

## MISSION STATEMENT

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.

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# HERALD

## THE CATHOLIC WEEKLY

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Hebr. 10:11-14

And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.



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## Failure to protect creation will incur God's judgment

VATICAN: World leaders are running out of time and must address the challenges of climate change before it's too late, Pope Francis said.

In a November 9 letter to Catholics in Scotland, where the UN Climate Change Conference was taking place, the Pope said he hoped leaders attending the summit would "meet this grave challenge with concrete decisions inspired by responsibility towards present and future generations."

"Time is running out; this occasion must not be wasted, lest we have to face God's judgment for our failure to be faithful stewards of the world he has entrusted to our care," he wrote.

The Pope's message came as the conference in Glasgow, also known as COP26, was set to

conclude on Nov 12.

At the summit, the United States and China announced that a joint agreement was signed between the two countries in an effort to lower greenhouse gas emissions. However, according to BBC News, neither country signed a pledge that would phase out the use of coal by 2030.

In his letter, which was released by the Vatican on Nov 11, the Pope said that while he regretted not being able to attend the summit, he thanked Catholics in Scotland for joining him in praying for the conference, which is "meant to address one of the great moral issues of our time: the preservation of God's creation, given to us as a garden to be cultivated and as a common home for our human family." — CNS



Demonstrators call for 'system change' during a march to the Commission on Human Rights office in the Philippine capital on Saturday, November 6, to mark the Global Day of Action for Climate Justice. (LiCas News Photo/Jire Carreon)

# Christ's mission continues amid the pandemic

**S**ANDAKAN, Sabah: "Discipleship in the Church does not stop while we are socially distanced. The mission of Christ does not stop while we are separated through concern for the spread of the virus infection," said Rt Rev Julius Dusin Gitom, Bishop of Sandakan.

"Life goes on. Christ's mission continues. Formation of the faith and other pastoral programmes must continue. In the current circumstances, pastoral programmes can only be effective if we learn to adapt and to take a new approach. Therefore, in the Diocese of Sandakan, each parish is encouraged to continue religious formation and other pastoral activities online whenever possible," said Bishop Julius in a recent interview with Catholic Sabah.

Though it may not be the most ideal mode to run faith formation programmes compared to face-to-face encounters, the bishop was astute in affirming that technology is still "the best we can do at this point in time".

The prelate said that the pandemic had not only affected the personal, community and



Bishop Julius Dusin Gitom

pastoral life of everyone, it had also curtailed the diocesan Vision and Mission Pastoral Plan. Though activities had been lined up together with a timeline for implementation, only a few of them could be carried out due to the lockdown. Nevertheless, the bishop remained optimistic. "The Lord continues to journey with us in these extraordinary circumstances."

"Undoubtedly, we all experience hardship, pain, struggles and difficulties, but the poor, the migrant communities and the marginalised are hit the hardest. Many have lost their jobs and sources of income," said Bishop Julius, adding that he was gratified that amidst this crisis, the faithful have shown great solidarity. "I am happy to see that in difficult times, we have learnt to look after one another. Some parishes set up 'food banks' so that those in need could collect daily provisions."

While agreeing that the health crisis has affected the economic, social and spiritual lives of many, the prelate said that "life must go on because we cannot be held hostage by the pandemic forever."

Due to the current situation, the bishop is limiting his pastoral visits and dedicating himself more to prayer. However, he said the Church must continue in its efforts to be close to the local communities through its pastoral work.

This year marks not only the 14th anniversary of Bishop Julius's episcopal ordination, but also that of the Diocese of Sandakan, which was established by Pope Benedict XVI on July 16, 2007.

A native of Tuaran, Bishop Julius is the

first bishop to emerge from St Peter's College Kuching, fulfilling the vision of Archbishop Emeritus Peter Chung who established the college in 1980 as a place of formation for priests and bishops.

"Although we could not gather to celebrate our diocese's anniversary with the usual ceremonies and formalities, all parishes were asked to mark the occasion in a meaningful way. An anniversary is about recalling God's blessings and thanking Him for His faithful love as we look to the future with faith and confidence. I spent my anniversary in personal reflection and prayer," said the 65-year-old prelate whose episcopal ordination took place on October 15, 2007.

Bishop Julius believes that the pandemic is a wake-up call from God. "Before the global health crisis, many things were taken for granted. Maybe we even took our lives for granted and forgot that life is not ours but a gift from God. The pandemic serves as a reminder that God is asking us to take care of our lives, not just here on earth, but especially our afterlife. God is telling us to care for one another, to care for the earth and to care for all His creation because all God's creatures are precious to him."

## RUMINATIONS

# Being an altar server... and all things in between

When I was asked to write an 800-word article about myself from a spiritual perspective for the Ruminations section, I panicked because I did not know what I should write about. However, after spending time in silent reflection and contemplating on what God might want to say through me to you, the reader, I thought of my passion and indeed a privilege, to serve as an altar server.

I've been an altar server for five years and to date, it continues to be an unforgettable experience. Being an altar server can be difficult at times, especially when one must serve at both a vigil Mass and a morning Mass (at the crack of dawn). Nevertheless, the joy I receive while serving is exceptional.

Serving at the altar comes with many stories and provides material for further discernment about my life as a son, a brother and, most importantly, a servant of God. As the Book of Jeremiah reminds me, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born, I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5).

Of my many takeaways as an altar server, the phrase "Order is of God, Chaos is of the Devil" stands out. Often said by my



By  
**Malcolm Francis Solomon**

parish priest and mentor, Fr Michael Chua, it is a phrase I will remember till the day I breathe my last. I believe this phrase changed my life and my perspective about God and the Liturgy. It tells me that, as soldiers of Christ in this temporary home, we must be of great discipline when we present ourselves before God, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, at his court.

In his book *The Lamb's Supper: The Mass as Heaven on Earth*, Scott Hahn expounds on Pope St John Paul II's description of the Mass as Heaven on Earth and says that what we celebrate on Earth is a mysterious participation in the heavenly liturgy. This description blew my mind because, while growing up, I believed Mass was simply a duty we Catholics must fulfil every Sunday. However, this understanding was the biggest mistake I made.

The Mass is not a duty but, instead, a calling for us, as sons and daughters of God, to participate in a heavenly realm in this sin-ridden world, a glimpse of the

paradise Christ promised when dying on the Cross.

During the Movement Control Order when public Masses in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur were suspended, I was broken – suddenly being physically distant from heaven on earth took a toll on me. During this time, serving at the altar was not an option but thankfully, leading the Teen Ministry named after St John Paul II, the saint who made me discover the Mass as Heaven on Earth, helped a lot.

We met as a community on Zoom almost every day. We shared the love of Christ with each other, and especially with teenagers who think Christ is a distant God. Seeing them grow in their faith, discovering the mysteries of God, warmed my heart and helped me cope with the lockdown.

Looking back at all that happened, from attending Mass to serving at Mass, and suddenly being stripped of that sacred privilege because of COVID-19, to finding fulfilment in community, and then coming back to the banquet of the Lord, it is evident that God is a master planner. He brought me to the pits of despair for me to discover His voice, and He taught me how to search for Christ from the depths of my heart.

It is apparent that when we are attentive to the voice of God, and our prayers are for God to reveal His voice to us, He will reveal it to our longing hearts.

Being an altar server in times like these, when the noise of this world deafens the voice of God, can be challenging — it takes a lot of strength, not merely physical strength but more importantly, spiritual strength through the help of Mary the Queen of Heaven.

I am sure that through the depths of my despair, our blessed Mother was with me, helping by interceding for me to God, so I could be attentive to His sacred voice.

I believe that being an altar server can help one hear the sacred calling of Christ to serve Him, and in the long run, being in love with His divinity and one day, hopefully going down the path less travelled.

As my Spiritual Director always reminds me, "You cannot run away from God". I'm praying for you dear reader as you align your path with the Glory of God through serving Him in many ways, in your parish.

**Malcolm Francis Solomon — son, brother, friend and a servant of God — is an altar server at the Church of Jesus Caritas, Kepong. He also leads the St John Paul II Teens Ministry of Jesus Caritas.**

## Live in the present

When I was in seminary formation during my early years, I always had this fear of whether or not I would be able to complete the formation and become a priest. This fear prevented me from concentrating on my progress, leaving me anxious.

Hence, to seek the light beneath the dark, I spoke to my spiritual father.

In a deep serene voice, he said, "Bona, come to the present."

A startled me asked him, "What do you mean by this, Father?"

"If you want to go back home, what would you do?" he asked.

I replied, "Prepare myself for the journey."

"Exactly! This is what you need to do. You must prepare yourself now to face the future. Whether you will be a priest or not, the future holds. But God has put you in this formation at **This moment**, to aspire to become a priest.

So, live in the present, thus the future will be good."

Yes! Many of us live in the future while disregarding the present moment.

Today our readings focus on eschatology, which is the branch of theology concerned

with the end time.

Speaking about the end time, the uncertainty and fear of the unknown overwhelms us since we do not have any control over it.

Today, let's discover why we should not be afraid but boldly face the end time. Let's look at it from three angles.

First, the past from the Book of Daniel. Second, the present from letter to the Hebrews. Third, the future from St Mark's Gospel.

### What we have learnt from the past

The Book of Daniel was written during a time of great persecution of the Jews, a couple of centuries before Christ. Daniel is one of the first books that includes an apocalyptic vision as prophecy. Even at a time of great distress, Daniel gave hope to the Jews that death is not the end.

Daniel emphasises God's love and His promise of a new life even after death. *The learned will shine as brightly as the vault of heaven, and those who have instructed many in virtue, as bright as stars for all eternity.* (Dan 12:3)

God loves us so much that He does not want to abandon us, even after our death.

## Reflecting on our Sunday Readings with Fr Bonaventure Rayappan

He promised us Heaven in which we will continue praising Him in the heavenly banquet.

### What we need to do in the present

In the letter to the Hebrews, we are reminded that Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of God's promise. *"By virtue of one single offering he has achieved the eternal perfection of all whom he is sanctifying."*

Through the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the hope of our own resurrection dawned. *"Since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive (1 Cor 15: 22),"* which portrays how Jesus willingly accepted the cross with love and obedience to amplify the love of God, cleansing us from our sins.

We too need to follow the footsteps of Christ to amplify God's love to His people on earth. Consequently, we need to be ready to face humiliation, persecution, and sufferings now, to be raised to life during the second coming of Christ, for He is our Hope, our Redeemer, and our Mediator to enter Heaven.

### Our expectations of the future

Today's gospel is not a prophecy of doom but an encouragement to prepare ourselves for Him, who loves us the most. The *Parousia* is a hope, an indication that we look forward as we will face our Lord Jesus Christ and so experience eternal life. How

### 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings: *Daniel 12:1-3;*

*Hebrews 10:11-14, 18;*

*Gospel: Mark 13:24-32*

do we do this? Simple and yet challenging — we do the will of God.

There are many ways of doing God's will, but to show love, compassion, and empathy to the needy is the ultimate fulfilment of doing that.

As we celebrate the Fifth World Day of the Poor, we are constantly reminded by the Pope, "The poor you will always have with you" (Mk 14:7). This pandemic has created a new kind of poor amongst us — the urban poor. This new poor, not knowing how to overcome the situation, resorts to suicidal ideation. Let us together identify them and be the beacon of hope to serve as God's hands and feet to those who are helpless.

St Basil once said, "The devil does not advise us to turn entirely from God but only to put off our conversion to a future time. He steals away our present time and gives hope of the future, but when that comes, he steals that also in the same manner."

So let us not live in the future while disregarding the present, where God is working through us. Let us joyfully await the *Parousia*.

● **Fr Bonaventure Rayappan is the assistant priest at the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Klang.**



## Penang Diocese Diary of Bishop Sebastian Francis November 2021

- Nov 14** Confirmation – Church of the Risen Christ, Air Itam
- Nov 15** Penang Diocesan Pastoral Team Meeting
- Nov 16** Council of Priests
- Nov 17** Clergy Monthly Recollection
- Nov 18** Mission Schools Meeting
- Nov 21** First Holy Communion – Minor Basilica of St Anne, BM
- Nov 22** Christ the King Talk (Melaka Johor)
- Dec 1** Parish Pastoral Assembly – Minor Basilica of St Anne, BM
- Dec 8** Final Profession of Sr Winnie Vun FMM – Kota Bahru

# Links to Synod questionnaires

The Synod is an invitation for every diocese to embark on a path of profound renewal as inspired by the grace of God's Spirit. How is our "walking together" in synodality realised in the Church today? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our "walking together"?

The *sensus fidei* of the whole People of God is sought on this question. Since each diocese has a unique context, its path for seeking, promoting, and reaping the fruits of this *sensus fidei* will be unique. Overall, the Synod guidelines remind us that:

- \* The goal is to ensure the participation of the greatest number possible, in order to listen to the living voice of the entire People of God.

- \* This is not possible unless we make special efforts to actively reach out to people where they're at, especially



those who are often excluded or who are not involved in the life of the Church.

- \* There must be a clear focus on the participation of the poor, marginalised, vulnerable, and excluded, in order to listen to their voices and experiences.

- \* The Synodal Process must be simple, accessible, and welcoming for all.

Here are the links to the questionnaires prepared by some of the Arch/Dioceses in Malaysia.

### KOTA KINABALU ARCHDIOCESE

<https://forms.gle/N9FW9FXB-GmsrvnxA7>

### PENANG DIOCESE

**Simple questionnaire**  
<https://forms.gle/hHqNadwtY-navaZ9r8>

**Elaborated questionnaire**  
<https://forms.gle/yFJ7XNLgF-Sz8juvDA>

### MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1Vpt3BKv\\_SYA7\\_Cm-nAKPsFFp75hoiu3SKxAq-n1EiS4gA/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1Vpt3BKv_SYA7_Cm-nAKPsFFp75hoiu3SKxAq-n1EiS4gA/edit?usp=sharing)

### MIRI DIOCESE

<https://forms.gle/nNaru6Apia-jT8Ad49>

QR code for the teens questionnaire



### Prayer for the Synod

## Adsumus Sancte Spiritus

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



DIOCESE OF MALACCA JOHORE



## MJD News Update #65

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

Remembering the World Day of the Poor that is to be celebrated on November 14, 2021, with the theme: "The poor you will always have with you" (Mk 14:7). A poignant reminder. The poor and poverty, and the works of charity will be an on-going reality in our midst.

The Prayer of St Theresa of Avila, gently rendered by John Michael Talbot, reminds us to be Christ-to-all. Out there, people are waiting for you and me, bearers of Christ.

*Christ has no body now but yours.  
No hands, no feet on earth, but yours  
Yours are the eyes through which  
He looks compassion on this world  
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good  
Yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world  
Yours are the hand, yours are the feet  
Yours are the eyes, you are His body.  
You can be the "touch of God"*

(check out the video on [here](#))

**It is a time of the uncompromising and the principled** The unprincipled continue. Again we see compromises. The big political parties and their big guns plotting and scheming, buying and selling, flaunting laws and SOPs. It is also hunting season again – hunt the cross-dresser, hunt the whistleblower, hunt the reporter. Selective hunting? MUDA refused to endorse the frogs. The young leaders at COP26 Glasgow called for bold action, not baby steps. Another whistleblower has exposed the corruption and deceptions in the MACC and the police.

**"Whoever is careless with the truth in small matters cannot be trusted with important matters."**

**A Thought for the Week:** A husband and his wife were sitting in the living room. The husband said to the wife: "I never want to live in a vegetative state, dependent on some machine and fluids from a bottle. If that ever happens, just pull the plug." She promptly got up, unplugged the big plasma TV and threw out his beer!

**PONDER AND CONSIDER:** Many worry about life af-



ter death. The question on their mind is: "Is there life after death?" **The most important question ought to be: "Is there life before death?" Are you living or merely existing?**

### Announcements for this Week:

1. The **Annual Clergy Discernment** for the year 2021 will take place from Nov 16 to 18 @ Majodi Centre. It is a time to sense the strengths, the weaknesses, the opportunities and the threats in our personal, parish and diocesan life.
2. The **MJD Young People Network** have begun their Malacca Johore Diocese Young People Day (MJDYPD) in preparation for the World Youth Day, on the Feast of Christ the King, Nov 21.

On the 20th, the youth will meet to dialogue with the Bishop and the two Vicar Generals.

On the 21st, MJDYPD Mass will be celebrated by the Bishop.

3. The **Synodal Process** at the diocesan level is in progress. The **Synod prayer** is an appeal to the Spirit of God,

to listen, to be docile and to courageously act on the word.

4. A **"different Church"**? Imagine, with the Spirit, the church that the Lord desires or approves.

Is there anything in us that the Spirit disapproves? Let the Spirit speak through you.

### This week's Question and Query

**The Q asks: Are there other versions of the Beatitudes?** Indeed there are many. They are new attitudes for new times. Our attitudes determine our happiness. But one's happiness is also found in attitudes of giving and in being other-centred.

