



Ignite

newsletter

Church of
St Francis Xavier
Petaling Jaya

VOL. 1, ISSUE 2 & 3: APRIL- SEPT 2020

FOR INTERNAL CIRCULATION ONLY



BECs: The Way Forward

By Cordelia Lee

The BEC (Basic Ecclesial Community) has been an integral part of Malaysia's Catholic Church since the 1970s. The inception of BECs is the result of the Second Vatican Council's call for the Catholic laity to take a more active role in the Church. In the 1960s, they were known as base church communities or grassroots-communities.

Our Church of St Francis Xavier has 19 active BECs across five zones in the Petaling Jaya precinct.

BEC Challenges

In the previous Archdiocesan Parish Pastoral Assembly in 2019, the BEC Core Team (BECCOT) had identified several areas of concern:

- BECs lack vibrancy due to poor leadership and people who lack interest, spirituality, focus or are too busy.
- BECs are unable to meet the needs of various groups, age and language.
- Some BECs comprise of a predominantly aging population. The BECCOT team cited lack of interest and time, health and transportation as key issues.
- There are families residing in SFX areas who attend Masses at other parishes. As such, they have opted to attend BEC gatherings under those parishes.

Calling for More Youths to Join BECs

Lorna Shu, a BEC Chief Coordinator for 8 years (2010-2018), points out that "BECs must be seen as integrated in a parish. There is still a need to continue with regular home visits and also come up with new ways to attract our youths." At present, Shu is coordinating Zone 4 cluster for BECs in Section 16, 17 and 19.

She conceded that BEC gatherings today are attended by more senior members compared to previous years. "Our BEC communities are ageing. I remember when our young children used to join us in our community prayers, celebrations and fellowship. We also helped each other prepare our children for their Sacraments. It was lively, noisy and fun. These days, we only plan prayer gatherings for our senior members. Perhaps we could also invite speakers to





File Photo

present topics and organize gatherings to share ideas based on common interests.”

“From our cluster, we have members joining other BEC groups to be with familiar friends. The concept of a BEC is to make friends where you live and find common ground. Even though it could be difficult to work with certain people in your BEC, we have to put aside our differences. We need to reach out and learn to accommodate, tolerate and love one another. God has a reason for us to belong where we are at,” said Lorna.

She also felt that members in the cluster should take up leadership roles in their respective BECs. “We must give ourselves the opportunity to discover our own talents, skills and potential. By doing so, we will find ourselves growing in our spiritual life.” Lorna stressed that a BEC is not just another ministry or organization, but it is the church at the grassroots.

“BECs are still around because of the sheer commitment, perseverance and determination of its members.”

“I still have fond memories of how

BEC members used to take turns looking after each other’s children. Today, our children have all grown up. My wish is that they are now part of their own BEC communities wherever they settled,” Lorna shared.



Lorna Shu

Alice Tan of St John’s BEC reminds that it’s crucial to involve the youths in our BECs and give them a sense of ownership.

“We need to empower our youths to be co-responsible for the growth in faith and participate actively in community. They are our future BEC leaders. During fellowships, senior BEC members need to reach out and engage young people in conversations on current issues, while getting to know them better. Interesting and vibrant con-

versations attract our youth. We could get them to work with seniors in organizing gatherings, outings, BEC Home Masses, coffee mornings, caroling and outreach projects.”

She called for BEC youth members to invite their friends in the neighborhood to festive gatherings such as Chinese New Year, Merdeka Celebrations and Christmas. This helps to build bridges across ethnic and faith communities.

“That way our youths will view the BEC as an outward-looking community but more importantly, make a positive and significant contribution towards a better tomorrow for all Malaysians,” said Alice.

Alice firmly believes that inter-faith interaction by BECs (as foundation units of the Parish) could contribute towards building a more just and harmonious nation for our children and grandchildren.

The BEC is a faith community. By participating in this community, sharing the word of God and testimonies, our faith will grow. If it remains stagnant, we may eventually lose it. Let us make an effort to belong to a BEC.

Staying Mission-Oriented & Relevant



Going forward, BECs need to be more mission-oriented and relevant to our parishioners:

- **Conversion (Fellowship):** BECs need a conversion of mind. It is important to continue motivating the ones who are attending BEC gatherings regularly and to seek out opportunities for growth with them. The BEC should not be perceived as a burden but more as an opportunity for growth.
- **Communion:** BECs need a spirituality of communion. Members must see each and every person as “a member” of “my BEC.” The BEC must be mindful that each one is a gift and we need to seek ways to accommodate one another despite the differences. The communion as expressed by the early Christian community — is the communion of mind and heart, communion of faith, communion of goods and the Eucharist.
- **Mission:** BECs need to move out of their comfort zones. Mission is never seasonal but a participation in the mission of the Church by virtue of baptism. For a BEC to be both prophetic and missionary, it needs to find concrete ways of reaching out to everyone by building bridges. BECs should take on the role of becoming ‘promoters of communion’ for the common good of all.

It is important for BECs to rally the faithful behind the Second Vatican Council’s “vision of a renewed Church” and “for the full living of the Christian vocation.” Individual differences should not serve as a hindrance to achieve unity in diversity. Without doubt, the indispensable role of BECs is to complement and strengthen the traditional parish structures as a “communion of communities.”

If you have yet to be part of a BEC, kindly seek assistance with your parish office to connect with a BEC community nearest to you.

Source: Herald/ CWN

Building Up Our BECs

“BEC meetings are usually held on weekday nights. This could be a little challenging as most of us have to be home early for our kids. But we do make an effort to attend BEC gatherings on weekends and festive occasions such as Merdeka, Christmas, and Chinese New Year celebrations.

Besides that, it’s also the meeting itself and the generation gap which leads to different topics of interest. Some of us are also occupied with other parish activities in church such as religious education, SFX Choir, and Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS). So it may be difficult to be active in everything.”

—Amelia Ng, SFX Parishioner with 2 young children

“I am not so involved in my BEC now. Yet, I remain in awe of the various BECs that are active and committed to the community. The love that shines through is inspiring. I believe the BEC is vital and relevant at any given time. We will have our ups and our downs... and that is the beauty of our Church. When we are down, we look inside and outside to find out what we can do to lift ourselves up.”

“Of course, from the inside, it is our willingness and humility to commit ourselves to our community. How do we effect that change and the transformation to commit? For me, the individual must be encouraged to have a personal relationship with our Lord...through programs at parish level, BEC level and other retreat programmes. From the outside, I believe that an active, open, accessible and encouraging Core team at each BEC is vital.”

