



Marking milestones of love

By MATTHEW TAY

THERE once lived on a farm a man and his wife. One day his wife, who had long beautiful hair, asked him if he could buy her a hair clip. The husband told her: "I do not even have enough money to buy a replacement strap for my watch". Later that day, he went to the town. Knowing he had no real use for the old, beaten up watch, he sold it for small sum and bought the most beautiful hair clip he could find. On returning home, he was shocked to find his wife, now with short hair, holding a new watch for him. This story was part of Father Adrian Yeo's homily at the first-ever mass celebrated in our parish to mark milestone wedding anniversaries. His homily emphasized one message: Love is Sacrifice.

Forty-seven couples from our parish gathered to celebrate their wedding anniversaries on Sept 12 at this mass. The anniversary milestones ranged from five years to 56.

Said Fr. Adrian: "It was an idea that I got from my previous parish and I thought that it would be a good idea to celebrate marriage itself. Nowadays, marriages are being threatened by divorce and I believe that this is a good opportunity to celebrate marriage, to celebrate love and to encourage couples to continue in their love. I am very happy to see so many couples at our very first Milestone Anniversary Mass."

It was also a chance for the couples, in front of their friends, family and God, to renew their wedding vows. "That was definitely

the most memorable part," said Clement and Kelly Chua, who celebrated their fifth wedding anniversary this year. "When we said it on our wedding day, I guess we were probably a bit nervous. But now, especially with the comfort and knowledge that it has been five years, it was more comfortable and real. For me, the reaffirmation of our vows was quite important."

John and Frances Woo, who celebrated their 20th wedding anniversary, were delighted to celebrate their special year with the parish community. "Both of us are converts and we were baptized in 2012. So for our 20th anniversary, we wanted to do a wedding mass, but we did not quite act on it,"

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they told IHM Heartbeat. "So when this milestone wedding anniversary mass was announced, it was like a wish come true."

Harry and Agnes Tan, who are part of the Family Life Group that organized the mass, were delighted with the response. "Many couples welcomed the idea because it is important to celebrate marriages within the community and let the younger couples see that the sacrament of marriage is really important," they said adding that the renewal of wedding vows reminds us

of the vow that we have undertaken and that God is very much part of our married life.

Harry and Agnes, who have been married for 21 years, also mentioned that there will be more family activities to look forward to in the parish. "Although we do not have any concrete plans, we are hoping to plan more family-based activities for the community such as family camps to provide families the opportunity to bond."

Reacting to the good response, the parish plans to make this Milestone Anniversary Mass a yearly affair. Both John and Frances as well

as Clement and Kelly recommend this experience to everyone. Said John and Frances: "It is extremely meaningful and it helps build the community as well because having a wedding mass alone can be really stressful but as a whole community, it makes the experience so much more meaningful."

Clement and Kelly agreed. "Having this mass yearly is not only for couples as a form of thanksgiving. It is also an affirmation of the reality of God's love in the world. Having this mass really reaffirms that and reminds us that this sacrament is real and about loving each other." ♥



Choir that comforts

By DENISE JULIA TAN



IN moments of grief, the smallest things can provide the greatest comfort. A familiar face, words of comfort or a hymn sung. This is the service that the Magnificat Choir offers to parishioners.

Initiated by then parish priest Fr William Lim in May 2010, the Magnificat Choir is a ministry dedicated to singing during funeral mass services. They are a group of mostly seniors and housewives who enjoy singing and wish to use their voices to bring comfort to the bereaved.

"It is rewarding to see the funeral smoothly run and when the bereaved families are happy with us... Our mission is to sing for funeral services and to comfort the families. Thus, we try to adhere to their requests whenever we can," shared co-ordinator Shirley Yeo, who is a retiree in her 60s.

Because the ministry is usually called upon at short notice, the group meets 30 minutes before each service to rehearse hymns that are included in their set lists. However, they try their best to accept hymn requests if they are given sufficient time to obtain the lyrics for rehearsing as well as for displaying them on the screen during the service.