*Blessed are those who remain faithful while enduring evils inflicted on them by others, and forgive them from their heart;  
Blessed are those who look into the eyes of the abandoned and the marginalised, and show them their closeness;  
Blessed are those who see God in every person, and strive to make others also discover Him;  
Blessed are those who protect and care for our common home;  
Blessed are those who renounce their own comfort in order to help others;  
Blessed are those who pray and work for full communion between Christians.*

**And the Lord said : You did it to Me.**

Thank you for reading. **Nothing happens without some injection.** "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Rom.12:2). Let us continue "Building His Kingdom" together.

**Bishop Bernard Paul  
November 12, 2021**

[Click here to watch the video](#)



## General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

# Local synod process a learning experience for teams

KUALA LUMPUR: “It has been a mixed start to the Synod process locally.” This was the point emerging from the diocese synod contact person reports as well as during their meeting on October 27, 2021, with the regional synod coordinator for the

Catholic Bishops Conference of Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei (CBCMSB).

While there have been various assemblies and expressions of participation within our local churches in recent history, the call of the Holy Father to ex-

plicitly build a synodal Church carries newness and a call to conversion. Some dioceses are well into their consultation process; others are just beginning. Everywhere, the teams are learning as they engage in the process.



## Diocesan Liaison Persons

The Diocese Contact Person(s) appointed to guide and animate the diocesan phase of the synodal process within the eleven dioceses are:

1. Mr James Chua	Vicariate of Brunei
2. Mr Anthony Lim	Kota Kinabalu Archdiocese
3. Sr Evelyn Tivit	Keningau Diocese
4. Fr. David Garaman	Sandakan Diocese
5. Fr Patrick Heng	Kuching Archdiocese
6. Fr Ivan Fang	Sibu Diocese
7. Fr Andy Lee	Miri Diocese
8. Ms Rita Krishnan	Kuala Lumpur Archdiocese
9. Fr Moses Rayappan	Malacca Johore Diocese
10. Fr Jude Miranda	Penang Diocese
11. Fr Valerian Cheong	Singapore Archdiocese



Source: Graphics RF

## Highlights and Challenges

### Highlights

- The Mass to launch the synodal process has been celebrated in nearly all dioceses.
- Coordination and facilitation teams have been established in most dioceses.
- The information / materials on the synod are being communicated within dioceses.

### Challenges

- Geography – Christian communities are spread out in remote areas, especially on the island of Borneo
- Diversity – Besides ethnic groups and languages, there is the urban-rural divide, the digital divide (access to Internet and level of digital skill), the education divide (level of education), etc.
- Catholic culture – the traditional culture of Catholics who are used to waiting for instructions from the

- Translations have been / are being done into local languages / dialects.
- There is creative use of video clips, children’s animation, and going to peripheries.
- The CBCMSB has issued a pastoral letter in the major languages; a video conversation with the Bishop President on the Synod; and a webpage dedicated to the Synod news

of all eleven dioceses and Rome at: <https://cbcmsb.org/synod-of-bishops-2023/>

- The Conference will dedicate its Jan 2022 meeting to discussing the preliminary findings and discerning the way forward.
- A regional online consultation is proposed to be held on July 15, 2022, before finalising the report.

parish priest or clergy and those who are resistant, is being put into question.

- Processes – some parishes/dioceses may have simply reduced the process to a survey questionnaire. With the extended date, everyone is encouraged to deepen and widen the animation process for the synod. The findings can also be fed back to the people, used for subsequent parish assemblies, or study days to reflect on local and national issues,



and discern what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

## Steps for smooth facilitation

Here are some points for attention that were picked up from reports, meetings, and conversations, which can help each parish/diocese to live well the synodal process:

- **Catechesis** — It was felt that the entire people of God need more catechesis and encouragement on the synodal process to actively participate and truly listen to the Spirit.

- **Reaching out** — It is vital to continue to reach out to the indigenous (orang Asli), the migrants, remote communities, lapsed Catholics, and other special groups, including non-Catholic Christians and members of other faiths, to listen to them. This was further confirmed during the meeting with the Synod secretariat.

- **Facilitation** — The facilitators and coordinators of Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), Catechists, Religious, and Lay Movements can play a significant role in this outreach and listening process.

- **Timing** — With the extended deadline, what do those dioceses that finish the process and submit the report early do in the months of Feb to Aug? They can continue to:

- ❖ **Deepen and widen the Synod process** — by going further towards persons and groups in the peripheries; encouraging creativity and animating various groups; revisiting the themes; etc.

- ❖ **Parishes can have a Study Day** — to reflect on the data gathered through the Synod process and see what they can bring to their annual pastoral planning.

- ❖ **Reflect on common social/national issues** — In light of the findings of a synodal Church locally, we can listen to the Spirit together, etc.

- ❖ **Reporting back** — the extension gives time for wider consultation and to give feedback to those consulted and the people. It is good to sense together what the Spirit is saying to the diocese/s.

- **Creativity and integrity of the process** — While the Synod Secretariat encourages creativity and adoption of the materials, the *Vademecum* also invites us to keep in view the integrity of the process and experiences.

- ❖ **Responsibility of Diocese Contact Person(s) and**

**Dioceses** — Article 4.1 of the *Vademecum* says that if the heart of the synodal experience is listening to God by listening to one another, then the first responsibility of the Diocese Contact Person(s) appointed to guide and animate the diocesan phase of the synodal process is to ensure the widest possible participation. “We must reach out to the peripheries, to those who have left the Church, those who rarely or never practise their faith, those who experience poverty or marginalisation, refugees, the excluded, the voiceless, etc.”

- ❖ **Significance of dialogue** — Therefore, “superficial or scripted input that does not accurately and richly represent the experience of the people will not be helpful, nor that which does not express the full range and diversity of experiences.” Checking with the Synod Method Team member, they encourage dialogue in the process of responding to the questions. They ask dioceses to go beyond quick surveys

or simply completing the report in a superficial way. We need to be attentive to this when formulating our questionnaires.

- **Communication** — how do we communicate publicly the Good News of the synod and promote it internally and externally? It needs reflection, planning and cooperation among various offices.

- ❖ The coordinator has requested all diocese contact persons to post updates of the synod (pictures, tools, video clips, creative images, etc) on their respective diocese Facebook page or website. The link is then to be shared with the Conference, which has already established a separate page on the Conference website. Extracts of this will then be forwarded to the Synod secretariat.

- ❖ **Monthly review** — the Diocese Contact Person(s) agreed to submit a brief monthly review, the next being in 2021, which can then be used to send out a monthly brief and attached links for public reading.

## New timeline for the local phase

Everyone welcomed the extension of the time given to local dioceses from April to mid-Aug 2022. Here is a proposed working schedule:

1. Dioceses are to submit their reports by June 01, 2022, instead of Feb 28, 2022, to the national coordinator/Conference Secretariat.
2. The Conference Secretariat, with selected diocesan representatives, will consolidate the reports into a regional report in June, and send the report to all bishops, contact persons, and diocese delegates to the regional event.
3. The online Regional/Diocesan event will take place on July 15, 2022.
4. The Eucharistic Celebration to mark the closing of the diocesan phase will be confirmed at the Bishops’ Conference meeting.
5. The Bishops’ Conference meeting from Aug 8-13, 2022, will be to listen and discern.
6. The Conference Secretariat will submit the final report to Rome by Aug 15, 2022.

# Caritas reflects on Pope Francis' World Day of the Poor message

KUALA LUMPUR: In conjunction with the fifth World Day of the Poor, Caritas Internationalis organised a webinar to reflect on Pope Francis' message on this year's theme, *The poor you will always have with you*.

Undersecretary of the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelisation Msgr Graham Bell said in his reflection on the papal message that while economic poverty is painful, it is easier to see. However, there are other forms of poverty which are harder to see - like those who suffer from mental illness and addictions.

In his message, Pope Francis mentions the woman with the alabaster flask full of precious ointment who poured it over Jesus' head, causing two different reactions. The first reaction was one of indignation by some who felt that the ointment, which would have had a market value of 300 denarii, could have been sold and used to feed the poor. The second

reaction was that of Jesus, who saw the woman's act as an anticipation of the anointing of his lifeless body before its placement in the tomb. Jesus was seen reminding them that he is the first of the poor, the poorest of the poor because he represents all of them. It was for the sake of the poor, the lonely, the marginalised and the victims of discrimination that the Son of God accepted the woman's gesture.

"The poor will always be amongst us until Christ comes again, but in their poverty, they represent Christ. And therefore, we must work to alleviate poverty, which also means we must become poorer," said Msgr Bell.

Coordinator for Human Rights and Justice at Caritas Ghana, Sr Regina Aflah, talked about the significant presence of women ready to lead in the context of Pope Francis' message.

She quoted Nicole Lipkin, a con-

tributor for *Forbes Women* who wrote in an article dated November 19, 2019, "studies show that once women land leadership positions, they excel — often surpassing men — because they have developed soft skills necessary for effective leadership. Traits like empathy, communication and listening are qualities that serve women well when in management positions."

A lawyer and lecturer currently pursuing her PhD in International and Treaty Law, Sr Aflah said that the poor in Africa had increased from 278 million in 1990 to 413 million in 2015. "Women are often in the middle of this poverty and the African woman uses her managerial abilities to support the family." But are organisations ready to accept women in leadership roles?

The Gospel of Luke shows how women were welcomed and instrumental in Jesus' ministry — women like Mary Magdalene, Joanna, wife



AsiaNews photo

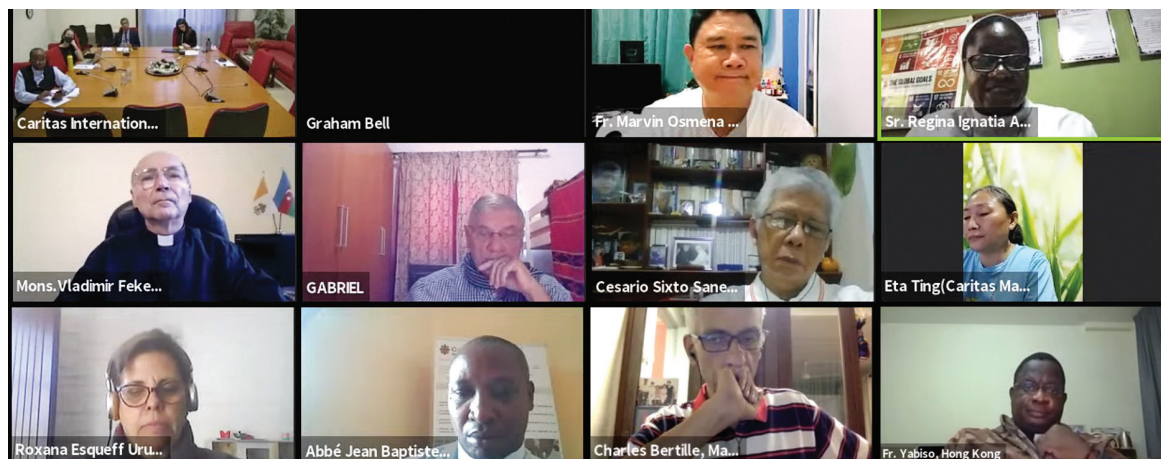
of Chuza, steward to Herod Antipas, Suzanna and several other nameless women who assisted His ministry out of their means. The Bible also mentions women like Deborah, Miriam and Esther who were influential and effective as leaders in their era.

Sr Aflah says women have unique strengths in making a difference in people's lives and they have abilities that need to be tapped into. However, as a nun for 19 years who has served in different capacities, her journey has not been without difficulties and challenges as a woman in management. Moving forward, Sr Aflah hopes there will be more opportunities for women in all roles.

The final reflection was by Jairo Martinez from Caritas Honduras. Presenting in Spanish, he reminded listeners that taking a new approach towards the poor means getting out of our comfort zone and taking a different approach. He said it's not just providing financial aid — we also need to use our five senses when approaching the poor to keep their dignity in the centre.

Charles Bertille and Eta Ting from Malaysia also attended the webinar. "It was touching to listen to the cry of a youth who does his best to help with the little he has to keep the poor family going. To sum it up, we will always have the poor with us. The poor deserve the best because Jesus is with us (Emmanuel) and He is among the poor to let us see Him in them and to serve Him, especially in the poor and the vulnerable who are neglected and ignored," shared Eta.

Going from prayer and reflection on poverty, Caritas Internationalis launched its latest project *From Prayer to Action, A Celebration of the World Day of the Poor, and World Youth Day*. This initiative combines the two themes by guiding you through short reflections about how you see the poor in our world and in your life, and simple yet profound ideas to turn your reflections and prayers into action and 'be a witness of what you have seen' like St Paul. Visit [www.caritas.org/prayeraction2021](http://www.caritas.org/prayeraction2021) to participate. — **By Gwen Manickam**



Caritas Internationalis organised a webinar to reflect on Pope Francis' message for the World Day of the Poor 2021.

## Mission with compassion

SEKINCHAN: Caring for the marginalised and those in need, especially those living in the fringes of society, has been the mission of a Catholic group from Kuala Lumpur.

On October 30, 2021, during the Mission month, 15 team members travelled more than 100km to Sekinchan to visit 70 migrant families there, to reach out to them with compassion and care.

These Indonesian Catholics are

mainly farmers with a meagre income.

A prayer session was held by the migrants at their 'kongsi', with the presence of parish staff Sharon Justina from the Church of St Paul the Hermit, and lay leader Sinnamah from the Chapel of St Anthony, Tennamaram in Bestari Jaya.

The KL group arrived with more than 1,500kgs of essential foodstuff to be distributed to the

70 families. Several migrants helped unload the foodstuff. They were beaming with joy at the visit from the KL group to their village. A first in six years.

They joined in the prayers, and later in the simple meal prepared by the migrants. It was an eye-opener for some of the members to experience the warm hospitality given by the migrants, despite having to endure tough living conditions with limited facilities.

They noted that the migrants were friendly and persevering in their faith in God, with a strong devotion to Mother Mary. The visitors encouraged them to continue living out their Catholic faith despite being in a foreign land, and to remember that God always cares for them.

Fr VA Michael, in a message, quoted the Gospel for that weekend; that we must love God and our neighbour. He said the KL

group seemed to have great love for its neighbours, especially the less fortunate, by being Christ-like in their care and compassion.

Earlier, with the approval of the parish priest, the KL group visited both the Chapel of Our Lady of Good Health in Assam Jawa and the Chapel of the Holy Infant Jesus in Kuala Selangor for prayer sessions and to reflect on Pope Francis' World Mission Sunday message. — **By Bernard Anthony**

## Dealing with addiction in the family

Dr Philip George, a consultant adult psychiatrist and addiction specialist, was a recent guest on *Catholics@Home* podcast. He shared about dealing with addiction, which may come in many forms such as smoking, gambling, alcoholism, video gaming, sex and pornography.

"There are three types of substance use, i.e., recreational substance use, substance abuse and substance dependence," says Dr Philip. Using the consumption of alcohol as an example, he explained that a person who consumes alcohol only on special occasions is referred to as a recreational user and is not considered as having an illness. However,

if the person consumes more than 5 to 6 drinks in a single sitting for more days than usual in a week, and that pattern has been going on for about a year, then it becomes substance abuse. The final stage is when the person goes on to become substance dependant which co-relates to addiction.

"There are many determinants such as biological, psychological, social and environmental factors that cause a person to go down the path that leads to addiction," says Dr Philip.

"People with addiction usually hit rock bottom before they take action to change their ways.

"The first and most important step



is when the person is willing to talk about his addiction, as there is awareness, understanding and a willingness to seek help. I would typically use the opportunity to start focusing on motivational interviewing such as discussing with the person why he is making this decision.

"The second step is to identify whether the person's decision to quit the addiction is made for himself or for his family. If he is doing it for someone else, and if the relationship

with that person turns sour, he may return to his addiction. To recover, he must take responsibility for himself and decide that he is doing it for himself.

"The final step is self-efficacy. This is the stage where most people who seek treatment have tried to quit their addiction but with no success. Most people who come to me have already tried several times to quit. They've had success for about a week and then they stop for a month and start again. It's not that they haven't tried.

"We need to give them self-efficacy to make them feel confident about being able to quit their addiction. This is where I link them to oth-

ers who have done it like Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous and Smart Recovery. These are people who have recovered from their addiction and are now helping others recover. Doing it together in a group is powerful."

Dr Philip said that family members may help the person with addiction by conversing with him and starting to put boundaries such as giving him an ultimatum that he must live on his own if he continues with his addiction. In some cases, the family members don't intervene and end up being enablers to the person's addiction. — **By Julie Lim**

To view this podcast, go to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qrcdX7OKS7c>

# Put out into the deep

KUALA LUMPUR: The Archdiocesan Family Life Commission (AFLC) recently organised a session *Put out into the deep*, based on the October theme of the Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Team (PMPT).

The objective was to *Rejoice, Rediscover and Renew* the call of Family Life as the new “Mission Field” in the Church. The Gospel passage Lk 5: 4-6, is not only about the physical miracle of catching fish; rather, it’s more about the mission of evangelising souls and accomplishing the mission of God. The symbolism of putting out into the deep water tells us that we must be fully committed if we are to evangelise and spread the Word of God.