– Pat Lam, SFX Parishioner

“Participation from students and young working adults in BEC gatherings may be higher if the activities are held during weekends or public holidays. Many of them cannot make it on Wednesday evenings as members need to get home early for work or school the following day. Activity-based gatherings with the use of YouTube for singing and video clips showing real life experiences to facilitate reflection and sharing would make the sessions more interesting to the young growing up in this digital age.”

“Gatherings which are too structured, rigid and routine tend to be less attractive. The facilitator needs to have an objective of the main takeaways for the gathering and then allow for more spontaneity in open sharing instead of sticking to a script.”

— Alice Tan, St John’s BEC



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Ignite is a quarterly newsletter published by St Francis Xavier's Social Communications Ministry.

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For the latest information and event updates, please check www.sfx.com.my, www.facebook.com/sfxpj/ or Instagram [@sfxpj](https://www.instagram.com/sfxpj).

Editorial Message from Parish Priest

Dear Brothers and Sisters

Peace of Christ be with you!

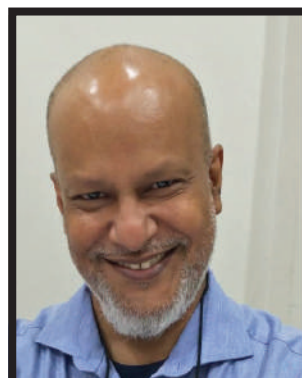
We are born through our parents into a world of human beings. We cannot survive without people. We live, move, and have our being in a world with others. People shape us. They serve as the mirror through which we discover ourselves. Language is communal by nature. Thus, we find our greatest happiness and sadness in relating to people. Church does not primarily refer to a building but to a group of people who follow Christ. At SFX, we have about 5,000 parishioners. As we gradually increase Masses, we hope to see more people including non-Malaysian citizens coming back to church.

It is at the BEC level that we form smaller communities and find it easier to get to know one another. A flourishing BEC, centred on Christ, is a great source of life to its members. It is for this reason that the Malaysian Bishops have always emphasized the importance of the BECs. I believe that during the MCO we sorely missed the daily interactions with our families and friends. Even now we are not as free to gather as we used to. It makes it difficult to do the things that we normally did in the BECs.

Still, Christians throughout the ages have adapted to the changing situations of their lives and learnt to be patient. I call upon all SFX parishioners to keep the faith, continue to pray and care for one another during this crisis. Despite these immense challenges, do not lose hope. As a faith community, we will emerge from this situation stronger.

Fr Norris Seenivasan, SJ

Parish Priest
Church of St Francis Xavier, Petaling Jaya



Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

By Luisa Lim

Did you know that SFX PJ is the first parish in Malaysia to adopt the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) in catechising children as young as three years old?

CGS is a Montessori approach to the religious formation of children: where they gather in a specially prepared environment called the Atrium. In this sacred space, the catechist, guided by the Holy Spirit, reads Scripture and shows presentations using materials from biblical and liturgical sources. The children then work with these materials with their hands. The Atrium is peaceful and quiet, almost like a library. In this way, we help children develop a personal relationship with God by themselves. When they learn to be still, the meditative state of prayer facilitates an encounter with God.



The Good Shepherd

The Atrium in SFX was set up in 2013 and is currently located on the 1st Floor of Xavier hall, next to Emmaus Centre.



Practical Life

It is inspiring to see prayerful children, quietly working with Atrium materials. This is made possible by the parent-child programme that we run in SFX. CGS is a community of faith. Parents are equipped to be primary catechists who support their children's spiritual development through a formation course, prior to their children entering the Atrium at age 3.

"I had garnered an understanding of the works in the atrium as well as a deeper connection with my daughter. I also felt newfound strength in my faith again."

- Yen, SFX on her CGS Formation

CGS also runs Silent Journeys for parents to experience the Atrium.

In the Atrium, children learn about the liturgical calendar and liturgical colours. They experience celebrations in ways that are meaningful to them such as The Liturgy of Light and Pentecost. There is a miniature Altar and they get to do what the priest does at Mass –*Preparing the Chalice, Epiclesis, The Offering* and more. Their time in the Atrium is experiential and it helps them to relate to the adult world at Mass. Most importantly, the love of God is conveyed and experienced.



Pentecost



Chasubles



The Cenacle



The Altar

We often hear of adults leaving the Church and how it can be difficult to catechise teenagers. We've heard it said: "Teach your children to follow Jesus, or the world will teach them not to". In CGS, we start planting the seed of faith at age 3, in an absorbent mind, at an age of joy and wonder, for the relationship with God to flourish. Could this be the way for the church to build up its community of faith? We do our best, and let God do the rest.

CGS speaks to the heart, just as God does.

"I strongly believe this CGS program is a precious & priceless gift that I could ever give to my child."
- Christina, SFX.

For more information on CGS, please contact Luisa Lim at 012 227 9600 or email luisalym@gmail.com

World Communications Day 2020

By Cordelia Lee



“That you may tell your children and grandchildren (Ex 10:2), Life becomes history”

Everyone enjoys a good story. “Stories can help us understand and communicate who we are” because we “human beings are storytellers” who need to be ‘clothed’ with stories to protect our lives. Pope Francis wrote this in his message for World Communications Day 2020, published on the memorial of St. Francis de Sales, Patron Saint of journalists and writers.

“Human beings are storytellers. Stories leave their mark on us; they shape our convictions and our behavior” said Pope Francis.

The Pope reminded that we all need “to make our own the truth contained in good stories.” Inspiring stories will help us rediscover our roots and the strength needed to move forward together. Amid the cacophony of voices and messages that surround us, he reiterated that “we need a human story that can speak of ourselves and of the beauty all around us. A narrative that can tell us that we are part of a living and interconnected tapestry.” Through memory, we pass on stories, hopes, dreams and experiences of one generation to another.

Weaving stories

Stories influence our lives, whether in the form of fairy tales, novels, films, songs, news— even if we do not always realize it. Often we decide what is right or wrong based on characters and stories we have made our own. By immersing ourselves in stories, we can find reasons to heroically face the challenges of life.

But not all stories are good stories. As Pope Francis points out, “How many stories serve to lull us, convincing us that to be happy we continually need to gain, possess

and consume. We may not even realize how greedy we have become for chatter and gossip, or how much violence and falsehood we are consuming.”

“Often on communication platforms, instead of constructive stories which serve to strengthen social ties and the cultural fabric, we find destructive and provocative stories that wear down and break the fragile threads binding us together as a society,” said the Pope.

In an age when falsification is increasingly sophisticated, reaching exponential levels (as in deep-fake), we need wisdom to create true and good stories. Let us find courage to reject false and evil stories. It is vital that we seek patience and discernment to rediscover stories that help us not to lose the thread amid today’s many troubles.

