

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.

Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven.

1 Cor. 15:45-47



Be the light to others

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The lector and the Word of God

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Jubilee Year 2025 can restore hope after years of pandemic and suffering

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What ails the priesthood?

VATICAN: Opening an international conference on priesthood, Pope Francis insisted that those who are not close to God in prayer, not close to their bishop and other priests, and not immersed in the lives of their people, are simply "clerical functionaries" or "professionals of the sacred."

"A priest needs to have a heart sufficiently 'enlarged' to expand and embrace the pain of the people entrusted to his care while, at the same time, like a sentinel, being able to proclaim the dawning of God's grace revealed in that very pain," the Pope said on February 17 as he opened the conference in the Vatican audience hall.

With some 500 people attending in person and hundreds more online, the Feb 17-19 symposium was organised by Canadian Cardinal Marc Ouellet, prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, and aimed at renewing a theological understanding of Catholic priesthood.

In his talk to the conference, Pope Francis did not mention the abuse crisis specifically but instead, focused on what he said he has learned in more than 50 years of priesthood, and from listening to and assisting priests as a Jesuit provincial, archbishop and Pope.

"It may be that these reflections are the 'swan song' of my own priestly life," the 85-year-old Pope said, "but I can assure you that they are the fruit of my own experience."

He insisted, as he often has told priests, that



Pope Francis greets participants at the International Theological Symposium on the Priesthood at the Vatican's Paul VI Hall, Feb 17, 2022. (CNA photo/Daniel Ibáñez)

"closeness" is essential to their ministry and identity: closeness to God in prayer, closeness to their bishop or superior, closeness to other priests and, especially, closeness to the people of God.

Proximity, he said, allows the priest "to break all temptations of closure, self-justification and of living like a 'bachelor'."

Closeness in all four areas allows priests "to manage the tensions and imbalances that we experience daily," the Pope said. They are not "an extra assignment," but "a gift" that the Lord gives "to keep the vocation alive and fruitful."

Closeness to God and closeness to the peo-

ple are intimately and intrinsically linked, he said, "since the prayer of a shepherd is nurtured and becomes incarnate in the heart of God's people. When he prays, a pastor bears the marks of the sorrows and joys of his people, which he presents in silence to the Lord."

At a time when many people experience a growing sense of being "orphaned," Pope Francis said, a pastor who is close to his people knows how to gather them and form a community where people, including priests, grow in their sense of belonging.

"This sense of belonging will, in turn, prove an antidote to the distortion of vocation that happens whenever we forget that the priestly

life is owed to others — to the Lord and to the persons he has entrusted to us," he said. "Forgetting this is at the root of clericalism and its consequences."

"Clericalism is a distortion because it is based not on closeness, but on distance," the Pope said.

The Church is, and is meant to be, a community of believers who help one another, share each other's burdens, rejoice with each other and work together to proclaim the Gospel, he insisted.

Pope Francis cited the African proverb, "If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go with others," and told conference participants that while "sometimes it seems that the Church is slow — and that is true — I like to think of it as the slowness of those who have chosen to walk in fraternity."

Priests need to be "clear" and honest about how much envy exists within their ranks and how destructive it is, he said. "And there are also clerical forms of bullying."

But "when priestly fraternity thrives and bonds of true friendship exist, it likewise becomes possible to experience, with greater serenity, the life of celibacy," Pope Francis said. "Celibacy is a gift that the Latin Church preserves, yet it is a gift that, to be lived as a means of sanctification, calls for healthy relationships, relationships of true esteem and true goodness that are deeply rooted in Christ."

"Without friends and without prayer," he said, "celibacy can become an unbearable burden and a counter-witness to the very beauty of the priesthood." — **By Cindy Wooden, CNS**

Pope's upcoming liturgical celebration schedule

VATICAN: The Holy See Press Office has released the schedule of upcoming liturgical celebrations that the Holy Father will preside over in the month of March.

On Ash Wednesday, March 2, Pope Francis will lead the *statio orbis* and a penitential procession beginning at 4.30pm in the Church of Sant'Anselmo. He will then celebrate Holy Mass, with the Blessing and Imposition of Ashes, at 5.00pm at the Basilica of San Sabina.

Last year, due to the COVID-19 pandem-

ic, the Pope celebrated the Ash Wednesday Mass at St Peter's Basilica in the Vatican.

On Friday, March 4, the Holy Father will be at the Consistory Hall at 10.30am for the Ordinary Public Consistory for the vote on various causes for canonisation.

Then, on March 25, the Pope will preside at a Penitential celebration at 5.00pm at St Peter's Basilica, said the announcement, which was signed by the Master of Pontifical Liturgical Ceremonies, Msgr Diego Ravelli. — **Vatican News**



Synod
2021
2023

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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5, Jalan Robertson, 50150, KL
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EDITOR

Patricia Pereira
editor1@herald.com.my



ASSISTANT EDITOR
Social Media Coordinator
Sandra Ann Inbaraj
sandra@herald.com.my



WRITER
Children's Section
Gwen Manickam
gwen@herald.com.my



GRAPHIC DESIGNER
Youth Section
Amanda Mah
amanda@herald.com.my



BAHASA MALAYSIA
Melania Liza Magnus
liza@herald.com.my



MANDARIN
Adelina Wong
yin4482@gmail.com



TAMIL
RK Samy
rksamy3@hotmail.com

ADVERTISEMENTS / MEMORIAM

advertisement@herald.com.my

LETTERS

letterseditor@herald.com.my



EDITOR'S NOTE

Over the years, you may have come across the Francis cartoon strip which was initially featured on Page 10 and is now on Page 2 of the HERALD. What is the purpose of this cartoon strip you may ask? How is it related to our faith? Are there any lessons to be learnt from it? In this issue, we hear from the cartoonist himself (please see below).

Dear readers,

I realised early on that art was my speciality. My mother made sure that I had paper and crayons, and I responded with tons of drawings.

I doodled my way through grade school and spent high school and college filling the margins of my notebooks with cartoons. I later went to journalism school, where I focused on political cartoons. Only toward the end of my career did I get a chance to do a comic strip, when former NCR publisher Tom Fox thought one on Pope Francis would work and not get us all excommunicated.

People often ask cartoonists, "Where do you get your ideas from?" This is, in fact, the biggest challenge, and it can take days to corner and tease out a timely topic that can be honed into a visual comment.

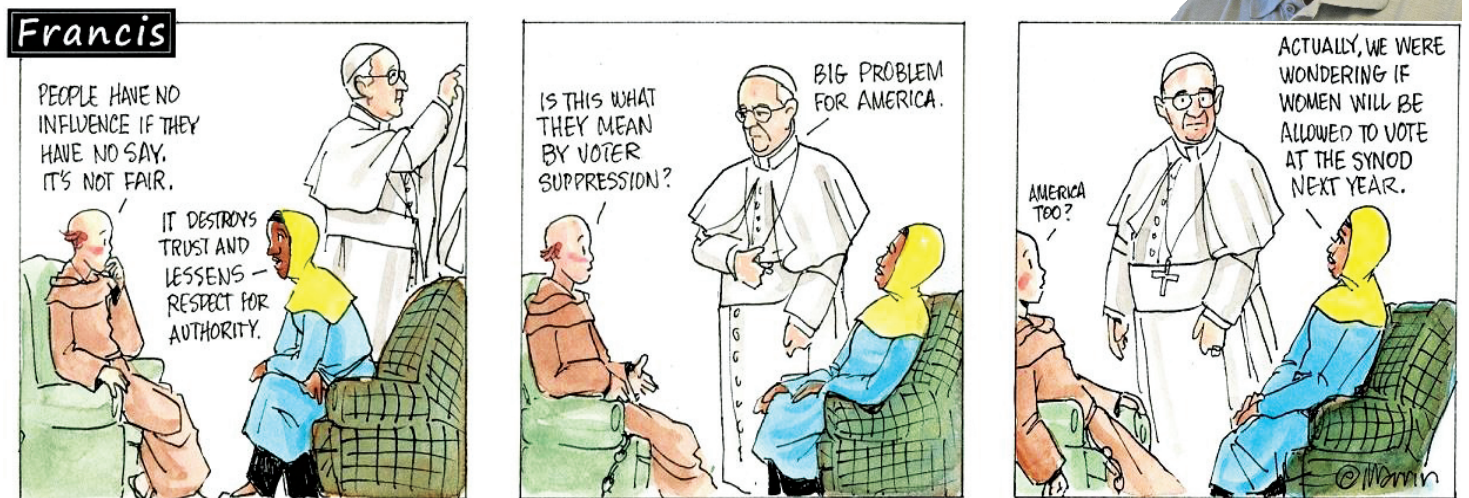
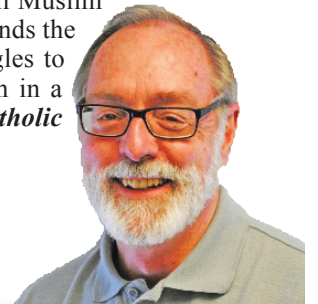
The "Francis" strip is a three-panel comic that uses a formula familiar to most jokes: Setup, misdirection, punchline. For example, see below. Setup: Leo and Gabby are discussing voter suppression. Misdirection: The Pope enters and thinks they are talking about the United States. Punchline: Gabby tells him they are wondering if women will be allowed to vote at the upcoming synod.

The cartoon "works" if readers first share the misdirection, are surprised and then agree that women should vote. The message is tied to current news and the humour depends on the audience's point of view.

Analysis can take the fun out of a joke or a comic strip, but this is a behind-the-scenes look at the process. The best cartoonists seldom explain, and use the fewest words. Their caricatures are funny, and good sequencing directs the eye through the little story. I am a true amateur in that my love of drawing exceeds my professional skill. The idea part can be nerve-wracking, but I enjoy doing the pencil sketches, recopying them in ink, then painting, scanning and saving the cartoons for use online and in print.

I have drawn more than 1,000 Francis cartoons since the strip began in 2013. The most fun is my interaction with the followers of "Francis", who appreciate that I am trying to convey the real Pope Francis' vision through the fictional characters in the strip. Lovable Brother Leo represents the Pope's values without knowing it. Gabriella, a young Somali Muslim woman rescued from traffickers, reminds the Pope of what is at stake as he struggles to preach and live the Church's mission in a dangerous world. — *National Catholic Reporter (NCR)*

Sincerely,
Pat Marrin
NCR Cartoonist



Let go of enmity

The Gospel today is full of instructions for every believer in Christ. Packed with life lessons such as loving our enemies, doing good to those who hate us, blessing those who curse us, praying for those who mistreat us, do not judge, do not condemn.

In fact, twice in the Gospel, we hear that we ought to love our enemies. For most of us, this seems like a very tall order ... even impossible to live up to. How can I humanly love my enemies who have intentionally hurt me?

In the First Reading, we hear of how King Saul goes out to the wilderness of Ziph in search of his enemy David. Yet David, when confronted with the opportunity to end the life of the one who hates him, makes a radical choice! "The Lord forbid that I should raise my hand against the Lord's anointed!" 1 Samuel 26:9. The choice to release enmity and do good to the one who hates him.

As I was reflecting on the First Reading, an interesting line stood out to me - 1 Samuel 26:12 (NRSV) "So David took the spear that was at Saul's head and the water jar, and they went away. No one saw it, or knew it, nor did anyone awaken; for they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the LORD had fallen upon them."

No one saw David or knew what David did... nor did anyone awaken. For a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen upon them. When David spared the life of Saul, there was no applause or celebration. In fact, the event went completely unnoticed.

David could have killed Saul without anyone knowing. But there was something different about David. God describes David as "a man after My own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14, Acts 13:22). That does not mean that he was sinless or perfect. It meant that David had the capacity to recognise his own weakness and yet pursue God with all his heart.

Friends, to be a man after God's heart is not possible with my own strength. This is only possible through the Person of the Holy Spirit working in me. We see this in David. When David sinned against God, his plea was, "God, please don't take your Holy Spirit from me" Psalm 51:10-11 (NRSV).

The Second Reading of today gives us the key. Jesus "last Adam has become a life-giving spirit" 1 Cor. 15:45. Unless I allow the life-giving Spirit of Jesus to become alive in my life, it will be impossible for me to love my enemies. I will do what comes naturally to my flesh, i.e. to pay back the one who hurt me with equal vengeance.

As we read in Romans 12:17-21 (NRSV)

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.

18 If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

20 No, "if your enemies are hungry,

feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads."

21 Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.

In my own life and ministry, I too have experienced many hurts. I have lost my temper countless times, with my family members and ministry partners. I have also encountered many Catholics who have left the Church out of bitterness, hatred and anger. They have chosen to take offence and remain vengeful. Countless times I have heard complaints by those who are angry and bitter with Church authorities. In this day and age, it is even an accepted practice to speak ill of the Man of God on social media — to tear down his character or reputation publicly. Yet David says, "who can lift his hand against the Lord's anointed and be without guilt? The Lord forbid that I should raise my hand against the Lord's anointed!" 1 Samuel 26:9.

I am aware of how often I have failed in this challenge of Jesus to love others as Jesus loves me. My flesh and human nature often takes control and I feel helpless. I recognise that each time I have allowed my flesh and human nature to take control, I recognise that I have lost the peace in my own life. Bitterness, hatred, anger, resentment never satisfies. But when I choose to let go of enmity, a peace that the world cannot give fills my heart. Of course, this is not easy. I have discovered

Reflecting on our
Sunday Readings
with Jude Antoine

7th Sunday of Ordinary Time (C)

Readings: 1 Samuel 26:7-9, 12-13, 22-23;

1 Corinthians 15:45-49;

Gospel: Luke 6:27-38

that this is only possible when I allow the Holy Spirit to fill my heart with His love and peace. Without the love of God in my heart, it is impossible to love my enemies. The consequence is that the blessings far outweigh the vengeance.

God cannot be outdone by generosity — As Jesus promises us at the end of today's Gospel — Luke 6:38 (NRSV) "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap."

As I release forgiveness, in return I experience God's forgiveness. As I release mercy, in return I experience God's mercy. What I give, I will receive. This Sunday, let us open ourselves in a new way to the Love of God, poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5).



● *Jude Antoine is a lay missionary and parishioner of the Church of St Joseph, Sentul. He and his family are based in Kuala Lumpur.*

KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE
Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

February

- 24 **MCCBCHST Exco Meeting**
- 25 **Malaysia Catholic Education Council Exco Meeting**

PENANG DIOCESE
Diary of Bishop Sebastian Francis

February

- 20 **Mass – Mt Miriam Anniversary**
- 22 **Council of Priests**
- 22-23 **Clergy Monthly Recollection**
- 23-24 **Permanent Deacons Formation**

Be the light to others

SKUDAI: “Though we are religious and pastors, sometimes we forget to be a light for the community we serve, and also a light that repels darkness,” said Bishop Bernard Paul at the World Day for Consecrated Life celebration.

He called on religious and parishioners to re-express the light of Jesus’ love in their hearts in order to bring light to the world.

On February 12, the religious community in the Malacca Johore Diocese renewed their perpetual vows before the bishop at the Skudai Catholic Centre. This renewal of perpetual vows was accompanied by Fr Valentine Gompok OFM Cap singing *Melayani Lebih Sungguh* and a prayer recitation by Sr Liza Angie FSIC.

In his homily, Bishop Bernard explained that the call to consecrated life does not mean simply doing spiritual activities.

“When we choose the path of consecrated life, it means we embrace Jesus’ way of life where all our joys and happiness are related to “giving”. Too often, we think our joy comes from what we receive from others. Yet in the light of the Bible and Church teaching, the more we give, the more joy and happiness will come to our life.

Bishop Bernard quoted the teaching of Pope Francis, that Jesus is the Bread and Living Water. Jesus gave His life so that we can overcome all forms of death and temptation. Indeed, Jesus is the formula for our joy.

He also mentioned two elderly prophets, Simeon and Hannah, which he used to elucidate



Bishop Bernard Paul with the religious community.

their joy after waiting so long for the Messiah. From the story of Simeon and Hannah, Bishop Bernard gave three questions for reflection.

1. Are we faithful to this calling? We need to examine ourselves, are we walking with Jesus or walking alone? What moves us? Is it the Holy Spirit or the great works of the world?

2. What do our eyes see? Do we go to Church to see God or do we go to Church and see people’s behaviour? Do our eyes know Jesus? Do my eyes know compassion? Like Hannah and Simeon, thousands of people came to the Temple, but only Hannah and Simeon knew the Baby Jesus.

3. What do our hearts embrace? Hannah and Simeon saw the Lord and instantly embraced Him. Or is our heart so full of bitterness that we do not see God. Embrace Christ in our hearts and reject worldly bonds. What binds us and what sets us free. By embracing Jesus in awe in

our hearts, we will be able to praise God freely and joyfully, freeing us from weakness.

Fr Laurence Motoyou OFM, representing all the religious, expressed his gratefulness to Bishop Bernard Paul for celebrating the Holy Mass for Consecrated Life.

“We renew our perpetual vows as religious not through our own will, but with the awareness that God loves us. So that as religious, we bring the blessings and light of love that God has given us, and we give back to the people, so that you can experience how much God loves, forgives and is faithful to us.

“Fifty years since the establishment of the Diocese of Malacca Johore, certainly many of us have gone through bad and good days. There are definitely many things that make it difficult for us to forgive. But God says I forgive you and I love you. So go and forgive and express God’s love to everyone,” said Fr Laurence.

Catholic lawyers told to invoke the guidance of the Holy Spirit

KUCHING: Catholic lawyers from the Archdiocese of Kuching came together for the Red Mass on February 12, to pray for the opening of the judicial year 2022.

The Mass, held at St Joseph’s Cathedral, was presided over by Archbishop Simon Poh, with Fr Galvin Ngumbang and Fr Mark Bonchol concelebrating.