The session began with Esther and Selva, Deputy Chair Couple of AFLC, sharing on *Mission* in their



The webinar organised by the KL Archdiocesan Family Life Commission.

lives. Their views on this were candid and crisp “It’s our mission to ensure that our children and we make it to heaven, or at least, qualify ourselves for heaven. Everything else that we do revolves around this mission we have for ourselves.” They said that being happy with God

in all eternity and believing that through Him everything is possible is the thrust of their family life and mission.

Fr Edwin Peter, parish priest of the Church of the Sacred Heart, drew similarities between mission and evangelisation and the generali-

sation of what the term missionary means. He explained that it extends into areas of education (mission schools), healthcare etc. The role of every Catholic is to evangelise. He reminded everyone of Pope Francis’ message for the 2019 Mission Year, i.e., that the whole Church revive her missionary awareness and commitment when he launched the theme *Baptised and Sent*. Fr Edwin pointed out that Pope Francis did not declare it as “Ordained and Sent or Prophesied and Sent”.

Speaking on the challenges of the current generation, Esther and Selva shared their concerns, and how they, as a family, “always look to the Church for guidance and wisdom”. The Church has been around for thousands of years and has abundant resources and knowledge. Fr Edwin

spoke on the concept of the “Home Church”, which became more relevant during the pandemic when places of worship were forced to close and has now become significant.

The webinar concluded with views from both the clergy and the laity on the Church’s expectations of their parishioners in being in mission and putting into the deep.

Touching on the role of families Fr Edwin said that everyone, from the very young to the elderly, can contribute and should be included in Church work, in every little way they can. — *By Deva and Jackie Param*

The webinar can be viewed at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4\\_D3LZO6yg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4_D3LZO6yg)

## Leadership formation in Risen Christ parish



Deacon Lazarus Jonathan

PENANG: Risen Christ Church organised a virtual formation session on *Redefining Lay Leadership in Church Ministry* November 4. The session, conducted by Deacon Lazarus Anthony Jonathan, was attended by lay leaders from the various BECs / apostolates and ministries of the parish.

The formation session, held from 9.00am to 12.30pm, invited participants to reflect on their present feelings, future of leadership and the mission they are called to serve. In light of the pandemic

which took us all by surprise, this session’s primary focus was to help leaders redefine their role of being missionaries of Christ in these unprecedented times. The session also intended to equip leaders with ways of adapting to change and innovating the way leaders reach out to support their communities.

The session was centred on the Scriptures and applying Jesus’ teachings, and leadership as lay leaders of the Catholic community. The topics covered included emphasis on the Great Commis-

sion (Evangelisation), Catholic Leadership Qualities, and Becoming Missionary Leaders of Christ. Deacon Lazarus, who shared his vast experience with his presentation, invited the participants to reflect on and incorporate the relevant leadership qualities in all aspects of their lives; being vs. doing.

Parish priest Fr Arul Mariadass showed his support with his presence. Also present was the assistant parish priest, Fr Oliver Tham, who took part in the discussion.

Participants left feeling motivated and energised. They agreed that there must be a shift in the style of leadership to cater for the current situation. They were also thankful for the timely formation session which reminded them that evangelisation is an important part of leadership which is constantly evolving according to the times.

They opined that, as lay leaders, they have to look at new ways to reach out to parishioners and to understand their spiritual needs. — *By AJ Michael*

## Party with the saints



Catechism students dressed as their favourite saints in the Become A Saint Challenge.

BUTTERWORTH: The catechism students of the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Sts Chastan and Imbert (NBVM and SCIC) honoured the saints in a special way this year by taking part in the *Become A Saint Challenge*.

The students dressed up as their favourite saint and recorded a short video about the saint for the contest that was held in the lead-up to All Saints’ Day. The contest drew over 30 participants whose selection of saints ranged from popular ones like St Joseph and St Michael to the more obscure St Expedite.

In addition to the *Become A Saint*

*Challenge*, secondary level students were tested on their knowledge of the saints via an online quiz. These activities culminated in an online All Saints’ Day celebration held on October 31. The event, dubbed *Party with the Saints*, began with a short talk about this important feast observed by the Catholic Church. Besides sharing about who the saints are, the speaker also traced the Catholic roots of Halloween and shared about some ways we can honour the faithful departed. The important takeaway from the talk was that saints were ordinary people like us who strived to live their ordi-

nary lives according to God’s will. Each of us, like them, is also called to become a saint.

One of the highlights of the evening was the announcement of the winners of the two contests. Exciting prizes were prepared for the winners while all participants of the *Become A Saint Challenge* received gifts in recognition of their tremendous efforts. Assistant parish priest Fr Konstend Gnanapragasam said he was moved by the enthusiastic participation of the students and thanked the organisers for the fun yet meaningful event. — *nbvmisc.org*

## Holy Family Church has online camp for First Holy Communicants

KAJANG: Fifty young parishioners of the Holy Family Church attended the First Holy Communion (FHC) online camp 2021 recently.

The camp was organised to help them realise the importance of the Sacraments they were to receive and the encounter with the Living God so that they would be inspired to become life-long Catholics. The theme was *Let the children come to Me* (Mark 10: 14).

The camp began with introductions, followed by the opening prayer led by Serena Kiong, the English Catechetical Coordinator.

Besides action songs, there was a church tour with an explanation about the liturgical items found in the church by Shaun Thomas.

There was also a video presentation, *The Weight of the Mass*, written by Josephine Nobisso that

depicts the significance of the Mass. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICDdm-NqtoQ&t=90s>)

Parish priest Fr Andrew Kooi, spoke about how the children should prepare themselves in the right manner to celebrate Mass in church or online.

The three best designs for their project “Jesus in the Eucharist”, inspired by ‘The Catholic Toolbox’ were also announced.

Jeremy Pan prepared an online quiz, “Quizziz” where participants competed against one another.

The camp concluded at 4.20pm with a prayer led by the children, followed by the final blessing by Fr Andrew. The participants were awarded a Certificate of Attendance which will be given to them when they meet face to face.



The three best designs on Jesus in the Eucharist project.

# Asian Churches urged to have innovative pastors

MANILA: Churches in Asia and across the globe need innovative and digitally savvy pastors who can find “new ways of being Church” in the age of the pandemic and social media, Catholic communication experts said during an international webinar.

The webinar on November 6 brought together communication experts from Asia and the Americas.

It was jointly organised by the office of social communication of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences and the Veritas Asia Institute of Social Communication (VAISCOM).

Some 180 clergy, religious educators and social communication directors from about a dozen countries including India, Mongolia, Myanmar and South Sudan attended the webinar.

“The Church needs pastors who are able to provide a deeper and more energising sense of the faith,” said Sr Angela Ann Zukowski, a member of Missionary Helpers of the Sacred Heart and the director of the Institute of Pastoral Initiatives at Dayton University in Ohio.

The Church’s response to the COVID-19 crisis should be to go beyond providing content and prioritise building a sense of community, the nun said.

Technology-savvy youth and the advanced-in-age “wisdom” groups should come together to discover new ways of being Church in this new missionary context, Sr Zukowski added.

Jesuit Fr Paul Soukup of Santa Clara University in California presented the keynote address and emphasised that digital pastors should be open to ideas and be willing to listen, especially to the people they serve.

Technological competencies, as well as a solid grounding in doctrine, are needed, the priest said, adding that pastors must also “test and try” what could work in terms of pastoring and providing care online.

The priest, who is the communications consultant of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, pointed out that nurturing faith, particularly in crisis situations, is important.

Digital pastors should then offer creative

inputs for the senses like hearing because the same inputs will evolve into stories of one’s experience of God, the priest said.

During the pandemic, the yearning for the divine and the sacred was felt even more strongly, he said. “This spurred initiatives like online Masses that aim to bring the experience of the church back to the people.”

Fr Nicanor Lalog, from Our Lady of Fatima University in Venezuela, said he adopted a creative way of the liturgy during the pandemic in Malolos Diocese, where he serves as social communications director. With the Holy Spirit’s guidance, the priest initiated motorcade processions and walk-through and drive-through communion.

Bernard Canaberal, head of SIGNIS Philippines, said Catholic media should broadcast content mirroring people’s felt needs and situations.

SIGNIS, the World Catholic Association for Communication, is critically adopting new media technologies while carrying out its mission under the “love shared and truth told” motto, just like the universal Church, Canaberal said.



A pastor celebrates a livestreamed Sunday liturgy in a church in Bangladesh’s capital, Dhaka, during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. (UCA News Photo/Stephan Uttom)

beral said.

Chainarong Monthienvichienchai, chancellor of St John’s University in Bangkok, said priests should be able to bring all their learning during the COVID crisis to a post-pandemic era.

We should continue using “the wonders of modern technology in our synodal Church,” he said, because this will result in an even “deeper communion for our mission in the world.” — [ucanews.com](http://ucanews.com)

## China shuts down Christian school in Beijing



Students from Golden Reed Kindergarten and Primary School Learning Centre in Beijing participate in a programme in 2020. (UCA News photo/China Aid)

BEIJING: Chinese authorities have closed a popular Christian school in Beijing, leaving the academic lives of more than 100 children in disarray.

Officials of Tongzhou district in Beijing shut down Golden Reed Kindergarten and Primary School Learning Centre in September, following an order to vacate the property and close the school, reported *China Aid*, a rights group led by Chinese exiles documenting human rights abuses and promoting religious freedom in China.

More than 100 mostly Christian students, including those with special needs like autism, studied in the school established by Golden Lampstand Church, an evangelical house church.

Besides a kindergarten and an elementary section, the school also provided facilities such as a daycare centre, kitchen, gym, playground and library.

Rights groups like International Christian Concern (ICC) expressed dismay over the closure of the school as it deprives the students of learning and school authorities are

forced to suffer a great loss due to the abandonment of facilities.

*China Aid* says the closure is part of the communist government’s ongoing persecution of Christians, especially evangelical and house churches and organisations affiliated with those churches.

The Chinese government has also continued a clampdown on Christian orphanages under the guise of enforcing new regulations on religious affairs, leaving thousands of poor and disadvantaged orphans and disabled children without vital support.

Rights groups say the crackdown on churches and Christian organisations including charities, schools and orphanages has intensified since 2018 when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) adopted repressive new regulations on religious affairs.

The rules require all churches, clergy and religious to be registered with state-sanctioned church bodies, and bans activities of organisations affiliated with religious groups without prior registration and permits. — [ucanews.com](http://ucanews.com)

## Sri Lankan cardinal files petition in court to protect country’s wetlands

COLOMBO: Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith of Colombo filed a petition before Sri Lanka’s Supreme Court to stop the acquisition of 3,863 hectares of wetlands by the country’s Urban Development Authority.

The proposal to develop the area reportedly involves the extraction of sand that will be used to cover almost 120 acres in Muthurajawela wetlands where a power plant is supposed to be built.

In a petition filed before the court on November 6, Cardinal Ranjith called for the cancellation of a notification needed for the acquisition of land in the wetlands.

He said the project would affect the livelihoods of the people and various religious sites in the area.

Among those named as respondents of the cardinal’s petition are Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, State Minister Nalaka Godahewa, Environment Minister Mahinda Amaraweera, the Urban Development Authority, and the Environment department, among others.

Muthurajawela is a marsh in Sri Lanka in the southern region of the Negombo lagoon, 30 km north of Colombo.

It is notable for its unique and highly diverse

ecosystem and is listed as one of 12 priority wetlands in Sri Lanka.

In 1996, a total of 1,777 hectares of the northern part of the Muthurajawela marsh was declared a wetland sanctuary by the government under the Flora and Fauna Protection Act.

The region supports 192 distinct species of flora and 209 distinct species of fauna, including Slender Loris, as well as another 102 species of birds.

Some of the identified species have been shown to be indigenous to the marsh.

“The entire Catholic community and I are opposed to the works that are about to be carried out in this area,” said Cardinal Ranjith during a media briefing in July this year.

In a letter to the Central Environmental Authority, the cardinal said “no study has been conducted on the social and environmental impact of the project.”

“This government must keep in mind the fact that the country does not belong to the president or to the ministers, but to the citizens, who have been prevented from carrying out projects in an arbitrary way,” he said. — [licanews.com](http://licanews.com)

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# Pope praises group helping married couples overcome crisis

VATICAN: On November 13, Pope Francis met with members of the Retrouvaille association, a worldwide group that helps married couples in crisis find ways to address the root problems in their relationships and move towards healing and renewal. The Pope expressed his gratitude for their commitment and encouraged them to persevere in this important outreach.

In his address to the members present, Pope Francis began by focusing on the word “crisis”, but also the word “opportunity”, since every crisis offers an opportunity. He stressed that we should not fear crises, since we can learn and grow from them, especially to avoid ending up in conflicts that can lead to closing our hearts. A crisis in our life is not comfortable, he admitted, but it is possible to come out of it



Pope Francis greets a couple during a meeting with members of the Retrouvaille marriage ministry Nov 6, 2021. (Vatican Media)

better, especially with the helping hand of others.

He also mentioned the “wounds”

produced by crisis situations, as Retrouvaille is familiar with since they help wounded marital relationships

move towards healing. And this is their gift, the Pope noted: being able to share their own experiences as couples who were once hurting and have overcome their own crises to be of service to other couples that find themselves in difficulty today.

There is a great need today for couples who can give witness to the fact that a crisis is not a curse but a part of life’s journey — and an opportunity, the Pope noted. However, to be “credible”, you need to have experienced it. Theoretical talks or “pious exhortations” are not believable, he said, but the “life testimony” they bring is: “You were in crisis and hurting but, thanks be to God, with the help of your brothers and sisters you were healed, and now you share this experience in the service of helping others”.

The Pope then focused on an-

other word in particular, “accompaniment”, saying this of course concerns priests and their pastoral ministry, but also involves married couples as protagonists in being close to other couples in their community. He praised how their work started from the grassroots, as the Holy Spirit brings forth in the Church new outreach that responds to new needs. Accompaniment is the first response to helping so many couples in difficulty, he noted, and this requires time, patience, respect and availability, as the Retrouvaille members know so well.

In conclusion, the Pope thanked his audience members for their commitment, and he encouraged them to continue in their efforts, entrusting them to the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St Joseph.

— *Vatican News*

## Poland’s Catholic Church to hold collection for migrants at Belarus border

WARSAW: The Catholic Church in Poland will hold a collection this month for migrants facing deteriorating conditions on the country’s border with Belarus.

Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki, the president of the Polish bishops’ conference, appealed to Catholics to aid the thousands of migrants caught in a “humanitarian catastrophe” at the roughly 250-mile border between the two countries.

“I turn to the faithful and all people of goodwill with a request for a nationwide fundraising — on Sunday, Nov 21 in all churches and chapels, through Caritas Poland — for migrants from the Belarusian-Polish border,” Gądecki said in a homily at Mass at the Holy Cross Church in the Polish capital, Warsaw, on Nov 5.

“The funds collected during the nationwide collection will be used

to finance Caritas Poland’s aid activities in the border areas during the migration crisis and the process of long-term integration of refugees who decide to stay in Poland.”

In his homily, Gądecki said: “Regardless of the circumstances of their arrival, they certainly need our spiritual and material support.”

The archbishop of Poznań, western Poland, underlined the need to support migrants at the border in an appeal issued on Nov 8.

“The mission of the Church is first and foremost to preach the Gospel. Consequently, when help must be given to strangers, we must not shy away from it,” Gądecki wrote.

“Without prejudice to the security of the Republic [of Poland] and its citizens, those in need must be shown our solidarity. In the current situation, the message of the parable of the Good Samaritan sounds even more urgent and awaits a universal implementation, also in the eyes of migrants themselves.” — *CNA*



Migrants gather at the Belarusian-Polish border. (Vatican News photo)

## Dozens of schoolchildren killed in deadly fire

NIGER, Africa: At least 25 schoolchildren were killed on November 8 when their classroom, made of straw and wood, was engulfed in a fire in southern Niger, authorities said.

The students, aged between five and six, were attending classes in a school in the town of Maradi, more than 600 kilometres (370 miles) east of Niamey, Niger’s capital.

Fourteen other students were reportedly injured in the fire that destroyed three other straw-hut classrooms at the school. Some of the injured are feared to be in critical condition.

It is still unclear what caused the tragic fire.

Niger, a vast, arid state on the edge of the Sahara Desert struggles

in the face of frequent droughts, insurgency and socio-economic difficulties.

The country’s government has tried to fix shortages of school buildings by building overflow classrooms made of wood and straw to accommodate all school children.

The recent fire is the second this year that a blaze has killed schoolchildren in the West African country. In April, 20 pre-school children were killed in a fire in Niamey, after being trapped behind their school gates.

Following this latest fire incident, classes have been suspended and three days of mourning have been declared in Maradi, said regional director of education, Maman Hdi.

In a statement on Monday, Nov

8, UNICEF country representative for Niger, Stefano Savi, expressed sadness over the loss of life in the tragic fire.

“UNICEF has received initial information indicating that several children were killed or injured in the fire,” Savi said. “Our hearts are with the children and families affected. Our most sincere condolences to the families of the victims and their communities.”

