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Caritas Bianchi College of Careers integrated into Saint Francis University

HONG KONG (SE): Saint Francis University [SFU] announced on August 25 that the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) had formally approved the integration of Caritas Bianchi College of Careers [CBCC] as an academic school under its umbrella.

This landmark transition aims to enrich the educational experience of students, offering more flexible articulation pathways, enhanced professional training, and improved career opportunities.

New structure under SFU

With the new arrangement, CBCC will share the same academic status as other schools of SFU. The position of dean has been created for the school, currently filled on an acting basis by Professor Annie Bligh, provost of SFU.

Under the revised structure, CBCC's existing departments will be integrated into SFU's schools:

- The Departments of Business



Professor Lo stands alongside teachers and students of Saint Francis University during a press conference to celebrate the integration of Caritas Bianchi College of Careers as one of its academic schools. Photo: supplied

and Hospitality Management will join the Rita Tong Liu School of Business and Hospitality Management.

- The Department of Health Sciences will become part

of the S.K. Yee School of Health Sciences.

- The Department of Social Sciences will move under the Felizberta Lo Padilla Tong School of Social Sciences.

CBCC will continue to operate its Department of Design and Department of General Education.

Graduates of CBCC will now receive diplomas and degrees issued by SFU, ensuring continuity of qualifications while aligning with the broader academic framework of the university.

Growing demand and future plans

Professor Lo Tit-wing, acting president of SFU, highlighted CBCC's essential role in vocational and professional education, noting the surging demand for its programmes. Enrollment at the college has risen by 16 per cent this year alone.

Looking to the future, SFU plans to launch a new programme in Religion and Ethics in the 2026-2027 academic year, broadening opportunities for students interested in advanced study in the humanities. Additionally, work is underway to develop an undergraduate degree within the Department of Design.

Graduates of CBCC will now receive diplomas and degrees issued by SFU, ensuring continuity of qualifications while aligning with the broader academic framework of the university

A legacy of service in education

Founded in 1971 in Pokfulam as Bishop Bianchi College of Careers, CBCC originally offered certificate and diploma programmes in accounting, design, tourism, and hotel management under the Caritas motto "Love in the Service of Hope."

The college introduced dual-award Associate Degree programmes in Business and Hospitality Management in 2001 and, in 2006, became the first non-University Grants Commission-funded institution to receive a government-granted site for a permanent campus in Tseung Kwan O.

In 2008, CBCC was administratively merged with Caritas Francis Hsu College [a predecessor institution of SFU, then known as Caritas Institute of Higher Education], paving the way for the development of a Catholic university in Hong Kong. The following year, a modern 10-storey, 16,400 sqm campus was opened in Tseung Kwan O, providing an upgraded academic environment.

In 2025, CBCC reached another milestone, formally becoming an academic school of Saint Francis University. This new chapter will expand opportunities for its students, preparing them to meet the needs of a rapidly changing society while remaining rooted in the values of Caritas.

Vatican 'appalled' by situation in Gaza

VATICAN (CNS): "We are appalled by what is happening in Gaza despite the condemnation of the whole world," Pietro Cardinal Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, told reporters in Naples on August 25 after Israeli military strikes on a hospital in Gaza killed at least 20 people, including five journalists [see page 5].

Cardinal Parolin said that even though what is happening in Gaza is shocking and prospects for peace in Ukraine seem more complicated than ever, Catholics must continue praying and hoping

The office of Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, said the attack on the hospital, which should have been off limits

in an armed conflict, was a "tragic mishap" that the Israeli military is investigating.

While in Naples for the opening of an Italian church conference focused on liturgy, the cardinal was asked about both Gaza and Ukraine.

"There is unanimity in condemning what is taking place" in Gaza, the cardinal said, referring both to the military strike on the hospital as well as the ongoing difficulty of providing humanitarian aid to Gaza's civilian population.

"It makes no sense," the cardinal said, according to Vatican News. "There seem to be no openings for a solution" even as the situation is "increasingly complicated and, from a human-

itarian perspective, increasingly precarious, with all the consequences we are seeing day by day."

As for Ukraine, Cardinal Parolin said that "on a theoretical level" there seem to be several potential paths to peace but "they must be put into practice," and "clearly, a disposition of the heart is also required."

The whole world needs to find reasons for hope, he said, which is precisely why Pope Francis chose hope as the theme for the Jubilee Year 2025.

"Today there are not many elements that help us to hope, especially at the international level," but "we must not resign ourselves" and "must continue to work for peace and reconciliation."

MercyHK to open new drug treatment centre in Sha Tau Kok

HONG KONG (SE): MercyHK, the charity organisation founded by Oblate Father John Wotherspoon, is gearing up to open a new drug treatment centre in Sha Tau Kok this September to provide a supportive environment for young drug addicts on their path to recovery. Faith-based rehabilitation programme offers young addicts hope for recovery and reintegration.

Father Wotherspoon said the centre was urgently needed, as a high percentage of addicts who had previously sought help from the organisation eventually relapsed. He expressed gratitude to donors whose generosity made the project possible. "The more we receive, the more we should help," he remarked.

Holistic rehabilitation model

The new centre, housed in a three-storey village building, will offer year-long programmes designed to provide physical, mental, and spiritual support. Rooted in Catholic faith, the centre will accompany recovering addicts through a holistic process before they reintegrate into society.

Eddie Chan, director of MercyHK, explained that the centre will focus on addicts at the early stage of recovery. Spiritual formation in the first three months will include the Alpha course, Bible sharing, prayer, and values education, alongside activities such as calligraphy and pet care to help residents develop routines and rediscover their self-worth.

Physical rehabilitation will involve fitness training, with plans to introduce nutritional guidance. Socially, residents will be encouraged to cook communally, join volunteer activities such as beach clean-ups, and rebuild family relationships. For vocational preparation, the centre will provide training in practical skills such as computer operation, fitness coaching, and electrical work.

Chan stressed the central role



Above: Father Li and deacons blessing participants at the thanksgiving session.

Right: James, flanked by Father Li, sharing his journey about staying off drugs at Star of the Sea parish, Chai Wan.

Photos: supplied

of faith in the healing process. "Understanding God is key to successful rehabilitation," he said. A chapel dedicated to St. Michael, patron saint against drug addiction, will be established within the centre to nurture the spiritual life of its residents.

Support beyond recovery

In addition to the new centre, MercyHK runs a men's shelter on Shanghai Street and is preparing to open a women's shelter to provide transitional housing and family reintegration support. Together, these facilities aim to



ensure that recovering addicts can continue to receive guidance and stability as they return to society.

Annual thanksgiving gathering

MercyHK's annual anti-drug thanksgiving gathering was held on August 16 at Star of the Sea Church, Chai Wan. Addressing the assembly, Chan underlined the importance of love and compassion in combating addiction

and reiterated the organisation's mission to serve the homeless, drug users, asylum seekers, prisoners, and those in recovery, addressing their physical, mental, social, and spiritual needs.

The gathering featured testimonies from individuals who had experienced transformation through MercyHK's programmes. James, now living in one of the organisation's shelters, shared his journey of resilience and faith after years of relapse

and imprisonment. Having suffered severe health problems due to drug use, he recounted how, after prayer before the Cross, he experienced unexpected healing. Today, James works with other recovering addicts in clean-up jobs and participates nightly in an online Bible study led by permanent deacon candidate Augustine Ma.

Other testimonies included that of the wife of a construction worker who said the shelter had enabled her husband to quit drugs completely and rebuild his family life, and a woman who expressed gratitude for Chinese medicine services that aided her recovery.

Broad community support

At the thanksgiving event, recognition was given to individuals and organisations supporting the project. Representatives from Caritas and Protestant groups were present, along with Father Simon Li, Father Paul Tam Wing-ming, Deacon Faustus Lam of Star of the Sea Parish, and Deacon Thomas Lam—demonstrating the importance of collective effort in addressing drug-related challenges.

MercyHK operates with four paid staff and six volunteers, under the support of the Beat Drugs Fund and in collaboration with the Keswick Foundation. Over the past year, its outreach has included:

- Educational seminars in five schools, reaching more than 1,000 students;
- Outreach at methadone centres, referring over 100 individuals into rehabilitation services;
- Support groups serving 170 drug users and people in recovery;
- A specialised programme for Nepalese drug users, benefiting participants through of 50 faith-based activities.

The thanksgiving gathering concluded with a Taizé prayer and blessings from Father Li, Father Tam, and the deacons present.

A Sign of hope

The opening of the Sha Tau Kok drug treatment centre marks a significant step in MercyHK's mission to serve society's most vulnerable. By integrating spiritual formation with physical, social, and vocational care, the new centre offers a holistic path of healing. It stands as a beacon of hope—showing that with faith, compassion, and community support, recovery and renewal are possible.