In addition to these rehearsals, the group also has Annual Group Meetings as well as quarterly meetings and practices that take place

at least twice a year. It is at these meetings that they revise familiar set songs, initiate new ones and correct mistakes.

"The aim is to increase the repertoire and improve the singing. My enthusiasm lies in helping us to sing with more emotion and passion. I'm trying to motivate the group to be more fervent and committed to this ministry," said Shirley, who has been a member for three years.

Besides singing as a choir, the group also sees to other aspects of the service - from doing the Gospel readings and being Communion ministers. They are accompanied by a celebrant and guided by a funeral rites booklet, put together by Fr Stanislaus Pang when the ministry was formed.

The Magnificat Choir also acts as an extension of the church, providing what is needed in times of grief. Sometimes, when the family of the deceased is small and there are not many attending the cremation, the group also follows the cortege to Mandai to provide moral support.

"It is a small gesture to show support and bring comfort and consolation to bereaved families, especially if one is a sole Catholic in the family. This act of love has influenced the conversion of the son of a deceased's family to Catholicism. He was so touched by the love and support he

received that he joined the RCIA and was baptised," said former co-ordinator Doreen Oei.

"It is very nice when you see a group singing for them. Letting them know the warmth of our Catholic church is the most rewarding thing," said Shirley.

Besides being the current co-ordinator, Shirley also takes on the roles of communion minister, organist, conductor and/or lector, depending on which department needs help. The ministry also has an Audio Visual team and a treasurer who handles donations and its members swap roles in rotation.

Although the Magnificat Choir currently has around 30 members, only an average of 20 or fewer are able to make it to services due to the unexpected nature of their vocation. Thus, they are inviting more people to join them.

"It is a very satisfying ministry in a sense... many people do not like to attend funerals because there is some sort of phobia. If there is nobody doing this service, then the families will be quite disheartened. But if they see a choir there as support, they will be more appreciative in the moment of bereavement. Maybe that's the mission after all, to bring the church's support to funerals," said Shirley.

Those interested in joining the Magnificat Choir may contact the church office. ❤️

Serving the Lord

By COLIN LEE

YOU see them at every mass beside the priest at the altar. These boys are members of IHM's St. Dominic Savio Altar Servers' Society and are affectionately called "the servers". The altar servers' society is named after the adolescent saint who is known for his famous motto 'death rather than sin'.

The boys have an opportunity to be at the service of God at a young age, where they would as Pope Francis puts it "have a privileged

to participate in other activities that are part of the community of servers.

The obligations of an altar server include attending meetings on the first and third Saturdays of the month, serving one weekday mass and one weekend mass and serve other masses as requested by the priests and sacristan.

The first meeting of the month tends to focus on bonding. The boys achieve this through sports, games and other social activities. The second meeting of the month

carry out their roles with appropriate decorum and reverence, maturing in understanding of their responsibilities in the liturgical celebrations. There are even tests at the end of each training segment, to determine the readiness of the cohort. In the event where one or more does not pass a particular test, the entire batch is retained to take the test again at a later date.

"We leave no one behind," said Timothy Kumar, 19, one of the current exco members who has been serving since 2006. The sense of belonging when he is with fellow servers, is something he treasures very much. And it is indeed this spirit of camaraderie instilled from the very beginning of their formation that bonds them and retains their friendship even after they have moved on from the ministry. "The people I was once friends with in the society have become more of brothers to me," shared Randy Gabriel, 15, who has been serving since 2011.

His views are echoed by past servers like Shiam Jerome, 26, who served from 2000 to 2009. From being there at each others' family gatherings to personal milestones, Shiam and his batch-mates of about 12 servers, remain close friends

till today. He added: "Today, if any of us is in need, we will call each other and no one will hesitate to help." As the youngest in the family, Shiam attributes his propensity to look out for someone younger as an instinct developed from his time spent with the servers. It was unsurprising then that his reply when asked for a word to describe the servers was without hesitation – brotherhood.