Stressing that “no child should ever be in danger when learning in school,” he added that the UN Children’s Fund will continue to work with national authorities and partners across the country “to ensure that children can attend school and learn in safe environments.” — *Vatican News*

## Church in France recognises institutional responsibility in abuse

LOURDES: French Bishops have officially acknowledged that the Catholic Church bears an “institutional responsibility” for the thousands of child abuse cases that emerged in a recent report.

The report, which was submitted early in October by the Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Church (CIASE), revealed that at least 216,000 people living in France have been victims of sexual abuse by priests and religious over a period of seventy years, from 1950 to 2020.

Speaking at a press conference on Nov 12, Archbishop Éric de Moulins-Beaufort, Chairman of the Bishops’ Conference of France (CEF), said bishops are “upset and overwhelmed” by the findings and have agreed to recognise the “systemic nature” of abuse in the Church in France. They admit that these crimes were not committed only by isolated individuals, but were made possible “by a general context, a mentality

and a series of practices within the Church that allowed these events to happen but also to recur, preventing them from being reported and sanctioned”.

Archbishop de Moulins-Beaufort added that this recognition implies “an obligation of justice and reparation”: “We are aware that this step is necessary to enter a path that allows us today to ask for forgiveness in truth,” he said. Also speaking at the press conference was Father Hugues de Woillemont, who said bishops are willing to meet and listen to all people having an issue with the Church on this matter.

Bishops are now focusing on the 45 recommendations of the CIASE Report, which call for, among other things, stronger internal control mechanisms, a clearer definition of the role of the bishop so as to ensure an impartial examination of cases, and enhancing the involvement of lay people in Church governance. — *Vatican News*



French bishops kneel as a sign of penance during a ceremony in Lourdes for abuse victims. (Vatican News photo)



# Climate justice and cash shadow UN talks

GLASGOW: Countries remain starkly divided on key issues at the UN meeting, including how rapidly the world can curb carbon emissions and how it can ramp up support for countries already battered by storms, floods and drought intensified by global heating.

After a week of headline announcements from host Britain on ending deforestation and phasing out coal, experts say the underlying COP26 negotiations have progressed little.

Countries are in Glasgow to work out how to implement the Paris Agreement's goals of limiting temperature rises to between 1.5 and 2 degrees Celsius.

And while recent announcements mean they have inched closer, many disputes remain unresolved.

These include pushing for more ambitious national carbon reduction plans, providing a long-promised \$100 billion (RM416.4 billion) annually to developing nations, and rules governing carbon markets.

"As the group least responsible for the climate crisis, but suffering most from its impact, we came to Glasgow with high expectations," said Sonam Phuntsho Wangdi of



Activists hold a demonstration outside the venue of the COP26 summit in Glasgow that aims to work out how to implement the Paris Agreement's goals of limiting temperature rises to between 1.5 and 2 degrees Celsius. (LiCas News Photo/Living Laudato Si')

Bhutan, who heads the Least Developed Nations negotiating bloc.

He urged "strong commitments" from delegates at the UN talks, calling for faster emissions cuts.

"Any compromise on limiting the temperature rise in line with 1.5C in this decade will mean jeopardising the lives of billions in the most vulnerable countries, like ours."

With scientists warning that countries have only until the end of the decade to slash emissions almost in half, former US President Barack Obama attended the summit to tell delegates, "time really is

running out."

He said the Paris Agreement of 2015 had made important progress, but stressed that the deal was just the beginning.

"Most nations have failed to be as ambitious as they need to be," he said, echoing current President Joe Biden in saying it was "disturbing" that neither the leaders of China or Russia had travelled to Glasgow.

Earlier, COP26 President Alok Sharma said the first week of technical negotiations had "already concluded some important issues that will drive accelerated climate action."

But he said any preliminary conference decision text had not yet materialised.

"We have a lot of work to do across all issues that remain," said Britain's chief negotiator Archie Young.

A senior diplomatic source told AFP that there was so much yet to be agreed that draft texts as they currently stood would be "illegible" for ministers.

"All countries are playing hardball," Stephen Leonard, climate law and policy specialist and veteran COP observer told AFP

"The EU want the highest ambi-

tion possible. The African countries want as much finance for adaptation as possible. Australia and Japan want to be able to trade as much carbon as possible."

Its first week saw around 100 nations commit to slashing their emissions of methane — a powerful greenhouse gas — by at least 30 percent by 2030.

In another development likely to dent emissions, India — the fourth largest polluter — said it would achieve carbon neutrality by 2070.

Experts said these announcements, along with countries' latest emissions-cutting pledges, could have a real impact on future temperature rises.

Dozens of nations have signed up to a COP26 initiative to end their use of coal — the most polluting fossil fuel — within decades, including major users South Korea and Vietnam.

But missing from the pact were the top consumers, China, India, and the United States.

Major exporter Australia, which also declined to join the initiative, said it would continue to sell coal for "decades into the future." —

licanews.com

## Facebook parent, Meta, to take religion, politics, race out of ad targeting

CALIFORNIA: Facebook-parent Meta said it will stop letting ads be targeted at users based on "sensitive" topics such as race, religion, sexuality, or political party, citing concerns about abuse.

The company's deep knowledge about its users' interests is prized by advertisers looking to reach a certain audience — and is an engine of its multi-billion-dollar ad business — but could be used to influence or exclude groups.

"We want to ... address feedback from civil rights experts, policymakers and other stakeholders on the importance of preventing advertisers from abusing the targeting options we make available," Meta vice president of ad product mar-

keting, Graham Mudd, wrote.

He noted the change was not based on people's actual characteristics but on things like how users interacted with content on the company's platform.

Starting on January 19, apps in the Meta family will no longer offer advertisers the option to target people based on their interest in causes, organisations or public figures related to health, race, ethnicity, political affiliation, or sexual orientation.

Examples include things like lung cancer awareness, same-sex marriage, the Catholic Church, Jewish holidays and political beliefs.

High-profile misfires of ad targeting on Facebook include pro-

motions of military gear served to far-right militia groups before the Jan 6 storming of the US Capitol by supporters of former president Donald Trump.

US housing officials also sued Facebook in 2019 over allegations that landlords and brokers were allowed to improperly restrict housing ads "to exclude people of colour, families with children, women, people with disabilities".

However, there may be some secondary effects for non-profit groups seeking fundraising or small companies looking for customers.

"The decision to remove these detailed targeting options was not easy and we know this change may negatively impact some businesses



Facebook-parent Meta.

and organisations," Mudd wrote in a blog post, adding thousands of options would be impacted.

Announcement of the ad-targeting tweak came as Facebook battles one of its worst crises ever — the leak of reams of internal documents to US lawmakers, regulators, and reporters by former employee Frances Haugen.

Haugen brought her arguments to key lawmakers in Brussels this week after giving testimony in Washington and London and ahead of a stop in Paris.

The EU is currently pushing through new laws that could force the world's biggest tech firms to rethink the way they do business. —

licanews.com

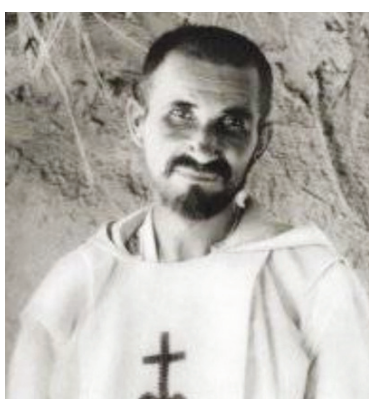
## Charles de Foucauld and six others to be canonised May 15

VATICAN: The Vatican announced that the canonisation of Bl Charles de Foucauld and six others will take place in Rome on May 15, 2022.

The date of the canonisation had been delayed due to the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, Foucauld's postulator said last month.

The May 15 ceremony will be the Catholic Church's first canonisation Mass since the start of the coronavirus outbreak. It will take place two years and seven months after the most recent canonisation, that of St John Henry Newman and four others in October 2019.

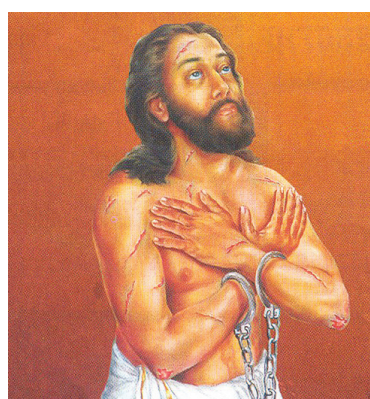
Bl Charles de Foucauld was a disolute French soldier who later became a Trappist monk and Catholic missionary to Muslims in Algeria. Known as Brother Charles of Jesus, he was killed in 1916 at the age of 58.



Blessed Charles de Foucauld

After his reversion to the Catholic faith, Foucauld wanted to imitate the life of Jesus, spending his last 13 years living among the Muslim Tuareg people, a nomadic ethnic group, in the desert of French-occupied Algeria.

Pope Francis approved a mira-



Blessed Devasahayam Pillai

cle obtained through Foucauld's intercession in May 2020, and the Church's cardinals signed off on his and six other canonisations during a Vatican consistory a year later.

With Foucauld, Pope Francis will also canonise Devasahayam Pillai, a layman from India who was mar-

tyred after converting from Hinduism to Catholicism in the 18th century.

Pillai, who is also known by his baptismal name, Lazarus, was beatified in 2012 in southern India. He will be the first lay Catholic in India to be declared a saint.

Seven years after his conversion, Pillai was killed at the age of 40 by gunshot, after he had been falsely accused of treason, arrested, and tortured for three years.

Two religious sisters will also be canonised on May 15: Bl Maria Francesca di Gesù, the foundress of the Capuchin Tertiary Sisters of Lano, and Bl Maria Domenica Mantovani, the co-foundress and first general superior of the Institute of the Little Sisters of the Holy Family.

Bl César de Bus, Bl Luigi Maria Palazzolo, and Bl. Giustino Ma-

ria Russolillo — three priests who founded religious congregations and institutes — will also be declared saints.

In October, Fr Bernard Ardura, the postulator of Foucauld's cause, said that the canonisation would likely take place next spring.

The Vatican was waiting for the global situation with COVID-19 to improve before it scheduled the event, Ardura explained, noting that thousands of people from countries such as the United States, Canada, France, and Algeria travelled to Rome for Foucauld's beatification in 2005.

"Canonisations are not for the saints, they are for us," the priest said. "Because for them it changes nothing. It changes nothing for them. It is for us. It is a great ecclesial act." — **By Hannah Brockhaus, CNA**



GUEST EDITORIAL  
Fr Frederick Joseph

## We must look beyond material poverty

This year we celebrate the fifth World Day of the Poor on November 14, 2021 with the theme *“The poor you have always with you”* (Mark 14:7). In this gospel, Jesus is not saying that we should not work to alleviate poverty, rather that we can show kindness to the poor whenever we wish.

The Pope goes further, saying that the encounter with the poor is more than just charity, or acts of benevolence, important as they are. Our encounter with the poor should be a genuine sharing, an establishment of community, a desire to get to know those who may have been invisible to us. Pope Francis, in his other writings, pushes us further. It is not enough to work for the relief of poverty. In Fratelli Tutti, we are called upon to challenge the structural causes of poverty. In our society, there is widespread injustice, many people who do not have what is their due, what they need to live a dignified and fulfilled life, and many people who have far more than they need. This is not a natural situation but the result of policy, which means it can be changed.

More often than not, when we speak of poverty, we think of those who are materially poor. However, we should also look at those who are *poor in spirit*. These individuals may be well off financially or economically and be high in the social strata, but they could be suffering from mental health issues, have lost a sense of purpose in life or, even more importantly, have lost a sense of God.

With the churches not having been in full operation for the past two years due to the pandemic, many may have fallen into this category of having lost or partially lost their relationship with God. Loss of loved ones during this period, either due to the coronavirus or other illness, has also made it hard for the grieving families. Under normal circumstances, family members, friends and BEC members would come together physically, offering prayers and support, but the new norm has restricted movement and physical contact.

In our society, we also have people who experience the poverty of isolation and loneliness, homelessness, modern day slavery, trafficking, relational poverty, being abused, or being victims of violence. These circumstances are often the drivers of, or the result of, material poverty. The Gospel calls us to a conversion of heart and this conversion, as Pope Francis says in this year’s message for the World Day of the Poor, “consists primarily in opening our hearts to recognising the many different forms of poverty and manifesting the Kingdom of God through a lifestyle consistent with the faith we profess.”

As a people of hope, we are called to rise above all these challenges and be unto others a beacon of hope, and in the words of Jesus from Matthew 5:13-16, be always reminded that *“we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.”* Our outreach to the poor, in whatever form it may be, should be advanced through the collaboration among BECs and parish ministries. We should also seek creative ways in collaborating with members and groups of other faiths for the common good of mankind.

It is crucial that we grow in our awareness of the needs of the poor, which are always changing, as are their living conditions. The prompting of this awareness becomes alive when we hear the voice of the Spirit. Pope Francis, in his concluding message for the World Day of the Poor, aspires that we inspire a movement of evangelisation that meets the poor personally wherever they may be. He goes on to say, “We cannot wait for the poor to knock on our door; we need urgently to reach them in their homes, in hospitals and nursing homes, on the streets and in the dark corners where they sometimes hide, in shelters and reception centres.”

While we engage in works of mercy, let us emulate Mary’s action who sat at the feet of Jesus listening to Him and soak in her wisdom when she uttered to the servants at the wedding in Cana, *“do whatever he tells you”*.

May those words always echo in our hearts and be our compass as we embark and continue in our mission for the poor.

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# Synodality: let’s try this one more time

There is still a lot of confusion and misunderstanding over the term ‘synodality’.

It is a word that is recurring regularly in Catholic circles now — made ‘famous’ by Pope Francis, to express ... what?

That question is the focus of much commentary. My contribution to the conversation is based on years spent facilitating several synods and many other similar Church gatherings.

Of course, no dictionary will help us in this. The word is too new. As yet, synodality has no definition. We have to use linguistic clues to tease out just what Pope Francis is trying to communicate by coining it. Definition will have to await an experience of this new kind of reality. We will only learn what possibilities it contains, as well as its limits, by actual participation in it. Definition implies naming boundaries. They will be discovered through trial and error — in the same way canonical synods came to be defined over the centuries.

Linguistic usage offers a starting point. When we tack a suffix like ‘ity’ onto an adjective like ‘synodal’, we are usually indicating that the reality we are pointing to bears some resemblance to a canonical synod. On the other hand, it means that the mere convening of a synod does not guarantee that there will be synodality. Otherwise, Pope Francis would not have been compelled to coin the new term.

That leaves us with a further task: to try to search out what characteristics make synodality like a synod, and what makes it point to something other than a synod.

### Like a synod

At a minimum we know that development of this new phenomenon will be something positive, something to be desired. Otherwise, the Pope would not be touting it so frequently. That implies, further, that Pope Francis is expressing his belief that achieving synodality is needed if our Church is to respond effectively to our contemporary world.

In his effort to describe something that cannot as yet be defined, Pope Francis uses an image. Synodality suggests a ‘walking with’. That image contains two components. It is not describing a static reality: there is change going on; movement from one state to another. Something new is being birthed. And it involves more than one person. You can’t model synodality by yourself. It is a ‘between’ phenomenon. Achieving synodality will require new behaviours on the part of its participants.

### Synodality involves structural change

The most evident feature of a synod is its composition — who is invited to participate and who is not. Synods are composed of bishops and the ordained clergy, whether those of a diocese or of a nation or of the universal Church. One of the features that make the experience of synodality different from that of a synod is the make-up of its participants. Francis clearly desires that the Church’s response to a rapidly changing world will be in the hands of a broader spectrum of believers than the episcopacy alone. At the core of his reform is his conviction that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are poured out on the whole Church. At that level, distinction based on ordination becomes irrelevant.

That is the same conviction that Paul VI expressed in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 47 years ago when he shifted the focus from the power of teachers to that of witnesses. He called all believers to witness to Christ by their living of the Gospel. Synodality characterises a gathering that actively engages all Catholics at that level.

### Something more: transformation of fundamental attitudes

Much of the commentary describing what is new in the synodality envisioned by Pope Francis focuses on a change in structure: participation, and responsibility for decisions, will involve more than the ordained. No matter what other features may eventually emerge as synodality becomes normative, the participant base will include laity and clergy. It will be based on the shared experience of the baptised, not simply the limited perspectives of the ordained. The goal is shared responsibility.

But expanding the participant base of future synods, as earth-shaking as that would be, does not seem to encompass the full transformation Pope Francis is seeking. Structures are inert, like empty wineskins. All depends on how they are used, and what is poured into them. And that depends on the quality of interaction on the part of their participants. Appointment to membership does not of itself guarantee shared empowerment.

### Hopes raised, then dashed

Examples of structural revision that promised revolutionary change but turned out to be stillborn are easily found. Groups of people previously excluded from membership on various types of boards are finally admitted. Think women, or people of colour. Expectations of equal inclusion are raised. Then the new members discover, to their disappointment, that they remain powerless in spite of their appointment. They learn that they are simply tokens created to burnish the reputation of the institution. They are listed on the group’s roster but they remain powerless. All depends on whose voice is listened to and taken seriously, and in spite of their appointment their voice is screened out.

