

ISSUE  
#08



CATHEDRAL OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS  
JOHOR BAHRU ✕ 新山耶稣圣心主教座堂



*stories from  
the heart...*



新山耶稣圣心主教座堂  
CATHEDRAL OF THE  
SACRED HEART OF JESUS  
JOHOR BAHRU

1982-2022

***How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.  
(Genesis 28:17)***

**"19th February 1982**

**This date marked a new phase in our lives, the beginning of our journey as faithful parishioners of a completely different church, a Cathedral at that."**

Revelling in the commemoration of the Ruby Anniversary of the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Johor Bahru, I hark back to the cherished memories of my experience here. As I write this, my being swells with a sense of ineffaceable gratitude to the Almighty Father for His graces and blessings. One of which is apparent in the form of this felicitous gift of becoming part of the principal church of the Melaka-Johor Diocese. Over and above that, great is the honour that comes with being part of it from the point of initiation.

Born and raised in Johor Bahru, my family and I were parishioners of Church of the Immaculate Conception. A great sense of furore was sparked following the announcements made on a Cathedral dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus to be built in the heart of JB town. Thence, the anticipation-filled wait was put to a genial end on 19th February 1982. This date marked a new phase in our lives, the beginning of our journey as faithful parishioners of a completely different church, a Cathedral at that.



The auspicious celebration was officiated by Bishop Emeritus James Chan with the attendance of the Apostolic Delegate Archbishop Renato Martino and bishops from Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei. My parents, two sisters and I, being a teenager of 17 years old were blessed to have been amongst the congregation that day. Freshly embedded in my mind also, is the very first parish priest of this cathedral. Indubitably so, the late Msgr. Peter Wee's pivotal role was instrumental in the building of this cathedral. The affability, sense of involvement and engagement displayed by him with the parishioners were of great apparency. This was especially true when it came to the Malayalee community, which was fair-sized in the early years in this Cathedral and slowly dissipated as many passed on.



*Mass preceded by Bishop Emeritus James Chan.*



*The Apostolic Delegate Archbishop Renato Martino relaying the Papal message.*



*The congregation gathered from far and near to join in the celebration on 19th February 1982.*



*Close-up view of the cathedral on its day of dedication.*

Reminiscing the history of this cathedral, it is unsurmountable to even omit out the fact that three resplendent statues were part of this nascency. This fact, though sadly uncharted to many, is substantially noteworthy in commemorating 40 years of the existence of the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The “trio” of which is actually the “Holy Family” are the Sacred Heart of Jesus statue (enthroned at the front of the Church), the Our Lady of Good Health / Velankkani statue, and the statue of St. Joseph.

The Our Lady of Good Health / Velankkani statue which is now placed in Vincent Hall, was initially placed at the side of the altar. This statue radiates antiquity and has a history of its own. The Malayalee community was responsible for its obtention from Velankkani, South India and upon debarkation in Singapore, it was transported in a lorry with a few cars following behind in procession to this cathedral. I could only imagine a scene so heart-warming. Accordantly, the Feast of Our Lady of Velankanni was celebrated annually for 25 years with grandiosity - procession and all.



*Statue of Our Lady of Velankanni.*



*Late Msgr. Peter Wee in the fellowship with the Malayalee community after the very first Feast of Our Lady of Velankanni celebration in this cathedral.*



*A few members of the Malayalee community of this cathedral including my late mother (second from the right).*

The statue of St. Joseph which was originally placed at the other side of the altar is now moved to the funeral parlour of the cathedral. This statue, along with the statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was donated by the late Clement D'cruz.

While my experience as a parishioner here began 40 years ago, it wasn't until 8 years later (1990) that I began offering my services to the Lord. This calling could have been attributed to my participation in the Parish Renewal Experience.



*Parish renewal experience attended by my sister, Janet (2nd row from front, 3rd person) and I (3rd row from front, last person).*

*Prayer invoking the Holy Spirit.*



Commentating was my longest service in this Cathedral, dating back to 1990 when I first served for every Friday evening mass at 6pm. This rendering of service remains constant to this very present moment.

Seeing as it was one of my greatest passions in life, I was prompted to “praise the Lord twice” through singing by joining the Sacred Heart Choir from 1990 to 2011 and eventually the St. Mark’s Choir for a few years. By virtue of that, I was given the opportunity to be a cantor, proclaiming psalms glorifying the Lord.



*Choirs from churches in the Melaka-Johor Diocese singing for the Thanksgiving mass of the opening of the New Millennium.*

Being strongly devoted to invoking the intercessions of Our Lady from a young age, I was inclined to be an animator of the Novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help. This was in 2004 and subsequently led to me being the coordinator to date. Joining the Legion of Mary in 2014, however, further enlivened my devotion to our Lady and elucidated to me, on a clearer note, the profound role of Mother Mary in drawing closer to Jesus. Needless to say, the words of St. Louis Marie de Montfort, patron saint of the Legion of Mary have always been etched on my mind, “If, then, we establish solid devotion to our Blessed Lady, it is only to establish more perfectly devotion to Jesus Christ, and to provide an easy and secure means for finding Jesus Christ”.

Amongst them all, there was one service, exceptionally special to me, the evidence of a sublime devotion proven in the enthronement of the Holy image at home – The Sacred Heart of Jesus. Yes, the very reason I was encompassed with unmingled rhapsody at the inception of this cathedral! Animating the Novena to the Sacred Heart of Jesus every first Friday of the month for years became an emergent source of hope to draw strength from the Gracious Lord.

Contrary to the 32 years as a commentator, my journey in the proclamation of God's Word is the shortest as of now, or rather, still fresh. In 2020, a new-found calling presented itself in the form of service as a lector. What started off on a voluntary basis in the midst of the pandemic has morphed into one of consistency. If there is just one word to sum up the feeling of proclaiming the Word of the Lord, it is "whole". Yes! I feel whole. Life feels wholesome when time is spared to listen to the fatherly voice of God speaking through the scriptures.

On a related note, many of the momentous events of my life have transpired in this very church. On 29th June 1996, the feast of St. Peter and Paul, the solemnization of my marriage took place with the celebrant being Msgr. Michael Mannayagam.



*My marriage solemnization on 29th June 1996, Cathedral of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.*

My three children received the Sacraments of Baptism, First Holy Communion and Confirmation in this cathedral. Graced am I that they too, have been serving the Lord in this cathedral to their uttermost dexterity. My eldest daughter, Angelique is an organist and cantor. My second daughter, Rebecca is a cantor and my son, Dominic who was an altar-server is now a lector. In distinction to offering up thanksgiving to the Lord God Almighty, these small services act as humbling factors to remind us time and again, that we are called to serve and not to be served.

With joy, came sorrow and these four walls could attest to it. My late parents and husband were laid to rest after the obsequies which took place in this cathedral. Trying times plagued, but were never meant to last. Prayer warriors who stormed the heaven were a source of comfort and solace.

Many are the services offered up in this cathedral, many more are the experiences gained, both the pleasant and not. Greater yet are the strength, gratitude and blessings that come from serving the Lord God Almighty. I don a feather in my cap at the realization that 40 years of camaraderie with the Mother Church have flown by and over three decades in the course of my service. This building with the infamous butterfly concept, which has been deemed by a few to be of an aesthetically non-conventional architecture (for a cathedral), remains a very, very beautiful crux of my life and my family, being a witness to the focal points in my life, both fond as well as sad memories. May this Mother Church unceasingly be a mediator between the Father and sinners, propagate the act of love and charity and consolidate unity amongst Catholics regardless of race.

All Praise, Glory, Laud and Honour be to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit!

*Angeline Mary Decruz*