Sacred Scriptures

The Sacred Scripture is “a story of stories.” The Pontiff says that the Bible shows us “a God who is both creator and narrator.” “As narrator,” the Pope continues, “God calls things into life, culminating in the creation of man and wom-



an as his free dialogue partners.” Pope Francis also invites us with this message, to be close to Sacred Scripture and reminds us that “the Bible is thus the great love story between God and humanity.” From the Book of Exodus, we learn that the “knowledge of the Lord is handed down from generation to generation mainly by telling the story of how He continues to make Himself present.”

Pope Francis recalls the story of Jesus, which shows how God has taken man to heart and that for Him “no human stories are insignificant or paltry.” “By the power of the Holy Spirit,” he explains, “every story, even the most forgotten one...can be reborn as a masterpiece, and become an appendix to the Gospel.”

A Story That Renews Us

A good story stands the test of time because it nourishes and renews life. Let us read the Scriptures, the stories of the saints, and also those texts that have shed light on the human heart and its beauty. The Holy Spirit is free to write in our hearts, reviving our memory of what we are in God’s eyes.

“When we remember the love that created and saved us, when we make love a part of our daily stories, when we weave the tapestry of our days with mercy, we are turning another page. We no longer remain tied to regrets and sadness, bound to an unhealthy memory that burdens our hearts; rather, by opening ourselves to others, we open ourselves to the same vision of a great storyteller.

“Telling God our story is never useless, even if the record of events remains the same, the meaning and perspective are always changing. To tell our story to the Lord is to enter into his gaze of compassionate love for us and for others. We can recount to him the stories we live, bringing to him the people and the situations that fill our lives,” he reassured.

Our own story becomes part of every great story.

On this note, the Pope points out that “no one is an extra on the world stage, and everyone’s story is open to possible change. For even when we tell of evil, we can learn to leave room for redemption; in the midst of evil, we can also recognize the working of goodness and give it space.”

How to Spot Fake News





FAKE NEWS is defined as news, stories or hoaxes created to deliberately misinform or deceive readers.

Thousands of people circulate false stories. Why? Because eye-popping headlines in our social media feed makes it easier for us to share content without evaluating or even reading it.

People are more likely to accept information that confirms their beliefs and dismiss information that does not. But the result of all this misinformation isn’t simply triviality. It can also provoke serious consequences.

By Social Communications Ministry
Church of St. Francis Xavier  SFX PJ   sfx.com.my

Trusted Websites

 Photos, audio recordings, and videos can be edited. Look at trusted news sources to see if the story is being reported elsewhere. Check the source of the story, do you recognise the website? Is it a credible/reliable source?

Verify Sources

If you’re still not sure if a message is true, search online for facts and check trusted news sites to find out where the story came from. Use fact-checkers or ask people you trust for more information. 

Beyond Headlines

 Most fake news use sensational headlines to grab attention. Often the headlines of fake news are in all caps and use exclamation marks.

Fake News Often Goes Viral

Even if a message is shared many times, it doesn’t make it true. Don’t forward a message because the sender is urging you to do so. If you noticed something is fake, inform the person who sent it to you and ask him or her to verify the information first. If a group or a contact is constantly sending fake news, kindly report them. 

Have you visited a fact-checking website? Here are a few sites:
FactCheck.org, International Fact Checking Network (IFCN), PolitiFact.com, or Snopes.com

Source: WhatsApp Security, Webwise

A Lighter Side...

By Cordelia Lee

Why Stories Always Matter



As children, we crave for bedtime stories. We look forward to the fairy-tale endings and moral lessons to be learnt. As we get older, some of us still yearn for such stories.

Before the age of paper and print, stories were often passed on from one generation to the other by word of mouth. Story-tellers, medieval jesters and oral poets would gather people in groups to share stories, legends, poems, traditions and history through vivid narratives. They were known as “weavers of words” for their mastery over the spoken word and ability to relate or tell stories. And that is how humans communicated since the beginning of time — by passing on stories.

There are many great lessons to be learned from stories. Stories have a way of magically transporting us away from our realities. They trigger our imagination and open up our minds to new experiences. We respond to stories because they stimulate emotion, warmth and a sense of togetherness.

Stories make us human. It is through stories that we experience a rich tapestry of emotions and feelings of happiness, sorrow, hope, frustration, and failure. Most of us are naturally drawn to stories because we see ourselves reflected in the various characters. We try to interpret the subtle meaning in stories and hopefully, understand ourselves, as well as others, better. We also rely on stories to make sense of our world.

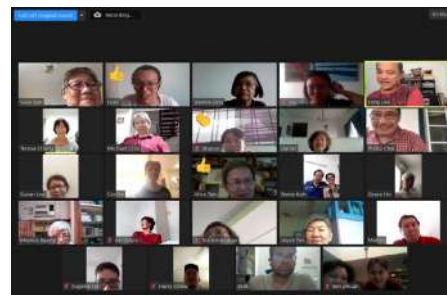
A good story teaches us powerful life lessons about forgiveness, gratitude, humility, love, leadership, valor and honor. It provides insight into moral values which lead to a meaningful and virtuous life.

Inspiring stories also tell of how ordinary people are willing to perform extraordinary deeds to save lives, to uphold justice and reach out to those in need of help. In times of adversity, it motivates us to keep fighting and gives us the burst of hope and courage to persevere. Stories help us better understand our place in the world. They will always matter, now and forevermore.

MCO Moments



SFX parishioners wearing face masks and maintaining physical distancing. Holy Mass resumed on Sunday, 28 June 2020



PMEIA and St John BEC members got together for a short talk on Buddhism. Eddy Lee, PMEIA Chief Coordinator & Lecturer in Comparative Studies of World Religions presented “An Overview on Buddhism” to help others better understand and learn about other faiths

A Firm Grip on Faith and a Foundation to Behold

By YC Hwang



File Photo

Members of the Firm Foundation Team

What's in a name that can appear and sound awkward in church ministry circles?

The initiators and pioneers of Firm Foundation responded to a timely need for faith formation for parishioners more than 20 years back. The emphasis then was on deepening the Catholic faith of parishioners, a niche that was visibly lacking within Malaysian church circles.

Regardless of the name, the ministry is oriented towards formation, specifically the continuing and renewing of faith formation in adults, having de-emphasised the deepening aspects, although not abandoning the ethos.

With a parishioner spectrum as diverse as SFX, the challenge is naturally on who needs what, and what needs who. All too often in adult formation or andragogy, the trajectory is largely unknown.

However, the direction can be better framed if planning is systematised and regulated.

The challenge of adult formation is twofold, that of knowing the faith followed by living the faith; the why's and the how's.

