

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

I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife.
1 Cor. 7:32-33



Bishops focus on Synodality ■ P5



For Glory
and for
Beauty

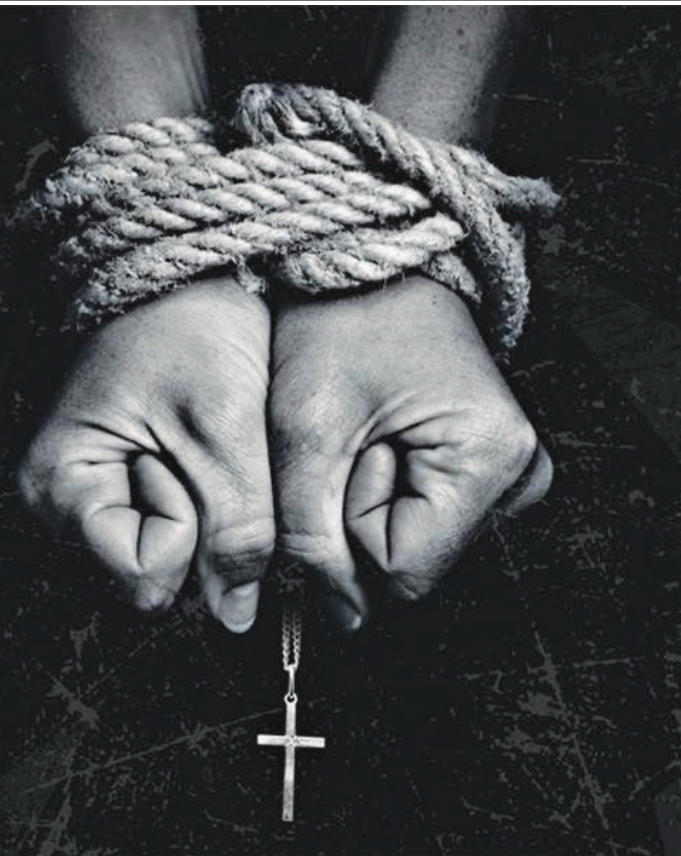
■ P12



Arise!
The
youthful
heart

■ P16

365 million Christians persecuted worldwide



ROME: Approximately 5,000 Christians lost their lives due to their faith last year. Close to 4,000 individuals were forcibly taken. Almost 15,000 churches faced attacks or closures, and over 295,000 Christians were compelled to abandon their homes due to religious persecution.

In total, 365 million Christians reside in countries marked by elevated levels of persecution or discrimination, according to the latest World Watch List published by Open Doors, an international advocacy organisation supporting persecuted Christians and Churches worldwide.

The report listing the 50 most dangerous countries for Christians to live in was presented on January 17 at the Italian House of Deputies.

As has been for years, North Korea appears again as the most hostile place in the world for Christians, who have no freedom of worship, and if discovered practising their faith, face labour camps, if not death. In 2023, the country strengthened its border with the People's Republic of China making it harder for Christians to flee.

But in its 2024 Watch List, Open Doors, a non-denominational NGO founded in 1955, notes that Nigeria alone accounted for 82 per cent of Christians who were killed last year because of their faith. The report — which covers the 12-month period between Oct 1, 2022 and Sept 30, 2023 — was unveiled on Jan 16.

Of the 4,998 Christians who died because of their religious affiliation during that period, Open Doors said 4,118 were in the massive West African country. That's a significantly higher figure than in other nations such as Congo (261), India (160), Uganda (55), Myan-

mar (34), or neighbouring Burkina Faso (31).

Nigeria also ranks third in the number of "targeted" churches, meaning those that were destroyed or closed by authorities. Africa's most populous country also leads in the unfortunate ranking of the number of Christians who were kidnapped last year (3,300 out of 3,906).

"These abductions target both forcibly converted young married girls and Church leaders because it allows for substantial ransoms," said Illia Djadi, the Open Doors analyst for West Africa.

"When pastors are released, they are so traumatised that they keep a low profile afterward," she said, during a press conference to present the Watch List.

This insecurity was tragically highlighted

on Christmas Day when nearly 200 Christians were massacred in Plateau State in central Nigeria. The attack, which led to the burning of eight churches, forced thousands of people to flee the region, according to sources on the ground that Open Doors interviewed.

"The Sahel jihadist groups are recruiting new members from the Fulani ethnic group, who are Muslim and nomadic, and are suffering from poverty due to the disappearance of herds caused by climate change," continued Djadi. "Christians are not the only targets, but they are a preferred target for these groups."

"For the tenth consecutive year, Nigeria is the top country in terms of Christians killed," the Open Doors analyst affirmed. "Despite this, we have seen that, thanks to security measures put in place for elections, this num-

ber has decreased. However, after the election period, we saw things resuming with renewed vigour. People on the ground feel abandoned by the West."

Moreover, with its 200 million inhabitants, a security crisis could constitute a new migration crisis for Europe.

Besides Nigeria, the 2024 Watch List notes the explosion in the number of church closures worldwide, estimated at over 14,000. That's three times higher than the previous year. China alone is responsible for about 10,000 closures by authorities.

"The period covered by the report coincides with the lifting of health measures in the country," explained Guillaume Guennec, advocacy director for the Open Doors. "Everything reopened except unapproved churches that did not fit the Chinese government's sinicisation logic of Christianity."

Overall, the NGO estimates that Christians face "very strong" persecution in 78 countries, up from 76 last year. More than 365 million Christians — or one in seven — face extreme persecution worldwide. This is a new record.

Open Doors say the top 10 countries where Christians are most persecuted are North Korea, Somalia, Libya, Eritrea, Yemen, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sudan, Iran, and Afghanistan. It also warns that in the Middle East and North Africa, "Christians are becoming less and less at home."

Open Doors has published the Watch List since 1993. The ranking uses a point system based on data collected in the field, "hammer" actions (beatings, murders, church destruction, etc.) and "vice" actions (oppression and restrictions on believers in their private, family, social, civil, or ecclesiastical life). While it is the work of an advocacy group, it is also an analytical tool that's used by various institutions and the media. — *Agencies*



(christianfreedom.org)

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OPINION

Unity, challenge of the Church

By 2024, the Catholic Church faces a particular challenge: unity. Which is still, to a certain extent, traumatic, since unity is a gift of the Spirit and is realised in the celebration of the Mass — of the priests in communion with their bishop, and of the bishops in communion with the Pope. If unity is a challenge, this means that we are doing something wrong, or that God is not doing His part. Since the latter is theologically impossible, we have nothing left but to attend to the first reason.

The above, if possible, becomes even more acute, since we are in the middle of the synodal exercise, that is, a “new way of doing Church” is being launched, whose fundamental characteristic is expressed by that word: “synodality”, which means “walking together, in the same direction.” Historically, we are at the watershed between two “synods on synodality,” which seek to promote this new way of “doing Church” promoted by Francis. It is not unreasonable to say that, if achieved, it will be the Pope’s great legacy to the history of the Church, since he will modify the way of governing it and making decisions for posterity.

Having said that, it cannot be overlooked that there are other “actors in the drama.” Although it is not fashionable to name him — only in markedly exaggerated horror films — the devil is, whether we like it or not, one of the protagonists of the drama. And his function is precisely that: to divide. His masterpiece is to achieve the “contradiction of the good”, that is, good people, who seek the good of the Church, each in their own way, according to their own way of seeing life,

their culture and their way of thinking, are opposed to each other. It is like two donkeys that, instead of pulling the cart in the same direction, pull in the opposite direction. And it seems that, for now, he is achieving it.

In some way, the division has been brewing throughout Francis’ pontificate. His way of leading the Church and presenting the evangelical message contrasts markedly with that of his two predecessors, who followed the same line. This, after all, is normal in the history of the Church, and has been seen in its recent history : just think of the different ways of directing the Church of the Venerable Pius XII and St John XXIII. Francisco has made an effort to maintain some continuity. Thus, for some years, he kept people from Benedict XVI’s team in key positions in the Church, such as Cardinals Müller and Sarah, or Archbishop Gänswein. But now they are no longer there, let’s say that, since the resignation of Cardinal Sarah due to age limit, those who run the Church are entirely from Francis’ team. In this historical context, the division has been accentuated, with two turning points being: the Synod on Synodality and the Declaration *Fiducia Supplicans*, of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Talking about the synod with one of the participants, he pointed out how this division was evident within the Church. He commented that the North American Episcopal Conference had elected synod fathers of conservative line; Francis appointed liberals to balance the doctrinal equation. The German Bishops’ Conference had appointed liberal synod fathers; Francis chose the few remain-

ing conservative German bishops. He said, curiously, how, throughout the close coexistence that existed during the synod, these differences were visibly manifested. While the German bishops of different stripes could converse cordially despite their obvious distances, the American bishops of different parties did not speak to each other, did not greet each other, avoided all contact. The conclusion he drew was that it was an urgent imperative to build bridges within the Church.

The straw that broke the camel’s back of this crisis of unity was the Declaration *Fiducia Supplicans*, which openly polarised the Church, making public the dissent with the Pontifical Magisterium, in individual dioceses (Prelature of Moyobamba), entire countries (Kazakhstan) and entire continents (Africa), with Cardinal Robert Sarah supporting these positions.

Personally, I think that it is a lack of understanding of the spirit of the document, but in any case, the facts show two divergent realities: if on the one hand it constitutes a deeply pastoral and hopeful writing, on the other it is clearly a marked error of government. Its effects, among which is the acceptance by the Pope and the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith that it is not applied in Africa, do not allow us to think otherwise. In any case, the task that remains pending for the Church in 2024 is to build bridges within itself. The synod has precisely this mission, but unfortunately, it is doubtful that it will achieve it because, in reality, it is part of the *casus belli*. — By Dr Salvador Fabre, *Exaudi*



Be faithful and live the Gospel truth

How many times do you hear: I never go to Mass, I’m a good person, but I don’t follow any faith or “religion” but I’m “spiritual”.

The bigger question is, what “spirit” are you following? If you’re not following Jesus Christ, then you need to ask yourself this question. The reason we are Christians is the fact that we follow Jesus Christ. We do what He tells us to do. Especially in regards to “obedience”.

Today’s Gospel reminds us that the devil, which is also a spirit (albeit an evil one), also knows Jesus Christ to be the Son of God. All “spirits” know Him. The evil ones are the ones who refuse to follow Him. They do everything in their power not to follow Him. They do not believe Him. To “believe” means to have confidence in the truth, the existence, or the reliability of something, although without absolute proof that one is right in doing so. Thus, we “Listen” to what He tells us to do, because we know it to be the correct path. We do it because we love Him.

Ask yourself again, what “spirit” am I following if I am not following Jesus Christ?

I know a lot of religious people that have a tendency to think that some of the devil stories in the Gospel are sort of fake. After all, where are they? Why don’t we see them anymore? Well, I have seen one, and it was in a church.

I vividly remember my trip to India many years ago, during which I had the

privilege of celebrating Mass in a local parish. As I delivered my homily, an unexpected incident unfolded that left everyone, including myself, in a state of shock. A man suddenly rose from his seat and began crawling down the centre aisle, headed towards the altar. The congregation and I watched in disbelief, anticipating that he would halt at some point, but he persisted, drawing nearer and nearer.

Ascending the steps, he came to a standstill before the altar and uttered something. I strained to understand his words, but could not. As I approached him, his appearance struck me profoundly and the only way I can describe to you what I saw is by saying, “He looked torn apart.” The man was totally broken. In a hushed tone, I urged him, “Stand up. You are not an animal; you are a man.” Taking him by the hand, I guided him to his feet, offering a comforting blessing. In that moment, a tranquillity enveloped him, and the tremors ceased. Members of the congregation came forward, assisting him to the back of the church, where further help awaited him.

Let’s avoid the misconception that the devil was more credible in Jesus’ time than in the present day. Similarly, let’s not idealise the notion that practising holiness was any less challenging in the past than it is today. Acknowledging our vulnerabilities and brokenness is a universal aspect of the human condition, one that transcends time and remains relevant in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Christ’s words are more inspiring, more uplifting, and more believable than any politician’s words during a political campaign. The humanity and divinity of Christ is much more believable than any person I know. What is it that is so amazing about the Lord? What drove people to love Him or dismiss Him or hate Him?

He taught them as one having authority. Having authority is much more than just preaching your own doctrine or quoting a scholar. Having authority means living your life and not allowing others to live it for you. It means being coherent. That is, you live by what you preach; you are not divided or broken. You are One. The possessed man spoke in the plural. “What have you to do with us? Have you come to destroy us? We know who you are!”

When we don’t understand something, like God or the devil or a teaching of the Church, then we tend to want to change it rather than to study it or try it.

Try something new! Be who you claim to be! Stop blaming others or making up excuses for your failures or lack of faith. Stop allowing the devil inside you (or outside of you) from taking over.

Try living the Gospel truth and then see what happens! Try being faithful to the Lord! Try being loving and

Reflecting on our
Sunday Readings

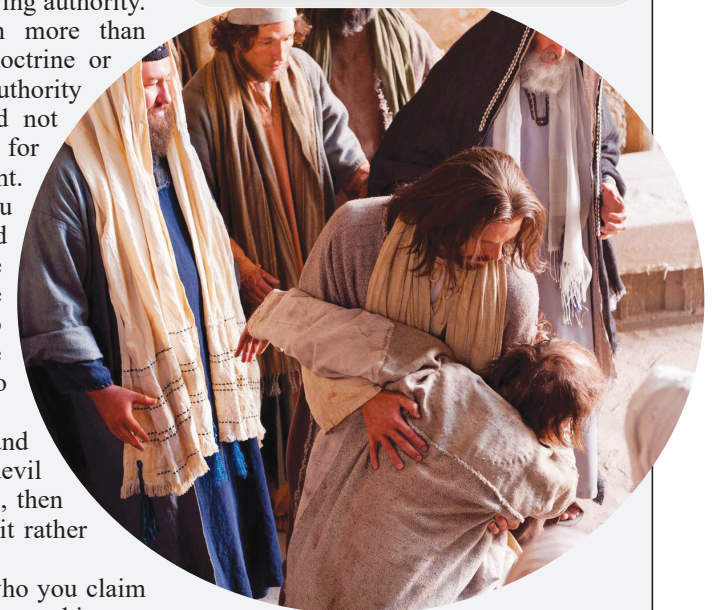
with Fr Rawi Alexander, OFM, Cap

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

Readings: Deuteronomy 18:15-20;

1 Corinthians 7:32-35;

Gospel: Mark 1:21-28



honest. Try being generous without conditions! Try being Christian and holy! Then, and only then, will you have your children’s obedience, your family’s respect and the admiration of doubters and seekers.

Salt of the Earth, Light of the World

Communion, Participation and Mission (Mt. 15: 16)

As the Church in Peninsular Malaysia journeys towards the Malaysia Pastoral Convention (MPC) to be held in 2026, she constantly discerns her vocation and mission in the light of the existing realities in relation to the family, Church, ecology and society.

In recent years, empowered by the Holy Spirit, she enters into the path that leads her towards becoming a more synodal Church, where every member of the baptised will “walk together” in Celebrating, Listening, and Walking Together in a Spirit of Communion, Participation and Mission.

Our goal is that together, as a community, and as disciples of Jesus Christ, we will truly become “salt of the earth and light of the world” (Mt. 5: 13-16).

