



Preparing for Easter

By COLIN LEE

SPOTTING a few eager parishioners behind tables, either selling or signing up people for some church activity is a common sight at the piazza on Sundays. But during the Lenten period there was added buzz.

The parish community, under a Parish Pastoral Council initiative, embarked on a Lenten outreach programme. The aim was to distribute food packs to families living in rented one-room flats within our parish. The two rental blocks are on Hougang Ave 1 and the first challenge was to sign up parishioners to donate the foodstuff. As usual, IHM parishioners were generous and all 417 pledge cards were taken up in no time.

Said Felix Lim, a PPC member and one of the members in the committee set up for the Lenten outreach project: "We provide our parishioners an opportunity to serve our underprivileged. It's not

just money... but actually taking the time and effort to do so."

Those who took the pledge card had to buy the food items – which included rice, oil, sugar, biscuits, Milo and noodles – and pack them in a recyclable bag and return them to the collection point in the church. On March 22, several parishioners joined the outreach committee to distribute the food packs at the two blocks.

Similarly, a blood donation drive on the same day saw many parishioners donate blood. Many have been supporting this event whenever it is held in our parish but this year there was the added incentive of doing it during Lent.

Many in our parish community, in their own little way, gave up something during the Lenten period.

"I'm giving up certain social media because I feel I've become too reliant on them," shared Youth

Ministry member Felysse, 17, who also committed to daily prayer on top of weekly mass this Lenten season. "I feel I don't spend enough time with God and figured I should make time for him," she explained.

The RCIA and RCIY communities made additional efforts to support each Elect, as they readied themselves for initiation into the Church. After the Rite of Election on Feb 22, till their baptism on Easter, the newly affirmed Elect undertake intense reflection to identify areas in their lives that require strengthening or renouncing; particularly during the celebration of rites termed Scrutinies. The rest of us are also invited to scrutinize our lives for the same. After all, the word "Lent" comes from an old English word for spring – indeed, a fitting term for a time of spiritual spring-cleaning! ♥

SSVP lends a helping hand

By DOMINIC ABRAHAM



YOU see them on the first Sunday of every month. Clad in dark blue T-shirts they move around the church aisles doing the second collection after communion. These are the members of the Society of St Vincent De Paul (SSVP) who have been helping the poor in our parish since June 1971 with the money thus collected.

All the parishes in Singapore have a unit of the SSVP, called a Conference. The IHM Conference has 35 members and they hold meetings twice a month, which begin and end with a prayer. During the meeting members discuss the progress of the people they help, who are called Friends In Need (FINs), and chart out new activities.

One such activity was a clothes donation drive for the needy in the Philippines and Indonesia held in January. It saw parishioners volunteer in large numbers to sort and pack the clothes over a weekend along with members of the SSVP.

The SSVP is an international lay Catholic organisation founded in 1833 in Paris by a bunch of young men led by Blessed Frederic Ozanam and has St Vincent De Paul as its patron saint. Today SSVP has grown to include more than 45,000 Conferences with more than 700,000 active members in 143 countries. One of the members of the IHM Conference, Michael Thio, is the President General of the SSVP, a

unique honour.

Members of the SSVP are committed to offering assistance to all those in need, regardless of race or religion. The IHM Conference renders assistance to FINs by way of cash and rations to those who reside within the parish boundaries. If someone outside these boundaries approach them, these needy people are directed to the SSVP Conference in the parish they belong to.

Since 1971, SSVP's IHM Conference has been led by six presidents -- Gabriel Ng, Allen Poi, Fernandez Pius, Patrick Jonas, June Tan and James Tay, the current president. James said he has succeeded in giving the Conference a corporate feel. There are various committees set up to address different requirements. The Visitation Committee manages visits to the homes of FINs. This committee also organises trips to other community homes, like homes for the aged and sick to spend time with the residents. The Spirituality Committee organises retreats, rosary sessions, gospel sharing, and Mass for FINs. The Education Committee helps to arrange for tuitions and government aid for education-related matters for the FIN, while the Hospitality Committee helps in organising fun fairs and members' fellowship sessions. The Events Committee handles outings, Christmas party, and special projects for FINs.