### Reactionary patterns are maintained by all

At this point, it would be easy to fall into the trap of pinning all responsibility for the failure of structures to achieve the empowerment they promised on those presently in power: the ‘old boys club.’

Actually, experience reveals that new members can, quite unconsciously, contribute to their own impotence.

The following personal experience makes the point: I once facilitated the training of a newly established diocesan pastoral council. The new body was composed of an equal number of priests, lay Church ministers, and lay parishioners. The bishop was deeply committed to sharing responsibility. There was much anticipation in the air. After a period of group formation, the council was called to decide future diocesan policy on a matter affecting every parish. The pros and cons of all options had been discussed thoroughly. It was time to test the waters. I called individual members to state publicly where they stood on

the question. They expressed a range of responses: highly supportive of one or other option; troubled but ready to trust a clear consensus; broadly satisfied by the way the views of each member had been respected.

Finally, I came to a quiet gentleman who said, “I just want us to do what the bishop wants ...” The disappointment of the other members showed on every face. Where had the fellow been?

I tell the story, not to cast blame on the man, but to make the point that cultural patterns — whether the exclusionary ones of the past or the empowering one hoped for from the adoption of new structures — are co-created by the interaction of all the players.

By his use of the term synodality, Pope Francis seems to be pointing beyond structural change to the adoption of a new mentality, a spirituality that celebrates and actively promotes equal participation and empowerment. That will take an uprooting of long-standing cultural expectations, on the part of lay participants, as well as their bishops.

It is clear from the frequency with which Pope Francis excoriates the evil of clericalism that he hopes the cultivation of a synodal spirituality will end that aberration of the Gospel.

### Cultural scripts

Only a few short years ago, both the ordained and their lay members came onto the stage with their respective scripts written for them by preceding generations. The laity’s script read “Father knows best” or “Pray for me, Father; you have a direct line to God.” That of the ordained was “We know Scripture and theology; the laity know only their eighth-grade catechism” or “We’re the protectors of their faith; we have to watch over them.” The content of the challenge presented by the development of a synodal spirituality, will be different for each group.

Bishops will be challenged to learn and practice a new way of listening as lay members describe, not merely their beliefs or theology but the way they actually experience life in today’s Church. And that will inevitably include the laity’s honest perceptions of clerical behaviour.

Listening at that level requires a new form of vulnerability. And confession. Newly empowered lay members will have to unlearn scripts developed across the years when they allowed accepted practice to reduce them to being passive recipients of whatever the clerics decided was good for them. To move from passive membership to actively assuming responsibility involves taking the risks of speaking up. The experience can be lonely. Both will be called to embrace the new experience of mutual trust.

### Conclusion

The culture that divided the Church into the teachers and the taught took centuries to develop; it will not be replaced overnight with one that values equally the experience of every member. The process will be gradual, and costly for all. It’s called shared responsibility, after all.

— By George Wilson SJ, LCI (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)

● George Wilson SJ is a retired ecclesiologist.



## General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

# Getting the feel for what synodality means

We, as a Church – worldwide – are preparing for a “synod on synodality” in 2023.

Pope Francis is asking us to become “a synodal Church”. And in various places, Catholics are preparing for ‘synods’ of various kinds.

In less than a decade, “synod” has shifted from being a technical word used by lawyers and Church bureaucrats to being a buzz word – and, apparently, it points to a magic formula that can solve the deep problems that afflict us in the

**Being a ‘synodal Church’ means meeting on common ground as equals by baptism and where everyone, including priests and bishops, must truly listen to everyone else.**

Church today.

But if everyone in the big room is shouting, “Let’s have synodality!”, over in the corner there is a small voice saying, “But I do not even know what that means!”

Even my computer finds it strange and every time I type “synodality” the automatic spell-check

underlines it.

If you sense you do not know what synodality means, that is a good place to be because *no one knows exactly what it means*.

A couple of years ago, the Pope asked the International Theological Commission (ITC) to prepare a document on synodality and they

had to admit that it was a new word.

The older meanings of the synod (a meeting of bishops) were of little use, and the ITC members tried to find parallels in history that might explain it.

The result is a very wordy document that contains many interesting bits and pieces. But when I finished reading it, I was no wiser as to why synodality would be much use to us.

Does that mean that Pope Francis has lost the plot? I believe it’s the exact opposite!

When one wants to be creative, to

discover new solutions, and face into the future as a challenge, knowing that the Spirit is with us, then it is best not to start from a very fixed and defined point.

Rather, it is better to start with a dream-like, ill-defined image – a sketch or a general pointer. And then see — through thought, discussion, and prayer — what the future might look like.

If the future is the challenge of the unknown, then the wrong place to start is with a very firm idea derived from the past.

## What images does synodality conjure up for us?

So what we need to do now is not define synodality, but ask ourselves what such an image brings into our mind.

The simplest meaning of synod is a meeting place. It was a gathering of the leaders of Churches of a region where they discussed their problems and tried to find solutions.

In mythic Church history, these were great assemblies that “solved” problems.

But in reality, they were usually far more slipshod affairs, and the solution proposed at one meeting for one problem created another. And so, yet another meeting was needed to solve the problems created by the previous meeting.

However, if we think of a “meeting point” in an airport, we might have a basic image that we could work with.

What does a meeting point suppose among those who meet?

Most obviously, we come to a meeting point from different places and directions. We may all be on a common pilgrimage of faith as the People of God, but we are starting from many places and have different needs, problems, and insights.

There is no one person who knows what the problems are or where we are now.

Coming from different places assumes that there are many of us and that we are meeting on common



**Being a ‘synodal Church’ means meeting on common ground as equals by baptism and where everyone, including priests and bishops, must truly listen to everyone else. (Fides photo)**

ground as equals. This is the very opposite of a single leader waving a banner and shouting to everyone: “Follow me! This way! Charge!”

A meeting place assumes dialogue and sharing of ideas and experience.

The meeting place is a level space that is common to all who arrive there.

It is not a case that everyone is expected to know the location of a particular place and then go, as factory workers go to the foreman’s office, to be told what to do.

When people meet up, there is an assumption that each wants to meet the other, to be in the presence of the others, and each will listen and share with the others.

Meeting places are, by their nature, non-hierarchical spaces.

This is going to be difficult for Catholics.

Unlike some of the Reformed Churches, we have never laid any stress on our equality in baptism. We have a tradition of some speaking and having the answers, the rest following, and listening.

In Latin, we express this as the *ecclesia docens* (the teaching Church) and the *ecclesia discens* (the listening Church).

In common parlance, it is expressed as “Father knows best” or that the duty of so-called ordinary Catholics is to “pray, pay and obey”.

If we go in for a meeting place type of gathering and still harbour these ideas, it will be a waste of time. And, worse, many will feel betrayed by a false promise.

## A two-way challenge

When I hear some people speak about the magisterium – the authority to speak and teach in the Church – I realise they believe this is really confined to the bishops and those agreeing with them.

That is fine, so long as they do not think of a synod involving anyone other than bishops (and most synods in the Church’s history have been bishops-only affairs).

But if we are to talk about a synodal Church and invite others to the meeting point, then everyone has to listen to everyone else. Moreover, it is hard to have real mutual listening of any

two people who have met.

It must not simply be a case that some go simply to hear what the bishops say, or that the bishops only listen to their sisters and brothers as part of a fact-finding exercise before they, the bishops, go off and decide matters. Real listening forms a new community of equals.

Likewise, each must speak. And that means engaging in a process of prayer, study and reflection.

It is not simply saying, “I would like this.” We are not meeting as suppliers and consumers, but as sisters and brothers.

## A meeting-place Church

These synods, right now, are one-off events. But we have to learn new ways of relating to one another.

It is going to be difficult, and it is going to be messy.

Many bishops and presbyters will see it as just time-wasting committees to be endured. Many laity will find it too demanding. A consumerist view of religion may be far from the image of discipleship, but it is a constant temptation.

Some priests have grown up in deeply patriarchal, pyramid-shaped societies and thus view authority and truth. This is at odds with the view of “their parishioners” who see things otherwise.

It will be hard!

But having this fuzzy aim – a meet-

ing-place Church – is worth it. It is basic to our image of our relationship with the risen Christ.

“No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (Jn 15:15). — **By Fr Thomas O’Loughlin, LCI** (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)

● **Thomas O’Loughlin is a presbyter of the Catholic Diocese of Arundel and Brighton and professor-emeritus of historical theology at the University of Nottingham (UK). His latest book is Eating Together, Becoming One: Taking Up Pope Francis’ Call to Theologians (Liturgical Press, 2019)**

## Uneven understanding, exercise of synodal process should be expected, welcomed

MANILA: Last month, a coastal parish in the northern Philippines gathered fisherfolk and residents of communities to discuss the impact of the phenomenon of black sand mining in the area.

The priest said the activity was part of the “synodal process” that was launched by the Catholic Church to listen to the concerns of the community.

In the southern Philippines, a parish priest was only able to send the president and treasurer of the Parish Pastoral Council to attend a diocesan consultation on how to proceed with the process.

He was apologetic. He said the parish and many other parishes in the area have been busy with various activities that impact communities,

especially during the pandemic.

“The meetings and consultations are too time-consuming,” he said.

Attending the activities entail resources, such as food and transportation, that parishes and individuals don’t have because of the effect of the health crisis on the economy.

In the national capital, many parishioners are still wondering how to go about with the “process” to ensure the voice of the “least, the lost, and the last” would be heard.

In poor communities, most people don’t have access to the Internet, especially to the online platforms that are being used for parish level consultations.

“I learned about the start of the synodal process only days before it was held,” said one parish worker.

“In the actual diocesan setting, there is lack of information and coordination,” he said.

Announcements were posted on social media, mostly on Facebook, with the date and people who are supposed to speak during the consultations.

“I did not know who are specifically mobilised,” said the parishioner. “I presumed that the lay people and the clergy who participate were selected earlier,” he said.

This makes the process problematic. Selecting people to attend the consultations will limit the scope, if not the wealth, of the discussions.

“I welcome the idea of a synod,” said Antonio “Tony” Villamor, a long-time church and human rights worker in a parish in the Philippine capital.

He said the process should result in “more dynamic changes in the Church, according to what is envisioned by Pope Francis.”

It is time for the hierarchy to “reach out to the multitudes of believers,” said Tony, adding that the Church leadership “has been perceived, and is doing, more of the sacramental.”

He said the Church needs to organise the faithful not only for online Masses but “in building compassion with the poor, alleviating poverty, advocating peace and working for social justice.”

The Church needs to be “more pastoral and more dynamic,” said Tony, even as he noted that there are “uneven practices and understanding of what a dynamic, constructive, community-based Church from the

grassroots or the peripheries is.”

He acknowledged that the process would take some time, especially in “uprooting the injustices” and in building a healthy community.

“The path of dialogue, cooperation, and planning through the synod must come out with more concrete and less motherhood statements,” he said.

“It must be like mustard seeds that grow with the fire of the Holy Spirit,” he added.

It is indeed presumptuous to expect one template (and uniform results) in the holding of the synodal process because as many of my faithful friends would say, “the Holy Spirit works in various and mysterious ways” unique to each individual. — **By Jose Torres Jr, LiCAS.news**

WORLD DAY OF THE POOR – NOVEMBER 14, 2021

# The poor enable us to discover the true face of the Father

## 1. Two Interpretations

(i) *“The poor you will always have with you”* (Mk 14:7). Jesus spoke these words at a meal a few days before Passover. The woman anointed the feet of Jesus, who represented the poor. Those who do not respect the poor betray Jesus’ teaching and cannot be His disciples.

(ii) That nameless woman, perhaps, also represents all those women who, down the centuries, would be silenced and suffer violence. Women, so often, are discriminated against and excluded from positions of responsibility.

## 2. Empathy

There is empathy between Jesus and the woman. Our concern for the poor does not consist of programmes and activities, it is about being one with them and it is this that will lead us to a genuine concern for the poor. The poor, always and everywhere, evangelise us, because they enable us to discover, in new ways, the true face of the Father. They have much to teach us. They know the suffering Christ through their own sufferings. It is necessary that we let ourselves be evangelised by them.

**The theme of the fifth World Day of the Poor is ‘The poor you will always have with you’ taken from the gospel of Mark. Pope Francis, in his message, highlights the need for conversion and for an approach that counters new forms of poverty in the world and promotes the freedom needed to live a life of fulfilment according to the abilities of each person. We give here a 10-point summary of the Holy Father’s message.**

## 3. Closeness

Jesus not only sides with the poor; He also shares their lot. The poor are not people “outside” our communities, but brothers and sisters whose sufferings we should share to alleviate their difficulties and marginalisation. The life of Fr Damien of Molokai, who worked among lepers, is a shining example for us.

## 4. Selfish lifestyles fuel poverty

Jesus invites us to ‘Repent and believe in the Gospel’ (Mk 1:17). It is more than just assisting the poor, we must become poor, willing to give up accumulation of riches. Then we will be able to give ourselves in love.

## 5. New Forms

We are seeing ever new forms of poverty in

our society. Poverty is also being seen as an intolerable burden to society. The number of poor has increased tremendously, especially during the pandemic. We must respond appropriately with far-sighted projects.

## 6. Response

We need to follow a path of justice so that social inequalities can be overcome. Often, our individualistic lifestyles are complicit in generating poverty and often saddle the poor with responsibility for their condition.

## 7. New ways

A different approach to poverty is required. It is a challenge that governments and world institutions need to take up with a farsighted social model capable of countering the new forms of poverty that are now sweeping the

world and will decisively affect coming decades. The poor can no longer be marginalised.

## 8. A Call

*“The poor you will always have with you”* (Mk 14:7) is a summons never to lose sight of every opportunity to do good. It is not a question of easing our conscience by giving alms, but of opposing the culture of indifference and injustice we have created regarding the poor.

## 9. Ever-changing needs

It is crucial that we grow in our awareness of the needs of the poor, which are always changing, as are their living conditions. People are less willing than in the past to confront poverty. Affluence, to which we have become accustomed, makes it more difficult to accept sacrifices and deprivation.

## 10. A Hope

We need to meet the poor personally wherever they may be. We cannot wait for the poor to knock on our door; we need to urgently reach out to them. It is important to understand how they feel, what they are experiencing and what their hearts desire.

To read the full text of the message, go to: <https://bit.ly/3bNwIw8>

## Encounter in the Periphery

*“Can anything good come from there?”* Nathanael asked. (Jn 1:46) Nazareth was, at the time of Jesus, the most marginalised valley in a shunned province of a conquered land. It portrays perfectly what a “periphery” is. The word periphery means a “marginal or secondary position in, or aspect of, a group, subject, or sphere of activity.” The periphery also carries connotations of being “peripheral” – inconsequential, not central, and it is both geographical and existential.

I believe it is in this context that we hear the recurring theme which has marked the beginning of Pope Francis’ pontificate, of what he calls “the periphery.” He brought the periphery into the central narrative of the Church’s life, ministry, and mission. The idea of the periphery is not entirely new in Catholic social thought. It represents an updated revised version of “the preferential option for the poor”. According to Pope Francis, it is the life experience of the periphery, walking the walk of the periphery, with the people of the periphery, through which one is acquainted with reality.

Christ’s teaching to his apostles, “Go to the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15) can be accomplished only if one has lived and experienced the geographical and existential periphery. This is how one follows the *Way, the Truth, and the Life*. Jesus of Nazareth is the epitome of the periphery. Jesus lived in the periphery for 30 years, far away from the centre of the Roman empire in Rome, and during his ministry, he never lost sight of society’s existential periphery – the poor, the lost sheep, the abandoned, the discarded, the prostitutes, the troubled women, the leper etc. That was where he encountered persons whom He ministered with and spoke truths that emerged from – and were informed by – his close association with the powerless in the periphery.

**In conjunction with World Day of the Poor, Fr Fabian Dicom reflects on the word ‘periphery’ as seen both in the context of the Church and our Malaysian society today.**



Persons and communities of the periphery continue to exist even today. In Malaysian society, both in the rural and urban peripheries, we have people who experience the poverty of isolation and loneliness, homelessness, modern day slavery, trafficking, relational poverty, the experience of being abused or the victim of violence. These circumstances are often drivers of poverty, or the result of poverty. And now our society is being traumatised by a global pandemic. The poverty which exists in our communities has been exposed even more and the hardest hit are those who were in poverty before the pandemic and would probably continue to live that way even when, hopefully, the pandemic ends.

“Come and see” (Jn 1:46) was Philip’s response to Nathanael’s question about Jesus. Nathanael was invited to encounter the Jesus of Nazareth precisely where He is, in the peripheries. I believe that the World Day of the Poor, which was initiated by Pope Francis in 2017, is also an invitation to “come and see” Jesus, where He continues to be today, in the poor, in the periphery: for Jesus tells us in Mt 25:40, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” We are invited to encounter the poor – “The poor you will always have with you” (Mk 14:7) – in the refugee, the migrant worker, the transgender person, the homeless, the destitute, the men-



Homeless people at the Komtar bus terminal in George Town, Penang. (The Star photo)

tally and physically challenged.