MONTH	FOCUS	SCRIPTURE REF	SPIRITUALITY
January	Gift of diversity	Gal 3: 28	Celebrating, Listening, and Walking Together in a Spirit of Communion, Participation and Mission
February	Celebrating human fraternity	Mt. 7; 12	
March	Living the Paschal Mystery	Phil. 2: 6-9	
April	Celebrating the dignity and value of women	Luke 24:8-10	
May	Empowering family life	Eph 4: 2-3.	
June	Let our children grow	Mt 19: 13-15	
July	Pastoral care for the elderly and the sick	Is. 46: 4	
August	Servant leadership	Mk 9: 33-35	
September	Listening to the cry of the earth	Rom 8: 22-23	
October	A shared mission towards a synodal Church	Acts 2: 42-45	
November	Remembering those who have gone before us	1 Thess 4: 13-14	
December	Pilgrims of hope	Phil 3: 20-21	

IMPORTANT DATES

February 1-7:
World Interfaith Harmony Week

February 2:
World Day for Consecrated Life



KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

January & February

- 26-28/1** *Peninsular Malaysia Deacons & Wives Annual Gathering – Minor Basilica of St Anne, BM*
- 1/2** *Visit to Muslim Council of Elders*
- 2/2** *Sacerdotal Ordination of Deacon George Vaithynathan – Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Silibin*



PENANG DIOCESE

Diary of Cardinal Sebastian Francis

January

- 29** *Mass & Fellowship at Little Sisters of the Poor and Meeting with the Mother General at 9.30am – Little Sisters of the Poor, Batu Lanchang, Penang*



MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

January

- 31** *Meeting – Caritas MJD Exco at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Johor Bahru*



Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #161

F12
MJD NEWS
UPDATES

Greetings to you. The Holy Father has asked that 2024 be a year of prayer, as preparation for the Jubilee. This commenced at Advent 2023. In preparation for the Jubilee, dioceses are invited to promote initiatives to remind people of the centrality of both individual prayer and community prayer.

The Jubilee 2025 website includes reflections on prayer. (<https://www.iubilaeum2025.va/en>).

The topics

- *Prayer Today: A Challenge to Overcome* by Angelo Coma
- *Praying With The Psalms* by Gianfranco Rava
- *The Prayer of Jesus* by Juan Lopez Vergara
- *Praying With Saints and Sinners* by Paul Brendan Murray
- *Parables on Prayer* by Antonio Pitta
- *The Church in Prayer* by a monk
- *The Prayer of Mary and the Saints* by Catherine Aubin
- *The Prayer Jesus Taught Us: The “Our Father”*.

Let this be a time to re-discover listening, connecting and yielding to the Spirit.

Praying for Prophets Time:

I came across this prayer, a soul praying for a prophetic spirit to be raised in our times. Dr Barbara Holmes, faculty member of the Centre for Action and Contemplation prays for the prophetic spirit to arise:

Where, O where, are the prophets, when we need them, O Lord?

Where are the brave ones who will speak truth to power?

Where are the anointed women and men who will refuse weapons of war?

Where are the women who stand at the cross in silent resistance against the systems that execute and crucify?

Where, O where, are the prophets?

We bring this entreaty to You today because You are our God.

Help us to become prophetic in action, prophetic in witness, prophetic in love. In Jesus’ name.

Social influencers, social media reports,

powerful campaigns and institutional disinformation rule the day. Do the prophets have a chance of ever being heard? Would they not be tried by the profiteering news media? Would the people come to listen?

The world waits the prophetic spirit.

Announcements for this Week

1. The MJD remembers the late Msgr Michcel Mananayagam, who always had a caring thought for the poor, the sick and the suffering. May his soul rest in peace.

2. Some changes can be expected as follows:

a) Fr William Pillai is transferred to the Church of St Louis, Kluang as assistant parish priest (with effect from March 1, 2024).

b) Fr Martinian Lee assumes the role of parish priest of the Church of the Holy Family, Ulu Tiram and the assistant parish priest is **Friar John Anandan OFM Cap** (with effect from January 18, 2024).

c) Fr Ryan Innas Muthu has been appointed Chairperson of new Holy Family Church Building Committee, assisted by **Fr Martinian Lee** (with effect from January 18, 2024).

d) Fr Moses Rayappan assumes the role of Chairperson of the SFX Restoration Committee (with effect from January 18, 2024).

3. The charitable welfare institutes of the diocese, which were single-handedly monitored by the late Msgr Michcel Mannayagam, have been assigned to the parish priests of the nearby parish community. They will be Bishop’s Delegate of each Board of Management, and will include these works of mercy as extensions of the parish’s mission. The Bishop’s Delegate for:

- Graceville is Sr Mercy Daniel RGS;
- Villa Paulos is Fr Edward Rayappan,
- Fatima Home is Fr Moses Rayappan,
- Segamat Hostel Project is Fr Paul Wong with the Canossian sisters.

The parishes must begin to see the

presence of these institutes in their midst as mission opportunities.

4. The diocese appeals to all, young and old, to share your creative digital, communication and organisational skills as volunteers, interns and pastoral workers. Contact the MJD Youth Network or Mission Pastoral Institute or Caritas MJD.

This Weeks QnQ: Q asks?

When times are bad, when things appear to be going wrong, how do you cope?

1. Wise sayings from people who have faced storms, smiled through adversities and held fast to the sure Rock, have led me through my dark moments.

2. Here are some wisdom quotes from St Teresa of Avila:

“Let nothing disturb you, Let nothing frighten you, All things are passing away: God never changes. Patience obtains all things. Whoever has God lacks nothing; God alone suffices.”

“It is love alone that gives worth to all things.”

“Untilled ground, however rich, will bring forth thistles and thorns; so also the mind of man.”

“The important thing is not to think much but to love much; and so, do that which best stirs you to love.”

“The closer one approaches to God, the simpler one becomes.”

“God withholds Himself from no one who perseveres.”

“To have courage for whatever comes in life – everything lies in that.”

~St Teresa of Avila

Just to tickle you: *A lot of kneeling will keep you in good standing.* Pray! The Church has dedicated 2024 as the Year of Prayer. *If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.* 2 Chron. 7:14

Bishop Bernard Paul

AOHD goes on Lenten campaign roadshow

By Dwayne Sadris

KUALA LUMPUR: In a series of briefings spanning three weekends, the Archdiocesan Office for Human Development (AOHD) successfully concluded its Lenten Campaign Roadshow, reaching all eight districts of the archdiocese. The roadshow aimed to disseminate information about the upcoming Lenten Campaign and foster a sense of community engagement.

With a cumulative attendance surpassing 1,000 individuals, the participants represented a diverse cross-section of the community including members from the parish councils, Parish Integral Human Development Ministry (PIHDM) members, BEC coordinators, catechists, and youth leaders.

This year's Lenten theme, *Church Celebrating Human Fraternity*, reflects the ideals of Pope Francis' *Fratelli Tutti*, emphasising social friendship and community outreach for the betterment of humanity. The theme



Cheryl Kristine explaining the Lenten Campaign to the church representatives in Sacred Heart Church.

underscores the importance of unity, highlighting the human fraternity's significance and promoting the idea that, despite differences, individuals share a common humanity, belonging to one large family.

During the briefings, AOHD introduced notable changes to the Lenten Campaign, including a redesigned general banner and modifications to the envelopes, intended for reuse in the years to come. The sessions also

shed light on Lenten Outreach activities and events organised by various ministries within AOHD and others from the Archdiocese.

The Lenten Campaign Roadshow kicked off on January 6 with simultaneous briefings held at the Church of St Thomas, Kuantan, for the Pahang-Terengganu district, and the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Peel Road, for the KL South district. Subsequent briefings took place on January 13 at the

Church of St Ignatius, Petaling Jaya, for the Petaling district, and the Church of Jesus Caritas, Kepong, for the KL North district.

The series continued on January 20, with the Church of the Holy Rosary, Kuala Lumpur, hosting the KL Central district briefing, and the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Klang, facilitating the Klang district session. The final leg of briefings unfolded on January 21 at the Church of St John Vianney, Tampin for the Negeri district, and the Church of St Paul the Hermit, Bestari Jaya for the North West district, bringing the 2024 Lenten Campaign briefing to a close.

AOHD expressed its gratitude to all those who worked diligently behind the scenes, including host parishes, district PIHDM representatives, presenters and translators, ensuring the success of each briefing. The collaborative efforts of these individuals played a pivotal role in making the Lenten Campaign Roadshow a meaningful and impactful experience for all participants.

Mt Singai's Christ the King statue exemplifies inculturation

BAU, Sarawak: The Christ the King statue now stands tall at the entrance of the Catholic Memorial Pilgrimage Centre (CMPC) at



Christ the King statue in Mt Singai.

Mount Singai, after it was blessed by Archbishop Simon Poh during a thanksgiving Mass earlier this month.

Present were Deputy Minister of Transport (Riverine and Marine) Dato Henry Harry Jinep and Association of Research and Development Movement of Singai Sarawak (Redeems) president Datuk Peter Nansian.

Archbishop Simon urged everyone to take a moment to appreciate the contemporary artwork of the newly unveiled statue, situated prominently for all visitors to Mount Singai. Additionally, he encouraged visitors to visit the Christ the King Chapel located nearby, further enriching their experience on Mount Singai.

Vincent Eddy Sireng, the chairman of CMPC, acknowledged the ongoing discussions on social media and verbal expressions concerning the statue. He emphasised that these comments were valid, considering that the completed work did not meet the expecta-

tions of many.

He said that the Greater Tanjong Committee, as the project initiator, had granted him the opportunity to address the criticisms during the statue's blessing ceremony. Vincent delved into the concept of 'inculturation,' highlighting its significance as the embodiment of the Gospel in native cultures and the integration of these cultures into the lives of the people and the Church.

He traced Jesus' 'presence' in Singai back to 1885 when the first missionaries (priests and nuns) arrived, marking the beginning of the Church's development and growth across various parts of Bau and Sarawak. He stressed that the statue's facial features were symbolic and not meant to resemble a passport picture, emphasising that it could represent an Asian, Bidayuh, or white figure with the same underlying meaning.

In his speech, Vincent expressed his belief

that the artistic impression of Christ by the local community, whether in paintings or statues, should consciously avoid adhering to the European image of a man with blond hair and blue eyes. Drawing parallels with Christians in mainland China, Africa, and Latin-America, he advocated for a similar approach to inculturation in language and art in Singai.

Vincent stated that, in his humble opinion, the statue before them was as commendable as any other. He expressed gratitude for the artwork and emphasised the importance of embracing diverse artistic representations of Christ within the local context.

He also expressed his gratitude to Dato' Henry, highlighting him as a dedicated member of the community and a steadfast supporter of the Church. He commended Dato' Henry's customary generosity, specifically acknowledging the financial support generously provided towards this project by him.

Long-awaited grotto for Gopeng parishioners

GOPENG: Cardinal Sebastian Francis recently blessed a newly constructed grotto dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes on the grounds of the Chapel of St Jude.

The blessing took place after a Sunday Mass, which was concelebrated by the cardinal and the chapel's administrator, Fr Michael

Dass, along with the assistance of Deacon Richard Wilson.

During the Mass, Cardinal Sebastian presided over the consecration of the chapel's new altar. After Mass, the parishioners and clergy processed to the newly erected grotto for the solemn blessing.

Addressing the gathered crowd, Cardinal Sebastian expressed joy in the solemn blessing of the grotto dedicated to Our Blessed Mother. He emphasised the significance of Mary as Christ's mother and the exemplar of the Church. The ceremony included the unveiling of a commemorative plaque, marking the significant moment.

The grotto, a beautiful addition to the chapel's grounds, was a long-awaited dream for the parishioners of St Jude, providing a sacred space for meditation and prayer, particularly the recitation of the Rosary, both for locals

and visiting pilgrims.

Fr Michael, who is also parish priest of the Church of St Joseph, Batu Gajah, revealed that the parishioners raised approximately RM26,000 for the construction of the grotto. He expressed gratitude to the entire community and especially to two parishioners for their substantial contributions.

The Chapel of St Jude which celebrated its centennial in 2019 operates under the purview of the Church of St Joseph, with Mass celebrated every Sunday at 11.00am and on Tuesdays at 7.00pm. — *By Bernard Anthony*



The newly constructed grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes at the Chapel of St Jude.



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Bishops focus on synodality

By Richard Chia

PENANG: This year's 113th Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei (CBCMSB) was a momentous event. The assembly of the bishops, archbishops and cardinals was held at the Minor Basilica of St Anne in Bukit Mertajam January 8-12, to coincide with the thanksgiving Mass for Cardinal Sebastian Francis on the occasion of his elevation to the College of Cardinals.

The Bishops' Conference assembly was graced with the presence of the Apostolic Nuncio to Malaysia, Archbishop Wojciech Zaluski, Cardinal Giorgio Marengo, the Apostolic Prefect of Ulaanbaatar, a missionary jurisdiction that covers the entire country of Mongolia and the General Secretary of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC) Fr William La Rousse.

Cardinal Giorgio expressed his great appreciation and thanks to the Bishops' Conference for their fraternal support when the Mongolian Church was graced with the historic visit of the Holy Father Pope Francis in September 2023. He presented the Bishops' Conference with a wooden plaque in the shape of the country of Mongolia, with words of thanks and appreciation written on it.

Nuncio Archbishop Zaluski expressed his



appreciation for the Bishops' Conference's solidarity with the Vatican. He communicated the Pope's thrust and tireless efforts in speaking out against the wars, human suffering, death and destruction happening globally. He reiterated the Pope's call for the Church to commit to bring the Gospel message to society, and to be steadfast in upholding pastoral charity.

Fr William La Rousse, a Maryknoll priest based in the FABC's Central Secretariat office in Bangkok, Thailand, provided an update of directions and thrusts of the Asian Church as it moves toward synodality. He

Standing from left: Fr William LaRousse, Fr Robert Leong, Bishop Bernard Paul, Archbishop John Wong, Bishop Joseph Hii, Bishop Cornelius Piong, Bishop Julius Gitom, Richard Chia. Seated from left: Archbishop Simon Poh, Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Wojciech Zaluski, Cardinal William Goh, Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Cardinal Giorgio Marengo, Archbishop Julian Leow.

brought with him several publications from the FABC; namely, the FABC General Conference Bangkok Document, the FABC Final Document of the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality and the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops First Session Synthesis Report.

Fr William reminded the Bishops' Conference of the follow through effort required in the preparation towards session

two of the general assembly of the Synod of Bishops scheduled for October 2024. The worksheets and instructions comprise questions for the local churches to reflect on and respond to the 20 questions and themes considered to be priorities. Each country is requested to elaborate the contributions of the in-depth study received from the local churches, and summarise a report at the national level.

Meeting the Religious Major superiors

The Bishops' Conference also held a joint cocktail and dinner with the Conference of Religious Major Superiors (CRMS), followed by a session together the next day. This annual joint meeting serves as a platform upon which the religious communities journey together with the Church — clergy and laity. The exchange of ideas, sharing of experiences and support for each other are one of the benefits from these joint meet-

ings.

At the joint meeting, it was a great opportunity for many of the religious superiors to openly engage in discussion with the bishops on any pressing matters, or matters that require the bishops' attention. This open dialogue certainly helps to cement the relationship of the religious communities with the diocesan shepherd in the dioceses they are serving.



President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei Archbishop Julian Leow, seated beside President of the Conference of Religious Major Superiors Friar Derrick Yap, OFM, in a lively discussion with all superiors and bishops present.