In extending a warm welcome to the small group of lawyers and their families to the newly refurbished Cathedral, Archbishop Simon said: “The Red Mass offers the legal community an opportunity to reflect on the God-given power and responsibility of all in the legal profession to uphold all who seek justice.”

Archbishop Simon and the priests wore red coloured vestments because “liturgically, red is the colour of fire and of blood, symbolising the fire of the Holy Spirit and the blood of martyrs.”

The Archbishop called on the lawyers to “invoke the gifts of the Holy Spirit, in particular for wisdom, understanding, counsel and fortitude for all our religious leaders and members of the legal profession... judges,



Catholic lawyers with Archbishop Simon Poh, Fr Galvin Ngumbang and Fr Mark Bonchol after the celebration of the Red Mass at St Joseph’s Cathedral, Kuching, February 12, 2022. (Today’s Catholic Photo/Stephanie Chua)

lawyers, law school professors, law students, and government officials.”

Reflecting on the Mass reading from 1 Kings about the abuse of authority, Archbishop Simon in his homily, reconciled that to the current situation in the world. “What can religious and legal communities do? What does the Word of God tell us?” he asked.

He suggested that Christians:

- Recognise that whatever we receive is a gift from God, including our heart, soul,

mind and might.

- Look upon the abundance of good things that surround us on earth as blessings to be shared.

- Avoid selfish ambitions and unhealthy suspicious fears which always accompany such ambitions.

- Be honest and admit our failures and learn from them rather than put the blame on someone else.

The prelate said Christians should always

be grateful and do things out of compassion and love, while at the same time share our time, talents and treasures generously, so we may gain eternal life.

Archbishop Simon told the lawyers to “invoke the guidance of the Holy Spirit” in order “to uphold all who seek justice and to build a civilisation and nation of goodwill, harmony, mutual respect and acceptance in our beloved Sarawak and our nation, Malaysia.”

After the Eucharistic celebration, Archbishop Simon concluded the Red Mass with this advice from the teachings of prophet (Micah 6:8): “You have already been told what is right and what the Lord wants of you. Only this: to do what is right, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God,” which he ingeniously rearranged into the acronym LAW:

- L – Love tenderly
- A – Act justly
- W – Walk humbly with our God among the people

“Do this, and you will be counted among the blessed and happy of the Lord,” the prelate counselled. — **By Ivy Chai, Today’s Catholic**

Creating harmony by visiting the different places of worship

KUALA LUMPUR: In conjunction with World Interfaith Harmony Week, the Parish Ministry of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (PMEIA) of the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus organised a visit to the different places of worship on February 12, 2022.

Twenty-five participants, consisting of the different faiths including 12 PMEIA members, were present.

The purpose of the visit was to enhance the understanding of the different faiths in Malaysia and to develop a better relationship among the adherents of the dif-

ferent faiths.

PMEIA Coordinator, Dr Florence John said, with the guidance and encouragement from parish priest, Fr Stanislaus Soosamariam, her ministry embarked on this programme with confidence.

Among the places of worship they visited were the Chapel of Our Lady of Good Health in Lorong Satu, Kampung Pandan for a prayer with the community. They then visited the Gurdwara Sahib Temple in Jalan Kampung Pandan where they witnessed prayers and were served with breakfast.

The PMEIA members then adjourned to Masjid Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur and were welcomed by the mosque committee. They were taken on a ‘harmony study tour’ around the mosque.

This was followed by speeches by the different religious representatives at the *dewan*

masjid (mosque hall). Among the speakers were Tuan Haji Muhyidin Bin Aziz@ Saari who is Imam Besar, Masjid Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur; Puan Manimegalei who represents Sri Ganesar Temple, Kg Pandan; Mr Jasbir Singh who is the President from the Gurdwara Sahib Temple in Jalan Kampung Pandan and Dr Florence.

After the speeches, all present were invited into of the mosque’s prayer hall for the Solat prayers.

All participants were given a packed lunch and a goodie bag before departing to the Gurdwara Sahib Temple for tea and snacks.

On behalf of the Sacred Heart Church, Dr Florence thanked the committees of the mosque, Sikh and Hindu temples visited, as well as the PMEIA members in making this event a truly harmonious and, in the spirit of unity in diversity. — **By Bernard Anthony**



Members of the Parish Ministry of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the Church of the Sacred Heart visiting different places of worship with participants of various faiths.

CM office review exercise

In the weeks leading to the Caritas Malaysia (CM) National Meet, an Office Review Exercise was carried out from November 15 to December 26, 2021. The office review exercise consisted of a Volunteer's Survey and an Office Bearer's Survey with these objectives:

- Assess if our activities are in line with the Vision, Mission and Values of Caritas Malaysia;
- Check if there are clear structure, roles and responsibilities;
- Review if we are responding to our mandate to develop the social mission of the Church;
- Reflect on the present reality, to help plan for the future.

The **Volunteers** are all those who offer their time at parish or diocese level ministries.

The **Office Bearers** are parish Caritas coordinators, parish commission members, diocese directors, diocese board members, and national

office bearers.

While some parishes or dioceses may use other names for their offices – the term Caritas is inclusive of all.

Volunteers:

- 22 male and 26 female volunteers from eight dioceses between the ages of 20 – to above 71 responded to the survey.
- Majority of the male volunteers are in the age groups of 41-70 years, whereas for the female group, the active ones are in the age group of 41 - 50 years of age.

Office Bearers:

- 18 male and 15 female from six dioceses between the ages of 31 – to above 71 responded to the survey.
- Equal amount of male office bearers in the age groups of 31 - 60 years.
- However, most female office bearers are in the age group of 51 - 60 years.

Observations:

- The survey findings show most volunteers in Church are thinly spread over a large variety of roles.
- Main areas of involvement are charity and social outreach, followed by liturgy, fund raising, BEC, and others.
- The presence of women in office bearer or leadership role is lacking.
- The presence of young people as volunteers or office bearers are non-existent among those who responded.
- 60 per cent say there is no increase in parish volunteers; and *umat tidak mahu melibatkan diri*.
- 70 per cent remain neutral or disagree that there are sufficient leaders at all levels of ministry.
- Emerging future roles at parish, diocese and national levels for social mission.

Diocese	Volunteers	Office Bearers
Kota Kinabalu	12	7
Sandakan	2	0
Keningau	2	0
Kuala Lumpur	0	0
Penang	13	6
Malacca Johore	8	9
Kuching	3	2
Miri	4	5
Sibu	4	4
Total	48	33

Volunteers

Volunteer involvement is an important aspect in CM (and the larger Church) as we rely on them to execute various programmes and activities. It is important to listen to their voices as they are close to the ground. This section examines their working relationship with staff and co-workers in the parish.

A healthy 23 per cent rated that they are satisfied and extremely satisfied that their parish shows appreciation for their contribution.

Structures, roles and responsibilities

In trying to gauge the volunteers' understanding of the structures, their roles and responsibilities, the majority say they are aware and understand CM's goals and objectives. They affirm that there is a working structure and organisation chart available and leaders at each level uphold the values of the Church and Caritas. They are also empowered and ensure



that decision making happens at the appropriate levels. Those affected have a voice and the rights and dignity of every person is respected regardless of their background (93.8 per cent agree).

Programmes, services and communication

About 85.5 per cent believe that the programmes and services for their beneficiaries are relevant and useful. Support and encour-

agement are given to the parishes to create and continuously improve projects and methods of working. Progress of their activities can be tracked and are reported regularly.

Whilst most agree that the activities are communicated on a regular basis with the relevant parties, a sizeable portion or 52.1 per cent either selected neutral, disagree or strongly disagree. This is an indicator that communication efforts need to be improved so that

all parties (volunteers, parish, staff, etc.) are aware and well informed.

Mission - Structures

Based on the feedback received, there is a Caritas office and director in every diocese. There is also a Board or Commission that is functional. Further questions were asked on the working structures, organigram, job descriptions, lines of reporting and whether the support received as Caritas office is adequate to fulfil its mission at the parish, diocese and national level. One can conclude from all the responses, that the strongest support is at the diocese level. A large percentage (more than 25 per cent) rated "neutral" on support at the parish and national level. No further comments were provided to justify their selection. We can deduce some reasons why the strength lies in the diocese centre: they are long established, they serve as administrative-decision making centres, they distribute resources, communication goes out from the centre.

Office Bearers

Mission – Workers

Feedback from office bearers affirm there is also a functioning Board or Commission. However, it is striking that 70 per cent remain neutral or disagree when asked if "there are sufficient leaders available at all levels" of the ministry. A recommendation made was the need for full-time staff; and bench marks, to bring the organisation and goals forward.

In terms of clarity of the working structures, job descriptions, and lines of reporting at every level (parish, diocese and national). But there is a sizeable number (39.4 per cent) who remain neutral about the clarity of job descriptions and lines of reporting at parish level.

In terms of support given to Caritas offices to fulfil its mission, once again the strongest score goes to the diocese offices. The parishes and national level are perceived to receive less support. We can see that the strength lies at the diocesan centre because of some of the reasons mentioned above. Do those in the peripheries, away from the centre, need particular support to fulfil the social mission of the Church?

Current Focus

From the open-ended questions, we can determine three focused areas of community activities:

- responding to poverty – e.g. through fundraising, providing food aid, etc;
- community outreach – e.g. to Orang



POVERTY



COMMUNITY
OUTREACH



COLLABORATION &
CAPACITY BUILDING



ENVIRONMENT



VOLUNTEERS



SPIRITUALITY /
FAITH FORMATION

Asli and migrants;

c) collaboration and capacity building – e.g. Shelter Homes for trafficked female victims; the Community Development training by the national office.

Other areas of concern that some parishes are involved in are:

d) activities related to the environment, for instance recycling, recruiting more volunteers, spirituality and faith formation.

Some of the feedback received highlighted the need to focus on the following aspects:

e) Work closely with other church ministries (e.g. prison, rehab centres, migrants, refugees, families, youth) and external NGOs to provide assistance.

f) Promote Caritas; provide training for staff and volunteers, including faith formation

g) Better understand what is integral community or human development? (Note: The term Integral Human Development is about providing a holistic approach to help communities improve their lives, taking into account the context and environment that they live in to attain peace, social justice and human dignity.)

Mission Roles

Success is measured separately at different levels.

How do you measure the success of your programmes:

- **Parish** – Summary: The execution of programmes, parishioners involvement, reaching out to more families in need and the impact on the parish communities.

- **Diocese** – Summary: Cooperation and collaboration, involvement from parishioners, creating and materialising programmes which fulfils the vision and mission of CM, growth of those trained in leadership and volunteers and reaching out to more communities in need.

- **National** – Summary: Create more collaboration among the dioceses, offer trainings, clear structures and support, healthy engagements among diocese and parish level, changing the perception of other parties that the Catholic Church is active in charity works.

What does this point to for our future roles?

a) At the local community and parish level – there is a request to do more for the needy; not only implementing but being aware of the impact, how our activities affect peoples' lives; being present and bearing witness.

b) At the diocese level – there is a need to shift gradually from playing a role as administrative centres towards calling and forming volunteers and leaders; and again, to do more for the needy.

c) At the national level – we need to work to change the perception around the Catholic Church in Malaysia, that she is active in charity and community development. This will require greater representation, communication, and advocacy for the identified areas of concern.

Journeying together

The fundamental question posed by the synodal journey is also valid for all ministries serving the poor and needy: How is this "journeying together" happening today in our dioceses (and ministries and Caritas offices)? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our "journeying together"?

It is noted in the summary above, that all are called to collaborate (and not work in silos). Here are some excerpts from the survey comments, worth reflecting upon:

- *Sama-sama turun padang ...* (parish, diocese, national – identifying issues, planning, monitoring, direction setting).
- Identify needs of people / *Mendengar dan menerima pendapat*.

Parish feast day focuses on synodality

KLANG: *Mary in Communion, Participation, and Mission*; the theme chosen for this year's Church of Our Lady of Lourdes' (OLL) feast day celebration, saw the return of hundreds of parishioners and visitors. It awoke a sense of synodality, whereby the coming together as one community to bring forth a harvest of holiness despite an ongoing pandemic, had been realised.

Taking synodal sub-themes throughout the nine-day festivities, Fr Vincent Thomas, on the first day, preached about *The Journeying Companions* and the importance of having the right companions accompanying one in one's faith journey. This was, further reiterated by Fr Simon Labrooy, on the second day's theme of *Listening*, who then explained how listening is a fundamental process necessary in ascertaining one's belief. Fr Michel Dass on the third day, spoke about the need of *Speaking Out* and expressing oneself, especially posi-



A mini procession modelling the one in Lourdes, France.

tively, with Fr Albet Arockiasamy reinforcing the act of *Celebrating* as a way of glorifying God for His goodness on the fourth day. Quoting Gerhard Lohfink, the German Catholic priest and theologian on the fifth day, Fr Surain Durai Raj verbalised how the many different types of disciples present within the Church are *Co-Responsible in the Mission of the Church*.

Fr Bonaventure Rayappan, on the sixth day, cited Socrates' principle on the significance of *Dialogue in Church and Society*, and how it enables one to arrive at the truth. Fr Peter Anthony, in commemoration of the World Day of the Sick on the seventh day, expressed how acknowledging the element of *God's Authority and Participation* in prayer is vital for the well-being

of one's soul, through a constant repentant disposition. The celebration continued in the evening with the installation of Fr Gregory Chan, as the parish priest of OLL, by Archbishop Julian Leow, and with the endowment of the parish keys signifying the official handing over of the parish to his care.

Fr Lawrence Andrew, the presider of the eighth day, talked about

the obligation of *Discerning and Deciding* to trust in God, a decision vital in preventing spiritual impoverishment, to empower one to live out one's Christian calling in life optimally through the grace of God. The festivity then continued with a mini procession within the church's grounds the same evening, modelling the ones in Lourdes, France.

Finally, OLL's novena feast day novena came to a befitting end on the ninth day, when parish priest, Fr Gregory, enunciated the value of *Forming Ourselves in Synodality* by being a church that is unceasingly renewing itself via shared synodal characteristics, building bridges between the old and the young via an act of coming together to pray and discuss God's will and the ways to achieve it. Fr Gregory then proceeded with the petition burning and flag-lowering ceremonies, with the faithful being treated to pre-packed food distributed for takeaway. — **By Bernadette Anne Fernandez**

Celebrating World Marriage Day

SUBANG JAYA: In conjunction with World Marriage Day, married couples of the parish of St Thomas More, Subang Jaya, commemorated the joy of marriage as they gathered for Mass February 12 and 13 with a feeling of celebration in the air.

The Family Life Ministry had decorated the church with pink and white flowers, a beautiful arch and a photo booth.

The observance of World Marriage Day is an opportunity to

focus on building a culture of life and love that begins with supporting and promoting marriage and the family.

The theme for 2022 is "Called to the Joy of Love".

Deva and Jacqueline Param, Anthony Tan and Genevieve Yap, and Angeline Lesslar and Chong Min Sin were couples that took to the rostrum at three different Masses to share their testimony on married life. It was evident that their God-centred life, their reli-

ance on the Holy Spirit, and an understanding that a happy married life is a selfless journey, has enabled them to cope with the challenges faced at various stages of their married life.

It was indeed a meaningful celebration when parish priest Fr Patrick Boudville led married couples in the congregation in an affirmation of marriage vows. After Mass, married couples took photos with various props at a decorated photo booth set up outside.

Praying for the sick and the elderly



Fr George Packiasamy anoints a parishioner with Oil of the Infirm.

KUANTAN: On February 11, 2022, the parish of St Thomas the Apostle celebrated the 30th World Day of Prayer for the Sick which coincided with the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes. This day of prayer for the sick was instituted 30 years ago by St John Paul II to motivate people, healthcare workers and civil institutions to be more attentive to the sick and to those who care for them.

This year's theme, chosen by His Holiness Pope Francis, is *Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful* (Lk 6:36). The elderly and the sick were invited to a special Healing Mass in church at 11.00am. In spite of the rainy weather, approximately 150 parishioners attended.

The intentions offered during Mass included prayers for the elderly and the sick members in our families, for the well-being of the courageous frontliners performing their duties during this pandemic, and for our inner spiritual strength as we face uncertainties during this challenging times.

Immediately after Mass, parish

priest, Fr. George Packiasamy, went round blessing the congregation with holy water. After that, he conducted the Sacrament of Anointing of the sick as he proceeded to anoint each one with the Oil of the Infirm (*Oleum Infirmorum*). This sacrament was to provide pastoral care for them and to console, affirm and strengthen them spiritually and physically.

Being aware of the high number of COVID-19 infections due to the Omicron variant and that the sick and the elderly are more vulnerable, the parish leaders, with the full cooperation of all parishioners, ensured strict observance of COVID-19 SOPs. As a precautionary measure to avoid cross-infection, a new cotton bud was used for each anointing with holy oil.

Fr George expressed his gratitude to all family members, BEC coordinators and the Parish Action Response Team (PRT) for ushering and assisting the elderly and sick parishioners to bring them to church to celebrate this event. —

By Francis Leong



Fr Patrick Boudville blesses the married couples from the pulpit.

Couples reminded of their roles

KUALA LUMPUR: World Marriage Day was celebrated at the Church of the Risen Christ on February 13, 2022. Married couples were invited by parish priest Fr Edwin Peter to come together to celebrate the day they had their marriage solemnised by respective priests.

The couples were reminded to proclaim the beauty of the Sacrament of Marriage, that is to honour the roles of husband and wife. This has brought about the building or rebuilding of the community, reminding us of our spirit of attachment, our bond and love to one another in good times and in

bad, in sad times and in glad.

It is from our Lord our God, the pastoral light from which we light our lamps together and become the "lighthouse" to our children, our communities and our society. By God's grace, we move forward having our lamps always lit for the glory of God.