Our society has also witnessed a greater sense of human solidarity and compassion in the way many Malaysians have responded to the needs of those who are suffering because of the pandemic. The pandemic has greatly increased our awareness of the periphery, exposing a reality that cannot be ignored. Many ecclesial organisations and parishes in the country must be commended for their efforts in reaching out to those in need by providing food, essential items, and financial assistance. However, Pope Francis, in his call regarding the mission with the poor, has been consistently saying that the encounter with the poor is more than just charity, or acts of benevolence, important as they are. Our encounter with the poor should be a genuine sharing, an establishment of community, a desire to get to know those who may have been invisible to us. It is not enough to work for the relief of poverty, we are called upon to challenge the structural causes of poverty. While being steadfast in proclaiming that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society,

of all the principles of her social teaching, the Church must continue her works of mercy in tandem with her works of advocacy and activism.

The challenge for us today as Church is to “come out of herself and to go to the peripheries, not only geographically, but also the existential peripheries: the mystery of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance and indifference to religion, of intellectual currents and of all forms of misery.” (Pope Francis — on the eve of his election). Perhaps the process of encounter, listening and discerning, in preparation for the coming Synod, may help facilitate the paradigm shift needed in the way we are called to be Church. Perhaps the process will prioritise the periphery as the focus, a process that looks from the edge rather than from the centre and enabling the periphery to determine the direction of the Church.

I am hopeful!

• Fr Fabian Dicom is a priest of the Penang Diocese and has been working with individuals and groups on the fringes of society for the last ten years.

WORLD DAY OF THE POOR – NOVEMBER 14, 2021

# Tackling urban poverty in Malaysia

The ability to eradicate poverty is the single biggest predictor of good health. In other words, eradicating poverty is more important for improving the health of Malaysians than building more hospitals or training more doctors. The converse is also true, that the single best predictor of poorer health is poverty.

A UNICEF survey in December 2020, called “Families on The Edge”, shows that urban poverty worsened in the first year of the pandemic. Although official urban poverty statistics are not available for this year, it is likely that urban poverty has worsened further.

Both urban and rural poverty exist and we should focus equally on both. Urban and rural poverty have different causes and therefore different solutions, but several factors remain the same. One, poverty is a relative concept and cannot be measured using monthly income levels alone. Two, poverty should be measured using a multidimensional poverty index that incorporates health, education and living standards. And three, eradicating poverty requires the active building of capacity, confidence and non-financial capital among the poor, rather than their just passively relying on cash transfers, handouts or economic assistance.

## Assemble the right coalition

Secondly, implementing these solutions requires the right coalition of actors. Traditionally, the government has been the most important actor in eradicating poverty in Malaysia. Since 1957, Malaysia has received negligible amounts of foreign direct aid or loans from the World Bank or International Monetary Fund, and most of the poverty eradication efforts have been domestically funded.

However, the landscape of actors and funders has fundamentally changed. The role and size of statutory boards like the Employees Provident Fund and Social Security Organisation have increased over time, with a gradually larger and more active Community Welfare Department (Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat), which is part of KPWKM. There are also many social enterprises, civil society groups, NGOs or even groups of well-meaning individuals, as evidenced by the organic *RakyatJagaRakyat* movement during the pandemic.

The private sector has also entered the landscape, beginning with their standalone corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities. As investment criteria begin to incorporate environmental, social and governance (ESG) elements, large corporations may soon include metrics like urban poverty into their business model. The government’s role is to avoid duplication of services — which leads to wastage and abuse of privilege — by registering those organisations that offer regular services.

Three underrated actors in poverty eradication efforts are educational institutions, licensing authorities and banks. Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) will be crucial to the upskilling of the urban poor and providing them with employment opportunities. They can be hairdressers, make-up artists, carpenters or cobblers. TVET should be lifelong and offer progressively more sophisticated content. The urban poor may not need traditional degrees, but will benefit from short modules or certificate courses. Most importantly, the urban poor need to be guided out of poverty. We must show them how to use their skills to earn a living sustainably,

In this article, DATUK MUNIRAH ABDUL HAMID and DR KHOR SWEE KHENG elaborate on three overarching strategies to resolve urban poverty in Malaysia – the right set of tools, the right coalition of actors and the right regulatory and bureaucratic framework.

## Build the right set of tools

Firstly, tackling urban poverty in Malaysia requires the right set of tools, as there is no single magic solution to resolve urban poverty. This set of tools can be divided into three components: shelter, financial assistance and employment. Each component requires short-term solutions and long-term investment to reorganise and repurpose our existing infrastructure and society.

For example, there can be multiple shelter solutions to cater for different categories of people. The Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development or Kementerian Pembangunan Wanita, Keluarga Dan Masyarakat (KPWKM) can provide annual grants for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to operate fully free shelters for those with mental health issues. Low-cost hotels affected by the pandemic can be converted into low-cost hostels for those who cannot afford to rent a place of their own. Under-utilised buildings like shopping complexes can be used for urban intervention programmes.

Financial assistance can be provided in short-term ways that encourage and incentivise the poor to “graduate” to progressively lower levels of financial assistance. This will reduce the risk of welfarism or prolonged dependence on the government. There is a spectrum of financial support that can be provided, ranging from direct cash transfers to a means-tested financial support package. Where possible, we believe that electronic cash transfers via e-wallets are the best approach, as they reduce administrative cost and ensure recipients are receiving the assistance directly.

Durable employment solutions must accompany shelter and financial assistance. However, solutions for durable employment are beyond the scope of this article, as they require changing the fundamentals of Malaysia’s persistently low-wage jobs, low productivity, the impact of the gig or platform economy, and the Industrial Revolution 4.0.

Nonetheless, there are some low-hanging

fruit we can easily harvest to promote durable and dignified employment solutions for the urban poor in Malaysia. These low-hanging fruit are based on simple principles: utilise their existing skills while providing longer-term upskilling so they can “graduate” to needing lower levels of government support.

One example is providing a clean, centralised kitchen (a “cloud kitchen”) so that women can, on a shared basis, prepare food to sell to individuals or restaurants. Another example is to convert abandoned buildings, multi-storey carparks or rooftops into urban or community gardens that produce food (as is being done in California, Singapore and Spain). A third example is to guarantee employment to the urban poor by imposing a minimum wage in the construction sector as well as gardening, maintenance or hygiene services. There are many more creative ways to provide the urban poor with a regular and routine salary, while including them in the formal economy.

## Enable smart regulation

And that is why we argue, thirdly, for the right regulatory and bureaucratic framework for poverty eradication. The current framework is arguably too rigid and prioritises the central role of the government in direct efforts to eradicate poverty. That could have worked in Malaysia’s adolescence and early adulthood, but is impractical and undesirable six decades after independence.

The right regulatory framework for poverty eradication will be non-paternalistic, and will treat all actors as equal partners. That framework will allow non-government and private sector actors to experiment with new ways to eradicate poverty in multidimensional ways, because financial assistance alone is inadequate. All non-government entities working in poverty eradication or community development should be regulated through smart regulations that allow adequate oversight without imposing unnecessary bureaucracy on them. In other words, the government becomes an active partner, coordinator and enabler, rather than the final approver.

Malaysia’s efforts to eradicate poverty have been relatively successful so far, but we need new strategies, frameworks and solutions as our understanding of poverty increases. Winning the war against COVID-19 also requires that we repair our social safety nets and provide multidimensional solutions to the multidimensional problem of urban poverty.

**Dr Khor Swee Kheng** specialises in health policies and global health.



This article first appeared in *Forum, The Edge Malaysia Weekly* (Oct 18 – Oct 24, 2021) and has been reproduced with permission from the authors.



The Salvation Army extends a helping hand in distributing food. (NST photo)

such as at centres offering intervention programmes.

The second underrated actor is the licensing authority. The government must re-examine the licensing regime for various jobs, and reduce the licensing requirements as much as possible. For example, someone who wants to open a rooftop community garden or start a small business selling biscuits and cakes should not have to go through multiple layers of bureaucracy. We must remember that the urban poor do not just lack money, they also lack the familiarity, confidence and courage in navigating an unfriendly or intimidating bureaucracy. Besides, there are also many who will never be able to satisfy all the requirements to obtain a licence.

The third underrated actor in poverty eradication efforts is the financial institutions. In a vicious chicken-or-egg situation, the urban poor are poor because they cannot access capital to lift their standard of living. We propose that for-profit banks consider building a micro-finance architecture for the urban poor in Malaysia. A hugely-successful example is the Grameen Bank, a profitable micro-finance organisation in Bangladesh with 20,000 em-

ployees, 2,500 branches, US\$2.8 billion in total assets, US\$204 million in revenue, and one Nobel Peace Prize its founder received in 2006. We have a selection of development banks in Malaysia, the global Alliance for Financial Inclusion is based in Malaysia and new financial entities like GrabPay provide us with an excellent opportunity to extend capital to the poor.

We should welcome a larger landscape of actors in our poverty-eradication efforts. The government should accept that these actors are all pulling in the same direction of eradicating poverty, and are not competing with each other. The success of each actor reflects positively on the government

**Datuk Munirah Abdul Hamid**, president of *Pertubuhan Tindakan Wanita Islam (Pertiwi)*, started the *Pertiwi Soup Kitchen* in 2010, which now feeds up to 1,200 people daily.



# Giving ourselves a better story

In a recent book, *Living Between Worlds*, James Hollis offers a piece of wit that carries more depth than is first evident. A therapist says to a client, *I cannot solve your problem, but I can give you a more compelling story for your misery*. That's more than a wisecrack. Whether we feel good or bad about ourselves is often predicated on what kind of story we understand ourselves as living within.

I remember a seminar some years ago where one of the keynote speakers was a young French-Canadian priest, Pierre Olivier Tremblay. Tremblay began his talk with words to this effect: I am a chaplain at a university, working with young college students. They are full of life, dreams, and energy; sadly however, they are mostly devoid of hope because they have no meta-narrative. They suffer a lot because they do not have a bigger story within which to understand themselves and make more sense of their own story. Their own stories, precious though they are, are too small and individualistic to give them much to draw on when pain and heartache beset them.

They need a bigger story within which to situate themselves, a meta-narrative. While this wouldn't necessarily take away their pain and heartaches, it would give them something bigger within which to understand their suffering.

Hearing this, I think of my parents and the spirituality that helped sustain them and their generation. They had a meta-narrative, namely, the Christian story of salvation history and of how, in that story, at the very beginning of history, Adam and Eve committed an 'original sin' that has ever since skewed reality and left us with the impossibility of ever attaining the full symphony in this life.

When their lives got hard, as is the case with all of us, they had a religious perspective as to why they were frustrated and in pain. They understood themselves to be born into a flawed world and a flawed nature. Hence, their prayer included the words, *for now we live, mourning and weeping in a valley of tears*.

Today we might frown on this and see it as unhealthy and morbid, but that narrative of Adam and Eve helped give explanation



Fr Ron Rolheiser

and meaning to all the shortcomings in their lives. While it didn't take away their pain, it helped give dignity to their misery. Today I see many sincere parents trying, in new ways, to give a bigger narrative to their young children through stories like *The Lion King*. That might indeed be helpful for young children; but as Pierre Olivier Tremblay points out, eventually a much bigger and more compelling narrative is needed.

The story within which we frame our pain makes all the difference in the world vis-a-vis

how we cope with that pain. For example, James Hillman tells us that perhaps the biggest pain we experience with ageing is our *idea of ageing*. This is true too for many of our struggles. They need the dignity of being seen under a larger canopy. I like what Robertson Davies says when he laments that he doesn't want to struggle with a 'growing edge', but wants rather to be 'tempted by demon'. He wants to accord a higher dignity to his temptations!

A bigger story brings us this dignity because it helps us differentiate meaning from happiness. We invariably confuse the two. What we need to seek in life is meaning, not happiness. Indeed, happiness (as we generally understand it) can never be pursued because it is always a by-product of something else. Moreover, happiness is ephemeral and episodic; it comes and goes. Meaning is abiding and can co-exist with pain and suffering. I doubt that Jesus was particularly happy as he hung dying on the cross, but I suspect that inside of all the pain, he was experiencing deep meaning, perhaps the deepest meaning of all. Not

incidentally, he found this deepest of all meaning because he understood himself as being inside the deepest of all stories.

At the end of the day, faith, religion, community, friendship, and therapy, cannot take away our problems. Most times, there isn't any solution; a problem must be lived through. As Gabriel Marcel famously put it, "life is a mystery to be lived, not a problem to be solved". The story within which we frame our pain is the key to turning problem into mystery.

Art Schopenhauer once wrote that all pain can be borne if it can be shared. The sharing he was referring to doesn't just have to do with friendship, community, and intimacy. It also has to do with story. Pain can be to borne more generatively when it finds itself inside a larger story than our own, when it shares a meta-narrative, a horizon wide enough to dwarf idiosyncratic loneliness.

Hollis is right. No therapist can solve our problem, but he or she can help us find a bigger story that can give more meaning and dignity to our misery — **By Fr Ron Rolheiser, all rights reserved.**

## WEDNESDAYS WITH POPE FRANCIS

### Paul, the true apostle

We are delving into the *Letter to the Galatians*, a little at a time. We have seen that these Christians find themselves in conflict on how to live the faith. The Apostle Paul begins writing his Letter by reminding them of their past relationship, his unease at being far from them, and the unchanging love he retains for each one of them.

However, he does not fail to point out his concern that the Galatians should follow the correct path: it is the concern of a father who has generated the communities in the faith. His intention is very clear: it is necessary to reaffirm the novelty of the Gospel, which the Galatians received through his preaching, to build the true identity on which to base their existence. And this is the principle: to reaffirm the newness of the Gospel, which the Galatians had received from the Apostle.

We immediately discover that Paul has a profound knowledge of the mystery of Christ. From the beginning of his Letter, he does not follow the shallow arguments used by his detractors. The Apostle "flies high" and shows us, too, how to behave when conflicts arise within the community. Only towards the end of the Letter, in fact, is it made explicit that at the heart of the diatribe is the question of circumcision, hence of the main Jewish tradition.

Paul chooses the path of going deeper, because what is at stake is the truth of the Gospel and the freedom of Christians, which is an integral part of it. He does not stop at the surface of problems, of conflicts, as we are often tempted to do to find an immediate solution that gives us false hope that everyone can agree with a compromise. Paul loves Jesus and knows that Jesus is not a man-God of compromises.

This is not how the Gospel works, and the Apostle chooses to take the more challenging route. He writes: "Am I now seeking the favour of men, or of God?" He does not try to make peace with everyone. And he continues: "Or am I trying to please men? If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ" (Gal 1:10).

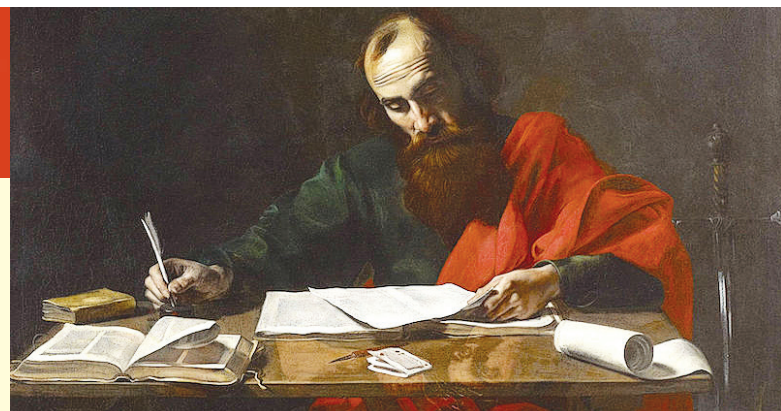
Firstly, Paul feels it is his duty to remind the Galatians that he is a true apostle not by his own merit, but by God's call. He recounts the story of his vocation and conversion, which coincided with the apparition of the Risen Christ during the journey to Damascus (cf. Acts 9:1-9). It is interesting to observe what he affirms of his life prior to that event: "I persecuted the Church of God violently and tried to destroy it. I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of

my fathers" (Gal 1:13-14).

Paul dared to affirm that in Judaism, he surpassed all others, he was a truly zealous Pharisee, "as to righteousness under the law blameless" (Phil 3:6). Twice he emphasises that he was a defender of the "traditions of the fathers" and a "staunch upholder of the law". This is the story of Paul.

On the one hand, he insists on underlining the fact that he had fiercely persecuted the Church and that he had been a "blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence" (cf. 1 Tim 1:13). He spares no adjectives: he describes his own self in this way. On the other hand, he highlights God's mercy towards him, which led him to experience a radical transformation, well known to all. He writes: "I was still not known by sight to the churches of Christ in Judea; they only heard it said, 'He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith'" (Gal 1:22-23).

He converted, he changed, he changed his heart. Paul thus highlights the truth of his vocation through the striking contrast that had been created in his life: from being a persecutor of Christians for not observing the traditions and the law, he was called to become an apostle to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But we see that Paul is



free: he is free to proclaim the Gospel and he is also free to confess his sins. "I was like that": it is the truth that gives freedom to the heart, and it is the freedom of God.