Looking towards MPC 2026

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50
1974-2024

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2023
Arch/Diocese
Pastoral Assembly
(A/DPA)
Malaysia
Religious Assembly
(MRA) 8-11 June 2023

Synod
2021
2024
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communion + participation + mission

Year of Prayer
2024
Regional
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• SABAH (2025)
• SARAWAK

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Parish Pastoral Assembly (PPA) ...>>>

Updated : 28/11/2023

For the nine dioceses in Malaysia, each bishop then reported on their respective Archdiocesan/Diocesan Pastoral Assemblies (APA/DPA) held in 2023. Everyone expressed positively on the spiritual conversation method (spiritual conversation focuses on the quality of one's capacity to listen as well as the quality of the words spoken) that was introduced at the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

These diocesan assemblies will lead up to Year 2024, declared as a Year of Prayer where the three regions of Semenanjung Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak will come together for their regional assemblies. For

the young Catholics in Malaysia, during the Jubilee Year 2025, the *Perjalanan Salib* Malaysia (Journey of the Malaysian Cross) will begin after the Malaysia Catholic Young People Assembly scheduled in April 2025. This assembly will bring together young Catholics from all the nine dioceses in Malaysia.

The ultimate convergence of all these assemblies will no doubt be the Malaysia Pastoral Convention (MPC) 2026 scheduled to be held in Johor, which will see the convergence of the clergy, religious and laity from all across the nine dioceses in Malaysia where we will meet together as one Malaysian Church.



Joint meeting of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei with the Conference of Religious Major Superiors of Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei.

Six new bishops for Church in India

NEW DELHI: Pope Francis on January 13 appointed bishops for five dioceses and an auxiliary for one in four states of India.

He also accepted the resignations of three bishops, including Bishop K A William of Mysore, who had been asked by the Vatican a year ago "to take a period of absence from the ministry."

Four of the bishops-elect are natives of Tamil Nadu that celebrated Pongal, its harvest festival, on the day. The announcement came a day ahead of the feast of St Devasahayam Pillai, the first native saint of Tamil Nadu.

According to a press statement from the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (Latin Rite), the Pope has also accepted the resignations of Bishops Gerald Almeida of Jabalpur in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh and Antonisamy Francis of Kumbakonam in Tamil Nadu, southern India.

The new bishop for Jabalpur is Fr Valan Arasu of the same diocese, currently serving as the principal of St Aloysius College

in the city, the legal headquarters of Madhya Pradesh.

In Kumbakonam, the Pope elevated its vicar general, Fr Jeevanandam Amalanathan as its new bishop.

Another diocese in Tamil Nadu, Kuzhithurai, got Fr Albert George Alexander Anastas, a priest of Kottar, as its new bishop. He currently serves as a professor at St Paul's Seminary, Tiruchirappalli.

The Pope has appointed Fr Bhaskar Jesuraj, a priest of the Agra archdiocese, as the new bishop of Meerut, both in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. The seat was lying vacant since March 19, 2022, when Pope Francis promoted Bishop Francis Kalist as the archbishop of Pondicherry-Cuddalore.

Bishop-elect Jesuraj now serves as the deputy secretary of the Agra Regional Bishops Council and principal of St Clare's Senior Secondary School in Agra.

Another vacant diocese, Karwar in



REV. FR. BHASKAR JESURAJ
Bishop Elect of Meerut



REV. FR. VALAN ARASU
Bishop Elect of Jabalpur



REV. FR. JEEVANANDAM AMALANATHAN
Bishop Elect of Kumbakonam



REV. FR. DUMING DIAS



REV. FR. ALBERT GEORGE ALEXANDER ANASTAS
Bishop Elect of Kuzhithurai



REV. FR. JUSTIN ALEXANDER MADATHIPARAMBIL
Aux. Bishop Elect of Vijayapuram

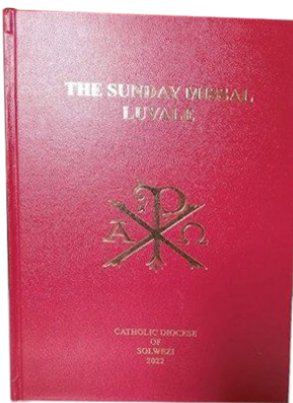
Karnataka, Tamil Nadu's northwestern neighbour, got a new bishop in Fr Duming Dias, a member of Shimoga diocese and director of the Sannidhi Pastoral Renewal Centre of Shimoga. The diocese was administered by Bishop Derek

Fernandes of Belgaum.

Vijayapuram diocese in neighbouring Kerala too saw the elevation of its vicar general, Fr Justin Alexander Madathiparambil, as its auxiliary. — By Jose Kavi, *Matters India*

Solwezi diocese launches locally translated Luvale Sunday Missal

ZAMBIA: The Bishop of Solwezi diocese in Zambia, Charles J.S. Kasonde, has urged priests, religious individuals, and the Catholic faithful within his diocese, to deeply integrate the Word of God into their daily lives. This call came during his homily at the recent launch of the newly translated Luvale language Sunday Missal (pic), which took place at Mount Carmel Parish in Kabompo District, Zambia.



cal year. This book is designed to assist us in preparing for, and engaging actively, in the weekly celebration of the Eucharist," said the Solwezi prelate.

Bishop Kasonde, however, reminded the lay faithful that the use of the missal must not only be limited to the actual celebration of the Mass. "It should help all of us, the lay faithful and those responsible for prayer and worship, to prepare adequately for Mass by facilitating meditation on the meaning of the scriptural texts," he said.

Bishop Kasonde emphasised the essential importance for priests, the religious, and the laity in the diocese to internalise the Word of God as part of their daily existence. He highlighted that God desires to communicate and reveal Himself to everyone within the Church.

"God's desire is to communicate and reveal Himself to each of His children, both individually and collectively," expressed Bishop Kasonde. He further stated, "It is the responsibility of every faithful person to give special attention to His Word. A missal, like the Luvale Sunday Missal, allows us all to immerse ourselves in the depth of the Word, particularly during the Holy Mass throughout the liturgi-

"This prior reflection enables us to better assimilate the Word of God, appreciate the Eucharist more deeply, and participate more actively in the Liturgy. This could be done especially in families and Small Christian Communities," he said.

Bishop Kasonde expressed gratitude to everyone involved in the translation and compilation of the Luvale Sunday Missal. Additionally, he extended appreciation to the Suwon diocese of South Korea for their generous financial support, which facilitated the printing and transportation of the Luvale Sunday Missal from South Korea to Zambia. — By Fr Willbroad C. Musonda, *Vatican News*

Washington excludes Iranian Christians in Turkiye from relocation programme

ISTANBUL: Washington has dealt a severe blow to Iranian Christians who have been in Turkish "limbo" for some time and who are seeking relocation, after having fled prison and persecution in the Islamic Republic, to a third country in Europe, Canada, but above all, the United States.

The American authorities have in fact established that they are "no longer eligible" for resettlement in the context of the refugee sponsorship programme launched last year by the White House. All this despite Tehran still being included, recently, among the countries of "particular concern" by the Secretariat of State for "promoting or tolerating particularly serious violations of religious freedom".

The US State Department has regularly designated Iran as a nation of particular concern for the continuous violations of religious freedom, including towards Christians as evidenced by recent news cas-

es with prison and violations of the practice of worship.

Last year, Iranian Christian refugees, most of whom arrived in Turkiye risking their lives along the way, received new hope with the resettlement programme sought and supported by Washington, a response to complaints from activist groups and people active in reception, many of which were contained in the Article18 report from last June entitled "The situation of Iranian Christians requesting international protection in Turkiye".

The document contains several critical elements, to respond to which new resettlement opportunities and sponsorship programmes are needed. Nonetheless, the US government has decided to remove Turkiye from the list of countries from which refugees can be resettled, dealing another blow to the many hundreds of refugees currently stranded. — *AsiaNews*



US authorities have ruled that Iranian Christians from Turkiye are no longer eligible for resettlement under the refugee sponsorship programme. (AsiaNews photo)

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REST IN PEACE

Diocese shuts down newspaper after 90 years

ILLINOIS: Bishop Louis Tylka of Peoria has ended publication of *The Catholic Post*, the newspaper of the Diocese of Peoria founded nearly 90 years ago, and announced that “as we look to the future, we will develop new strategies in a wider communications plan”.

“While it is true that we will no longer have a diocesan newspaper, I am committed to exploring new opportunities to share the stories of our faith in the Diocese of Peoria,” wrote Tylka in a letter mailed January 11 to the biweekly newspaper’s 10,000 subscribers.

The final regular edition was dated Dec 24, 2023.

Established in 1934 as *The Peoria Register* and part of a pioneering chain of diocesan newspapers printed in Denver, its name was changed to *The Catholic Post* in 1969 when both production and printing were moved within the diocese.

The Catholic Post has a rich history in the Catholic press. Two of its former editors – Msgr Robert G. Peters, who was editor or publisher for 47 years, and Albina Aspell, a pioneer among women in Catholic journalism — served as president of the Catholic

Press Association of the United States and Canada, now the Catholic Media Association, or CMA. Both also were recipients of the association’s highest honour, the St Francis de Sales Award.

Peters’ technical skills helped guide many Catholic publications into the computer age. In 1987, Aspell addressed St John Paul II and a world Synod of Bishops on the need for the Catholic Church to be more open in providing information.

Fr John Dietzen, former associate editor, began a question-and-answer column that was syndicated by *Catholic News Service* and was its most popular offering for many years.

The Catholic Post regularly received CMA recognition for journalistic excellence, including third place for Best Newspaper in its classification in 2022. Since 1963, the newspaper also published the annual directory of the Diocese of Peoria.

Tom Dermody, who served as editor of *The Catholic Post* for 32 years until his retirement in 2022, called its closing “a difficult goodbye.” He said the decision was “the latest evidence of a seismic shift that continues to rock journalism” as print pub-



The official newspaper of the Catholic Diocese of Peoria, *The Catholic Post*.

lications in both the secular and religious press seek their place in an increasingly digital age.

Dermody lamented that dioceses are losing in the transition — including a regular, tangible connection shared by Catholics, parishes, and schools in their regions — but he focused on gratitude for all that *The Catholic Post* accomplished in serving the Church for nine decades.

Bishop Tylka cited the challenges of declining subscriptions, increasing costs, and a shrinking workforce as factors in

his decision.

He expressed gratitude to “all those who have shared in the history of producing *The Catholic Post*.”

“Over the last 90 years, many have come to understand who we are as the Church and have learned more of our faith in Jesus Christ through their efforts,” wrote the bishop. Through the decades, he added, *The Catholic Post* has been “a trusted source of information, inspiration, and formation in the Catholic faith for tens of thousands of Catholic families.” — *OSV*

Philippine Churches call for dialogue amidst ‘fragmentation’



An activist displays a placard calling for peace outside a Catholic church in Manila during a demonstration. (LiCas News photo/Mark Saludes)

MANILA: Christian Churches in the Philippines marked this year’s Week of Prayer for Christian Unity by urging the dismantling of “any form of barriers” to peace and reconciliation.

In a joint statement issued on January 18, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) and the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) renewed their commitment to pursuing “lasting peace”.

“We convey high hopes that barriers to peace in our country be resolved through dialogues and negotiations,” the statement read.

The statement was signed by Bishop Mel Rey Uy, chairperson of the CBCP Episcopal Commission on Ecumenical Affairs, and Ms. Minnie Anne Mata-Calub, general secretary of the NCCP.

The religious leaders encouraged Christians “to leave behind our divisions and unite our forces” amid the climate crisis and environmental devastation to “turn our common future into the dawn of a new and radiant day.”

Christians around the world observe the “Week of Prayer for Christian Unity” from

January 18-25, between the feasts of St Peter and St Paul.

This year’s commemoration is themed “You shall love the Lord your God ... and your neighbour as yourself” (Lk 10:27).

The Church leaders said the theme highlights “the call for all Christians to love God and neighbour” amidst “fragmentation — wars, strife, and environmental destruction, this mandate is even extended to the whole created Earth”.

“In our week of prayer, we are urged to look beyond our walls and comforts and enlarge the space of our tent as a space of communion, a place of participation, and a foundation for an ecumenical mission,” the Church leaders said.

The leaders urged the faithful to put “love at the centre” of the quest for peace and reconciliation. They stressed the need to “stand for truth in times of misinformation, a firm conviction in times of corruption, a shared sense of humanity in times of hunger and economic strife, peace based on justice and reconciliation in times of war, and compassion for our threatened environment”. — **By Mark Saludes, LiCAS News**

Churchmen blame poor education for Indian witch hunts

BIHAR: Churchmen have blamed a lack of education for the high number of women being lynched for allegedly practising witchcraft in India.

The claim follows a January 4 incident in the eastern state of Bihar where a woman called Chinta Devi was beaten to death by a mob for allegedly practising witchcraft.

The mob killed Devi and set her house in Rohtas district on fire after the body of a four-year-old missing boy was found near her home.

“It is an inhuman act and we condemn it. It is a matter of concern and society, as well as the administration, should take

note of it,” said Fr James Amakatt, vicar-general of Buxar diocese that covers Rohtas district.

Black magic is supposedly practised mainly by Dalits (formerly untouchables) and tribal people, said Amakatt.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau, more than 2,500 women have been killed for allegedly practising witchcraft since 2000.

This number is estimated to be higher as many cases go unreported.

The notion of women performing black magic is prevalent in Bihar’s neighbouring states like Jharkhand, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh, as well as other areas in

India, the priest added.

Unfortunately, it is not addressed, he observed, adding that illiteracy is one of the main reasons for this belief.

Fr Vincent Ekka, who heads the tribal studies department at the Jesuit-run Indian Social Institute in the national capital New Delhi said that belief in witchcraft is the result of a lack of education.

“To cure illness and bring economic prosperity, people in India go to local quacks who mislead them,” Ekka said.

The priest, from the tribal community, said this “lack of knowledge” forces people to believe in witchcraft.

In 2023, a 65-year-old Dalit woman was

killed for allegedly practising witchcraft in Bihar’s Katihar district. In 2022, the brutal murder of two women as part of “ritualistic human sacrifices” took place in southern Kerala. Their bodies were cut into pieces and buried in different pits.

In India, there is no central law to deal exclusively with crimes related to witchcraft, superstition, or occult-inspired activities.

In 2016, a bill was introduced in the lower house. However, it was not passed. The provisions in the bill included punishment for accusing or identifying a woman as a witch. — **By Bijay Kumar Minj, ucanews.com**

A 'true miracle' amid non-stop war

GAZA: In the shadow of darkness, eight children in Gaza City beamed with joy as they received their first Communion earlier this month.

As the world marked 100 days since the Hamas militants' attacks that unleashed hell in the Holy Land on Jan 7, images of the children from Holy Family Parish — the only Catholic parish in the Gaza Strip — dressed in white albs to receive the sacrament, were a stark and welcome contrast in a land that has had very little reason to smile since Oct 7 last year.

Across the border in Israel, the families of those hostages still held by Hamas and other groups marked the poignant milestone of 100 days without their loved ones with a vigil in Tel Aviv.

As he has done from the beginning of the current conflict, the Pope used an appearance on Italian television Jan 14 to plead for an end to violence. "It's true that making peace is risky, but war is riskier," he told the show "Che tempo che fa."

The Pope's solidarity and interventions are reassuring for the Christian community, but as war continues to rage with Israel vowing not to stop until Hamas is eradicated, Church leaders in the region feel increasingly helpless.



Eight children from the Holy Family parish in Gaza City received their first Holy Communion on January 7, after completing their preparation programme and education, despite the Israel-Hamas war. Seen with the children is assistant priest, Fr Youssef Assad and altar servers of the parish. (OSV News photo/courtesy Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem)

Speaking to OSV News from Jerusalem, Franciscan Fr Francesco Patton, the custos, or guardian, of the holy places, was downbeat.