Every year, new servers are recruited by a recruitment drive in collaboration with the catechists in the primary section. Those who miss the recruitment drive but are still keen, may look for the servers at the sacristy or reach them at [altar.servers@ihm.sg](mailto:servers@ihm.sg). ❤️



way to draw closer to Jesus". And it might just be this closeness that draws Joshua Lerh, 16, who has been serving since 2007 to reveal that, "serving God at the altar makes me want to come to the church more often and more willingly".

The duties of the servers are many. This includes carrying various items during the procession, ringing the bell at designated moments and assisting the priest throughout the mass.

On July 30, nine new altar servers were commissioned, bringing the total number of servers to 47. Their commissioning marked their joining the ranks of their seniors to serve at the holy feast when called upon and

places more emphasis on spirituality and is often the time when Fr. Luke (above, right), the group's spiritual director, provides direct input to help strengthen the faith of the group.

While the official criteria to become a server is simple enough – baptized male Catholics who have received their first Holy Communion – the process requires a true desire and commitment to serve the Lord at his altar. Prior to serving, the servers undergo a rigorous year of formation where they receive instruction on the parts of the mass and their meaning, the names and symbolism of various objects used, their positions and postures at various times of the mass. During this period they learn to

IHM Snapshots

By AGNES CHUA



IHM Jollies: On July 26, about 60 Jollies friends and members visited the Gardens by the Bay, followed by lunch at the Marina Barrage. They had a great time. ♥



Chinese Ministry: Members of the Chinese Ministry celebrated National Day and Fr. Cary's birthday on Aug 11, two days after the actual day. ♥



Mass for the Elderly & the Sick: On Aug 9, a mass for the elderly and sick was celebrated along with the Sacrament of Anointing. Two hundred and thirty parishioners received the sacrament. ♥



RCA: Nineteen inquirers were accepted into the Rite of Catechumenate on Sept 4. Fr. Adrian received them at the main door of the church and welcomed them inside. ♥

IHM Meditation Group

By FIONA FOO

THE IHM Christian Meditation Group was formed in January 2003. It was set up with the intention to seek and be with God, and to allow His presence within us to grow immensely and give purpose to our lives.

The group consists of about 15 members and they gather every Tuesday to engage and enrich their entire being with prayer. Apart from their weekly meet ups, the group also organizes a yearly overseas meditation retreat in places like Chiang Mai.

Each prayer session takes about 25-30 minutes. Members sit together in quiet stillness and silently begin to recite a mantra, usually the ancient Christian prayer phrase

MARANATHA. The term means "Come, Lord", and is one of the earliest forms of the Christian prayer. A rhythm develops naturally through breathing, and it helps in maintaining full concentration. Sitting posture is an integral factor in meditation, and it is best to sit straight and still for attention and reverence, and at the same time, feel comfortable and relaxed.

It takes great effort and willpower to maintain full concentration, and it is only normal for an active mind to face the incessant problem of distraction. The Christian Meditation Group advises its members to keep returning to the prayer phrase, and eventually with more practice, one will be able

to engage completely in this form of mental and heart prayer.

"Meditation is also a good way to offer our personal intentions to the Lord by bringing them to mind," says Theresa Lee, one of the founding members of the group. Apart from this, meditation helps one to embark on a journey of self-discovery, eventually leading us to God from within. Other positive results from meditation, Theresa observed, is how she finds herself to be more understanding towards the people around her.

The group welcomes anyone who would like to explore meditation as a different kind of prayer, speaking to God with our heart and mind from within us. ♥

Jesus comes to them

By JOLYN TAN



JULY 9 was a special day for 59 Primary 3 children, as they received their First Holy Communion on this day. Decked out smartly in white, they were a bunch of eager and anxious young faces before the mass. Leading up to this First Holy Communion were months of spiritual preparation, along with a one-day retreat during which the Sacrament of Reconciliation took place.

