



Easter Joy

By FIONA FOO

THIS year's Holy Week was special in its own way. On Maundy Thursday, 12 Catechists – men and women, participated in the washing of the feet. Later, many parishioners and visitors from other parishes spent time praying before the Blessed Sacrament placed in the church hall until midnight.

Good Friday was marked by two services, which included the Way of the Cross, in the morning and afternoon. And on the night of Easter Vigil on April 15, 20 elects were baptised. One candidate was also welcomed into the Catholic faith and five others were Confirmed.

The night began with the blessing of water and fire in

St. Gregory's Hall, followed by the lighting of candles. The congregation then proceeded into the church, beautifully illuminating the entire place. The readings of the night and Father Adrian's homily clearly beseeched everyone to reflect on the love of God for us, reminding us to transform our lives and walk with God again.

After which, the Catechumens experienced the waters of baptism, followed by the candidate who professed his faith to be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church. The Sacrament of Confirmation took place shortly after, and the congregation warmly welcomed them into the IHM parish family with a heartening

round of applause. Ivan Chua, who was baptised last year and was a sponsor this year for the St. Matthew group in RCIA, could not be prouder. Said Ivan: "I thank God for giving me the sanctifying graces to be a sponsor. This Easter drew me to my own baptism, which offered me a new life to become the adopted child of God and follower of Christ. The conversion of hearts is the act of the Holy Spirit and I am happy for those fully initiated into the Catholic Church".

Among those who were baptised this year, included a family of four whose conversion story (on page 2) was nothing short of inspirational. ❤️

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MAUNDY THURSDAY



GOOD FRIDAY



Easter was special for this family

By FIONA FOO

FOR both Matthew Lau and his wife Cecilia, the Catholic faith is not something alien. Matthew was baptised at birth and stopped going to church when he was studying abroad. Back in those days, there were no catechism classes and he did not have the opportunity to further explore the faith. During his university studies in the UK, he came across subjects that studied all types of religion. “I wondered, why choose Catholicism, when there are so many options?” said Matthew. Soon, the exposure as an adult slowly diluted his relationship with God.

As for Cecilia, despite being brought up as a Taoist, she attended a convent school and was exposed to the faith growing up. She fondly



remembers her graduation ceremony held at St. Theresa’s Church, where the graduating students adorned the significant white robes and held candles. “I felt good during the prayers and while singing hymns,” she recalls.

This Easter was special for them. They were baptised along with their two sons – Gordon, 14 and Declan, 11. Matthew was also confirmed. It was the boys who first inspired Cecilia to embark on this journey of faith. As they were growing up, Cecilia wanted to instill strong family values in them and her friend recommended her to read Christian parenting books. She was intrigued and resonated with the values wholeheartedly, but found it difficult to comprehend the significance

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EASTER VIGIL

*Easter was special for this family – Continued from Page 2*

without a strong foundation in the faith. At the same time, her school experience somehow drew her into the Catholic faith as she reminisced the good times of days gone by. It also helped that Matthew was a baptised Catholic, making the choice back to the Catholic church a much easier one.

Matthew's job also saw the family relocating abroad for four years. It was through that lifestyle and culture change that made them realise how important religion is. Matthew recounted incidences where he saw abortion clinics labelled as fertility clinics, and was shocked that such acts were even legal. He felt that the "extreme secularism" of the country he was living in could possibly contribute to certain moral issues prevalent in the society. To the Lau family, religion meant strong values that they could inculcate in not just themselves, but their two sons as well. With both push and pull factors, Matthew and Cecilia decided to bring the whole family to the Catholic church.

While waiting for the next cycle of RCIA to begin, Matthew and Cecilia decided to enroll Gordon into RC1Y, and Declan into catechism class. And they saw great changes in the two boys. Gordon began to wake up at 5.30am in order to reach his school, St. Joseph's Institution, early and attend the Catholic prayer group, where the members come

together to do morning prayers. "I have already committed. Many people dropped out and I want to help bring the group together," says Gordon. Apart from the prayer group, Gordon also participates in Catholic camps, teaching Secondary 1 students about the faith. His RC1Y experience has been enriching as he finds great joy and insights talking to the older members, sharing experiences and learning from each other. One of his key takeaways since embarking on the Catholic faith is patience, especially with people.