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A year of joy and healing for Laughter Luminaries Association



Right: Father Ancheril [right] and Deacon Johnny Wong [second from left] with group members in their 'uniform' in the Tai O parish. Above: A 100-year-old member, fondly called 'Uncle Kam', celebrating his birthday during the first anniversary celebration of the group. Photos: supplied

HONG KONG (SE): The Laughter Luminaries Association marked its first anniversary with a joyful celebration on August 8 and 9 at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Chapel in Tai O with laughter, prayer, and fellowship. Founded by Claretian Father Jojo Ancheril and a group of volunteers, the association is inspired by Dr. Madan Kataria of India, who began promoting the health benefits of laughter in 1995.

Father Ancheril said the past year has demonstrated the transformative power of laughter in the lives of members. "Laughter is a powerful remedy for the soul," he noted, expressing gratitude for the joy and healing experienced in the community.

Two days of celebration

The anniversary programme featured talks, laughter practices, and communal meals, strengthening bonds among participants. On August 9, Father Ancheril celebrated Mass, encouraging the faithful to cultivate joy within their communities and to "be more generous in laughter, bringing blessings to families and society."

One of the most moving testimonies came from a centenarian couple whose lives were

profoundly changed through weekly laughter sessions. Initially quiet and reserved, they became more vibrant and youthful through the simple gift of shared laughter.

The language of laughter

Father Ancheril explains that laughter requires no special skill. "Laughter is contagious, and when one person laughs, everyone laughs naturally," he said.

While no expertise is needed, the group also uses playful hand movements and exercises to stimulate laughter and help participants let go of inhibitions.

Although most members are not Catholics, the group integrates prayer after each laughter session, alongside shared meals, to build a spirit of community. The association also promotes universal values such as love, peace, unity, and compassion.

"Laughter transcends age, religion, culture, or background," Father Ancheril affirmed. "It is a universal language, and our doors are open to everyone."

He added that the group has become a place of indirect evangelisation, with laughter and prayer helping members rediscover joy and even form unexpected friendships.

Growing reach and future plans

What began with a small circle of participants has now grown to include corporate professionals, students, families, and the elder-

ly. Father Ancheril noted that this diversity highlights the deep benefits of laughter for mental and spiritual well-being.

Looking ahead, the association hopes to expand its reach by collaborating with schools and elders' care facilities, bringing the healing power of laughter to more people in need.

At the close of the anniversary, Father Ancheril expressed heartfelt gratitude to all who have shared their stories and laughter.

"Together, we have discovered that laughter is not only medicine for the heart, but also a way to share God's love with one another," he said.

Reflections from the vicar general

By Father Joseph Chan Wing-chiu

Back to school



August is coming to an end, marking the end of summer. A new semester. Those who are just entering the education system, particularly new students transitioning to kindergarten, primary, secondary school, or even university, typically return to school a bit earlier than others. This allows them to adjust to campus life and familiarise themselves with the various facilities and rules.

We as priests are often invited to schools to lead prayers and religious educational activities at the start of the academic year.

During this time, the phrase "the sea of knowledge is boundless" often comes to mind. This line originates from a poem by Han Yu of the Tang Dynasty: "In the mountain of books, diligence is the path; in the sea of learning, hard work is the boat." It serves as a reminder that we must approach the endless knowledge of life with diligence and perseverance.

Even our Lord Jesus Christ, despite being the Son of God, came among us with this mindset. Born as a normal human being, he grew up learning to speak, walked clumsily as a child, and explored the world through his senses, just like anyone else.

Through his parents and elders, he learned about the Law of Moses, prayers from the Psalms, wisdom literature, the teachings of the prophets, and the history of his people. He gained practical skills from his earthly father, Joseph, becoming a carpenter. All of these were the tangible results of his step-by-step learning throughout his life.

Before officially embarking on the mission of proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom, Jesus spent 30 years learning and preparing. He chose followers to be his close companions, teaching them the true meaning of the gospel. Through interactions with them and the crowds.

He continuously learned how to fervently expand the God's Kingdom on Earth and guide the faithful to fulfill the will of the Father. Ultimately, even as he faced his own death, He continued to demonstrate this learning attitude. The Apostle Paul summarised Jesus Christ's learning journey by stating, "He learned obedience through what he suffered" [Hebrews 5:8].

Let us also learn from Christ, humbly acknowledging our human shortcomings and recognising that we need to deepen our understanding of God's creation as well as the mysteries hidden within it through learning. In this process of learning, we will become more like Jesus Christ, adopting his kindness and humility and learning his obedience to the Father even unto death; and in turn, we will share in the eternal life that Jesus Christ has given us.

Hong Kong Catholic Church
Sunday Mass Schedule
 You can obtain the Mass times and whereabouts of churches from the Hong Kong Catholic Church's website
<http://www.catholic.org.hk>



Pope Leo XIV greets participants in the International Catholic Legislators Network during a meeting in the Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican on August 23.

Photo: CNS/Vatican Media

Catholic legislators must help build 'city of God,' pope says

VATICAN (CNS): Catholic legislators are called to enact laws that reflect love of God and love of neighbor, Pope Leo XIV told an international group of lawmakers.

"The future of human flourishing depends on which 'love' we choose to organise our society around—a selfish love, the love of self, or the love of God and neighbour," he told members of the International Catholic Legislators Network when he welcomed them to the Vatican on August 23.

Holding their annual meeting in Rome, members were discussing the theme "The New World Order: Major Power Politics, Corporate Dominions and the Future of Human Flourishing."

Pope Leo told them that the theme expressed both a concern and a longing.

"We are all concerned about the direction our world is taking, and yet, we long for authentic human flourishing," he said. And "we long for a world where every person can live in peace, freedom and fulfillment according to God's plan."

The pope, a member of the Augustinian order, turned to one of St. Augustine's most famous works, *The City of God*, to help the legislators understand the task facing them and the way Christians are expected to work in the world to help build the kingdom of God.

St. Augustine, he told them, was "a leading voice of the Church in the late Roman era" and "witnessed immense upheavals and social disintegration."

The pope said that *The City*

of God, written in the early fifth century, "offers a vision of hope, a vision of meaning that can still speak to us today."

St. Augustine knew that in human history "two 'cities' are intertwined: the City of Man and the City of God," he said. "These signify spiritual realities—two orientations of the human heart and, therefore, of human civilisation."

The pope said, "The City of Man, built on pride and love of oneself, is marked by the pursuit of power, prestige and pleasure," while the City of God is "built on love of God unto selflessness [and] is characterised by justice, charity and humility."

He said St. Augustine encouraged Christians to infuse the earthly society with the values of God's kingdom, which would simultaneously direct human history toward its fulfillment in God while promoting human flourishing in this life.

"This theological vision can anchor us in the face of today's changing currents," Pope Leo said, particularly "the emergence of new centres of gravity, the shifting of old alliances and the unprecedented influence of global corporations and technologies, not to mention numerous violent conflicts."

But what is human flourishing, the pope asked. "Today, a flourishing life is often confused with a materially wealthy life or a life of unrestricted individual autonomy and pleasure. The so-called ideal future presented to us is often one of technological convenience and consumer satisfaction. Yet we

know that this is not enough. We see this in affluent societies where many people struggle with loneliness, with despair and a sense of meaninglessness."

He said, "Authentic human flourishing," is what the Church often calls "integral human development," which is concerned with each person's physical, social, cultural, moral and spiritual well-being.

"Natural law," or "the moral order that God has written on the human heart," would describe human flourishing as a situation where "individuals live virtuously, when they live in healthy communities, enjoying not only what they have, what they possess, but also who they are as children of God," the pope said.

Human flourishing must include "the freedom to seek truth, to worship God and to raise families in peace," Pope Leo said. "It also includes a harmony with creation and a sense of solidarity across social classes and nations."

The pope told the legislators their vocation is to "be bridge-builders between the City of God and the City of Man," working "for a world where power is tamed by conscience, and law is at the service of human dignity."

In January, the late Pope Francis asked ambassadors serving at the Vatican to promote a "diplomacy of hope," he said. "I would add that we also need a 'politics of hope,' an 'economics of hope,' anchored in the conviction that even now, through the grace of Christ, we can reflect his light in the earthly city."

EDITORIAL

SUNDAY EXAMINER

31 AUGUST 2025

The urgency of prayer in an age of violence

POPE LEO XIV invited all the faithful to dedicate Friday, August 22, to fasting and prayer, "begging the Lord to grant us peace and justice and to dry the tears of those who suffer because of ongoing conflicts." His call is not merely a pious gesture. It is a cry from the heart of the Church, urging us to awaken from indifference and rediscover our Christian duty to intercede for a wounded world.

Even in moments of supposed rest—holidays, family gatherings, leisure—our minds are not at peace. The horrors of war and violence follow us. Yet this unrest, as St. Augustine reminds us—"You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you"—is not a weakness, but a sign of our humanity. Restlessness is the pulse of the Spirit within us, drawing us toward justice, compassion, and peace.