The young and senior married couples at the Church of the Risen Christ, KL.

The lector and the Word of God

By Gwen Manickam

PETALING JAYA: Kicking off a series of formations at the Church of the Assumption was a three-hour session for some 55 lectors and commentators by parish priest, Msgr Leonard Lexson, the Ecclesiastical Assistant for the Kuala Lumpur Archdiocese Liturgy Commission.

Held on February 12, 2022, he presented a brief history of lay proclaimers, of which Jesus could be considered a forerunner, as stated in Luke 4:16-22, and Isaiah 61:1. Msgr Leonard talked about the Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy (CSL) which establishes the principle of greater participation by the laity in the celebration of Mass.

Following a two-year lull of functioning in pandemic mode, we were reminded, under the CSL Reform of the Sacred Liturgy #29, that "Servers, readers, commentators, and members of the choir also exercise a genuine liturgical function. They ought to discharge their office, therefore, with the sincere devotion and



Msgr Leonard Lexson conducting a formation for lectors and commentators at the Church of the Assumption.

decorum demanded by so exalted a ministry and rightly expected of them by God's people. Consequently, they must all be deeply imbued with the spirit of the liturgy, in the measure proper to each one, and they must be trained to perform their function in a correct and orderly manner."

Some of the qualifications required of a liturgical minister, reader or lector (which is a word rooted in the Latin word *legere*, meaning "to read") includes, being a baptised Catholic who has reached the age of comprehension and received the Sacrament of Confirmation. A lec-

tor should practise the basic tenets of the Catholic way of life, have a deep love for the Word of God and the Eucharist and be one who supports and participates in the growth of BECs.

To be an effective lector calls for adequate preparation which includes study, prayer, and practice. Unless the readings are done well, people will not hear God's voice speaking through the texts and be truly nourished at the table of the word.

In the second part of the formation, Msgr Leonard emphasised that when the Scriptures are read in Church, God is speaking to his

people, and Christ, present in his own Word, is proclaiming the Gospel. Thus, as stated in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), the lector's preparedness is of utmost importance – not only should the lector be familiar with the texts of what he or she is to deliver, but also, make those words his or her way of life.

Msgr Leonard further guided those present through the rubrics stated in the GIRM before explaining the Lectionary for Mass. He said, during the celebration of Mass, the biblical readings with their accompanying chants from the Sacred Scriptures

may not be omitted, shortened, or replaced by non-biblical readings. For it is out of the word of God handed down in writing that even now "God speaks to his people" and it is from the continued use of Sacred Scripture that the people of God are enabled to bear witness to Christ before the world by its manner of life. Furthermore, because of the dignity of the Word of God, the books of readings used in the celebration should not be replaced with other pastoral aids, like leaflets.

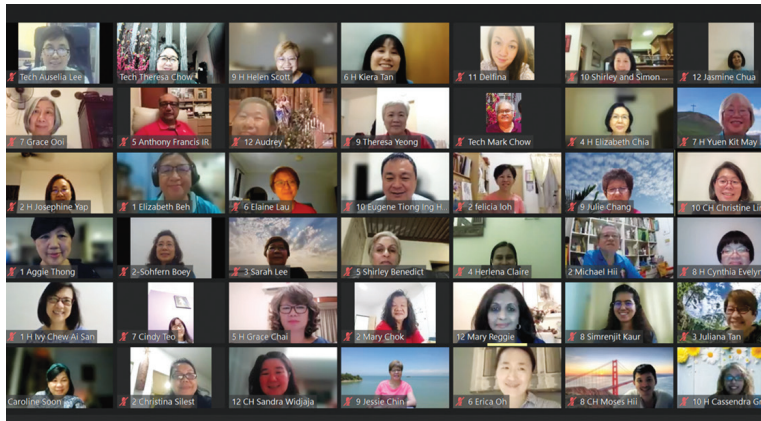
In addition to covering the lectors and commentator's appropriate attire while on duty, he elaborated on the need to be spiritually and technically prepared. He said liturgical formation equips lectors with a grasp of the meaning and structure of the liturgy of the word and of the significance of its connection with the liturgy of the Eucharist. Technical preparation, on the other hand, helps lectors be more skilled in the art of reading publicly, either with the power of their own voice or with the help of sound equipment.

A transformative journey in 33 days to Morning Glory

KUALA LUMPUR: Close to 100 lay Catholics from all over Malaysia together with two members of the clergy embarked on a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) Retreat on Marian Consecration. A journey that started from January 9 to February 11, ended with Marian Consecration on the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes.

Organised by the Alpha-Formed teams comprising of lay leaders from the various dioceses, particularly from Kuala Lumpur and Kuching, this DIY retreat touched on the inspiring stories of four saints' devotion to Our Lady: St Louis De Montfort, St Maximilian Kolbe, St Teresa of Calcutta, and the old-time favourite saint, John Paul II. It is based on a book by Fr Michael Gaitley, a priest of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception. His inspiration is largely drawn from the insightful reflections of the four saints on the Blessed Mother.

The 33 Days' journey included reading a brief section daily, followed by much pondering and reflection with the help of a *Retreat Companion* guidebook. Then, once a week, there was a Zoom meeting for the small groups where participants would gather and share insights. The members of the small groups are truly Pan-Malaysian, with every group



A screenshot of the participants at one of the sessions.

having members from different parts of the country.

About 50 of the participants were from the Klang Valley. The consecration date for this group was held on Feb 12, with a Mass celebrated by Msgr Leonard Lexson, at the Church of the Assumption, Petaling Jaya.

Three of the core team members, Stephen Chin, Grace Chai, and Cynthia Baring Gould from Kuching, organised the consecration ceremony for about 20 participants at the Cathedral of St Joseph. Archbishop Simon Poh was present for the Consecration.

Participants from other parts of Malaysia were advised to participate in the Eucharistic Celebration at their

home parishes and pray the Consecration prayer.

So, how does Marian Consecration affect us, and what are the fruits of Marian Consecration?

We are yoked to Christ, as our Blessed Mother leads us to her Son. When we undergo suffering, our yoke is lessened because Mary intercedes for us, and as a mother, she identifies all that we go through. As God-bearer, Mother Mary teaches us to not only receive the Word, but to live it out in our daily lives. The fruits are still unfolding in our lives, but we emulate what St John Paul II did when he was alive. His daily entrustment to the Blessed Mother is in his insignia: *Totus Tuus* (Totally yours).

SJIS offers opportunity to further studies in Germany

KUCHING: St Joseph's International School (SJIS) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Eduroam Sdn Bhd (German Educare) on February 12.

This MOU offers SJIS's A-Level students an opportunity to further their tertiary education at universities in Germany. Dubbed the German Education Pathway, the program starts with this April's A-Level intake.

The students can attend lesson on the German language concurrently with their A-Level classes in Kuching and achieve up to B1 level by the end of their A-Level programme. Then they continue with a nine-month preparation programme in Kuala Lumpur to complete their German language up to C1 level, and prepare other requirements such as visa application, and university selection, to study in Germany.

Traditionally, Malaysian students looked to English speaking countries for their tertiary education, but with the rising costs, Germany is proving to be a more affordable option. In addition to meeting the competitive standards of higher education, offering a wide range of undergraduate subjects, as well as world-leading technical degrees, Germany's public universities currently do not charge tuition fees, even for international

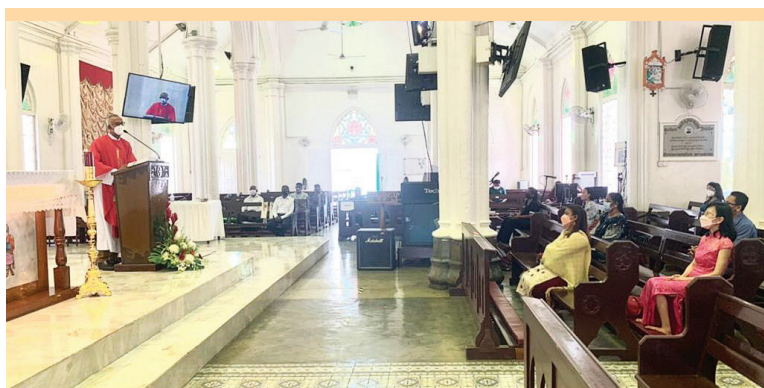


students.

The German Education Pathway, already established at several colleges in West Malaysia and has successfully placed numerous students at German universities, helps broaden the students' education and career options. Besides earning a reputable degree, students also learn a foreign language and may work in Germany for several years after graduating, to gain experience.

The MOU also enables German Educare, an approved leading German Language provider in Malaysia, to work exclusively with SJIS in Sarawak.

SJIS Kuching (a member of the St Joseph's Family of Schools) managed by the Marist Brothers, started in January 2017. It offers secondary education based on the United Kingdom Cambridge O-Level (IGCSE) and A-Level curriculum. The school is an approved UK Cambridge exam centre in Kuching.



Fr Clarence Devadass addressing the parish and BEC coordinators during the homily.

Parish leaders and priests pray together

KUALA LUMPUR: About 80 parish and BEC leaders of the Church of St Anthony came together to pray with their new parish priests, Fr Dr Clarence Devadass and Fr Eugene Benedict, during a Eucharistic celebration recently.

In his homily, Fr Clarence said that when there is a change of priest, the parishioners will begin to feel anxious and think about the character and the style of the new

parish priest and might also compare the new priest with the previous priest.

In relating the message of the Gospel where Jesus invites His disciples to a quiet place to get some rest, Fr Clarence said that this message is for all leaders to reflect on what God wants us to do as a servant. He said that the ministry we undertake is not to fulfil the will of the coordinator, priest

or bishop, but the will of God. Therefore, as a leader, it is necessary to ponder on this and pray to know His will.

At the end of his homily, Fr Clarence called on leaders to serve with love so that parishioners who come to this parish will return home with joy as they can praise, meet Jesus in the Eucharist and feel His love through the community of St Anthony's parish.

Filipinos urged to offer reparation for 'personal and national sins'

MANILA: Archbishop Socrates Villegas of Lingayen-Dagupan in the northern Philippines called on the faithful to offer reparation for "our personal and national sins" ahead of this year's national elections.

The archbishop appealed for a Lenten season of "reparation Rosary for truth, integrity, and wisdom" starting Ash Wednesday, March 2, until Wednesday, April 13 (the eve of Holy Thursday).

He urged everyone to pray the Rosary in all churches, at home, and "even in our work places."

"I invite our brother priests to make Confessions more available to our people, especially during this Lenten season and I beg our faithful to go to Confession," said Archbishop Villegas.

He called on the faithful to offer their "reparation Adoration" for the same intentions from Easter Monday, April 18 to May 8, "the vigil of our national elections."

He said the Blessed Sacrament should be exposed publicly for an hour in parish churches, chaplaincies, and pastoral stations.

He urged the faithful to stay in silent Adoration, as much as possible kneeling down,



Archbishop Socrates Villegas and the clergy of the Archdiocese of Lingayen-Dagupan during a prayer service at the St John the Evangelist Cathedral in Dagupan City in 2017. (LiCas News photo/Glenn Munoz Lopez)

to atone for the sins of the nation.

"We will pray for twenty-one days for all the voters in the coming elections," said the archbishop.

"We cannot delay offering reparation for our personal and national sins. The bitter

fruits of our sins are already strangling us," he said.

"We are reaping what we have sown. Catholic values will erode further if we ignore the guidance of God," he said. — *licas.news*

Can Christians influence South Korean presidential poll?

SEOUL: South Koreans will head to polling stations on March 9 to elect a new president, who will choose between China, its leading trading partner, and the US, with whom it has a military pact.

At a time when US-North Korean relations are at an impasse, and the Joe Biden administration is acting aggressively against China, much may rest with Christians who form 28 per cent of South Korea's population.

Although churches played a significant role in the democracy movement, South Korea's conservative mega-churches are known for their far-right politics and have a close connection with Korean-American churches, as well as US evangelical churches.

South Korea's Christians — particularly its evangelicals — are the crucial link that shaped South Korea's ties with the US after it became independent from imperial Japan.

Unusual for an Asian country, of South

Korea's 51 million people, some 20 per cent are Protestants and eight per cent are Catholics, making Christians the biggest religious group in the country, even larger than Buddhists who form 16 per cent. Most South Koreans (56 per cent) have no religion.

Christians in South Korea wield considerable influence relative to their numbers as they are commonly found among the country's elites. Out of the eight South Korean presidents in the democratic era (since 1987), six were Christians — three Protestants (Roh Tae-woo, Kim Young-sam, and Lee Myung-bak) and three Catholics (Roh Moo-hyun, Kim Dae-jung and current President Moon Jae-in).

Moon Jae-in, the current president, converted to Catholicism as a North Korean refugee child in Busan as he lined up to receive food that Catholic nuns served daily.

The Catholic Church has been advocating Korean unification. Churches in South Ko-

rea celebrate National Liberation Day from Japanese rule on Aug 15 every year with a special prayer for peace and reunification.

While the Catholic Church has prospered in South Korea, the Holy See does not recognise North Korea's state-run Korean Catholic Association (KCA), which claims there are 3,000 Catholics in the country, while the UN estimates around 800.

Reconciliation between the two Koreas has been a major thrust of the Church, and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea (CBCCK) established the Special Commission for the Reconciliation of the Korean People in 1997.

During his visit to South Korea in 2014, Pope Francis dedicated the last Mass to peace and reunification. "Jesus asks us to believe that forgiveness is the door which leads to reconciliation," he said in his homily in Myeongdong Cathedral in Seoul. — *ucanews.com*

Pope appoints ethnic priest as new bishop in Taiwan

CHIAYI: Pope Francis has appointed a native priest from the ethnic Tsou community as the new bishop of Chiayi Diocese in Taiwan.

Fr Norbert Pu, 63, has been serving as the parish priest of Christ the King Church in Putzu since 2017, a Vatican bulletin said on February 15 while announcing the appointment.



Bishop-elect Pu is the ninth bishop of Chiayi. He succeeds Bishop Thomas An-zu Chung, who served Chiayi Diocese from 2008 to 2020 before Pope Francis appointed him archbishop in the national capital, Taipei.

Born on Aug 26, 1958, in Alishan, Chiayi, Norbert Pu obtained a bachelor's degree in philosophy in 1980 and in theology in 1985 from the Faculty of Theology of St Robert Bellarmine at Fu Jen Catholic University in Taipei. He was ordained a priest on Jan 1, 1987.

He studied theology at St Augustin University in Germany from 1994 to 2000 and acquired a master's degree.

Since his ordination, he has served Chiayi Diocese in various roles. He was parish priest of St John's Cathedral Church (1988-94); acting parish priest of Diocesan Pilgrimages Centre (2008-09); parish priest of St John's Cathedral (2004-16) and diocesan consultor (2008-09).

He was president of the Commission for the Aboriginal Apostolate (2009-10) and offered pastoral services to aboriginal tribes in Taiwan.

Then he served as the president of the Commission for the Liturgy (2010-11); spiritual director of the pastoral regions of Chiayi (2011-13); member of the Cemeteries Commission for the diocesan Pilgrimages Centre and the Finance Commission (2013-14); spiritual director (2014-15) and member of the Priests' Council (2015-16).

He spent June 2016 to July 2017 for further studies in Germany. On his return, he was appointed parish priest of Christ the King Church in Putzu.

Since 2017, he has served as diocesan consultor and a member of the Priests' Council and of the Commission for Infant Schools. Since 2018, he has been vice-president of the Commission for the Liturgy and chaplain of the Catholic High School of Hong Ren. — *ucanews.com*



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Pope gives greater authority to bishops, conferences

ROME: Saying he wanted to promote a “healthy decentralisation” of some aspects of Church life, Pope Francis made several changes to Church law, granting greater authority to individual bishops, bishops’ conferences and synods of bishops of the Eastern Catholic churches.

The changes, the Pope said, should “foster a sense of collegiality and the pastoral responsibility” of bishops and religious superiors who are closest to the matters being decided and therefore have a better understanding of what is appropriate.

Pope Francis’ amendments to both the Code of Canon Law of the Latinrite Church and the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches were published by the Vatican on February 15, the day they were to go into effect.

The modifications, the Pope said, “reflect even more the shared and



Bishops during a Mass in St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican. (Vatican Media)

plural universality of the Church,” which includes many legitimate differences, but preserves its unity in communion with the Pope.

At the same time, he wrote, the changes “encourage a more rapid efficacy of the pastoral action of governance by the local authority, which is facilitated by its very proximity to

the persons and situations which require it.”

For setting up an inter-diocesan seminary, drafting a programme for the formation of priests or publishing a national catechism, with the new law, the bishop or bishops’ conferences involved simply need to obtain a “confirmation” from the Vatican

and are no longer required to seek the “approval” of the Vatican.

In Church law, “approval,” as opposed to ‘confirmation,’ entails a greater commitment and involvement” of the Roman Curia. “Therefore, it is evident that the shift from requiring ‘approval’ to requiring ‘confirmation’ is not only a terminological change, but a substantial one, which moves precisely in the direction of decentralisation,” Bishop Marco Mellino, a member of the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, told *Vatican News* on Feb 15.

In another change, Pope Francis gave local bishops the authority to determine when there is “a just and necessary cause” for reducing the number of Masses to be said in fulfillment of a will or legacy left to the Church. Previously such a decision was reserved to the Vatican.

Mellino told *Vatican News* the law still insists that donations left to the Church be used for the donor’s intentions, but recognises that over time, especially if the money was left decades ago, adjustments may be necessary.

Pope Francis also added a new paragraph to the canon dealing with consecrated virgins to make clear that a bishop may establish an association for consecrated virgins in his diocese and a bishops’ conference may do the same on the national level.