The retreat took place during the June school holidays, conducted by the catechists along with the help of parent volunteers. Centred on the theme "I Am Special", the retreat included sessions on baptism, reconciliation and the Eucharist. For Lena Jacuta from Class 3 Hope, the opportunity to simply "stay in Church for an entire day to pray to Jesus, and spend a day with God" was something that she really

treasured.

Something new this year was a parent's session that was held concurrently during the retreat. Run by the Neighbourhood Christian Communities (NCC), the aim of this session was to remind parents of their role as being the first catechists for their children. Sister Sandra from Verbum Dei also gave a sharing on the importance parents have in the faith formation of their children. The session was well received and attended by 50 parents.

Catechists faced time constraints in preparing the children adequately for the Sacrament of Reconciliation and their First Holy Communion. With many catechism classes cancelled due to various holidays in the first half of the year, the catechists had to work on a very tight schedule. Nevertheless, Mary Sua, the level coordinator for

the Primary 3 cohort, praised the children as being "very focused and engaged", allowing time during catechism lessons to be effectively spent. The shift towards a more hands-on approach in class also helped the children to be more involved, and Mary believes that they are "more enriched by this process".

Now, Justin Ng, from 3 Faith feels "happy to not be the one left out", because he was the only one left in his family that could not receive Holy Communion yet. His classmate, Deborah Poh, also echoes this sentiment in that "attending mass is very different now" as she can "take part in church more fully". Indeed, we are elated that our little brothers and sisters in Christ are now able to fully participate together with us in the communion of the Body of Christ. ♥

World Youth Day 2016 in Krakow, Poland

By CELINE ONG, CHAI HUI ZHONG,
CHRISTINE SAW, IVY LAM, JOYCE TAN,
MARK CHONG, MERVIN PRAKASH,
RACHEL CHAN, SARA CHAN, AND
WESLEY LYE



The Singapore contingent led by the Office for Young People at the Closing Mass at Campus Misericordiae in Krakow.

FROM July 19 to Aug 3, 10 of us from IHM were in Krakow, Poland as part of the contingent led by the Office for Young People, to attend the 31st World Youth Day (WYD). We were there with two million other fellow pilgrims from all over the world. Although we had to brave physical discomforts – the relentless sun of the Polish summer, having one’s face smashed into armpits and backpacks of other pilgrims in the jostling crowd, the lack of sleep, and many other such incidences – it was that interior journey deeper into ourselves, and into our spiritual lives, that made the sacrifice worthwhile. We are excited to share our experiences and reflections here!

The universality of the Catholic Church

WYD was a surreal experience of the universality of our Church. Seeing the multitudes of youth gathering and embracing the discomforts, and then celebrating Mass together despite the different languages that were spoken, was a true expression of the Church being universal.

The search for vocation

For many of us, this pilgrimage was a time of searching for answers for our vocation, a time of asking God what He was asking us to do, and a quiet time to listen to His voice. In reflecting on our calling, there was a greater sense of self-awareness of our own shortcomings, but yet also a consolation of the infinity of

God wherein these weaknesses are redeemed. In response, there was a prompting to open our hearts wider to God, allowing Him to give the fullness of life He promised. Testimonies given were also a source of inspiration for us. For example, during the Youth Arise International festival, Sister Anna Nobili shared that she had felt unfulfilled and unhappy before encountering Christ. However, after going to church and attending a retreat, she experienced much joy in finding her vocation.

Poland, the land of the Divine Mercy and birthplace of St. John Paul II

Poland is a very special place. It is a country whose borders have shifted repeatedly over the past centuries due to aggression from foreign invaders, and in recent history, had to endure persecution during the Nazi Occupation and oppression under the communist regime. But amidst the suffering, it is also a country of deep spiritual encounter: the message of the Divine Mercy was received in Poland by St Faustina Kowalska; Czestochowa is home to the shrine of the image of the Black Madonna; heroic martyrs such as St Maximillian Kolbe and St Edith Stein arose from the horrors of Auschwitz; and Poland is the birthplace of St John Paul II, the pope whose love for the youth sparked his initiation of the World Youth Days. The late Polish Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński once remarked that, “Poland is such a strange country, in which the deepest sorrow is changed into joy”.