Firm Foundation was created and tasked with providing such a need in the parish. How has the ministry fared from the past to the present? Like all others, there have been good and dry spells, enthusiasm as well as periods devoid of excitement.

As for the present, the team helming the ministry is as grounded as anyone could wish for. Nevertheless, there remains the need to reach out for more participation to encourage creativity in the ministry so that programmes planned for formation are enhanced.

Without any intervention, it is a normal video show. With intervention, questions and sharing are introduced in small groups thereby shaping the dynamics for a positive outcome in forming Catholics. Such is encountered learning.

Invited speaker presentations are also normally followed by a planned phase for question and answer, here again to enhance the learning experience.

While there is a plethora of video programmes available for formation today, it was not the case 20 years ago where engaging prominent speakers to speak at Firm Foundation programmes was a challenging task.

Two notable programmes worth recalling – 'Why Catholic' in the



File Photo

Session on 'Our Catholic Faith'

year 2000 and 'The Ecumenical Church Councils' in the year 2001 – are fondly remembered by participants.

That brings us to the present. A year ago it was decided together with our Parish Priest that rebooting the basics of faith education was the proper and constructive approach to a restart.

The present programme "Our Catholic Faith – Understanding the Essentials" is the result of that desire. Covering 27 topics of Catholic faith fundamentals, it started on Oct 7, 2019 and concluded in June 2020.

The way forward is to build upon the basics that we started, and as a progression to some programmes that can be considered intermediate. All descriptions of Firm Foundation may seem mundane to an outside observer, but as a ministry there are various activities set out to bond participants socially and spiritually. Typical examples are fellowship dinners, outings to places of interest and spiritual retreats. Retreats in particular are the primacy of a reminder that all actions and activities of the ministry are the desire of the Lord written in our hearts. Ultimately, the drive that remains is to serve the Lord and his Church here on earth.

St John BEC, SS2

“Our BEC, A Welcoming Extended Family”



BEC Home Eucharist on Wednesday, 21 August 2019

Over the last couple of years that we have had our monthly Reflection and Sharing gatherings, we found that our members needed more opportunities for fellowship and bonding. The seniors have also requested the Core Team to organise more outings.

In 2019, our BEC began organising outings for seniors during weekdays and for everyone on weekends. We have also continued Sunday afternoon gatherings for all.

Our Seniors

Our BEC began the year by organising lunch outings to the Bread of Life Corner, Ecumenical Centre, CCM, located along Jalan University. Between February and June 2019, we organised seven small group outings for the seniors to get to know one another better. A group of twelve seniors also attended Mass at the Church of St Anne, Port Klang, during the Feast Day Celebration. In October, fifteen seniors travelled to Klang for an enjoyable bak kut teh lunch.

Our Seniors and Young Adults

Senior BEC members also joined young adults and friends from the parish in two weekend outings. The first was to KLPac to watch Euphrasia the Musical on Sunday 28 April 2019. It was a memorable performance which highlighted the undaunting spirit of St Mary Euphrasia Pelletier, the founder of the Congregation of the Good Shepherd Sisters. The outing ended with a delicious western buffet at the Bread of Life Corner.

Our second outing was a Pilgrimage to St Theresa Church in Nilai, the Pilgrim Church for the Extraordinary Missionary Year of the Archdiocese. Twenty six BEC members and friends travelled in six cars on Saturday 16 November 2019. We brought along groceries for the Orang Asli families which the St Theresa Parish Community visits regularly.

Upon arrival at the St Theresa Parish Centre, we had breakfast prepared by the parish commu-



Pilgrimage to St Theresa Church, Nilai on Saturday, 16 November 2019

nity. We were then taken through a Pilgrimage Walk with 5 Stations and learnt about St Therese and her life story. We thank Fr Benedict and his Parish Community for the profound spiritual experience in the rustic charm of their Parish Centre away from the madding crowd.

Our Children

During Lent, the seniors joined the homebound and children for the Progressive Way of the Cross. On the morning of Saturday 23 March 2019, we visited four homes including two with homebound seniors. In the afternoon, we went to three homes with children and the older ones even read some of the reflection passages. As we walked the Way of the Cross with Jesus, we were reminded once again how much He loves us and would like us to love one another and to reach out to others as a community especially the poor and the vulnerable.

Our BEC has seven young children from four families. The children attend Sunday School and CGS. Although we are unable to organize a Children's Group, they manage to participate actively in fellowship gatherings. It is always a blessing to have three or even four generations enjoying fellowship. Through this, we hope our children experience community life and we pray that they would be able to carry on this practice when they are grown up.

Thanksgiving Celebration of Community Life

Our BEC Home Eucharist was celebrated by 32 members and 4 guests on Wednesday 21 August at the Xavior family home, presided by Fr Norris Seenivasan, SJ, our Parish Priest. It was an inter-generational gathering. The sense of community that was felt and celebrated in thanksgiving

during the Eucharist did not just happen overnight but was nurtured over the months of informal interactions and outings beyond the monthly BEC Reflection/Rosary gatherings.

Our SYNC-ers

It is heartening that our Single, Young and Catholic Group (SYNC-ers) headed by our Youth Coordinator have participated actively in outings and Sunday afternoon gatherings and also our Reflection/Rosary gatherings. There is a strong sense of mutual support and growth in faith with the grace of our Lord Jesus.

Our Sisters and Brothers from Sabah and Sarawak

Our friendship with our East Malaysian brothers and sisters began when one of our BEC members from Sabah invited us to the Gawai and Kaamatan Celebration in Loyola Hall in 2017. The BEC members who participated were fascinated with the resplendent attire and warm hospitality that we continued to attend the annual celebration in the following years. Six members of the Yang Diutus (YD) group have participated, at different times, in our BEC fellowship gatherings since November 2018 and we have enjoyed their company.

During the Parish Pastoral Assembly on 30 November 2019,

Archbishop Julian Leow encouraged the BECs to welcome our young sisters and brothers from Sabah and Sarawak to participate in gatherings and other activities. The Core Team took this up and invited members of CSSUM to our Annual Carolling on Sunday 22 December 2019 organised by the SYNC-ers. We were truly glad that six CSSUM members joined us in two homes for carolling and fellowship. We will continue to welcome members of the YD and the CSSUM to our BEC gatherings for them to experience a home away from home and for us all to journey in faith together.

Our Mission

The Mission of the Church in Malaysia would include being actively engaged in building a united, harmonious nation of justice and peace. Our BEC would contribute by building bridges across ethnic and religious communities. Getting to know families living around our homes would foster mutual understanding of various ethnic cultures and faith traditions and hence promote unity and harmony. Change in any society begins at the grassroots and our BEC could definitely lead the way in our neighbourhood and perhaps also the Parish Community of SFX.