"I feel very sad and frustrated, because at this moment it seems impossible to do

something for the civilian population of Gaza — particularly for the children. But it is impossible also to obtain that the Israeli hostages will be freed," he said.

"We are praying every day for peace, for reconciliation, for a diplomatic and political

solution of this terrible situation," he told OSV News from St Saviour's Monastery in Jerusalem's Old City, just a few minutes' walk from the site of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection — the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Before the war there were an estimated 1,200 Christians in Gaza, most observers say the number has dropped now to around 800 with those holding dual nationalities able to flee via Egypt. Most of the Christians are Greek Orthodox, but there also is the Catholic community gathered around Holy Family Parish.

Fr Patton described their witness amid the war as "a true miracle."

"All of them know each other, and are waiting for the end of the war. They cannot leave the Gaza Strip and they need food, water, medicines, fuel — everything," he said.

"They are giving to us a strong testimony of faith, because they in practice live inside the church, praying, helping each other and keeping their hearts free from hatred.

"And this for me is a true miracle," according to the Italian friar, who is the 168th custodian of the holy places since St. Francis first brought the order there in the 13th century. — **By Michael Kelly, OSV**



Nicaragua cancels legal status of 16 NGOs, some Catholic

MANAGUA: The Nicaraguan government on January 16 cancelled the legal status of sixteen NGOs, ten of which are Catholic or evangelical.

According to reports from the Ministry of the Interior, nine non-governmental organisations have been outlawed for failing to comply with the regulations governing them and for hindering the oversight and surveillance operations provided by the authorities.

The movable and immovable property of the NGOs will be transferred to the State.

Another seven NGOs, however, have voluntarily submitted requests for dissolution.

Over 3,500 non-governmental organisations have been dissolved by the government in Managua since 2018, the year when popular protests against social security reform erupted. — **Vatican News**

Bishops in Cameroon deplore violence in North and Anglophone regions

YAOUNDE: Catholic Bishops in Cameroon have expressed their prayerful closeness to the victims of the ongoing violence in the North region bordering Nigeria, and in the conflict-ridden Anglophone regions, where separatists have been fighting the Francophone-controlled central government since 2017.

In a communiqué released by the National Episcopal Conference (NECC) on January 13 at the closing of its annual meeting held in Maroua-Mokolo Dioceses, the bishops deplored the "horrendous acts" perpetrated by Boko Haram Islamist terrorists from neighbouring Nigeria.

Boko Haram attacks began in Nigeria's Borno state in 2009 before spreading to neighbouring countries, including Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, sowing terror in bordering villages. In the far North of Cameroon, the attacks have reportedly forced more than 320,000 people to flee the region.

The Cameroonian bishops also deplored the atrocities committed by the

Anglophone separatists in the North-West and South-West regions.

In their communiqué following their meeting, focused on the theme "A Synodal Church on Mission", the Cameroonian bishops deplored "all forms of violence in the country" and expressed their "constant paternal solicitude and continual prayer for all."

They also manifested concern about "the growing and yawning poverty among the population," appealing for "greater justice, solidarity, hard work, and continuous trust in God."

At the opening of the four-day session, the President of NECC, Archbishop Andrew Fuanya Nkea of Bamenda, urged all citizens to work towards ensuring that "real peace" is realised throughout the country in 2024 and cautioned them against despair amid growing security challenges.

"We think that all Cameroonians should be open to love peace, to work for peace, and to ensure that Cameroon is in peace," he said. — **Vatican News**



People protesting the insecurity in Anglophone regions in Cameroon.

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‘I like to think of hell as empty’ Pope Francis



VATICAN: Pope Francis appeared on Italy's most popular prime-time talk show on January 14 where the pontiff shared how he hopes that hell is “empty.”

Three million people in Italy tuned in to watch the nearly hour-long television interview.

The 87-year-old Pope began his appearance on the television show *Che Tempo Che Fa* by joking that he is “still alive” and has no plans to resign.

“For as long as I feel I still have the capacity to serve, I will go on. When I can no longer do it, it will be time to think about it,” Francis said.

When asked by the interviewer, Fabio Fazio, how he “imagines hell,” Pope Francis gave a short response.

“What I am going to say is not a dogma of faith but my own personal view: I like to think of hell as empty; I hope it is,” Pope Francis said.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says that Catholic teaching “affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. Immediately after death, the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, ‘eternal fire.’ The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs.”

The *Catechism* also says: “In

hope, the Church prays for ‘all men to be saved.’”

Theologians like Hans Urs von Balthasar in his book *Dare We Hope That All Men Be Saved?*, have put forward the possibility that one could “hope” that hell might be empty because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross, making the distinction between universal salvation as a hope and universal salvation as a doctrine, which he rejects.

American Catholic evangelist Ralph Martin wrote in his 2012 book *Will Many Be Saved? What Vatican II Actually Teaches and Its Implications for the New Evange-*

lisation that “what motivated the Apostles and the whole history of Christian missions was knowing from divine revelation that the human race is lost, eternally lost, without Christ, and even though it is possible for people to be saved under certain stringent conditions without explicit faith and baptism, ‘very often,’ this is not actually the case.”

Pope Francis has previously spoken about the existence of hell in public speeches during the

past 10 years of his pontificate. In March 2014, he said in an address that members of the Mafia should change their lives “while there is still time, so that you do not end up in hell. That is what awaits you if you continue on this path.”

Fabio then asked the Pope if he ever feels alone, especially when there is negative reaction to his decisions, for example, his approval of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith’s declaration that a priest

can offer informal blessings to gay couples as long as it is clear the Church is not equating their union to marriage.

“Yes, as you say, when you make a decision, there is a price of loneliness that

you have to pay, and sometimes decisions are not accepted, but most of the time, when decisions are not accepted, it is because they are not understood,” the Pope responded.

Sometimes, rather than trying to understand and to have a direct, “fraternal discussion” about a decision, he said, people just hang on to their doubts and become “a resistance and make ugly conclusions.”

“This has happened with the recent decision about blessing everyone,” Pope Francis said.

“The Lord blesses everyone who is capable of being baptised, that is, every person. But then people must enter into conversation with the Lord’s blessing and see what path the Lord is proposing for them.”

But, he insisted, “the Lord blesses everyone, everyone. The Lord blesses everyone who is capable of being baptised, that is, every person. But then people must enter into conversation with the Lord’s blessing and see what path the Lord is proposing for them.”

The pastoral work of the Church, he said, is to “take them by the hand and help them to go down that road, not condemn them from the start.”

“I always tell confessors: Forgive everything and treat people as kindly as the Lord treats us. And then if you want to help people, you can talk and help them move on, but forgive everyone,” he said.

Pope Francis repeated his conviction that God never tires of forgiving people, but people tire of asking for God’s forgiveness.

“The Lord waits for us, He knocks at the door of many hardened hearts so that they will have the ability to recognise the wrong they are doing,” he said.

Fazio asked the Pope about the phrase in the classic Act of Contrition: “I detest all my sins because of thy just punishments.”

“Sin deserves punishment,” the Pope said. But, he said, he believes the “literary expression” in the classic version of the prayer “is too

harsh, given God’s love. I prefer to say, ‘Because by sinning I have saddened your heart.’”

“In my 54 years of priesthood — I’ve been a priest 54 years; I’m old,” he said. “This is a confession. In these 54 years, I’ve only denied forgiveness once because of the person’s hypocrisy. Just once. I’ve always forgiven everything, even when I knew the person could fall again, but the Lord forgives us. He helps us not to fall or to fall less, but He always forgives.”

Pope Francis spoke with the TV programme, which is recorded in Milan, northern Italy, remotely from the Vatican.

In the interview, Pope Francis was also asked why he ends every speech and public audience asking for people to pray for him.

“Because I am a sinner and I need God’s help to remain faithful to the vocation He has given me,” the Pope replied.

“As a bishop I have a very great responsibility to the Church. I recognise

my weaknesses — that’s why I have to ask for prayers, for everyone to pray for me to remain faithful in the service of the Lord, that I do not end up in the attitude of a mediocre shepherd who does not take care of his flock,” he added. — *Agencies*

“God never tires of forgiving people, but people tire of asking for God’s forgiveness.”

Catholic news media can’t be ‘neutral’ in the message they convey

VATICAN: Pope Francis said people working in Catholic media must not refrain from being involved in the evangelising mission of the Church and that, therefore, “they cannot remain ‘neutral’ with respect to the message they convey.”

The pontiff made his remarks during an audience with a delegation from the Society of Catholic Publicists of Germany on the 75th anniversary of its foundation recently.

The Holy Father also explained that “interreligious dialogue, ecumenism, and the defence of peace, freedom, and human dignity” should be the goals of communication professionals, especially if they are Catholic.

“How many conflicts today, instead of being extinguished by dialogue, are fuelled by fake news or inflammatory statements in the media! That’s why it’s all the more important that you, strong in your Christian roots and in living the faith daily, ‘demilitarised’ in your

heart by the Gospel, support the disarmament of language,” the Pope said in his discourse, which he gave in writing to the delegation.

To achieve this “demilitarisation” of language, he shared four guidelines that Catholics in the media can put into practice: “Foster a tone of peace and understanding, build bridges, be available to listen, and engage in respectful communication toward others and their reasons.”

He also noted that Catholic journalists have a fundamental role to play in situations involving tension and disputes by “providing correct information” to resolve misunderstandings and contributing to the construction of peace in society, “helping mutual understanding and not setting people in opposition to each other.”

Pope Francis was also emphatic in asking Catholic journalists not to be turned in on themselves but to go out and “bring the Christian

message to all areas of life” using the enormous resources, platforms, and communication tools available to the modern world.

“A Church concerned, above all with itself, becomes ill with self-referentiality,” he warned.

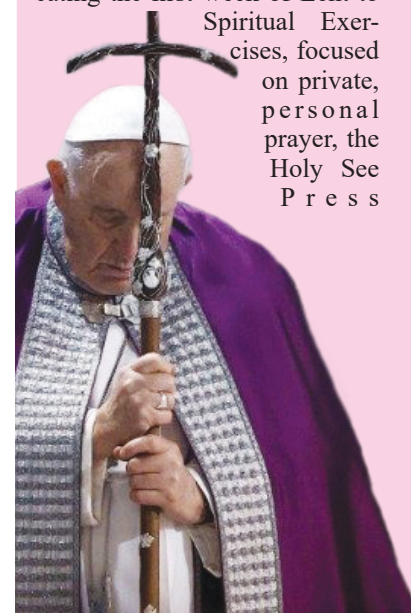
In that regard, the pontiff pointed to the weakest in society as the centre of attention of communication professionals. In these peripheries, Pope Francis commented, is found “the God of love, waiting for the good news of our charity.” The Holy Father pointed out the need for journalists “who highlight the stories and faces of those to whom few or no one pays attention.”

Catholics in the media should “always think of the faces of the people, especially the poor and the simple, and start from them, their reality, their dramas, and their hopes, even if doing so means going against the current” and sparing no effort, he concluded. — *By Andrés Henríquez, CNA*

Curia invited to live Lenten spiritual exercises in prayer

VATICAN: Pope Francis and the Roman Curia will be dedicating the first week of Lent to

Spiritual Exercises, focused on private, personal prayer, the Holy See Press



File photo of Pope Francis during Lent.

Office announced January 15, stating the Pope had invited all Cardinals residing in Rome, heads of Dicasteries, and Superiors of the Roman Curia to take the week for prayer.

Pope Francis’ engagements are suspended that week, including the General Audience of Wednesday, Feb 21.

His next public event that week is expected to be his Sunday *Angelus*.

The Holy Father urged top officials of the Roman Curia to “experience in a personal way a period of Spiritual Exercises.”

In order to facilitate their personal retreat, he requested them to suspend their “work activities and engage in prayer from the afternoon of Sunday, Feb 18, to the afternoon of Friday, Feb 23.”

— *By Deborah Castellano Lubov, Vatican Media*

What's stopping the Church from embracing synodality?

Clericalism isn't the only thing

In a rare intervention in the synodal process on October 25, 2023, Pope Francis seemed to suggest that clericalism is at the root of resistance to synodality. "Clericalism is a whip, it is a scourge, it is a form of worldliness that defiles and damages the face of the Lord's bride [the Church]," he said. "It enslaves God's holy and faithful people."

These are strong words. They point to a significant issue in the life of the Church, but I am unconvinced that clericalism is the

problem that blocks synodality from entering the life of the Church. Rather, the mindset of many of us regarding our role and participation in the Church may be an even bigger problem.

Let us begin by trying to identify what exactly clericalism is. It can mean different things because it is rooted differently in the clerics who manifest it. For example, what could be tagged as clericalism may simply be evidence of a general sense of entitlement. Sadly, that is a negative and potent

feature of some personalities, ordained and not ordained. Entitlement shapes behaviour ranging from the plainly rude to the horrifically criminal, as well as its haughty ecclesiastical form that gets the name clericalism.

The same word, clericalism, can also express a controlling personality at work in a church setting: a personality that must, at all costs, be in charge to the detriment of others. In a less toxic but also clearly eccentric way, clericalism can stand for a kind of antiquarianism and aestheticism that revels in

the past at the cost of genuine engagement with the present. This last form seems to be what the Pope decries when he speaks of young priests shopping and "trying on cassocks and hats or albs with lace."

Is clericalism in these different forms a problem that sets up resistance to synodality? Yes, of course it is. At the same time, it is not the root problem. The fundamental resistance to synodality belongs to a much wider swath of Church membership than its ordained segment.

Co-responsibility for mission: The heart of synodality

In various places, the synthesis report of the first session of the Synod on Synodality speaks of what is at the heart of synodality. A section at the beginning of part two of the document is especially clear and deserves close attention:

The sacraments of Christian initiation confer on all the disciples of Jesus the responsibility for the mission of the Church. Laymen and laywomen, those in consecrated life, and ordained ministers, have equal dignity. They have received different charisms and vocations and exercise different roles and functions, but all are called and nourished by the Holy Spirit to form one

body in Christ (1 Cor. 4-31). They are all disciples, all missionaries, in the reciprocal vitality of local communities who experience the delightful and comforting joy of evangelising. The exercise of co-responsibility is essential for synodality and is necessary at all levels of the Church. Each Christian is a mission on this earth.

Co-responsibility for the mission means coming together in communion to participate in moving the mission of the Church forward. It is at the heart of synodality. Furthermore, this shared responsibility for the mission shapes every level of Church life. It means listening to each other, working to-

gether, challenging one another and encouraging each other.

The mission at the heart of synodality also needs to be clear. We do not construct the mission; we receive the mission. It is given to us by Jesus Christ as the continuation of His mission in the world. And that mission brings good news to the world by proclaiming that all things are reconciled and recapitulated in Christ. Entrusted to the entire Church, the mission shapes her fundamental identity — in the words of the Second Vatican Council, "the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or...sign and instrument, both of a very closely knit union with

God and of the unity of the whole human race" (*Lumen Gentium*, No. 1). In other words, the mission ultimately serves communion, with God and with each other, the twofold dimension of horizontal and vertical communion that form a unity and flow into each other in Christ.

If co-responsibility for the mission is at the heart of synodality, and if that mission is ultimately a movement to communion, then what is the pathway to implement the mission? At this point, we can turn to the third term of the triad that has been a part of this synodal process from the beginning: participation.

What is participation in the Church sense? Full engagement marked by dialogue, listening and frank proclamation. Together, as Pope Francis has explained, communion, participation and mission describe synodality in its full reality. All three dimensions are essential. Participation, however, presents the key challenge and resistance to synodality in the context of the Church today.