A FIN is adopted by the SSVP after a few members interview the potential FIN. Once adopted, the FINs come under the watch of two or three members. These members make sure that the physical and emotional well-being of the FIN is taken care of and that any assistance provided does not become a one time act.

SSVP's charity goes beyond geographic boundaries. By the act of Twinning, where based on need, richer countries are paired with poorer countries to receive aid and support. Indonesia and Philippines are paired with Singapore, in this twinning exercise. Said James: "The aim of the recent clothes collection drive was to "involve the parish community in helping the FINs' and it was heartening to see the support from the parish members who donated loads of clothes. It would have been easy to sell the clothes and provide the proceeds from this sale to the people in Indonesia and Philippines, but the intention was also to help the FIN feel good by sharing in the act of helping themselves. This they achieved by raising funds from selling the donated clothes in their own countries."

SSVP members also help out in several parish activities. They run the canteen occasionally, volunteer their services at blood donation drives and during parish feast days.

Building a community within SSVP, where service and work evolves into spiritual development and growth for its members' is one of James' objectives. Parishioners are encouraged to volunteer their time by becoming a member of the SSVP as the number of FINs are growing, and in the process also attain spiritual self-development. Interested parishioners can contact the church office or any SSVP member in that blue T-shirt. ❤️



Above: Children of FINs playing a game with SSVP members during an outing. Left: SSVP members planning the clothes donation drive.

IHM Snapshots

By AGNES CHUA



A **dvent tree:** IHM Epiphany team has been running the Advent Tree project for several years. They did it again during the last Advent with parishioners pledging to pray for the conversion of their loved ones and friends. ♥



R **ite of Election:** Our elects from RCIA & RC1Y with Fr. Adrian Yeo, Fr. Erbin Fernandez and Archbishop William Goh at the Rite of Election on Feb 22. They request your prayers as they journey towards the waters of baptism at Easter. ♥



L **enten preparation:** Children attending catechism lessons are seen preparing themselves practicing humility, love and sacrifice. The catechism sessions are based on lesson plans from Office of New Evangelisation. ♥



C **ommissioning of Catechists:** Catechists being commissioned in January to take on another year of catechising our children and youth in IHM. ♥



C **hildren's Liturgy:** The Children's Liturgy Group spending an afternoon with the Children's Christmas Choir to reflect on the birth of Jesus. The children sang with the Agapevoces Choir at the 10am Christmas Mass. ♥



N **ew Altar Servers:** Six young boys were welcomed into the Altar servers group. The photo was taken during their investiture. ♥



N **ew Wardens:** Nine new wardens were commissioned on January 17. The same evening the Wardens had their annual dinner which was well-attended. ♥

Understanding the faith better

By MATTHEW TAY



THROUGHOUT our faith journey, we learn about our religion through catechism, RCIA or through various parish communities. But there are times when we ask ourselves the difficult questions in faith, such as why would a loving God sacrifice his only son? Would we then start questioning if we truly understand our faith and all that we learnt?

That is where Symbolon comes in. Christian Kwan, the Symbolon coordinator in our parish, came across the programme and found that it was very useful in providing a deeper knowledge of the faith to Catholics. Believing that it will be good for the parish, he proposed it to Father Adrian Yeo.

"Whatever material that is available in the church today to catechise is hotchpotch and not wholesome. If you want to attend courses such as Bible-timeline, Liturgy or Sacraments, you will only learn that little aspect," Christian added. "Symbolon covers every aspect of the faith in a very basic way. It will help launch an average catholic into that level of faith where they are more confident and understand the teaching of the church."

Divided into 20 weekly sessions, the first 10 sessions focuses on 'Knowing the Faith', with sessions on God, Jesus and the Church, while the second half contains topics focused on 'Living the Faith', which touches on issues like Sacraments and Catholic Ethics.

The current Symbolon programme is open to the various church ministries and consistently brings in around 30 participants per session. Bianca Chan of the Young Adult Community, who attended

her first Symbolon session, found it surprisingly engaging.