Our restlessness today must not be wasted. From Gaza to Israel, Ukraine to Russia, Sudan to Haiti, innocent cries reach heaven. Prayer must be a living, urgent force—denouncing war merchants and governments arming conflicts as "defence." Genuine prayer inspires courage—to speak, act, and hope amidst despair.

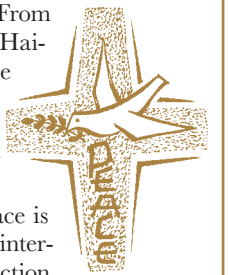
Pope Leo XIV has reminded us that "peace is not a spiritual utopia: it is a humble path that intertwines patience and courage, listening and action. And today, more than ever, it demands our vigilant and generative presence." The Christian vocation is not passivity but vigilant presence, a readiness to resist the "banality of evil" that normalises injustice and mocks human dignity.

The scriptures give us luminous examples. Judith, faced with the destruction of her people, did not remain passive. She prayed, listened, and acted. Esther, though she could have saved herself, chose instead to risk everything so that her people might live. Their stories remind us that prayer is not escape but engagement; it is the source of strength to face what seems impossible and transform it into life.

We also turn to Mary, Queen of Peace, whose Magnificat proclaims that God "has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly." Her song reminds us that the history of salvation is woven through the faith of the humble, the tears of the suffering, and the hope of those who trust in God's power to do what seems impossible.

Today, the Church calls us to join our prayers with Mary, Judith, and Esther. To fast is to strip ourselves of illusions and comfort; to pray is to surrender our restlessness to God and allow Him to make us instruments of peace. If we remain silent, our restlessness will curdle into bitterness and shame, and we will share responsibility for the violence we tolerated.

Now is the time to pray for peace—earnestly, urgently, and together—so that our restless hearts may find their true rest in God, and our world may rediscover the path of justice and peace. *jose CMF*



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Address all correspondence to the editor of the Sunday Examiner.

Caritas slams 'man-made famine' in Gaza, urges ceasefire

GAZA (LICAS NEWS): Caritas Internationalis condemned what it called a "man-made famine" in Gaza, urging an immediate ceasefire as UN agencies reported fresh civilian deaths, attacks on hospitals, and worsening hunger. It said the situation was not accidental but the result of "calculated choices."

The statement followed the UN's declaration of famine in Gaza on August 22, two days after Israeli forces stormed Gaza City, where nearly a million displaced civilians had sought refuge.

Caritas said 273 people had already died of starvation, including 112 children," adding that the situation is "not a tragic accident" but a "result of calculated choices."

It added, "A population stripped of shelter, sustenance, and safety has been left to perish in full view of the world."

Caritas said the situation in Gaza should not be seen as war but as the systematic destruction of civilian life, describing the siege as a "machinery of annihilation" enabled by "impunity and the silence or complicity of powerful nations."

Healthcare under attack

UN agencies reported that at least 20 people, including four health workers and five journalists, were killed when strikes hit Gaza's Nasser Hospital on August 25.

"While people in Gaza are being starved, their already limited access to healthcare is being further crippled by repeated attacks," said Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general of the World Health Organisation [WHO].

"We cannot say it loudly enough: STOP attacks on healthcare. Ceasefire now," he added.

The WHO said 50 others were injured, including critically ill patients. Hospital facilities, including the emergency ward and surgical unit, were damaged.

UN secretary-general, António Guterres, condemned the incident and called for a prompt investigation.

"These latest horrific killings highlight the extreme risks that medical personnel and journalists face as they carry out their vital work amid this brutal conflict," his spokesperson said.

Among those killed was journalist, Mariam Abu Dagga, who had worked with the UN on a photo essay documenting Gaza's



Photographer Hatem Khaled, a Reuters contractor, sits in a car, after being wounded in Israeli strikes on Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip, on August 25. Photo: OSV News/Ramadan Abed, Reuters

hardships.

"Silencing the last remaining voices reporting about children dying silently and famine with the world's indifference and inaction is shocking," said Philippe Lazzarini, head of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

Famine and displacement

Caritas said civilians, mostly children and women, "are being starved, bombed, and erased," blaming governments and corporations for enabling the crisis "through military support, financial aid, and diplomatic cover. Their silence is not neutrality, it is endorsement."

The Gaza Health Ministry reported 11 new deaths from malnutrition and starvation in the past 24 hours, bringing the total to 300.

The death toll in Gaza has surpassed 61,000, according to local authorities. More than 800,000 people have been newly displaced since the end of a ceasefire in March, UN humanitarian aid delivery remains blocked.

Only seven of 15 missions requiring Israeli coordination were facilitated on August 24, while others were denied or impeded, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Caritas Internationalis demanded a permanent ceasefire, unrestricted humanitarian access, release of hostages, and accountability for perpetrators.

It also called for the implementation of the International

Court of Justice's 2024 advisory opinion on ending Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory.

"The famine in Gaza is a test of moral integrity, and too many have failed. To starve a popula-

Building God's kingdom requires listening, dialogue, pope says

VATICAN (CNS): At a time when many governments seem unable to promote peace, justice and development for all, Christians must be prophetic, reaching out to others and daring to try something new, Pope Leo XIV told participants at the 46th Meeting of Friendship Among Peoples.

"Without the victims of history, without those who hunger and thirst for justice, without migrants and refugees, without the cry of all creation, we will not have new stones" necessary to build the kingdom of God, said the pope's message to the gathering held every August at Rimini, the Italian seaside city.

Tens of thousands of young adults from attended the August 22-27 meeting, organised by the Communion and Liberation Movement.

This year's theme was drawn from The Rock by T.S. Eliot: "In the vacant places we will build with new bricks." Organisers said the theme is meant "to express the hope of a novelty within the drama of history, the desire to build together places in which to share the search and experience of what is true, good and just."

Pietro Cardinal Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, wrote to the participants on behalf of Pope Leo. One of the featured

exhibits at the meeting focused on the martyrs of Algeria: Bishop Pierre Claverie of Oran and 18 others, including the seven Trappist monks of Tibhirine, who were killed between 1993 and 1996 while Algeria was locked in a 10-year-long armed conflict between government forces and extremist Islamic rebel groups.

Cardinal Parolin said the pope was pleased with the choice because they are an example of "the Church's vocation to dwell in the desert in deep communion with all humanity, overcoming the walls of indifference that set religions and cultures against one another, in full imitation of the movement of the incarnation and giving of the Son of God."

The martyrs' "way of presence and simplicity, of knowledge and of 'dialogue of life' is the true path of mission," the message said. "Not self-exhibition, in the contraposition of identities, but self-giving to the point of martyrdom of those who, day and night, in joy and amid tribulations, worship Jesus alone as Lord."

The pope's message said, "Where those responsible for state and international institutions seem unable to enforce the rule of law, mediation and dialogue, religious communities and civil society must dare to be prophetic.

'While people in Gaza are being starved, their already limited access to healthcare is being further crippled by repeated attacks'

tion is to desecrate life. To remain silent is to be complicit," Caritas said.

Quoting Pope Francis, it added, "We are either all saved together or no one is saved."

"The world is watching. History is recording. And Gaza is waiting, not for words, but for salvation," it said.

This means allowing ourselves to be driven into the desert and seeing now what can be born from the rubble and from so much, too much, innocent suffering."

The Meeting of Friendship's focus on dialogue—among Catholics of differing opinions, with other Christians and with members of other religions—is the only way to "prepare the 'new stones' with which to build the future that God already has in store for everyone, but which only unfolds when we welcome one another," the message said.

"Unarmed and disarming, the presence of Christians in contemporary societies must translate, with skill and imagination, the gospel of the Kingdom into forms of development that provide alternatives to paths of growth without equity and sustainability," the group said.

"In order to serve the living God, we must abandon the idolatry of profit, which has severely compromised justice, freedom of encounter and exchange, the participation of all in the common good and ultimately peace," it said.

"A faith that is estranged from the desertification of the world or that indirectly contributes to tolerating it would no longer be following Jesus Christ," it said.

Singapore churches share faith in night festival



Hues of colours play over the façade of St. Joseph's Church on August 23. Photo: Christopher Khoo

By Christopher Khoo

SINGAPORE (SE): Catholic churches in downtown Singapore are taking part in a special night festival organised by the national heritage agency as a means of showcasing the faith which started on August 22 and runs until September 6.

The annual Singapore Night Festival arts and culture festival has been held in the historically and culturally rich Bras Basah-Bugis area since 2008. It showcases artworks and performances by local and international artists, as well as light installations.

Over the years, the three historic churches in the area—the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd, St. Joseph's Church and the Church of Ss. Peter and Paul—have taken part in this initiative as a means of sharing the faith.

This year, the cathedral and Saint Joseph's Church are taking part in the event.

Father Jude David, rector of the cathedral, told the congregation at lunchtime Mass on August 22 that participating in this government-organised event is “our means of continuing to do the work of evangelisation”. This is because “as non-Christians come into the cathedral to look around and join the activities here, we also pray that by meeting the community, they also meet Christ.”