Alice Tan

Assistant Chief Coordinator

St John BEC, SS2

St Francis Xavier Parish

Petaling Jaya

"Our BEC is moving in the right direction by growing the bond of friendship among our families, among the seniors and young adults and with our brothers and sisters from Sabah and Sarawak.

The basis of growing in faith together is close friendship with one another and with Jesus. Growth in faith leads to the mission of helping to build a caring and harmonious nation.

It begins with the neighbourhood before it could take root in the larger society. In all that we do as an Extended BEC Family, we walk in faith with Jesus allowing Him to guide us along the way."

As I Have Loved You

“Married life has to be renewed each day ... Love isn’t easy. The most beautiful thing that a man and a woman can give each other is true love, for a lifetime.”

- Pope Francis

By Peter & Pauline Huntsman

“Have you considered attending the Marriage Encounter?” This is how we would invite married couples. Some just tell us, “We need to check our schedule first”; while others swiftly reply, “Oh, it’s OK, our marriage is fine.”

And then they would try to avoid the topic. Some even attempt to avoid us completely. It makes us feel sad and frustrated because we know that Marriage Encounter will definitely make a positive difference to their marriage.

Marriage Encounter enables married couples to spend undivided time together – a time to share their feelings, disappointments, hopes, fears and frustrations; and to do so openly and honestly with each other. It’s not a retreat, nor a marriage clinic, nor a group sensitivity session. It’s a unique approach aimed at revitalising Christian marriages. Marriage Encounter is for any couple who wants to enrich their marriage life whether they have been married for a short time or for many years.

The Christian marriage is a sacrament which builds up the community of the Church and society. Strengthening and enriching one’s marriage is a truly priceless gift to the family and church. This is what drives us to get married couples to attend the Marriage Encounter (ME).

Let us hear from two of the encountered couples on their ME experience!

Rene & Pauline Leow
April 2009 (Married for 9 years)

“The ME weekend made a big impact on us. We came away with a better understanding of one another and learned practical tools that help us communicate better, especially in busy (and sometimes stressful) times of juggling family and work life. It was encouraging to be with other couples who have a similar goal of building a healthy, mutually respectful, loving and lifelong commitment to each other. It also helped us realize what a wonderful gift we are to each other as husband & wife. We encourage our friends to give the ME weekend a try. Like many other ME couples, we wish we had gone sooner.”



Geethan & Therese Royan
February 2020 (Married for 41 years)

“Attending the ME weekend was one of the best decisions we have ever made. We found it extremely helpful to our relationship as the focus was on the couple finding each other anew, looking at better ways to communicate and dialogue with one another using all our senses and feelings. No boring stuff, no embarrassing moments, just a rediscovery of each other! Strongly recommended for all married couples. It’s never too late!”

**Marriage Encounter –
A Weekend of Discovery, A Lifetime of Love**



For more details please contact
Pauline Huntsman at
pphunts@gmail.com

Importance of Interfaith Dialogue

By Eddy Lee

When we hear the word “dialogue”, we may immediately think of two or more people speaking to one another. Interfaith dialogue usually conjures up the image of people from different faiths coming together to have a conversation. While that image is partly correct, interfaith dialogue goes beyond having a conversation among people of different faiths.

It includes various interactions such as working together for a common project, playing different games or sports together, going out to have a meal together, etc. At times, these interactions could also lead to an insightful conversion experience on the people who are involved. It is not a conversion with a different faith, but one of the heart and mind.

Interfaith dialogue is not new in our Christianity history. The best example of interfaith dialogue involving Christians is the dialogue between St Francis of Assisi with Sultan Malek al-Kamil of Egypt during the crusade era.

Sultan Malek al-Kamil, a nephew to the great Salah al-Din, was an educated and spiritual ruler. He was so impressed by Francis that instead of beheading him for trying to convert his royal highness (according to Muslim law at that time), the Sultan invited Francis to stay for a few days in order to understand each other, perhaps with an intention of converting St Francis.

However, both men eventually came to realize that their respective faith is strong and they knew and loved God. When Francis was allowed to leave, Sultan Malek gave him an ivory trumpet, an indication of the intimate spiritual relationship both men had developed during dialogue. The trumpet has been well preserved and is kept on display at the Basilica of San Francesco in Assisi.

Although the interfaith encounter did not manage to stop the Crusade (it might if they were to continue to dialogue longer), both men experienced a profound



St Francis Assisi and the Sultan

In 1219, St. Francis, a man of peace, and Brother Illuminato went to the battlefield to dissuade the crusaders from waging war against the Muslims at Damietta. Sadly they failed. In the end, the Christian armies were badly defeated by the Muslims.

St. Francis and Brother Illuminato went to the enemy camp to meet with the Sultan to broker a peace deal. Francis also harboured an intention of converting the Sultan to Christianity. They were subsequently arrested and beaten before being brought to the Sultan.

conversion of the heart and mind. Although they were from different faiths, they found a common ground in God. Their dialogue was not based on “knowledge in the head” or theology (although I am sure they had great exchanges on) or about who was right but on realization of the common experiences of the people of faith and prayer – and a peace that transcends all understanding (Philippians 4:7).

This realization enabled Francis to discard his view that Muslims are hostile enemies but recognize them as worshippers of God and bestow peace on them

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Being the Light at the Place of Encounter

The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy
- Dr Martin Luther King Jr.

By Mildred Lopez

Who would have ever thought that I would find one of my life-defining moments in prison?

While I was attending the course of **Jesus In The Gospel (JTIG)** and **Ignatian Spirituality & Prayer Program (ISP)** in tandem, I had a spiritual experience urging me to visit prisoners and set them free. My sons who love me dearly had reservations. I must admit that I too harboured some doubts myself. I was facing some personal challenges. But I decided to let go and let God use me.

I joined the Prison Ministry and found to my dismay, that their current priority was to visit Death Row prisoners. Due to security concerns, the visit was to be one person to one prisoner. Amidst so many fears I prayed that the prisoner I meet sees not my face but the face of Christ and that the Holy Spirit guide our encounter and be my Paraclete.

The death row prisoner, we refer to them as *Friend In Prison (FIP)*. The first FIP I met was Dolly (not her real name). As I entered through the arch of a narrow tunnel to where the prisoner was brought, I did not know what she looked like, but she was waving at me. I do not know how she knew me. I was taken aback as she was in handcuffs. We started talking as if we knew each other. Having had no visitors for the 5 years she was in prison, she was overflowing with news about herself and her life. I don't know what I said but she laughed a few times. She was overwhelmed with joy that someone cared enough to visit her. We talked and we prayed.