In addition, he gave religious superiors, when acting in consultation with their councils, broader authority for authorising long absences from the community or for dismissing or accepting a request of a member with temporary vows to leave the community permanently.

— *cruxnow.com*

Indian court bans all religious clothing amid dispute over hijabs

BANGALORE: Amid widespread protests over a ban on *hijabs* in schools, an Indian court has temporarily prohibited all forms of religious dress in schools while it considers a legal challenge to the *hijab* ban.

The current conflict began in September 2021 when a girl’s preparatory school in the Indian state of Karnataka moved to ban *hijabs*, saying the Muslim headscarves violated the school’s dress code.

In the months and weeks since, students at various schools in the region have protested the ban by wearing their *hijabs* and demand-

ing to be let back into school. At the same time, mobs of Hindu nationalists, many wearing the saffron colour associated with Hinduism, have protested at the schools in support of the *hijab* ban.

Hindus make up 84 per cent of Karnataka’s people, while about 13 per cent are Muslim and fewer than two per cent are Christian.

The government of Karnataka, which has expressed support for the *hijab* ban, is deliberating whether to pass an anti-conversion law similar to that of eight other Indian states, which Christians and others say are abused by extremists. Basavaraj

Bommai, the chief minister of Karnataka, is a member of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party.

After weeks of protests so intense that high schools and colleges had to close, the Karnataka High Court on February 10 issued an order calling for an end to the violence and for schools to reopen. The order came in response to two petitions asking that Muslim women be allowed to wear *hijabs* in school.

“Whether wearing of *hijab* in the classroom is a part of essential religious practice of Islam in the light of constitutional guarantees, needs a deeper examination,” the court wrote.

The court then ordered that all students, regardless of religion, should not wear religious garb in school “until further orders.” The court specifically mentioned saffron shawls, scarves, *hijabs*, and “religious flags.”

Though the Indian constitution guarantees freedom of religion, eight states have passed laws aimed at preventing conversions from Hinduism to minority religions by “force” or “inducement.” These laws and related accusations have drawn criticism from India’s religious minorities and from an official US advisory body. — *CNA*

Pro-life bell forged in Poland and blessed by Pope Francis resounds in Ecuador

GUAYAQUIL, Ecuador: A bell forged in Poland and blessed by Pope Francis has arrived in Ecuador, where it will ring out in honour of unborn children.

The bell, known as the “Voice of the Unborn,” was welcomed into the Cathedral of St Peter the Apostle in Guayaquil, Ecuador’s chief port city, during a Mass on February 12.

The Pope blessed the bell, one of three created at the behest of Poland’s Yes to Life foundation, at the Vatican on Oct 27, 2021.

The first bell was produced in 2020 after Bogdan Romaniuk, the foundation’s vice-president, read that more than 42 million children are killed annually worldwide as a result of abortion.

The foundation commissioned the Ludwisarska Jan Felczyński Studio in Przemyśl, south-eastern Poland, to produce the first bell.

Cast in bronze, it weighs more than 2,000 pounds and is nearly four feet in diameter. The bell is decorated with a DNA double helix and an ultrasound image of an unborn child.

It bears the words of the Fifth Commandment, “You shall not kill,” and a quotation from Jeremiah 1:5: “Before I formed you in the



The ‘Voice of the Unborn’ bell. (CNA photo/Family News Service)

womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you.”

After it was blessed by the Pope, the bell was transferred to All Saints church in Kolbuszowa, south-eastern Poland, but is taken to pro-life events around the Central European country.

Requests for copies of the bell came from Ukraine and Ecuador. The foundry cast them and they were blessed by Pope Francis.

The bell for Ukraine is based at the parish of St John Paul II in Lviv, a city around 40 miles from the Polish border.

For the arrival ceremony in Ecuador, keyrings depicting the bell were created with an inscription from the Polish Pope John Paul II’s 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*: “Respect, protect, love and serve life, every human life!” — *CNA*



Members of All India Muslim Students Federation protest against the hijab ban in educational institutions by the Karnataka government at Delhi University in New Delhi, India, Feb 9, 2022. (CNA photo/PradeepGaurs)

New bishop ordained in Vietnam’s Hung Hoa Diocese

HUNG GOA: Vietnam’s youngest bishop was ordained on St Valentine’s Day and is expected to promote unity and love in the country’s largest diocese made up of multiple ethnicities, cultures and languages.

Fifty-three-year-old Fr Dominic Hoang Minh Tien was ordained bishop of Hung Hoa on February 14 by Emeritus Bishop Anthony Vu Huy Chuong at Son Loc Cathedral in Son Tay town on the out-

skirts of capital Hanoi.

The ceremony, attended by Singapore-based Archbishop Marek Zalewski, the non-resident representative of the Holy See to Vietnam, 23 archbishops and bishops, hundreds of priests and religious from other places, was aired online due to COVID-19 protocols.

Bishop Alfonse Nguyen Huu Long of Vinh said Bishop Tien, whose episcopal motto is unity and love, chose the day of the patron of

love, St Valentine, for his ordination.

Unity and love are vital for the Catholic Church and the new bishop takes the leading role in ensuring the unity and love of all Catholics in his diocese, he added.

Bishop Tien, who is the ninth bishop of the 127-year-old diocese, said it is important to do re-evangelisation work among Catholics who could pay little attention to their faith practice due to wars and

restrictions on religion. Catholics dominate only 10 out of 120 parishes while the rest were a mix of various faiths and ethnic groups.

Bishop Tien said the diocese re-established the parish after the number of baptised people grew to a few hundred in a couple of years. The provinces of Dien Bien, Lai Chau and Son La, which were considered to have no religion by the government, are now home to over 10,000 Catholics. — *ucanews.com*



Bishop Dominic Hoang Minh Tien

'Unacceptable to trample on human dignity'

"I find it unacceptable for human dignity to be ignored, trampled upon, or eliminated entirely. God gave us this dignity when He created us in His image and likeness. And therefore, it is universal because it comes from the love of God," Bishop Stephen Chow said, according to the Italian magazine *Mondo e Missione* (*World and Mission*).

Bishop Chow spoke to the magazine published by the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME) at a time when many foreign missionaries are worried about their future in Hong Kong due to a recent crackdown on freedom of expression.

"I truly believe that missionaries have a place in the Hong Kong Church. We appreciate their role and what they have done, and we will do our best to keep them here," Bishop Chow said.

Hong Kong has been a hub of Christian missionary activity in East Asia since the mid-1800s. Following the handover from British rule in 1997, the city has remained a diverse metropolis with roughly 700,000 expatriates living in Hong Kong, out of a total population of around 7.5 million people.

"Hong Kong must continue to

In his first interview since he was ordained to lead the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong, Bishop Stephen Chow Sau-yan underlined the importance of protecting human dignity.



be an international city," Bishop Chow underlined.

"As religious, we must learn to work with the government and to find as much space as possible. But that does not mean we can no longer be critical. We are here as prophets, but with the humility of dialogue," he added.

Though he was reluctant at first to accept the appointment as a bishop, Chow said that in the process, he was "invited to obedience, which means abandoning oneself."

The 62-year-old was consecrated as a bishop in Hong Kong's Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception on December 4, 2021. More than 6,000 people tuned in live to watch Chow's consecration Mass on YouTube.

"I do not live by public opinion. Otherwise, I would not be free to discern God's will and have inner

freedom. Mine is a balancing act and I find this stimulating," Bishop Chow said.

He explained that he does not see himself as a diplomat because he is a bishop, and that is a distinct role.

"I am not a diplomat; a bishop is not that. Sure, sometimes we have to be diplomatic, but my main concern is discerning God's will," he said.

Reflecting back on his formation and education, the Jesuit bishop said that Ignatian spirituality shaped his relationship with God.

He cited the late Fr James Hurley, a Jesuit priest who was a founding member of Amnesty International in Hong Kong, as an influence on his thinking about human rights.

Hurley, originally from Ireland, spent over 50 years as a Jesuit missionary in Hong Kong. At the time of his death in 2020, Chow said: "Many of us have been awakened by his passion for social justice."

"The incidents of 1989 had a great impact on me. They put me in touch with my identity as a Chinese person," said Bishop Chow.

On June 4, 1989, tanks rolled into Beijing's Tiananmen Square and military forces opened fire on the university students and other citizens calling for democratic reforms.

"My personal story and that of the Chinese people were linked by that event," he said.

Born in Hong Kong in 1959, Chow went on to study in the United States, earning bachelor's and master's degrees in psychology from the University of Minnesota, before entering the Society of Jesus in Dublin, Ireland, at the age of 25.

Bishop Chow returned to Hong Kong in 1988, a year before the Chinese government's crackdown on student protesters in Beijing culminated in the Tiananmen Square massacre.

With a master's degree from Loyola University in Chicago and a doctorate in education from Harvard, Chow said that he believed that education and culture help to build up society.

"The Church should also be like this: working with the new generations to build the future together," he said.

Bishop Chow mentioned that one challenge Hong Kong faces is that many experienced teachers have emigrated.

"It is not easy to hire teachers and principals. Several professionals, such as social workers and psychologists, have also left. This is another reality that we have to face," he said.

When asked about his message for young people in Hong Kong disappointed by the current political situation, Bishop Chow said: "Don't look at the walls, look toward the future."

"I also tell young people to imagine how they want the Church, the world, our Hong Kong to be, and to share their vision with

others, not just listening to like-minded ones," Bishop Chow said.

The bishop said he hoped that the Catholic community in Hong Kong would have more dialogue with

young people to "find the way to do things in a good and productive way."

"In the many years spent abroad ... I have learned the importance of culture. At Harvard, in particular, I learned how it impacts our lives. That is why I now attach great importance to what we are creating. Culture can be subversive. And then there is the idea that reality is not a given, but is created; and we build it together," he said. — *licas.news*

"I do not live by public opinion. Otherwise, I would not be free to discern God's will and have inner freedom. Mine is a balancing act and I find this stimulating."

"I am not a diplomat; a bishop is not that. Sure, sometimes we have to be diplomatic, but my main concern is discerning God's will."

Top canonist warns against dangers of social media for priests

ROME: Ahead of a high-profile conference on the priesthood, prominent Jesuit canonist Fr Gianfranco Ghirlanda has cautioned against the risks of social media and excessive attachment to outward devotions, stressing the importance of service.

Speaking to *Crux*, Fr Ghirlanda said a priest's spiritual life is essential to their ministry, and the greatest danger he sees to a healthy spiritual life is what Pope Francis has called "spiritual worldliness."

Spiritual worldliness, he said, means "hiding behind external forms of devotion, liturgical correctness, orthodoxy to the bitter end, of 'always correct manners,' of always being in order, but to protect one's own search for security and personal benefit."

It is an obsession with outward details, such as fancy cufflinks on the sleeves of a shirt, and is a spiritual attitude that "can lead to careerism, losing sight of the fact that the ministry is a service for others and not for oneself," he said.

A former rector of the Jesuit-run pontifical Gregorian University and a sought-after advisor for the Vatican on canonical affairs, Fr Ghirlanda spoke ahead of a major Vatican seminar on the priesthood

taking place Feb 17-19 and titled, *Toward a Fundamental Theology of the Priesthood*.

Fr Ghirlanda himself is giving a talk on the *Holy life of the clerics: theological-canonical perspective*, on the final day of the seminar, which will be opened by Pope Francis speaking on *Faith and the Priesthood Today*.

The seminar is exploring various aspects of priestly life, including the vow of celibacy.

Canadian Cardinal Marc Ouellet, prefect of the Vatican's Congregation for Bishops, has said the seminar will hear various perspectives on priestly celibacy and the married priesthood, however, in the past he has defended the vow as a gift to the Church and an act of faith, and has said discussion at the seminar will not be limited to just that topic.

In his interview, Fr Ghirlanda warned against the danger "efficiency" poses to a priest's spiritual life, saying this becomes a problem when a priest is "exercising the ministry as if the positive effects depended on one's own efforts and on the means applied, forgetting that it is effective only through the action of grace, even if combined with everything that the priest makes available to him-

self."

"It is losing sight that everything must be done as if it depended on us, aware that everything depends on God," he said, quoting the biblical passage, "When you have done everything you had to do, consider yourselves useless servants."

Fr Ghirlanda also cautioned against the misuse of social media in the digital age, saying they "can distract a priest a lot" and can "take away a lot of time unnecessarily."

"I don't want to demonise social media, because if used well, they can also be a very valid apostolic tool," he said, but they can lead to the "trap" of what he called an unhealthy curiosity.

The screen, he said, "generates curiosity that is never satisfied and therefore generates other curiosity about news, information, etc., that is not always necessary," whereas a healthy spiritual life requires time away from the digital world for prayer and meditation on Scripture and Jesus' life.

"Sometimes the intrusiveness of social networks eliminates" this space of "interior silence" that needed for genuine prayer, he said.

Fr Ghirlanda pointed to the hy-



per-politicised, polemic, and often toxic nature of public discourse today, especially in the online world, and noted that the Church itself is not immune to this.

"The Church, and therefore priests, lives in history and in a specific society. Unfortunately, the spirit of division and polemics also penetrates the Church," among priests and also inside religious institutes and associates and ecclesial movements, he said.

Polarisations, he said, "are created where everyone believes they have absolute truth and is unwilling to listen to others."

This, Fr Ghirlanda said, is what Pope Francis has termed, "self-referentiality," which is an attitude in which "I find the truth only in myself and I don't need any ex-

ternal verification, no objectification."

"This closes all dialogue, it leads to a polemical and exclusionary attitude of others who do not think like me," which is unhealthy for priestly life and ministry, he said.

In Fr Ghirlanda's view, the strongest sign of a healthy spiritual life for a priest "is service, spending your entire life at the service of others, reserving nothing for yourself."

"Of course, this is not easy and the search for implementation is for the whole of life," he said, saying a true spirit of service "is that 'leave everything' that Jesus asks and which we hope to be able to leave at least at the end of life." — **By Elise Ann Allen, *cruxnow.com***

Jubilee Year 2025 can restore hope after years of pandemic and suffering

By Gerard O'Connell

Pope Francis has set in motion the preparations for the Jubilee Year 2025, which he believes “can contribute greatly to restoring a climate of hope and trust as a prelude to the renewal and rebirth that we so urgently desire” after two years of pandemic and suffering.

He chose *Pilgrims of Hope* as the motto for the Holy Year and, on January 3, entrusted Italian archbishop Rino Fisichella, the head of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelisation, with the responsibility for organising this event, which is hoped to bring millions of pilgrims from all over the world to Rome.

To further encourage the preparatory effort, Francis today sent a letter to Archbishop Fisichella, positioning this jubilee as a year in which “we must fan the flame of hope that has been given us and help everyone to gain new strength and certainty by looking to the future with an open spirit, a trusting heart and a farsighted vision.”

He recalled that every country in the world has suffered over these past two years because of the pandemic that “made us experience first-hand, not only the tragedy of dying alone, but also the uncertainty and fleetingness of existence, and in doing so, has changed our very way of life.”

Christians, he said, “together with all our brothers and sisters” across the globe, “have endured those hardships and limitations. Our churches remained closed, as did our schools, factories, offices, shops, and venues for recreation. All of us saw certain freedoms curtailed, while the pandemic generated feelings not only of grief, but also, at times, of doubt, fear and disorientation.” Thankfully, he said, the scientific community “quickly developed an initial remedy that is gradually permitting us to resume our daily lives.”

Writing on Feb 11, the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, Pope Francis struck a distinctively positive note by declaring, “We are fully confident that the pandemic will be



A file photo of Pope Francis closing the Holy Door of St Peter's Basilica to mark the close of the Jubilee Year of Mercy at the Vatican in this Nov 20, 2016, file photo. The Pope wrote a letter explaining his hopes for the Holy Year in 2025. (CNS photo/Tiziana Fabi, pool via Reuters)

overcome, and that the world will return to its usual pattern of personal relationships and social life.”

“This will happen more readily to the extent that we can demonstrate effective solidarity,” he said, so that “those most in need will not be neglected, and everyone can have access to scientific breakthroughs and the necessary medicine.”

He emphasised the need “to recover the sense of universal fraternity” and “to refuse to turn a blind eye to the tragedy of rampant poverty that prevents millions of men, women, young people and children from living in a manner worthy of our human dignity.” He also called for greater attention to the plight of “the many refugees forced to abandon their native lands.”

In his letter, Pope Francis emphasised that “the spiritual dimension of the Jubilee, which calls for conversion, should also embrace these fundamental aspects of our life in society as part of a coherent whole.” He said it should include care for creation—“our common home”—and

noted that “growing numbers” of men, women, young people and children, “have come to realise that care of creation is an essential expression of our faith in God.”

He asked Archbishop Fisichella to “find suitable ways” for the Holy Year “to be planned and celebrated with deep faith, lively hope and active charity” and to stimulate the pastoral outreach of the local churches and intensify their commitment to synodality.

Pope Francis concluded:

I would greatly desire that we devote 2024, the year preceding the Jubilee event, to a great “symphony” of prayer. Prayer, above all else, to renew our desire to be in the presence of the Lord, to listen to Him and to adore Him. Prayer, moreover, to thank God for the many gifts of His love for us and to praise His work in creation, which summons everyone to respect it and to take concrete and responsible steps to protect it. Prayer as the expression of a single “heart and soul” (cf. Acts 4:32), which then translates into solidarity

and the sharing of our daily bread. Prayer that makes it possible for every man and woman in this world to turn to the one God and to reveal to Him what lies hidden in the depths of their heart. Prayer as the royal road to holiness, which enables us to be contemplative, even in the midst of activity.

This is the second jubilee year convened by Pope Francis. But, unlike the extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy in 2015, the forthcoming one will be an ordinary jubilee, which takes place every 25 years.

