrong or bad about our human bodies. In-

“
In our spiritual lives, and in the life of our communities, we are called to cultivate these fruits as a witness to the new life and freedom we have received in Christ through the gift of his Holy Spirit.
”

deed, we have seen how much he insisted on the reality of the human flesh that Christ brought to the cross! Flesh is a word that indicates the person's earthly dimension, closed in on itself in a horizontal existence, where worldly instincts are followed and the door to the Spirit, who lifts us up and opens us up to God and

others, is closed. But the flesh also reminds us that everything ages, that all things pass, wither, while the Spirit gives life. Thus, Paul lists the works of the flesh which refer to the selfish use of sexuality, to magical practices connected with idolatry and to all that undermines interpersonal relationships such as "enmity, jealousy, dissension, divisions, factions, envy..." (cf. Gal 5:19-21). All of this is the fruit — let's say — of the flesh, of behaviour that is solely human, "sickly" human. Because humans have their values, but all this is "sickly" human.

The fruit of the Spirit, instead, is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal 5:22-23), as Paul says. Christians, who in baptism have "put on Christ" (Gal 3:27), are called to live as such. It can be a good spiritual exercise, for example, to read St Paul's

list and take a look at our own behaviour to see if it corresponds, if our life is truly in accordance with the Holy Spirit, if it bears these fruits. Does my life bear these fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control? For example, the first three that are listed are love, peace and joy: a person in whom the Holy Spirit dwells can be recognised by these traits. A person who is at peace, who is joyful and who loves. With these three traits, the action of the Spirit can be seen.

Fruitfulness of love

The Apostle's teaching poses quite a challenge for our communities too. Sometimes, those who approach the Church get the impression that they are dealing with a dense mass of rules and regulations: but no, this is not the Church! This can be any association. But, in reality, the beauty of faith in Jesus Christ cannot be grasped on the basis of so many commandments or of a moral vision developed in many layers which can make us forget the original fruitfulness of love nourished by prayer which brings peace and joyful witness. In the same way, the life of the Spirit, expressed in the Sacraments, cannot be suffocated by a bureaucracy that prevents access to the grace of the Spirit, the initiator of the conversion of heart. And how often, we ourselves, priests or bishops, follow so much bureaucracy to give a sacrament, to welcome people, so that people say: "No, I do not like this", and they go away, and many times they do not see in us the power of the Spirit who regenerates, who makes us new. We therefore have the great responsibility of proclaiming Christ crucified and risen, enlivened by the breath of the Spirit of love. For it is this Love alone that possesses the power to attract and change the human heart.

Saints of the Week

Sts Cyril and Methodius

Brothers Cyril (Constantine) and Methodius, born into a prestigious senatorial family in Thessalonica, renounced their wealth and status to become priests.

Both were living in a monastery on the Bosphorus — now known as the Istanbul strait which separates Europe and Asia — when authorities from the Khazar Empire asked Constantinople for a Christian missionary. Cyril was chosen and his brother accompanied by him. Both learned the Khazar language and converted many people. Soon after the Khazar mission, there was a request from officials in Moravia — a region in present-day Czech Republic — for missionaries who could preach and celebrate liturgical services in the local dialect.

To fulfil this mission, Cyril and Methodius adapted the Greek alphabet into a script for the Slavonic language. The result was the "Cyrillic" alphabet, which was first used to translate the Bible and liturgical books. It also became the primary means of written



Feast day: February 14

Patron Saint of Slavic Peoples and Ecumenism

communication for large portions of the world, including modern day Russia.

Sts. Cyril and Methodius' missionary work among the Slavs laid the essential foundation for the later Christianisation of Ukraine and Russia in 988, when the Rus-

sian Prince Vladimir accepted Baptism.

As Byzantine Christian theologians and missionaries the brothers were known as the "Apostles to the Slavs" for their work in evangelising to the Slavs. — **Agencies**

St Claude de la Colombière

This is a special day for the Jesuits, who claim St Claude as one of their own. It's also a special day for people who have a special devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus—a devotion Claude de la Colombière promoted along with his friend and spiritual companion, Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque. The emphasis on God's love for all was an antidote to the rigorous moralism of the Jansenists, who were popular at the time.

Claude showed remarkable preaching skills long before his ordination in 1675. Two months later, he was made superior of a small Jesuit residence in Burgundy. It was there he first encountered Margaret Mary Alacoque. For many years after he served as her confessor.

He was next sent to England to serve as confessor to the Duchess of York. He preached by both words and by the example of his holy life, converting a number of Protestants. Tensions arose against Catholics and Claude, rumoured to be part of a plot against



Feast day: February 15

the king, was imprisoned. He was ultimately banished, but by then his health had been ruined.

He died in 1682. Pope John Paul II canonised Claude de la Colombière in 1992. — **Franciscan Media**

‘If the Pope comes to Ukraine, the war would end’

ROME: As tensions between Russia and Ukraine continue to foment, one of the country’s top Catholic prelates has reiterated his desire for a papal visit, which he believes will help calm escalations and put an end to a nearly eight-year conflict.

Speaking during a recent online media roundtable, Major Archbishop of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church Sviatoslav Shevchuk said that whether it happens now or once a solution is reached doesn’t matter, but what Ukrainians want is that “the Pope goes to Ukraine.”