Younger brother Declan, too, has ignited a flame for the faith. He enjoys reading the Gospel, with his favourite being the one on the miraculous catch of fish where Jesus told Peter to let down the fishing nets to prepare for a catch despite unsuccessful attempts by the fishermen.

The journey to baptism has been life-changing for the Lau family. They come together to pray daily as a family now, sharing joys and difficulties experienced at both work and school. This has strengthened their family bond immensely by putting Christ at the centre, solving problems and leaving everything to God. In fact, the children also help Matthew and Cecilia to learn and grow in the faith by being patient with each other, understanding problems before administering blame or punishment too quickly.

The recent retreat in Johor's Majodi Centre also touched their lives. During quiet time, the catechumens were asked to write letters to Jesus and Cecilia prayed for some answers in her life. A couple of weeks later, she found the answer in the weekly Breaking of the Word during the 11.15am Sunday mass.

"Baptism is not the end", says Cecilia. She hopes to participate in charity events as a family, and is looking forward to be a neophyte in the next RCIA journey. For Matthew, getting confirmed this Easter feels like he is back home with God. "Jesus has always been in my house, I was the one who left but He never leaves", he says as he affirms his ever-readiness.

Given their experiences, both Matthew and Cecilia have some advice to share. "Knowledge is limitless", says Matthew. He strongly believes that all Catholics should constantly seek a deeper knowledge in the faith through various faith formation ministries provided by the Catholic church. As for Cecilia, she encourages non-Catholics and Catholics to share what they learn with friends and family. "You never know when you can motivate each other to grow together!", she says as she recounts an incident where her Christian colleague-turned-friend was motivated by her going for the Alpha course and went back to church as well. ♥

IHM Snapshots

By AGNES CHUA



Catechists: About 100 Catechists, Liturgy of the Word for Children, catechism facilitators and helpers were commissioned on 8 January 2017. The act of catechesis is the responsibility of the entire parish community and parents are the first and most important catechist to their children. We are all stewards of the mystery and humble workers in the Lord's vineyard we should lift each other in prayer. ♥



Youth Catechists: The Youth Catechists held their annual Year 1 Camp from March 10 to 12. Apart from spiritual formation, the camp helped both old and new members of the community bond. ♥



Youth Ministry: Members of the Youth Ministry ran the canteen on March 19. This is part of their community service to the church. ♥



Epiphany: The Epiphany group is running the 16th Alpha Course for non-Catholics. Over 20 guests along with friends are taking part in the 10-week programme. ♥



SV.P: Annual education awards were presented to the children of Friends in Need during an Easter celebration. ♥



Legion of Mary: The IHM Legionaries held their annual consecration to Our Lady known as Acies. it is the most important Legion function of the year. Members renew and express publicly their consecration to Mary. ♥



Lenten Bloodmobile: Two hundred and twenty three people turned up at our Lenten Bloodmobile outreach held on March 19 and 155 bags of blood were collected. More than 70 also registered for the Bone Marrow Donors Programme. ♥



Hospitality Ministry: March 12 was a historic day for IHM's Hospitality Ministry as it welcomed its first woman minister into the fold. Heather Low joined the Sunday 5.45pm group as a Hospitality Minister. She is seen here with her parents and fulfilling her duties as a Hospitality Minister. The ministry welcomes more women from the parish to join the ministry. ♥

God is calling you to teach

By MATTHEW TAY

YOU may have often heard the priest appealing for parishioners to sign up to become catechists. This is because IHM is constantly looking for volunteers to help educate the youths of the church. It is a ministry that has one of the toughest tasks in the church – to prepare our Catholic youths spiritually. Yet, catechists often do not get the credit they deserve.

Mary Sua is one of those who stepped forward to volunteer as a catechist for primary students. Said Mary, who has been teaching for five years “I hope that as a catechist, I can be a role model for the young children assigned to me and sharing my knowledge, faith and my life stories that makes them aware how relevant Jesus is in our lives.”

But it was not an easy journey at first for her. “I started in 2012 as a primary two catechist assistant but left after a year as I felt I was not able to contribute to the First Holy Communion (FHC) children without experience and training. However, I decided to give it another try, on condition I am not placed in the FHC level and I was assigned to primary three,” Mary told IHM Heartbeat.

“Ironically, a year after I joined, FHC was moved from primary two to primary three! Sometimes you just can’t run away from what God wants you to do!” she joked. Mary is now the head of primary three as well as the FHC camp, which prepares children to receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion for the very first time.