Pope Francis said, “God’s holy and faithful people” have experienced the jubilee celebration “as a special gift of grace, characterised by the forgiveness of sins and, in particular, by the indulgence, which is a full expression of the mercy of God.”

The last ordinary jubilee took place in the year 2000 and was opened by Pope John Paul II as humanity entered the new millennium. Millions of people came to Rome then, including thousands of young people. Pope Francis hopes Jubilee 2025 could witness something similar.

Archbishop Fisichella, who successfully organised the 2015 Jubilee Year of Mercy, told *Vatican News* on Jan 13, that “one of the priorities concerns the reception of pilgrims and the faithful, with a large number of pilgrims expected in Rome during the Holy Year — in the hope that in the next two years, the health emergency will no longer affect activities as it does today.”

A jubilee year is a special year of grace, in which the Church offers the faithful the possibility of obtaining a plenary indulgence. Traditionally, it begins just before Christmas and ends on the Epiphany of the following year.

The Pope inaugurates the Holy Year with the rite of the opening of the Holy Door in St Peter’s Basilica. After that, the Holy Doors of the other papal basilicas — St John Lateran, St Paul Outside the Walls and St Mary Major — are opened and remain so until the end of the jubilee year. — americamagazine.org

Number of Catholics worldwide rose by 16 million in 2020

VATICAN: The number of Catholics worldwide increased by an estimated 16 million in 2020 to 1.36 billion, according to statistics released on February 18 by the Vatican.

The rise was in line with global population growth in the year that the coronavirus pandemic swept the planet, reported *Vatican News*, the online news portal of the Holy See. Catholics continued to account for 17.7 per cent of the total world population.

The figures for 2020 — the most recent year where numbers are available — come from the 2022 edition of the *Anuario Pontificio (Pontifical Yearbook)* and the 2020 *Annuarium Statisticum Ecclesiae (Statistical Yearbook of the Church)*, compiled by the Vatican’s Central Office of Church Statistics.

As in previous years, the Church grew most rapidly in Asia (1.8 per cent) and Africa (2.1 per cent) and most modestly in Europe (0.3 per cent).

Almost half (48 per cent) of the world’s Catholics live in the Americas, with 28 per cent located in South America.

The numbers of bishops worldwide saw a

minute decline, from 5,364 in 2019 to 5,363 in 2020.

At the end of 2020, there were a total of 410,219 priests, a decrease of 4,117 compared to 2019. Although there was a fall in the number of priests in North America and Europe, there was a “significant increase” in Africa and Asia, reported *Vatican News*.

In 2020, around 40 per cent of the world’s priests lived in Europe, 29 per cent in the Americas, 17 per cent in Asia, 12 per cent in Africa, and one per cent in Oceania.

The number of Catholics per priest worldwide rose from 3,245 in 2019 to 3,314 in 2020. In Europe, there was an average of 1,746 Catholics per priest, 2,086 in the Americas, and 5,089 in Africa.

There was an increase in permanent deacons, from 48,238 in 2019 to 48,635 in 2020. The number in Europe dipped slightly from 15,267 to 15,170.

The number of male religious who are not priests grew worldwide from 50,295 in 2019 to 50,569 in 2020, with an increase seen in Africa (1.1 per cent), Asia (2.8 per cent) and Europe (4 per cent) but a decrease in the Americas (-4 per cent) and Oceania



St Peter's Basilica seen through a bubble on Dec 3, 2019. (CNA photo/Daniel Ibáñez)

(-6 per cent).

The number of women religious fell globally from 630,099 in 2019 to 619,546 in 2020, a drop of -1.7 per cent. But there was a rise in Africa (3.2 per cent) and Asia (0.2 per cent), alongside a decrease in Europe (-4.1 per cent), the Americas (-2.8 per cent)

and Oceania (-5.7 per cent).

There were 111,855 seminarians in 2020, compared to 114,058 in 2019. There were notable decreases in Europe (-4.3 per cent), the Americas (-4.2 per cent), and Asia (-3.5 per cent) but a rise of 2.8 per cent (from 32,721 to 33,628) in Africa. — *CNA*



'58,000 Cups of Coffee' initiative fuels synod conversations

DAVENPORT, Iowa: An idea began brewing in Patrick Schmadeke's head as he listened to an interview with Xavière Missionary Sr Nathalie Becquart on the Synod of Bishops in 2023 and the process leading up to it.

"Synodality starts with coffee," said the French nun, who serves as undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops.

"That just rang true to me. I wrote it down on my notepad," said Schmadeke, Director of Evangelisation for the Diocese of Davenport. "Conversations over coffee are places that listening humbly about people's experience of church can take place."

Meanwhile, he and members of the diocesan Evangelisation Commission were trying to figure out how to reach the disaffiliated.

"They don't just show up at church for an event, and are unlikely to show up for a formal listening session," he said. "Most, if not all of us, have friends and family who are disaffiliated. So, how do we leverage people's personal relationships?"

Then Schmadeke began to smell the coffee. The diocese had just compiled its 2021 diocesan Mass attendance count, which totalled 19,399, about 60 per cent of the pre-pandemic count. If each of those 19,399 Mass-goers had a conversation with three different people, that would total around 58,000 cups of coffee!

So put the coffee pot on. The *58,000 Cups of Coffee Initiative* of one-on-one synod conversa-

tions has begun in the Davenport Diocese.

"This is a clever way for Catholics in the diocese to engage other people on the topic of the Catholic faith," Davenport Bishop, Thomas R. Zinkula, said. "A lot of folks don't know how to broach the subject; they don't know what to say; they think they don't know enough about the faith; they won't have answers to questions."

"The synod and this initiative give them an excuse, an opportunity, to talk to others about the faith, and all they have to do is listen."

Here is how it works:

Mass-goers are invited to have a synodal conversation with three different people: someone already in the pews; someone who used to be in the pews but hasn't been since the pandemic; and someone who has never been a part of a faith community or stopped practising long ago.

The conversation focuses on the essential question of the synod in the Davenport Diocese: Based on your personal experience, what fills your heart and what breaks your heart about the Catholic Church (e.g., in your parish and beyond your parish)?

"This is about listening to the experience of your conversation partner. It's not about debate or listening in order to respond, it is about a deep and thorough listening in order to understand," said Schmadeke. "We want to learn from their experience."

No one is limited to three conversations. "Grab coffee with as

many people as you can! This is an opportunity to generate enthusiasm for the faith in our communities," Schmadeke said. The diocese provides a form on its website — davenportdiocese.org — for the person who initiated the conversation to share thoughts about the experience.

Deacon candidate Ryan Burchett, who serves on the Evangelisation Commission, reached out to a Catholic friend who has been away from the church for some time.

"It led to a really interesting conversation for us," Burchett said. "He told me where he stood and I told him where I stood. We both left the conversation in tears. It was heartfelt and meaningful."

"So seldom, in this day and age, are we afforded the opportunity to be heard without being subjected to advice, judgment, counterpoints," Burchett said. "It was a time to stop and listen."

He admitted to feeling a bit anxious inviting his friend to talk about their faith. "I felt like I was throwing the dice a little bit." The question, 'What fills your heart and what breaks your heart,' moves past the superficial stuff. It cuts to the core. My advice — don't be afraid to go there and give it a shot."

Burchett is grateful that he did.

Responses submitted to the diocesan website have been equally compelling. "People are baring their hearts," Schmadeke said. "People need the space and conversations to allow this stuff to



come to the surface." Among the comments:

- "This man is my son, and while he deeply appreciates the faith-life we gave him growing up, and he is still drawn to the rituals, the Church has deeply disappointed him."

- "She is aching for spiritual fulfilment and connection to community. She has been a faithful Catholic but sees the faith as needing to be actions for the wider good (rather) than a rote Mass attendance faith. I felt her pain and seeking."

The *58,000 Cups of Coffee* initiative is one of two prongs of the diocesan synod process. The other prong focuses on organised listening sessions that leverage the structures of the Church, such as parishes, schools and other diocesan entities to connect to the greater community.

Responses from the listening sessions and conversations will provide the content for a 10-page summary the diocese will submit to the US Conference of Catholic Bishops. The USCCB will synthesise summaries from throughout the nation to send to the Vatican for the world Synod of Bishops that will convene in 2023.

The insights gathered in the diocese will also be "very helpful in our efforts to evangelise the people in our diocese," Bishop Zinkula said.

"Hopefully, once they get a taste of this, people will be more inclined to continue to have one-on-one conversations about the Catholic faith with others," he said. "Hopefully, it will become more natural and normal." Keep the coffee pot on. — **By Barb Arland-Fye (The Catholic Messenger), cruxnow.com**

Uruguay's Church hopes for revival with synod preparations

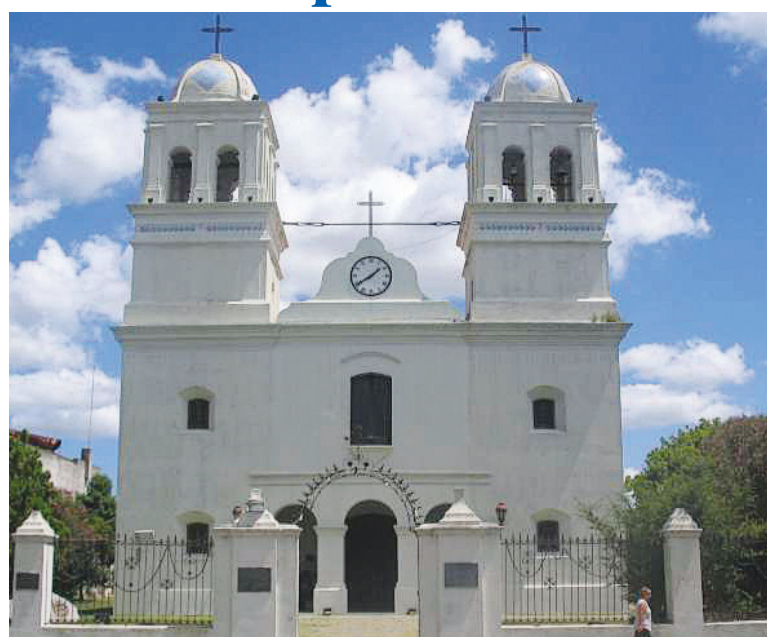
Uruguay's Catholic Church has a lot riding on the two-year global preparations for the Synod of Bishops on synodality Pope Francis has convoked for 2023.

Uruguayan church leaders began the first phase of a listening process for the synod on February 6 and are counting on parishes, base groups and religious congregations to contribute to a national document the country will present for the synod.

Church leaders admit that the process will not be easy as they struggle against falling numbers in what is South America's most secular country.

"We are working to get Catholics involved in the church again. We have experienced a pronounced downward curve this century, but we believe that it has now plateaued," Cardinal Daniel Sturla of Montevideo told *Catholic News Service*.

The number of Uruguayans identifying as Catholic has fallen to around 30 per cent, and less than 40 per cent of the country's 3.5 million people have confidence in the church, according to the most recent Latinobarómetro regional survey.



The Church of St Charles Borromeo is Uruguay's oldest church located in San Carlos. (UCA News photo/Wikipedia)

While other countries in the region have separation of church and state, Uruguay went through a secularisation process during the 20th century. Religious holidays are absent: Christmas is called Family Day, Holy Week is Tourism Week,

and the Feast of the Immaculate Conception is National Beach Day.

The cardinal said secularisation has also meant that people do not leave the church for other churches, like in neighbouring Brazil, where Pentecostal churches have boomed

in recent decades. Uruguayans simply leave religion behind. Less than 10 per cent of Uruguayans identify as Pentecostal.

"People here are not leaving the church to join evangelical groups; they just stop belonging to a church. They believe in something, they believe in someone, but they do not believe in an institution," he said.

The church began a campaign in 2019 to encourage Catholics to return to the church. Cardinal Sturla said it started strong but ended when the pandemic erupted locally in March 2020. The listening campaign and synod preparation could jump-start things.

The listening process is similar to what the bishops in Uruguay and throughout the region did before the Sixth Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean held last November in Mexico, and what the church in South America's eight Amazon Basin countries undertook in the runup to the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon in October 2019.

Uruguay's Church did a survey in its parishes to better define what

it wanted to focus on during synod preparation. The survey settled on two of the 10 themes identified for the synod.

"Ten themes seemed excessive, so we are looking at two big issues, mission and the synodal style of the Church," said Cardinal Sturla.

Fr Mathías Soiza López, who is coordinating the synod process for the Montevideo Archdiocese, said the church needs to take advantage of the synod process to define where it is going.

"We need to use the synod process and everything it implies to ask ourselves questions that will help us, as an archdiocese, going forward," he said.

The pre-synod plan calls for groups to discuss issues, form ideas and provide input for a meeting the country's bishops will hold this May. A document for the synod will come next.

"We want to reflect our experience as a church. It will be our small way of contributing," Fr Soiza said.

Uruguay has eight dioceses, in addition to the Montevideo Archdiocese. — ucanews.com

RUMINATIONS

There is always HOPE

My name is Carmel Dominic. I am 36 years old. For the past four and a half years, I have been recovering from complications due to neuropathy caused by Diabetes. Neuropathy means that a good part of my nervous system (nerves) has been damaged. Thus, my heart, eyes, intestines, stomach, kidneys and uterus were compromised. Adding to that, I had a fibroid in my uterus that was about 16cm in width. This meant I needed an operation because it was so big. I have also started vomiting acid reflux as the nerves in my stomach were not able to digest food. Due to this, I was on a blended rice porridge diet for almost two years. The few things that my stomach could tolerate were porridge, coconut water and oral salts. I was weak and dizzy most of the time. As you can imagine, the physical recovery was tedious and painful but the real challenge was the mental and spiritual healing.

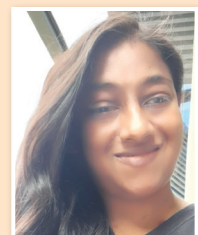
The mental battle was the hardest. Fear, doubt, anger, confusion are all potent ingredients that can make you spiral into a pit of hopelessness and depression. Memories of the past came in tidal waves, taunting me. How could someone who was so full of life be brought down so low? Why had God allowed this to happen? What did I do to offend God? These were the thoughts that were at the forefront of my mind. At this point, I stopped praying. I didn't see the point. I wished for death. Every day I woke up, I was disappointed, because I had to live through another day of hopelessness and immense physical pain. I didn't want to feel this pain, both mentally and physically. I tried to end my life twice. But even death didn't want me.

One day, my aunt visited me and said something so simple, and yet so profound that it gave me the courage to fight for my life. When I confided in her that I wanted to die and that I had attempted to end it, she simply told me that the world would lose a great listener and she would miss me. Then I thought to myself, if one person can see this light in me, then I must have done something good in my life. From then on, I chose life. I spent the initial part of my recovery confined to my room because I was physically weak. There wasn't much that I could do besides watch videos and ponder about my life. And, this was also the time when I started communicating with God on a constant basis. I told Him everything. He was my only friend at this time. For the most part, I cried out to Him in anger and frustration. The memories of the past and the uncertainties of the future still plagued my mind. But, I kept on talking to Him anyway. What started off as ranting and venting, later turned into normal everyday conversations. I asked Him silly questions like why did He make the majestic Blue Whale and the poisonous scorpion? His reply? Because I can!

I started praying not only for myself but for the people and situations around me. But, my prayer life was different. It was a lot more authentic. I prayed from my inner most heart. I could feel His presence every time I prayed. I had built a rapport with God. We had a bond. I know that He is always listening to me, though He gives no answer at times. I had learnt to trust Him. When I was told that I had to go for dialysis, I thought that was the beginning of the end of my life. Again, I cried out to Him asking why? He simply said to trust Him and His plan. Having no choice, I obeyed. I am so glad that I did because now, I can do so many of the things that I didn't think I ever could again. God is indeed good and faithful.

I learnt to love myself a little late in life, and yet, God is gracious. He was and is patient with me. I can say with absolute conviction that without my Jesus, I wouldn't have come this far. He positioned people in my life to pray for me when I was lost, He provided the best medical care and gave me parents who were able to withstand whatever that came their way. I am doing so much better and now. I have regained about 75 per cent of my vision, when initially I only had 30 per cent. Dialysis has been the biggest blessing. I have stopped vomiting, my skin is healthier, my hair is thicker and I have even put on weight, which is ironic, since dialysis typically causes a person to lose weight.

The battle is always internal. Once I found a glimmer of hope, I clung to it, and found my way back to myself. It's important to keep thanking God for the small mercies and graces. That in itself is healing. Some days, I still struggle. But, with every ounce of strength I gained from God, I found courage and was able to fight even if I am having a bad day. Though I am still recovering, I am grateful for all the healing that I have already received and will continue to walk this path guided by His loving hand.



Carmel Dominic used to be a Lifestyle writer with *The Edge*. She is a parishioner of the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Penang and is active in Caritas Holy Spirit. She is also a writer for the *HERALD*.

Confessions of a Vietnamese parish priest



Priests concelebrate at a Mass in Tan Do parish, Hanoi Archdiocese on Feb 2, 2022. (Photo courtesy of tonggiaophanhanoi.org)

By Fr Joseph Ta Xuan Hoa

The faithful see parish priests as someone who brings Christ to the people. They offer daily sacrifices to God to atone for their sins and that of their people; preach God's Word to the laity, connect parishioners, build unity and peace within parishes, and serve as another Christ. Unlike Saint Paul, who worked to support himself, priests nowadays only do spiritual things and forget about working for a living, said my friend and fellow priest, at a recent retreat. Sometimes, he also felt he could not do anything for his laypeople.

He said, we may be seen as 'saints' but we are humans, with limitations, fragility, and weakness.

As priests, we often perform spiritual duties, sometimes mechanically, while failing to have a corresponding inner life, almost like civil servants carrying out administrative jobs.