The two churches are organising concerts, heritage tours and the sale of religious items for visitors on the evenings of August 22, 23, 29 and 30.

On August 22, visitors to the cathedral—Christians as well as non-Christians—were treated to sacred music on the organ and violin. The next evening, they enjoyed choral music by the Cathedral Choir of the Risen Christ. The 50-strong choir sang songs in various languages, ranging from traditional sacred pieces to more modern ones.

‘I felt it was very nice of the church to welcome anyone to listen to their music...’

Over at St. Joseph's Church, visitors enjoyed choral music on August 22 and a performance by a guitar duo on August 23. The façade of the church was also bathed in various hues of light as part of a light installation display.

The initiatives appear to have borne fruit.

Janice Liew, who attends an Evangelical church, and who attended the concert by the Cathedral Choir of the Risen Christ, said: “I felt it was very nice of the church to welcome anyone to listen to their music, even if they might not be Catholic, because there might be some choral lovers who are not Catholic.”

Christopher Khoo is a Singapore-based freelance journalist and educator.



Activists, including Catholic nuns, at a rally opposing Yuvinus Solo in August 2024. Photo: UCAN, Photo supplied

Activists decry light sentence for Indonesian lawmaker convicted for trafficking

FLORES (UCAN): Catholics and rights activists in East Nusa Tenggara province, Indonesia, have criticised the relatively light sentence imposed by courts on Yuvinus Solo, a legislator from Flores Island, found guilty of committing human trafficking.

The activists are opposed to the three years' imprisonment and 200,000,000 rupiah [US\$12,300] fine levied on Solo was found guilty of offenses under trafficking laws by the Maumere District Court in December last year.

Prosecutors appealed for a review in the Supreme Court, seeking a tougher sentence. Under existing laws, an offender charged with human trafficking faces up to 15 years in jail and a fine. However, the court dismissed the plea in its July 30 verdict, which was received by the state prosecutor on August 20.

Solo was accused of involvement with a syndicate that sent 70 workers to a palm oil plantation in Kalimantan, in the Indonesian part of Borneo Island, without following legal procedures in March last year.

Anti-trafficking campaigner. Divine Word Father Otto Gusti Madung regretted that the sentence did not reflect any justice for the victims.

“This sentence cannot serve as a deterrent to other perpetrators,” the rector of the Ledalero Institute of Philosophy and Creative Technology in Flores said.

Holy Spirit Sister Maria Fransiska Imakulata, coordinator of the Flores Island-based Humanitarian Volunteer Team, said justice was denied to the victims.

“Human trafficking is part

Human trafficking is part of the syndicate's work. When law enforcement officers cannot reach the syndicate, it means we are still surrounded by perpetrators

of the syndicate's work. When law enforcement officers cannot reach the syndicate, it means we are still surrounded by perpetrators,” she said.

The workers reported facing abuse and neglect, including denial of promised salary, food, and lodging.

One worker, Yodimus Moan Kaka, reportedly died of starvation. His wife, Meri Herlina Mbani, filed a case with the police with support from nuns and priests working for safe migration.

Despite being a suspect in a human trafficking case at the time, Solo was sworn in as a parliamentarian last August and was not detained for investigation.

After he was named a suspect

last May, priests, nuns, activists, and students protested the police decision not to detain him by citing an illness.

They also alleged that the lawmaker and his associates had reportedly approached the victims to withdraw the case and resolve it through customary laws, and not trafficking laws.

East Nusa Tenggara Province is one of the country's most impoverished regions and a hub of human trafficking, according to the National Human Rights Commission.

Traffickers active in the province send hundreds of workers illegally to other parts of Indonesia and neighbouring Malaysia, where they face abuses and rights violations, reports say.

In 2023, provincial police recorded 256 trafficking cases. But rights groups say the actual number is much higher.

Between 2018 to 2022, at least 516 workers from the province died in Malaysia, according to the Indonesian Migrant Workers' Protection Agency. Of them, 499 workers were illegal migrants.

Last year, the dead bodies of 151 migrants were returned to the province, the highest in five years. Since January, the bodies of 82 migrants have been returned home.

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The image of Our Lady of Aranzazu.

Photo: TheFilipinoDevotee, CC BY-SA 4.0, Wikimedia

Cardinal Tagle urges faithful to bring new shrine into society's 'thorny' places

MANILA (LICAS NEWS): "The Shrine of Aranzazu must be a beacon not only of devotion but also of solidarity with those in suffering," Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle, pro-prefect for the Section for First Evangelisation and New Particular Churches of the Dicastery for Evangelisation, said on August 22. "The Blessed Mother is there, her Son is there, Aranzazu."

Cardinal Tagle was celebrating Mass at the newly elevated National Shrine of Our Lady of Aranzazu in the Diocese of Antipolo, the Philippines, on the feast of the Queenship of Mary.

In his homily, the cardinal said the shrine's mission goes beyond honoring the Blessed Mother in devotion.

The cardinal said it must also accompany those who live amid the "thorns" of life — poverty, displacement, violence, and the pain of families still searching for their missing loved ones.

He drew from the origins of the devotion in Oñate, Spain, where the image of the Virgin and Child appeared on a thorn bush. The cardinal explained that this symbol points to Mary's constant presence in places of hardship, and to the call for her devotees to also stand in such "thorny" places of society.

Quoting from scripture, Cardinal Tagle also reflected on thorns as signs of humanity's brokenness—from the cursed earth in Genesis to the "thorn in the flesh" of St. Paul that kept him humble, and finally to the crown of thorns endured by Jesus.

Each, he said, reveals both the suffering and the grace present in human struggle.

Among the "thorns" he highlighted are the cries of mothers searching for their children who have disappeared.

"We must help the mothers who until now are still searching for their children, not knowing where they are. Were they

abducted? Were they killed?" the cardinal asked.

His appeal echoed his recent pastoral engagement at the 11th Philippine Conference on New Evangelisation in Manila, where he hosted a "heart-to-heart" conversation.

Among the participants was Edith Burgos, mother of missing peasant-activist, Jonas Burgos, who has spent years seeking truth and justice.

The cardinal said it must also accompany those who live amid the 'thorns' of life—poverty, displacement, violence, and the pain of families still searching for their missing loved ones

Cardinal Tagle reminded the faithful that true devotion to Mary cannot be separated from discipleship in Christ. "Who truly honours Mary as queen? Only those who recognise and follow Jesus as king," he said.

The cardinal added that the shrine's new status is not simply a recognition of history and devotion, but a call to live out faith in solidarity. "Therefore, the faithful of San Mateo must be present in the thorny places of society," he said.

Cardinal Tagle said that the National Shrine of Our Lady of Aranzazu would find its true meaning not in titles or ceremonies, but in becoming a refuge where "prayers rise like incense," the poor are welcomed, and those who carry the thorns of life find companions in faith.

Junta in Myanmar plans to demolish cathedral and Buddhist monasteries

(UCAN): Myanmar's military junta plans to demolish a historic cathedral and 19 Buddhist religious sites as part of its ongoing effort to excavate the site of a 16th-century city, according to a leaked document sent to religious leaders.

The junta plans to expand excavations in the ancient city of Toungoo-Ketumati to include areas that are currently home to 16 Buddhist monasteries, one Buddhist nunnery, a Buddhist retreat centre, a pagoda, and the Sacred Heart Cathedral of Taungngu, according to the official letter, which is now circulating on social media.

Archaeological excavations are already underway in Toungoo, also known as Ketumati, the first capital established by King Mingyi Nyo in 1510 as the centre of the Toungoo dynasty, which ruled most of Myanmar for more than 200 years. It is located in Toungoo Township in Myanmar's Bago Region.

The August 10 letter signed by Khin Maung Aye, deputy director of the junta's Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, was sent to the chief Buddhist monk of the Sangha Committee in Toungoo Township. It said that the religious sites are situated within the areas of the ancient city's walls and moat.

The excavation and preservation of the northern wall and moat of the ancient city remains a "priority," and "religious buildings located within the cultural zone" should remove whatever they should remove, the letter said.

Church officials also said that they have been informed of the junta's excavation plans, which pose a threat to the city's cathedral.

Father Xavier Wine Maung, the cathedral parish priest, said that "parishioners are shocked."

The church "holds great personal significance" for the community where generations were baptised, married, and prayed over before their burial, and are shocked to learn that it will be demolished.

"They come to me and ask, 'What should we do if this happens?'" Father Wine said, adding that he has "no clear answers." The Catholic community "is powerless to defend their beautiful cathedral."

He said, "My only hope is to plead for leniency, asking them to save at least the main church



The Sacred Heart Cathedral of Taungngu.

Photo: UCAN/Dennis Lo

Father Xavier Wine Maung, the cathedral parish priest, said that 'parishioners are shocked'

building. It doesn't matter if they demolish other buildings in the compound."