If it is true that co-responsibility for the mission leads to communion — which becomes real through the active participation of all the baptised — then we face a fundamental problem. A passive consumer mindset is currently pervasive in the US Church, and this mindset probably exists elsewhere as well. That mindset militates against participation.

Of course, not everyone in the Church is passive or oriented towards obtaining something from the Church rather than participating co-responsibly in her mission of



Members of the assembly of the Synod of Bishops gather for morning prayer October 27, 2023, in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

communion. A large swath of Catholics, however, veer in that direction. And that fact is hugely consequential for the development of a synodal Church.

Language betrays this passive consumer mindset. For example, Catholics reflexively speak about "getting" sacraments: get

the baby baptised, get confirmed, get first Communion, get absolved, get married, get anointed and even get ordained. The implied sense of obtaining something in getting the sacraments reveals something. For so many Catholics, this kind of sacramental contact is their essential connection with the

Church, and this can be true for people who are sincere and devout. In the context of synodality, however, it is a very diminished way to be in the Church. This is obviously not active co-responsibility for the mission.

In another context, I have written about my experience of collating the synod consultations in my diocese. One important feature that I detected was how people directed their responses. Generally, they spoke to the Church, not from the Church, as if the Church were an entity outside of themselves. This outsider form of reference does not match co-responsibility for the mission.

Add to all of this clericalism, especially in its forms of entitlement and control. Although it may not be the root challenge to synodality, it surely is complicit in hindering the movement to a synodal Church. In fact, clericalism supports the passive, consumer-oriented, outsider mindset among Catholics that subverts synodality.

What is the next step?

The core challenge to synodality can be expressed in many ways: passivity, a consumer-driven mentality, a sense of looking at things from the outside with a consequent lack of ownership and a generalised disengagement. Laid out in this way, the challenge is indeed formidable. It is not, however, impossible to address.

The key is to call all people, ordained and non-ordained, to conversion. Pope Francis has frequently said that a synodal Church requires conversion—but that summons to conversion also needs specification. Whatever can be done to change the way that people see themselves in the Church will be the key to embracing our synodal future. The call to conversion must first explain co-responsibility for the mission by way of participation. The communication must be clear that conversion entails a new way of living in the Church.

Traditionally, this communication would be some form of instruction or catechesis. Although this is a necessary step, if it is the only measure taken, it is inadequate because the communication must involve much more than an intellectual conviction. A spiritual-formational component that touches the heart must also be a part of the call to conversion. But how can that happen? Four actions come to mind: dialogue, witness, worship and a retrieval of history.

The synodal process has already emphasised dialogue within the Church as an essential element of our life together. Then, as we speak of our experience and listen deeply to each other, we can trust the Spirit to prompt us to a deeper awareness of who we are as responsible people and collaborators in mission. Linked to dialogue is mutual witness, a process of offering and receiving testimony

from those who have already grasped the sense of co-responsibility for the mission.

Our liturgical worship also offers us a template of co-responsibility for the mission when we engage in the act of worship with full, conscious and active participation. We are not passive spectators or consumers. Rather, we are people who actively lift up their worship of God in communion with one another and intend to engage the world beyond the walls of the Church.

Finally, a retrieval of history of co-responsibility in mission lived out in the past can be very helpful for today's formation. Co-responsibility is not an entirely new reality in the life of the Church. Before Vatican II and, in some sense, feeding into its dynamism, there were movements that captured and lived out a shared responsibility for the mission, especially for laity.

If we deliberately and intentionally call people to a synodal conversion by summon-

ing them to it and drawing them into dialogue, witness, worship and the retrieval of past experiences of co-responsibility, then by God's grace, people will begin to claim their responsibility to carry the mission forward. Eventually, a critical mass of convinced believers will emerge: people who take ownership and responsibility for the mission. As that happens, a larger collective conversion will begin to take hold in the community of believers.

At that point, to be a Catholic simply will mean to be in communion with each other and to be co-responsible for the mission by way of participation. In that moment, the synodal Church will have emerged. — **By Fr Louis J. Cameli, America**

• *Fr Louis J. Cameli, a priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago, is Cardinal Blase J. Cupich's delegate for formation and mission.*

An ongoing misunderstanding

between the Bishop of Rome and his priests

Inside the *aula magna* or great hall of the Pontifical Lateran University, a massive mosaic adorns the wall. It is an image, created in 1937 at the Vatican's workshop of mosaic craftsmen, of Jesus sitting on a cathedra with a raised right hand. Over the years, generations of students have passed before this figure of "Christ the Teacher," highly symbolic of this esteemed centre of Catholic education in Rome known as "the Pope's university".

But during a day-long gathering here in March 2023, the atmosphere was not one of contemplation. Rather, it was a mixture of discontent and misunderstanding. Behind closed doors of the amphitheatre, the priests of Rome were engaged in heated discussions with Cardinal Angelo de Donatis, the Pope's vicar, over the new "constitution" of their diocese. This fundamental legal text, which had been published two months earlier, significantly redefined the responsibilities and functioning of the Catholic Church in the Italian capital.

"One of our priests has said, 'The Pope always stresses that he is the bishop of Rome and he signs his texts from the Lateran Basilica, but he never comes here. He never visits the seminary'," complained another priest during the gathering.

This straightforward criticism and the ap-

plause it elicited from the others in the *aula magna* epitomised the misunderstandings that have grown over the past ten years between the Roman clergy and their bishop, Pope Francis.

John-Paul II: a model Bishop of Rome

There are about 810 ordained priests who serve the 332 parishes of Rome. And their relationship with Francis had started well — especially since he spontaneously presented himself on the evening he was elected (March 13, 2013) as the Bishop of Rome. Immediately, many Roman pastors thought of another man in white, John Paul II, who has remained for many a model bishop of Rome.

"During his pontificate, he visited all the parishes of Rome," recalled a priest from the Italian capital. "He routinely invited the priests of the church he was going to visit for lunch."

Francis has never done this.

"The priests of Rome feel abandoned by their bishop. They feel unloved and misunderstood," summarises a source in the Italian capital, corroborating many testimonies gathered from the Roman clergy.

"He doesn't come to the field. And when he writes to us, it's always to criticise some-

thing..." lamented another priest.

This was evident in a letter Francis sent to all the clergy of Rome on August 5 last year, a missive that caused incomprehension among most of them. While he said "thank you" to them for their "witness," their "service," the "hidden good" they do, and the "forgiveness and consolation" they bring, there was another part of the letter that most captured their attention. The Pope urged them to make a profound examination of conscience.

"God asks us to go all the way in the fight against spiritual worldliness," he said. When clericalism is at work, he continued, one "focuses on the 'I': one's own sustenance, one's own needs, the praise received for oneself instead of for the glory of God".

Lack of trust among the ranks of the Roman clergy

Some also criticised the Pope, despite his push towards greater "synodality," for taking authoritative control of the diocese's affairs, establishing financial oversight bodies, and appointing individuals from outside Rome to key posts. His effort to reform the diocese has been, to say the least, poorly received.

"There is a lack of trust," pointed out one of the priests. Others complained about the growing rift between Francis and Cardinal

de Donatis, the "vicar" who's charged with overseeing the operational management of the diocese. The Pope's recent reform of the diocesan constitution effectively stripped the office of cardinal-vicar of some of its authority and place it in the hands of the vice-regent.

"We don't really understand who does what and whom to address," a priest lamented.

The Pope embarked on a tour of Roman parishes this past autumn, and one wonders if it's because he did so in response to the growing criticism from his priests. On September 28, he visited a church in the western suburbs of Rome, followed by another in the east in November, and a third just before Christmas.

On each occasion, he had private, closed-door discussions with the priests of all the parishes in the deanery. But Cardinal de Donatis was not invited to any of them. A priest who participated in one of these gatherings said Francis told the clerics they could ask him anything they wanted. The private dialogue continued on January 13 at St John Lateran, the Pope's cathedral. And this time all the priests were invited, including the cardinal-vicar. — **By Loup Besmond de Senneville, LCI** ([https:// international.la-croix.com/](https://international.la-croix.com/))

A year lost for Sudan's children

Sudan's children have lost almost an entire year of their lives. Fighting that broke out in April 2023 is taking a toll on each and every person and, as usual, it is the children who are suffering most.

Osman Abdelkarim, Head of Child Protection and Operations for Save the Children in Sudan, describes the horrifying reality on the ground in his northeast African country.

"Actually, the situation is even more complicated than you could imagine," he warns, explaining that Sudan was in need of humanitarian assistance even before the conflict broke out on April 15, 2023.

Now, over six million Sudanese are suffering from displacement, which has led to desperation.

Women and children

Women and children, Abdelkarim says, are the two most vulnerable groups. He notes that children "do not understand what is happening," whereas women are often victims of sexual violence as they flee.

Unfortunately, as Abdelkarim explains, there is no safe place to run. "The people are displaced from Khartoum to Yezira, and then again to other locations, and this makes some people decide just to go back home."

They feel like no place is safe, accept the situation and go back home, where they witness and are exposed to endless violence.

Endless violence

The conflict in Sudan, stemming from events on April 15, has led to the exodus of millions of people from the capital, Khartoum, and various regions across the country.

Abdelkarim explains that the conflict between Sudanese Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has expanded to key areas, including Al Jazirah State, West Darfur, South Darfur, East Darfur, Central Darfur, North Darfur, and the three states of Kordofan.

While the government retains control over certain areas, such as the east and south, the



Sudan refugees in undisplaced home. (UNHCR photo/Andrew McConnel)

RSF controls the west up to Khartoum.

This situation has severely impacted services and access to assistance, with the conflict persisting for nearly eight months without a clear resolution in sight. In this time, nearly 1,800 civilians have been killed and 6,000 injured, including children.

Services

Children have seen their entire lives disrupted by the conflict. "Schools are not operational," says Abdelkarim, and "there is no access to services."

Whereas before systems were in place to enable children to attend school, now 6.9 million children are not attending school.

Children are seeing the violence with their own eyes, warns Abdelkarim, and in return, "adolescents have decided to join the calls to defend the country."

He explains that the children join in the fighting. "This way they not only see the violence, but they experience it; they become

it," says Abdelkarim, emphasising the brutal effect this can have on a child's future.

"They cannot be objective," says Abdelkarim. "They are pushed by the feeling of revenge," and this only complicates things for them in the future.

Whether they are witnessing violence or practising it, Abdelkarim warns, "reintegration will be even more difficult later."

The silence of the Western world

So why has the Western media been almost silent about the war? Abdelkarim explains that, on the one hand, there is more documentation concerning conflicts in other countries.

"In Sudan, it's not easy to find the documentation and to verify the news coming out of the country," he says.

On the other hand, Abdelkarim continues, the news is sometimes "more focused on some conflicts than others," and he admits, "I do not know why."

Fleeing the violence

But this violence affects everyone. As human rights are violated, countless numbers of people are fleeing the violence, and without the help of the international community, many are undertaking perilous journeys to safer neighbouring countries.

"People are starting to cross borders to different countries and even to different continents," says Abdelkarim. "They're being smuggled and trafficked; they're finding any way to enter the various countries. Half a million people have fled to neighbouring countries."

Here, too, as they migrate to new countries, humanitarian assistance is needed to ensure the safety and security of all people, including those lacking access to services in Sudan.

In Sudan, the list is endless. "Health, sanitation, food, water, hygiene" — everyone is suffering, and as time is wasted discussing the situation with donors, the situation worsens, "and malnutrition rises," says Abdelkarim.

Over 500,000 children were already suffering severe acute malnutrition before the fighting broke out. Thirty-six children suffering from malnutrition are being looked after by Save the Children health workers. Before the conflict broke out there were only 12, and as the numbers have risen drastically since April, they are expected to continue to rise, warns Abdelkarim.

An appeal for peace

Abdelkarim's request is therefore simple: "We need food."

He concludes with a heartfelt appeal to the international community. 13.6 million children in Sudan now need humanitarian support.

"I ask for more push for commitment from the parties to end the conflict," says Abdelkarim, adding that we need this more than ever "so that the people of Sudan can finally rest." — **By Francesca Merlo, Vatican News**

For Glory and for Beauty

150-year-old vestment manufacturer driven by a passion for perfection



*The unsurpassed quality is evident.
(NCR Photo/Watts & Co.)*

Cecilia Rexworthy's unexpected journey to the upper echelons of ecclesiastical couture began with a few basic keywords typed into a Google search: nice white silk fabric church.

This was five years ago, when the Catholic mom of four, a former book editor living on the outskirts of London, was making a switch to a new career as a needleworker and needed special material for some embroidery work she was doing for her parish.

The search results led her to 7 Tufton Street, London, the unassuming storefront of Watts & Co., a church vestment manufacturer tucked away in the shadow of Westminster Abbey.

Its front door, Rexworthy discovered, was a portal to a bygone age of English craftsmanship. Inside, she found seamstresses and embroiderers creating some of the most exquisite handmade chasubles, copes, stoles and altar linens she'd ever seen.

Rexworthy says it was like wandering into Aladdin's cave or stumbling upon a hobbit hole.

"It's like, 'Wow, these people actually exist. And it's great; it's beautiful,'" recalled Rexworthy, who wound up getting hired by Watts and becoming one of those people herself.

"I'm just amazed that not more people knew about it," she said, "and I'm still slightly amazed that not everyone knows about it now."

There are a lot of amazing things about Watts & Co., a very high-end but rather low-profile clothing and furnishing firm whose exacting standards have drawn a loyal following of both Catholic and Anglican clients — including the British royal family — for an astonishing 150 years. (The company provided the vestments for Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887 and, more recently, Prince William and Kate Middleton's wedding, among other royal commissions.)

Now under fifth-generation ownership, Watts is the ecclesiastical equivalent of a luxury European fashion house. In fact, the company's fabrics come from the same English mill that makes Hermès' ties.

"They're the absolute best," Watts CEO Robert Hoare, 42, said of the company's long-standing supplier. "All the threads are pre-dyed for us in the same way as they have been for generations."

That a company like this still exists after so many years is extraordinary in itself. It hasn't been easy: In just the six years since Hoare took the helm, Watts has staved off bankruptcy and rebounded from a devastating flood that nearly wiped out its inventory. Yet today the business is booming, driven in large part by a surge in interest, primarily in the US, in the traditional Latin Mass and efforts to enhance the Novus Ordo liturgy through a renewed focus on beauty and reverence.

"There is a massive move in the Catholic Church towards beauty and quality vestments," said Hoare, whose family has been Catholic since his forbear, architect George Gilbert Scott Jr, converted from Anglicanism in the 1880s through his friendship with Cardinal (now St) John Henry Newman.

Dreaded Annual Visit

As a boy, Hoare used to dread his annual visit to the Watts workroom to be fitted for his school uniform. Even bishops found the place intimidating, he says.

Now, he said, "It's just a totally different vibe."

Under Hoare's leadership (his sister runs a separate company, Watts 1874, that makes luxury wallpaper and fabrics that have been featured in five-star hotels, James Bond movies and the television drama *Downton Abbey*) the company has grown from eight employees to 34.

Most of these workers are English craftspeople in their 20s and 30s who were trained at Central St Martins, a top design and art college in London, and the Royal School of Needle-

work at Hampton Court Palace, one of Henry VIII's residences, in southwest London. The latter school is where Cecilia Rexworthy "got the bug" in a beginner embroidery class and went on to complete a rigorous four-year certification programme. "We are more like a heritage brand that behaves like a start-up," Hoare said. The workroom is bursting with fresh ideas, client consultations are done via Zoom, and designs are tweaked using 3D software. But the attention to detail and craftsmanship remains unchanged.