We place financial burdens on other people because of costly construction work, torture parishioners with words unworthy of priests in our homilies and cause difficulties to our brothers and sisters in administering the sacraments, especially matrimony.

In short, we fail to bring joy to our people and have not learnt to love them yet.

I vividly remember the advice of an old priest professor at the seminary. Every time we met, he said: "After you graduate from the seminary, please remember to love your parishioners."

Do my friend and I have far too pessimistic opinions about priests? It is also possible that we are rather gloomy. Although there are still many wonderful priests who bring true joy and happiness to the communities they serve, we

want to raise the problem, so we look at ourselves and repent.

If we have received everything freely, then we must also give freely. If we have not loved our parishioners, we should not expect them to love us either. You reap what you sow - that is the law of life. If we are present in communities without transforming the people we are responsible for, so they can live happier lives, then we have not fulfilled the mission given by God.

This morning, after I finished Sunday Mass for children and was still in the sacristy, an elderly lady gave me some money, one part for Mass stipend and the rest, her thanks to God and me. She asked me to pray for her two grandchildren and both were blessed by God.

“*If we have received everything freely, then we must also give freely. If we have not really loved our parishioners, we should not expect them to love us either. You reap what you sow – that is the law of life. If we are present in communities without transforming the people we are responsible for so that they can live happier lives, then surely we have not fulfilled the mission given by God.*”

One had left his home due to family problems and is now reunited with his family. The other, a 41-year-old who was infected with COVID-19 and in a critical

condition at a field hospital in Saigon where other patients around him died of the contagion, had recovered well.

She believed God answered my prayers for her family. By her words, I knew she trusted in my prayers.

I was like a dog with two tails after meeting with the woman. I was delighted, not because I did something for this life but because I saw how strong her faith was. Perhaps it was due to her faith that God did good things for her two grandchildren, and I just acted as a mediator, a catalyst to create more trust for her.

In the Gospel, the Lord once said: "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." Many times, Jesus affirmed, "Your faith has healed you." It is faith that makes real miracles happen in daily life. When He returned to His homeland, Jesus was unable to perform any miracles because His people did not have faith.

The story of the elderly lady makes me feel quite confident in priests' vocation and mission. If we priests are dedicated to praying and having a deep inner life, our presence is always a delight to the community. On the contrary, if we carry out our priestly ministry like the world, it will be a complete disaster for God's people.

However, as humans, we easily commit sins displeasing God. May each time we stumble and fall, we become stronger, to implicitly trust in God's mercy. Thanks to this, we become more and more like Jesus the Shepherd, who always loves and cares for his sheep and "who comes that they may have life and have it abundantly". — ucanews.com

Childhood trauma and shame

On the outset, the terms “trauma” and “shame” may appear unrelated. In truth, however, there is a strong correlation between the two. Shame is a powerful emotion and is responsible for a host of problems including self-criticism, self-blame and self-neglect.

It is a term that refers to a chronic feeling or emotional state of feeling bad, worthless, inferior, and/or fundamentally flawed. The shame that one experiences has its roots in trauma. Trauma, on the other hand, is an emotional response to a dreadful event such as a physical or sexual abuse, an accident or natural disaster. Whilst these events are traumatic in nature, there are many other permutations of a traumatic experience which may not be readily associated as such, for example, childhood neglect.

Many of the psychological issues that one faces are likely to originate from one’s childhood. Traumatic childhood experiences often leave a deep wound which may persist into adulthood. When a child encounters repeatedly demeaning statements from the child’s parents, such as “You are stupid”, “You are useless”, and “It is all your fault” and is also criticised, abused and deliberately humiliated, they in turn harbour the shame deep inside, decaying, in the process, their own self-worth. Some common beliefs a person suffering from toxic shame include: “I am unlovable”, “I do not matter”, “Everything is my fault”, “I cannot do anything right”, “I do not deserve good things”, “I was a bad child”, “I deserve to be treated the way others treat me”, “I’m a bad person”, “My needs and wants are not important”, “Nobody likes me”, “I cannot be myself



Heart, Mind and Soul
Fr Philip Chua

around others”, “I have to hide my true emotions and thoughts”, and “I am never good enough”.

This mental state results in unhealthy behaviours including having toxic relationships, poor self-care and perception, being overly sensitive to the perception of others and being susceptible to manipulation and exploitation. In the absence of a safe haven for comfort and reassurance, they begin to speak of themselves in the same manner, conditioning themselves into routinely feeling ashamed. Consequently, this leaves an ineradicable mark which may last a life-time unless it is gently healed. Toxic shame is, however, not easily identifiable as it is often defended by our dissociation, anger and futility — tucked and hidden away like anxiety, depression or addiction.

Unfortunately, it is common for a shame-ridden person to also suffer from a lingering feeling of anxiety and low self-esteem. There are various coping mechanisms employed — some people cope by hurting or not taking care of themselves, while some hurt other people and become highly antisocial and depressed. Toxic shame is often accompanied by toxic guilt, where the person feels unjust responsibility and guilt. So, the person not only feels ashamed, but also feels guilty for things they are not actually responsible for. They also

feel responsible for the emotions of others, and feel ashamed and guilty when other people are unhappy, especially if it is in some way, attributable to them.

Children are highly dependent on their parents for their physical and emotional well-being. As they cultivate a greater sense of self, they rely on their parents’ reflection and appreciation of their true self and identity. Children must be able to express their actual feelings, wants, perceptions, thoughts and aspirations. In turn, parents must mirror those feelings with acceptance, validation, and protection. Therefore parents, as guardians, play a pivotal role in creating a nurturing and reassuring environment for children so that they have a more wholesome image of themselves — one who is competent, acceptable and not inferior to others. When parents fail to fulfil these crucial needs, children create distorted beliefs about themselves. In their developing minds, they believe that if they are not entitled to have their own feelings, needs, and desires, then something must be wrong with them.

There are, however, tips that parents may employ to manage the risk of childhood trauma and the resulting feeling of shame. They include:

- 1. Do not overpraise them, only praise when it is true.** The praise should be focused on the effort rather than the achievements because children may not always emerge a winner or a top scorer all the time.
- 2. Stop harsh criticisms.** Words like, “You are stupid” are often interpreted by children as the truth and their whole-being crumbles.
- 3. Give your children some form of responsibility as early as possible.** Helping around

and showing acts of kindness instil positive and reassuring feelings.

4. Act what you preach. Children regard their parents as role-models. If they did something wrong, they probably would have emulated the behaviour from their parents.

5. Focus on their strength. Children with the right aptitude and talent can be successful in their own right. Focusing on their strengths will help them to elevate their confidence and realise their full potential.

Childhood trauma and the resulting shame create a fractured foundation for the individual for the rest of their lives. As a result, they may spend their lives searching to fill the profound sense of emptiness they feel where there should have been a healthy and wholesome sense of self.

There is a saying that goes “Childhood constitutes the most important element in an adult’s life, for it is in his early years that a man is made”. It is therefore critical that we recognise that as parents or guardians, we possess the capacity to shape a child’s life and determining his or her prospects in life. Central to this is the need for us to provide a wholesome and nurturing environment for children to grow and flourish in, as well as be acutely aware of the debilitating impact that a traumatic experience may have on them.

● **Fr Philip Chua** is a registered and licensed Counsellor & Clinical Supervisor under Lembaga Kaunselor Malaysia. He is also the Ecclesiastical Assistant of the Archdiocesan Mental Health Ministry and can be contacted at: philip@archkl.org

The power of transformation

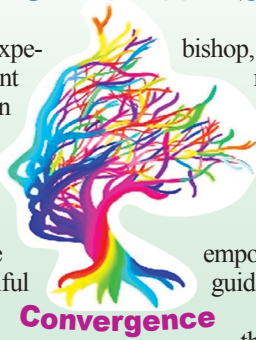
My transition from a naïve/ inexperienced person to a confident and competent one took place in 2012. As a 17-year-old teenage girl who was preparing for her SPM, I did not have many experiences outside of school. I most certainly did not expect to have wonderful experiences and beautiful memories with the Women’s Ministry of the Archdiocesan Office of Human Development (AOHD), until I stepped into the real working world.

I used to be a person with very low self-confidence and sometimes, I was clueless about my future, especially my career and, as an individual as well. However, journeying with the Women’s Ministry gave me a very positive impact in my life. I’ve had great support ranging from companionship and guardianship from various people, coming from different vocations.

While I was volunteering with the Women’s Ministry, I was exposed to many programmes and volunteer services such as the Soup Kitchen where I met people from diverse backgrounds. Listening to their stories made me feel like I was serving Jesus Christ as said in the Bible: “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me” Matthew 25: 35-40

Throughout the journey, I enjoyed beautiful companionship, counselling and guardianship from a wonderful and wise group of people. Listening to their experiences and participating in programmes with them made me feel fortunate and opened my mind to endless possibilities for the future.

I also had the opportunity to meet and have private conversations with the then Arch-



bishop, Murphy Pakiam, and the current Archbishop, Julian Leow. I was thrilled to have met them in person — it was even better than meeting any celebrities for sure.

Besides that, I also received empowering educational and career guidance from a jovial and amazing person who inspired me to join the nursing services. Initially, I had my doubts, wondering whether I could ever be a competent nurse, but as I eventually joined one of the nursing intuitions, I managed to prove myself wrong, with God’s grace, and the guidance of my mentor. After all the exposure, it stirred in my heart that I wanted a serving profession as a career.

Participating in some of the programmes conducted by the Women’s Ministry also helped me improve my interpersonal skills, for example, giving health education about the disadvantages of using polystyrene in 2014.

On a personal note, as I was finishing school, I learned about etiquette, housekeeping, survival skills and financial planning via the Catholic Women’s League. This helped build my self-confidence and, with their assistance, I was also able to empower other young women who were stepping into the real world.

I thank God that I received sponsorship for my higher education while pursuing my STPM in 2014/2015 and continued to receive career guidance until I joined the nursing field.

I am currently working as a nurse in a hospital and I’m grateful for the experiences and unforgettable memories, and for the plans that God had for me all along. The power of transformation can be summed up in these words, “If nothing ever changed, there would be no such things as butterflies.” — *Lepidoptera Girl*

The butterfly effect

The beauty of butterflies is beyond words. This magical insect draws our attention as it flutters, flaps and flies gracefully. Its radiant colours captivate our eyes and soul. But there is more to a butterfly than just its beauty. The late Maya Angelou, author and poet, said, “We delight in the beauty of the butterfly, but rarely admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty.” There’s a process and journey that shapes true beauty. The metamorphosis of a caterpillar to a beautiful butterfly is painstaking but ends with tremendous results. This enchanting process offers plenty of life lessons. One thing we learn from caterpillars is that change is possible even in adverse environments, making the butterfly a powerful symbol of hope and transformation.

Similarly, adolescence is a period of transformation, like a caterpillar changing into a butterfly. A period of great change physically, sexually and how they think, feel and interact with others. A period of overwhelming external and internal struggles that society sometimes unfairly judges.

A generation shaped by smartphones and social media is providing teenagers with valuable opportunities to develop skills and build a positive digital footprint. However, today many teenagers are constructing their cocoons within social media. Visual platforms like Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok have become toxic mirrors that can stoke anxiety around body image and deflate self-esteem. “Selfieholics” curate their own images to become prettier, thinner, and sexier. “Fitspiration” and “thinspiration” messages have promoted eating disorders. Consumerism enters the playground and teenagers swing from “Nada to Prada” to portray a desirable image of who they are or who they aspire to be to gain a sense of belonging and peer approval. The fixation of “likes” and FOMO (fear of missing out) leads to anxiety and a diminished sense of self. Increasing screen time contributes to teenage withdrawal and isolation which subsequently leads to anxiety and depression, cyberbullying and so on.



Keeping in mind these challenges, the Women’s Desk of the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development (AOHD), with Catholic Women’s League (CWL), embarked on the *Girls on a Journey: Butterfly programme* for teenage girls, to enable them to develop a concept of oneself as a person of worth and dignity, as they explore the meaning of life. This holistic programme equipped them with the abilities required to understand and deal confidently and effectively with the challenges of everyday life. Designed for age groups 12 to 14, it covers domestic skills, decision-making, creative thinking, interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness building skills, coping with stress and emotions, sexuality, health, financial, moral issues, environmental issues, and Catholic teachings.

The live-in programme was interactive and included role-play, group sharing, testimony, exercises, field experience and audio-visual activities to make it fun and educational during the school holidays.

Girls who had completed this programme are like that caterpillar that transformed into a beautiful butterfly. They are empowered, mindful, and true to themselves as they lead a better life. One of the participants said that she has “learned to be independent and how to use freedom wisely”. A mother shared “I have seen many changes in my daughter, since she attended this formation. She is more disciplined, confident and is more involved in church activities”. The changes in their life spark a ripple effect that influences their family and community. Like a butterfly, these girls have become a great symbol of change, adaptation, and growth. — *By Mary M*

The death of chastity in our culture

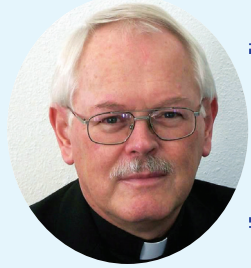
The concept of chastity has fallen on hard times.

Several years ago, I was invited to speak to a group of students at a Catholic university. The invitation came with a request and a caveat. I was to speak on chastity, but ideally, I was to avoid using the word. The Dean of Theology, who had invited me, had appraised the situation this way: *perhaps more than anything else, the students need a challenge to chastity, but they are so turned off by the word that if we mention it in the title, very few will show up.*

His hunch was right on both scores, the need for chastity in their lives and their aversion to the word. That's also true for our culture.

For many today, the word chastity has negative connotations. Outside of a constantly-shrinking number of select Church circles, the word chastity sets off mostly negative alarms. Within our highly secularised and sophisticated world, for the most part chastity is identified with naiveté, with sexual timidity, with religious fundamentalism, with a toxic over-emphasis on sexual purity, with a lack of sophistication, and with something that perhaps made more sense in another age. Commonly, the notion is ridiculed, even in some religious circles. Very few people today dare talk about saving sex for marriage or about chastity as virtue.

What's behind this? Why this negativity and disdain towards the word chastity?



Fr Ron Rolheiser

Partly this is based on a number of popular perceptions. Chastity is often seen as grounded in a religious fundamentalism, which our culture today either disdains or pities (*"Chastity for Jesus"*). As well, the notion of chastity is seen as a product of the Church's long-standing, one-sided emphasis on virginity and celibacy and its failure to articulate a healthy, robust spirituality of sex. It's hard to argue with perceptions, except to say that the reasons for the demise of the concept of chastity in our culture are much more complex than this.

Admittedly, our catechesis about chastity is part of the problem. My suspicion is that a good number of people are negative vis-à-vis the notion because of how the concept has been presented to them. Our churches and moral teachers have to assume some of the blame and admit that, far too often, the concept of chastity has been presented, however unintentionally, precisely as a naiveté, a repression, and as an over-emphasis on sexual purity. There's a parallel here to how atheism finds its ground. Just as so much atheism

is a parasite feeding off bad religion, so too much of the negativity towards the concept of chastity is a parasite feeding off unhealthy religious teaching.

However, our culture's negativity towards the notion of chastity feeds off more than a less-than-healthy catechesis. The culprit? Sophistication as a virtue that is an end in itself. In short, our culture prizes personal sophistication above most everything else, and when sophistication is so highly prized, chastity easily looks like naiveté and ignorance.

Is it? Is chastity a naiveté, an ignorance? At the end of the day, is the notion of chastity a sexual repression, an unhealthy timidity, a toxic over-emphasis on sexual purity, a religious fundamentalism, a pitiable pre-sophistication? Admittedly, that can sometimes be the case. However, here's the case for chastity.

In 2013, Donna Freitas, the author of a number of books on sexuality and consent, published a study entitled, *The End of Sex: How Hookup Culture is Leaving a Generation Unhappy, Sexually Unfulfilled, and Confused about Intimacy*. That title is the book in caption. Nowhere in the book (and for this she has been unjustly criticised by some church groups) does she ever say that what is happening in our culture today in terms of soulless sex is wrong or sinful. She doesn't have to. She simply spells out the consequences – unhappiness, confusion, sexual depression.

A generation earlier, the renowned edu-

cator Allan Bloom, writing out of a purely secular perspective, came to the same conclusion. Looking at the bright, very-sophisticated young students he was teaching, he concluded that the very unbridled sophistication they so prided themselves in (which he termed "the absence of chastity in their lives") had this effect in their lives: it left them "erotically lame".

And so, I submit that chastity merits another look from our culture. There's *first-naïvete* (childishness) and there's *second-naïvete* (childlikeness). There's *hook-up sex* and there's *soul-sex*. There's *religious fundamentalism* and there's the *wisdom of divine revelation*. There's the *over-emphasis on sexual purity* and there's the *dehumanising disrespect for others* (that the #MeToo is standing up to). There's a certain *ennui and fatigue* in an ultra-sophistication that believes all taboos may be broken, and there's a *vibrancy and happiness* that's felt in keeping your shoes off before the burning bush. Note, in every one of these dualisms, chastity speaks for soul, for wisdom, for respect, and for happiness. — *All rights reserved*

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

Maturing of Christian faith and mindfulness



Fr Michael Kelly, SJ

There are at least two approaches to assessing whether the Church is doing its job in lending plausibility to the affirmation of faith in Jesus. The first goes to the relevance of the Church's messages and services and how adequately or appropriately they meet the challenges of the times. This first challenge is relevance and that was the challenge the Church in general set itself in the issues mostly considered at Vatican II.

The second way of assessing the Church's performance in proposing and promoting the plausibility of the Gospel for us today is what might be termed a more "essentialist" challenge: Do the claims of the message and for the person of Jesus make sense? Are they coherent? Do they "stack up"?