Baptist pastor, Samuel Saw, of the Hallelujah Church in Taunggoo, said, "I'm very sad because it's a historic Catholic church that's been part of this area since Christianity began to grow here."

The cathedral's history began after the Second Anglo-Burmese War [1852-1853], when the British took control of most of Lower Myanmar, including Pegu [Bago] and Taunggoo. They established the current location of the cathedral and built a church for Christian soldiers of the British and Indian armies.

The British transferred the estate occupying 1.4 hectares to the members of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions who arrived in Myanmar in 1869, according to Father Wine.

The Apostolic Prefecture of Eastern Burma was established in 1870. It became the Vicariate Apostolic of Taunggoo in 1890, and a diocese in 1955.

The current cathedral was constructed in 1987, replacing the structure that was rebuilt in 1945 after the original 19th-century building was destroyed in World War II, the priest said.

Among the 16 Buddhist monasteries facing demolition, the biggest is the Nandawon Dhamma Yeikthar Monastery, which sits on a one hectare site.

"The junta is not a legitimate government," according to Buddhist monk, Venerable Min Thonnya, a writer and leader of the 2007 Saffron Revolution that protested against the government's economic policies.

Venerable Min, who lives in exile said that the junta has no authority to engage in such activities.

He said that projects involving national heritage should be carried out with "the full consent of the people," pointing out that people and their buildings need to be properly surveyed, and damages should be fairly compensated; displaced residents should be resettled.

Data shows that the junta's war against resistance groups since the 2021 coup has led to the destruction of several religious sites.

According to the independent research team Nyan Lynn Thit Analytica, airstrikes damaged at least 302 religious buildings nationwide between February 2021 and December 2024.

The National Unity Government (NUG), the government-in-exile formed by a group of elected parliamentarians and government members ousted in the coup, said the military junta head, Min Aung Hlaing, deliberately targets religious places.

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Jesus of Nazareth demanded child abusers to be held accountable

The news in the Philippines these days is focused on impeachment, changing the Constitution, and other mundane political matters. The public, Congress and government agencies are far from addressing the needs of children who have been sexually and physically abused by relatives, human traffickers and online predators, and the seeming social acceptance that allows the abuse to happen.

The country's justice system needs reform, and while many judges are working hard to deliver justice to child abuse victims, many others are not. Some have overloaded court schedules, causing a number of child-abuse cases to languish up to two to three years in some family courts.

Such manufactured delays prolong the suffering of the child victims. In a letter to the Preda Foundation in October 2023, Court administrator, Raul B. Villanueva, said that out of 183 statutory family courts, only 106 are organised. They are clogged with many important cases.

Child sexual abuse cases are about traumatised children, and they need special and immediate attention and speedy justice. As they say, justice delayed is justice denied.

Special children's courts need to be established by law, with highly trained prosecutors and



Father Cullen with the residents of the Preda Centre. Photo: preda.org

judges to bring justice and healing to the abused children. The convictions of their rapists would be a strong deterrence to would-be child abusers.

During a visit some years ago, Mama Fatima Singhatch, the United Nations' special rapporteur for online child abuse and trafficking, said the Philippines should pass a law setting up a special children's court. This is needed to hear and quickly resolve

Child sexual abuse cases are about traumatised children, and they need special and immediate attention and speedy justice...

child abuse cases. It is hoped that children's rights advocates in the Senate would work on this proposed legislation.

Meanwhile, telecommunications corporations and Internet service providers [ISPs] must be held responsible for the uncontrolled transmission of images of sexual abuse of children beamed from the Philippines to pedophiles overseas. A corporate policy to deploy effective artificial intelligence-driven software is absent. Those allowing child abuse to happen are as guilty as those committing it.

The UN Children's Fund [UNICEF] has said as many as two million Filipino children have reported being sexually harassed and abused online. Due to stigma and fear of scoldings, most children do not report such abuse. With cheap mobile phones and low-cost Internet access, the number of victims is likely to double or triple the known figure. Every child is vulnerable. The figures for child sexual abuse victims globally are sobering: one in three girls, one in every five boys.

Consider how people abuse their own offspring. What is seri-

ously wrong with the human race? Humans are supposedly the world's most intelligent creatures, with large brains. Most, apparently, have very low moral values. We are a damaged species, indeed, waging brutal, senseless wars against ourselves, driven by greed and ambition, with millions of people killed and wounded. Pedophiles and child abusers are waging war against children by raping and abusing them.

Generally unknown, ignored

The great values taught by Jesus of Nazareth to respect, protect and care for children are generally unknown, and his call to bring abusers to justice is also generally ignored. This is the great failure of the institutional Church.

With exceptions, it mainly counts success on the number of baptised members, and most of its clerics are isolated and removed from the suffering of people, particularly victims of human rights violations. Most of the clergy repeatedly perform rituals and give irrelevant theological speeches.

As an institution, the Church has lost its main purpose to transform society by motivating people to actively do good and oppose every evil with the conviction that they will win. This is faith, aimed at creating a society where equality, justice, truth, freedom, and human rights and dignity are experienced daily.

Many clerics have abused children themselves with impunity and are protected by silence and inaction. This has disgraced the

institution with regard to child protection. Only by the courage of some of its true leaders and dedicated members of the People of God does the light of truth and action for justice for children continue to burn brightly.

A recent UNICEF-Interpol report said 90 per cent of the online grooming for sexual abuse of children occurs on Facebook. However, it is still clear that the majority of child sexual abuse acts are committed by family members. Child defenders and nongovernment organisations are campaigning and educating students, parents and teachers to report abuse and help child abuse victims get justice.

What people can do is to oppose the seeming social acceptance of and apathy over child sexual abuse by institutions and the wider public. About 40 per cent of mothers of the 62 sexually abused children in Preda's therapy home have chosen to protect their rapist husband or partner rather than standing with their children to demand justice.

This is devastating emotionally for the children. When judges postpone hearings, the children's suffering increases.

Church authorities must act against the abusers in their ranks and end impunity. The Church must become a beacon of child rights by cooperating with truly independent children's rights' organisations to pursue justice for the victims. They should end the obstruction of legal action and allow offenders to be brought to justice in the civil courts. The Church's internal safeguarding programme should bring those clerics to justice in those same courts.

Only when a strong movement of people realising the extent of child sexual abuse and demanding action by all authorities would there be hope to reduce it. If not, the abuse will continue to grow.

Vatican studying possible papal trip to Turkey, Lebanon

VATICAN (CNS): A plan for Pope Leo XIV to visit Lebanon as well as Turkey in late November and early December is being studied, a Vatican official said.

Lebanon's Bechara Cardinal Rai, patriarch of the Maronite Catholic Church, told Al Arabiya television on August 19 that the pope could visit Lebanon "by the end of the year." He said that preparations had already begun but that the dates for the visit had not been confirmed.

The Vatican press office did not respond to a request to comment on Cardinal Rai's announcement.

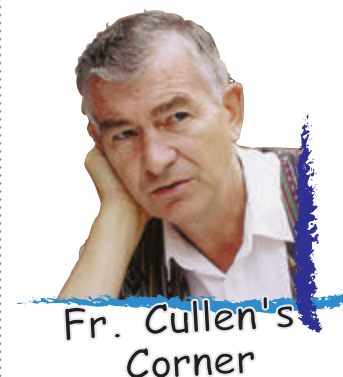
The visit to Lebanon could be part of a trip Pope Leo said he hopes to make to Turkey in late November.

In July, Pope Leo had told a Catholic-Orthodox pilgrimage from the United States that he had hoped to travel to Turkey to mark the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, which first developed the common Christian creed.

Pope Francis had been planning to travel in May to Iznik, the site of the ancient city of Nicaea, to mark the anniversary with Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople.

Because it would be his first trip to Turkey as pope, Pope Leo's November trip is likely to include a stop in the capital, Ankara, for meetings with government officials and a visit to the Phanar, the patriarchate's headquarters in Istanbul.

Pope St. John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis all made visits to the patriarchate to join in the November 30 celebrations of the feast of St. Andrew, the patron saint of the patriarchate.



Fr. Cullen's Corner

Father Shay Cullen

Notice Board

Ways to connect prayers and actions...



God's answer to our prayers can manifest through our actions, as outlined in Matthew 25:35-40, which instructs us on how to minister to others. He knows our needs even before we articulate them, and this understanding can deepen the significance of our prayers when we focus not just on ourselves but on serving others. As we engage in acts of kindness and ministry, we discover that God rewards our efforts abundantly. By connecting prayer to action, we cultivate a meaningful practice that transcends mere words. —**Maria Magdalena Espinosa**

For many, prayer is the essence of faith—a sacred opportunity to meet God and seek his guidance. This dialogue often inspires individuals to act with love, whether by helping a neighbor in need or volunteering at church. In moments of prayer, we can feel his call to serve, acting in accordance with Scripture's profound command to "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). However, it is not uncommon for prayer to sometimes feel routine, which can hinder our ability to translate those moments into actionable love. Nevertheless, prayer acts as an anchor in God's love, motivating our actions, be they small acts of kindness or substantial efforts to assist others. In this way, we allow our actions to become a living expression of our faith, demonstrating God's love to those around us.