I realised then that she taught me what loneliness felt like, the cruelty of it. That a human being, even on death row does not want to die alone, does not want to be forgotten. And that a human being no matter what wrong they have done, deserves to be loved.

My next FIP was Jane. I had first rushed to see her when she reached the point of trying to commit suicide after 7 years in prison with no visitors, waiting for death by hanging. She was broken and in tears. She was seated before I entered the place of encounter.

When I entered she asked me "Are you an angel?" I said, "No."

But you look like an angel." I said, "No, I am a friend, come to see you. It's 7 years, your time for mercy has come. Jesus loves you". I could feel the Holy Spirit within me.

She cried even more. I listened to her as she belted out her sorrows. She spoke of her family and her little children. I offered her two choices: to look for moments of joy and live well while she had life, or to die before her time was due. I sang to her an uplifting song and asked her to repeat and sing along with me.

She was a mother and hence, a life-giving tree. Her branches provide shelter and her roots must sustain her children. I asked her to write her story as she would like her children to know. To make it a good one I gave her a small prayer book with a picture of Mother of Perpetual Succour and said I would be praying for her. I encouraged her to call home and connect with her children. Her disposition could make all the difference in the upcoming appeal. I assured her that I would be back. At my subsequent visit, I gave her a book by Henri Nouwen titled: **'HERE AND NOW'**.

At my next visit, I learnt that Jane's death sentence had been commuted from death row to 12 years. Since she had served 7 years, only 5 more years were left. I was overjoyed....mercy had indeed come for her. Jane composed a song to celebrate her new life, which she sang to me.

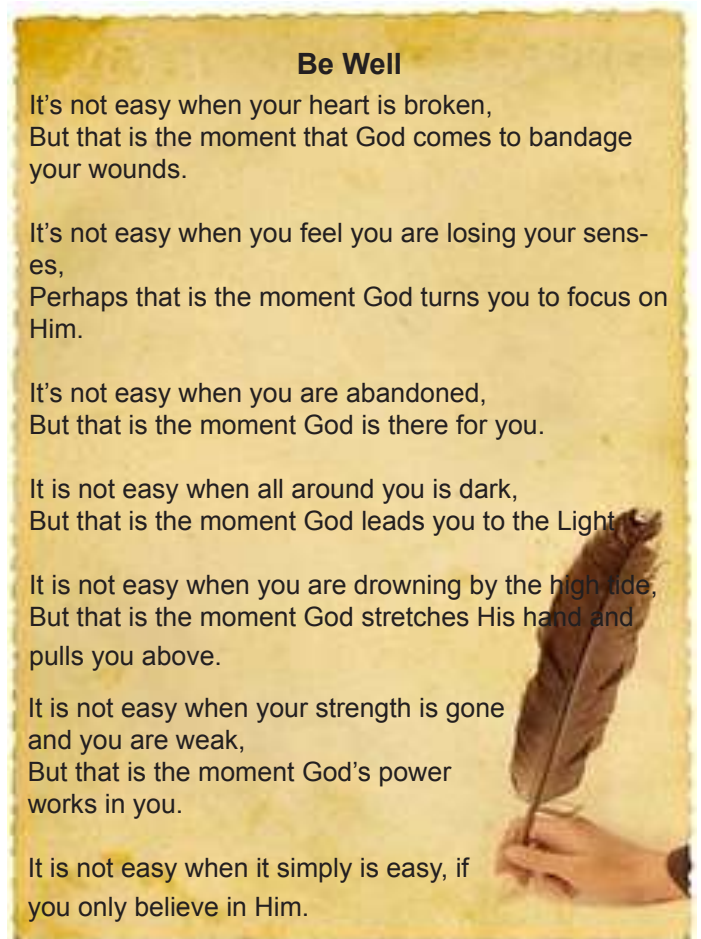
I finally understood the great power of love. With just the giving of a little love, how much it blossomed in Jane. Love indeed moved mountains and it is I who has been blessed by the love and generosity of Jane.



A gift for the New Year by Jane, an Indigo colored pouch with a teddy bear attached



“We sang the song jubilantly together and rocked the prison”



“So grateful for life and inspired by Henri Nouwen, Jane also composed a poem”

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which was quite scandalous during the age of the Crusade. Francis was so impressed by the Islamic spirituality, especially the five-time daily prayer, that he introduced the thrice-daily prayer of the Angelus, marked by the ringing of the church bell.

Unfortunately, there were no accounts of Sultan Malek's thoughts after his dialogue with Francis. However, we may deduce from the Sultan's gestures that he too had a conversion of heart and mind to peace. Sultan Malek had numerous times offered peace to the Crusaders but to no avail. He was known to have treated captured Crusade soldiers humanely. The Sultan also allowed Francis and other Christians

to enter Jerusalem to have their pilgrimage. In 1229, Sultan Malek negotiated a ten-year peace treaty with Frederick II of Sicily and returned Jerusalem to Christian rule.

The encounter of the two great men should serve as the foundation and ultimate goal of interfaith dialogue today. The dialogue of these two spiritual men did not end in peace on Earth. The Sultan continued to battle the Crusaders. But they showed us the most important aspect of interfaith dialogue is a conversion of heart and mind to peace (which eventually realized in the physical realm in 1229). This is not a worldly peace that is a result of strict rules and laws that instill fear in people not to commit wrong doings. Rather it is a divine peace that transcends all understanding and fear.

St. Francis of Assisi demonstrated this divine peace by crossing over to enemy line and bridged a divide no man has ever done.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid (John 14:27)

Called to Serve

By Kathleen Sammy



**Liturgy of the Eucharist after the diaconate and priestly ordinations
(L-R: Rev Fr Philip Tay, Deacon Bonaventure, Archbishop Julian Leow, Rev Fr Norris
Seenivasan SJ, Deacon Gilbert James (back), Rev Fr Francis Go)**

Two priests and a deacon were gifted to the Church here recently on the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord on 6 August.

Rev Fr Philip Tay Kok How OCD, Rev Fr Francis Go Sheau Peng OFM Cap and Deacon Bonaventure A/L Rayappan (diocesan) were ordained by Archbishop Julian Leow of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur at the Church of St Francis Xavier (SFX) PJ.

Priests, religious, family and friends celebrated the gift of these men to the Church; a wonderful respite in the midst of the pandemic. Nevertheless, safety SOPs were strictly adhered to.

Archbishop Julian said to Bro Bonaventure, "As a deacon, that is as a minister of Jesus Christ, who came among his disciples as one who served, do the will of God from the heart: serve the people in love and joy as you would the Lord... Never allow yourself to be turned away from the hope, offered by the Gospel."