Thinking back on his story, Paul is full of wonder and gratitude. It is as if he wanted to tell the Galatians that he could have been anything but an apostle. He had been brought up as a boy to be a blameless observer of Mosaic Law, and circumstances had led him to fight the disciples of Christ. However, something unexpected happened: God, by His grace, had revealed to him His Son who had died and rose again, so that he could become a herald among the Gentiles (cf. Gal 1:15-16).

How inscrutable are the ways of the Lord! We experience this every day, but especially if we think back to the times when the Lord called us. We must never forget the time and the way in which God entered our lives: let us keep fixed in our hearts and minds that encounter with grace, when God changed our

existence. How often, in the face of the Lord's great works, does the question spontaneously arise: but how is it possible that God uses a sinner, a frail and weak person, to do his will? And yet, none of this happens by chance, because everything has been prepared in God's plan.

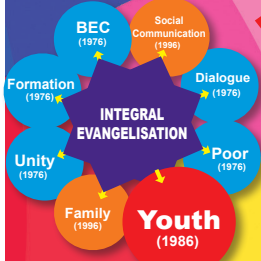
He weaves our history, the story of each one of us: he weaves our history and, if we correspond with trust to his plan of salvation, we will become aware of it. The calling always implies a mission to which we are destined; that is why we are asked to prepare ourselves seriously, knowing that it is God himself who sends us, it is God himself who supports us with his grace.

Brothers and sisters, let us allow ourselves to be led by this awareness: the primacy of grace transforms existence and makes it worthy of being placed at the service of the Gospel. The primacy of grace covers all sins, changes hearts, changes lives, and makes us see new paths. Let us not forget this.



# YOUTH

November 14, 2021



## MISS ME?

# An online "reunion" between Christ and Campus Youth

Join SESSIONS with Bro. JONATHAN and Sr. DELICIA SSFS and HOLY MASS with Fr. RAMON SDB

ORGANISED BY:

**KUCHING:** "Come home with me and refresh your soul." (1 Kings 13:7).

The Kuching Campus Ministry (KCM) recently organised the event, *Miss Me?*

It was an online "reunion" between Christ and campus youth, valuing more deeply the sacraments of communion and confession in this COVID-19 time. The programme was a collaboration between the Kuching Archdiocesan Youth Commission (KAYC), seven seminarians of St Peter's College Major Seminary Kuching (SPC) and Sr Clothilda Delicia Francis Xavier Klumai from the Sisters of St Francis Sarawak (SSFS).

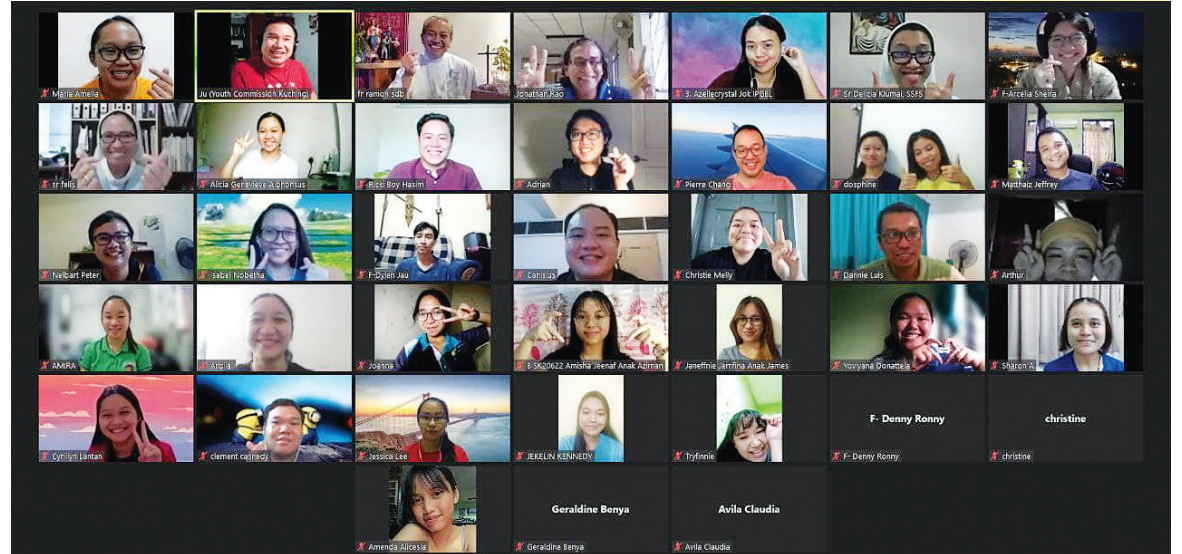
Around 68 youth registered for this event. They were mostly from the Kuching Campus Ministry, which includes ILKKM Kuching, IPGK Batu Lintang, IPGK Tun Abdul Razak, Politeknik Kuching Sarawak, SEGi College Sarawak, UiTM Kampus Samarahan and UNIMAS, as well as campuses outside Kuching like Politeknik METRO

Betong, UiTM Mukah, IPGK Rajang, UPM, and Politeknik Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah. The event was also attended by youth from different parishes in Kuching as well as Sibu and Miri Dioceses.

To begin the session, KAYC presented two videos on the Eucharist and the sacrament of Confession, to help the youth get ready and deepen their understanding of the session. The videos showed what Catholics should do during Holy Communion, as well as the importance of Confession.

At 2.00pm, the emcee, Azel-lecrystal Jok, greeted everyone and introduced the theme and objective of the programme: to ENCOURAGE/MOTIVATE campus youth to go back to Jesus through the sacraments (the Eucharist and Confession especially) as we gradually go back to the 'old normal' but with certain parametres.

Bro Canisius then led the opening prayer, followed by an icebreaker led by Matthaiz Risob and Arcelia Sheira. Two questions were asked during the ice-breaking session: 1. What have you missed most during this



pandemic? The three main answers were "praise & worship", "gathering" and "friends" whereas for question 2: In one word, what does Holy Mass mean to you? "Connection with God" and "love" were the most common answers from participants.

There were two sessions which were both interactive and communicative. The first session on Confession, presented by Bro Jonathan Rao, SPC, was to help the partici-

pants understand the purpose of this sacrament and the need to go for Confession. He also explained about the general absolution and shared some quotes from the saints on Confession. There was also a quiz regarding the Sacrament of Confession, and the winners were Claudia binti Jephari from ILKKM Kuching and Jessica Lee Yu Li from IPGK Tun Abdul Razak.

In session two, Sr Clothilda Delicia

reminded the young people to always be in communion with God. This is because we receive the Body of Christ as spiritual food to give us strength, for God is the source of our strength.

The programme closed with Mass celebrated by Fr Ramon Borja. During the homily, he said to love is to listen, and the more we listen, the more we love. — *By Arcelia Sheira anak Duat*

### TESTIMONIES BY THE YOUTH:

"The "Miss Me?" event was both interesting and eye opening as I was able to learn many new things from the event. It was a brand-new experience for me, and I thoroughly enjoyed it." — *Jessica Lee Yu Li, IPGK Tun Abdul Razak*

"It meant a lot as I gained knowledge about the meaning of repentance and how to receive the Eucharist. I hope such events will continue in the future." — *Ramles Manggoi anak James Brook, SEGi College Sarawak*

"I can forgive the sins of others, but I cannot forget them. When it comes to Jesus, He forgives and forgets all our sins whenever we confess to Him." — *Karen Bulan Jeffrey, UNIMAS*

"For me, this programme helped in deepening my faith, especially during the post-pandemic period. As we know, this pandemic has prevented us from gathering as we used to during the old days. Therefore, through this programme, I learned about Confession shared by Bro Jonathan, which I never knew before. Besides that, Sr Del's sharing touched my heart and opened my eyes to not be afraid in replying to God's call. Finally, I was also touched by Fr Ramon's homily: "The more we listen, the more we love." Hence, I hope there will be more programmes like this in the future." — *Yoviyana Donattela anak Pait, Politeknik Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah, Shah Alam*

"Shalom and thank you for inviting me to the "Miss Me?" virtual event. Throughout the whole programme, I learned a lot from the sharings and deepened my understanding of Confession and Holy Communion, which is very interesting and exciting as well. I really miss a lot of things that we used to do before the lockdown/COVID. I am looking forward to another event like this and hopefully I can make it. Also, I hope we can gather in person after the situation improves. Overall, in my opinion, there was no problem throughout the event. Thank you and God bless." — *Adrian Mark, St Joseph Cathedral, Kuching*



# KK Archdiocese hosts first virtual vocation seminar and retreat

KOTA KINABALU: The Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu held a virtual vocation seminar and retreat for the first time in the Archdiocese's history from Oct 29-31. It attracted 12 participants who responded from across the Archdiocese.

The three-day online programme was conducted in Bahasa. It began with a virtual Eucharistic Celebration presided over by Archbishop John Wong and concelebrated by Fr Mattheus Luta and Fr Isidore Gilbert. Frs Mattheus and Isidore, rectors of Initiation Year and Aspirant Formation respectively, were responsible for setting up the virtual programme.

The programme consisted of vocation sharing and promotion by seminarians in the year of Aspirancy and Initiation from College General Penang and St Peter's College Kuching. Talks were given by both Fr Mattheus and Fr Isidore while group sharing was facilitated by the four seminarians (Lasius Gantis, Peter Chung, Sylvester Wong and Terans Thadeus) who are now doing their pastoral while awaiting their Diaconate ordination. Time was also allotted for adoration and prayer to help the participants pray and discern their calling.

Interaction with the participants

was provided through group sharing and Q&A where they were given opportunities to ask questions about the call of the priesthood.

At the close of the event, Archbishop Wong encouraged the participants to be bold and courageous in responding to God's call without delay.

The participants appreciated the efforts of the Archdiocese in initiating and organising the online vocation seminar and retreat amidst the pandemic. Many of them gained new insight and inspiration to help them discern their calling. — **By Seminarian Sylvester Wong, Catholic Sabah**



LISBON: WYD Lisbon 2023 in a partnership with Move Sports, is organising WYD Global Race, a worldwide race from November 21-30.

This race, besides being the first of this kind, has the mission of promoting WYD Lisbon 2023 as well as raising funds for participants.

"We accepted the proposal of Move Sports to be partners in an initiative that, besides its innovative characteristics, allies physical exercise to a solidarity dimension. We hope that the results of this race can help thousands of young people to live the unique experience of participating in a World Youth Day", said Duarte Ricciardi, WYD Lisbon 2023 executive secretary.

António Cunha, from Move Sports, clarified: "We feel called by the WYD Lisbon 2023 theme, *Mary stood up and left in a hurry*, and we immediately thought about the importance of movement and the urgency for action.

"On the other hand, the world has been challenged by Pope Francis himself, to the need for a life

change, to take care of our Common Home, which implies the practice of healthy life habits.

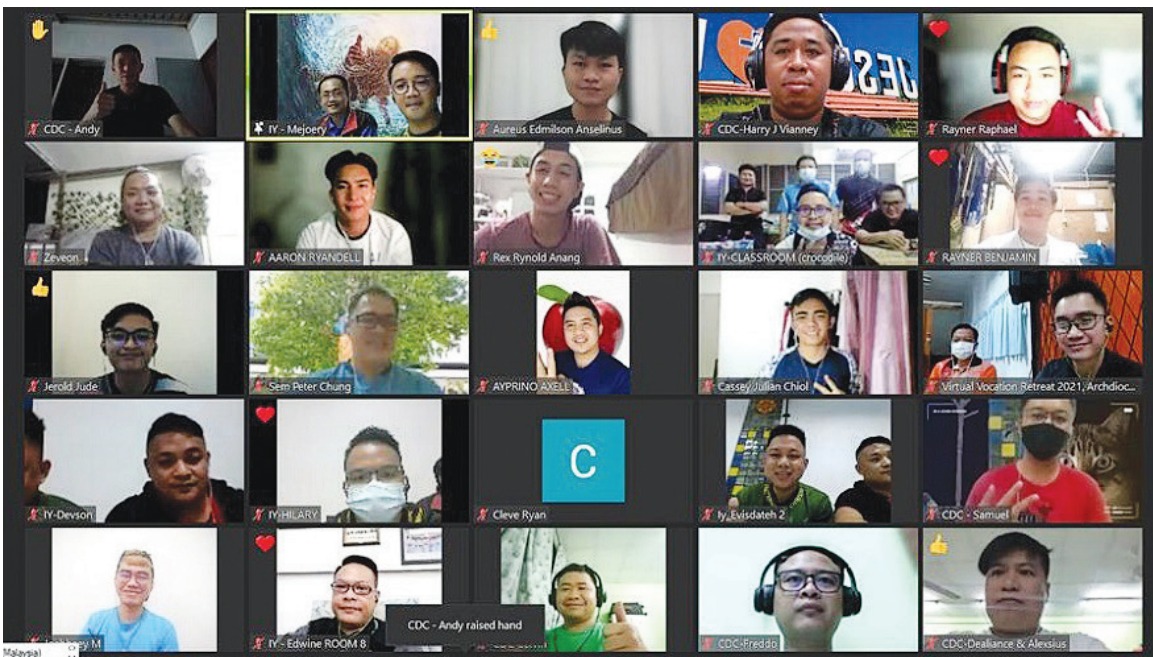
"We suggested it to WYD Lisbon 2023 organisation, and we were truly welcomed. From that moment on, the path was simple. Our challenge is to give people the opportunity to run with a purpose, with an aim."

The app allows you to do your preparation and run within a community, together with your friends, colleagues or even strangers.

The app also provides split times and displays highlights during your participation. You will receive incentives along the way because the truth is you never run alone. You have God on your side and a whole community supporting you.

All the prayers and intentions that take place during the race will be "streamed" through the usual process.

Everyone can participate. Just log on to [www.wydglobalrace.com](http://www.wydglobalrace.com) or download the viRACE app and follow the steps! The race ends on Nov 30 and the results will be available then.



A screenshot of KK Archdiocese's first virtual vocation seminar and retreat.

## What participants say

The seminar sheds light on vocation calling through guidance, talks and sharings. To all youth out there, there's no "too late" or "too early" in God's vocabulary. You are the now of God. Muster your courage and harden not your heart towards the call. — **Jerold Jude**

I have come to realise and understand what 'vocation' means. Indeed, there is a need for more "frontliners" for the Church, especially more priests. Let us not stop praying for priests and religious in their role as "frontliners". To the youth: if you feel called to the priesthood and religious life, don't be afraid to say "yes", or to serve others for the glory of the Lord. — **Cassey Julian**

The seminar has made the vocation calling, the process of becoming a priest, and the lifestyle of priesthood clearer. They were presented in detail and all questions and doubts were answered well in the Q&A session. — **Jerold Juanis**

I experienced the unconditional love of God for me during the retreat. It touched my heart, opened my eyes, and tuned my ears to listen, to feel and to seek more about God's call for my life. — **Aureus Edmilson**

The words 'Don't be afraid for I am with you' have opened my heart to say 'yes' to serve Jesus and the community because God's plan is beautiful and a joy, if we trust and believe in him. — **Rayner Raphael**



## A CHOREOGRAPHIC CHALLENGE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

LISBON: The theme song for the 2021 World Youth Day (WYD), *Jesus said to Me: Levántate! ¡Levántate! Get Up!* has been released. WYD will be celebrated at the Diocesan and/or local Church level on the feast of Christ the King, November 21.

The song, produced and released by the Fundación Ramón Pané together with the Programa Cristonautas (Cristonautas Programme) is aimed at motivating young people to become Christian protagonists in this world, especially given the situation the Church is experiencing today.

Rleased in Spanish, English, and Portuguese, it was written by Fundación Ramón Pané's Executive Director Bro Ricardo Grzona, FRP, using the Lectio Divina method.

"As we reflected on what might be needed for the upcoming WYD, we looked at our Church once again and we sought to understand, especially in the way that young people understand things. So, we did what the first evangeliser of America, Ramón Pané, did in 1494, we 'inculturated ourselves' and suggested contemporary rhythms".

"We like to equip young people with ways to reflect and pray, as



well as encourage them to participate in WYD at their local churches or dioceses this year, in preparation for WYD Lisbon 2023".

The Holy Father chose "Get up! I make you a witness to the things you have seen!" (cf. Acts 26:16), as the theme for WYD 2021.

"This spiritual path, marked by the Pontiff, continues the reflection which begun during the 2019 WYD in Panama, and of the path initiated by the synod, particularly the Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*."

"This theme is an invitation to young people to 'get up,' to hasten to live the Lord's call and spread the Good News, as the Virgin Mary did after responding to her call: 'Here I am'."

Official Video "Jesus said to Me: Levántate! ¡Levántate! Get Up!" <https://www.exaudi.org/2021-world-youth-day-has-a-song/>

For enquiries, please contact:  
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MEMORIAM

**1st Death Anniversary of  
 Vincent Joseph**  
 (3rd January 1941 – 14th November 2020)



*May Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Light draw you to His eternal house of light to worship God singing with the celestial choirs "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen."*

Forever grateful for the gift of you, Athan.