"The use of multimedia and various speakers addressing questions that I've been struggling with for a long time was quite useful," she said. "Like why did Jesus have to die for our sins? Couldn't God have forgiven us without being so sadistic? How could a loving God sacrifice his own son?"

"I think many of us struggle

with similar questions but don't have the patience to go and read thick books, attend long lectures or even know where to begin searching," Bianca added. "This series provide lots of material for reflection and discussion that can be used for our Young Adults sessions."

Anyone can sign up for the online programme on <http://www.symboloncatholic.org/> and start the journey to deepen your faith. ♥



Symbolon sessions in progress.

How to register for the Symbolon Online programme:

- 1) Go to <https://www.symboloncatholic.org/index.php/register/36d538>. This is a special webpage for IHM parishioners to register to use Symbolon under the parish licence granted only to IHM Church.
- 2) Register:
 - a. Type in your name, email and create a password
 - b. Answer some other questions and click 'REGISTER'
 - c. You will receive an e-mail upon successful registration to receive all content at no cost
- 3) Go to Symbolon website. You can easily Google it if the link above does not work
 - a. Click 'login' on the webpage toolbar
 - b. Choose the sessions you wish to participate in
 - c. There will be a participant guide which is printer friendly. It can be used for instructions, prayers or reflection
- 4) There is no limit to how many times you can access to a particular session
- 5) Symbolon can be accessed through all electronic devices with available internet connection

Bonding over bingo

By MATTHEW TAY

THERE is no easier way to have fun. All that was needed were some tables, chairs, a whiteboard and a cage which is turned to eject small wooden balls with numbers on them.

That was what happened on 6 February 2015. It was the bingo night organised by the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC). The PPC organises monthly activities for the parishioners, which alternate between community events and spiritual activities.

A good number of parishioners were seated promptly at 8pm in the St Gregory Hall, with even more arriving as the night wore on. The objective was simple, each person was handed a number card. Then the host would announce what to look



for when he calls out the numbers, which will usually be either 'first row', 'middle row', 'last row' or 'full house' (all the numbers in the card). The host will then draw random numbers from the Bingo Cage and the first person who completes the required row would win a prize.

The first two rounds started simply enough, with the host calling for 'first row' and '(any) single line'. The third round however, took an unexpected twist when Father Adrian Yeo took over the hosting the bingo. He started testing everyone's mathematical brains by teasing the numbers in equations. It soon elevated to a guessing game with Father Adrian only giving hints to various numbers like 'two swans' or 'two fat ladies'.

In the end, it was all in good fun and bonding. Laughter and groans, all in good fun of course, filled the hall as numbers were called out. There was no better way to end it than to have double winners.

After being a successful host for the night, Father Adrian was extremely happy with the event. "The idea is to bring people together and have fun together," he said with a smile. "We have community activities every other month and it is always good to mingle with our parishioners."

The next Parish Night will be the Easter Party on 10 April 2015 at 8pm. The PPC invites all to join the parish community and have a great bonding session. ♥

Movie nights at IHM

By JOYCE TAN



Left: Parishioners at the most recent movie night, where the movie Fireproof was screened.

Right: Movie retreat in December 2014, led by Sr. Wendy.



EVERY fourth Friday of the month, about 30 parishioners from all walks of life gather at Prayer Hall AB to watch movies. These movies are either centered on Christian themes, or based on the lives of saints, including both early Church fathers like St. Augustine and modern-day saints like St. Josephine Bakhita. These monthly movie nights were initiated by a parishioner Bianca Chan, in November 2012. She was inspired after attending

movie nights at Novena Church, particularly those movies featuring the life stories of saints. "When I saw how they dealt with disappointments, adversity, and suffering, it helped me to understand what holiness is, what it means to put my faith into practice, to offer up my sufferings to God, to have a childlike trust in God's providence", says Bianca. In December last year, Bianca organized a half-day movie retreat based on the Nativity Story movie, which was led by Sr. Wendy

from the Daughters of St. Paul.

Those attending have expressed that they have enjoyed the movies. Agnes Soh, a parishioner who is a regular at the movie sessions, felt that she had learnt about the lives of saints, and that the movies screened were interesting, as they were not the usual movies shown in cinemas.