Catechist guiding the children during an activity.



Primary 2 children with Fr. Adrian after their First Holy Communion.

“Organising the camp takes a lot of time and planning. One has to coordinate and prepare the materials needed. It can be really frustrating and challenging at times. Thankfully, we had help from the youth ministries. God is always great,” Mary recalled.

Echoing her sentiments was Roy Khng, another catechist who works closely with the secondary three youths, preparing them for confirmation. “The camps are special times for us to help the teens be really open to God’s prompting. We need the time to break down the barriers that most of us put up and we help the teens be open to God,” said Roy. “Confirmation is their initiation into their adult faith life and not the end of the road of their formation. All of us must continue to grow in our knowledge of the faith and relationship with God.”

Roy’s transformation from lapsed Catholic to a catechist happened after he returned from the US in 2003. He had spent seven years there. “When I was in the US, I had gone from attending daily mass faithfully to abstaining from mass due to church politics and my inability to integrate with the Catholic community in my school,” Roy recalled. “When I returned to Singapore, I was ensconced in my secular lifestyle and had no desire to return to the fold.” That was when he bumped into his niece, catechist Jacqueline Khng, who invited Roy to “come and see”.

“She thought that her catechism class could use an extra pair of hands and I went to ‘see’,” Roy recalled. “My heart was moved so I spent some time in prayer and made a firm decision to come back to the faith.”



First Holy Communion Camp Session.

Recounting his experience, he calls on others to make the same journey. “I’m often in awe when I see the Spirit move and hearts transformed,” Roy said. “We are always humbled by the conversion and reconciliation that is worked through us, even though we are broken, God works miracles with flawed tools. So I’d like to invite anyone reading this to come help in catechism. The harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few.”

Roy’s call is not only for adult parishioners, but as part of the Youth Catechist (YC) team, he encourages youths to make the step to teach their younger peers. “At YC, we train youths to help and facilitate catechism. So come in at 16 and in three to five years, you might be ready to take a class on your own!” ♥

Shaping the building blocks of the church

By COLIN LEE and MATTHEW TAY



THE youths are the present and future of the Catholic Church". That was the message of Pope Francis' homily during the Asian Youth Day in 2014. And in IHM, we often see the youths running around, actively getting involved in church. Though they all come from various ministries, they are part of the wider Youth Ministry (YM), co-headed by Shiam Jerome.

"Time management!" Shiam joked when asked about the difficulties the youth are facing in today's world. "But in truth, the worldly commitments of youths nowadays are many, thus a large number of Catholic youth puts the church as their last priority. By the time they come to church, they are just too tired to spend time with their community and God. We must find a way to integrate God into their daily lives outside of church," Shiam told IHM Heartbeat. "The focus of YM is to be a platform where our youths from all walks of life can gather to grow spiritually as well as a community."

The current YM is made up of ministries catering to four different age segments: Pre-confirmation (aged 13 to 15), schooling teenagers (16 to 21), young adults (18 to 25) and the young at heart (25 onwards).

The various ministries include the Community of Youth (COY), Fellowship and Community (FC), Post-Confirmation (PC), Right of Christian Initiation for Youths (RCIY), Young Adults Community (YAC) and Youth Catechist (YC). The

other affiliate ministries with YM are Via Christus Choir (VCC) and Altar Servers (ABS) to provide the youths an option to serve in the liturgy.

With all the worldly issues and uncertainty in their lives, the YM's goal is to provide support for the youths as they face the constantly changing challenges of the world. "The youths nowadays face plenty of different challenges during the different stages of their lives. Also, the world today is very different as compared to say 10 years ago," Shiam said. "The YM ministries provide various opportunities for youths of all ages to overcome their worldly and spiritual challenges and grow as one church."

Certain activities are constant such as fellowships conducted by FC while other groups have their weekly sessions. However, they also gather based on the liturgical calendar for prayers as well as have an annual YM dinner.

This year also marks the first year that the YM is attempting a combined YM camp. The verbum Dei Missionaries will be conducting the camp and its focus is for the youths to recharge and rebuild their relationship with God as a community. "We are looking to integrate more youth groups together," said Shiam.

"We are also looking to help youths within IHM who are not part of the current YM umbrella to form their own communities which we can support based on the requirements of the new groups."