—**Kerina Li**



The connection between prayer and action is an ongoing, evolving relationship. It is a continuous cycle that involves seeking God's guidance and striving to apply that wisdom in our daily lives. Through prayer, we can experience personal transformation that encourages us to reflect on our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. This process of introspection often leads to positive changes and a renewed sense of purpose. Our actions thus stand as tangible expressions of our faith; as the saying goes, faith without works is dead, underscoring the need to translate our beliefs into concrete actions.

—**Marilou D. Padilla**

Engaging in morning and night prayers feels akin to conversing with someone who understands the full depth of our lives. This intimate relationship helps us cultivate empathy and sensitivity toward the feelings of others. By practicing the words spoken in my prayers, I connect more deeply with God, particularly through the intercession of our Blessed Mother Mary. I am reassured of his presence not only during challenging times but also consistently throughout my life.

—**Ethel Balmes Ramelo**



Balancing work and motherhood can often feel like walking a tightrope. Prayer serves not as a magical solution but as a guiding compass, helping me choose patience and leading me to apologise when I lose my temper. It allows me to find joy in small moments, such as a video call with my son and family, reminding me to be grateful for the opportunities I have. Perhaps prayer is less about changing God's mind and more about aligning my spirit with his. Rather than merely asking for love, it invites us to become vessels of love when it is most needed.

Today I may stumble, yet each day is a new beginning where I can pray and try again. Faith, after all, is not a protective barrier against failure; rather, it acts as the adhesive that binds us together as we continually strive toward growth and improvement in our lives.

—**Genie Rose A. Reyes**

Tenth anniversary celebration of Migrants Lay Missionaries

On August 16, the Migrants Lay Missionaries (MLM) celebrated their 10th Anniversary at the parish hall of St. Alfred's Church, themed "A Decade of Grace, Rooted in Christ, Growing in Love." The program featured an opening prayer, creatively expressed through a liturgical dance interpretation of "You Raised Me Up," followed by the Philippine National Anthem.



After a message delivered by Father Jay Francis Flandez, the chaplain to the Filipino migrants and their spiritual director, a video presentation highlighted the group's journey and achievements since its formation. The MLM started on 15 August 2015, with only 13 members, led by Father Flandez and the late Sister Vicky Ramos. Their mission was to create a community space for Filipino migrants to engage in Mass and find support while away from their families. The first Mass was celebrated on 29 August 2015, marking the official establishment of the group.

Today, the MLM gathers for a regular Mass every Saturday at 3.00pm. They also host spiritual activities like running a catechesis group, Eucharistic adoration, and praise and worship sessions, focusing their mission on the Holy Eucharist. Outreach efforts involve engaging with fellow migrants in parks, streets, and restaurants to invite them to Mass, and members craft handmade rosaries to share as a sign of devotion.

In response to the pandemic, the MLM relocated to Bayanihan Centre in Kennedy Town on 10 April 2021, continuing their mission there until 13 April 2024. Later in April 2024, the community moved to St. Alfred's Church in Tai Wai to expand their outreach, and they added new ministries, such as Eucharistic Minister and Liturgical Bible Study, increasing active membership to 46 under Father Flandez's guidance.

Father Dominic Fung, OMI, the assistant parish priest, congratulated the members and thanked former parish priest, Father Mark Anthony Serna, OMI, for his support. Sister Mary Cordero, OSF, reminded the group that their role as lay missionaries makes them witnesses of God's love, encouraging them to continue spreading kindness and deepening their faith.

The celebration included performances by the pastoral team, a modern dance from the group known as Talking Angels, and a poetic tribute by Marivic Garay.

Father Flandez's surprise performance later added more joy to the celebration.

Certificates of recognition were awarded to the members, acknowledging their dedication. The festivities concluded with a Mass presided over by Father Flandez, where new officers were installed, and the community sang "If We Hold On Together" to end the day on a heartfelt note. SE



Members renewing their vows during the ceremony.

A corner for you

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YOUR DAILY MASS GUIDE

AUGUST 31 – TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME.

Mass of the Sunday, *Gloria, Creed*, preface of the Sunday (green). Readings: Sirach 3:19-21, 30-31; Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24a; Luke 14:1, 7-14.

SEPTEMBER 1 – MONDAY: TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME.

Mass of the memorial (green). Readings: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Luke 4:16-30.

SEPTEMBER 2 – TUESDAY: TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME.

Mass of the day (green). Readings: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6, 9-11; Luke 4:31-37.

SEPTEMBER 3 – ST. GREGORY THE GREAT.

Mass of the memorial (white). Readings: Colossians 1:1-8; Luke 4:38-44.

SEPTEMBER 4 – THURSDAY: TWENTY-SECOND WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME.

Mass of the day (green). Readings: Colossians 1:9-14; Luke 5:1-11.

SEPTEMBER 5 – FRIDAY: TWENTY-SECOND WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME.

Mass of the day (green). Readings: Colossians 1:15-20; Luke 5:33-39.

SEPTEMBER 6 – SATURDAY: TWENTY-SECOND WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME.

Mass of the day (green). Readings: Colossians 1:21-23; Luke 6:1-5.



Apostleship of Prayer
Themes for September 2025

For our relationship with all of creation

Let us pray that, inspired by Saint Francis, we might experience our interdependence with all creatures who are loved by God and worthy of love and respect.

Twenty-second Sunday of the Year

Readings: Sirach 3:19-21, 30-31; Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24a; Luke 14:1, 7-14

When Jesus sits at a table, he never sits only to eat. He transforms the meal into a lesson of love, humility, and fraternity. In today's Gospel (Luke 14:1, 7-14), Jesus is invited to dine in the house of a Pharisee. He is watched closely, judged, as if he were under a microscope. But Jesus does not worry about appearances. He notices the eagerness of the guests to claim the best seats, to be seen as important. And then he tells a parable that reveals the heart of the Kingdom of God: "Those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Jesus shows us a new way of living. In a society, and sometimes even in our own communities, we are tempted to seek the first places. We want recognition, influence, and the seat of honour. But in God's banquet, there is only one seat reserved: the last place, the

Take the last place, find Christ

place of service. And it is there that we find Jesus himself, who came not to be served but to serve, who bent down to wash the feet of his disciples, and who gave his life for us on the cross. This is true greatness: to make ourselves small so that others may be lifted up.

Jesus goes even further. He tells us whom to invite: not our friends or rich neighbours who can repay us, but the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame. In other words, those who cannot give us anything in return, those who are often invisible or unwanted in society. This is the heart of the Gospel: gratuity. Love that is not calculated, not traded, not exchanged for favours. Love that reflects the very love of God, who gives everything freely.

This challenges us deeply. How many times do we close the doors of our hearts or our homes because we are afraid of inconvenience? How often do we prefer to surround ourselves with those who think like us, who look like us, who can benefit us in some way? Jesus reminds us that the Church, his community, is not a club of the perfect, but a banquet open to everyone—especially those who carry wounds, weaknesses, and burdens.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us ask ourselves today: where do I place myself at the table of life? Do I seek the first place, or am I content with the last? Do I welcome those who cannot repay me, or do I prefer those who give me security

and comfort? The Gospel invites us to conversion, to move from self-interest to generosity, from pride to humility, from exclusion to welcome.

In the end, our reward is not what others think of us, nor the recognition we receive, but the embrace of the Father who calls us his beloved children. Let us then walk the path of humility, open our hearts to those in need, and rediscover the joy of a life lived as a gift. In choosing the last place, we will find ourselves closest to Christ, who makes all things new.



● Father Josekutty Mathew CMF



Ayaw natin sa mga taong mayayabang, na ang tingin nila sa kanilang sarili ay sila lang ang importante sa kanilang pamayanan. Ang ganitong klaseng tao ay hindi nagpapahalaga sa kanilang kapwa. Para sa kanila mas importante sila kaysa iba.

Ang buhay Kristiyano ay buhay na marunong magpapahalaga sa kapwa tao. Hindi ang sariling kapakanan ang iniisip kundi ang makakabuti para sa karamihan.

Tulad ni Kristo, S'yay ay pumarito para iligtas tayo, at ibinigay N'ya ang kanyang buhay, S'yay nagpakumbaba upang tanggapin ang krus para sa ating kaligtasan.

Sa ating Ebanghelyo sa Linggong ito, pinaalalahanan tayo

Alamin ang iyong lugar

ni Hesus na maging lingkod sa lahat ng tao. Dahil ang tunay na taga-sunod ni Kristo ay handang i-sakripisyo ang sarili upang paglingkuran ang kapwa ang sundin ang kalooban ng Diyos.