We were privileged to have our accommodation in the town of Wadowice, where St John Paul II was born and had spent his childhood. Being in Wadowice, the place “where everything began”, gave us opportunity to learn and reflect more on his life. He had lived life to the full, participating in the richness of faith, culture, sport, academia, and nature – an expression of a flourishing soul, intellect and body, of a life dedicated to the service of God and others.

Trusting in God’s mercy

The theme for this year’s WYD was “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy”. Reminding pilgrims to trust in God’s divine mercy were ubiquitous banners with the words “Jezu Ufam Tobie” (“Jesus I trust in you” in Polish) below the image of the Divine Mercy. This prompted us to examine our own trust in God, whether we really entrusted everything to God and believed that He had the best plan for us. In Pope Francis’ homily during the closing Mass of WYD, he spoke of the spiritual stature that everyone possesses as beloved children of God, whose love for us is faithful and even obstinate.

Despite being in the midst of an overwhelming crowd of pilgrims, each of us had a unique encounter with God, where God reached out and spoke to us in different ways. Although WYD 2016 has come to a close, the fruits of this encounter that we carry with us back to our own lives will now start to grow. WYD 2019 in Panama awaits! ♥

I kissed the hands of a saint

by PATRICK JONAS



I was a university student when I first met Mother Teresa. It was in the early '70s and she had come to my hometown in Kollam, Kerala, to open one of her homes.

She gave a talk at the local YMCA and I went to hear her speak. There were not many in the audience. Mother had yet to win the Nobel Prize and did not command the popularity she did in later years. She impressed me with her words of determination as she spoke of her mission.

Years went by. Mother became a global personality. The work she did for the poor and suffering hit a chord with many. The order she founded, the Missionaries of Charity, spread across the world.

In 1987, work took me to Kolkata and I visited the headquarters of Missionaries of Charity but was disappointed not to have met Mother as she was away on tour.

Two years later, Mother fell seriously ill. Most thought she would not pull through her illness. I was by then a journalist and working for a news magazine in south India which asked me to write a Page 1 story on her along with our Kolkata correspondent. During the course of my research,

I found out that Mother began her day with a prayer written by St. Francis of Assisi.

"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace; Where there is hatred let me sow love..." goes the prayer. It explained in a way the life Mother Teresa had chosen. She would rush down to areas of conflict to save the abandoned and the unwanted.

Mother survived the health crisis. With a pace-maker implanted in her, she continued on her journeys across the world spreading the message of God's love and helping the poorest of the poor.

In 1995, I visited Kolkata again. I was on vacation from Saudi Arabia, where I had moved to by then to work in a newspaper. This time, Mother was in the city. One morning, I went for mass at the chapel in the Mother House.

Mother was in the chapel. She had shrunk considerably and walked with a stoop but her face – full of furrows – remained the same. I was fortunate and happy to receive Holy Communion from her.

As the people left the small chapel after mass, Mother stood outside the door handing each one a prayer book. After receiving my copy (above), I held her hands and paused

for a moment. I then kissed her hands. To me, those were the hands of a living saint. Hands that brought succour to many.

A month later, it was time for me to return to Saudi Arabia. It is an offence to carry Christian literature into that country. Since Saudi customs officials check every piece of baggage, I decided to leave the prayer book behind in India with my mother for safekeeping. But, despite searching high and low, I could not locate it. I had travelled to different parts of India during the one month and I thought I had been careless and left it somewhere.

Knowing full well that the punishment would be severe if the Saudi authorities found the prayer book in my baggage, I searched all the bags over and over. But there was no sign of it. I was upset with myself for losing such a precious gift.

On landing in Jeddah, I was asked to open all my bags, as is the practice, by the Saudi customs officials. After checking my baggage thoroughly they let me through.

Once home, I opened one of my bags. There, right on top, was the prayer book!

Mother Teresa was canonised by Pope Francis on Sept 4. ♥



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