The next movie screening will be on the life of St. Augustine and it will take place on March 27 and April 24 at 7.30pm. All are welcome! ♥

Young@Immaculate Heart

By JOYCE TAN & IVY LAM

YOUTHS and young adults looking for communities to journey with have several choices at IHM. You can choose your community from the ones featured here.



Altar Servers' Society

We are: St. Dominic Savio Altar Servers' Society comprises of members from the ages of 9 to 18 and currently has 51 members. The main role of the altar server is to assist the priests during weekday and weekend masses.

Meets: For mass ☺ And also first and third Saturday afternoons @ Mother Mary's Room

Who can join: Boys who have received their first Holy Communion

Contact: Timothy Koh / 9722 1179
Timothy Kumar / 9146 3246
altar.servers@ihm.sg



Community of Youths (COY)

We are: COY was established in early 2015. We aim to be a community for young people to grow and journey together in faith as we foster a common Catholic culture in the wider community.

Meets: Sunday mornings 11am - 1pm @ Upper Room

Who can join: Youths aged 16 and above

Contact: Alvin Lim / 9177 5652
Rebecca Chan / 9679 1482
coy@ihm.sg



Fellowship & Community (FC)

We are: We are a community of young believers, who come together for mass, evening prayer (Vespers), dinner and games on Wednesday evenings. We also have games in the hall on Saturday evenings and help out in adhoc projects for the parish.

Meets: Wednesday evenings & Saturday evenings, 7pm - 10pm @ St. Gregory's Hall

Who can join: Confirmed youths

Contact: Russell Chin / 9488 4591
Janel Boo / 9182 8847
ihmfc@ihm.sg



Rite of Christian Initiation for Youth (RCIY)

We are: A group of youths within the church of IHM whose mission is to introduce God to other non-Catholic youths. We do this through a year long process known as the RCIY journey. The journey is where we share our faith stories and experiences with the non-Catholic youths, befriending them and welcoming them into our community in the process.

Meets: Sundays 11am-1pm @ IHM St. Peter and Paul Room (Level 3). Next journey begins Jan 2016

Who can join as Sponsors: Actively practicing Catholics aged 18 - 30

Who can join as Enquirers: Non-baptised Youth aged 14 - 21 who want to know more about the Catholic Faith

Contact: Daniel Lee 98751235 / Seishen 97108145 / Junrong 8161 0482 rciyihm@gmail.com



Post Con

We are: A group of fun-loving youth who have decided to journey together as a community founded in love, faithful in prayer, and fixed on God. We do what the apostles used to do – eat, pray, share, complain, love, be loved :-)

Meets: Saturday 3pm - 6pm @ St. John's Room (Level 2), followed by community dinner together

Who can join: Post-confirmation youths

Contact: Wesley Lye / 97250730 /
wesley.lye@gmail.com
Olivia Vong / 81829964 /
olievong@gmail.com



Young Adults Community (YAC)

We are: A community of disciples that supports and encourages personal growth through sharing our lives, praying and worshipping together, studying scripture, receiving the sacraments, serving others and loving God. "One family journeying in the faith by living in the light of Christ"

Meets: Sunday 3 – 5pm @ IHM St. Phillip Room (Level 2), preceded by fellowship at 2pm in St. John's Room (Level 2)

Who can join: Youths and Young Adults who seek God and Community

Contact: Aaron Monteiro / 9231 3543
Benjamin Long / 9739 9784
yac@ihm.sg



Youth Catechists (YC)

We are: IHMYC. We make a difference. We focus on forming our members to be better Catholics. We deepen our faith through deeper learning, meaningful service, challenging projects and have a rocking good time while serving and experiencing God!