Ang taong nagpakumbaba ay hindi makasarili at hindi mapagmataas. Sa ating ebanghelyo ang taong mapagmataas ay namimili ng upuan para lang sana sa piling panauhin. Gusto niya na mapansin siya sa mga tao. Tandaan natin ang tunay na alagad ni Kristo ay nilimot na ang sarili. Hindi na ang sarili ang mapansin kundi si Kristo na sa pamumuhay niya. Kung tayo'y

tunay na nagpakumbaba malamang si Kristo ang makikita sa buhay natin hindi na ang sarili natin. Ito ay ang hangarin natin bilang tumanggap ng binyag. Si Kristo ang itataas sa buhay ng isang Kristiyano.

Ang taong may pusong mapagpakumbaba ay marunong maglingkod na walang kapalit. Sabi ni Hesus sa ating pagbasa; "Kapag naghahanda ka, huwag ang mga kaibigan mo, mga kapatid, mga kamag-anak o mayayamang kapitbahay ang aanyayahan mo, sapagkat aanyayahan ka rin nila, at sa gayo'y nagantihan ka. Kaya kung

ikaw ay maghahanda ng isang malaking salu-salo, ang mga pulubi, mga pingkaw, mga pilay, at mga bulag ang anyayahan mo. Hindi sila makagaganti sa iyo at sa gayo'y magiging mapalad ka. Gagentihan ka na ng Diyos sa muling pagkabuhay ng mga banal." (Lc. 14:12-14).

Ang taong nagpakumbaba ay may gantimpala!



● Father Arnold Abelardo CMF

Long-held belief declared dogma 75 years ago

The feast of the Assumption, celebrated on August 15, commemorates the belief in the bodily ascension of Mary into heaven. This year marks the 75th anniversary of the dogma being officially defined in the apostolic constitution *Munificentissimus Deus* (The most bountiful God) by Pope Pius XII, though the tradition itself is ancient.

While Scripture does not directly reference Mary's Assumption, it underscores her dignity and privilege. For instance, the Hebrew Scriptures contain passages in the Song of Songs that some scholars interpret as prophetic references to Mary, such as "Arise, my friend, my beautiful one, and come!" (2:10). The New Testament supports this belief, exemplified in Gabriel's greeting to Mary, "Hail, favored one!" (Lk 1:28).

The absence of historical documentation regarding Mary's death, combined with her designation as *Theotokos* (Mother of God) at the Council of Ephesus in 431, propelled the proliferation of apocryphal literature concerning her dormition—the belief that she "fell asleep." The term "Dormition" can be misleading, as it often emphasises her death rather than her Assumption, which is understood as her being taken to heaven body and soul.

Significant apocryphal texts, such as *De transitu Mariae* (The Passing of Mary) and *Transitus Beatae Mariae Virginis* (The Assumption of Mary), detail the events of Mary's death. Early church authority, notably St. John Damascene (d. 750), referenced them to affirm that Mary's body was taken to heaven after her burial in the Garden of Gethsemane.

The celebration of the Assumption began in the East, eventually being introduced to Rome in the mid-seventh century as *Natale Sanctae*

Mariae referring to Our Lady's "birth" into heaven.

Pope Sergius I, who reigned from 687 to 701, was instrumental in formalizing the feast, incorporating processions into its

liturgy.

Scholars and Church leaders in the medieval period bolstered the belief in the Assumption. St. Thomas Aquinas linked it to Psalm 131:8, saying, "Arise, Lord, come to your resting place, you and your mighty ark," referring to Mary as the true Ark of God. St. Anthony of Padua similarly depicted Mary's Assumption as her elevation to a heavenly bridal chamber.

The Assumption was recognised as a major feast in the 1570 Sacramentary published during the Counter-Reformation under Pope Pius V. This reaffirmed the Catholic Church's commitment to the feast and its significance amid a period of doctrinal reform.

The dogma was formally established on 1 November 1950, when Pope Pius XII declared, "We pronounce, declare and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma: that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory."

In conclusion, the Assumption of Mary, while firmly rooted in ancient tradition and supported by the teachings of the Church, was officially declared a dogma only 75 years ago. This anniversary serves as a reminder of the enduring significance of Mary in the Catholic faith, her unique role in salvation history, and the theological reflections that continue to inspire the faithful.

● Father Richard Gribble
OSV News
(Abridged by SE)



AI ‘resurrections’ raise ethical issues, prolong grief, say Catholic experts

(OSV NEWS): “It’s not good to think that we can digitally resurrect people,” Brian Patrick Green, director of technology ethics at Santa Clara University’s Markkula Centre for Applied Ethics, said, addressing the matter of the AI creation of interactive avatars of deceased loved ones. “That’s the completely wrong terminology,” he said. “It’s a mockery of the word ‘resurrection,’ and it shouldn’t even be used.”

Even if the intent is to serve a good cause, when it comes to such AI avatars, “there’s a right way to do it and the wrong way to do it,” Green said.

Interactive recreations through artificial intelligence—so-called “AI resurrections”—walk a fine line between honouring and betraying individuals, while raising several ethical issues and prolonging the grieving process, he and other Catholic experts said.

As AI technology has progressed, trained on increasingly larger amounts of data, several companies throughout the world have rolled out “digital avatars,” or “deadbots,” of deceased persons for bereaved family and friends, who can simulate conversations with the digital creations.

Green is also a member of the AI Research Group, comprised of North American theologians, philosophers and ethicists convened at the invitation of the Vatican Centre for Digital Culture, part of the Dicastery for Culture and Education.

The group has already produced *Encountering Artificial Intelligence*, an ethical and anthropological assessment of AI based on collaborative scholarly investigations conducted from 2020 to 2023.

Green said that broadly speaking, it is understandable that parents of children killed in a mass shooting would find such AI advocacy “to be a good memorialisation of their child,” but noted that “the child can’t be asked their consent for it, because they’re gone.”

Such AI usage could translate into “the instrumentalisation of a memory,” said Green. “Maybe the [AI] son would be completely on board with his parents doing this. ... But we don’t know that.”

As a result, said Green, there is “a risk of violation here, which is that we owe something to the dead. ... We owe respect to the dead. We owe respect to future generations. We have this idea of respecting other people around us right now. But we tend to think of that in terms of space, not time.”

In particular, the Catholic



A user interacts with a smartphone app to customise an avatar for the personal artificial intelligence chatbot, Replika. Photo: OSV News/Luka, Inc. handout via Reuters

faith—with its core beliefs in the resurrection of the body made possible by Christ’s own death and resurrection, and in the communion of saints—stresses that “there’s a continuum from the dead who have gone before us” and future generations “who are coming in front of us,” said Green.

“We’re just here doing our part as the kind of union between the past and the future, and that’s a big responsibility,” he said.

Green suggested, instead, that AI can assist in creating a “digital scrapbook” of a lost loved one—but even so, he warned, “we need to not confuse computers with people.”

That task has become more challenging as large language models—core AI models that are trained on vast amounts of data for various purposes—are “psychologically confusing to us,” said Green.

“Human beings don’t meet talking artifacts; we only meet talking people,” he said. “And, of course, beyond that, there’s also angels and demons and God. ... We’ve never had to deal with machines that can talk. ... Now that the object can talk back, I think we’re not psychologically prepared for it.”

Such avatars—which “likely come from a good place of helping the bereaved”—stand to “ultimately hinder the process of grief and bereavement” by generating “a lot of confusion,” said Patrick Metts, a licensed professional counsellor and associate director of the Archdiocese of Atlanta’s Office of Evangelisation and Discipleship.

Metts—who developed the “Accompanying Those Who Mourn” bereavement ministry training course endorsed by the

Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers—pointed out that interactions with an AI avatar of a deceased loved one “would cause this potentially persistent presence with the bereaved that’s not based in reality, not based in truth.”

He added that “there’s great concern” such a presence would “potentially further isolate the bereaved individual” at a time when interpersonal actions and social support is particularly needed.

“The hope, of course, in a bereavement process is that they [the bereaved] are engaging with the community around them,” Metts explained. “They’re receiving consolation from the community around them, from the church, from the sacraments.”

However, “having this avatar present with them” could undermine those bonds and “create more loneliness,” he said, “because ultimately, that avatar is going to fall infinitely short of the person they lost.”

Metts also drew a distinction between grieving and mourning, with the latter constituting “more of an active role in the grieving process, in which the bereaved takes steps to actively remember” the person, through for example the funeral Mass, visiting the gravesite, “writing in journals ... listening to songs that the person used to love.”

Metts said, “These types of active things can help bring a sense of acceptance and closure and consolation to us when we are missing the loved one.”

Both he and Green noted that modern culture increasingly seeks ways to avoid discussions of death.

“There’s a lot of dysfunctionality around our conception of death

... We want to make sure that new technologies don’t contribute to that dysfunction.”

He added, “If we can’t acknowledge that people die, then we’re not living in the real world anymore.”