These challenges are more urgent to us at different times of our lives – challenges to the plausibility of faith claims occur at times of our intellectual maturing and when claims and evidence or argument become very important to us.

Challenges to the relevance of faith claims occur when events, movements, or the coherence of our understanding push us or are pushed by us beyond the limits we have been satisfied to live within till a crisis happens and the limits are dispensed with.

Intellectual blockages occur when previously accepted frameworks are no longer

sustainable and the overwhelming sense of irrelevance hits us when what we think and believe no longer strikes us or anyone as the way to make sense of our lives.

But I have a deep misgiving with both of these approaches to faith and the plausibility of the person and message of Jesus because their focus begins and ends with me. The focus is almost exclusively on me and what I want and need.

It may be OK to start there. But if the approach is to have any lasting purchase, it needs to move beyond such reference points around me as soon as it can.

What does that mean? It's very simple: if claims invite us to faith – in Jesus or any ultimate reference point like God – they need to move beyond claims that make functional sense about what benefit they are to me or about the way they satisfy my requirements for intellectual coherence.

They need to make sense, of course. But they need to move beyond that if they are to lay hold of my mind and heart as offering something of which I can be in awe.

Let me explain what I mean by this parallel example. When I was much younger than I am now, I really wondered how on earth someone could ever choose to enter a monastery and adopt a commitment to perpetual silence.

Living in the shadow of the Biblical "three score years and ten" – I am in my 70 year – I am much more alive to how my taste for life, engagement and interaction changes with the years. I am now much more at ease in my own company and have had plenty of time to consider the shortness

of life and the certainty of death.

Moments of arresting incoherence are, in fact, precious gifts, if we can let them become that. If we don't just brush them off and dismiss them as obstacles to getting on with our lives, we can be driven to our knees to listen and to learn. We can be driven into the presence of God where we recognise our lives are really mostly out of our control and we are in God's hands. We are driven to contemplation.

In other words, I can understand how a person can live in their own company and in the company of the mystery of God and little else. And it can happen to us not only when meaning in our lives runs dry but also when we become dizzy with the frenetic pace life moves at.

The calling of a contemplative is to discover the hidden meaning and divine resonance in all experience and for that, we need a considerable amount of silence to discover just where God is present and active.

And what happens as we do that on a daily basis – and as often as not many times in a day – is that we let go into that mystery and cease the futile attempt to control our experience and specify what we want as the outcome. In other words, we give ourselves into the uncontrollable mystery of our experience and wait for God to take hold of us.

In recent times, I have discovered a further reach of this experience. Frequently I long to be with people living and dead – family and relatives, friends living today, or ones who have been with me in life and may now have gone to God. I give each and

every one into the hands of God and make a prayer of my remembering them.

Of course, we aren't the first people to reach that point in our lives. I have been greatly helped to understand and draw benefit from such experiences by the writings of a 17th-century spiritual writer, the recently canonised St Claude de la Colombiere.

St Claude achieved celebrity because he was the spiritual director of St Margaret Mary Alacoque who is the fountainhead of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. But his enduring doctrine and advice that even holds in the 21st century is his encouragement of the "practice of the presence of God" which is the Christian equivalent of the Buddhist practice of "mindfulness."

Being aware of the presence of God makes us alert to the promptings of the Spirit and moves us into God's presence in all we experience. And this experience is the antidote to the exhaustion that comes when we realise that our struggle for relevance in our faith or compelling intellectual coherence in our understanding of faith assertions will never actually meet our requirements. — ucanews.com

● **Jesuit Fr Michael Kelly** is a media professional with 40 years of experience in writing and reporting, editing and publishing, TV and broadcast radio production in Asia and Australia. For 10 years he led Asia's leading Church media organization - UCA News. Currently, he is the English language publisher of the respected Jesuit periodical "La Civiltà Cattolica".

Little Catholics' Corner

Dear boys and girls

In today's Gospel Jesus tells us to be kinder and more generous to others than they are to us. He says the way we treat others is how God will treat us.

Have you felt like getting even when someone has been unkind to you, and even felt like being mean back? Jesus says we should be extra kind to that person instead.

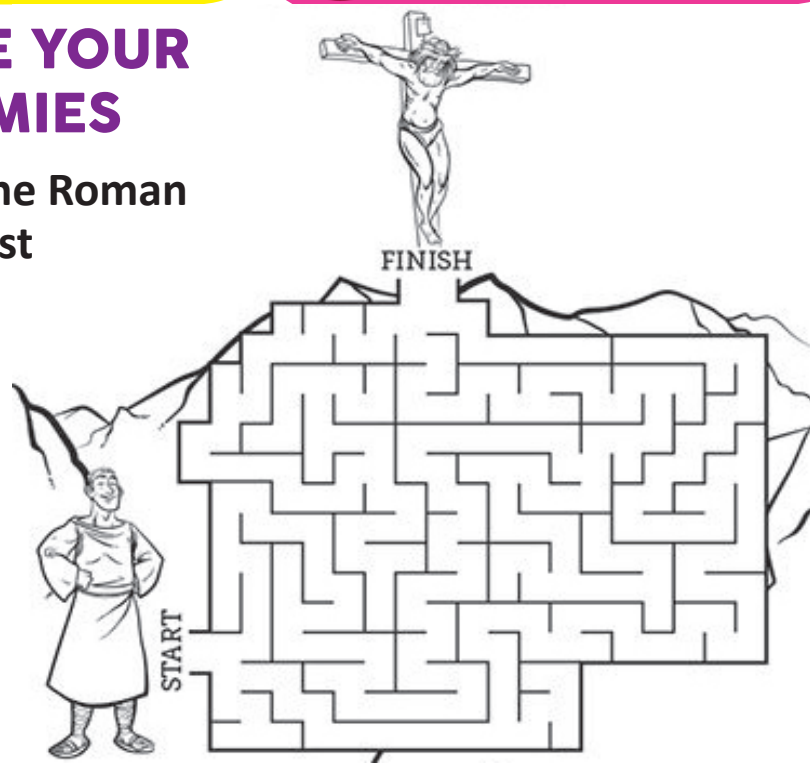
Sometimes we do mean or selfish things too, and hope God will forgive us.

What our Lord is talking about is called mercy. Mercy means being nicer to a person than they deserve. God is the most merciful of all, and we should try our best to be like Him. Next time someone is mean to you, ask Jesus to help you forgive that person and be kind to them.

Aunty Gwen
gwen@herald.com.my

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

Lead the Roman to Christ



David and King Saul Word-Find

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

See if you can find all the words in CAPITALS in this story of David and King Saul. Use the leftover letters to fill in the blanks at the end.

LONG AGO GOD chose SAUL to be the king of the ISRAELITES. Sometimes Saul WAS a good RULER and sometimes he wasn't. When David became a great WARRIOR the people STARTED to love HIM more than they LOVED King Saul. The king became ENVIOUS and wanted to kill DAVID, so he took his SOLDIERS and WENT HUNTING for him. But that night when the KING and his soldiers were SLEEPING,

David FOUND them. He could have easily KILLED King Saul, but he CHOSE to be MERCIFUL INSTEAD. He went AWAY without HURTING Saul.

Let's Colour



YOUTH

FEBRUARY 20, 2022

FIFTY-SEVEN YOUTH ATTEND VOCATION SEMINAR IN SABAH

BUNDU TUHAN, Sabah: After a year that locked out any chance of a physical gathering, the recent vocation seminar for diocesan priesthood, held over the January 21-23 weekend, garnered an attendance of 57 participants.

The vocation hopefuls came from the various parishes across the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu and the Diocese of Keningau.

The in-person seminar definitely had the advantage of a more conducive environment at Bundu Tuhan Retreat Centre than the online seminar held last year because of SOP restrictions.

Archbishop John Wong presided over the opening Mass on Friday. In his homily, he pointed out that the Gospel from Mark 3:13-19 was relevant for the purpose of the



The participants with Fr Michael Modoit, Fr Isidore Gilbert, Archbishop John Wong, Fr David Gasikol and Fr Mattheus Luta.

seminar.

As disciples of Jesus Christ were called to learn from Him and reflect on His teachings, the archbishop hoped that the participants would seize this opportunity to listen to Jesus' call to them and to respond ac-

cordingly.

He emphasised that it is through conforming our daily living to the will of God that gives us the power to witness the Gospel.

After Mass, all present congratulated the archbishop and wished him "happy anniversary" on the occasion of the 23rd anniversary of his sacerdotal ordination.

In response, he assured the participants of his prayers and urged them not to be afraid to respond to the call. "My survival for 23 years is the living proof of God's providence," said Archbishop John.

As part of the programme, Fr Mattheus Luta, the rector of initial year Formation House, shared his journey to the priesthood, while Fr David Gasikol, the vocation director of Keningau Diocese, shared his experience in ministering as a diocesan priest.

The rest of the programme included group sharing, a question-and-answer session, individual interviews, and Eucharistic Adoration with Taize.

The seminar concluded with a closing Mass on Sunday, followed by the announcement of aspirants selected for 2022 by Fr Isidore Gilbert, the director of Aspirants Formation House.

They are: Fredg Faresley Kamarudin and Rayner Raphael (St John Tuaran); Anderian Alexander and Cyril Mozes Matingal (St Michael Penampang); Alexisuis Francis (St Joseph Papar); Coenelius Patrick, Clive Leo Singki, Jackelson Jerome Jimmy, and Friendey Sukor (St Francis Xavier Keningau); Uldrique Mark, Cornelius Justin, and Caddy Yangun (St Theresa Tambunan); and Valerian Victor (Holy Spirit Sook). —

By Seminararian Matthew Lo, *Catholic Sabah*



Fr Isidore Gilbert and Fr David Gasikol with the selected aspirants for 2022.

CONNECT, PRAY AND CHIT-CHAT WITH ASAYO KL

KUALA LUMPUR: ASAYO KL is organising online gatherings for young people in the KL Central and Pahang-Terengganu Districts this month.

Young people from the parishes within the Pahang-Terengganu district are cordially invited to meet online on February 22, 2022, while those in KL Central district will meet on Feb 25, 2022. Please refer to the event details via ASAYO KL's social media platforms or website <https://www.asayokl.my>

What will happen at this online meeting? There will be opportunities to pray, connect and interact with one another. The meeting will be facilitated in four languages; English, Bahasa Malaysia, Mandarin and Tamil.

We look forward to meeting students whose campuses are within the Klang Valley and also those in Pahang-Terengganu, especially if you attend Mass or activities in the parishes. If you're unsure which district or parish you belong to, not to worry, do join us anyway and discover more!

Don't forget to register via <https://www.asayokl.my/hangout>

**You will receive the Google Meet code two hours before the event.

See you and we can't wait to hang out with you! —
ASAYO KL

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a seat!



And let's HANGOUT!

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February '22

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DISTRICT

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25/2, FRI KL CENTRAL

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Catholic athlete Sarah Escobar makes history at Winter Olympics



Sarah Escobar
Team Ecuador Esquí Alpino

WASHINGTON: When Sarah Escobar packed her bags for the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, she included a memento from her mother: a stone carved with the word "Faith."

"Sarah's mom said she gave it to her, and Sarah holds it near because she feels that she is grounded in her belief in God and in the fact that we are all connected in our humanity," Pamela Madzy, the coordinator of the migrant ministry at Escobar's hometown parish, told CNA.

The 20-year-old alpine skier from New Jersey may not have won gold during the Winter Games, but she did make history. Escobar is Ecuador's first female athlete to compete in the Winter Olympics and carried the country's flag during the opening ceremonies. Born in the US to Ecuadorian emigrants, she claims dual citizenship.

The athlete competed in the women's giant slalom on February 6 and 7.

Escobar, the sole athlete to represent Ecuador at the Winter Games, travelled to Beijing from St Michael's College in Vermont, where she studies psychology. But before Vermont, Escobar called New Jersey home — and attended St Kateri Tekakwitha in Sparta with her family.

While there, she volunteered as a translator for the parish's migrant helpline.

Madzy coordinates St Kateri Tekakwitha's faith-based migrant ministry, a Catholic Charity outreach project in the Diocese of Paterson. The ministry's Spanish Helpline serves immigrant workers, she said.

"Sarah's mother was one of the people who volunteered to answer calls," said Madzy. "We rotate volunteers monthly and Sarah's mother, Eleana Escobar, volunteered for about eight years from 2011 to 2018."

During that time, her two children, Sarah and Ethan, helped her.

"Their mom wanted them to not only practice their Spanish but to also understand the human difficulties immigrants must face and to learn empathy and compassion," Madzy said.

Sarah, she added, helped her mother retrieve messages and served as a translator for those who did not speak Spanish.

"Sarah told her mother that she decided to represent Ecuador in the Olympics as a connection to all immigrants."

"The helpline allows people to call and leave a message anytime day or night and our gifted bilingual volunteers would pick up the

messages and relay them to me so the ministry would be able to obtain suitable assistance for the caller," Madzy explained. "Our ministry focuses mostly on medical assistance, but we try to assist in every need that is brought to the helpline."

One of the main reasons the Escobar family first chose to attend St Kateri Tekakwitha parish, Madzy said, is because the parish offered Mass in Spanish. Then, they found out about the helpline.

Today, Sarah's mother, Eleana, says that her daughter still volunteers periodically as a translator, Madzy added. And, she added, Sarah told her mother that she decided to represent Ecuador in the Olympics "as a connection to all immigrants."

Madzy shared her excitement over Sarah competing in the Olympics.

"I was really very surprised when

I saw her name in an article about the Olympics — I recognised her name and immediately sent a text to her mother to confirm," said Madzy. "Then I immediately started to text everyone from the Helpline volunteer group and migrant ministry volunteers' group."

Eleana told them when Sarah was going to compete.

"I am sure if people were listening hard enough, they could have heard the roar coming from Sparta at about 9.30pm Saturday night when Sara made her first run down the slope!" Madzy exclaimed. "We all are very proud and excited that she is an Olympian."

Eleana was unable to travel with her daughter to Beijing due to COVID-19 policies. But she could watch with the knowledge that Sarah had her "Faith" stone.

"I think that is the connection to her mom since her mom could not go with her," Madzy concluded. That, and her faith. — **By Katie Yoder, CNA**

Reflection for young people in preparation for MJD50

In preparation for the MJD Golden Jubilee celebration, the youth are invited to reflect and pray through a series of brochures based on *Christus Vivit!*

These reflection materials are available in four languages for the different age groups; youth (13-17), campus students (18-24) and young adults (18-39).

You can download the digital copy here: <https://mjdio-cese.my/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/MJD-50-Reflection-Material-1-English-Youth.pdf>

Recognise - Interpret - Choose (RIC) is a method of spiritual accompaniment and discernment introduced by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* (169-173) and continued in the documents of the Synod on Young People, especially the *Working Document* (3, 112-115), the *Final Document* (4, 97) and *CV* itself (236-37). We propose that you use the RIC method for reflection and sharing, along with this brochure, whether you are by yourself or with your youth groups, CSSs or CFs!

RECOGNISE

To look and listen, to be aware of what it is that strikes or nudges me as I read this text. What image, word, or phrase pops up? Naming the 'what' of the matter helps you focus.



INTERPRET

Understanding the 'what' through the eyes of faith. What does what I've recognised mean for me?



Interpretation is not done alone, it happens with the vast treasure of Scripture, Church teaching, spiritual accompaniment, our local Church communities and our own personal experience.

CHOOSE

How can I respond concretely to what I've recognised and interpreted? What choice or action must I make?



— MJDPN

FEBRUARY KEEP OUR HEARTS YOUNG!

*Being alive is to possess hearts that are ever young!
Let's ask Pope Francis what this is all about :)*

What does it mean to have a young heart?

CV12

A young heart is flexible, it can adapt to changes, turn back from all wrong and pick itself back up in life! In the words of St Paul, young hearts have the ability to be renewed.

How do we make sure that we maintain a young heart?

CV13

We must ensure that it is capable to love, as everything that keeps us apart from others makes us spiritually old. St Paul tells us to strip ourselves of the 'old-self' and to put on a 'young-self' (Col 3: 9-10).

Jesus Himself, a prime example of the young, wants to give us hearts that are ever young (CV 13)! Let's dive into another key element of what being alive means!

Personal reflection

1. Do you have a young heart? Recall the experiences that 'renewed' you!

2. Is there anything that is preventing you from keeping your heart young? What steps can you take to strip away from the 'old-self' and put on a 'new-self'?

Group reflection

Reflect on *Colossians 3:9-17* to find out more about what St Paul said on having a young heart! After five to 10 minutes, share in your groups on:

1. Which verse struck you the most and why?
2. What do you think God is challenging you to do next?



Heya everyone, As most of us are on our smartphones, we tend to use the smartphone to snap photos and for many, it's the only camera they use.

Do you want to take better photos with your smartphone? Each week, I will share one tip.

For this week, it is to use **NATURAL LIGHT** where possible.

Lighting determines the mood, tone and the atmosphere of the photo.

I will share another tip next week.

So, until then, go ahead, snap photos and praise His name!

Amanda
amanda@herald.com.my



For enquiries, please contact:
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MEMORIAM

To Jesus, the Holy Spirit and Mother Mary. Thank you Jesus, for loving Patrick, 9-01-2007. Thank you, Jesus, for keeping him in your light. 18-02-2007. Thank you, Jesus, for sending your angel to take him home. 19-02-2007. Thank you, Lord, for keeping Patrick in heaven with you. 21-02-2007.

Thank you, Mother Mary for your intercessions and answering all our prayers and sending Patrick home in peace. 19-02-2007.

~ Wee-Lim family



Patrick Wee
Returned to the Lord
19-2-2007

**15th Anniversary
In Ever Loving Memory of**

"May Patrick's soul rest in peace.
May his body rest in peace.
May his spirit live for all eternity in the Lord, in the Holy Spirit, in the company of Mother Mary, all the Angels and Saints, Amen."