Meets: Saturday 3pm - 4.30pm (Seniors). Saturday 4.30 - 6pm (Y1s) @ IHM St. Peter and Paul Room (Level 3)

Who can join: Confirmed youths and young adults up to age 24 who seek community and want to help with catechism

Contact: Adam Chua / 81277078 /
adam_94@live.com.sg
Jason Sim / 98187341 /
jascool1997@yahoo.com.sg
ihmyouthcat@gmail.com



Via Christus Choir (VCC)

We are: A dynamic group that aims to collectively utilise our talents for the greater glory of God. We strive to inspire and strengthen people with God's message of love, peace and faith. By working closely with the Church, we hope to reach out to people who do not know God and also bring people closer to Him through song and music.

Meets: Sings for Sunday 8.30am mass, followed by community breakfast. Weekly choir practice/spiritual sessions are at 11am in St. Cecilia Room (Level 3). Additional practices on Saturday evenings 7 – 9pm during Easter/Christmas.

Who can join: Anyone between 16 and 40 who loves God and music.

Contact: Zachary Scotts Wu / 8282 3520 /
zach.scotts.wu@gmail.com
Benjamin Phipps / 9666 2036 /
benjaminhipps@outlook.sg

Fr. Luke returns to IHM

by PATRICK JONAS



COME May, Fr. Luke Fong will make a trip to Chicago. It is a trip that he is looking forward to, for it will bring him face-to-face with the man who now calls him his 'blood brother'. A couple of years ago this man was a stranger to him, one of the thousands of second-generation Chinese in the US. But it was his noble gesture that gave Fr. Luke a second lease of life after cancer struck.

As per the rules, the donor remained anonymous till a year after the transplant was successful. When the donor got Fr. Luke's details, he wrote to him. He is a practising Christian and attributes his ability to have done this kind deed, to God.

Narrating his battle with the illness over a cup of Earl Grey tea that he made for himself and me, Fr. Luke said: "I think it is amazing that God gave me a donor who is sympathetic to my whole life's dedication to God. It would be a strange irony if a staunch and angry atheist were to be my donor and he would be so angry that he saved a priest."

The trip to the US is also to ship back to Singapore his personal belongings left in Washington DC. He was studying there more than two years ago for a teaching degree in theology when bouts of fever on a daily basis left him enfeebled, forcing him to return to Singapore to seek medical attention from local

specialists. It was then that he was diagnosed with biphenotypic Leukaemia.

Fr. Luke, who worked in the hotel industry before he heard God's call, was ordained in 2001. He was posted to IHM parish in 2008 after serving three years respectively at St Anne's and OLPS parishes. It was during his two years here that he started writing a blog. He had toyed with the idea of writing for sometime but worried whether he would be able to sustain it. That was when one day at the IHM parish dining hall, Fr. Aloysius Ong threw him a challenge. He told him that if he did not start he would never know whether he would succeed. And so, with some trepidation, he started the blog in August 2009, which has since seen more than 280 posts and is going strong.

Those who have read his posts or listened to his homilies, know well that he has a way with words, often tinged with a wry sense of humour. He says he had a fascination for the language even when he was young and his schooling at St Michael's Primary and St Joseph's Institution may have helped him too. He also gives credit to his dad and mum. They never allowed Singlish to be spoken at home.

And home used to be for the good part of his growing up years, in Thomson Hills. He was however, born 50 years ago in the Macpherson

area. Yes, he is an SG50 boy, though he looks years younger. And for those who are familiar with his physical features when he served IHM previously, he is now leaner. His illness robbed him of more than 15kg. He used to pay serious attention to fitness and pounded the roads 40km a week. That was the time he thought he would never fall ill.

While in hospital and recuperating at home, he focused his energies on some of his lesser known talents. He is fond of origami and made several roses for the nuns, nurses and doctors who attended on him. He also tried to perfect his talent in roasting pork. He says he must have made at least 10 attempts to get the ideal roast.

When he felt he was healthy enough to resume his priestly duties the archbishop offered him the opportunity to serve as assistant priest in IHM. "I think it was providential. The fact that I was back in a familiar place takes away the stress and challenges of getting to know a whole lot of new people. From the warm welcomes I have got, I think the parishioners are genuinely happy to have me back," says Fr. Luke adding that Fr. Adrian has been very kind in allowing him time to settle down.

It is perfectly right to say that it is not only the IHM parishioners who are happy with his return. God loves him too. ❤️



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