"We're the last company around that does what we do, and so it's very important that I conserve this for the next generation," Hoare emphasised.

Pursuing 'Aesthetic Perfection'

Yet another surprising fact about Watts is that no one by that name has ever had a stake in the company.

The firm was founded in 1874 by architects George Frederick Bodley, Thomas Garner, and Hoare's ancestor George Gilbert Scott Jr, Gothic Revivalists who designed some of the country's most notable cathedrals and grand homes of their day. (It's possible they chose the name as an inside joke, as in, "Watts in a name, anyway?") Watts was the fruit of the trio's "passion for total aesthetic perfection," as the company describes it, which extended to the interiors of their buildings. The company became known for producing the very best textiles, furnishings, metalwork and liturgical vestments at its original workshop on Baker Street, a short carriage ride from the fictional residence of Sherlock Holmes.

After World War II, however, Watts was nearly done in by a cultural shift toward utilitarianism, brutalist architecture and all things modern. In the wake of Vatican II, Catholic parishes and seminaries burned heaps of beautiful old vestments, ushering in an era of "beige polyester" liturgical garb, as Rexworthy phrases it.

"It was a bit of a tragedy, design-wise," she said.

Hoare credits his late grandmother Elizabeth Hoare, who took over as the firm's director in the 1950s, with keeping the business afloat.

Not one to go down without a fight, she gathered up discarded vestments from all over England to create the largest collection of church embroidery in the UK now housed at the Elizabeth Hoare Gallery inside Liverpool Cathedral, which was designed by her uncle, Giles Gilbert Scott, who, amazingly enough, also came up with the design for England's iconic red telephone boxes. Elizabeth also charmed the local authorities into providing Watts with its current space on Tufton Street rent-free until the company could get back on its feet.

True Grace

If there was anything Robert Hoare was sure of as a young man, it was that he had no desire whatsoever to take over the sinking family business.

A talented chef, he might have pursued a culinary career if his father hadn't talked him into working for Watts for a year. By the end of that stint, his competitive fires stoked, he resolved to make a go of it.

The way forward, Hoare reasoned, wasn't to economise with cheaper materials and outsource manufacturing to Asia. It was to go in the exact opposite direction, doubling down on the pursuit of aesthetic perfection that was Watts' hallmark from the start.

"We're not selling widgets; we're supplying the absolute best. And that's why people come to us. We often get customers coming back in 30, 40, 50 years or even longer, or sometimes with vestments which are over 100 years old, and they want us to restore them. This is what we want," Hoare said.

"We're not looking to make a quick buck today. We're looking for this to be around for the next hundred years," he said.

"It's a totally different mindset."

Setting the bar so high translates into higher prices. Watts' bespoke vestments can cost thousands of dollars, with the most elaborate chasubles priced at \$10,000 or more.

That may sound extravagant to some, but providing vestments of such high quality is rooted in the Old Testament tradition of clothing priests in the finest garments as a means to honour God. "And thou shalt make a holy vesture for Aaron thy brother," Exodus 28:2 says, "for glory and for beauty."

One of the company's major clients, St Patrick's Seminary in Menlo Park, California, recently used a \$250,000 donation to purchase more than 150 new vestments from Watts for that same reason.

St Patrick's president-rector, Fr Mark Doherty, said his 70-plus seminarians are taught that like beautiful architecture or liturgical music, a priest's attire can help cast our gaze heavenward, bearing an imprint of the Creator.

The challenge of that countercultural approach is not to go too far in the other direction, "where the created thing becomes the whole thing, the everything," he said.

Watts manages to strike that balance masterfully, he added. "They understand that true class, true grace, is generally understated. It never overshoots."

This is the sort of culture Cecilia Rexworthy encountered the day of her hobbit-hole discovery. She was struck especially by her visit to the finishing room, where she watched workers carefully examining every piece of fabric with a magnifying glass to flag any flaws.

Now working part time as a researcher for Watts, scouring through archives for new (old) design ideas, Rexworthy said that 75 per cent of what goes into making a garment of exceptional quality are small details that few people will ever notice.

"It's all what's gone on beforehand, or in the seams or in the lining; all that work is hidden," she said.

"It's a bit like the medieval cathedrals," she pointed out. "All that skill and all that beauty and all that work, you can't see half of it because it's on top of the roof and no one's going to see it. But they did it anyway. And that's just beautiful. That's worthwhile." — **By Shannon Mullen, *Register***



Watts employee Cecilia Rexworthy embroiders with gold thread. (NCR Photo/Courtesy of Watts & Co.)



**SUNDAY
OBSERVER**

Anil Netto

The Kingdom of God vs evangelical Christian Zionism

In 1904, a little-known meeting took place. Theodore Herzl, the secular Jewish founder of Zionism, met Pope Pius X in an attempt to seek the latter's support for the formation of a secular Jewish homeland in Palestine.

Pius X responded: "We cannot prevent the Jews from going to Jerusalem — but we could never sanction it. The soil of Jerusalem, if it was not always sacred, has been sanctified by the life of Jesus Christ. As the head of the Church, I cannot tell you anything different."

Back then, the Church was concerned about access to the sacred sites in the holy land and securing the rights of Christians in Palestine. Under Ottoman rule, the Church appeared comfortable with the arrangements for access and control of the holy sites. They worried that a Jewish state would erode their customary rights.

Not surprisingly, ahead and after the formation of the State of Israel in 1948, the Church advocated the internationalisation of Jerusalem. Even today, the Church calls for a "special status" for the city that has special historical significance for three major faiths.

Also, Jews had suffered genocide in the Holocaust and many viewed their aspiration for a homeland sympathetically.

Unfortunately, when the State of Israel was formed in 1948 on 56 per cent of the land of Palestine (despite the Palestinian Arab population numbering two-thirds of the population), it resulted in the Nakba — The Catastrophe. Zionist forces destroyed 530 villages and expelled 750,000 inhabitants from their homes and captured 78 per cent of historic Palestine.

Fast forward to 2014. When Pope Francis visited Bethlehem in Palestine territory, he angered many in Israel by praying before the

separation wall that Israel erected.

But the Bishop of Rome also laid a wreath on the tomb of Herzl in trying to tread a middle path between the two nations. (This was a customary practice among many leaders visiting Israel.)

Today, Francis and the Church maintain their call for a two-state solution — though that will be difficult to achieve given the many illegal Israeli settlements on Palestinian territory.

The problem now is that too many Christians — even those in the mainstream churches — have subscribed to the evangelical Christian Zionist view of Israel.

In fact, many evangelical Christian Zionists spend way too much time obsessing over the "End Times". This is when they believe Christians will be zapped up to the heavens in the Rapture, leaving behind other mortals to a period of great tribulation.

Zionist Christians see it as their calling to express unconditional support for Israel in the hope of hastening the Second Coming of Christ. This Christ is not the Prince of Peace as we know him. Instead, he has morphed into some kind of violent warrior king who is supposed to lead the armies of the good guys against the bad guys. This would supposedly then usher in a 1,000-year period of peace, centred on Jerusalem.

However, the late Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI maintained that "a theologically-understood acquisition of land (in the sense of new political messianism) was unacceptable...a strictly theologically-understood [Jewish] state — a Jewish faith-state that would view itself as the theological and political fulfilment of the promises — is unthinkable within history according to

Christian faith and contrary to the Christian understanding of the promises."

What this probably means is that Christians should not view the State of Israel through a messianic lens, as somehow heralding the End Times — even if we may regard it as the "legitimate home of the Jewish people", which may have religious significance for Christians as an instance of "God's faithfulness to the people of Israel" (Ratzinger).

The Catholic Church has taken a cautious and moderate approach to the state of Israel. The Vatican finally recognised the state of Israel in 1993. This recognition was based more on the political reality on the ground and diplomatic considerations — rather than on theological grounds. It came after years of concern over control of sacred Christian sites and Christian and other minority rights.

The Vatican has also been concerned about Palestinian rights, culminating in its recognition of the State of Palestine in 2013.

A clearer position of the Church's stand on the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories emerged in 2010. That was when Pope Benedict chaired a special synod of bishops on the Middle East after turmoil in that region, including the US War on Iraq and an uprising by the Palestinians against Israeli occupation (Second Intifada).

The final synod statement called for "the necessary legal steps to put an end to the occupation of the different Arab territories".

One sentence, couched in diplomatic language, jumped out of the text: "Recourse to theological and biblical positions which use the word of God to wrongly justify injustices is not acceptable."

This is tantamount to saying that Christians should not use the Bible to justify any injustice

and atrocity, let alone a genocide — just because it is committed by the State of Israel.

If anything, the Old Testament is replete with exhortations to the people of Israel to treat the strangers in their midst fairly and with justice.

While the Church *Catechism* teaches that the "Old Covenant [between God and the Jews] has never been revoked", Benedict believed the covenant is a dynamic reality involving a series of covenants (Abrahamic, Mosaic, etc) leading to a New Covenant that includes Christ as the pivotal point in history.

A covenant is not a one-way deal. God expects His people to act justly, to love mercifully and to walk humbly with Him (Micah 6:8).

Without cracking our heads too much, we really need to live up to the Kingdom values that Jesus outlined in the Beatitudes.

Christian Zionism's obsession with trying to analyse the formation of the State of Israel in 1948 in relation to the End Times is a serious distraction. It promotes a pessimistic view of the world and leaves Christians disempowered. It diverts our attention away from Jesus' kingdom on Earth and His call to us to be the salt and light of the world — right now, right here wherever we are.

If anything, what the Israeli government is doing today in Gaza — as outlined by South Africa in its charge of genocide at the International Court of Justice — shows just how far Israel has strayed from the call to act justly, to love mercifully and to walk humbly with God.

● Anil Netto is a freelance writer and activist based in Penang. He believes we are all called to build the kingdom of God in this world.



**A BLESSED
LIFE**

Tianne Ramona Pereira

Making a difference — one life, one day, one act at a time

It is staggering to acknowledge that over 1600 million individuals worldwide struggle to afford life's basic necessities such as food, shelter, clean water, minimal healthcare, and fundamental education. Shockingly, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) reveals that a disheartening 10 per cent of the global population — 828 million people — go to bed hungry every night. These statistics force us to confront the stark reality that there are individuals surviving daily in conditions unimaginable to those of us privileged enough to read this article.

As I sat researching poverty, my fingers tapped away on digital devices, swiftly accessing a wealth of information. Seated comfortably in a chair designed to support my posture, within the confines of a well-cooled room, a sudden wave of embarrassment washes over me. It's a sense of embarrassment directed both inwardly and outwardly, contemplating how we coexist in a world where our young children have access to technologically advanced tablets, iPhones, and gaming devices — luxuries that come with a hefty price tag, merely for entertainment. We effortlessly traverse borders in flights, engage in face-to-face discussions with individuals in different time zones, and enjoy the convenience of doorstep deliveries for all our needs with a simple click.

And yet, within the same global sphere,

there are people who lack even the most basic amenities. In this very moment, some may not possess a candle for light or access to clean water for essential activities like brushing their teeth. The stark contrast in our experiences prompts a profound question: How is it possible that such disparities persist in a world that has achieved remarkable advancements and conveniences for some but leaves others grappling with dire circumstances?

We mustn't overlook the fact that poverty extends beyond mere financial deprivation. It permeates various facets of society, contributing to a myriad of global issues and yielding countless repercussions. From hunger and malnutrition to limited access to education, poor healthcare, deficient social protection laws, social discrimination, injustice, inequality, and marginalisation, to political instability, heightened crime rates, human rights violations, mental health challenges, corruption, authoritarianism, and abuse — the cascade of consequences seems endless.

Determining culpability in this complex web is no easy task. Should we attribute it to a country's governance or its corrupt leadership? Are the individuals affected merely lacking initiative or a sense of entitlement? Could the aftermath of war be casting a prolonged shadow on disrupted livelihoods? A recent article I read explained how the COVID-19 pandemic dealt a severe economic blow to Malaysia, undoing the strides made in poverty eradication. While many are recovering post-pandemic, the most

vulnerable and marginalised communities, already grappling with adversity, find themselves disproportionately affected.

Instead of delving into the reasons behind someone's suffering, perhaps the greater responsibility lies in identifying how I can contribute to alleviating their plight.

As Christians, where do we commence in the battle against poverty? While the monumental task of eliminating global poverty may seem daunting, the words of St Teresa of Calcutta echo in my mind: "Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love." Drawing inspiration from the principles of multi-level marketing, I envision a practical approach to making a difference—one life at a time, one day at a time, one act at a time. Picture the transformative impact if each person extended a helping hand to just one other individual — the collective force of compassion could reshape the world!

My role model, is and always has been, my dad. As long as I can remember he has always reached out to those in need. In fact, when he saw a Rohingya family who needed food assistance, he got a few friends together and went on the first mission offering rice bags to 70 families. Today, seven years later, friends, family, neighbours (of all races and religions) are part of the mission known as Bread & Roses, giving aid to almost 400 refugee and urban poor families every month. It began with recognising the need and then doing something about it!

I am sure there are many other unsung heroes out there, reaching out and doing the extraordinary. I truly believe each and every one of us has a role to play, whether we are rich, poor, young, old, abled or not — this is a task we must take on together. I understand fighting poverty takes time. The process of eliminating poverty is not simple, it takes time to empower and facilitate those affected to become performers in their own development. But with that said, we can and must be instrumental!

I, for one, think money alone is not enough! Why? Because it takes real heart, dedication, patience and a whole lot of determination to do the ground work, to get resources and channel them out. To some it may be easier to write out a RM5000 donation than to give five days of service — reemphasising my point that we all have a part to play. Some of us donate, some of us volunteer, but all of us should keep ourselves in the know, create awareness, speak up, challenge ideas and assumptions and pray! This is not a job for someone else to take on, it is a job for you and I.

Tianne Ramona Pereira identifies first as a Catholic daughter, sister, wife and mother. From years in the media industry, she eventually started and continues to run her own businesses while teaching part-time. She has been actively serving in church for as far back as she can remember and is involved in various charities.



Fr Ron Rolheiser

The law of gravity and the Holy Spirit

A sound theology and a sound science will both recognise that the law of gravity and the Holy Spirit are one in the same principle. There isn't a different spirit undergirding the physical than the spiritual. There's one spirit that's speaking through both the law of gravity and the Sermon on the Mount.

If we recognised that the same Spirit is present in everything - in physical creation, in love, in beauty, in human creativity, and in human morality, we could hold more things together in a fruitful tension rather than putting them in opposition and having the different gifts of God's Spirit fight each other. What does this mean?

We have too many unhealthy dichotomies in our lives. Too often we find ourselves choosing between things that should not be in opposition to each other and are in the unhappy position of having to pick between two things which are both, in themselves, good. We live in a world in which, too often, the spiritual is set against the physical, morality is set against creativity, wisdom is set against education, commitment is set against sex, conscience is set against pleasure, and personal fidelity is set against creative and professional success.

Obviously, there's something wrong here. If one force, God's Spirit, is the single

source that animates all these things, then clearly, we should not be in a position of having to choose between them. Ideally, we should be choosing both because the one, same Spirit undergirds both.

Is this true? Is the Holy Spirit both the source of gravity and the source of love? Yes. At least if the Scriptures are to be believed. They tell us that the Holy Spirit is both a physical and a spiritual force, the source of all physicality and of all spirituality all at the same time.