“We can’t wait 10 years until all the conditions are there, all the pre-conditions,” he said, insisting that Pope Francis “is the greatest moral authority in the world.”

“Of all religious leaders,” including Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill and other Orthodox pa-

triarchs, “in a majority Orthodox country the greatest moral authority is Pope Francis. They all say it: If the Pope comes to Ukraine, the war would end,” Shevchuk said, adding, “The Pope is truly a messenger of peace.”

He praised recent initiatives of the Pope regarding Ukraine, including prayers during the traditional papal Christmas *Urbi et Orbi* address and the Pope’s decision to designate January 26 as a day of prayer and fasting for peace in Ukraine.

These gestures, Shevchuk said, were “strongly felt throughout the world.”

Shevchuk said he reiterated his invitation for Pope Francis to visit during a meeting he had with the Pope at the Vatican while he was visiting Rome in November.

“Gestures are very eloquent in themselves and visiting Ukraine

would be very beautiful for all of humanity,” he said. While no one is expecting “miracles,” a papal visit, he said, is a strong spiritual event that would “conserve us all in the faith. We need tangible gestures.”

The Eastern Rite Catholic bishops of Ukraine have been pushing for a papal visit for years, and Shevchuk has made recent statements indicating that a papal visit could happen as early as this year, with some speculating that it could happen over the summer.

Shevchuk’s latest plea for a visit comes as tensions with Russia could be reaching a boiling point.

Asked about accusations that Pope Francis is hesitating to visit Ukraine or to speak out more forcefully to avoid putting his courtship of Russia and his budding connection with Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill at risk,



Troops in Ukraine. (Vatican News photo)

Shevchuk said the Vatican’s style is not to be forceful, but to be a mediator.

Vatican diplomacy tries “to be above the conflict so as to have the freedom to mediate, to reconcile the opposed parties,” he said. “It doesn’t make great con-

demnations.”
“The Holy See, in a discreet way, is trying to save the situation, to promote communication,” he said, adding, “I think this situation will evolve and for me, the Holy See is prepared to respond in an adequate way.” — cruxnow.com

Vatican symposium to explore relationship between priests and laity



The three-day international symposium will begin with an introduction from Pope Francis on faith and the priesthood today. (CNS file photo)

VATICAN: The Vatican will hold an international symposium next week to discuss the theology of the relationship between Catholic priests and the laity.

The conference, *For a Fundamental Theology of the Priesthood*, will take place from February 17 to 19 in the Vatican’s Paul VI Hall.

Cardinal Marc Ouellet, prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, organised the meeting together with the France-based Research and Anthropology Centre for Vocations.

“The initiative proposes to reawaken enthusiasm for our faith in the gift of God and to give new zeal to the promotion of vocations,” organisers said.

According to a press release:

“Bishops, clergy, laypeople and religious will meet for a moment of reflection and study on the relations between ordained ministers, and lay and religious members, with a view to harmonising their contribution, which will be articulated and in line with the call to holiness addressed to each one.”

The three-day symposium will begin with an introduction from Pope Francis on faith and the priesthood today.

Around 500 priests, bishops, religious, and other Catholics are expected to attend.

Theologians and other Catholic experts will present on topics including the Fathers of the Church, St Thomas Aquinas, priestly celibacy, the pastoral challenges of the priesthood, vocational forma-

tion, and the complementarity of the different states of life.

The symposium on vocations will be one of the first Vatican conferences to be held in-person since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cardinal Ouellet told *Vatican News* that the conference will address the “fundamental priesthood of the baptised and the ministerial priesthood.”

“Usually, when we think of priesthood we think of the priests and bishops and so on, but the fundamental priesthood is the priesthood of the baptised: we are part of the Body of Christ and as such, we participate in the mediation of the Church, the participation of the Church in the Priesthood of Christ,” he said. — CNA

Egypt names first-ever Christian head of country’s highest court

CAIRO: Egypt’s president swore in the first-ever Coptic Christian to head the country’s highest court on February 9.

Judge Boulos Fahmy is the 19th person to preside over the Supreme Constitutional Court since it was established in 1969. President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi picked the 65-year-old Fahmy from among the court’s five oldest of 15 sitting judges, as is prescribed by law.

Fahmy succeeded Judge Saeed Marei, who retired over health reasons, according to Mohamed Bassal, a respected expert in Egypt’s judicial affairs and editorial manager of the *Shorouk* daily.

Fahmy has headed the court’s General Secretariat since 2014. His appointment as chief judge has been welcomed by many in the Muslim majority country.

Moushira Khattab, head of the government-appointed National

Council for Human Rights, hailed the decision as “historic” and “a giant move” in the field of political and civil rights.

Christians, who make up almost 10 per cent of Egypt’s population of more than 102 million, have long complained of discrimination at the hands of the Muslim majority. Activists also say Copts are discriminated against and kept from high office.

Since taking office in 2014, most Christians have seen el-Sissi as their protector and ally in opposition to Islamists. He usually attends Orthodox Christmas Mass as a show of solidarity with Copts.

He has also taken steps to empower Christians, including the appointment of the first-ever Coptic Christian woman as provincial governor in 2018. He also allowed the building of churches across the country after decades of restrictions. — cruxnow.com



Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi (right), meets with Judge Boulos Fahmy. (Crux photo/Egyptian Presidency Media Office)