Above: IHMYM annual thanksgiving dinner
Below: YM canteen - serving our community



Moving forward, the YM will be looking to get more external speakers to address issues such as money management, morals, theology of the body and other issues youths struggle with.

To the youths of IHM who are looking for a community, Shiam invites all to approach any of the YM ministries. "The YM ministries are constantly open for all so feel free to approach any of them should you have any interest in joining!"

They can email the YM coordinators at youthministry@ihm.sg. ♥



One mass led to his baptism

by DENISE TAN



(Left) Br. Gabriel with Br. Nicholas, and (right) with Daniel Lee

GOD'S love is everywhere but one of the best ways to experience it is through the people around us, and Brother Gabriel Wong can testify to that.

For Br. Gabriel, 35, his faith journey started when he was a student in Nanyang Junior College. He had joined the dragon boat and canoeing team and became close friends with fellow teammates Daniel Lee (who is IHM's current RCIY coordinator) and Ignatius Cheah. As Br. Gabriel was not a cradle Catholic, he received many invites to Protestant and Catholic churches alike. But it was when Ignatius invited him to mass at the Church of the Holy Cross that things "clicked".

"The moment Monsignor Francis Lau raised the Eucharist up and said "this is my Body," I teared... There was something profoundly different with the Catholic church. Here, there isn't a God of the young or old, because at some Protestant churches, they segregate the young and old when worshipping. But here, I saw a family unit. Grandparents, grandchildren, fathers, mothers, and young people worshipping together. This was a God of all people."

Br. Gabriel was touched and that one mass led to a second, a third, and eventually to his baptism in 2005. The decision to join the RCIA programme came when Ignatius brought his then girlfriend (and current wife) Leah, who was also on the same dragon boat and canoeing team, to RCIA. Although he is extremely grateful to Daniel and Ignatius for journeying with him, Br. Gabriel laments that they took too long.

"I knew them in 1999 and 2000, and I only got baptised in 2005. For

four long years, they never brought me to their Catholic church for some reason. They were very shy," he joked. Despite that, Br. Gabriel summarises his entire conversion and vocation in the story of that one leper, out of 10 whom God healed, who came back to give thanks. It is one filled with immense gratitude and thanksgiving, especially for the people around him.

Another person whom Br. Gabriel is thankful for is Br. Nicholas Lye. Post-baptism, Br. Gabriel was studying in Nanyang Technological University and was interested in joining the Catholic Student Apostolate (CSA), of which Nicholas was president.

"I didn't want to go through tertiary education just getting the degree and going to hall. I wanted much more – I wanted a community... Br. Nicholas was the one who replied to me when I requested for that. He was very kind – he came to meet me and took me to one of the groups one afternoon. We prayed the rosary together and had sharings in empty classrooms... He also took me to attend mass in NTU itself on several occasions. It was a very powerful experience because it was the first time I got to see young people my age as a community."

Although Br. Gabriel, who went on to work in the navy, and Br. Nicholas did not keep in contact after graduation, God – "with His sense of humour" – brought them together again on a vocation retreat in the seminary.

"Back then, the seminary only admitted pairs. We were in the right time frame together. We both took a leap of faith, left our jobs and joined the seminary. It was the grace of God

in that sense. Without him, I would have had to wait another year. That was very providential – that I had someone to journey with."

Br. Gabriel shared how God has a "funny way of arranging things", reminiscing the times he had to take bus service 147 to and from school but often ended up falling asleep and waking up at the bus stop outside Br. Nicholas' place. Now, after eight years of journeying together as classmates in the seminary, the two joke that God had brought Br. Gabriel there all those times because "someone was waiting for (him)".

"For me, it's all about a recollection of moments throughout my life that I sometimes don't even understand. I think our faith is something like that – to join the dots and realise that the hand of God is there."

Br. Gabriel, who is spending a year in IHM, wants to thank all those who have been praying for him. He is also very thankful to Fr. Adrian and the other priests for accepting him as a final year seminarian.

"I am looking forward to this whole year of journeying with you all. I hope that through our conversations and encounters, we can get a better sense of God's love."

He also hopes to impart some discernment to people regarding their vocations, urging all of us to always ask where God and our families are in the choices we make.

"Once you put God in the centre of your vocation – whether it is marriage, single-hood, priesthood, or religious life – it will make a huge difference. We won't be relying on our own strength anymore – that's what makes the difference." ♥



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