We first meet the person of the Holy Spirit in the opening line of the Bible: In the beginning there was a formless void and the Spirit of God hovered over the chaos. In the early chapters of the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit is presented as a physical force, a wind that comes from the very mouth of God and not only shapes and orders physical creation but is also the energy that lies at the base of everything, animate and inanimate alike: Take away your breath, and everything returns to dust.

The ancients believed there was a soul in everything and that soul, God's breath, held everything together and gave it meaning. They believed this even though they did not understand, as we do today, the workings of the infra-atomic world: how the tiniest particles and energy waves already

possess erotic electrical charges, how hydrogen seeks out oxygen, and how, at the most elemental level of physical reality, energies are already attracting and repelling each other just as people do. They could not explain these things scientifically as we can, but they recognised, just as we do, that there is already some form of "love" inside all things, however inanimate. They attributed all of this to God's breath, a wind that comes from God's mouth and ultimately animates rocks, water, animals, and human beings.

They understood that the same breath that animates and orders physical creation is also the source of all wisdom, harmony, peace, creativity, morality, and fidelity. God's breath was understood to be as moral as it is physical, as unifying as it is creative, and as wise as it is daring. For them, the breath of God was one force and it did not contradict itself. The physical and the spiritual world were not set against each other. One Spirit was understood to be the source of both.

We need to understand things in the same way. We need to let the Holy Spirit, in all its fullness, animate our lives. What this means, concretely, is that we must not let ourselves be energised and driven too much by one part of the Spirit to the detriment of other parts of that same Spirit.

Thus, there shouldn't be creativity in

the absence of morality, education in the absence of wisdom, sex in the absence of commitment, pleasure in the absence of conscience, and artistic or professional achievement in the absence of personal fidelity. Not least, there shouldn't be a good life for some in the absence of justice for everyone. Conversely, however, we need to be suspicious of ourselves when we are moral but not creative, when our wisdom fears critical education, when our spirituality has a problem with pleasure, and when our personal fidelity is over-defensive in the face of art and achievement. One Spirit is the author of all of these. Hence, we must be equally sensitive to each of them. Someone once quipped that a heresy is something that is nine-tenths true. That's our problem with the Holy Spirit. We're forever into partial truth when we don't allow for a connection between the law of gravity and the Sermon on the Mount

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Why do I pray?

Because I'm going to marry Christ

I was going from one room to another in my house when the question "Why do I pray?" came to my mind without any connection to what I was doing or what I was thinking.

Amazingly, the answer appeared as automatically and spontaneously as the question: "Because I am going to marry Christ."

It would never have occurred to me to give that answer. I had never thought of my relationship with Christ, neither in this world, nor in heaven, as a marital union, but those thoughts, as unexpected as they were spontaneous, led me to a whole new reflection.

The first thing I thought, now reflectively, was that at the end of the day, that is probably the union we will have with the Lord in eternal life; and it led me to consider what my prayer is like and why that idea could come to me.

I realised that prayer is indeed a communication with those who love me and whom I want to love, and that I spend a lot of time trying to get to know them, either through reading the Bible, especially the Gospel, or in contemplative prayer.

Isn't that what lovers do: contemplate themselves, seeking to know and encompass everything about the loved one?

I searched the Bible for the verses that refer to the relationship with the Lord as a spousal relationship, finding beautiful words, full of strength in Revelation 19, 7-9 and 21, 1-5.

Also, in Isaiah 62.5 — "As a young man marries a maiden, so your builders marry you. 'As a husband rejoices with his wife, so your God rejoices with you,' and 2 Corinthians 2 — "I am jealous of you, the jealousy of God, because I have betrothed you to one husband, to present you to Christ as a chaste virgin."

All these readings made me understand that the one who marries the Lord is the Church. But what is the Church, if not all the baptised, from the Pope to the smallest of babies who have just received the Holy Spirit? The baptised are members of the Church, each of us must marry the Lord to form the wedding.

I realised that, in reality, almost the entire Bible can be read in terms of conjugal love. The Father gives His Son as husband to humanity, and if that were not enough, He also gives us His love, the Holy Spirit, so that we can correspond to Him. This is just so awesome!

I continued to reflect on my prayer and realised how self-centred it often is. I realised that I am like the boyfriend who, as soon as he has a moment with his beloved, dedicates himself to talking to her only about what he

has done in his day, what has gone wrong, the plans he has and the worries that invade him, but he barely listens to his beloved nor does he seek to reciprocate her, just to be heard.

For months already, on one occasion, when I had just returned after being unfaithful to the Lord (when I returned from confessing, I mean), I was thinking about how it was possible that the Lord would always forgive me. I understood that Christ is like an abused wife, that despite my infidelities and my mistreatment, He does not stop loving me and is always waiting for my repentance. He never denies me forgiveness, He always welcomes me back into His arms. Furthermore, I understood that like the wife of the drunk who time and again comes home in a deplorable state, she does not suffer so much from the contempt and

mistreatment to which I subject her, but from the deplorable state to which she abandons me. And her happiness when I return is not because of Him, as if He needed my love, but because of seeing myself restored and able to welcome His love.

I understood then that Jesus was really in love with me, and logically with everyone; that the best way to understand what He feels for any of us is this: "He is madly in love", like a teenager, only He does not idealise anyone, quite the contrary, He knows us fully and hence the perfection of His love, His love is total, without limits in the face of our weaknesses.

I kept thinking about my prayer and realised that, like any boyfriend, I also spend a lot of time talking to His Mother, my Mother. Knowing the beloved's mother is necessary to be able to get to know her in her deepest intimacy. And I also spend time talking (and listening) to those who have been His friends, the Apostles, without a doubt, and His disciples, but also the friends He has had throughout the centuries, the saints. They talk to me about how they have related to Jesus and, consequently, about what He is like, and they, who have already reached the goal, the wedding with the loved one, help me, guide me on the path to Him.

But it is He who speaks to me the most. I pray to hear Him. Every minute in front of Him in the tabernacle, or better yet, face to face, when He is exposed in the monstrance. Each Eucharist is the wedding dinner, as if it were the "rehearsal" for the definitive banquet. At every Mass, my beloved gives Himself to me. How I would like to receive Him as He wants me to!!

Why do I pray? Because I am going to marry Christ. Amen. — **By Nacho Calderón Castro, Exaudi**



(Pixabay/KLAU2018)

Little Catholics' Corner

Word Search

The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him." (Mark 1:27)



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

OBEY IMPURE QUIET
SHOOK SPREAD COME
SABBATH DESTROY NEWS
JESUS AUTHORITY SPIRIT
TEACH AMAZED PEOPLE

Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. (Mark 1: 26)

Can you find EIGHT differences between the two images below?



Hello children,

Jesus began His earthly ministry by teaching people in the church areas. Some were sceptical about who He was, but many people noticed how He spoke like someone who knew what He was talking about.

As Jesus taught, there was someone who had an evil spirit inside him.

But the demonic spirit recognised that Jesus was God's son. In fact, it cried out from within the man, and was probably pretty terrified when it realised who Jesus was and that it was no match for the Messiah.

Jesus rebuked the evil spirit saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!"

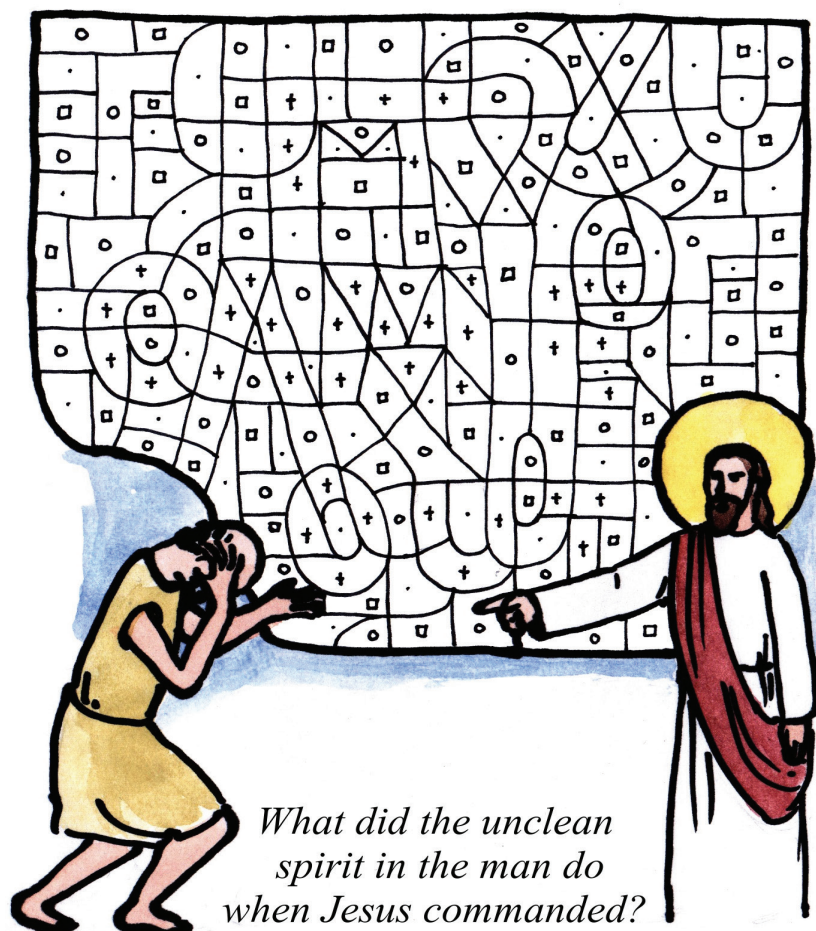
Wow, all it took was a few words, and this menacing evil spirit came right out!

The people at the scene recognised that Jesus had real authority. That He had done something others hadn't been able to do!

Children, Jesus had power over everything: evil spirits, sickness, death, even the weather! This was because He truly was God.

Love
Aunty Eliz

PRESENTATION OF THE LORD
FEBRUARY 2, 2024



What did the unclean spirit in the man do when Jesus commanded?

Colour in only the spaces that have crosses to find out what it did.



Can you help Mary and Joseph find the way through Jerusalem to present Baby Jesus in the Temple?

YOUTH

January 28, 2024

Pope to young people: BE RESTLESS, TAKE RISKS

VATICAN: Stay restless, take risks, and never lose your sense of wonder.

That was Pope Francis' advice to participants in a meeting organised by the Toniolo Young Professional Association recently.

Members of the Italian organisation — who the Pope thanked for their “service and commitment” — have been assisting the Holy See's work with the United Nations.

Pope Francis began his address by warning against “what some call ‘short thought’ (pensiero breve)”.

‘Short thought’, he said, is “made up of a few characters, and burns quickly; a thought that does not look upwards and ahead, but at the here and now ... a thought that does not look back at history.”

“Faced with the complexity of life and the world,” the Pope stressed, “this short

thought leads to generalisation and criticism, to simplification and the distortion of reality, in the pursuit of one's own immediate interests instead of the good of others and the future of all.”

How can ‘short thought’ be resisted? Pope Francis suggested three strategies: restlessness, risk, and amazement.

“Do you dream?” Pope Francis asked the young people. “Do you have restlessness in your thoughts, in your hearts? Are you restless or are you ‘retired’ young people already? Do not forget: restless dreaming.”

He also encouraged them to “not be afraid to risk”.

“Please risk, risk” the Pope urged. “If you do not risk, who will?”

Finally, he also recommended “astonishment” as an antidote to ‘short thought’.

“Think about it,” he suggested: “Have I lost the capacity to be amazed?”

“When a young person loses the capacity to be amazed, loses astonishment, they are already retired.”

The Pope also stressed that “Life ought to be given away, not managed.”

“A quest that fascinates you, a prayer from the heart, an enquiry that shakes you, a page that you give to others, a dream to be realised, a gesture of love for those who cannot reciprocate...”

This is the style with which God made the world, the style of gratuitousness, which gets you out of the logic of ‘I do in order to have’ and ‘I work to earn’.”

— By Joseph Tulloch, *Vatican News*



(World Youth Day facebook)

Arise! The Youthful Heart

KUALA LUMPUR: The Catholic Youth Rally (for Mandarin-speaking youth) Arise! The Youthful Heart was successfully held at the Malaysia Bible Seminary (MBS), Kundang, Rawang, last month.

This three-day two-night event attracted about 280 young people from the various dioceses in Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore, with the objective of “renewal, reflection, action and faith”. This event was originally scheduled to be held at the end of December 2020 but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was postponed to 2023.

Archbishop Julian Leow, Archbishop Wojciech Zaluski, Apostolic Nuncio to Malaysia and Timor-Leste, together with Fr Andrew Wong (CDD) - Spiritual Director of Youth Ministry, Fr. Augustine Lee - Ecclesiastical Assistant to Archdiocesan Chinese Language Apostolate Committee (ACLAC), F. Joseph Heng, Fr John Baptist Yoew, Fr. Lawrence Ng (CDD), Fr George



Ho (OCD), and Fr Vincent Thomas celebrated the opening Mass.

Also present were Sr Theresa Chew (FDCC), Bro Joseph Lim (CDD), Bro Arshvin, Bro Anthony Robert, Bro Robert, Bro Vincent, Committee representative from The Peninsular Malaysia-Singapore Chinese Apostolate Commission (PMSAC), and ACLAC, parents and sponsors.

During Archbishop Julian's homily, he said that Catholic youth will face many

challenges, and encouraged our youth to strengthen and deepen their faith by spending time with God, as well as establish an intimate relationship with the Lord so that they can face various situations in today's society. He said: “The Youth are not the leaders of tomorrow, but today!” He also called on young people to participate and be aware, and to be interested in the people and things around them. Not only should you focus on your studies, but you should also pay

attention to current social issues affecting the world, such as climate change.

Archbishop Julian also said that young people should follow the theme *Arise! The Youthful Heart* and become disciples and followers of the Lord. He advised them to spend time in building a relationship with God: praying, meditating and reading the Bible. We must listen to and follow the Church's position and teachings, and let the Church guide us, opening our hearts, listening to and following the Lord's footsteps and truth, and moving towards the right path!

Archbishop Wojciech also expressed special thanks to the organising committee for the invitation. This is his first time participating in youth activities. He also brought the blessing from Pope Francis to the participants. He was glad to see so many youth represented in this rally. In the West, whether in Western Europe or Eastern Europe, many young people have left the Church. He said that he would definitely write report and submit this to the Pope. He also shared a quote from a thinker: “As long as we put God first, everything in the world will be smooth.”



THE SCANDAL OF THE YOUNGEST MIGRANT

who now sets an example in Spain

In the narrow streets of the centre of Cadiz, Spain, there is a face that is becoming increasingly familiar, as he often accompanies migrants arriving, especially from Africa. It is the face of the social worker Mohamed El Harrak, a young professional of Moroccan origin who works for the Fundación Centro Tierra de Todos and who knows well the sufferings of migration, having experienced them himself.

Mohamed was only nine years old when his father ended up in prison, leaving him, his mother, and his three older brothers in a state of abandonment in Ketama, a rural area in northern Morocco, Africa, where they lived in poverty. But that child had heard that the port of Tangier was not so far away and that from there, one could reach Spain, a kind of promised land where many Moroccans managed to build a future.

So, despite his young age, Mohamed did not hesitate. He ran away from home, and travelled 220 kilometres to reach that city. After wandering its streets for weeks, and after countless failed attempts, he took advantage of a red traffic light to climb onto a truck and hide in the spare wheel compartment. A few hours later, the vehicle embarked on a ship, and arrived at the Spanish port of Algeciras, where the police immediately discovered the little stowaway.