- Mother : A. Margaret Mary
- Wife : Stella Vincent
- Children : Shireen  
Ivan
- Grandchildren : Elisha and Elena
- Daughter-in-law : Jennifer

**10th Anniversary  
 In Loving Memory of**



**Albert Ebenezer Devadass  
 Called home to be with the Lord  
 18th November 2011**

*10 years have passed without you my dear  
 Nothing has changed, Nothing has gone better  
 Everyday passes with anguish, pain and fear  
 Eyes don't dry but always wet with tears*

*Your thoughts and your face still linger  
 Nothing can be done to make me stronger  
 Not a day goes by without feeling much anger  
 At the way God took you away like a stranger  
 You know I'm weak and scared to stay alone  
 You were my only companion and you've flown  
 You had left me and gone away on your own  
 Leaving me behind to fret, cry and mourn*

*Surely we will meet again I don't know when  
 I have to be patient and wait until then  
 You are so missed by our very devoted children  
 Even more by our sweet and lovely grandchildren*

*Hope you are watching us from heaven above  
 Pray and ask God to keep us safe with all His Love*

*Ever loving grandchildren  
 children and wife.*

**3rd Anniversary  
 In Loving Memory of**



**Joseph Marcel Gomez  
 Departed: 15 November 2018**

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

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

**2nd Anniversary  
 In Ever Loving Memory of**



**Don Bosco Raman  
 16th March 1960 –  
 16th November 2019**

*When doubts filled  
 my mind, your comfort  
 gave me renewed  
 hope and cheer.  
 ~ Psalm 94:19 ~  
 We miss you every  
 moment of our lives.  
 Your presence  
 continues to  
 surround us. You still  
 live in our hearts and  
 minds of the loving  
 family you left behind.*

Dearly missed by,  
 Your beloved sisters,  
 brother, wife,  
 daughters, sons,  
 nephews and nieces.

*The Lord  
 is a stronghold  
 for the  
 oppressed,  
 a stronghold  
 in times of  
 trouble.*

Psalm 9:9

**2nd Anniversary  
 In Loving Memory of**



**CHARLIE GOH  
 SIN CHAN**  
 (ex Bro Paul s.g. at  
 Montfort 1964-1969)

**Born:**  
 1 November 1925  
**Died:**  
 18 November 2019

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

Ever remembered by friends and old boys  
 Montfort Boys Town, Batu Tiga, Selangor.

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# St Albert the Great



**Feast day: November 15**

**Patron Saint of:**

- Educators/Teachers
- Philosophers
- Medical Technicians
- Scientists

Albert the Great was a 13th-century German Dominican who decisively influenced the Church's stance toward the Aristotelian philosophy brought to Europe by the spread of Islam.

Students of philosophy know him as the master of Thomas Aquinas. Albert's attempt to understand Aristotle's writings established the climate in which Thomas Aquinas developed his synthesis of Greek wisdom and Christian theology. But Albert deserves recognition on his own merits as a curious, honest, and diligent scholar. He was the eldest son of a powerful and

wealthy German lord of military rank. He was educated in the liberal arts. Despite fierce family opposition, he entered the Dominican novitiate.

His boundless interests prompted him to write a compendium of all knowledge: natural science, logic, rhetoric, mathematics, astronomy, ethics, economics, politics, and metaphysics. His explanation of learning took 20 years to complete. "Our intention," he said, "is to make all the aforesaid parts of knowledge intelligible to the Latins."

He achieved his goal while serving as an educator at Paris and Cologne, as Dominican provincial, and even as bishop of Regensburg for a short time. He defended the mendicant orders and preached the Crusade in Germany and Bohemia. — *Franciscan Media*

## St Margaret of Scotland

On November 16, the Church celebrates the feast day of St Margaret, Queen of Scotland. Her feast day was originally June 10, but was moved to Nov 16, the day of her death, upon the renewal of the Church's Liturgical calendar. Some continue to celebrate her feast on June 10, but many, including all of Scotland, celebrate her feast today.

Margaret was born into royalty in Hungary around 1045. Her father was Edward Atheling, heir to the English throne, and her mother was Princess Agatha of Hungary. Her family returned to England when she was 10 years old, but the Norman Conquest forced them into exile. By this time, her father had died, and her mother fled with the children. They boarded a ship which crashed onto the coast of Scotland, where they remained.

In 1070, at the age of 25, Margaret married the king of Scotland, Malcolm Canmore. As queen, Margaret's faith had a strong influence on her husband's reign. She softened his temper and led him to practice virtue. She dignified the court, providing an example of purity and reverence that led others to follow in her path. She and the king prayed together and fed the hungry, offering a powerful witness of faith to the people they served.

In addition to being a model wife and mother, Margaret worked tirelessly to bring justice and relief to the poor of Scotland. She also built churches and encouraged practices of religious devotion. In her private life, she exhibited great prayerfulness and piety. Her influence was seen not only in her husband's life, but throughout all of Scotland.



**Feast day: November 16**

Margaret died in 1093, just four days after her husband and one of her sons were killed in battle. She was canonised in 1250 by Pope Innocent IV and named patron of Scotland in 1673. — *CNA*



**Feast day: November 16**

On Nov 16, the Catholic Church celebrates the memory of a distinguished medieval nun and writer in the Benedictine monastic tradition, St Gertrude of Helfta, better known as "St Gertrude the Great."

One of the most esteemed woman saints of the Christian West, she was a notable early devotee of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Born in Germany on Jan 6, 1256, Gertrude was sent at age five to a monastery in Helfta, to receive

## St Gertrude the Great

her education and religious formation. Under the leadership of the abbess Gertrude of Hackeborn, the monastery was highly regarded for its spiritual and intellectual vitality. The young Gertrude's teacher, later canonised in her own right, was the abbess' sister St Matilda of Hackeborn.

A gifted student with a great thirst for knowledge, Gertrude excelled in her study of the arts and sciences of her day, while living according to her community's strict practice of the Rule of Saint Benedict. By her own account, however, something seemed to be lacking in Gertrude's personal devotion, which suffered due to her overemphasis of intellectual and cultural pursuits.

A change in her priorities began near the end of 1280, in the season of Advent. Gertrude was 24 and had greatly distinguished herself in many fields of study. But her accomplishments seemed meaningless, as she considered the true meaning and goal of her monastic vocation. Anxious and depressed, Gertrude felt she had built a "tower of vanity and curiosity" rather than seeking to love God above all things and live in union with him.

In January of the following year, she experienced a vision of Christ, hearing him declare: "I have come to comfort you and bring you salvation." During 1281, her priorities shifted dramatically, away from secular knowledge and toward the study of Scripture and theology. Gertrude devoted herself strongly to personal prayer and meditation, and began writing spiritual treatises for the benefit of her monastic sisters.

Understanding the love of Christ as the supreme and fundamental reality, Gertrude communicated this truth in her writings and strove to live in accordance with it. Though acutely aware of her own persistent faults, she also came to understand the depths of God's mercy. She accepted the illness and pain of her final years in a spirit of personal sacrifice, while recalling the goodness of God that had transformed her life.

St. Gertrude the Great died on Nov 16, though it is not known whether this was in 1301 or 1302. While some of her written works were lost, others survive: *The Herald of Divine Love*, *The Life and Revelations*, and *St Gertrude's Spiritual Exercises*. — *CNA*

## St Elizabeth of Hungary

In her short life, Elizabeth manifested such great love for the poor and suffering that she has become the patroness of Catholic charities and of the Secular Franciscan Order. The daughter of the King of Hungary, Elizabeth chose a life of penance and asceticism when a life of leisure and luxury could easily have been hers. This choice endeared her in the hearts of the common people throughout Europe.

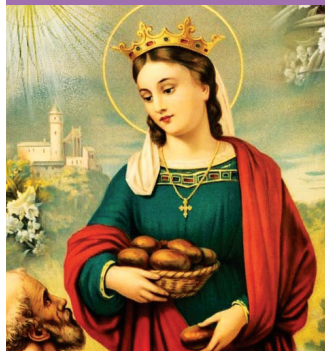
At the age of 14, Elizabeth was married to Louis of Thuringia, whom she deeply loved. She bore three children. Under the spiritual direction of a Franciscan friar, she led a life of prayer, sacrifice, and service to the poor and sick. Seeking to become one with the poor, she wore simple clothing. Daily she would take bread to hundreds of the poorest in the land who came to her gate.

After six years of marriage, her husband died

in the Crusades, and Elizabeth was grief-stricken. Her husband's family looked upon her as squandering the royal purse, and mistreated her, finally throwing her out of the palace. The return of her husband's allies from the Crusades resulted in her being reinstated, since her son was legal heir to the throne.

In 1228, Elizabeth joined the Secular Franciscan Order, spending the remaining few years of her life caring for the poor in a hospital which

**Feast day: November 17**



**Patron saint of:**

- Bakers
- Beggars
- Brides
- Charitable societies
- Charitable workers
- Charities countesses
- Death of children exiles
- Falsely accused people
- Hoboes
- Homeless people
- Hospitals
- In-law problems
- Lace makers
- Lace workers
- Nursing homes
- Nursing services
- People in exile
- People ridiculed for their piety
- Sisters of Mercy
- Tertiaries
- Teutonic Knights
- Toothache
- Tramps; widows.

she founded in honour of St Francis of Assisi. Elizabeth's health declined, and she died before her 24th birthday in 1231. Her great popularity resulted in her canonisation four years later. — *Franciscan Media*

## Daily Short Reading

**Sunday, November 14**  
(Apocalypse 7:10,12)

Victory to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and strength to our God for ever and ever. Amen.

**Monday, November 15**  
(2 Thessalonians 3:10-13)

Do not let anyone have any food if he refuses to do any work. Now we hear that there are some of you who are living in idleness, doing no work themselves but interfering with everyone else's. In the Lord Jesus Christ, we order and call on people of this kind to go on quietly working and earning the food that they eat. My brothers, never grow tired of doing what is right.

**Tuesday, November 16**  
(Romans 13:11,12-13)

You must wake up now: the night is almost over, it will be daylight soon. Let us give up all the things we prefer to do under cover of the dark; let us arm ourselves and appear in the light. Let us live decently as people do in the daytime.

**Wednesday, November 17**  
(Romans 12:1-2)

Think of God's mercy, my brothers, and worship him, I beg you, in a way that is worthy of thinking beings, by offering your living bodies as a holy sacrifice, truly pleasing to God. Do not model yourselves on the behaviour of the world around you, but let your behaviour change, modelled by your new mind. This is the only way to discover the will of God and know what is good, what it is that God wants, what is the perfect thing to do.

**Thursday, November 18**  
(Eph 2:19-22)

You are no longer aliens in a foreign land, but fellow-citizens with God's people, members of God's household. You are built upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, and Christ Jesus himself is the foundation-stone. In him the whole building is bonded together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you too are being built with all the rest into a spiritual dwelling for God.

**Friday, November 19**  
(Eph 4:29-32)

Do not use harmful words in talking. Use only helpful words, the kind that build up and provide what is needed, so that what you say will do good to those who hear you. And do not make God's Holy Spirit sad. For the Spirit is God's mark of ownership on you, a guarantee that the Day will come when God will set you free. Get rid of all bitterness, passion, and anger. No more shouting or insults. No more hateful feelings of any sort. Instead, be kind and tenderhearted to one another, and forgive one another, as God has forgiven you in Christ.

**Saturday, November 20**  
(2 Peter 1:10-11)

Brothers, you have been called and chosen: work all the harder to justify it by good deeds. If you do all these things there is no danger that you will ever fall away. In this way you will be granted admittance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ.



# Asian environment defenders face increasing threats and violence

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa: As the climate crisis intensifies across the globe, environmental activists are facing rising levels of threats, criminalisation, violence and being silenced, says a new report from CIVICUS, a global civil society alliance.

The new report, *Defenders of our planet: Resilient in the face of restrictions*, released on November 9, shows environmental protesters have been criminalised and have met with repression on all continents from 2018-21.

The new study from the CIVICUS Monitor looks at the common tactics and restrictions being used by governments and private companies to suppress environmental movements. The research focuses on three worrying trends: bans and restrictions on protests; judicial harassment and legal persecution; and the use of violence including targeted killings.

The main perpetrators of violation

of civic freedoms are state authorities and private companies, the report said, adding that despite the risks and restrictions, activist groups continue to score important victories to advance climate justice.

CIVICUS noted that while world leaders meet in Glasgow for the UN Climate Change Negotiations (COP26), the host nation is one of many countries where activists are regularly facing rights violations.

"Silencing activists and denying them of their fundamental civic rights is another tactic being used by leaders to evade and delay action on climate change," said Marianna Belalba Barreto, research lead for the CIVICUS Monitor.

"Criminalising non-violent protests has become a troubling indicator that governments are not committed to saving the planet."

For years CIVICUS data has consistently shown that Latin America is



Rights defenders including advocates of environmental, land and indigenous rights are facing rising levels of threats, criminalisation and violence in Asia. (UCA News photo/CIVICUS Monitor)

by far the deadliest region for rights defenders, including those advocating for environmental, land and indigenous rights. Between 2018 and 2021 in Latin America, the CIVICUS Monitor documented targeted killings of rights defenders in Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Peru.

## Myanmar junta amends broadcasting law to curb media

NAYPYIDAW: Myanmar's (military) junta has amended the broadcasting law in a move that rights groups say will further suppress journalists and the media and erode freedom of expression.

On November 1, junta chief Min Aung Hlaing amended the Law on Television and Broadcasting by including tough penalties for violators. It increases penalties for prison time for violations such as broadcasting without a license, including via the Internet, and continuing to report after a license to do so has been revoked.

The original law, which was enacted under a quasi-civilian government in 2015, applied only to radio and television but the new amendment includes "any other technology" that people use to access radio and TV broadcasts.

"In effect, the Broadcasting Law now also applies to the Internet including YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, media websites and other platforms used to publish videos, podcasts and similar digital versions of traditional television and radio," *Free Expression Myanmar* said in a statement.

"The amendment rolls back a decade of legal progress by re-establishing criminal laws targeted solely at the media. The amendment's effective inclusion of Internet-based media is, therefore, a violation of the



A protester holds a portrait of detained Myanmar civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi as Myanmar migrants in Thailand protest against the military coup in February. (UCA News photo)

right to freedom of expression and media freedom as protected under international law in Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights."

The junta suppressed the press following the Feb 1 coup and has charged several journalists with defamation and unlawful association. It also revoked the licenses of private media outlets. The crackdown has forced several news outlets to change their daily operations or work from hiding or self-imposed exile.

Farhan Haq, a spokesperson for the UN secretary-general, said threats of violence and attacks against journalists in Myanmar have created a climate of fear for media professionals, impeding the free circulation of information, opinions, and ideas.

"Our colleagues in Myanmar continue to be concerned over the

systematic imposition of restrictive policies and practices by the military authorities on media outlets in Myanmar, and continue to urge the military to release all persons detained arbitrarily, including journalists," Haq said on Nov 2.

Since the coup nine months ago, at least 126 journalists have been arrested and 47 remain in custody. News outlets are also under pressure, with 20 independent stations suspending operations and raids having been carried out against nine media companies. Dozens of journalists remain in hiding due to outstanding arrest warrants, according to Haq.

Myanmar ranked 140th out of 180 countries and regions in the 2021 World Press Freedom Index, down from 139th a year earlier, according to Paris-based Reporters Without Borders. — [ucanews.com](http://ucanews.com)

## Seoul launches foundation for lay missionaries in honour of late cardinal

SEOUL, South Korea: The Archdiocese of Seoul has established a foundation to support the work of Korean lay missionaries and vocations in Southeast Asia.

The foundation was established to honour the memory of Cardinal Nicholas Cheong Jin-suk who led the archdiocese from 1998 to 2012. The prelate died on April 27 at the age of 89.

During his lifetime, the cardinal always insisted on the duty of every member of the faithful to live the mission, which he described as a treasure for the whole Church.

The Nicholas Cheong Missionary Scholarship Foundation aims to help lay people respond to the call of evangelisation to bring the Gospel to the whole world.

The foundation will grant 10-year scholarships until 2031, the year of the centenary of the birth of Cardinal Cheong, for Korean Catholic lay missionaries already engaged in evangelisation activities in communities in Southeast Asia.

Applications will be examined by a commission that will award the scholarships every year on Dec 6, the feast of St Nicholas.

The Foundation will also open a Support Centre for Catholic Arts, which will offer Catholic artists financial support and other forms of



Cardinal Nicholas Cheong Jin-suk aid for their art projects.

Born in 1931 to a Catholic family in Seoul, Cardinal Cheong entered the Catholic University of Korea in 1954 where he earned a bachelor's degree in theology.

After his ordination in 1961, he served for seven years in Seoul and taught students at a Catholic high school. In 1968, he went to Italy to study at the Pontifical Urbaniana University in Rome where he got his master's degree in canon law.

Upon his return to South Korea, he was appointed the youngest Catholic bishop in Korea at age 39. From 1996, he led the Catholic Bishops Conference of Korea for three years.

He was named archbishop of Seoul in 1998 after Cardinal Stephen Kim Sou-hwan stepped down. He served in the post for 14 years and retired in 2012. — [licasnews.com](http://licasnews.com)