Green and Metts said Catholic teaching, thought and pastoral

‘[there is] a risk of violation here, which is that we owe something to the dead. ... We owe respect to the dead. We owe respect to future generations. We have this idea of respecting other people around us right now...’

practice can handle the challenges wrought by AI avatars of the deceased, and other forms of AI use—particularly with Pope Leo XIV prioritising the issue of AI.

“Reach out and be a presence in that person’s life, and fight against the tendency of society to compartmentalise and avoid it [grieving],” he said. “Actively meet the person in their grief and accompany them in their grief—that’s how the Church can respond.”

Pope marks Ukraine’s Independence Day with prayers for peace

VATICAN (CNS): “With a heart wounded by the violence that ravages your land, I address you on this day of your national feast,” Pope Leo XIV said in a message to the country’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and pledged his prayers for the Ukrainian people on the country’s independence day.

Zelenskyy, posted the message on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Ukraine declared its independence from the Soviet Union on August 24, 1991.

“I wish to assure you of my prayer for the people of Ukraine who suffer from war, especially for all those wounded in body, for those bereaved by the death of a loved one and for those deprived of their homes,” the pope wrote to the president.

Pope Leo prayed that God would console the Ukrainian people, “strengthen the injured and grant eternal rest to the departed.”

The pope also told Zelenskyy that he continued to pray that the Lord would “move the hearts of people of good will [so] that the clamour of arms may fall silent and give way to dialogue, opening the path to peace for the good of all.”

The pope wrote, “I entrust your nation to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Peace.”

Zelenskyy, posting the pope’s message, thanked him “for his thoughtful words, prayer, and attention to the people of Ukraine amid devastating war. All of our hopes and efforts are for our nation to achieve the long-awaited peace. For good, truth, and justice to prevail. We appreciate @pontifex’s moral leadership and apostolic support.”

After reciting the Angelus prayer on August 24, Pope Leo also drew attention to the global prayer for Ukraine requested by the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religions.

“Today we join our Ukrainian brothers and sisters who, with the spiritual initiative ‘Global Prayer for Ukraine,’ ask the Lord to grant peace to their war-torn country,” the pope told thousands of people gathered in St. Peter’s Square.

Philippine diocese condemns large-scale mining, warns of threat to environment

BANGUED (LICAS NEWS): The Diocese of Bangued condemned plans for large-scale mining in Licuan-Baay, Abra province, the northern Philippines, warning of grave threats to the environment, indigenous peoples' rights, and the health and livelihood of communities.

In a pastoral statement released in the third week of August, Leopoldo Corpuz Jaucian along with clergy said that the Yamang Mineral Corporation obtained an Authority to Verify Minerals without securing the Free, Prior, and Informed Consent [FPIC] of indigenous peoples.

Church leaders in Abra described the move as a violation of both due process and fundamental human dignity.

"The Church in the Diocese of



The Abra River. Photo: Provincial Government of Abra, public domain

Bangued stands united in defending the environment and the sanctity of God's creation," the statement read. "Such disregard for law and community raises deep concerns about credibility,

respect, and justice."

The diocese warned that mining in Licuan-Baay will not only affect the area but also nearby municipalities, as the Malanas and Baay Rivers flow into the Abra River, a vital lifeline for local communities.

It cautioned that mining operations would bring "contamination, flooding, and destruction," with impacts that extend across the province.

Citing the teachings of Pope St. John Paul II and the Gospel of Mark, the diocese stressed that stewardship of creation is a moral duty that cannot be traded for short-term profit.

"The short-term lure of profit

can never outweigh the lasting value of clean rivers, fertile soil, healthy communities, and a living culture," the statement read.

The pastoral letter reiterated that the Church condemns "every action that destroys our environment."

The clergy called on government officials and agencies to act with courage and integrity, enforce environmental laws, and defend the rights of the people of Abra.

They also invoked the Supreme Court ruling in *Oposa v. Factoran* [1993], which affirmed the responsibility of each generation to protect the environment for future generations.

"If we remain silent, our children and their children will suffer—and they will hold us accountable," the statement warned.

The diocese urged the faithful to remain united in protecting creation. "Let us choose life, justice, and stewardship," the bishops and clergy said, adding that Abra can still stand as a "vibrant witness to the beauty of God's creation."

Diocese of Macau opens cause for beatification of Salesian Father Gaetano Nicosia



EDICT



On 6th November 2017, the Servant of God Don Gaetano Nicosia S.D.B. died in Hong Kong. Born in 1915 in San Giovanni la Punta, Archdiocese of Catania, Sicilia, Italy, in 1935 he came to China as a missionary. Having become a Salesian of Don Bosco in 1937, he continued his Salesian and priestly formation in Hong Kong and Macau, where he was ordained a priest at the St. Joseph Seminary Church in 1946. After 17 years of work in Salesian houses serving the youth and the faithful in Macau, Hong Kong and mainland China, in 1963 he was sent to take care of Hansenian patients near Ká-Hó, Coloane, Macau. He served them and other Hansenians for 47 years, at the same time also serving poor and abandoned children. Seriously injured in 2010, he was hospitalized in Hong Kong, assisted in particular by the Little Sisters of the Poor, in whose St. Mary's Home for the Aged he died on 6th November 2017, aged 102.

As his reputation for sanctity and signs has grown over the years, the Postulator General of the Salesians of Don Bosco, Don Pierluigi Camerini S.D.B. formally requested me on 24th January 2024 to begin the relevant Cause of Beatification and Canonization. After consulting my Curia and my neighbouring Brother Bishops, after obtaining from the Holy See, with the consent of Cardinal Stephen Chow Sau Yan S.J., on 11th June 2024 the transfer of competence for the Cause from the Bishop of Hong Kong (place of Don Gaetano Nicosia's death) to the Bishop of Macau (main place of Don Gaetano Nicosia's life and work) as well as the *Nihil Obstat* on 21st May 2025, with the present Edict I inform the ecclesial community about the request received from the above-named Postulator General and I invite all the faithful to communicate directly or to send to the Diocesan Tribunal of Macau (Paço Episcopal, C.P. 324, Largo da Sé, Macau, China) all information from which one can in some way deduce elements favorable or contrary to the reputation for sanctity of the aforementioned Servant of God Don Gaetano Nicosia.

Furthermore, since it is necessary to collect, in accordance with the canonical provisions, all the writings attributed to Don Nicosia (diaries, letters or any other private writing) or in any way pertinent to the Cause, we order, with this edict, whoever is in possession of them, to return them with due promptness to the same Diocesan Tribunal, if they have not already been delivered to the Salesian Postulation. Those who would like to keep the originals, may present a copy, which will be duly authenticated.

Finally, we establish that this edict will remain posted for a period of 6 months in every parish of the Diocese of Macau, that it will be published in the Diocesan Bulletin, in the Newsletter of the Salesians of Don Bosco, as well as in any place - with the consent of the relevant Ordinary - linked to the figure of the Servant of God Don Gaetano Nicosia, in particular the Diocese of Hong Kong, with the express permission of Cardinal Stephen Chow Sau Yan S.J., the Archdiocese of Catania, with the express permission of Archbishop Luigi Renna, and the Patriarchate of Lisboa, with the express permission of D. Rui Manuel Sousa Valério S.M.M.

Macau, 16th July, 2025, Memorial of Our Lady of Mount Carmel



+ Stephen Lee Bun Sang
Bishop of Macau

Rev. Cyril Jerome Law, Jr.
Chancellor

No evacuation order for Gaza parish

GAZA (RVA NEWS): Father Gabriel Romanelli, parish priest of the Holy Family Catholic Parish in Gaza, clarified that no evacuation order has been issued for the parish and its surrounding area.

"There has been no order of evacuation in this area of our neighbourhood. Our area is in the Old City of Gaza, within the larger neighbourhood of Zeytoun," Father Romanelli said on August 19.

While stressing that the parish remains intact, the priest admitted the situation continues to be dangerous. "Bombings can be heard night and day. Some far away, others closer. At times, even shrapnel arrives," he said.

"Unfortunately, the war continues. And, with the war, every day more dead, wounded, and destruction are added... and the needs of every kind for the entire civilian population of Gaza grows," he lamented.

Despite the challenges, Father Romanelli expressed gratitude for the community's safety. "We are well, thanks be to God," he said. "We continue to pray for peace."

Since the outbreak of the war on 7 October 2023, several hundred people have sought refuge at the parish, the only Catholic church in Gaza. The church itself suffered an attack on July 17 when a tank round struck its compound killing three people and injuring several others, including Father Romanelli, who sustained a minor leg wound.

Following that attack, Pope Leo XIV prayed publicly for the victims by name, condemning what he described as the "barbarism of war," Vatican News reported. The pope renewed his appeal for a just and lasting peace, calling on all sides to respect human life and dignity.

The parish continues to shelter displaced families, providing food, medicine, and spiritual comfort amid the ongoing violence.