"It was a case that caused a scandal, because it was new that such a small child should arrive in the way I had. For

several days I went from one police station to another before being placed in a reception centre called El Cobre," recalls Mohamed. From that moment, he began a journey that, over the course of two years, took him to six different protection homes in various cities of the Spanish region of Andalusia. According

to official records, he is in fact the youngest unaccompanied minor to have arrived in Spain as a migrant without documents.

The affection of a community of nuns, the work of professionals, and the warm welcome of the community of a Salesian school changed Mohamed's life and facilitated his integration in Spain.

The longed-for stability

He himself admits that, being so young, he had no self-control and tended to flee the residences because he could not adapt to anything. Only when he arrived at the reception centre for minors Divina Infancia in Cadiz, run by the Servants of the Immaculate Child, did he find the longed-for stability. He was about to turn 12. There, he was welcomed by five nuns who, together with an interdisciplinary team of professionals, offered him appropriate support and managed to enrol him in a Salesian school, where a new world opened up for him, especially characterised by the welcome from his classmates and their families.

"My goal was to reach their same linguistic, cultural, and academic level and to follow their habits. I told myself: since I am here, I must integrate. I woke up and fell asleep in the library," says the young man, who made study and soccer his daily routine.

Mohamed was thus able to complete his school education and then obtained a diploma in assistance to people in situations of dependency and another in socio-cultural and tourist animation. But that was not enough. Thanks to a scholarship, he obtained a degree in social work at the University of Cadiz, a course of



The multidisciplinary team of the Fundación Centro Tierra de Todos in Cadiz responds to the needs of hundreds of migrants every year. For many of them, this organization is the first helping hand they find. (Giovanni Culmone/Global Solidarity Fund)



Almost 12 years after leaving his country, Mohamed returned to Morocco and was able to meet his two younger brothers, born during his absence. According to him, it is the most beautiful and powerful moment of his life.

study he followed while working forty hours a week. This allowed him to support himself and not lose the residence permit granted to him by the Spanish Government, because he was now of

age and had to take responsibility for himself as a migrant.

The most beautiful moment

Mohamed was 20 years old when he returned to Morocco for the first time to visit his family. He was already in telephone contact with his parents, who in the meantime had added two more children to the family. "It was the most emotional moment of my life, because I went there to meet them. I had never seen them, and I went to pick them up from school. I think it was the most beautiful moment of my life," says Mohamed excitedly.

But by then he had put down roots in Spain, where he returned to continue working in the social services field. Today, he is pursuing a master's degree in Mediation while working for the Fundación Tierra de Todos, an organization dependent on the Diocese of Cadiz and Ceuta, which is dedicated, among other projects, to the reception and promotion of migrants.

The director of the Migration Secretariat of this Diocese, Scalabrinian missionary Sante Zanetti, knows Mohamed's story well, as well as those of the thousands of migrants he has met in Europe and America during his religious life. For him, the greatest challenge of migra-

tion is

to help ensure that people are not forced to lose their identity and values, and that they learn to interact with the characteristics of the society that welcomes them.

"It is about uniting abilities, values, and projects to create that new humanity whose path is indicated to us by Jesus Christ. This union of forces, projects, and faith helps us build a better, more fraternal, and more humane world," says the priest.

Mohamed is involved intimately with this project. Because of his origin, language, experience, and acquired skills, he plays a fundamental role in the reception and guidance of those who arrive for the first time in Cadiz from Africa.

"My goal has always been to be an example for them. I tell them to stay calm, to be patient, to be responsible, because everything is achieved if you follow the right path," assures Mohamed.



At just 25 years old, Mohamed has accumulated life and work experience that allows him to respond assertively and effectively to the needs of migrants arriving today in southern Spain. (Giovanni Culmone/Global Solidarity Fund)

The child who fled Morocco now is 25 years old, and five months ago obtained Spanish nationality. This fact is highly appreciated by his colleagues because, in their opinion, he makes a great contribution to the country. — By Felipe Herrera-Espaliat – Cadiz, Spain, *Vatican News*



The affection of a community of nuns, the work of professionals, and the warm welcome of the community of a Salesian school changed Mohamed's life and facilitated his integration in Spain.

Teen's fundraising feat to save her childhood Catholic school

ILLINOIS: Seventeen-year-old high school senior Susan Lutzke may have successfully saved her childhood Catholic elementary school from closing after raising more than \$400,000 to address the institution's financial difficulties.

The principals of St Bede School in Ingleside, Illinois, announced on December 13, 2023, that if the money wasn't raised by Jan 26, the school could face closure. Loving her experience at St Bede, Lutzke immediately sprang into action.

"Honestly, I didn't really think about it that much," she told *CNA* in a Jan 5 interview. "We found out the night of Dec 13, and we were kind of sad about it. And then the next morning I made a GoFundMe in the car in the parking lot at my high school."

The crowdfunding campaign almost instantly began generating funds, with almost 900 donations ranging from \$10 to \$50,000.

When Lutzke spoke to *CNA* earlier this month, the funds were over \$300,000. She called the success "pretty crazy."

"I don't think I ever really expected it to get where it is," she added.

"I can't believe it," said Tina Lutzke, her mother. "We're so happy and grateful for the support that it's received."

In an updated statement on the GoFundMe, Susan Lutzke wrote on Sunday: "We're thrilled to announce that we have officially surpassed our initial goal of \$400,000 with 12 days left until the deadline."

"Our hearts are full, and we struggle to find the words to properly convey our grati-



Susan Lutzke, an alumna of St Bede School, has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars in less than one month for her former Catholic institution. (CNA photo/Tina Lutzke)

tude," she said.

She added that "33 days ago, we were completely overwhelmed with the daunting task of raising such a huge sum of money

in such a short period of time, especially over the holidays. However, we were bound and determined to give it our all." — By Joseph Bukuras, *CNA*

For enquiries, please contact:
Email: memoriam@herald.com.my
Tel: 03-2026 8291

MEMORIAM

In cherished memory of



54th Anniversary
Lily Agnes Loone
Born: 25-10-1903
Departed: 29-01-1970



49th Anniversary
Mark Loone
Born: 25-03-1903
Departed: 29-01-1975



33rd Anniversary
Helena Claire Loone
Born: 15-02-1928
Departed: 20-01-1991

Always beloved and dearly missed by
family and friends.

3rd Anniversary
In Ever Loving
Memory of my
beloved wife,
AMY PHILOMENA
ZUZARTEE
15.04.1953 - 26.01.2021



Dearly missed by husband
Vincent Shanmugan
and loved ones.

Everyone who calls on the
name of the Lord will be
saved. – Romans 10:13

23rd Anniversary
In Loving Memory of



Henry Pereira
Departed: 1-2-2001

*May the road rise up
to meet you, may the wind
be always at your back,
may warm rains
fall softly upon your fields,
and until we meet again, may
God hold you
in the palm of His hand.*

Deeply loved and missed by
wife Lucy Pereira,
children and all loved ones.

25th Anniversary
In Memory of



MARY BRIGGET NEE THOMAS

Born into this life: 20 February 1925
Born into eternal life: 31 January 1999

*.... and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
forever. (Psalm 23:6)*

Deeply missed and cherished by Loved Ones.

In Loving Memory of

7th Anniversary



Catherine Ho
Lai Koon
(19-3-1939 to 27-1-2017)

*You are missed but always loved,
You are gone but never forgotten,
We know your souls are at peace above,
In eternal joy in the Lord's kingdom in heaven.*

Deeply missed by your children, grandchildren,
siblings, relatives and friends.

3rd Anniversary



Joseph Fong
Meng Tao
(16-6-1933 to 3-2-2021)



1st Anniversary
In Loving Memory of

John Ignatius Dicom
(John Marius)

31st Jan 1937-29th Jan 2023

*"God is love, and he who abides in
love abides in God, and God abides in
him." – 1 John 4:16*

Deeply missed and always loved by
wife Edith, son Lionel,
daughter-in-law Tina,
granddaughters Kiera, Caitlin &
Willow, relatives & friends.

Mass will be offered for John on
29th Jan 2024 at 7am at the
Church of Our Mother of Perpetual
Help, Ipoh Garden, Ipoh.



15 JUNE 1933 - 28 JAN 2015

9th ANNIVERSARY

In Loving Memory of

THERESA
BALAKRISHNAN

*Dearly missed and fondly
remembered by
Husband, Children,
Grandchildren, Relatives,
Friends & Students.*

*"I will not forget you! See,
I have engraved you on the palms
of my hands" - Isaiah 49:15-16*



12th Anniversary
In Ever Loving Memory of
Weeratunga Paul Perera
Returned to the Lord on
1st Feb 2012

Dearly missed by
Daughters: Pamela & Pauline
Sons-in-law: Christopher & Jerome
Grandchildren: Glenn, Ashley,
Sara Jane, Sherrellyn
and loved ones.

18th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of our Beloved Mama



Rosa Pereira (Dass)
Called to rest:
28-01-2006

*Those we love
don't go away
They walk
beside us everyday
Unseen, unheard
but always near
Still loved, still missed,
and very dear.*

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

Always loved
and remembered by:
Children, sons-in-law,
daughters-in-law,
grandchildren,
great-grandchildren and
a host of relatives
and friends.



Gregory Lily Pereira

(retired teacher Fr Barre's Convent and
Ibrahim Secondary School, Sungai Petani)

09/09/1932 – 05/12/2023

*"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the
race, I have kept the faith"
2 Timothy 4:7*

Spouse of the late Vincent Gabriel Pereira
(former teacher St. Theresa's School, Sungai Petani).
Married 27/01/1960.

Daughter in law of the
late Thomas Vincent Pereira aka Vincent Saar
(former headmaster St. Michael's School, Alor Star)

Daughter of the late Gregory and Agnesia
Fernandez (Chavara, Kerala, India)

Mother of Dr Xavier Vincent Pereira and
Dr Emmanuel Joseph Pereira.

Mother-in-law of
Dr Sharuna Elizabeth Verghis

Godmother of Rita Morris, Molly Anne Morris
and Michael Raja, and many others.

Grandmother of Devansh Johan,
Monessa Anne, Martina Andrene, Marise Agnes.

Mourned by a host of relatives, friends,
Godchildren and ex students.

In Loving Memory of



CAMILO GOMES
23.12.1925 – 22.1.2016



JULIA GOMES
9.3.1929 - 27.10.2023

Close in our hearts you will stay.

Dearly missed by
children, grandchildren and great grandchildren



Love's Enduring Gift - Remembrance

4th YEAR IN LOVING
MEMORY OF OUR BELOVED

MR I. KULANDAISAMY

25.12.1938 -25.1.2020

*"I have fought the good fight,
I have finished the race,
I have kept the faith"
2 Timothy 4:7*

*Death leaves a heartache no one can heal, Your guidance and love leave
us a memory no one can steal. We lost someone we dearly love, but
gained an angel who watches closely over us.*

DEEPLY MISSED AND LOVINGLY REMEMBERED
BY YOUR BELOVED FAMILY.
IN OUR HEARTS FOREVER.

REST IN PEACE WITH CHRIST.

Divine Shepherdess procession in Venezuela draws 2.7 million

VENEZUELA: More than 2.7 million people gathered in the city of Barquisimeto in Lara state, Venezuela, on Sunday, January 14, to accompany the image of the Divine Shepherdess Virgin in a procession, reported state governor Adolfo Pereira in a post on X.

Pereira commented that there was a very positive atmosphere at the gathering, "where peace, calm, and the religiosity of the people reigned."

According to *catholic.net*, the devotion traces back to 1703 in Seville, Spain, when a Capuchin friar saw the Virgin Mary dressed as a shepherdess holding a shepherd's crook. She was surrounded by some sheep, but one that had strayed was pursued by a wolf, which the Archangel Michael dispatched with an arrow.

The friar commissioned a painting depicting what he saw and began to spread devotion to Our Lady under this avocation, which eventually was carried to Spanish America and to Venezuela in particular.

The image is taken to represent Mary's role in protecting the flock of her Son from the evil one. "Divine" is taken in the sense of "most excellent."

This year's procession began early with the traditional Divine Shepherdess Devotional Race. Approximately 44,000 runners ran the six-mile course, which went past the most iconic places in the city until reaching St. Rose Church, the starting point of the procession.

The image of the Virgin was processed more than four miles throughout the day, from St Rose Church to the metropolitan cathedral of Barquisimeto, where the archbishop emeritus of Coro, Mariano Parra, celebrated the Mass for the reception of the image.

"It's no coincidence that this procession has been held 166 times, and every [time] the number of people accompanying the Divine Shepherdess increases, thus becoming



Millions of people gathered in the streets of Barquisimeto in Lara state, Venezuela, to accompany the Divine Shepherdess in a Jan 14, 2024, procession. (CNA photo/Adolfo Pereira via Lara State Government)

one of the largest manifestations [of Marian devotion] in the world," Parra said in his homily.

The prelate said that God manifests to the Church in Venezuela — through the Divine Shepherdess — what His will is and invited all the faithful to make an effort to know and understand what God wants.

"Mary, under the invocation of the Divine Shepherdess, today asks us — as disciples of her Son — to learn from her: to live only for Christ and at His service. This is our reason for being," he said.

The archbishop emeritus concluded by asking the Divine Shepherdess "to lead us to her Son, Jesus Christ, and help us to be faithful, to go around the world sowing love, justice, and peace." — **By Andrés Henríquez, CNA**

Venezuelan bishops' commitment in 'year of grace 2024'

VENEZUELA: The 121st Ordinary Plenary Assembly of the Venezuelan bishops concluded January 12, during which the prelates analysed the current national situation and the greatest challenges the new year presents to the country and the Catholic Church.

Following the meeting, the bishops published a pastoral exhortation asking all Venezuelans to work for peace, justice, and fraternal solidarity as well as make an effort that allows "opening doors and building bridges of understanding and coexistence."

The bishops also called attention to the "urgent national problem" in economic, humanitarian, immigration, education, and corruption matters. "The most serious thing

about this situation," they commented, is "that there is no interest in a solution at the institutional level."

The prelates called for "a serious, sincere, and committed dialogue and negotiation between the government and the various sectors of national life," in reference to the presidential elections scheduled for this year in the country.

"Once again we extend our best wishes so that this year 2024, with the effort and participation of each person and all the country's institutions, we may travel the route of dialogue, encounter, and the type of country that we all want," the bishops concluded. — **CNA**

Pontifical Universities offer online course on Integral Ecology

VATICAN: Pontifical (Church-run) universities in Rome are coming together to launch a new Joint Diploma in Integral Ecology.

This is a key concept for Pope Francis, stressing the interconnectedness of environmental, economic, political, social, and ethical issues.

The course will run from January to June 2024, and be taught by an international group of prominent academics, leaders and activists.

In a press release, the Pontifical Universities said that the course was a response to "the unprecedented challenge facing the planet."

"In 2015," they write, "Pope Francis gifted us *Laudato Si'*", his landmark encyclical calling all people of good will to action on climate change.

However, they say, as Pope Francis recognises in his more recent Exhortation *Laudate Deum*, "our responses have not been adequate", and "the world in which we live is collapsing and may be nearing breaking point."

The Joint Diploma was first launched in 2016, but is now being offered for the first time in English.

The course will consist of six modules of 90 minutes each, to be held from January to June 2024, on every third Thursday of the month from 13.30 to 15.00 Rome time. There will also be a workshop in March and an international on-line conference on *Laudate Deum* in May.

The course was officially inaugurated on January 25, but admissions will remain open up to March 31, 2024.

More information, including the link to enrol in the course, can be found here (<https://bit.ly/3OagBAe>).

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2024

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