And to Deacons Philip and Francis, Archbishop exhorted, "Now, dear sons, you are to be raised to the Order of the Priesthood. For your part you will exercise the sacred duty of teaching in the name of Christ the Teacher. Impart to everyone the word of God which you have received with joy. Meditating on the law of the Lord, see that you believe what you read, that you teach what you believe, and that you practice what you teach... remember then that you are taken from among men and appointed on their behalf for those things that pertain

to God. Therefore, carry out the ministry of Christ the Priest with constant joy and genuine love, attending not to your own concerns but those of Jesus Christ."

He also reminded the deacons that just as Christ's disciples returned to the plain to meet the people after the transfiguration, so must they as newly ordained priests - to serve others in this time of uncertainty amidst the pandemic. People are broken and in need of a shepherd, and those who are called to the priesthood must be present in the lives of the people. The Feast of the Transfiguration celebrated on their ordination should remind them that one day they will gaze upon the transfigured Lord Jesus if they remain faithful to their call. The Archbishop exhorted the people to remain faithful as well. In reference to the gospel reading, "Behold my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on Him," we should all follow Jesus and listen to Him. The people were requested to keep the newly ordained priests and deacon in their prayers.

During the litany of supplication invoking the prayers of the saints, all knelt while the three men lay prostrate on the floor in an act of humble prayer and surrender to God. Rev Fr Gerard Theraviam was the presenting priest for the rite of ordination to the diaconate. During the calling of the candidates to the presbyterate, Rev Frs Kenneth Gopal OCD and Michael Teng OFM Cap were the presenting priests for their respective candidates.

In the final speech at the end of Mass which was de-

livered in turn by Deacon Bonaventure (Tamil version), Rev Fr Francis (Mandarin version) and Rev Fr Philip (English version) - the newly ordained expressed their deepest gratitude to His Grace Archbishop Julian Leow for ordaining them as priests and deacon describing it as "an honour and privilege". They extended their thanks to Fr Norris Seenivasan SJ, Parish Priest of SFX, for his generosity as well as the staff and parishioners for their assistance. Their deepest thanks and gratitude went to the Master of Ceremonies, Rev Fr Michael Chua, who worked tirelessly to ensure the smooth proceedings of

the Mass and to their formators, religious communities and Order, for journeying with them.

"To all our friends and family members, a big thank you for your presence and support. Above all, we thank God for all the blessings He has shown to us and His guidance all these years. As we continue with our journey as fellow pilgrims in this world, we humbly ask for your prayers as we also continue to pray for all of you, that in all that we do, we will do it for the good of the Church and for the greater glory of God," said Rev Fr Philip.

Vocation Stories of the Newly- Ordained

Fr Francis Go Sheau Peng, Fr Philip Tay Kok How and Deacon Bonaventure Rayappan were ordained on Aug 6, 2020 at the Church of St Francis Xavier, Petaling Jaya.

All articles by Cordelia Lee

A Chance Encounter That Paved the Way to Priesthood



Fr Francis Go (OFM Cap.) first received the call to the priesthood when he was still in secondary school; he did not respond to it. God called him the second time when he was 21 years old. And again, he ignored it: he wanted to explore the world at large! When Fr Francis received his calling for the third time outside St John's Cathedral in Bukit Nanas, he readily embraced it and set forth to pursue a religious life.

As the eldest child among five siblings, Fr Francis was raised in a typical Chinese family. He was born in Segamat, Johor but raised in Gemas, in southern Negeri Sembilan.

"When I was about 16 years old, I saw the picture of Saint Anthony of Padua in a calendar. And I said to myself that someday I want to be just like him," revealed Fr Francis.

As a young man, Fr Francis was eager to venture forth and explore the world. Moreover, he was just starting his career in the IT industry. But a chance encounter with a Capuchin brother would forever change the course of his life.

The Call From Within

"One day, I saw a Capuchin friar standing outside St. John's Cathedral. Somehow a soft inner voice suggested that I approach him. I guess I was also fascinated by his brown robe and long hood which looked somewhat mysterious," Fr Francis related. "After we chatted for a while, I came to realize that the 'Call from God' had always been deep within me. Something stirred inside me and triggered a strong desire to consider a priestly vocation."

By 2003, Fr. Francis took the first step towards priesthood and joined the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin as a postulant. After serving for two years, he entered the Novitiate in Baguio, Philippines and made his First Profession by 2006. He journeyed to Bangalore, India for his Franciscan Spirituality from 2008 to 2009. By the following year, Fr. Francis made his Perpetual Profession.

He returned to the Philippines to study Philosophy at Saint Anthony Mary Claret College and graduated with a degree in Bachelor of Arts.

After completing a four-year Ecclesiastical Course, Francis took a Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology (STB) affiliated with Pontifical Urbaniana University, Rome, Italy. In May 2019, he returned to Malaysia.

During his formative years as a priest, Fr Francis looked up to the late Fr Ignatius Huang as his role model. "He was a kind and intellectual priest. I admired him and drew inspiration from his teachings and advice," he shared. "My greatest joy is being able to give powerful witness to the message of Jesus and the life of St. Francis of Assisi," declared Fr Francis.

A Sense of Emptiness That Sparked a Desire for the Priesthood



Deacon Bonaventure Rayappan seemed to have it all. Born and raised in Klang, he is the youngest child in a family of five, including his parents.

"My schooling years were great. Besides learning from new experiences, I made a lot of friends who eventually became my best buddies. I must thank my parents because they gave me the liberty to explore," recounted Dn Bonaventure.

Of course, Dn Bonaventure's parents also cautioned their son not to overdo things as there is always a limit.

"I am happy that I was able to explore various possibilities during my teenage years because now I can distinguish between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world," he explained.

Helming A Family Business

After obtaining a certification in Business Administration right after secondary school, Dn Bonaventure joined his father's Canopy Rental business. By the time he was 21, Dn Bonaventure took over the family business. Life was smooth sailing as everything was going well. Things began to unravel in his life soon after and he realized what he was missing the most —God!

"My discernment towards priesthood began when I

was 23 years old. I was happily running the business and working my level best to achieve success. Everything was going according to plan. Yet I felt a big void in my life." This emptiness brought Dn Bonaventure back to his Church.

"I had been a very active member of my parish until Confirmation. Old memories were then rekindled and this made me go back to church," he reminisced.

One fateful day, Dn Bonaventure met with his cousin who was a seminarian (Fr. Vincent Tomas). His cousin shared enthusiastically about his own experience in the seminary and casually asked if Dn Bonaventure had ever thought about the priesthood.