Forever Deeply Loved in our hearts,
Wife Bertha,
Son Edmund,
Daughter and Son-in-law Angela & Jit Fu

We carry this treasure in vessels of clay

However, we carry this treasure in vessels of clay, so that this all-surpassing power may not be seen as ours but as God's. Trials of every sort come to us, but we are not discouraged. We are left without answer, but do not despair; persecuted but not abandoned, knocked down but not crashed.

At any moment we carry in our person the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in us.

For we, the living are given up continually to death for the sake of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may appear in our mortal existence. And as death is at work in us, life comes to you.

We have received the same spirit of faith referred to in the Scripture that says: I believed and so I spoke.

We also believed and so we speak. We know He who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us with Jesus and bring us, with you, into his presence.

Corinthians: 4:7-14

Prayer to St Jude

O Most Holy apostle, Saint Jude, faithful servant and friend of Jesus, the Church honoureth and invoceth thee universally, as the patron of hopeless cases, of things almost despaired of.

Pray for me, who am so miserable. Make use, I implore thee, of that particular privilege accorded to thee, to bring visible and speedy help where help was almost despaired of.

Come to mine assistance in this great need, that I may receive the consolation and succor of Heaven in my necessities, tribulations, and sufferings, particularly (here make your request here) and that I may praise God with thee and all the elect throughout eternity.

I promise, O Blessed St Jude, to be ever mindful of this great favour, to always honour thee as my special and powerful patron, and to gratefully encourage devotion to thee. Amen.

— Augustine Retnasamy



Mary Stella Dawson-Asir
Oct 24, 1936 - Feb 26, 2021

First Anniversary Memorial Masses
Saturday | Feb 26, 2022
6:00pm | Church of the Assumption, PJ
6:30pm | Church of St Anne, Port Klang

*Sadly missed along life's way,
quietly remembered every day.
No longer in our life to share,
but in our hearts, you're always there.*

**28th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of**



Augustin Pathrose Lopez
Departed on
24th February 1994

Eternal Rest grant upon him, O Lord And Let Perpetual Light shine upon him. May his soul Rest in peace. AMEN.

Dearly missed and fondly remembered by

Wife: Eleyamma
Children: Judit, Jude, Ida, Freeda, Linda, Justin
Son-in-law: Robert
Daughters-in-law: Jasmine, Samantha
Grandchildren: Raymond, Rhianna, Joel, Julianne, Juliette, John.

**21st Anniversary
In Loving Memory of
our beloved Dad
Michael Bong Su Hee
25-09-1943 ~ 25-02-2001**



Deeply missed, always remembered and cherished by Loving wife, sons, daughters and spouses, grandchildren, relatives, friends and all loved ones.

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NOTICE

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**5th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of
Lawerance Balachandran**



Returned to the Lord on 26.2.2017
*"Your love is always in our hearts
Your kindness is fondly remembered
Your faith has shown us grace and mercy
Even though you are now in God's kingdom,
The memory of you is always beautifully near."*
Deeply missed and fondly remembered by
Wife, Children & family

**9th Anniversary
In Ever Loving Memory of**



RONNIE ANTHONY ROZARIO
From the Lord: 6th February 1933
With the Lord: 23rd February 2013
FOREVER IN OUR HEARTS
Deeply loved and forever cherished by his beloved Wife, Lalitha Rozario, children, grandchildren & loved ones.



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REST IN PEACE

A Catechesis on the Letter to the Galatians:

Walking according to the Spirit

In the passage from the Letter to the Galatians we have just heard, St Paul exhorts Christians to walk according to the Holy Spirit (cf. 5:16, 25), there is a style: to walk according to the Holy Spirit. In effect, to believe in Jesus means to follow Him, to go behind Him along His way, just as the first disciples did. And at the same time, it means avoiding the opposite way, that of selfishness, of seeking one's own interests, which the Apostle calls the "desires of the flesh" (v. 16). The Spirit is the guide for this journey along the way of Christ, a wonderful but also difficult journey that begins in Baptism and lasts our entire lives. Let us think of it as a long excursion on the mountain heights: it is breath-taking, the destination is attractive, but it requires a lot of effort and tenaciousness.

Belief in God

This image can be helpful to understand the merit of the Apostle's words: "to walk by the Spirit", "to be led" by Him. They are expressions that indicate an action, a movement, a dynamism that prevents us from halting at the first difficulties, but elicits confidence in the power "coming from above" (Shepherd of Hermas, 43, 21). Walking along this path, the Christian acquires a positive vision of life. This does not mean that the evil present in the world disappears, or that the negative impulses of our selfishness and pride diminish. Rather, it means that belief in God is always stronger than our resistance and greater than our sins. And this is important!

As he exhorts the Galatians to follow this

path, the Apostle places himself on their level. He abandons the verb in the imperative — "walk" (v. 16) — and uses the indicative "we": "let us walk also by the Spirit" (v. 25). That is to say: let us walk along the same line and let us be led by the Holy Spirit. It is an exhortation, a way of exhorting. Saint Paul feels this exhortation is necessary for himself as well. Even though he knows that Christ lives in him (cf. 2:20), he is also convinced that he has not yet reached the goal, the top of the mountain (cf. Phil 3:12). The Apostle does not place himself above his community. He does not say: "I am the leader; you are those others; I have reached the top of the mountain and you are on the way". He does not say this, but rather, places himself in the midst of everyone's journey, in order to provide a concrete example of how necessary it is to obey God, corresponding ever more and ever better to the Spirit's guidance. And how beautiful it is when we find pastors who journey with their people, who do not separate themselves from them. This is very beautiful. It is good for the soul.

Easy temptation

This walking "by the Spirit" is not only an individual task: it also concerns the community as a whole. In fact, it is exciting, but demanding, to build up the community according to the way indicated by the Apostle. The "desires of the flesh", "the temptations" — let us put it this way — that we all have, that is, our jealousies, prejudices, hypocrisies and resentments, continue to make themselves felt, and having recourse to a rigid set of precepts, can

be an easy temptation. But doing this would mean straying from the path of freedom, and instead of climbing to the top, it would mean returning towards the bottom. In the first place, journeying along the way of the Spirit requires giving space to grace and charity. To make space for God's grace, not being afraid. After making his voice heard in a severe way, Paul invites the Galatians to bear each other's difficulties, and if someone should make a mistake, to use gentleness (cf. 5:22). Let us listen to his words: "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (6:1-2). An attitude that is quite different from gossiping. No, this is not according to the Spirit. What is according to the Spirit is being gentle with a brother or sister when correcting him or her and keeping watch over ourselves with humility so as not to fall into those sins.

Reflect on our weaknesses

In effect, when we are tempted to judge others badly, as often happens, we must firstly reflect on our weaknesses. How easy it is to criticise others! But there are people who seem to have a degree in gossip. They criticise others every day. Take a look at yourself! It is

good to ask ourselves what drives us to correct a brother or a sister, and if we are not in some way co-responsible for their mistake. In addition to giving us the gift of gentleness, the Holy Spirit invites us to be in solidarity, to bear other's burdens. How many burdens there are in a person's life: illness, lack of work, loneliness, pain...! And how many other trials that require the proximity and love of our brothers and sisters! The words of St Augustine when he commented on this same passage can also help us: "Therefore, brothers, if a man has been caught out in some wrongdoing, [...] correct him in a spirit of gentleness. And if you raise your

voice, love within. If you encourage, if you present yourself as a father, if you reprove, if you are severe, love" (cf Sermon 163/B 3). Love always. The supreme rule regarding fraternal correction is love: to want the good of our brothers and sisters. It is a matter of tolerating the problems of others, the defects of others in the silence of prayer, so as to find the right way to help them to correct themselves. And this is not easy. The easiest path is to gossip. Talking behind someone else's back as if I am perfect. And this should not be done. Gentleness. Patience. Prayer. Proximity.

Let us walk with joy and patience along this path, allowing ourselves to be led by the Holy Spirit.

“Paul urges us to “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal 6:2), to be gentle in correcting those who go astray and compassionate to those who are suffering.”

Saints of the Week

Sts Jacinta and Francisco Marto

Between May 13 and October 13, 1917, three Portuguese shepherd children from Aljustrel received apparitions of Our Lady at Cova da Iria, near Fátima, a city 110 miles north of Lisbon. At that time, Europe was involved in an extremely bloody war. Portugal itself was in political turmoil, having overthrown its monarchy in 1910; the government disbanded religious organisations soon after.

At the first appearance, Mary asked the children to return to that spot on the 13th of each month for the next six months. She also asked them to learn to read, write and to pray the rosary "to obtain peace for the world and the end of the war." They were to pray for sinners and for the conversion of Russia, which had recently overthrown Czar Nicholas II and was soon to fall under communism. Up to

90,000 people gathered for Mary's final apparition on Oct 13, 1917.

Less than two years later, Francisco died of influenza in his family home. He was buried in the parish cemetery and then re-buried in the Fátima basilica in 1952. Jacinta died of influenza in Lisbon in 1920, offering her suffering for the conversion of sinners, peace in the world, and the Holy Father. She was re-buried in the Fátima basilica in 1951. Their cousin, Lúcia dos Santos, became a Carmelite nun and was still living when Jacinta and Francisco were beatified in 2000; she died five years later. Pope Francis canonised the younger children on his visit to Fátima to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the first apparition—May 13, 2017. The shrine of Our Lady of Fátima is visited by up to 20 million people a year. — *Franciscan Media*



Feast day: February 20

St Peter Damian

St Peter Damian was very good to the poor, probably because he was orphaned and treated shabbily by one of his brothers. It was common for him to have a poor person or two with him at table and he liked to minister personally to their needs.

Peter escaped poverty and the neglect of his brother when his other brother, the arch-priest of Ravenna, took him under his wing. His brother sent him to good schools and Peter became a professor.

Peter was very strict with himself - he fasted rigorously and spent many hours in prayer. Soon, he left teaching and gave himself completely to prayer with the Benedictines of the reform of St Romuald at Fonte Avellana. They lived two monks to a hermitage. Peter was so eager to pray and slept so little that he soon suffered from severe insomnia. He found he had to use some prudence in taking care of himself. When he was not praying, he studied the Bible.

The abbot commanded that when he died, Peter should succeed him. Abbot Peter founded five other hermitages. He encouraged his brothers in a life of prayer and solitude and wanted nothing more for himself. The Holy See periodically called on him, however, to be a peacemaker or troubleshooter, between two abbeys in dispute or a cleric or government official in some disagreement with Rome.

Finally, Pope Stephen IX made Peter the cardinal-bishop of Ostia. He worked hard to wipe out simony — the buying of Church offices — and encouraged his priests to observe celibacy and urged even the diocesan clergy to live together and maintain scheduled prayer and religious observance. He wished to restore primitive discipline among religious and



Feast day: February 21

priests, warning against needless travel, violations of poverty, and too comfortable living.

He wrote many letters. Some 170 are extant. We also have 53 of his sermons and seven lives, or biographies, he wrote. He preferred examples and stories rather than theory in his writings. The liturgical offices he wrote are evidence of his talent as a stylist in Latin.

He often asked to be allowed to retire as cardinal-bishop of Ostia, and finally Pope Alexander II consented. Peter was happy to once again become just a monk, but he was still called to serve as a papal legate. When returning from such an assignment in Ravenna, he was overcome by a fever. With the monks gathered around him saying the Divine Office, he died on February 22, 1072.

St Peter Damian was a changing Benedictine monk and Cardinal in the circle of Pope Leo IX. He was placed by Dante in one of the highest circles of Paradiso as the great predecessor of St Francis of Assisi and he was declared a Doctor of the Church in 1828. — *Franciscan Media*

Vatican unveils theme for 2nd World Day for Grandparents and Elderly

VATICAN: The Vatican announced that Pope Francis has chosen a theme for the second World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly.

The Dicastery for Laity, Family, and Life said on February 15 that the grandparents' day, which will be celebrated on July 24, will be an opportunity to reflect on verse 15 from Psalm 92: *In old age they will still bear fruit.*

The theme "intends to emphasise how grandparents and the elderly are a value and a gift, both for society and for ecclesial communities," a press release said.

"The theme is also an invitation to reconsider and value grandparents and the elderly who are too often

kept on the margins of families, civil and ecclesial communities," it continued. "Their experience of life and faith can contribute, in fact, to building societies that are aware of their roots and capable of dreaming of a future based on greater solidarity."

Pope Francis established the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly in 2021. The day takes place annually on the fourth Sunday of July, on or close to the July 26 Feast of Sts Anne and Joachim, the grandparents of Jesus.

The Vatican's laity, family, and life office said that the invitation to listen to the wisdom of the elderly is also significant in 2022 given the synodal journey the

Church has undertaken.

This year, the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly will also coincide with the 10th World Meeting of Families, taking place in Rome from June 22-26.

The Dicastery for Laity, Family, and Life said it invites Catholic parishes, dioceses, associations, and communities around the world to celebrate the elderly and grandparents on July 24.

Pope Francis, who is 85 years old, has been an advocate for the dignity of the aging, and has often emphasised the important role of grandparents in passing on the Catholic faith. — **By Hannah Brockhaus, CNA**



Pope Francis greets an elderly woman. (Vatican Media)

Italian bishops hail rejection of referendum bid on euthanasia

ROME: The Italian Constitutional Court, on February 15, rejected as "inadmissible" a petition calling for a referendum on the decriminalisation of euthanasia. Its promoters had gathered 1,200,000 signatures, more than double the minimum 500,000 required.

The proposed referendum question called for the abrogation of a clause in a 1930 law that punishes the "murder of a consenting person" with up to 15 years in jail. The referendum would have proposed the removal of penalties for those who assist in the suicide of patients who have incurable illnesses or suffer intolerable pain and have already had palliative care.

However, according to the 15 high judges, repealing punishments in these cases would not safeguard the minimum constitutional standards governing the protection of human life in general, "particularly for the weak and the vulnerable".

The Italian Bishops welcomed the Court's ruling, noting that it is also a reminder for "society as a whole" to support all efforts aimed at "overcoming or alleviating suffering or discomfort". According to the Italian Bishops' Conference (CEI), "more attention should be paid to people living in conditions of fragility and vulnerability who ask to be treated with dignity and accompanied with respect and love".

Recalling Pope Francis' "clear words" on this issue at the General Audience of Feb 9, the CEI statement reiterates that "life is a right, not death, which must be accept-



Vatican News photo

ed, not administered" and that "we must accompany people towards death, but not provoke death or facilitate any form of suicide".

Debate over euthanasia and assisted suicide has come to the fore in Italy in recent years, with centre-left parties generally in favour of new legislation on end-of-life issues, and the centre-right opposed to it.

In 2017, the Italian Parliament passed a new Law on living wills, known as the Advance Healthcare Directives (*Disposizioni anticipate di trattamento* or DAT). The new legislation does not legalise assisted suicide, but gives adults in their full mental capacity the possibility to leave written instructions regarding their preferences for medical treatment in case they are no longer able to make that choice at a given moment because of illness or mental incapacity.

In 2019, the Constitutional Court advised that Parliament clarify the issue of assisted suicide

in a new law, while indicating for some extreme cases conditions at which medical aid to suicide may not be punished.

The failure of lawmakers to agree on a bill that would allow terminally ill patients to seek assisted suicide through the Italian health system and protect doctors from any legal action has prompted advocates of euthanasia to opt for the referendum.

Following Tuesday's ruling, the "Luca Coscioni" right-to-die Association, a driving force behind the referendum bid, pledged to continue its battle to legalise euthanasia, saying the court's decision "makes the road longer and more complicated".

Pro-life organisations, including the Popolo della Famiglia (PdF), Pro vita and famiglia and the Committee 'No all'Eutanasia Legale, on the other hand, hailed the Court's ruling, remarking that it spurs Parliament to focus on palliative care rather than on legalising euthanasia. — **Vatican News**

Myanmar crisis could take 10 years to resolve

PHNOM PENH: Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen said it would take five to 10 years to resolve the violent crisis in Myanmar, as ASEAN foreign ministers began arriving in Cambodia for their annual meeting.

Speaking at the inauguration of seven bridges in western Cambodia, Hun Sen said international criticism of his efforts to end the violence, which erupted in response to last year's coup led by General Aung Min Hlaing, had made negotiations too difficult.

"Seeking peace is not easy," he told journalists. "It might take five to 10 years in the case of Myanmar. If both ASEAN's chair and the UN secretary-general's special envoy are criticised for their efforts to resolve the Myanmar crisis, how do you expect Myanmar to end the ongoing violence and humanitarian crisis?"

Last month Hun Sen became the first foreign leader to visit Myanmar since the coup when he attempted to move forward the five-point consensus agreed by ASEAN and bring Myanmar back into the fold after it was banned from the bloc's annual summits.

But he was widely criticised for

legitimising the regime and a ceasefire which, as this year's chair of ASEAN, Hun Sen helped negotiate. The ceasefire is in tatters amid continued military strikes and reports of massacres.

Myanmar was uninvited to the foreign ministers' retreat amid the violence, although it can send a non-political envoy, but has to date declined.

High on the agenda are issues surrounding China and the disputed South China Sea, admitting Timor-Leste to ASEAN and formulating a plan for a post-pandemic economic recovery.

The regional bloc has increasingly split along traditional lines in recent years. Divisions initially emerged over attitudes to China and respective claims in the South China Sea but widened over Myanmar's ethnic cleansing of its Muslim Rohingya population, and further in the wake of the coup.

Analysts said that this has pitted maritime Muslim and Christian countries Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines against mainland Buddhist countries Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Thailand. — **ucanews.com**



ASEAN foreign ministers pose for a group photo in Phnom Penh on Feb 17, 2022. (UCA News photo)