"I was startled, as I had never thought about being a priest! But my cousin was not one who gives up easily," said Dn Bonaventure. "He urged me to reconsider and reflect on God's calling. At first, I paid little attention to whatever he was saying. However, it dawned on me later, that by joining the priesthood, I would be fulfilling God's will. Slowly, I started to realise what I felt was my vocation."

After much soul-searching, contemplation, prayer and constant encouragement from his cousin, Dn Bonaventure began to seriously consider a priestly vocation. He finally contacted the Archdiocese Vocation Director.

"Although my cousin gave up his job and a comfortable life, he was still able to live a joyful and peaceful life compared to me. I had almost everything but was living contrary to my calling. This made me discern the call of God," said Dn Bonaventure. In 2013, Dn Bonaventure entered College General for his initiation year and continued Philosophy studies until 2015. After completing his studies, Dn Bonaventure enrolled at St. Peter's College in 2016 for Theology studies. He graduated in May 2020 and is currently posted at the Church of St. Anne, Port Klang for pastoral duties.

A Call to Priesthood: An Invitation That Was Always Open



Lying prostrate before the altar during the Litany of the Saints

Fr Philip Tay, OCD grew up like any other normal teen in Malacca. He is the third child in a family of four siblings. Due to his family's financial situation, Fr Philip did not have the luxury of hanging out with friends during his younger days.

"My spare time was spent either helping my parents with their noodle business, revising my school work, working part-time or undertaking extra-curricular activities," said Fr Philip, who was also actively involved in the Legion of Mary.

"My secondary school, SM St Francis Melaka, has a beautiful chapel where we would have Mass every first Friday and the students would organize the liturgy. I was involved in the choir. Every morning before assembly, a group of us from Form 1 to Form 6 would gather at the chapel to recite the Rosary, together with one of the Catholic teachers and La Salle Brothers," related Fr Philip.

Despite his early involvement in liturgy and Mass, Fr Philip did not think about a priestly vocation. Instead, he was aiming for the usual milestones of a successful career to marriage and setting up his own family. "Like any other person of my age, I was aspiring to graduate, work, get married and settle down," he smiled.

"Although the idea of priesthood had come up occasionally in my life, I never felt it really fit. I am shy by nature and don't make friends easily so I tend to stick to those I'm comfortable with. I was not attached to any particular parish either," shared Fr Philip.

During his college days, Fr Philip went through a

rough patch in his relationship with God. Despite his keen involvement in the Catholic Students' Society to which he devoted much time and effort, he felt helpless and abandoned. But it was at this low point in his life when Fr Philip's faith and love for Christ was rekindled.

"I think that was the lowest ebb of my spiritual life. One of my seniors in college (the brother of Archbishop Simon Poh) suggested that I attend a charismatic rally, "Youth Explosion", organised by KLASE (KL Archdiocese School of Evangelisation). During the rally, there was an altar call for vocations. The priest announced, 'Anyone who feels called to the priesthood and religious life, please come on stage'. About three of my friends went up, but I did not," recalled Fr Philip.

However, the Holy Spirit finally came upon Philip during a healing session. "I just 'surrendered' and let everything go and allowed myself be carried by the Spirit. I felt the love of God so strongly; I broke down in tears! I finally understood that God had not abandoned me. He had allowed me to go through the experience so that I could grow spiritually and fully understand how deep God's love for me was," explained Fr Philip. The spark that ignited Fr Philip that evening never left him.

"After graduation, I worked and started to build a career for myself. But one day, it occurred to me that there had to be more to life than career and money," he said. "I was also actively involved in the parish at that time, and it prompted me to think seriously of the time when I had been touched by the Holy Spirit."

When the Archdiocese held a vocation weekend, Fr Philip signed up for it. By 2005, he entered College General but left in November 2006 to contemplate on his religious vocation. In 2012, Fr Philip applied to the Carmelite Friars and was accepted into its postulancy programme in Singapore. He later proceeded to do his Novitiate in Hsinchu, Taiwan. From 2015 to 2019, Fr Philip continued to pursue studies in philosophy and theology.

Order of the Discalced Carmelite Friars

"After I left the Diocesan seminary, I realised that I was searching for two elements that I felt was necessary – a deeper prayer- life and strong community involvement," said Fr Philip. Ultimately, it was

the amount of time that was dedicated to mediation that drew me to the Carmelite Order. The other aspect were the writings of the Carmelite saints, which were rich and deep in spirituality.

“Of course, through it all, prayer played a very important part. Ultimately, a vocation is a gift and a call from God and if it’s not meant to be, no matter how hard one tries, it will never happen. A genuine voca-

tion must come from God and it is always an invitation, one that we are free to respond to or to ignore.”

“The greatest joy in my journey as a lay person was to serve the Church in various ministries. Now that I am embarking on the journey of priesthood. I hope I can use my knowledge and skills to guide Catholics in prayer and catechesis,” said Fr Philip.

A Virtual Choir Brings the Community Together

Keeping our spirits high in the current situation and spreading a little joy and happiness

By Joanne Aw



Christ Be Our Light



St Nicholas BEC - Instrumentalists

grim background of the Covid-19 pandemic and stay-at-home orders, we found the lyrics of the hymn ‘**Christ Be Our Light**’ apt and uplifting. With participation from 43 members and after many hours of editing and mastering, the video was finally completed.

Our second choir video subsequently inspired St Nicholas BEC to produce their own virtual choir video. With the help of SFX Music Ministry, St Nicholas BEC produced a choir hymn **Because He Lives**. The BEC members found great joy in giving praise together as a virtual choir, as well as connecting with friends and family members.

MCO Moments



Catholic Doctors Association’s Dr Juliet Matthew checking on SFX Migrant Ministry’s Peter Claver’s house in Section 17 on 20th July



Dr Juliet dispensing medicine to patients in our Migrant Ministry centre



Religious Education: Our Std 4 students attending online classes

Preparations for Holy Week 2020 took place early this year with choir rehearsals starting at the end of January. After six rounds of rehearsals, Covid-19 struck Malaysia. The Malaysian government swiftly implemented Movement Control Order (MCO). As a result, Catholic Bishops of Peninsula Malaysia announced suspension of all Masses and church activities.

Despite all the setbacks, our choir group did not want to see our rehearsal efforts go to waste. Inspired by other choir videos posted on YouTube and driven by our desire to comfort SFX parishioners during the MCO period, Gordon Pereira and myself decided to produce a virtual choir video.

The Good Friday choir members banded together and sang the hymn which we had been rehearsing ‘**Ave Verum Corpus**’, a motet by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Yearning to sing together again after our first foray, we decided to continue with another one video! Against the